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The world at your fingertips

Cotton on to this

It's affectionately known as 'LINT', but the site at <http://librariesinteract.info/> calls itself 'Blog central for libraries in Australia'. Unlike many other blog sites it's very well organised, with an effective search facility, a list of contributors, postings organised by categories and archives for the last five months. And there's plenty to see on the site: I found a link to a 'naughty librarian' Halloween costume, showing that it spreads its net wide.

... and they've clearly taken this advice

Anyone starting off on the blogging journey should take a good hard look at Avinash Kaushik's advice at <http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/2006/10/top-ten-blogging-tips-insights-from-a-novice-blogger.html>. It's not enough to put anyone off, but it's all sensible stuff – especially the bit about committing enough time to do it right. In an age when so many personal sites and blogs are barely good enough to be posted on fridge doors, Avinash's suggestions are quite timely.

Lessons from a search guru

There's an interview with a highly respected Australian academic (now returned to her native land) at http://www.boxesandarrows.com/view/long_tails_and. Amanda Spink has been researching Web search for nearly ten years and says that not much has changed. Typical searches still involve 2–3 terms, there's little query modification and hardly anyone uses advanced search facilities. She does report some more complex behaviours, especially the use of concurrent searching on various search engines, or possibly using different terms simultaneously. She also points to an ongoing problem in the Web industry – how do you train billions of users, even on simple concepts such as cached pages in the result set? There's also a reference to her new book on search behaviour; look for it in all major libraries soon.

Whatever, it's still the Web

The investigation of the Web 2.0 phenomenon continues. The Pew Internet group has a very interesting report at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Web_2.0.pdf that not only looks at the differences (real or perceived) between this and the previous version, but also produces some rather startling observations between people-centric sites (like Photobucket and Wikipedia) and the more traditional services like Kodakgallery and Encarta. The report also shows clearly the impact of younger users

and most significantly, the concept of 'space' as interpreted by Geocities in the past and by MySpace now.

Professional indexing

A discussion of the usefulness of site maps and other finding tools led me to <http://www.web-indexing.org/>, the site for the Web Indexing Special Interest Group, an affiliate of the American Society of Indexers. Its main focus is the use of traditional human indexing in the Web medium, and to that end it provides information about professional consultants who can help index your sites. They also have a list of sites that show the benefits of having proper indexing.

Master of all the nations

One of the best general information sites I've seen in a long time is NationMaster, a site developed in Sydney that takes data from a range of (reputable) sources, and massages it into tabular formats. In this way, they can produce graphs that illustrate things like per capita armed forces strength across all countries (that's bound to be useful to someone!) and a raft of other statistics. They also have special areas where lesson plans and other education aids are provided. See it at <http://www.nationmaster.com/index.php>.

Starting at the end?

I'm not sure how useful the OneLook Reverse Dictionary at <http://www.onelook.com/reverse-dictionary.shtml> really is, but at first glance it can be fun. What they do is index many, many online dictionaries, encyclopaedias and reference sites so that you can search for related concepts or crossword clues or simple questions. I entered 'rat catcher' and the first three answers were ratter, mouser and cat. Not bad.

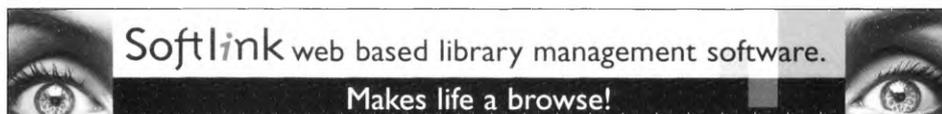
More fun with words

Another interesting one – and definitely worth bookmarking for crossword fans – is Lexical Freenet at <http://www.lexfn.com/>. This one is based on work published in 1998, and for a particular term will give you related terms, synonyms, antonyms, rhymes and anagrams, and much more. Sad to say, some of the links don't work – but those that do can keep you occupied for quite a while.

It's only words

This one's probably in the category of 'catch it while you can'. The LyricWiki at <http://www.lyricwiki.org> is a collection of song lyrics contributed by users of the site. The problem (as I understand it) is that these are almost all subject to copyright and the owners of these

Blogging advice from Kaushik: all sensible stuff – especially the bit about committing enough time to do it right



rights are likely to be coming along with their lawyer friends, asking for satisfaction or the removal of their lyrics.

Where there's a will?

I've written in the past about what happens if (God forbid) we move on from this troubled life and leave all our mail accounts behind. There's some further discussion of this at <http://news.com.com/Taking+passwords+to+the+grave/2100-1025-6118314.html?part=dt&tag=nl.e703> where various legal experts examine some of the aspects of our digital estates. There's some question, for instance, about how private e-mails should be treated and whether your family needs a court order to get access to your account where you're gone. And then there are more simple issues, like the administrator password for your computer – without which new software can't be added. Some sort of planning is certainly needed.

Beware of overly large files

It seems like years since webmasters cautioned us sternly about putting PDFs on their sites, because of the massive size of such files. While storage size alone is no longer a problem, we still should be cautious about providing resources that may take a long time to download. Added to this is the reality that many PDFs are initially created for print purposes and their high resolution may not be necessary for a Web publication. There's a good description of various options for PDF optimisation at <http://www.websiteoptimization.com/speed/tweak/pdf/>.

Stand out and be noticed

The Keyword Discovery site is a commercial undertaking where they try to sell you their services so that your website can be more visible through search engines – no surprise there. What they do do, though, is give you a taste of how they might help, and in their discovery tour at <http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/tour-overview.html> you can pick up a few ideas that can help your site to stand out from the crowd.

Roll your own search engine

Another month and another interesting announcement from Google. This one's about developing your own search engine. What you do is specify which sites and files you want to have included in the search and then hit Enter. It's that simple. Of course, it's all done with smoke and mirrors but the results are impressive. You can also invite collaborators to suggest other resources to be added to the list – up to a limit of 2000, apparently. You can get started at <http://www.google.com/coop/cse/overview>.

For dedicated informationists

There are some people who really need their dose of new information at regular intervals, and

my modest once-a-month allocation may not be enough. For those avid seekers of stuff, let me suggest the Library Link of the Day at <http://www.tk421.net/librarylink/>. You can bookmark the site, or get it via e-mail daily. There's even the possibility of an RSS feed.

It's magic!

One of the common problems you'll find with material published on the Web is when they've been created with some other system. The prime example of this is Microsoft Word, which has an option to save documents in HTML format, but the resulting code is usually regarded as something no respectable dog would have for breakfast. Enter the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with their Accessible Web Publishing Wizard. This reasonably priced product produces high-quality code that's suitable for all sorts of users, especially those with disabilities. You can even try before you buy, at <http://www.accessiblewizards.uiuc.edu/>.

They go round and round

I like to question things (or, in the opinion of my colleagues, to be difficult). Not for me the 80/20 rule; I much prefer the 76/24 or even the 83/15 (which leaves room for just a little bit of uncertainty). So I was pleased to read a challenge to the all-too-familiar Gartner Hype Cycle, with its peaks, troughs, slopes and plateaux. Roger Sessions, at <http://www.objectwatch.com/newsletters/ObjectWatchNewsletter053.pdf>, has come up with his own Life Cycle model, which seems to me much more sensible.

And it (mostly) came to pass

There are a few seminal works that led to all sorts of computer-based developments over the past 60 years; one of the most often quoted is Vannevar Bush's 'As we may think' from July 1945, in which he looked back on World War II and thought about what to do with the technology that arose from research of that era. Some ideas didn't quite happen (he suggested that Encyclopaedia Britannica might be compressed to the size of a matchbox and could cost only a few cents) but many were taken up, one way or another. Read and enjoy it at <http://www.theatlantic.com/ideastour/technology/bush-full.mhtml>, as part of the Atlantic Monthly's 150th birthday celebration.

Shudder!

ITWorld Canada has been publishing a series of good and bad examples of technology over the past month, but the one that I enjoyed most was a collection of the 25 worst websites of the past 12 years. Have a look at <http://www.itworldcanada.com/a/The-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/5708a43b-4706-4a63-a59a-580d17801829.html> and hope that we've learned something from all this.

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.



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or call 1800 777 037

Microsoft Word documents saved into HTML format – the resulting code is usually something no respectable dog would have for breakfast