

# Libraries and 'net censorship



Kerry Webb

There has been a lot of discussion in the media and on various lists about the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Bill 1999*, in which the Federal Government is seeking to find ways to limit access to offensive material. Some opponents of the legislation are asking the Government: 'What's the fuss? The sort of material which you are trying to block can be found in public libraries all over the place. You don't censor public libraries, so why worry about the internet?' They assume that nobody would ever dare to dictate what is placed in public libraries. We know that isn't so.

## AMOL among the best in the world

The Australian Museums and Galleries On-Line site at <http://www.amol.org.au/> has been chosen as one of ten finalists in the Culture and Media section of the Global Bangemann Challenge, an international competition for innovative IT projects. The winners will be announced in Stockholm on 9 June. Details are at <http://www.challenge.stockholm.se/>.

## We still have a lot to learn

I have written before about Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox column where he writes about various aspects of the Web. In the 2 May issue at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/990502.html> he revisits to a column from 1996 where he looked at the 'Top ten mistakes in Web design'. He found that three years later there has been some change but many problems remain. The main culprits: use of bad Java programming, over-use of animation, outdated information and slow downloads. He has an interesting point about animation — people tend to equate it with advertising and consequently ignore it.

## Getting it all together

Bernie Sloan from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has put together a Web site with links to a collection of about 100 primary source documents dealing with the governance and administration of library consortia and co-operatives. It includes By-laws, Memoranda of Understanding, Resource Sharing Agreements and Strategic Plans. They have been collected from groups mainly in the US, but there are a couple from Canada and one from South Africa. None are from Australia, which raises the question — how many of our consortia documents are online and should we be letting Bernie know about them? His site is at <http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/~sloan/consort.htm>

## An interim ANB

The National Library is making progress in using Kinetica as a way of producing something like the old ANB. The data is available for the moment as a series of monthly files of Recent Australian Publications on the NLA FTP server at <ftp://email.nla.gov.au/pub/>

ANB/ The current process involves records being extracted from Kinetica and lists being produced on a PC in classified and main entry forms (with the suffixes cla and alp respectively).

## Just what we needed (really!)

Lycos has announced a 'new way' to index the Web, with 8500 volunteer editors cataloguing Web pages for Netscape's Open Directory. Apart from the numbers involved (experts, editors, computer hobbyists — all volunteers), it does seem similar to what Yahoo has done for several years now. Compare the two at <http://directory.netscape.com> and <http://www.yahoo.com>. The good news is that they will not take payments for listing sites.

## Progress for XML?

In a column at [http://webreview.com/wr/pub/1999/04/02/edge/index.html?wwwrrr\\_19990402.txt](http://webreview.com/wr/pub/1999/04/02/edge/index.html?wwwrrr_19990402.txt) David Strom argues that Microsoft's embracing of XML and incorporating it into its *Office* products is not good news for the standards process. He suggests that by making their version of XML the default authoring format for the Web, they will effectively hijack the language. When you consider how pervasive their standard Word formats are, you can see how this might happen.

## Electronic theses and dissertations

The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (<http://www.ndltd.org/>) based at Virginia Tech has a collection of information about various aspects of creating and accessing research in electronic form, and there are a few Australian universities among their participants. One of the interesting links points to statistics for usage of the Virginia Tech archive, which shows Australian users second only to those from the UK in 1997.

## Who is using what

If you are interested in what is happening on the Web and how it is being done, check out <http://www.statmarket.com/>. StatMarket looks at the traffic generated by millions of users to millions of sites and publishes statistics on Web browsers, operating systems, traffic and ISPs (although these will be of less interest to Australian users). One startling statistic — Microsoft Internet Explorer has twice as many users as Netscape Communicator. It seems just yesterday that Netscape had a huge lead over Microsoft in the browser wars.

## Style, not fashion

Janice Walker was a teacher at the University of South Florida in 1994 when she leapt to fame as an expert on citing online resources. When her guide was endorsed by the Alliance for Computers and Writing it became known as the *Walker/ACW Style Sheet* and has appeared all over the Web

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since. She is now engaged in a larger project called *The Columbia guide to online style* which has a Web site at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/> and a book published by Columbia University Press. The Web version is quite brief (and of course points you to where you can order the book) but it will be the method for issuing updates to the book well into the future. The book is very good, with information not only on citing resources but also with plenty of useful instruction on creating documents for print or electronic publication.

#### Preserving history

The History Data Service has published *Digitising history*, a comprehensive guide to creating, documenting and preserving digital resources derived from historical documents. The guide is at [http://hds.essex.ac.uk/g2gp/digitising\\_history/index.html](http://hds.essex.ac.uk/g2gp/digitising_history/index.html) and will also be published by Oxbow Books later this year. It is intended as a reference work for individuals and organisations involved with, or planning, the computerisation of historical source documents. It recommends good practice and standards that are generic and relevant to a range of data creation situations, from student projects through to large-scale research projects.

#### Local government research

The National Local Government Research Information web site at <http://www.locgovresearch.gov.au> has been set up by the Local Government Ministers' Conference to provide a focal point for research into local government issues. It features links to Australian and international local government bodies and peak organisations and will soon include an e-journal covering this area.

#### Information literacy

The April issue of the Information Literacy SIG newsletter is now available on the InfoLit web site <http://www.alia.org.au/sigs/infolit/home.html>. Its contents include SIG contacts, information about recent research and new publications. A feature of the current issue is the 'Snippets' section which include brief items of interest to SIG members. Future issues will include information about SIG State contacts, relevant government reports, newsflashes and items with a section focus (school libraries, university and TAFE, public and special libraries). Editor Anne Hazell welcomes contributions by SIG members for the newsletter; contact her at [ahazell@decspop.nexus.edu.au](mailto:ahazell@decspop.nexus.edu.au). SIG members who do not have ready access to the internet can request a printed copy of the newsletter from Di Booker on 08 8207 8239.

#### Legal information list

Legalinfo-online is a new announcement list for anyone interested in keeping track of new sites and developments in online access to legal information in Australia. It will also cover relevant seminars and conferences, and new developments in the delivery of online legal information including standards

and government initiatives, but not Internet law issues such as copyright and e-commerce or general discussion of the law. You can subscribe online at <http://www.fl.asn.au/legalinfo/subscribe.html> or by sending a message to [majordomo@fl.asn.au](mailto:majordomo@fl.asn.au) with subscribe legalinfo-online in the body of the message.

#### RLG digital preservation report

The report 'Digital Preservation Needs and Requirements in RLG Member Institutions' is available on the RLG Web site at <http://www.thames.rlg.org/preserv/digpres.html> in both HTML and PDF formats. It is the result of the 1998 study of RLG members' current practices, needs, and plans for preserving their growing collections of digital holdings and represents an up-to-date picture of the current state of digital preservation and the key concerns and expectations from an international cross-section of libraries.

#### A new look for ACN

The Australia's Cultural Network website has been given a makeover and the owners are looking for comment and feedback. There's a whole range of things that you might not have seen before, like topical articles - the one on Libraries in Australia for Library Week (<http://www.acn.net.au/articles/1999/05/alw.htm>) was quite impressive. Much of the material on the site was pretty well hidden in the earlier design, but now it's been brought to the surface. See it all at <http://www.acn.net.au>.

#### New Metadata site at NLA

Also with a new look is Meta Matters (<http://www.nla.gov.au/meta/>), the collection of Metadata information from the National Library. You should check out the well-selected reading list on Metadata.

#### VRA online

The Visual Resources Association is a body interested in the history, production, conservation, and accessibility of visual materials, whose members include slide and photograph curators, film and video librarians, photo archivists, rights and reproduction officials, photographers and art historians. Its home page is at <http://www.vra.oberlin.edu> and it maintains the VRA-L list. To subscribe, send a message to [LISTSERV@uafsysb.uark.edu](mailto:LISTSERV@uafsysb.uark.edu) with `Subscribe VRA-L firstname lastname` in the body of the message.

#### and that's the way it is...

It's now five years since Virginia Walsh first asked me to write this column, and I have decided that five years is enough. I still enjoy doing it, but I reckon it is time that someone else had the pleasure. So, starting next month there will be another writer bringing you the best of the Web. Thanks to Emma and Ivan for their help in putting the column together (and for not being too stroppy about deadlines) and special thanks to all the ALIA members who have commented on the column and suggested topics or sites. So for now, as the strapping chap in the picture would say — happy and safe surfing. ■

*Digitising history is intended as a reference work for individuals and organisations involved with, or planning, the computerisation of historical source documents. It recommends good practice and standards...*

The ALIA home pages and the ALIA web service, ALIANet, can be found at the following URL:  
<http://www.alia.org.au/>

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TYPING THESE  
URLS!**

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