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Webb's web

All roads lead ...

One of the things that we Web workers agonise over is 'how will they find us' — the 'they' being the eyeballs that we want to attract to our websites. It's a very hard question to answer, because there are so many eyeballs and there are quite a few ways for them to get from there to here. There's search, of course, but there's a whole industry of search engine optimisers (operating with various degrees of probity) who'll advise you how to build your site to be more attractive to search engines. And I haven't yet seen any research about whether they represent value for money. There are links — free and otherwise — and the big challenge there is to find the best sites to be linked from, so that the surfers you're looking for will take the bait. And then there are the people who guess URLs. The article at <http://btobonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070727/FREE/70727004/1078> says that around two-thirds of users enter keywords or company names into their browsers, add a '.com' and hope for the best. And that doesn't count those who'll search Google for 'xyz.com' — and get a result. Which just shows that you should think carefully before you choose your domain name, and also register ones with descriptive terms if they're available.

More on science

I wrote a couple of months ago about the US www.science.gov site, the portal for access to US government scientific information. Now, there's an even more extensive site — <http://www.worldwidescience.org> — which bills itself as a global science gateway, using federated search across portals from ten countries.

What's new in Library 2.0

Long-time readers of the column will recall Belinda Weaver (now the Manager of the UQ eSpace) and will acknowledge that she's a powerful presenter. She's turned her mind to Library 2.0 and has prepared this fine summary of what it's all about <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view.php?pid=UQ:13780>.

The right words in the right place

If you love language in all its forms, it's easy to become saddened by the level of communication that you come across on the Net. Ugly abbreviations in email, blogs that should never have been written, Web pages that struggle to have any comprehensible meaning — you wonder if standards mean anything. And then along comes an article like Amber Simmons' at <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/revivinganorexicwebwriting>. She carefully explains the difference between copy and content — the former is anorexic; the latter well-nourished. And then she talks about the real reason why you use alt text for images, and that made me catch my breath. A graphic designer will spend a long time choosing an image for the right effect; why should you dismiss it in two words? From the comments that followed, it seems that I wasn't the only one impressed.

What it's like to have friends

My flirtation with Facebook <http://www.facebook.com> continues, with a certain amount of satisfaction on all sides, but also a little wariness. We've seen warnings that the sort of information that you might put in your profile could allow someone to impersonate you, and there's the problem of what to do when an old school acquaintance whom you've gladly forgotten asks you to be their friend. Of more interest to me though is how anyone is going to make money out of these sites. There are discreet ads which will bring in some revenue, but I couldn't see what else they were going to sell, until last night. One of its cute ideas is that you can send a gift to a friend (well it's actually an image of a gift, but it's the thought that counts). But they come in two types — one free and another costing a dollar at a time. Maybe that's where the money might come from.

Flattery 2.0

Meanwhile, there are those who liken the Web 2.0 to the dot.com bubble or the Y2K extravaganza and predict a crash before too long, which explains why various entrepreneurs are working hard to get on board before everyone's enthusiasm wanes. The latest one I've seen

is <http://www.iyomu.com> which bills itself as social networking for grown-ups, expecting that that we more senior citizens will want our special place with different facilities — although what these are isn't clear yet. What is clear is that they have a lot of work to do on their user interface, as it's quite difficult to use right now.

What's that rattling in the closet?

The team at ancestry.com.au have announced a few new databases available for searching (including a 14-day free trial). The one that'll probably get the most attention for a while is the Convict Transportation Registers, covering the 165,000 new settlers landed from 1788 on. See it at <http://landing.ancestry.com.au/intl/au/convict/>.

The academic as hero

Chris Blackall has moved from the Australian Partnership for Sustainable Repositories (ASPR) at The Australian National University to the National Gallery of Australia, but before he moved across the lake he gave a lively talk titled 'Masters of the Bibliographic Universe: The Promises and Pitfalls of Digital Scholarship in the Age of Googlepedia', featuring a demonstration of how to integrate bibliographic citations into scholarly works. You'll find a link to the presentation and the podcast on the ASPR's publications page at <http://www.aprs.edu.au/publications/presentations.html>.

Also from APSR

Chris's colleague Margaret Henty's article in *D-Lib*, <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/may07/henty/05henty.html>, provides a good summary of the issues surrounding digital repositories, with particular focus on the next five to ten years derived through a series of interviews with staff at various levels. One issue that I was pleased to see given some prominence was 'engaging the community' — an activity that is very often overlooked.

The wisdom of the masses

I'm not sure what to make of Michael Gorman's two-part article at <http://blogs.britannica.com/blog/main/author/mgorman>. You could say that if



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he's being hosted by Britannica, of course he'd have a red hot go at the world of Wikipedia, but I'm sure he voices the concern that many people have about this new way of collecting and presenting knowledge. It's not quite that we're overly seduced by the authority of the great encyclopedias of the past to the extent that we can't appreciate how things could be done better, but there's something quite dangerous about leaving such an important resource at the mercy of anyone with an axe to grind and a keyboard to tap. As always, many of the comments in response move the discussion along briskly and in some quite interesting directions.

Take their word for it

The UK National Archives and Microsoft have signed a memorandum of understanding for a project to ensure preservation of the nation's digital records into the future. Microsoft will make available a system that combines previous

versions of Windows and Office, to help solve problems of managing historical records based on legacy Microsoft Office formats, which have been the dominant form of text representation over the past 20 years.

Our inventions for all to see

The Canberra-based Cambia has added Australian patents to its worldwide Patent Lens resource at <<http://www.patentlens.net>>. The new additions comprise the full text of over 115,000 Australian-granted patents and over 580,000 patent applications, and join around seven million worldwide patent documents already on the system. It's been a major project, involving the OCR processing of almost ten million pages of Australian patent documents to turn the images into searchable text!

More on digitisation projects

Things have been a little quiet recently with the mass digitisation projects, but it's clear

that there are things happening behind the scenes. A couple of months ago, a dozen big US universities agreed to digitise parts of their library collections, amounting to around twelve million volumes, in Google's book-scanning project. These libraries in America's midwest say that their actions will be consistent with US copyright law, which probably means that Google will only be making available limited portions of copyrighted books. Meanwhile, the lawsuits already in place from the Association of American Publishers and the Authors Guild grind ever on.

You say potatoes ...

I'm a typically bewildered computer user, with a Mac at home and Windows at work. And there are problems with working out which keystrokes to use from time to time, but I was intrigued by an article by Joel Spolsky at <<http://www.joelonsoftware.com/items/2007/06/12.html>>

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Workwatch

In recent weeks we have received workplace queries touching on topics covered in earlier Workwatch columns. These matters include appropriate recognition of librarianship as a profession, superannuation and entitlements to adequate breaks in the working day. This month's column provides updates on each of these issues.

Professional standing: In March 2007, this column referred to occasions where positions in libraries had been advertised with advice that appointees could be trained 'on the job', with no specific training or library experience required. More generally, ALIA is aware that in some organisations, library staff are not accorded the same professional recognition given to other professions in the same organisations. Since then, ALIA has been contacted by a group of health librarians whose employer is proposing that their salary scale be moved from a professional stream to a broader administrative salary range, with the implication that their training and experience is less specialised than is the case among other health professionals. ALIA has made a written representation to the employer, noting that health librarianship is a highly specialised branch of the library profession whose contribution to research and clinical decision making is a major part of provision of health services.

This is the kind of situation about which ALIA is vigilant. Library staff with concerns about any perceived lack of recognition should contact National Office to discuss what might be done to assist.

Superannuation contributions: A query has also been received concerning failure by an employer to pay the Superannuation Guarantee Contribution (SGC), amounting to 9% of an employee's earnings and which must be paid at least quarterly. Those eligible for SGC payments are employees aged between 18 and 70 whose pre-tax earnings exceed \$450 in a calendar month. Eligibility applies regardless of whether an employee works on a casual, part-time or full-time basis. For employers, SGC payments are tax deductible but with a charge being levied where payments have not been made by the end of each quarter. Relevant information for both employers and employees is at <www.ato.gov.au/super>. Click on either the 'Individuals' or 'Businesses' icons.

In many workplaces it is a legislative requirement that superannuation deductions be recorded on payslips. The requirement applies in any workplace covered by the Federal Workplace Relations provisions, that is, in Commonwealth departments and agencies; throughout the territories and in most workplaces in Victoria¹ (For payslip and other record-keeping requirements see the Workplace Ombudsman's site at <www.w.o.gov.au>.) Legislation in some states includes the same requirement. In all workplaces it is a right of employees to inquire as to whether timely deductions are being made and, where Choice of Fund is available, to ensure that payments are flowing to the nominated fund. In addition to records kept by employers, employees should check superannuation statements from their respective funds as to the frequency and amount of contributions.

More generally, the Federal Government has circulated a booklet entitled 'Better Super' throughout Australia. The booklet covers superannuation reforms which came into effect from 1 July 2007 and relate mainly to employees approaching retirement. Further information is at <www.ato.gov.au/bettersuper> and the link to 'SuperSeeker' is especially recommended.

Meal breaks: ALIA received a recent query from a member working in a small library where, in practice, she was only able to leave her workstation for short periods during a seven-hour day. Although her employer was aware of requirements to provide employees with at least one half-hour break, no efforts were made to provide backup when staff members took a lunch break from the reception/information desk. This situation will be familiar to library staff whose duties involve regular contact with the public in libraries which are open continually during the day and sometimes in the evenings.

At s. 607 of the Workplace Relations Act it is stipulated that an employer must not require an employee to work for more than five hours continuously without an unpaid meal break of at least 30 minutes. The only qualifications on this requirement would be where other recognised awards and agreements allow a different condition, possibly requiring more frequent breaks in workplaces where particular safety considerations exist.

Library staff who have concerns about meal breaks, or any other basic working conditions, should first check their contract of employment and workplace agreement (individual or collective) for relevant provisions. Where grounds for complaint may exist, employees should confer with supervisors and, if that fails to resolve the difficulty, with a relevant union or the Workplace Ombudsman. Although ALIA is not a union, we can be approached for advice as to entitlements and as to steps that may be taken to address the problem. ✦

1. In 1996 the Kennett Government in Victoria referred its industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth, as per s51(xxxvii) of the Australian Constitution which allows individual states to refer powers not otherwise in the bailiwick of the Commonwealth.

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about the two companies' different attitude to designing the way that fonts are displayed on their respective systems. It's not a surprise (at least to this Apple convert) that Microsoft has taken the decision to improve readability while Apple is more concerned with rendering the typeface as truly as possible.

Tips on blogging

I'm becoming more interested in blogging, mostly because I'm trying to see how government organisations can use all of the Web 2.0 technologies, so an article by Tom Johnson at <<http://www.idratherbewriting.com/2007/04/09/>> came along at the right time. What he's done is extract from his experiences and those of others a list of lessons learned (and those yet to be learned). One interesting point is that many of the comments listed after the article are cryptic or even unintelligible; maybe that's another usability tip that he could include. And I don't know what he'd make of the cartoon at <<http://www.bankruptcylitigationblog.com/archives/dog%20blog.jpg>>.

What not to do

And just for a bit of fun, consider this if you're ever in the position of an evil overlord, coming up to the climax of a movie or a bestselling seven-book series — <<http://www.eviloverylord.com/lists/overlord.html>>. ✦