Weavers web

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Copying, instead of reinventing, the wheel

With so many libraries trying to organise, evaluate and filter web resources on behalf of library users, it is timely to look at what's in the literature about building and maintenance of portals for information. The Portal Webliography [http://www.infomotions.com/portals/] is an attempt to collect, organise, and disseminate pointers to information about portals. It also aims to provide examples of both user-created and off-the-shelf-but-customisable interfaces to sets of internet resources. The Webliography does not cover directories or search engines that cannot be customised. The site is divided into several sections, and includes articles about portals, directories, examples of customisable portals from the commercial and educational sectors, and vendors — those selling either applications or services. There is also an alphabetical list of all the records in the Webliography. For those working in higher education, it might be worth looking at the article, 'Portals in higher education — what are they, and what is their potential' [http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm00/articles004/looney.pdf], by Michael Looney and Peter Lyman of the Digital Preservation Coalition. They go into the creation and use of portals in this sector, and have some useful screen grabs to illustrate their arguments.

Busy bees

The Digital Preservation Coalition [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/dner/preservation/prescoalition.html] seem to be a busy lot, as they are on the job of trying to partner with others to preserve digital resources in the United Kingdom and abroad. The Coalition was set up in 2001 to conserve a range of materials, so as to assist the United Kingdom's own National Learning Networks, to preserve the United Kingdom's contemporary cultural heritage, and to keep good records of research and development for the benefit of industry and society in general. The Coalition is supported by a wide range of leading institutions, such as the National Library of Australia, the British Library and OCLC. Others can be identified in the membership section. Unsurprisingly, these include many institutions from the higher education sector in the United Kingdom. The Coalition's site provides information on the Coalition's mission, goals and guiding principles, what the current program of work is, who's doing what when, and contact details for further information or involvement.

Not to be outdone...

It's not all higher education out there in digital archive-land. A new initiative, ibliblio [http://www.ibiblio.org], is an attempt to create a digital library and archive for ordinary people. This is a not-for-profit initiative that has created a gateway to freely available information, such as Software and FTP archives, music, literature and language, art, history, science, politics, and reference materials.

And yet another...

Does it rhyme with toaster? Or is it pronounced oyster? Who knows? Anyway, OAIster [http://oaister.umdl.umich.edu] is a new project of the University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services. The goal of the project is to create a collection of free, useful, previously difficult-to-access digital resources that are easily searchable by anyone. Nothing in this project is set in stone yet, so if you are interested, visit the project site and fill in the short (seven questions) survey. They are particularly interested in user opinions of what kind of information is hard to get online. You can add your own wishlist of things you would like to see included in the finished archive, whether on the visible Web or within the invisible Web, so have your say.

It might turn up in Google

We don't often think of search engines when we think of paid content, yet we may have to adjust our thinking a little if the folks at Google have their way. Eric Schmidt, the new CEO of Google, is interested in making Google's search capacity as good as it can be, but that's not all. Like the OAIster people, he is interested in what users might be looking for that isn't yet online, such as government information worldwide, or full-text legal information and articles locked up in subscription services like Lexis-Nexis. Schmidt told the *Boston Globe* in an interview in February that he would like to see all kinds of material hosted by the Google search database. [http://www.boston.com/dailyglobe2/035/business/Eric_Schmidt+shtml] Not all content turned up by such searches would be free, but were Google to start hosting such content, it could all be searched via the one interface (which has to be a plus for novice users).

And the winner is...

Google has scored best search service two

years running in the SearchEngineWatch awards (http://www.searchenginewatch.com/awards/2001-winners.html). For web searchers who have used it, this award seems only fair, as Google (http://www.google.com) constantly refreshes its enormous database, adds new services such as image, newsgroup and shopping catalogue search, avoids clutter and advertising and adds useful functionality to searching such as the indexing of PDF and Word files in addition to text and HTML files. The SearchEngineWatch awards are interesting not just for who is out front (such as Yahoo for current news, Vivisimo for meta search) but for who has dropped out or vanished. Google and AllTheWeb (the runner up) are the main contenders for the search crown now that so many others, such as Lycos, are losing credibility by accepting paid placements. Google does not intend to go down that particular road.

E-government

The Australian Government has done a huge job of getting government information online. So have the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom Online website has just won an award for accessibility, and the United State's FirstGov portal has just been redesigned to make it more user-friendly. Both contain thousands of links and referrals. What about the rest? If you would like a survey on who's e-governing and who's not, have a look at the Global E-Government Survey 2001, which surveyed 196 nations to see how they are progressing with getting data and information online. The report was compiled by a market research company, and has some astonishing findings. Worldwide only two per cent of government websites have some form of disability access, and only thirty-three per cent of government web sites are searchable. Seventy-two per cent of sites have an English language version. Get the full survey (in Adobe Acrobat format) at http://www.worldmarketsanalysis.com/e_gov_report.html. You might have to scroll across to see the download link, but it's there.

Stickybeaking

If you're already a city dweller, staying home could be a whole lot cheaper than travelling abroad, or worse, settling somewhere else. If you would like to be sure of that, have a look at the Finfacts Worldwide Cost of Living Sur-

vey 2001 [http://www.finfacts.com/costofliving.htm]. The survey compares the prices of more than 200 items in 144 cities around the world. (No advice on the bargains you might be able to stumble across off the beaten track — you'll have to find those out for yourself when you go.) Using New York City as a base guide to prices, the survey compares the relatively high cost of living in major world cities. Predictably, costs are highest in the major financial and commercial places such as Tokyo and Hong Kong. But who would have thought Moscow would come in second? Things have certainly changed. Moscow more expensive than London? It must be dear.

It's a date

Easter really has come around early this year; it isn't just that supermarkets have been selling chocolate eggs since Christmas. But why is that? How is the date worked out? If anyone's asking, the US Naval Observatory has a Date of Easter website that explains the rules [http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/easter.html]. Apparently, the common rule that Easter Day is the first Sunday after the full moon that occurs next after the vernal equinox, is misleading. (Good, because I never understood that anyway.) The site gives the precise rules and has a chart of Easter dates past and present (1980–2024) in case your own calculations go to pot.

45 million and counting

In 2001, the forty-fifth millionth unique catalogue record was added to WorldCat, an OCLC service that provides users with electronic access to the Library of Congress Union Catalogue. That's just one of the staggering figures in *Extending the Cooperative: OCLC Annual report 2000–2001*. The report details the latest accomplishments of one of the world's biggest online content and service providers, currently serving more than 40 000 member libraries in eighty-two countries. In recent years, OCLC has gone well beyond simply providing bibliographic information alone by broadening its services to include other content such as online documents and full-text electronic resources. If you want to know how they did it, and what it all adds up to in money, look at the full report (in Adobe Acrobat format) http://www.oclc.org/about/annualreport/2001.pdf. ∎

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