

What body is that?



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Alphabet soup is not to everyone's taste, and especially with the internet there's a lot to remember. Alex Simonelis from Dawson College in Montreal has taken a stab at setting out the origins, goals and membership of the major players, such as IETF, ICANN and the W3C. It's not a bad summary, although it could do with a few links and perhaps a little more explanation. But it works as a one-stop shop at http://www.acm.org/ubiquity/views/v6i5_simoneli.html.

Open access literature

The Open Access Bibliography: Liberating Scholarly Literature with E-Prints and Open Access Journals presents over 1300 selected English-language books, conference papers, articles, technical reports and other printed and electronic sources that are useful in understanding the open access movement's efforts to provide free access to and unfettered use of scholarly literature. Where possible, links are provided to sources that are freely available on the internet (which amounts to around 78 per cent of the bibliography's references). It's at <http://info.lib.uh.edu/cwb/oab.pdf> — but be warned: it's big.

More images online

In a generous gesture, the New York Public Library is putting hundreds of thousands of its images online, allowing free personal downloads of material including maps, Civil War photos and illuminated medieval manuscripts. Over the next few months, the collection will grow from the quarter of a million images available now, to double that size. They say that they expect wide use. Indeed. See for yourself at <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org>. In doing this, the NYPL is continuing the tradition started by the Library of Congress, whose recent offerings include the Civil War Maps at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/collections/civil_war_maps/. Good on them!

It's only fair

The Federal Attorney-General has announced that the Australian Government will conduct a review into whether or not Australian copyright law should contain a 'fair use' defence similar to the fair use defence in the US *Copyright Act*. The review will be carried out by the Attorney-General's Department, following the release of an issues paper in April 2005. Anyone involved with the provision of information online will need to watch this with interest. There are more details at <http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/www/ministerruddockhome.nsf/page/speeches/>.

New ideas in education

Every generation is different from all that have gone before, but you can successfully

argue that the current group of learners has been subject to a radical new environment. Accordingly, EDUCAUSE has recognised the new aptitudes, attitudes, expectations and learning styles of the people who have grown up with the internet, and has produced an e-book 'Educating the Net Generation'. You can read it in HTML format or PDF (in whole or by chapters) at http://www.educause.edu/content.asp?page_id=5989&bhcp=1.

Kids Web

It is an interesting debate about whether children should be spared the bad stuff on the Net, but if you're looking for somewhere to start, you could do a lot worse than Kids Web: The Digital Library for K-12 students at <http://www.npac.syr.edu/textbook/kidsweb/>.

It is a very small subset of the web that is simple to navigate, and contains information targeted at the K-12 group. It is also very attractive. But, as I said, it is a starting point only. Most kids will be busting out of it as soon as they can.

The web not the death of language

In an article from *Wired News* at http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,66671,00.html?tw=wn_story_top5, David Crystal sounds quite upbeat about the future of language in the era of internet communication, and has high hopes about the ability to explore the power of the written language in a creative way (or is that cre8iv?). Having passed such a judgement, I then read the second half of the article, which analysed a collection of instant messages, and found that they did not always match the stereotypes.

Metadata – the debate continues

Despite having been long involved with metadata, I have always had a nagging doubt about whether it is worth all the fuss. I have developed the standard for ACT Government webmasters (building, of course, on the great work that has been done in other jurisdictions) and worked to get them to understand and then apply the rules. And all the time, that little voice has been rattling around in my head, asking: 'Is this the best way to get to where we want to be?' We have seen search facilities based on metadata (helped out by full text) and it is clear that they are not all that they are cracked up to be. Granted, the metadata can be used to embellish the search results (title, description, publisher) but is it really much use? Dick Bultermann, writing for the *IEEE Multimedia Journal*, expresses his own doubts: <http://www.computer.org/multimedia/mu2004/promo1.pdf>.

Putting the acid on harvest control lists

Joining the metadata debate (in a way) is the

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Not just lip service.

Real customer service and support.

Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), which recently announced that it will not be requiring government agencies to maintain harvest control lists, which is good news for some (who diligently maintained their HCLs) but won't mean much to the silent majority who just ignored them anyway. What metadata AGIMO will now be gathering will come from the HTML files themselves, rather than the HCLs.

Readings on web design

When you first come to the wild world of web design, you may be stumped about where to start. An article at *Digital Web* magazine proposes four good web design books at http://digital-web.com/articles/four_best_web_design_books/. Without having read them, it is hard to recommend them, but from the descriptions in the article, they seem worthwhile. The author gives an indication of the audience for whom they have been written, and a neat summary of each. As for me, I picked up at a remaindered store Vincent Flanders' *Son of 'Web Pages that Suck'*, the second in a series of irreverent but informative books that help you 'learn good design by looking at bad design'.

Accessibility visualisation

There's a student group at the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign which has developed a prototype web accessibility visualisation tool. Its purpose is to generate graphical views of accessibility problems. They are looking for feedback on how useful the tool is and how it may be improved. It has had a couple of iterations in the testing and it's certainly better than it was when it was first presented. Try it at <http://devserv.rehab.uiuc.edu/accwebsim/beta/>.

What's in a name?

Webmasters often wonder about the best name for their sites. And then they sometimes think about the second-, third- and fourth-best names. The reason for this is that many of their users will guess the name if they are not too sure about it. Of course, this is a common issue on the Net, with whitehouse.com having a different purpose from whitehouse.gov. Anyway, what's the benefit in having extra names for your site all pointing to the real address, given that domain names are quite cheap? Well, Jill Buckley Smith at HealthIn-site has reported that about 1.4 per cent of their traffic in a typical week will get to the site from their other registered domain names (healthinsite.com.au, .org.au, .com and .org — as well as a couple of misspellings of the main name). This means that around 600 people get to the correct site, rather than being directed to a 'health' website selling discount pharmaceuticals or dodgy remedies.

Worldly wise

The WorldLII (the World Legal Information

Institute) has announced a new resource: the International Courts and Tribunals Project at <http://www.worldlii.org/int/cases/>. It provides a comprehensive search facility for final decisions of all international and multinational courts and tribunals, at global and regional level. You can search the decisions of 20 international courts and tribunals, already comprising over 20 000 decisions.

What do teens want?

A couple of months ago, Jakob Nielsen turned his attention to the usability of websites for teenagers, in the US and in Australia. A couple of his findings were much as you would expect — they like cool graphics and they like to *do* stuff — but others were not. Most teenagers aren't techno-wizards, their preferences are for simple and clean designs, and they don't like tiny fonts — just like the rest of us. See the report at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20050131.html>.

Now you know

The United Nations Official Document System (ODS), the main full-text web resource for official documentation from the United Nations, was previously available only as a subscription service, but has now been published freely on the web. It includes a comprehensive collection from 1993, with older documents being added daily. Selective coverage of General Assembly and Security Council documentation currently reaches back to before 1985. The ODS also provides access to the resolutions of the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council from 1946 onwards. See it at <http://documents.un.org>.

Looking into the future of the internet

The Pew Internet and American Life Project has conducted a survey of technology experts and scholars to evaluate where the Net is headed over the next decade. One of the findings is that the blogging era will bring significant changes to the world of publishing — and this has been borne out by recent developments where a blogger's report has caused the departure of a senior TV network executive in the US and another case where a court had to decide whether an American blogger was entitled to the same protection as a journalist when protecting his sources. Other findings of the Project were that a devastating network outage is likely, that schools in particular have not adapted to the new environment, and that there was no consensus about the Net's impact on religion and community groups. The whole report (with the survey questionnaire) is at http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/145/report_display.asp. ■

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