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The website for the 57th World Health Assembly, at <http://www.who.int/features/2004/wha57/en/> includes information on initiatives on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, greater safety on roads, surveillance and control of Buruli ulcer, and eradication of guinea-worm disease. The site also includes a speech by former US president Jimmy Carter speaking on the importance of access to treatment for people with mental illnesses.

Tenderly yours

The Federal Government has moved most of its online tendering activity to its Aus Tender website at <https://www.tenders.gov.au>. Initially, only a handful of departments and agencies had used the facility, with others advertising on the Australian Government Advertising website at <http://www.ads.gov.au>, which offered only a brief description of the business opportunity along with contact details. On the new site, users will be provided with additional features, including the ability to register areas of interest and to receive e-mail notifications of new tenders.

Accessibility rating

While they can only provide an indication of how sites rate, and you really need to use some human judgement, accessibility tools can give you a pretty good idea of many aspects of compliance. At <http://www.webaim.org/techniques/articles/freetools/> there is a review of a number of free online tools that you can use. Apart from well-known facilities like Bobby, you will find others that look at the same sort of criteria but from a different angle. The review is accompanied by an excellent five-page introductory discussion.

What's Undoc?

Also dealing with accessibility is a new development from Deque, a women-owned software company. Its Undoc system takes web pages in HTML or PDF format and converts the contents to XML, so that they can be re-purposed — generally in other formats but specifically to meet the new US Section 508 accessibility standards. Their site at <http://www.deque.com/> has all the instructions that you need to register for their beta program for Undoc, and also for the Ramp product, which analyses sites for accessibility compliance.

Markup developments

One of the more interesting (and probably one of the more mind-bending) conferences is Extreme Markup Languages, devoted to markup, markup languages, markup systems, markup applications, and software for manipulating and exploiting markup. It has been running since 2001, with the next one due in August in Montreal. The papers from the conferences are published in a number of formats — whatever the users supply, original

papers tagged in XML, HTML and PDF. The aggregated papers for the last three years have been collected at <http://www.idealliance.org/papers/extreme03/index.html>.

But if that is your thing...

There is a list that discusses all of this good stuff — techielibrarian, for 'metadata' Library and Information Science professionals. Its discussion topics include the creation and nature of taxonomies, ontologies, the Semantic Web, RDF, Information Architecture, Knowledge Management, Thesaurus building, XML, Schemas, OWL, Topic Maps, controlled vocabularies, authority control, data management, and much more. You can get to it at <http://lists.topica.com/lists/techielibrarian>.

You could not find a worthier recipient

The father of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, has received the Finnish Technology Award Foundation's first Millennium Technology Prize. The award is given in one of four disciplines for 'outstanding technological achievements that directly promote people's quality of life, are based on humane values, and encourage sustainable economic development.' The award is worth one million euros, and his contribution is worth every cent of it. The press release for the award is at http://www.technologyawards.org/index.php?article_id=3932.

Domains and semantics

Tim was also a plenary speaker at the 13th annual World Wide Web Conference in New York City in May, in which he spoke about two main questions: What should we do with top level domain names? And what should we do with the semantic web? He is clearly very interested in the latter, encouraging developers to get stuck into the semantic web, and to seek a new direction for the web in general, which he believes is in some danger of stagnation. On the subject of the high-level domain names (like .biz, .info and the suggested .mobi) he made a strong case for concentrating on the ones we have, that we know and understand. The full presentation is at <http://www.w3.org/2004/Talks/0519-tbl-keynote/>.

International web awards

The latest winners of the international Stockholm Challenge Award have been announced, and are a varied bunch. The awards promote projects that find innovative ways to use IT, particularly those that bring benefits to users and society. It is not too hard to understand what they are about, because despite the international flavour of the successful sites, English is clearly the dominant language of the web. The exception is Mexico's Citizen Portal, which is OK, but is not particularly original. There is the complete list of winners at <http://www.govtech.net/news/news.php?id=90273>.

Size does matter

Ever wondered how big the web is? Some people do, and it is not particularly easy to give an accurate answer. (Of course if the answer is just a little inaccurate, who is to know?) One site that gives some statistics is Global Reach at <http://global-reach.biz/globstats/>. Another collection is at <http://webreference.com/internet/statistics.html>, but they all suffer from two problems — the time-lag in getting the information and reporting it, and the common situation where up-to-date (and accurate) information is a valuable marketing tool and you are probably not going to get it for free.

Open PDF

Several US federal agencies are working to create an archiving version of the Adobe Portable Document Format, which will eventually be submitted to the International Organization for Standardization for approval as an international standard. The committee expects to release a draft of the PDF/A standard by early next year with a final standard out by the end of 2005. It is part of their overall task of grappling with the issue of archiving documents for long-term storage, made more difficult by the ever-changing nature of the IT industry. Their job has been made easier by Adobe's practice of openly-publishing the PDF specifications. There's more discussion at http://www.gcn.com/vol1_no1/daily-updates/25986-1.html.

If you build it, will they come?

Reports from both the UK and the US are showing that while citizens are happy to be able to access all sorts of online services, there is a significant portion of the community that wants to be able to speak to a real human being. This is not just due to those people uncomfortable about dealing with computers, but it is also a recognition that there are quite a few issues that can not really be dealt with through an online system. Indications from the Pew Internet & American Life Project's *How Americans get in touch with government* report [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_E-Gov_Report_0504.pdf] are that forty per cent of respondents would prefer to contact the government by phone. And UK government is finding that the introduction of new portals is not automatically bringing increased online patronage. Maybe we are nearing saturation point?

UNO, you know!

Most enterprises have trouble keeping track of their acronyms, and the United Nations is no exception — in fact, they are probably the rule! If you have a need to find the right name for one of their organisations look no further than <http://www.unsystem.org/>. There is not only a list of all of their websites, there is also an extensive chart showing how they inter-relate.

Lifting the lid on search

Enquiro, a search engine marketing company, recently undertook a research project to try to look into the mind of the searcher. Through an enhanced-focus group format, they observed the search behaviours of twenty-four people and it quickly became clear that the participants had mentally divided a search engine results page into distinct sections. Most of the searchers had clearly delineated sponsored results from organic ones, and 'above the fold' results (those that do not require scrolling down in the browser window) from 'below the fold' results (results that require scrolling). The full report is at <http://www.enquiro.com/research.asp> under *Inside the mind of the searcher*.

More on open-access to the literature

The journal *Nature* is currently featuring an online special on the debate over access to the electronic scientific literature. Given the way that the internet is changing how scientists work and publish, new business models are continually being tested by publishers, including open-access, in which the author (or their institution) pays and content is free to the user. The site features weekly papers commissioned from leading scientists, librarians, publishers and other stakeholders, together with links to news and other related features. You can find it at <http://www.nature.com/nature/focus/accessdebate/>.

Universities and the hidden web

Google has begun a project with MIT and sixteen other universities around the world to provide a way to search the institutions' collections of scholarly papers. If it is successful, the search feature could appear on Google in a few months, probably as an option on Google's Advanced Search page. While Google indexes many university web pages, the new project will allow users to direct their searches to on-campus repositories of scholarly materials, containing copies of academic papers, technical reports, drafts of articles, and other work by academic staff. Scholars would be able to choose whether their works will be available to all Internet users or only to others on their own campuses. It is interesting to note that the participating universities have tagged all the materials with metadata tags, given Google's reluctance to use such information from general websites. ■

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