

## A rich portal

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**Kerry Webb**

kerry.webb@alianet.alia.org.au

**A**lert readers of this column will have noticed that the segments are usually quite short, with a brief description of a news item or site or new development that's caught my eye, a wry (ha!) observation and a URL. This column is different because this particular application is worth a good look. Towards the end of June, I saw a demonstration of a system that exemplifies what the web can and should do. At Monash University, a team led by Sue McKemish is working with Breast-Care Victoria and the Breast Cancer Action Group to develop a portal called Breast Cancer Knowledge Online. Their aim is to produce a service that can deliver targeted information to users — depending on the age and condition of the patient, the level of detail needed and who the searcher is (the patient, a child, a friend or a parent). They also give an objective rating of the quality of each resource — it may be peer-reviewed or subject to editorial review, or it may be an advertising piece from a drug company. In this way, a user can ask for just what they want (either searching or browsing the entire collection) and will also be given some assistance in evaluating the degree of authority of the resources that they find. It is a very good model that can be applied to many areas of information provision — not just in medical literature. The project is based on a well-thought-out metadata structure and is supported by a grant from the Australian Research Council. The portal itself is not yet live, but you can follow its progress through the project site at <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/eirg/bcko.html>.

### Closer digital archive relations

Under the Digital Recordkeeping Initiative led by the National Archives of Australia, we will be seeing a lot of research into finding the best ways to preserve digital records and standardise the technologies used for updating, upgrading and storing data. National, state and territory jurisdictions, as well as the New Zealand government, will be working together to collaborate on the development, articulation and implementation of a common set of strategies for enabling the making, keeping and using of digital records. The press release is at [http://www.naa.gov.au/publications/media\\_releases/digital.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/publications/media_releases/digital.html).

### Easy reading

It is not easy being a media baron, or so I am told. They are trying to move with the times (or the *Herald*...) but they still have to please their shareholders. So, there is pressure to put their newspapers online,

but also to make some money from the exercise. The result is that you are often asked to 'register' and provide some information that may be used to send you promotional material. This may or may not be a privacy problem, but it is usually inconvenient. Enter <http://www.bugmenot.com/> which will give you a working sign-on and password to get into the newspaper site. It will not give you the sort of access that paid subscribers have, so you will not really be depriving the barons of much income at all.

### Too late for the survey, but...

The AMeGA Project [<http://ils.unc.edu/mrc/amega.htm>] aims to identify and recommend functionality for applications supporting automatic metadata generation in the library and bibliographic control community. The project is being led by the School of Information and Library Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and is being supported by the Library of Congress. A recent component of the project is a survey (which ran until 31 July — sorry) in which respondents were asked to identify which metadata elements could most-effectively be generated fully- or semi-automatically. It will be interesting to see what the survey results are, and where they lead.

### PDF — the debate continues

There is a good discussion on the usability and accessibility aspects of PDF documents at [http://www.communityinclusion.org/curbcut/archives/odds\\_n\\_ends/000052.html](http://www.communityinclusion.org/curbcut/archives/odds_n_ends/000052.html). While some people rail against the use of this technology, others point out the inconsistencies in such arguments. In many ways, it is a familiar argument — should the software be blamed when people use it badly? Or, should people be blamed if the software is so hard to use properly?

### You've got new mail

After a lot of waiting and a certain amount of hype, Google's new Gmail service is starting to spread among the online community. They have gone about it in an unusual way, with a core of users who have expressed interest in the concept, and when those users have generated some activity on their account they are then given a few invitations to distribute to their friends. In this way, they are establishing a community, of the sort that some people were wary of when other services like Friendster and Orkut were announced a few months ago. And it has not been plain sailing at all for the new kid on the block. There are reports that Yahoo! and Hotmail have been

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blocking Gmail invitations sent to account holders on those systems.

#### **But what is it like?**

The system itself is not bad. The interface is well-designed, and the advertisements (which is how Google is going to pay for the one gigabyte storage allowance for each user) are unobtrusive. It is still a little unusual though. Mail messages are stored only once, but are displayed in a threaded mode, which makes discussions easy to follow. And there are still some concerns about whether your mail is really safe from prying eyes (especially since the recent arrest of an AOL employee for selling thousands of e-mail addresses). You cannot sign up yet, but you can get a little more information at <http://gmail.google.com/gmail/help/about.html>.

#### **Where do they get these names?**

Gimpsy [<http://www.gimpsy.com>] is a different type of portal, but then I guess you have to be different to stand out from the crowd. Rather than trying to classify sites by what they are about, the Gimpsy crew concentrate on what the user can actually do on the site. If all that a site provides is information and all that the user can do is to read it, then it is not accepted into Gimpsy. So, the main page has a lot of verbs, like Bet, Chat, Learn and Watch. After that, there are subjects appropriate to the verb — in the case of Learn, you will get chess, computing, how to, language, and so on.

#### **ACRO going in to bat**

Australia Creative Resource Online [<http://www.uq.edu.au/acro/>] is a federally-funded archive of video, music and other creative material that has been put together to provide creative raw materials that helps to stimulate the production of new broadband content. Working on the assumption that much more material is produced than finally makes its way into the finished product, the team behind ACRO are putting together a sort of digital junkyard that can be mined by media workers and researchers. Providing that creators can show that they own the product, the ACRO project is willing to accept contributions, and in some circumstances, arrange for its digitisation.

#### **Open-source**

I first reported on this in 1999, so it is probably worth another look now. OSS4LIB at <http://www.oss4lib.org/> has information about open-source systems for libraries. It now features links to over 100 projects, as well as bibliographies and relevant articles. And their list is still active, with searchable archives. Not surprisingly, recent discus-

sions have centred on open-source content management systems.

#### **What we can learn from history**

Living Internet is a site that sets out the history of the internet and its major applications (e-mail, WWW, Usenet, lists) in a methodical way. Under each category, there is a specialised segment on history, design, key features, security and so on. Plus the obvious link to 'more information'. See it at <http://www.livinginternet.com/>.

#### **It may be management, but is it right?**

There is a lot more discussion these days on rights management, of all types. On the simpler side of things, have a look at <http://craphound.com/msftdrm.txt> which is a talk given by Cory Doctorow to a Microsoft Research Group in June 2004. It concentrates on rights management in the audio- and video-recording industry, which is a topic that the public can appreciate quite well. But there is another aspect of the whole digital rights area that has not had much coverage yet. Microsoft announced in Office 2003 a feature called Information Rights Management, where a user can specify just who can do what with a document — read it, print it, change it. The user can also specify a 'use-by' date after which the document virtually ceases to exist. The problem is that it is not necessarily easy to detect these restrictions when you receive such a document. Records managers in particular are not impressed, and there is a spirited attack on the concept in the May 2004 issue of the RMAA's *Informaa* quarterly. Although there has not been much coverage in the general press, many government bodies are aware of the problem and are working with software vendors to find ways to resolve it. You will be hearing more about this.

#### **All of the statistics that you need, and more**

For those occasions when you are asked for the growth of internet usage in Nepal (estimated sixty per cent from 2000 to 2004), or the eighth-most-common language on the web (Italian, apparently), look no further than <http://www.internetworldstats.com/>. ■

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