

Librarians make online information more accessible

Australian Library Week get-together for Tasmanian library workers: Hobart

Finding information on the internet is difficult' ... '10 000 hits on a term' is not what most people are looking for.

In an address to twenty-seven library workers from special, school, academic and public libraries, Lloyd Sokvitne (manager of Information Systems Development at the State Library of Tasmania) outlined the success of the State Library in applying library industry skills to make information on the internet more accessible.

Lloyd began by pointing out that early systems for finding information on the internet were characterised by 'low cost' business models. 'Bottom line' thinking led to search engines such as AltaVista being developed. AltaVista provided a cheap computer-generated solution to the problem of making data accessible to users. Yet the AltaVista solution was no more (and no better) than free-text searching.

The problem remained: finding information on the internet was difficult. Such bottom line business models continued to dominate until the dawning of Dublin Core Metadata. Dublin Core opened the way for a new business model. Rather than focussing on low cost, it recognised both the need for high-quality descriptions of

data and also the importance of retrieval precision rather than recall volume. Down with 10 000 hits!

Dublin Core is a standard for describing the content of electronic resources, and has a structured set of elements or fields that perform the same function as tags do within Marc records.

In step the librarians...

Librarians understand the importance of precision. Their aim is to provide library users with the information they want. For years they have been developing cataloguing and indexing skills which achieve a high degree of precision for print and audio-visual resources. With the development of Metadata, they have been able to extend their cataloguing skills to assign high quality descriptions to electronic information. According to Lloyd, cataloguers may again 'rule the world'!

The State Library of Tasmania has been very successful in managing the *Service Tasmania Online* project. It has made government information easily available to the whole community and aims to provide the public with small, relevant result sets.

In steps the Government...

Each State government department has

keenly created its own web-site without a whole-of-government perspective. These sites have been produced by a range of people who have approached the task from differing perspectives. Information on these sites is often difficult to find.

People talk...

People have noticed that the State Library has designed *Tasmania Online* in a way which makes information easier to find. The Library's expertise is recognised and its success in electronic information retrieval is valued. As a result, the State Library has been asked to assign Metadata to all relevant State, Commonwealth and local government web-sites.

Lloyd spoke of his role in addressing meetings and conferences, explaining to people in government about the State Library's internet/metadata expertise and encouraging government departments to avail themselves of the State Library's skills.

The happy ending...

Contrary to the downsizing in most other libraries, the State Library has been able to employ additional staff — an extra three full-time-equivalent librarians — to work on the government's Metadata project.

At the launch of *Service Tasmania Online* on 11 May 2000, the Tasmanian premier, Jim Bacon said in his speech (without prompting from Lloyd) that:

All this is made possible by the comprehensive indexing system which underpins Service Tasmania Online. The meticulous indexing regime produces accurate and consistent Metadata, ensuring the site yields high quality, meaningful information.

The creators and managers of this clever indexing system are librarians right here in the State Library, and I congratulate them for their efforts. Their vision and achievements illustrate their value as the information managers of the 21st century...

On a dark May evening, Lloyd's enthusiasm for the 21st e-century and the opportunities it offers library workers brushed off on us all. Thank you Lloyd! The free flowing wine, delicious hot nibbles and high volume conversation were all great too! Thanks to Janet and Chris of Hobart Book Shop for a warm and cosy venue. If you missed it, you missed out!

Sue Owen

ALW returns to St George College



After a number of years absence Australian Library Week made a welcome return to St George College of TAFE Library in 2000.

Works from teaching sections of the college accompanied by library stock from the same area promoted the theme of 'Libraries here for the long run'. Australian Library week balloons added to the festive atmosphere and bookmarks were handed out to students as they borrowed items from the library.

The highlight was a display of work

from a variety of sections of the college. Included were fashion designs; electric circuit boards; architectural drafting pictures and models; art works; airbrushed car panels; and a display from the Student Association. The display attracted a lot of attention from both staff and students — especially popular was the tiger painted on the side of a panel van (see above).

Library staff conducted daily classes on databases, the library catalogue, library orientation and the internet. Staff and students alike enjoyed a morning tea on the Thursday morning. ■