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'Information Architecture is the last refuge of people who are too articulate for their own good.'

When you really need to know

People with an illness are usually given plenty of information from their doctors, and then there's a wealth of publications from the government and voluntary organisations. But you always have a couple of other questions, and that's where support websites come in. A good example is the Diabetes Australia site at <http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/home/index.htm>, which has a range of information as well as links to each of the state and territory organisations. Of these, the Victorian site at <http://www.dav.org.au> is the best. It's well designed and attractive, and shows signs of careful attention to information architecture. So, spread the word to your patrons, your friends and your family. And maybe it's worth a look for your own sake too.

What we can learn from history

Google has introduced yet another service to make your searching more productive, by letting users record what they've searched for and recalling it later. You'll have to get a Google account (if you're a Gmail user you already have one — but it's free anyway) but, after that, you'll be able to either search or browse your search history and see what results you've clicked on in the past. You'll also be able to cluster search results that are topically related. At the moment, it's a beta offering and is limited to web search — and doesn't include News or Images. There's more information at <http://www.google.com/searchhistory/>.

Is Wikipedia anti-elitist?

The Stumpers list has been discussing Wikipedia of late, and arguments pro and con have been advanced. It seems that, wherever you go, there is a difference of opinion. One person addressed the issue from the point of copyright, having been asked by many Wikipedians if he would contribute material from his website. He says: 'In a world awash in unverified and undigested facts, Wikipedia only muddies the quest for knowledge and truth' and adds a few links of criticism of the concept, including Karen Schneider's at http://freerangelibrarian.com/archives/010105/wikipedias_reality_.php and Wikipedia's own summary page of critiques <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Criticisms> (together with some rebuttals).

What does it mean?

One area where members of the library profession can and do make a valuable contribution to websites and other online resources is Information Architecture, but unfortunately it's often a concept looking for a definition. To get an idea of what some people think

it means, go to <http://www.brainboost.com/search.asp?Q=what+is+information+architecture&Submit=Ask> and be informed. Some of the comments are useful and some are less so: 'Information Architecture is the last refuge of people who are too articulate for their own good.'

But does it have the answers?

Having seen the link, I explored Brainboost a little. The results were patchy, at best. It's a metasearch facility that applies a ranking to the results that it gets from other search engines. For some queries, it seems to work well, but not for everything. But it may be worth adding to your list of sites. Try it at <http://www.brainboost.com>.

Hard to say, easy to use

Factbites is another search engine that's worth watching. Based on technology from a Sydney company, it extracts 'meaningful' sentences from the pages that it finds and displays them, rather than the usual practice of a semi-random extract from the page. This helps the user see if the page is worth clicking on. It's also topic-based, so that a series of related subjects are displayed for refining the search. It's only in beta at this stage, but if they can keep up the good work, it will be a useful addition to the search engine family. It's at <http://www.factbites.com/index.html>.

Any more questions?

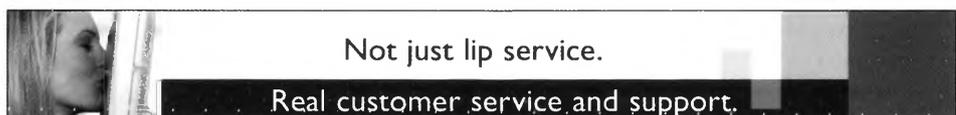
And if you're still not sure what search engine best meets your needs, go to Phil Bradley's chart at <http://www.philb.com/whichengine.htm>. It's a very useful resource that takes you through a series of questions to work out exactly what you need — like whether you have keywords or a phrase, whether you want a factual answer or an overview, or whether you want a personalised experience or a visual representation of the results. It would be particularly useful for someone wanting to get started in searching.

Digital library for sale

There's an article in First Monday by Arthur Sale from the University of Tasmania called 'De-unifying a digital library' in which he describes the University's decision to explore using a unified digital library for all its research output, a project that puts it somewhat ahead of other major Australian initiatives. It's at http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_5/sale/.

Who pays?

The US National Institutes of Health are asking scientists who receive research funds to voluntarily submit copies of their peer-reviewed research manuscripts to a digital archive at the National Library of Medicine, with the intention of making manuscripts



available free to the public within a year after the research is published in a scientific journal. In doing this, they're trying to balance public interest in free access to taxpayer-funded research with the commercial interests of publishers who disseminate health and medical information. The publishers are watching this carefully, with some suggesting that researchers may be forced to pay to have their articles published in professional journals because free digital archives will undermine the financial basis of medical and scientific publishing. Supporters of open access disagree.

... the one in the middle?

Further on the economics of publishing, there's an article in First Monday exploring the position of scholars in the debate on online journal pricing and site licence ownership between libraries and publishers. It's largely based on a survey conducted at Stanford University on e-journal usage by scientists and medical practitioners. The conclusions are that strong agreements based on mutual trust will be necessary between publishers, scholars and libraries. Obvious, really, but it needs to be said. The article (with information about the survey) is at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_3/jeon/index.html.

More good things from the EU

EPOCH is a network of European cultural institutions that are working towards improving the quality and effectiveness of the use of Information and Communication Technology for Cultural Heritage. The site, at <http://www.epoch-net.org/>, features an interesting database of projects in this area, including quite a few on 3-D visualisation in virtual museums.

More than just English

Meanwhile, most of the European national libraries have joined forces against Google's plan to create a global virtual library. Led by France, they want to ensure that other languages are not sidelined by the dominance of English cultural material on the web. (The British Library has given its implicit support to the move, without signing the motion.) Whatever their motivation, we'll all benefit — probably even Google users.

For various values of XACT

From the people who brought you Bobby, there's a new and improved online checker called WebXACT which will examine a page for accessibility, privacy and quality issues. It's not bad, but there are some oddities. One page I submitted was flagged as having no 'Author' metadata, when it clearly had a Creator meta tag. I'd guess that Creator is much more widely used than Author. Perhaps

it's confused by the presence of the DC prefix before the tag name. As for accessibility, it seems to detect the usual features, and it looks like the privacy check is limited to the presence of a Privacy statement. So, you still need some sort of human verification. You can try it at <http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp>.

No, not the island

Given the URL <http://www.tasi.ac.uk/advice/using/finding.html> and fancying myself as a puzzle solver, I spent a few fruitless minutes trying to work out which British university was TASI. It turns out to be the Technical Advisory Service for Images, a JISC initiative that provides advice and guidance to the further and higher education community about creating and delivering digital images and managing digitisation projects, both large and small. This particular document is a guide to general tools and strategies for finding images, and is part of a series covering a whole range of issues.

For the record

If there was any doubt that blogs are here to stay, a story from a North Carolina hospital has shown that a collection of first-person accounts of patient experiences can be used as an effective marketing tool. So far, they've had five patients describe their experiences with various treatments and procedures, and offer advice on how to cope with injections and other wonders of modern medicine.

Not a minute to lose!

One of the great things about the web is the way that people are able to beaver away in their own little corner of the world and produce something that is going to be useful to all sorts of readers. A recent example is the Naval Biographical Database, being developed by Chris Donnithorne of the Royal Naval Museum Library. It features ships and people — both administrative personnel and those at the pointy end, of all ranks. So far he has more than 10 000 entries from the period 1660–1815. Basic information is free, with a small charge for additional data. You can look at it now on <http://www.navylist.org>.

Physics publishing

It's only been going for less than a year, but the *Librarian Insider* newsletter from the Institute of Physics Publishing has become well established in providing information to its community. The latest issue includes information on digitisation of historic archives, and publishing deals on behalf of JISC for current and archived material back to 1874. See it at <http://www.iop.org/EJ/librarians/?pge=insider>. ■

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