Webb's Web

👤 Posted by Kerry Webb   💬 25 comments

E-book review

Last time we met, I reported that I'd just started to use my new Kobo e-book and that I'd be writing about how I found it. Well, my use so far has been limited to free books that either came pre-installed or that I was able to download from Project Gutenberg (**www.gutenberg.org**) or from Google's new eBookstore (**books.google.com.au/ebooks**).The reasons for this are simple: I don't particularly care for the limited (the very limited) selection of e-books available from Borders and other local suppliers, and overseas suppliers with a larger inventory refuse to serve me.

So, I'm reading Anne of Green Gables (an old favourite) and Right Ho, Jeeves half a page at a time – which is all that will fit on the screen at a font size that's acceptable to my tired old eyes. But you get used to it after a while, although the need to hit the Next Page button a lot is a mite wearing.

I haven't taken it travelling yet, so I can't really say much about its portability. One thing I have noticed is the attention that the editors need to pay to the source text to get it to display properly. The books on the Kobo that I've read haven't all been given the attention that's really needed.

For this device, books need to be in EPUB format, which I've been able to upload through Calibre (**calibre-ebook.com**). I was also able to convert Word documents to EPUB through Calibre, without too much trouble. More instructions on this can be found at **www.web-books.com/Publishing/Word2EPUB.htm**

So, it definitely has its uses - but Mt To-Be-Read on the bedside table will continue to cast a giant shadow.

Turning to another portable format

There's been much more happening in the world of website accessibility in the past couple of months. One incident that generated a lot of discussion (and some uninformed comment) was the release by the Australian Government Information Management Office of its Report in PDF Accessibility (**www.finance.gov.au/publications/pdf-accessibility-study/index.html**) that basically said that if you're going to publish a PDF document, you should also publish an equivalent document in a more accessible format. Now, this should not have come as a surprise, because they'd been flagging this for quite a while – but there's been a polite storm of protest. The people from Adobe (who really own the PDF, despite it being an ISO standard) have been quite muted in their comments, except to correct any misapprehensions among people commenting on the report. They were, of course, deeply involved with the preparation of the report and did their best to steer it in a particular direction, but the inescapable fact is that while PDFs can be made accessible to people with the appropriate screen readers, most of them are not so constructed and AGIMO, in my opinion, have made the right decision.

Going to the movies

Although the PDF question will cause a lot of web managers to curse and mumble, wait until the penny drops for the custodians of large scale video material – particularly the collections of filmed proceedings from the various parliaments around the country. WCAG 2.0 requires that recoded video must at least be accompanied by captions and/or descriptions, and none of parliamentary proceedings meet this requirement at present. Further, live streamed video in the future will also need to be captioned. It's going to be a very expensive undertaking, and the Disability Discrimination Act does not permit the cost of conversion to be a defence for not having an accessible website. This really is a problem for all concerned.

Escaping the clutches

From time to time you may want to remove a page or perhaps a site from the Google index. I've had a bit of experience with this and it can be tricky. Now Vanessa Fox has written an article for Search Engine Land at **searchengineland.com/removing-pages-from-google-53086** that looks like it answers most of the questions you might have. (The site also offers advice on doing the same for Yahoo! and Bing).

Tim speaks, and people listen

Tim Berners-Lee's latest call to arms at **www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=long-live-the- web** on behalf of the web shows very well what an international treasure he really is. He ranges widely over issues like net neutrality, the gathering of massive amounts of data by social media sites, open standards and walled gardens - and especially the need to keep the web separate from the internet.

This last point reminds me that some people have an imperfect understanding of exactly what Tim's role is. One suggested to me recently that he found it bizarre that TB-L was not on the Board of ICANN. I was tempted to suggest that he knew little of the role of either, but held my tongue. Better I think, to let Sir Tim lend his illustrious name to good causes, and speak for himself as he has done so eloquently here.

In good company

It was reported in November that Nicaraguan troops accidentally invaded Cost Rica last week, due to a fault in Google Maps. I can sympathise with the invaders, having relied too much on Google's product on a trip to Victoria. We wanted to travel from Bairnsdale to the King Valley (well, who wouldn't?) and it seemed that either of two possible routes over the High Country would work. And, as it was late in October we didn't expect any problems from snow. So, armed with the dinky little printout from Google we headed into the foothills but after an hour's travel there was an ominous sign. Specifically, it read Road Closed Ahead. It turns out that the problem wasn't with late snowdrifts, but the 50km of gravel road up there that was being sealed. Now, no-one can expect Google to keep up with that sort of information, so just remember that it really does pay to check ahead.