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*Community geographic
names: applications
will be accepted
from July 2006
<http://www.aucd.org.au>*

Creating, testing and using the Net

A pretty good beginning

Writing in Crikey (<http://www.crikey.com.au>), Margaret Simons comes to the conclusion that there is, after all, a substantial market for serious online journalism. She cites the examples of one of the first Australian internet-based journals, *Online Opinion* (<http://onlineopinion.com.au>), which had nearly half a million visits in March, and the Net-based magazine *New Matilda* (<http://www.newmatilda.com>) has over four thousand subscribers. Crikey itself has more than twice that number and in February clocked up around 850 000 visits. They're all profitable of course: most such journals receive support in many ways and don't pay their contributors much, if at all. But give them time.

Website audit and analysis

Any time that you're considering doing anything substantial to a website, you should carry out an Audit and Analysis exercise. Obviously it's important when you're re-developing, or migrating to a new content management system, but it's also useful in times of stability – just so that you're ready for any unexpected changes. But how to do it? Chiara Fox, an experienced American information architect, gave a presentation at the recent Information Architecture Summit (<http://www.iasummit.org>) and you'll find a zipped version at http://www.chiarafox.com/ia_summit_06.zip.

...and, on the subject of reviews

The article at <http://www.alttags.org/archives/2006/01/08/48/> gives a few simple pointers to the sorts of questions that you should be asking on a regular basis. I particularly like the section of website relevance, but I'd go further than that. While they talk of checking to make sure that the site is an accurate reflection of your business, I think it's more likely that the mission of the site will change far more often than the basic business. Many sites start off by featuring one aspect of the organisation's activities, but later they branch off into unexpected (and often more profitable) directions. Before long, the initial purpose of the site has been overtaken, but the site architecture has stayed the same. And, of course, 'think about your customers' is never inappropriate advice.

Are they really 'super'?

Research is showing that users of the internet are going to fewer sites – and those few are most often 'supersites' – to satisfy their information needs. The UK government has found that more than half of British users regularly

visit fewer than seven sites. They say that it's an example of the public using the Net more smartly, but I'm not so sure. Some of us see the internet as a great resource to poke around and find things and chortle when we find something really cool (well, I do) but for most people it's just another tool to meet their needs. Not too surprisingly, the research was conducted by the UK government's own supersite, <http://www.direct.gov.uk>.

The people speak!

There's been a long-running story about community websites in Australia. It started many years ago, when some forward-thinking entrepreneurs started registering domains like sydney.com.au, believing that they would be valuable real estate. Well, maybe they were, but other people living in those cities and towns started complaining that these names should be reserved for community use. The upshot was that the allocation of any more names like this was stopped until auDA (the body that regulates Australian domains) had decided how to handle it. This eventually led to an auction of unallocated .com names last year, with the proceeds going to support new names of the form innisfail.qld.au or burnie.tas.au, which will be available only to non-profit groups developing community sites. Commercial organisations, private citizens and government authorities will not be eligible to apply. It may lead to the occasional bunfight, as rival groups claim to be the rightful representatives of a local community, but I think it's quite an elegant solution. Applications will be accepted from July, and you can find out more from <http://www.aucd.org.au>.

Maps, of all types

We've seen quite a few mapping-oriented developments in the past few months – Google Earth (for those with enough bandwidth) and Frapper, to name but two. Then there's MapMuse at <http://find.mapmuse.com/re1/mmHomeBrands.php> where you can find places to 'live, learn, work and play'. It only covers the USA at the moment, but it has interactive maps for locations of 7-Eleven stores, schools, sports clubs, lighthouses and national parks.

For lovers of movie trivia only

George Macdonald Fraser, chronicler of the escapades of Harry Flashman, once wrote a marvellous book titled *The Hollywood History of the World*, in which he explored many of the great movie classics and commented on their view of history. This one isn't quite in the same league as Fraser, but it's very enjoyable nevertheless. The Movie Timeline at

Softlink web based library management software.
Makes life a browse!

<http://www.paulkerensa.com/movietimeline/> lists the movies' contribution to recorded history from 'In the beginning' (The Bible) and 'A long time ago' (Star Wars) to the year 865 427 810 (*The Time Machine*). Along the way, we can recall how Bill & Ted kidnapped Sigmund Freud in 1901 and Harry Potter was born on 31 July 1990. It's a must for Reference Desks everywhere!

So, what's antisocial bookmarking?

You'll probably come across the term 'social bookmarking' and wonder what it's about, but when it's explained, it's really quite simple. An article from *SitePro News* at <http://www.sitepronews.com/archives/2006/mar/22.html> points out that it's an integral part of Web 2.0 and relies on collective wisdom. I've written previously about this sort of concept as applied in del.icio.us and Digg, and I'm still not convinced that it's the way of the future, but it's worth knowing about.

What they think of us

A couple of months ago, OCLC published a document titled *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* (2005), based on a survey conducted last year in which they received over 3,300 responses from information consumers in Australia, Canada, India, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States. The findings show that many users are still not aware of the rich variety of electronic resources that they can find in libraries. Read it at <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm>.

Travel and the Net

Having recently done a bit of travel overseas, I've been reflecting on the impact the internet has had on the way we go about organising our voyages. In our case, we used the web to find accommodation and train timetables, we made hotel bookings by e-mail, we used internet cafes to keep in touch (although you can't rely on finding them everywhere), we made museum bookings and received confirmation codes by e-mail, and we sent lots of e-mail thank-yous to the places we'd enjoyed. Add to that the number of hotels that offer WiFi and places like the Yahoo! Café at Narita Airport, you'll find that it's more of an online world than ever.

Design choices

For anyone interested in developing an effective website, the paper at <http://www.eastonmass.net/tullis/WebsiteNavigation/WebsiteNavigationPaper.htm> is worth a look. They had the opportunity of evaluating six different models for displaying menus – using a 'Yahoo!' style where all options were displayed, a 'rollover' style where options were shown as you moved the mouse over the main heading, one that used Flash, one

that expanded/collapsed menu items, a 'drop-down' style and a 'fly-out' style. They eventually reduced the field to two – Yahoo! and drop-down, and finally chose the latter. The paper also has a link to more information about the test and the context of the design.

Stylish indeed

We need all the help we can find in improving our writing (I know I do), which is why documents like *The Economist's Style Guide* at <http://www.economist.com/research/styleGuide/index.cfm?page=673899> is so useful. It's based on the style book provided to all journalists at that magazine, and begins with George Orwell's classic advice, starting with 'Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print' and finishing at 'Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous'. Well, I hope that clears it up a bit.

Testing Web editing tools

Peter Krantz at standards-schmandards.com has published an evaluation of Web-based editing tools in which he created a sample document with headings, lists, tables and other types of content. He then inspected the resulting HTML code and produced a ranking for each editor. Even if you don't use any of the systems that he tested, it will give you an idea of the sorts of things that you should be looking for in such an editor. The report is at <http://www.standards-schmandards.com/index.php?2006/03/03/36-wysiwyg-editor-test>.

...and another test

Looking at more than just the quality of the code produced, Laurence Veale at iQ Content examined five editors and considered other features such as cost, usability, accessibility and technical support. He found that the XStandard editor provided the best quality code (it also scored well on Krantz's test), but was ranked lower when you considered things like ease of installation and accessibility. The report is at http://iqcontent.com/publications/features/article_73/.

Who's afraid of the big bad scroll?

Referring to a recent article by Jakob Nielsen about keeping important information 'about the fold', the article at http://www.usabilityone.com.au/news_nov05_3.asp points out that we shouldn't be afraid of scrolling. I agree. While it will have made sense at one time to keep pages short so that users didn't have to scroll at all (as some corporate standards dictated) we need to acknowledge that the user community is maturing and can probably cope with some information not being immediately visible, as long as there is enough information displayed at the start of the page to reassure them that they're on the right track. ■

Save yourself the trouble of typing URLs!

This column (with URL links) can be found on ALIANet at: <http://alia.org.au/publishing/incite/>.

Contributions and suggestions for this column are always welcome. Please contact Kerry Webb via e-mail kerry.webb@alianet.alia.org.au.

Many users (in several countries) are still unaware of the rich variety of electronic resources that they can find in libraries.



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