

Our lives and times



Kerry Webb

kerry.webb@alianet.alia.org.au

Check these out

One of the main speakers at the NSW Country Public Librarians' Conference in Coonabarabran in July was Rachel Van Riel, who spoke with enthusiasm on the subject of getting information about books to readers. She illustrated her presentation with two examples – Whichbook and 4uReaders. Whichbook (<http://www.whichbook.net>) lets you choose what sort of book you want, through a series of criteria and a slider bar for each. So you may specify a rating between happy and sad, gentle and violent, short and long, and so on. What you'll get is a list of recommendations with reader comments. You can also choose by type of character, plot or geographic setting. It's a great little service, and if you're lucky enough to live in the UK, each entry has a link that lets you order it from your local library. 4uReaders (<http://www.4ureaders.net>) is a little different, providing a lot of fun information (including book recommendations) to different groups of young people.

Tales of our lives

In a much appreciated publishing gesture, the Australian Dictionary of Biography has been published in an online version at <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au>. It contains over 10 000 scholarly biographies (many with portraits) of people who died before 1980. It's marvellous resource for the amateur or professional researcher.

Pix from the Big Apple

Also in the realm of digital information on the web is the latest offering from the New York Public Library: 'Streetscape and Townscape of Metropolitan New York City, 1860–1942' at http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?col_id=243, consisting of several hundred prints and photographs that you can search or browse by subject.

...and across the pond

The entire history of Liverpool is to be placed online in a project which will go live during the city's 800th birthday year in 2007. The site will eventually include over 150 000 items, including those relating to railways, football and pop music, as well as Liverpool's significance as Britain's second biggest port. Another site related to this sort of activity is <http://www.newsarchiveplus.com/>, which is working towards establishing a digital archive of 18th, 19th and early 20th century UK national and regional newspapers. They have big plans and are offering some innovative services for libraries and consortia.

Fair exchange

Do you need a holiday? Silly question I know, but when you're ready to take some time off, give a thought to Librarian Exchange at <http://www.librarianexchange.net>. They're not an employment agency – more a networking site where you can find others with an interest in exchanging jobs, homes etc. The site is a little confusing: it's not clear whether registration is free or around US\$100, but it has participants from over 30 countries, so you could find something of interest.

If it's Friday, there's probably something about poets

If you don't know what day it is, well you're probably in good company. Most of us get a bit confused from time to time. But if you're not too sure of the significance of the day, try <http://www.todayinliterature.com/>. After a two-week free trial, there's a small annual subscription cost, for which you get a daily e-mail newsletter and access to the site's archives. They also offer site licences for schools and libraries.

Maintaining the standard

You need to keep up with the latest in metadata standards, so you'll want to look at the latest edition of the National Archives' *Australian Government Implementation Manual: AGLS Metadata* at http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/gov_online/agls/cim/cim_manual.html. It's not substantially different from the previous version, with the main change being the removal of requirement for Harvest Control Lists (not before time!), but the Archives are to be congratulated for keeping the record straight.

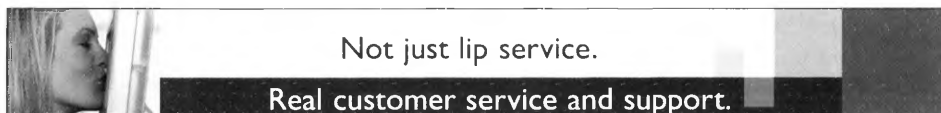
And on the topic of standards ...

Phillipp Lenssen, in a blog at <http://blog.outer-court.com/archive/2006-06-23-n15.html>, has opened up a good discussion on the use of cascading style sheets (CSS) within the general topic of understanding Web Standards. One of his initial points was that separate 'print' versions of web pages were unnecessary, but then a couple of people pointed out the benefits, such as being able to preview what will be printed and then deleting the unnecessary bits. However, not all of the comments have been favourable and quite a few are somewhat challenging – and that, dear readers, is why I love the net.

More on the new version of the web

The interest in Web 2.0 keeps growing, partly because of all sorts of people jumping on an already overloaded bandwagon. One of the latest (and quite a sensible contribu-

10 000 Australian lives: the best biography resource is now online



tor) is Kim Roach, writing on SitePro News about the impact of Web 2.0 thinking on website design. The article is interesting in suggesting that there is a holistic aspect to the web – not just bringing us new developments but changing the way we look at it (literally). Maybe it's a bit fanciful, but see for yourself at <http://www.sitepronews.com/archives/2006/july/5.html>.

...and the ripples keep spreading

Some parts of the library world, too, appear to be embracing the concept – or at least identifying it as the basis of their new developments. At <http://librarytechnologynow.org>, there's an announcement about their Web 2.0 tools, which so far are mainly concerned with social networking, user reviews and Q&A. Of course it could be that W2 is like a coat hook that can only bear so much load before everything tumbles down in a heap.

Trying to make some sense of it all

The article at <http://www.webology.ir/2006/v3n2/a25.html>, though, is an altogether different matter. It's written in clear language without too much hype – as long as you can get past 'multi-sensory communication' and a 'matrix of dialogues'. What Jack Maness tries to do in the article is provide a coherent definition of 'Library 2.0', bringing together various technologies like Instant Messaging (possibly initiated by an online catalogue detecting certain behaviour in the user), more intensive multimedia applications, blogs and wikis, and mashups – where two or more of these technologies are brought together to create a completely new service.

Another 2.0!

There's a lot of interest still in Version 2.0 of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0). Recent comments on the product and the process have included an interview with Gian Sampson-Wild, an Australian expert and member of the WCAG Working Group. In the interview (at <http://webstandardsgroup.org/features/gian-sampson-wild.cfm>) she explains some of the problems with the new guidelines and the difficulty that people will have understanding how to achieve compliance with the appropriate standards.

And more generally...

There's a new book titled *Understanding Web Accessibility* that looks pretty good, on the basis of a sample chapter that's been published at <http://www.uiaccess.com/understanding.html>. In fact, that chapter alone will give you a lot of background to the subject.

Personalising the web experience

I'm not sure why the various companies of-

fer all sorts of new web services, although it's probably to make their brand (rather than their sites) 'sticky'. Maybe that needs a bit of explanation. The concept isn't talked about too much now, but the aim of many websites used to be to keep you on the site; that is, to increase its stickiness. Now, that will only go so far before you need to break out of the sticky grip. So now the big entities (like Yahoo! and Google) will offer you all sorts of services, knowing that you'll wander around, but they'll try to make sure that you keep returning. The easiest way to do this is by making their page the home page on your browser – but just having a Google search box is too boring, which is why they'll let you personalise the page with news, weather, Word of the Day, sports scores etc. My Yahoo! can do the same. We're now seeing a few other sites getting into the personalisation act – Pageflakes for one (<http://www.pageflakes.com>). The people behind it are three entrepreneurs who no doubt have something big in the wings, and what better way to get some exposure for the company? If you like the experience, well and good; if not, there'll be plenty of others waiting to serve you. One of these might be Netvibes (<http://www.netvibes.com>), which offers much the same type of service, but with one strange variation. It offered to let me check my Gmail account, as long as I supplied them with my login and password. That was not an encouraging start.

You are not alone

If you're the sort of person who occasionally comes to a brick wall, particularly when you're involved in web design, this article in A List Apart (<http://www.alistapart.com/articles/throughthestorm/>) could be a life-saver. Walter Stevenson writes about some of the frustrations he finds when things just won't happen the way that we want, and comes up with a few suggestions on how he takes a deep breath, picks himself up and starts all over again. Maybe it's all obvious, but there are a few tricks that most of us can learn.

Picture this

Urbanex is a site that claims to be about urban exploration, but a significant focus is on photography in general, with camera and software reviews, and tutorials on related matters. One useful item is about finding images on the Net, at <http://urbanex.wordpress.com/2006/06/12/how-to-find-images-on-the-mighty-internet/>. After listing the obvious places (Ask, Google, Yahoo!), the author proceeds to less obvious sites, like those involving Creative Commons licences, and free and commercial stock image collections. *

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.

In clear language, Maness provides a coherent definition of 'Library 2.0', bringing together technologies

Softlink web based library management software.

www.softlinkint.com or call 1800 777 037