



Kerry Webb

kerry.webb@alianet.alia.org.au

A search engine to rival Google? We'll just have to wait and see how Quaero develops.

Online woes and crisis management

Various magazines (including *Campus Review*) have been discussing the demise of AllLearn, the latest of a series of online learning ventures that have ceased to exist (in the immortal words of John Cleese). Others that have succumbed to financial difficulties have been Columbia University's Fathom and New York University's NYU Online. Maybe it's a factor of unrealistic expectations on the part of university funding bodies or maybe it's just that we're all still coming to grips with what will and won't work on the Net. See the article at <http://www.universitybusiness.com/page.cfm?p=1334>.

Sticks and stones – in the electronic world

An example given by Dave Hawking (the father of Panoptic and now involved with the Australian search engine developer Funnelback) illustrates one of the quirks of search engines, but one that we should note carefully. If you do a search on Colin Powell, high on the list of search results will be Condoleezza Rice's home page. Now, you'll look in vain on Condoleezza's page for multiple occurrences of Colin's name, and no – the search engines aren't sufficiently smart to know that he was the former occupant of her position. The answer is that some of the major search engines take note of the anchor text used in a link to a page, and 'colin powell' was used in the past in many links to the home page of the Secretary of State, for obvious reasons. It's the same reason why a search on 'click here' will find the Adobe Acrobat download page. So, if you want your pages to be found, make sure that you get people to use the right text in their links to you. Good luck.

Opening up the archives?

An advisory committee to the National Archives and Records Administration has recommended that NARA should use open architecture standards in building its electronic archives, but it notes that security requirements may have a big impact on its decision. Open architecture would allow the system's components to be interchangeable, and the resulting system could be more 'future-proofed', according to the committee. It would also assist in other organisations' adoption of and interaction with the system. Documents relating to the work of the Advisory Committee on the Electronic Records Archives (ACERA) can be found at <http://www.archives.gov/era/acera/>.

Multinational multimedia search

Last year, the German and French heads of state announced their plans to create and

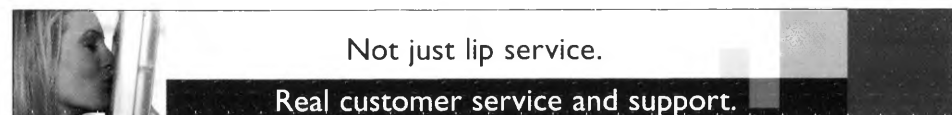
launch a search engine to rival Google. Now, in a broad collaborative venture, they've announced details of the Quaero project, which will allow users to conduct searches by entering images ('query images') and audio components ('query sound clips'), not just keywords. The system will also recognise colours and shapes to identify pictures and videos containing images similar to the query image. This has been tried before – with indifferent results. Now, with better and faster technology being thrown at the problem, it will probably work better. But how much better, that's the question. Some users will want a 'like this' result, but I suspect that we're a long way from a really useful search facility of this type. As yet, there's no site on the web to describe the project, so I guess we'll just have to keep an eye on the press to keep track of it.

Do we have the numbers?

It's been widely appreciated for some time that we're running out of IP addresses, the individual identifiers that are given to every computer or device connected to the internet. Previous concerns about this have concentrated on the proliferation of web-enabled toasters and fridges, but now it's clear that the growth of internet connectivity in Asia – particularly in China and India – will be the impetus for change. The change involved is a new standard, Ipv6, and many organisations are advanced in their migration plans, according to the article at <http://www.internetnews.com/infra/article.php/3605501>. The US federal government, for instance, has mandated that its backbone networks switch within two years, but others are lagging. The Australian situation will be clarified at a Summit in December this year. See <http://www.isoc-au.org.au/ipv6summit/>.

Information what?

As one who likes to think of himself as an information specialist, perhaps an information engineer and formerly a Web architect, I read with interest the article 'Does information need architects?' at <http://www.kmworld.com/Articles/ReadArticle.aspx?ArticleID=15620> where David Weinberger discusses whether information professionals would be threatened by bottom-up tagging systems and folksonomies. Even if the idea of people adding their own descriptions catches on beyond the limited world of online photo collections, there are still plenty of areas where we'll need the clear and logical thinking and an appreciation of user needs that come with a professional approach to information management.



Major oops!

A site that I'm associated with had a little trouble recently. It seems that a staff member was working on a spreadsheet and discovered that the data had been corrupted, so he saved the spreadsheet with a distinctive, but quite inappropriate name. Later he returned to this saved spreadsheet and tried to retrieve the data, and was eventually successful. He then created a PDF and published it on the web, but unfortunately didn't change the name of the file, which was visible for all the world to see. As soon as his web manager found out about this, she removed the offending file and replaced it with one that had a more genteel moniker. So far, so good. Except that Google (and other search engines) still had entries in their indexes for the badly named file and a search displayed this name in the list of results. Some panic ensued, as the people at the top of the organisation felt this didn't reflect well on their practices. Eventually, the web manager found the Google facility which lets you request that an entry be removed from their index. Sighs of relief all round! If you ever find yourself in this position, you'll get some comfort at <http://services.google.com:8882/urlconsole/controller?cmd=reload&lastcmd=login>.

And then there was this

The dust had barely settled on that crisis when another one arose. A bunch of material about an internal IT project had been published on a website and people were worried that there might be confidential material exposed. Well, there was nothing to really worry about, but it was decided that it should come down asap. What had happened was that the previous project manager had believed strongly in open government and had published the documents in good faith. The problem was that the publication had not been authorised by any senior person – or at least not that anyone would acknowledge. The fact that the organisation's standards required senior officer approval for all publication had been conveniently ignored for many years.

Scanning away

An article in SearchEngineWatch refers to an article by Kevin Kelly in the *New York Times* considering some of the major book-scanning projects currently under way. (You'll have to register to read the original article, but there's a heavily annotated version at http://www.serendipit-e.com/blog/2006/05/kevin_kelly_sca.html.) Kelly quotes some interesting statistics: one book in 20 has been scanned (not a bad achievement) and

they're now doing around 1 million books a year. And he makes the important point that with so much information online and findable, books that are only marginally popular will find an audience greater than the virtually nonexistent one that they have now.

The right address

I needed to verify the format of an international postal address recently; what was displayed in the White Pages for that country just looked strange. A bit of poking around led me to Frank's Compulsive Guide to Postal Addresses at <http://www.columbia.edu/kermit/postal.html>. We can all be grateful that Frank was so compulsive in this case, because it clarifies what some countries expect in their addresses (whether street numbers are before or after the street name) as well as postal codes, state/province/region and much more.

Not just French restaurants

Hotfrog (<http://www.hotfrog.com.au>) is a new business directory that uses the 'clouds' display that I've written about previously. It's using a few good ideas: a locality map is part of the standard display, and it also shows related topics. For instance a search on 'restaurants' will show links to related products and services like 'cafes', 'Italian restaurant' and 'Pizzeria'.

King is content

David Lee King is in IT with the Kansas City Public Library and he's done us all a service by gathering together a list of articles on the subject of techies and non-techies getting along together (<http://tinyurl.com/fzeye/> – I usually don't do TinyURLs but in this case it was really necessary). It's a good collection and has some very good suggestions that make so much sense when you come to look at them. Beyond this list though, his site (<http://www.davidleeking.com>) is well worth reading, as he covers a lot of ground in his exploration of libraries and the electronic world.

New in e-government

The Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) has published its new e-government strategy under the title 'Responsive government – a new service agenda', four years after its last offering on this topic. It's full of good ideas, but more importantly it sets out a work program with (fairly) firm dates in two phases: 2006–08 and 2008–10. It also puts more emphasis on project management and project assurance methodologies and re-use and sharing of systems. See it at <http://www.agimo.gov.au/?a=50078>. ■

Save yourself the trouble of typing URLs!

This column (with URL links) can be found on ALIANet at: <http://alia.org.au/publishing/incite/>.

Contributions and suggestions for this column are always welcome. Please contact Kerry Webb via e-mail kerry.webb@alianet.alia.org.au.

Getting techs and non-techs into a good relationship: it can be done!

Softlink web based library management software.

www.softlinkint.com or call 1800 777 037

