Webb's web

Kerry Webb

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Not the winning post

It is remarkable that some organisations are so slow to acknowledge the internet and what it can do for them. Prime examples are Telstra and Australia Post. Telstra's White Pages are only now becoming useful thanks to improvements in their search facilities, and it appears that they have been so busy fighting off rival ISPs that they have lost sight of the potential of service improvements in the electronic world. Australia Post is in a different position, for the moment at least. Despite the growth in e-mail, they are still delivering lots of letters, but this is bound to change. Imagine the ease with which electricity and gas utilities, local governments and financial institutions could generate bills and send them through the Net, once the obvious privacy and security concerns are addressed.

At http://www.auspost.com.au/ you can get an idea of what they plan for future services, but if you want to communicate with the organisation, bad luck. There is no contact phone numbers or addresses (although you can search for your local post office, but that does not work anyway) and no e-mail address for the corporation. I did try the only e-mail link on the site (which allows you to comment on the design of the site) and that message bounced. And if you want to put in a link to the site, you have to ask their permission and explain why you want to do this. They have a long way to go.

Commonwealth electronic publishing

Recognising that government public information is increasingly being made available by electronic means, AusInfo (formerly the Australian Government Publishing Service) has released an exposure draft on guidelines for Commonwealth information published in electronic formats. Although the deadline for comments has expired, the document contains much useful information for anyone interested in any aspect of electronic publishing. It is at http://www.ausinfo.gov.au/guidelines/index.html

Vocational education database

The Vocational Education and Training Database (VOCED) is operated by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and provides information on Australasian research reports and projects and international material relating to the Asia Pacific region. It is based on a network of clearinghouses in Australia and New Zealand for the VET sector. You can search the database and find out more about the system at http://www.ncver.edu.au/voced.htm

IBM gets clever

The CLEVER project at IBM Almaden Research Center aims to develop algorithms and systems to address problems of information overload — sounds like a good idea! It is not about indexing everything in a document collection, but rather seeks to find the documents representing the most authoritative information on a subject. It starts by using a search engine to gather a root set of pages matching the query subject and then adds to the pool all pages pointing to or pointed to by the root set. After that it uses the links between these pages to find hubs of information, thereby exploiting the cumulative effort of the people who have built the web pages. See it at http://www.almaden.ibm.com/cs/k53/clever.html

Bugs everywhere

One of the great things about the Web is that information can be published easily and distributed very widely (of course there is a downside to this — not all that is published and distributed is worthwhile or even reliable, but that's another story). A good example is Bug Net at http://www.bugnet.com/ which collects data on bugs and fixes for PC software. It has quite a lot of free information, and a subscription service if you want more.

What shall we name the baby?

Apparently the US Census Bureau receives many requests for the most common names reported in their Census. Well, you too can find out now, by looking at http://www.census.gov/genealogy/names/ I am not sure what it tells you, as the list contains names given to people over the last 100 years or so, but it is fun to look at.

If you want more

This column will give you pointers to information on and about the internet but even its greatest fans would admit that it could not cover everything. The Internet Training Institute (http://www.iti.com.au) provides subscription-based monthly updates on new resources and tools in its internet contents services. Check their site for a sample.

Library lists

Someone asked me where they could find library-related lists and newsgroups. The best resource is still the one originally maintained at the University of Houston and now at the Washington Research Library Consortium (http://www.wrlc.org/liblists/). It has title and subject indexes, a search facility, and links to other sites, such as the equally useful Internet Library for Librarians at http://www.itcompany.com/inforetriever/email.htm

Standards for libraries

The National Library of Australia published in October a detailed discussion paper on standards, including a statement of the Library's intended activities. It covers catalogue descriptions, data standards, systems interconnection and digital formats and preservation standards. You will find it at http://www.nla.gov.au/services/standards.html

E-journals site survey
Also from the National Library, there is a survey on what people feel about the Australian Electronic Journals website, which it's been providing since May 1995. The survey form is at http://www.nla.gov.au/survey/ozej/

Report on internet use
A Forrester Research report, quoted in *Wired* magazine (http://www.wired.com/news/news/culture/story/15538.html), notes significant differences between new and experienced internet users. Newer users are less likely to click on advertisements or buy goods on the Web, but are more concerned about privacy and security. Those who have been online for a few years, on the other hand, are more comfortable getting news, entertainment, and information online. But even these users are more likely to give information to a non-profit group than to an advertiser.

More people online at home
The Australian Bureau of Statistics announced early in November that fourteen per cent or 913 000 of all households now have internet access. About 2.4m households (thirty-six per cent) frequently use a home computer, up from thirty per cent recorded two years ago. The main barriers to accessing the Net from home are cost (thirty-one per cent) and lack of interest (twenty-seven per cent). To get the full story, look under Media Releases at http://www.statistics.gov.au

Internationalisation at work
The Web site of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has now changed to http://www.ifla.org Previously within the domain of the National Library of Canada, IFLANET now has its own identity but the address change only applies to the Web site, not the IFLA mailing lists, such as IFLA-L, DIGLIB, and LIBJOBS. Similarly, the directory structure within the IFLA Web site remains exactly the same so all you have to do is change the start of any URL from www.nlc-bnc.ca/ifla/ to www.ifla.org/

Collection of Web Data at LC
Alexa Internet and the Internet Archive have presented the Library of Congress with forty-four tapes containing two terabytes of data representing the entire contents of the World Wide Web in the months of January and February 1997. The gift is in the form of an interactive digital sculpture with four computer monitors, flashing pages from the 500 000 sites gathered and stored at that time. See http://www.alexa.com/company/inthenews/loc.html

Newspaper digitisation
The EU project LAURIN (Libraries and Archives Collecting Newspaper Clippings Unified for their Integration into Networks), is looking at the digitisation of newspaper clippings (and is also looking for a more believable acronym). It involves several European libraries and archives. The Context link on their Web site (http://germanistik.uibk.ac.at/laurin/context.html) provides a good overview of relevant issues and links to other projects and resources.

Gene map online
Nearly half of the human genome has now been published on the internet. The National Library of Medicine's updated gene map from the Human Genome Project is at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genemap

eLib projects
A reference to the Lonsdale report on 'The publishing of electronic scholarly monographs and text books' led me to the page listing the UK eLib projects managed by the UK Office of Library Networking (http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/dlis/models/studies/) which shows some pretty remarkable work going on over the last couple of years, and a couple of interesting projects coming up in the area of electronic libraries. Now, if only Senator Alston's mega-department would move its sights a little away from the Information Economy and towards the Information Society, we may be able to do something with this growing body of knowledge.

E-book standards
The Chronicle of Higher Education reported in October that a consortium of publishers, software makers and electronics manufacturers have agreed to work together to set technical standards for electronic books. Those involved include Microsoft, Bertelsmann, HarperCollins Publishers, Penguin Putnam, Simon & Schuster, and Time-Warner Books. The standards will be based on HTML and XML.

Keeping abreast of Copyright issues
The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department has an electronic newsletter e-News on Copyright at http://law.gov.au/copyright_enews/ within their website *Window on the Law*. It provides a pretty good overview of what the department is doing in Australia and internationally.

New Museum journal
The Open Museum Journal (http://amol.org.au/craft/omjournal/journal_index.asp) was launched in November, as a joint project by the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage Studies at Curtin University and Australian Museums On-Line. The journal welcomes contributions that seek to inform a broader audience about current developments, analytical discussions of past, present and future exhibitions and discussions which examine current developments in broader social, cultural and economic contexts. Subscription is free.

MARC utilities
The Library of Congress provides MARCMakr and MARCBreakr — free utilities for converting between text and MARC format. Read all about it at http://lcweb.loc.gov/marc/marcutil.html ∎