But where is the pay-off?

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In a recent article in *Educause Review* 'Why IT has not paid off as we hoped (yet)' [http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm03/erm036_articles.asp?id=1], the authors have some good things to say about our profession: 'The real heroes of the digital revolution in higher education are librarians; they are the people who have seen the farthest, done the most, accepted the hardest challenges, and demonstrated most clearly the benefits of digital information. In the process, they have turned their own field upside down and have revolutionised their own professional training. It is a testimony to their success that we take their achievement for granted.' Stirring words, but the rest of the article is an interesting analysis of how information technology has and hasn't produced that changes that many of its proponents had expected. On this occasion, the argument is about education, but the comments are valid for other sectors, even libraries.

Taking big bites
The National Library of Australia (NLA) has, in a short time, updated its ILMS, public catalogue and website, and done it successfully. The new site has quite a different feel from the old one — more utilitarian, but still quite attractive, and more importantly, helpful. The documentation on the site says that it comprises about 15 000 HTML documents: which takes quite a lot of managing. Of particular interest is the NLA's metadata strategy for the site at http://www.nla.gov.au/metadata.html which goes into considerable detail on how metadata is to be applied, and to for which resources it has been included.

Opening it up
The term 'open access' has many meanings. To some software suppliers it rings the knell of doom (not that they will admit it), to consumers it can mean free software (although it does not necessarily finish up that way), and to many libraries and researchers it is a promise of more accessible information. There is an interesting essay titled 'Open access and the case for public good: the scientists' perspective' at http://www.infotoday.com/online/jul03/romero.shtml. It is an issue that has been going on for years between scientists, publishers and librarians, with few results so far. This may change, as the subject was on the agenda for the World Summit on the Information Society (10–12 December 2003). To see what happened at the Summit, see http://www.itu.int/wsis/.

And while we are on the topic...
The Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences And Humanities [http://www.zim.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin/berlindeclaration.html] arose from a conference held last October, which discussed new ways to access scientific knowledge and cultural heritage via the internet. The Berlin Declaration extends the scope of previous statements such as the 'Bethesda declaration on open access publishing' and the 'Budapest open access initiative' by incorporating cultural heritage.

The animated mathematician
Someone with way too much time on their hands (and aren't we thankful!) has translated Tom Lehrer's classic song 'The Elements' into a multimedia format. And you'll be able to find out about the ones that have since been 'discahvered' at http://www.privatehand.com/flash/elements.html.

Old material coming online
The National Library of Medicine (NLM) has announced that it will convert 1.5 million OLDMEDLINE citations from its older printed medical indexes to machine-readable form and add them to PubMed in a staged process. The citations were originally printed in hardcopy indexes published from 1953 through 1965. The first batch will be the 1950–1952 data, which it expects to add in early 2004. NLM anticipates a quarterly cycle for revised records. There is more information on the project at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/techbull/so03/so03_oldmedline.html.

Cleaning up your corner of the Net
Web usability expert Jakob Nielsen has offered some thoughts on 'information pollution' in an interview with BBC News Online. He points out that e-mail in particular needs to be managed carefully and offers a few useful tips, the most useful of which is that you should 'time manage and prioritise'. The story is at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3171376.stm and features some reader feedback, which turns out to be generally less useful than Jakob's advice.

Online reference, where to next?
In an article in *Electronic Book Web*, Sam Vaknin discusses 'The future of online reference' and discovers some disturbing trends. At a time when Barnes and Noble was withdrawing from the e-books business, when Amazon introduced its 'search inside the book' and when Project Gutenberg added its 10 000th title, he interviewed a number of online and print publishers to ask about the future of paid access to online reference works, textbooks, and scholarly material. All agreed that there was a sort of 'two- or even three-tier' structure to information on the web, delivered to users depending on their ability and inclination to pay. They also expected to see an increasing use of person-

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alisation, with services that tailor results to what the system knows about the user. It is at http://12.108.175.91/ebookweb/stories/storyReader$2407.

New on Digital Preservation

The Digital Preservation Testbed is an organisation in the Netherlands, which researches all sorts of issues dealing with digital preservation on behalf of the Dutch government. They have recently published a White Paper, 'Emulation: context and current status' at http://www.digitaleduurzaam heid.nl/bibliotheek/docs/White_paper_emulation_UK.pdf with previous publications covering e-mail preservation and the use of XML. They also have on their site an excellent Knowledge Bank, with plenty of links to resources on general preservation topics, at http://www.digitaleduurzaamheid.nl/index.cfm?paginakeuze=65&categorie=2.

Getting around in the Great Wen

If you like maps (and who doesn't?) this will keep you busy for hours. The Bath Spa University College site has published a version of Greenwood's Map of London, created from a survey carried out from 1825–1827. The map, scaled at eight inches to the mile, zeroes in on central London in marvellous detail and allows you to move around and focus on points of interest. See http://users.bathspa.ac.uk/greenwood/.

Achieving standards compliance

In an interview with the designer of the new PGA.COM website, there are a few good comments on how the use of a content management system can get in the way of good intentions about adhering to web standards. He also talks about their attitude to the issue of support for older browsers. The complete interview is at http://webstandards.org/learn/interviews/tdominey/.

Eco on books

Umberto Eco spoke at the newly opened Bibliotheca Alexandrina in November on varieties of literary and geographic memory, and the future of books and other systems. As you would expect from such a master of the written word, it is well thought out and beautifully written. Here is an example: 'A mediaeval cathedral was a sort of permanent and unchangeable TV program that was supposed to tell people everything indispensable for their everyday life, as well as for their eternal salvation.' You can find the lecture at http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/665/bo3.htm.

Book stumpers

One of my occasional pastimes is reading the STUMPERS-L list [http://domin.dom.edu/depts/gslis/stumpers/], where people can take questions that they have been unable to answer. Although some queries generate no responses (like my recent enquiry about ABBA record sales, humph!) there will usually be someone on the list able to help or dig around a bit. A common sort of question is about half-remembered children's books, and I recently found a site that specialises in this sort of thing. It is the Loganberry Books Stump the Bookseller site at http://www. logan.com/loganberry/stump.html and you can post a question for $2 (which can be paid through PayPal).

Global issues and the internet

The US State Department produces a number of e-journals relating to major issues facing the US and the international community. In the November 2003 edition of *Global Issues*, they featured several articles on 'The evolving internet'. One of them looked at the progress and promise of the internet (and took quite a gloomy view of the results that might follow the World Summit on the Information Society), and in particular the attitude that access to the internet is an entitlement for all people. This issue of the journal is at http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itgic/1103/ijge/ijge1103.htm.

Web research guide

For the benefit of scientists, faculty members students, researchers and authors who use their ScienceDirect product, Elsevier has produced a pretty good *Web Research Guide* at http://www.webresearch.sciencedirect.com/. Although mainly directed towards Elsevier's services, it still has some good general tips, covering issues like asking better questions, using 'experts' and specialist resources for searching abstracts and indexes.

ALPSP learned journals collection

The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers [ALPSP] (274 members in twenty-eight countries) has developed a service where smaller ALPSP member publishers work together to sell a combined package of their journals to consortia and other large customers. There is a free trial available, with details at http://www.alpsp-collection.org/trialform.htm.

Education and training for people with disabilities

The new Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) site is now online at http://www.adcet.edu.au/. ADCET provides information about inclusive teaching, learning and assessment strategies, accommodations and support services for people with disabilities in post-secondary education and training. One interesting feature is a link to HREOC's site with a list of decisions on complaints under the *Disabilities Discrimination Act.* ∎

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