

Webb's web

Comedy may be the best form of attack

Concerned about the Commonwealth Government's internet censorship plan? Worried that your attempts to oppose it are falling on deaf ears? Then try the Censordyne approach (<http://www.censordyne.com.au>). With the departure of *The Chaser* from our screens, we need all the relief that we can get.

A comment on the state of democracy

I see from a post on the Commonwealth's Government 2.0 Taskforce site (<http://www.net2.gov.au>) that someone has developed a service that lets you enter your address and find who your elected representatives are at the local, state, and federal level. It's presumably for people who don't take much interest in elections, but maybe that observation is a little unfair. At the same time, Microsoft has initiated its Ask a Pollie site at <http://www.microsoft.com/australia/askapolle/index.aspx>, but that one has already come in for some criticism that it's not 2.0 enough. The true test will be whether Microsoft changes its tack after seeing such comments.

eBook news

There's been a bit of action recently in the online/portable book business. First it was Amazon's Kindle and their little problem with George Orwell (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/07/19/2629854.htm>) – not the best choice of author to have this happen to. They found that copies of *1984* and *Animal Farm* on their database had been uploaded by someone without the necessary permission. Easy, they thought, we'll remove it from our systems – and also from the devices of customers who've bought it. The difficulty was that they weren't very frank with these customers about what the problem was, and they paid the price with some bad publicity.

Then a couple of days after that, Barnes & Noble released their eBook Store at <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/ebooks/> with a whopping 700 000 titles (many of them coming from Google's public domain collection). The big benefit appears to be that the books will be readable on a range of devices – unlike the offerings from Amazon and Sony. Initial reports look promising, although I have read of some people struggling with B&N's use of cookies.

Know your origins

I don't recall having written about this before (but if I have, it's worth another mention). The Online Etymology Dictionary at <http://www.etymonline.com> is a rich source of word origins, and could be used quite effectively to debunk a few myths. One thing that attracted me is the ability to sponsor a word – just the gift for that person who has everything.

Is Google responsible?

There's a very interesting court report at <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/QB/2009/1765.html>. An education provider took exception to a post that somebody made on a Digital Trends (<http://www.digitaltrends.com>) forum, and took action – not only against that company but also against Google, through which you could find the offending post by doing a search. Now, the significant point is that they particularly objected to the snippet from the post that Google displayed in the search results. Google's defence included the claim that it was all done by a computer program and they couldn't go through and manually edit this text before it was incorporated into their database – although they were prepared to remove offensive information when it was brought to their attention. Fortunately their defence was successful, but it won't be the last we hear of cases like this.

A whole lotta metadata

It's tempting to think of metadata in the context that's most familiar to you – the mostly useless stuff at the top of your HTML – but then you come across a seminar like the one put on in June by the National Archives (<http://www.naa.gov.au/whats-on/outreach-and-advocacy/forums/metadata/>). And then you see that there really is a lot of work going on in many other areas. The presentation that impressed me most was the one by Mary Jane Stannus on how the ABC is keeping track of its digital resources.

Moving right along

The Commonwealth's *Government 2.0 Taskforce* had only been going for five weeks when they released their first Issues Paper for comment. Practising what they preach, they'd first put it up as a draft and asked all of their readers for initial comments before final publication. By the time you read this, the time for commenting on the paper will have passed but they will no doubt have moved on to other topics.

And then there were two

Possibly the biggest news of the year (at least in the navel-gazing world of the web) was the agreement between Microsoft and Yahoo! to work together to try to compete effectively with Google. Jason Calacanis, a minor competitor in the search field, was quite direct in his assessment of what it all means (see <http://calacanis.com/2009/07/29/yahoo-committed-seppuku-today/>) and I agree with him. At the same time, I had another look at Microsoft's Bing (<http://www.bing.com>) and was still mightily unimpressed. Knowing Google though, I don't believe that they'll be relaxing one little bit – and that's surely good news for all of us.

Why people tweet

Pity the people who have to decide what to do about social media like Twitter – especially those for whom it's an important commercial decision. A study from TNS and The Conference Board (reported at <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1007193>) shows just how varied are the uses of this most newsworthy of all the 2.0 tools. While a good number use it to keep in touch with their friends, "29.1% used it to update their status, 25.8% to find news and stay updated, 21.7% for work purposes and 9.4% for research". Now that's market segmentation!

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