

Be prepared, be very prepared

An indication of just what a brave new world we're looking at with social media is the story about Nestlé at <http://tinyurl.com/28xrhbv>. After they received some unwelcome responses on their Facebook site, the Nestlé PR staff behaved in a particularly aggressive manner, but soon had to climb down quite publicly. It all emphasises the issue that we've been discussing at work recently – if you're going to move into social networking, be aware that it operates by some new rules and that extensive training is crucial.

And then there was the story about a government department carrying out some community consultation using one of the free online survey services. Overall, they were happy with what they got, but they didn't bother to check the box saying that they wanted the responses kept private – until they received a couple of polite calls from respondents saying that their e-mail addresses were being displayed. Perhaps the survey services should explain a bit more clearly what the privacy settings are for.

A new sort of presentation

Among the very enjoyable and informative talks at the NLA's Innovative ideas Forum in April (<http://www.nla.gov.au/podcasts/innovative-ideas-forum.html>) was Kent Fitch's "Resistance is Futile". His remarkable train of thought was displayed via Prezi (<http://prezi.com/>), which fitted the topic very well. Prezi is not for everyone, mind you, and I can think of a lot of presentations where the medium would definitely overpower the message – but it's definitely worth a look. As are all the other talks on the NLA podcast page. And if you're content with just the words, Mark Pesce's are at <http://blog.futurestreetconsulting.com/?p=282>.

How not to do it

Thanks to the internet, we have not only the means to try all sorts of initiatives, but also a convenient channel to learn the lessons from early adopters very quickly indeed. I was thinking about this while reading the OASIS Report: Avoiding the Pitfalls of eGovernment - 10 lessons learned from eGovernment deployments (<http://tinyurl.com/2dxm6nu>). OASIS, an international consortium that works on eGovernment standards, has cast its net wide among the people who've taken the first few bold steps and has reported back on the way things could have been done just that little bit better.

No longer plus ça change ...

The good people at Pew have produced another thoughtful report, introduced at <http://tinyurl.com/yhko7t5>. Titled *The Impact of the Internet on Institutions in the Future*, the document outlines a study involving nearly 900 stakeholders and critics, which found that by a 2-1 majority believed that by 2020, "innovative forms of online cooperation will result in significantly more efficient and responsive governments, business, non-profits, and other mainstream institutions." I'd be with the majority in this, but the big question is the meaning of significant. There's no doubt that most institutions are more responsive and efficient than they were a decade ago, but I believe that many of the changes that have occurred in that period could not have been foreseen. So although things will be different by 2020, they'll be different in ways that most of us can't even begin to think of.

Apple to the rescue?

And now, for the obligatory look at the world of e-publishing, let's see what The New Yorker has to say. In an entertaining piece at <http://tinyurl.com/y7ycuzq>, Ken Auletta warns – among other things – that people hailing Sheriff Jobs riding up in a cloud of dust to rescue readers and publishers from the depredations of the Amazon Gang (that's not quite his metaphor) – these people may in time come to distrust the rescuer as much as the current crop of baddies. As I read the essay, I sensed a lot of whistling in the dark, a yearning for better times, of well-dressed publishers and long lunches, but there's the undercurrent that acknowledges that those days have definitely gone. Still, it's heartening to hear of publishers and editors encouraging budding talent – even if it really didn't happen all that much.

A little progress on the Accessibility front

Most people involved in web publishing know about the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), a set of rules that govern how you should build websites so that people with disabilities can get something approaching the experience that others have all the time. They may know about them, but it seems that "knowing about" is the extent of their awareness – if you take the time to poke about the Web a little. In this country, there's the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) administered by the Australian Human Rights Commission – they're the ones that you can complain to if you feel that a site is discriminatory. To date, the only well-known case is that where SOCOG was required to pay damages for refusing to make its online booking site more usable to blind people.

You're likely to hear a little more about this before long, as the AHRC is soon to release its guidance notes about the new version of WCAG (I wrote about these in this column a year ago), and that will mean that all Australian web developers will have to pay a bit more attention to how they build their sites. All Australian governments have committed to comply with the new guidelines within 2-4 years and everyone else would do well to have similar plans.

Somewhere, over the rainbow

And finally, if you're planning to read Jasper Fforde's *Shades of Grey*, don't look at the reviews on Amazon. You won't see any spoilers, but some of them explain a bit too much about the intricate world that Our Jasper has created; it's much more fun to work it out yourself as you make your way through the book.

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