# Webb's web

## Assertive Submissions

I took the time to read through the submissions that the Government 2.0 Taskforce has received (see **http://gov2.net.au/submissions/**) because I really wanted to see what people are saying. The good news first: there are many fine ones (including ALIA's of course). These provide a minimal amount of background about the organisation involved, address the issues that the Taskforce has asked about and don't grind too many axes. There are also a few that aren't worth reading, possibly penned by executives whose performance agreements require that they respond to a certain number of enquiries each year, with no regard to relevance and quality. And then there are the submissions from private individuals, which fall into both categories - even the one where much of the text had to be suppressed because of its inappropriate nature.

## Microsoft can find the millions to fund such a sweetener for many many months

Quite a few though displayed a disturbing lack of awareness of how best to use the technology. Several displayed the PDF bloat that I've mentioned before, and one from a major government department had apparently been photocopied crookedly. It's not a good look, and neither was the use of Word 7 by many organisations, necessitating a few more hoops to jump through before you could read their documents.

## Something like this

There have been other attempts to do image search on the web - based on similarity to a particular picture - so it's hard to guess how successful Tineye (**http://tineye.com**) will be, but in doing a few searches one thing struck me. It's handy little way to check if anyone has appropriated your images, because they'll show up more and more in the search results as the Tineye database grows.

## Libraries – now it's personal

While the relationship has moved on from its first burst of excitement, I'm happy enough with LibraryThing (**http://www.librarything.com**). It meets my needs for an online personal catalogue and provides a set of interesting forums for discussing all sorts of issues. They also publish a nice little newsletter every month (The State of the Thing) to keep you informed of what's new. So why would you change? It's a good question, and one that I don't have an answer for – even after looking at an Australian offering called Booktagger (**http://www.booktagger.com**). This one isn't bad (although the user interface is a little clumsy) but to succeed they need to be better than the competition, not just as good.

## Communities – online and other

Many people don't know who Tim O'Reilly is, but they'll probably recognise the computer books with the animals on the covers - that's Tim's private zoo. We really owe a lot to him, and he deserves all the thanks we can muster. I was thinking about this while reading one of his company's latest offerings (there's a free download at **http://tinyurl.com/lr692e**). It's Jono Bacon's *The Art of Community: Building the New Age of Participation*. Whether you're into online communities or merely organising a political party, there's a lot of very useful advice there.

## I can hear the harrumphs coming in from everywhere

The Danish Government is reported to be allowing Internet access to high school students during exams (see **http://tinyurl.com/ybmnxvs**). To someone who remembers using a slide rule – and living through the controversies about whether electronic calculators should be allowed in examination rooms – this is a bit of a shock, but then it depends just what you're trying to test. If it's only to see whether you can regurgitate facts, that's one thing. But if we're moving to a more information-literate society it makes a lot of sense.

## All the news that's fit to suppress

As interesting as the buzz is that News Corporation is arranging a deal with Microsoft to transfer all its content from Google to Bing, it's even more entertaining to see all the pundits trying to work out if it's a wise or crazy move. There is of course the benefit that it's bound to increase Bing's market share – if only by a small amount – and Microsoft can find the millions to fund such a sweetener for many many months, but then it's (to my eye at least) quite anti-competitive and we can expect a lot of activity in that area before the dust settles.

## Well, what basket should we put all our eggs into?

Hanging his hat on reports that Wikipedia editors are bailing out in large numbers, Mike Elgan is looking a bit further into the future at **http://tinyurl.com/yz585ym** to ask about the implications of many web 2.0 sites foundering. It's a valid concern: although I've recently been called a pessimist in a blog (Cassandra would have been more flattering, and skeptic more accurate) I do think that we need to keep a realistic eye on the foundations of our 2.0 dreams. Some of the general notions though for safeguarding the future are risible: a government take-over of Second Life for one. Others are more sensible, such as a proposal for government-sponsored URL-shortening service or a video-hosting site. Both ideas have a lot of merit.

## She blinded me with Library Science

Among the great time-consumers on the net are the publications known as web comics. The medium allows a great deal of experimentation with drawing techniques, and like all web publishing the barriers to entry are low. I haven't looked around too much, so there may be some really bad ones, but if you have a bit of free time over the summer try xkcd (**http://xkcd.com**) or if a story line is more to your taste go to Questionable Content (**http://questionablecontent.net**) – part of which is set in a university library – yay!

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