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Hebrew cataloguing

Cataloguers of materials in Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, Aramaic, and any other language that uses the Hebrew alphabet will find the Yale University Library's Hebraica Team website useful [http://www.library.yale.edu/cataloging/hebraicateam/]. The site includes cataloguing tools and background and links on the Hebrew language, as well as an introduction to the twenty-two character Hebrew alphabet and an online Hebrew keyboard. There is an online Hebrew-English dictionary, and an explanation of gematria, the numerology system.

Really Simple Syndication

Recent problems with e-mail-borne viruses have led many in the media industry to predict the demise of the e-mail newsletter and its replacement with a more user-directed technology such as Rich Site Summary, also known as RSS. Using an RSS reader, users can get the content of syndicated materials without the risk of picking up a virus. As more and more people allow their content to be syndicated, this may become a more viable option for many. Syndication generally means creating an XML file of material that news aggregators can read and display. WebReference.com [http://www.webreference.com/authoring/languages/xml/rss/] has some useful information for those who want to know more about this emerging technology.

Blog tools

Trawling for useful blog content might seem a daunting task, as so many blogs are personal rants or raves, with little to offer librarians or researchers. But a couple of tools such as Technorati [http://www.technorati.com/] and Bloglines [http://www.bloglines.com/] may help with discovery. In addition to offering a keyword search of approximately 360 000 weblogs, Technorati allows bloggers to see if other sites are linking to theirs, so it may be a handy tip to pass on to your blogging customers. Bloglines allows you (or your library users) to subscribe to the RSS feeds of favourite blogs. Bloglines also monitors when specified blog sites are updated. You do not have to know anything about RSS to use Bloglines — simply read the latest entries of interest within Bloglines itself.

One to watch

With the enormous amount of free and open source software such as Linux available, a neutral source of guidance on the topic is always welcome. Though the site is yet to launch officially, OSS Watch [http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/] may be one to bookmark now. It aims to provide the United Kingdom further and higher education community with authoritative advice about free and open source software, and about related open standards, such as OpenURL. Obviously the tips would be useful to anyone, anywhere who dips a toe into the open source pond.

Accessibility central

With so many different web browsers and versions of browsers in the Net market, it is easy to design pages that do not work for some of them. The Bobby Online Free Portal [http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp] can help you jump the accessibility hurdle by exposing any problems your pages might have and highlighting repairs necessary. Problems include images or image maps with no text alternative which can make data difficult to retrieve for visually impaired people, frames that block the appearance of content or make navigation confusing and pages designed to work exclusively with Internet Explorer. The site has extensive information on the World Wide Web Consortium's accessibility guidelines.

Theses and eprints

Anyone who wants to do a Masters or PhD needs to know how to go about the research process. Looking at existing theses, particularly in topics close to yours, is a pretty good way of getting an idea of what is in store. The dissertationsandtheses.com [http://www.dissertationsandtheses.com/] site offers a search service for research students to help them locate theses in their subjects. The aim of the site is largely to sell the more than 25 000 research papers and theses it owns, but there is useful information for researchers that is free as well. The chapters sections provide an introduction to stages in the research process, such as creating the hypothesis, the literature review, the research methodology, the writing and structuring of the discussion, and organising the bibliography.

New on the archive scene

Anyone involved in digital preservation will find the work of erpanet, the Electronic Resource Preservation and Access Network, useful. The service has now set up an ePrints service [http://daedalus.lib.gla.ac.uk/] so that others can easily tap into the work they do. The papers cover a range of preservation

issues such as authenticity and integrity, storage, metadata, roles and responsibilities, standards and harvesting. The archive, designed for the cultural and scientific heritage community, is still in the early stages, but is definitely one to watch.

How stuff works

School and public librarians are probably already aware of the HowStuffWorks website [http://www.howstuffworks.com/], as it provides easy-to-follow descriptions of the workings of interesting inventions and products in electronics, science, computers and the home. Now Stanford University has got into the exposition act as well, with the 'How Everyday Things Are Made' [http://manufacturing.stanford.edu/] website. It includes the making of familiar objects such as cars, aeroplanes and bottles, as well as explaining manufacturing processes such as forging, casting, and injection moulding. The site covers more than forty different products and processes, and includes four hours of video which might be useful for teachers in schools.

Key to the portal

I have long been a fan of the fortnightly ejournal, FreePint, as it provides so much useful information for librarians trying to navigate the Net. The ejournal publishes a regular index to its content, and the latest is at http://www.freepint.com/issues/03indexa.htm. It appeared at the end of June, so will not be up to the very minute, but you will still find bags of useful information there. The index is available in three formats — PDF, HTML or plain text (which can be downloaded).

Keeping up with CMS

If you are shopping around for a content management system, or are looking to upgrade the one you already have, you will find the CMS Review site [http://www.cmsreview.com/] useful. It covers issues such as the defining features of a CMS, steps in selecting one for your organisation and criteria for comparing systems. Options to buy, build or lease are also examined. The site covers 'proprietary and open-source products, application development frameworks, finished out-of-the-box solutions, and hosted services at application service providers'. You can also use the site to find online demonstrations and download sites for trial versions of some of the available software.

Go the distance

Anyone involved in distance education and remote services to library users will find something useful in the 'Information support for e-learning: principles and practice' briefing paper [http://www.sconul.ac.uk/pubs_stats/pubs/Information_Support_for_eLearning_Final.pdf] jointly produced by SCONUL, the UK-based Society of College, National and University Libraries, and UKeUniversitites Worldwide, a British company that offers online degrees from United Kingdom universities to students worldwide. The aim of the briefing paper is to alert teachers, web designers and administrators of online courses to the information support issues involved in eLearning, and how libraries can help to provide the information-rich environment that online learners need. Issues addressed include information access, information skills, advice and assistance to learners and costs and communication issues.

Index of eBooks

The Digital Book Index [http://www.digitalbookindex.com/] aims to provide access to more than 73 000 online books, from a range of different publishers and online archives. Though not visually very impressive, the site does a useful job of making this vast store of content accessible, by book title and well as by publisher and provider. Items from more than 1800 publishers and private publishing organisations are included, and the index spans both commercial and non-commercial publishing, such as NetLibrary and Project Gutenberg. In addition to fiction and non-fiction on a range of topics, the site is also rich in reference works, offering a large number of dictionaries, encyclopaedias, thesauri, glossaries, bibliographies, timelines, chronologies, literary histories, and writing and style guides. New users will need to log in so that the site can figure out who its users are.

Open for business

BioMedCentral has long been in the business of freeing scientific information. Now they have launched Open Access Now [http://www.biomedcentral.com/openaccess/] as a forum for debate about open access issues. For those who might have missed it, debate has been going on for a while now about the way research findings are currently published and distributed, and how the existing system might be improved. ∎

The aim of the briefing paper is to alert teachers, web designers and administrators of online courses to the information support issues involved in eLearning, and how libraries can help to provide the information-rich environment that online learners need...