

New worlds, new tricks

You may quote me

I've written from time to time about Stumpers-L (now known as Project Wombat), the list of last resort for difficult questions. One of its regulars is Fred Shapiro from the Yale Law Library, who's been involving the list in research for several years while he worked the Yale Book of Quotations. It was published late last year and I've been enjoying dipping into it for a couple of months now. What sets it apart from many of its competitors are the occasional footnotes that provide context and cross references.

And another thing

I've also been spending my time (profitably) on Library-Thing (www.librarything.com). This is the home user's version of ABN and the other great shared cataloguing initiatives of the 1980s, enabling you to catalogue your personal collection using the data from LC, the NLA and various book suppliers. The technology is based on the Z39.50 search and retrieval standard – not widely used outside the world of networked library systems. There are many good features in LibraryThing, but the most useful one is probably the ability to add your own personal tags to any of your books – even the name of someone to whom you've lent one of your treasures. Hey presto – your very own circulation system!

Talking about the Net

auDA (the Australian Domain Authority) has a number of roles – not just in running the .au domain space. In the past year they've had some bouquets and brickbats for the establishment of the community domains, but it would be hard to see their critics complaining about Let's Talk Net (www.letstalknet.com.au). It's a site with a series of audio Q&A segments exploring all sorts of topics like e-mail etiquette, security, searching and so on, with separate segments directed at consumer and business users. It's just the sort of thing you need to introduce newcomers to the Net.

Food and wine

There's something about networking that enriches everyone's experience. People in Canberra who are interested in information architecture meet every month for drinks, nibbles and discussion. courtesy of the local branch of a consulting firm (you can find out more from the canberra_ia_community Yahoo! group) and you can always pick up a few good pointers. A couple of months ago, the speaker was local guru Donna Maurer, who talked about folksonomies. Among the

sites that emerged as interesting examples was Epicurious (<http://www.epicurious.com>) where you can browse recipes by cuisine, main ingredient, preparation method etc. It even lets you exclude ingredients that you may be allergic to. Another site is Extra Tasty (www.extratasty.com) which encourages you look for drink recipes depending on what you have in your liquor cabinet.

Directory assistance

The University of Leicester has done a great job (funded mainly by the UK Big Lottery Fund) in digitising a series of local and trade directories for England and Wales, from 1750 to 1919. They have high quality reproductions of comparatively rare books, providing valuable tools for research into local and genealogical history. The main emphasis is on Leicestershire, but there is also significant coverage of publications for London. You'll find them at <http://www.historicaldirectories.org/>.

You have to see it

One of the smartest uses of visual techniques I've seen is the Periodic Table of Visualisation Methods at http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic_table/periodic_table.html. Based on the well-known table of the elements, it addresses data, information, concept, strategy, metaphor and compound visualisation – with pop-up examples of each of the dozens of methods. It's really hard to describe, but once you go there you'll be hooked.

Read on!

Project Gutenberg is one of the early and continuing successes of the web. Before Wikipedia was even a dream, there were people pounding in the texts that were (hopefully) not subject to copyright. Now, for those who aren't good typists, they've come up with a new way to contribute – proofreading. Through Distributed Proofreaders (www.pgdp.net), you can join members from around the world who proofread and prepare books for inclusion in the project. You just have to register on the site to begin. and they provide a simple guide to get you started.

Available in all sizes

It may sometimes happen that you need to resize an image but don't have the software on the computer that you're using – perhaps at an internet café while you're travelling. That's where Quick Thumbnail (<http://quick-thumbnail.com>) will be useful. Just browse to the image on the computer and select the resize factor – by pixels, percentage or standard sizes – and away you go.

What's in a name?

I came across this site while tackling the annual King William's College quiz, and decided it needs a wider audience. Who Named It (www.whonamedit.com) is a biographical dictionary of medical eponyms

Webb's web



Kerry Webb

kerry.webb@alianet.alia.org.au

Visuals can make a website – and smart techniques are on offer

Information Services in the digital age

Are you interested in having a satisfying, stimulating career where the areas you can apply your knowledge are only limited by your imagination?

Are you interested in working in diverse and dynamic workplaces?

If you answered YES to both of these questions, then a career in Library and Information Services is for you:

- Associate Degree of Science (Library Technology)
- Bachelor of Science (Library Technology)
- Bachelor of Information Technology / Bachelor of Science (Library Technology)

For more information, please contact the Student Support Officer on (08) 9370 6299, e-mail: scis.info@ecu.edu.au or visit www.scis.ecu.edu.au

www.ecugreatcareers.com



that will eventually provide a complete survey of all medical phenomena named for a person, together with a biography of that person; there'll be around more than 15 000 eponyms and more than 6000 persons. So, you can find out about famous names such as Huntington and Parkinson, and how they came to be associated with the condition. As for the quiz, my team didn't quite do as well as previously. I guess the quiz setter is getting better at finding questions that aren't Google-friendly.

The nitty gritty on edna

The edna Sandpit is a new service at <http://sandpit.edna.edu.au> to allow users to test-drive new technologies for teaching and learning. The applications that prove to be sustainable and demonstrate most value can be rapidly moved to edna production services. Current examples are web conferencing (Live Classroom), podcasting (Moodle/iPodcast) and a personal learning environment (elgg). There'll be more coming along.

Out of this world

In the December column, I mentioned the LINT site about library blogging. A more recent project takes us into a whole new galaxy. <http://virtual.librariesinteract.info> is blog central for Australian Libraries in Other Worlds, affectionately known as VLINT. It started as a place to record the nuts and bolts of the Australian Libraries in the Second Life project, but its scope grew to include Australian library folks' adventures in virtual worlds like World of Warcraft, speculative fiction, interactive fiction, gaming and virtual library branches. When I get my first life sorted out, perhaps I can venture into a second one.

Pics at the Smithsonian

The Smithsonian Institution has released a striking initiative to open up their marvellous photographic collections to a digital audience. While only a small sample of their 13 million images are currently online, what you'll find there will give you a taste of what's to come. Once you get past the overly flashy interface, enjoy the pictures that they have on offer. See it at <http://photography.si.edu/>.

New Zealand cultural site

Late last year, the NZ Ministry of Culture and Heritage launched its new cultural portal, NZLive.com (www.nzlive.com). The site brings together in one place a wealth of information regarding New Zealand's culture, where users can build their own profiles, adding events, links, organisations and articles that they are interested in. During the site design, the Ministry consulted around 200 organisations, many at consider-

able depth, and they plan to continue that consultative approach into the future.

Mixing from a master

I've tried doing some basic work in image editing, but have usually given up after a short time. I continue to admire what people can achieve in the constrained world of the web and the browsers available to us. Fortunately, many of them are happy to share their experience. One example is the work that Matthew O'Neill has done with blending various backgrounds at <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/supereasyblendys> where he describes his step-by-step methods and includes the code that you need to get the right results.

Just checking

Another way to check various aspects of a website – the Truwex Web Page Check Tool at <http://checkwebsite.erigami.com/accessibility.html>. It will not only give a report on the accessibility of the site, but also a rating of its privacy, performance and the general quality of the pages on the site. It suffers from the usual drawbacks of such automated tools, but as a general way of checking, it's not too bad.

How much do you have to play with?

One of the important issues in designing your websites is to know what size windows people will be using to look at your pages. Just as important as the screen resolution though, is a consideration of the exact size of the content in the window. The report cited at <http://www.baekdal.com/reports/actual-browser-sizes/> found that while most people browse with their windows maximised, you need to take account of the usable size after the appropriate allocation has been made for toolbars etc.

Step-by-step descriptions for great effects – or simple improvements

What's in a name?

We had a debate at work recently about URLs. The question was should we set up our sites so that whether or not the users type the 'www.' at the beginning of the domain name, they still get to us. We quickly realised it's not much work to set up the domain name servers to recognise the name either way. But look around a bit and you'll find a lot of high profile sites where they haven't done this.

Intelligent Information Management Solutions

Trimagic Software

Australia's leading supplier of library automation and content management solutions.

Trimagic are experts at working with you to understand your information needs.

We deliver powerful solutions to help your organisation gain a competitive edge.

Call us now to discuss your needs

[02] 9880 8666

or visit our website at

www.trimagic.com.au

GSAS & GITC approved. Authorised Inmagic dealer for Australia & SE Asia.

 **Trimagic**