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# And the winners are...

Each year, the Museums and the Web competition looks at museum websites to find the best in various categories. The site judged best overall was from the UK Science Museum at <http://www.makingthe modernworld.org.uk/>. It's not much to my taste — quite flashy and a little confusing — but, to quote one of the judges, it 'gives the user many options for shaping their experience and makes good use of new technologies'. Several of the other category winners showed a similar fondness for new technologies, and I had trouble loading them, even on a fast connection. My favourite though would be Cycles: African Life through Art at <http://www.ima-art.org/cycles/>. See the winners for yourself at <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2005/best/>.

### Why should it be so?

Maybe you think I'm being harsh on the museum community with my comments about these award-winning sites, so let's explore it further. I spend a lot of time reading comments about usability and accessibility of websites in general, and the museum sites from the competition would not pass muster in the commercial or government sector. So why are they acceptable in their own community? They may argue that they have a particular need to attract and engage visitors — especially young people — and so must use new technology to grab their attention. But this attitude has been largely discredited in the general website community, so why should museums continue to go down this path? Time will tell if they're right.

### Even more images online

The British Library has called tenders to upgrade its online images service (at <http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary/index.jsp>). Currently they have around 14 000 images available, but they plan to increase this to 100 000. Material available from the service includes notes from Leonardo da Vinci (hmm, I wonder if they're in code?), the Magna Carta and many of Shakespeare's papers.

### Writing on the web for everyone

The Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) continues to provide good quality presentations as part of its Better Practice series. The most recent was at the National Museum of Australia on the subject of Accessibility and Writing for the Web. Andrew Arch from NILS was up to his usual standard in talking about many aspects of accessibility, and Dey Alexander from Monash University gave a very useful talk (with plenty of examples) on how to make your website content readable. The presentations are cur-

rently available in PDF format at [http://www.agimo.gov.au/resources/events/2005/web\\_accessibility/](http://www.agimo.gov.au/resources/events/2005/web_accessibility/) but, practising what they preach, AGIMO will also have HTML versions soon.

### And more from AGIMO

AGIMO's minister, Senator Eric Abetz, has announced that they'll be reviewing their *Guide to minimum website standards* to make it easier for the public to access information and encourage agencies to adopt best practice methods. Their previous Guide was released in 2002 — which is at least three years in internet terms — so this review should pick up some of the changes in good practice that have emerged since that time. This will be useful for many of us, as the people responsible for drawing up policies on such matters are always checking to see what the others are doing. And AGIMO will probably be doing the same — looking at other jurisdictions' efforts in this area.

### Whatever you want to call it



Shedding some light on the confusion between thesauri, controlled vocabularies and ontologies, Maewyn Cumming of the UK Cabinet Office has produced a simple guide titled 'Tomatoes are not the only fruit: a rough guide to taxonomies, thesauri, ontologies and the like'. It's quite readable and very useful, although from her comments she does seem to have been bitten by a rabid librarian at some time in her past. It's at [http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/schemasstandards/gcl\\_document.asp?docnum=681](http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/schemasstandards/gcl_document.asp?docnum=681).

### And another view

If that's not quite what you were looking for, a paper from Earley & Associates goes into the subject in a little more detail in the paper 'Preparing a controlled vocabulary for content management and access: an indexer's perspective' at [http://www.earley.com/earley\\_report.htm](http://www.earley.com/earley_report.htm). It won't tell a librarian anything that they didn't know before, but it explains quite clearly the difference between many of the concepts involved in such a project.

### On the subject of indexes and indexing

It appears that Microsoft and Apple don't see eye to eye on yet another issue — indexes. It's been reported that the next version of Windows won't have an index component of their Help facility because, in the words of the Microsoft representative, 'people don't use it'. Apple, on the other hand, will have a sophisticated indexing capability in their next Help engine. The problem is, as we well know, that different users have different habits. While one will be happy with searching for the answer, another needs to see the structure of the Help information. Others would be happier



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with an instruction manual, but we lost that battle years ago. For a good examination of all this, look at Jan Wright's article 'The future of indexing' at [http://www.winwriters.com/articles/indexing\\_future/index.html](http://www.winwriters.com/articles/indexing_future/index.html).

### **Our country, from on high**

A geologist friend of mine pointed out an interesting site developed by the School of Earth Sciences at the University of Melbourne. It's the Australian Landform Atlas, providing a view of the continent based on elevation above sea level. Because it's colour-coded, it may be confusing at first, as a patch of green doesn't necessarily represent a grassy area. But once you get over this, you'll find many parts of the country displayed as you've never seen them before. Look, for instance, at the caldera around Mt Warning in far northern New South Wales, or the shape of the Sydney basin. See it at <http://jaeger.earthsci.unimelb.edu.au/Images/Landform/landform.html>.

### **The future of the semantic web**

The UK JISC has published a new report on semantic web technologies, in which they look at how it may impact on the higher and further education sectors over the next few years. The emphasis is (of course) on the UK experience but, if it comes about, it will surely be applicable around the world. Starting with Tim Berners-Lee's original vision for the semantic web, it then discusses the technology and tools now available to support it, and finally looks at those areas where it will most likely have the biggest impact, such as distance learning, libraries and information management, and collaborative research. Unfortunately, the upbeat tone of the report is muted by the more realistic assessment of all the work that has to be done to make Sir Tim's vision come to pass. The report is available (in various formats) from [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=techwatch\\_ic\\_reports2005\\_published](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=techwatch_ic_reports2005_published).

### **Yet more on Google**

It wouldn't be a monthly column without some controversy regarding Google, so here goes. The Google Library project, which will scan millions of books for full-text searching, has come under fire from a group of American academic publishers, who claim that it seems to involve systematic infringement of copyright on a massive scale. Google has countered by saying that it does offer protection for copyright holders and for books still in copyright — users will see only bibliographic information and a few sentences of text. Other publishers are looking very closely at the whole project. It's going to be a bumpy ride.

### **Managing your websites**

A report that the British Library will be consolidating a number of their websites onto a single platform may be an indication that there's a subtle change happening. While their decision seems to be driven by a move to an enterprise content management system, many organisations in Australia — especially in the government domain — are thinking about consolidation for other reasons. One is that government domain names are going to cost more from next year, and will have to be renewed every two years — and the renewal notices will concentrate the minds of managers wonderfully. And that's a good thing, because there's plenty of evidence that many managers don't think too much about the implications of having a website. The Victorian Government has addressed this by requiring formal business cases for any proposal to develop websites. It may seem like overkill, but there are good reasons for having a proper basis for making such decisions. Information about their Website Management Framework is at <http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/Victoria/websitemanagementframework/wmf-index.htm>.

### **A sense of place**

But while this is going on, there will be a whole new group of sites coming along. auDA, the body running the Australian domain name system, has released 'geographic' names in the com.au and net.au domain space, after having had an embargo on such names for several years. To be fair to everyone, they're conducting a ballot for these names and charging a premium price for those bidders who are selected, as there's no doubt that names such as perth.com.au or adelaide.net.au will have particular value. The money raised by this ballot will go towards supporting community-based portals like geelong.vic.au or katherine.nt.au, which will be available later this year. More information on both of these developments is at <http://www.auda.org.au/geographics/index/>.

### **Life planning**

The book *Never too old to rock'n'roll* is an invaluable source of information for those of us facing the challenges of life after 50, especially with transition and life/work planning. On their website, they've provided a series of exercises from the book at <http://www.never-toold.com/Main/Page.aspx?PageID=12>. And don't think they're just for the mature demographic; the questions that they ask are worth considering, no matter how old you are. ■

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