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The old and the new

If you thought the world of online began the day Tim Berners-Lee developed the concept of a World Wide Web, think again. Not only were people online — exchanging e-mails, swapping files and connecting to remote computers via Telnet — before the first web browser was even thought of, but a whole world of online information existed for the use of librarians and researchers. That world of teletype and dial-up information services, and database providers such as DIALOG and the Rand Corporation's ORBIT, is chronicled in an article in *Information Today* called 'Online before the internet: early pioneers tell their stories' [http://www.infotoday.com/searcher/jun03/ardito_bjorner.shtml]. The online business model took off in 1960 with the launch by the Lockheed Corporation of its DIALOG service, a database host that allowed users to connect to large databases, in areas such as business and medical information.

Blog spot

The more I use web logs, the more I find the format perfect for current awareness. Though a lot of the more personal web logs are a shameful waste of time and bandwidth, the good ones — the ones that contain useful postings and are only updated when something relevant comes along — are well worth a look. It is surprising that more libraries don't use them to keep customers informed as the format is perfect for that job. The Information Literacy Weblog [<http://ciquest.shef.ac.uk/infolit/>] from the UK's Sheffield University is a good example of a web log for the library profession — focused on one issue, and updated only on a needs basis. The site would be useful for anyone interested in new reports, research, news, conferences and announcements in this field, and not just in the United Kingdom, but worldwide.

Spoonfeeding

Another web-enabled service I like more and more is RSS. While the jury is still out on whether the acronym stands for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication, the technology allows you to see a range of news or headline feeds within a quickly scanned page. The excellent FaganFinder site [<http://www.faganfinder.com/>], an internet lucky-dip of tools and services, has an introductory article on the subject, 'Explanation

of RSS, how you can use it, and finding RSS feeds' at <http://www.faganfinder.com/search/rss.shtml>. While I tend to use feeds to read content from a range of different services, the article explains how you can use RSS to display headlines from elsewhere as a way of providing additional content to your users. If you want to see how RSS might work without the bother of downloading an RSS reader such as AmphetaDesk, have a look at LISFeeds [<http://www.lisfeeds.com/>], which gathers and displays the output of a range of library news services such as library web logs. You can click on each news outlet by name and see the headlines generated by the site. It all adds up to a convenient one-stop shop for a range of library news.

Object lesson

Unless you are Rip Van Winkle, the notion of virtual learning objects will have brushed past your consciousness at some stage. If you would like to know more, get hold of the online text 'The instructional use of learning objects', which is freely-available online at <http://www.reusability.org/read/>. According to the blurb, the book 'tries to go beyond the technological hype and connect learning objects to instruction and learning'. The book is divided into five main sections, one of which, 'Learning objects explained', may be all that you will ever want or need to know. The site also provides 'war stories' from the frontlines of those trying to implement this kind of technology, and you can join in discussions of the issue at the site. The future direction of learning objects is also covered.

The DEVIL you know

Tracking down useful learning objects may be a struggle for many time-pressed academics, which is where the UK DEVIL project may come in handy [<http://srv1.mvm.ed.ac.uk/devilweb/index.asp>]. DEVIL, which stands for Dynamically Enhancing VLE Information from the Library, is a pilot project to help tutors identify resources of interest for courses, and to provide academic staff with tools to integrate a whole range of resources, in a variety of media, including library resources and material sourced elsewhere. Under the links and resources area, there is a document on 'Extended use case scenarios based on the DEVIL Project functional specification' which might be useful for getting ideas.

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Whistle stop

Online communities are useful places to hang out if you can find one that matches your interests. WebJunction [<http://webjunction.org/>] is such a community for libraries and other agencies who help the public gain access to information technology. While the site is mainly a problem-solving place for North American librarians, anyone in the field will find useful information, such as sample policies and practices, there. Recent content on the site includes a survey of methods for monitoring your network traffic, an explanation of domain name servers (DNS), and an introduction to web logs for librarians. WebJunction librarian George Needham also answers questions from readers.

Information-literate societies

With terms such as knowledge nation, the information society, life-long learning and the information economy being bandied about everywhere, it is good to know that someone is trying to make sense of such diverse terms and nail down what they really mean. The World Summit on the Information Society has drafted a Declaration of Principles, entitled a 'Common vision of the information society', the full-text of which can be seen at the WSIS's website [<http://www.itu.int/wsis/>]. The World Summit is being held in two phases — the first in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003, the second in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005. Keep an eye on the site for revisions to the draft declaration and other relevant material.

Up to something?

Library schools in the United Kingdom do not just turn out qualified librarians; many also engage in research projects of use to the profession. To see who's doing what where, look at the *Directory of current research in LIS departments in the UK and Ireland* [<http://www.lirg.org.uk/lirn/directory.htm>]. It lists the schools that are actively researching projects at the moment. While it would be useful to be able to search for projects of interest, the institutional approach seems the only way in. Luckily, it is relatively quick to click the links for each place and see what they are doing. For example, the library school at the University of Wales at Aberystwyth is looking at trends in electronic information services, something that will be

of relevance to just about all libraries these days. The directory supplies the URL of the project, contact person, contact details and sources of funding.

Mag mania

Unless you have a lot of space in your day, you will not want to read every article in the *Journal of Digital Information Management*, but the odd piece, such as 'Indexing for XML-based articles' in the latest issue I saw, will definitely be worth a look. This peer-reviewed quarterly journal covers digital information processing, content management, metadata, digital libraries and related fields. [<http://dirf.org/jdim/>] Also worth seeing is *Information Research*, a free, international, scholarly journal, which publishes research across a wide range of information-related disciplines. All past issues are still accessible online, and the latest issue I saw had a VLE article, 'Embedding online information resources in Virtual Learning Environments: some implications for lecturers and librarians of the move towards delivering teaching in the online environment' which might be a useful adjunct to the virtual learning objects/environments sites mentioned above. [<http://informationr.net/ir/index.html>]

Fiction finders

Public library staff are often asked to recommend books to readers who have exhausted the works of their favourite writers and need to move on. If it is crime fiction they want, the *New York Times* has an alphabetical list (by author) of crime fiction reviewed since 1997 [<http://www.nytimes.com/books/specials/crime.html>]. It covers everyone from Ian Rankin to Sue Grafton, Val McDermid to Minette Walters. To see the list, you need to register; however, this costs nothing and gives access to a huge range of all kinds of archival material provided by the NYT. Also concerned with matters bookish is *The Reader's Corner* [<http://www.autopen.com/>], which focuses on the romance, fantasy, and mystery genres. The site looks like a dog's breakfast, but it is bursting with content — essays, articles, excerpts from novels and stories, editor's picks and reading lists. The site has been going since 1995 and has a popular, slangy style with topics such as 'Murder with a stiff upper lip' for those who fancy classic English mysteries. ■

This column
[with URL links]
can be found at:



<http://www.alia.org.au/incite>

Contributions and suggestions for this column are always welcome. Please contact Belinda Weaver via e-mail.

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