

Webb's web

Shirky on Groups

I wrote last year about Clay Shirky and his book and the Cognitive Surplus, and I've kept a lookout for anything of his ever since. There's this essay from 2003 on social software (http://www.shirky.com/writings/group_enemy.html), which has retained its freshness and relevance for six years. Of course, he refers to 'weblogs' but we can't blame him for that. Back to the matter in hand: the essay is a pretty good read and ranges widely across the related topics – from the way that Chinese contributors to Usenet scuppered the proposal for a soc.culture.tibet newsgroup to more general issues of group interaction. It will be interesting to see what he's writing about six years from now.

And something more recent

Having just spent a week with a couple of young journalists, I was interested to see a later offering from Clay. The essay at <http://tinyurl.com/bpxulr> should be read by all people involved in newspapers. My journalist friend (who's an editor with a major financial newspaper in London) told me that he still believes that the press barons should have held the line against the Internet and its concept of 'free' right from the beginning. In his carefully argued essay, Shirky points out how that was never ever possible. It is an inconvenient truth, but newspapers will and must change.

The future and the past of the book

With e-books in the news again (now that Amazon's newly released Kindle 2), there's a timely comparison of half a dozen aspects of digital and paper books – costs, attractiveness, timeliness of publication. *Poe's Deadly Daughters* (<http://poesdeadlydaughters.blogspot.com/2009/02/digital-fallacies.html>) have come to the conclusion that perhaps the main difference may be their relevance to people of different ages.

Watch the use-by date

Reading Gerry McGovern's post (<http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/nt/2009-03-16-microsoft-online.htm>) set me thinking about publishing practices. I've been pretty much in favour of publishing stuff and leaving it there as long as there is space on the web server. McGovern, though, points out that there are a few problems with this, and suggests that you should always cull material that's not earning its keep. Perhaps the most significant objection is that a lot of irrelevant documents and pages might be cluttering up your search results pages and making it harder for users to identify the resources that really matter.

Guidelines for e-Government

At a conference last year I heard José M. Alonso speak about e-Government, and I was even then impressed by his command of the topic. At that time, he had only just started in his job at the World Wide Web Consortium and now, eight months later, the efforts of his team have resulted in the publication of *Improving Access to Government through Better Use of the Web* at <http://www.w3.org/TR/2009/WD-egov-improving-20090310/>. Like many W3C documents, it is long – and we need to note that as a work in progress, it's going to grow even longer. Nevertheless, it's not at all boring and even jaded old practitioners can learn a lot from it.

Checking for hidden obstacles

Many public sector organisations have been wary about diving into the turbulent waters of social media, and it seems that their caution is somewhat warranted. Only after many months of negotiations has the US Federal Government come to an agreement with a number of Web 2.0 services to enable their employees to make use of them. Buried in the terms and conditions of most services they found requirements that may be too onerous for government staffers to agree to in the course of their employment. See more at <http://tinyurl.com/d72gxo>

Off to camp!

In more news on government use of social media, there are serious plans to run something called Government 2.0 Camp Australia later this year – spurred on by a similar event that took place in Washington DC at the end of March (<http://www.acidlabs.org/2009/03/29/government-20-camp-australia/>). I'm not over-enthusiastic about the name – because it seems just a little too quirky – and I'm enough of a traditionalist to wish that the impetus came from some serious source within the Federal Government, rather than a collection of private individuals. But then, what revolutions ever originated within the halls of power? I'll keep you posted on its progress.

"...what revolutions ever originated within the halls of power?"

Maps in the footers

I've not been a fan of site maps in the classical form; they require a lot of effort to keep up to date (and if you don't make that effort, what use are they?) and few people look at them (in my opinion). It looks like I'll have to change that opinion, though. There's a whole new breed of site map and I just hadn't bothered to notice them. Take a look at the post on Nick La's site at <http://www.webdesignerwall.com/trends/modern-sitemap-and-footer/> where he looks at how many major sites are putting them into footers – with some success.

Designing with colour

There are some very good ideas in Wade Preston Shearer's post about designing for colour-impaired users (<http://northtemple.com/2009/02/07/designing-for-color-impair>). The best one is to differentiate action buttons not only by colour, but by shape as well. He also provides a link to the useful Color Oracle (<http://colororacle.cartography.ch/index.html>) utility.

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