Web Watch

SERVICE COMPARISON WEBSITES

Comparison websites allow you to see information about similar organisations within the one site. These include MyHospitals (http://www.myhospitals.gov.au)[1] from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and MySchool (http://www.myschool.edu.au), managed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

MYHOSPITALS

MyHospitals (http://www.myhospitals.gov.au) "presents information on hospitals throughout Australia and how they compare against national and state and territory data, including:
• Hospital profile
• Services offered
• Number of admissions
• Waiting times for emergency departments and elective surgery
• Safety and quality (*Staphylococcus aureus* bacteraemia)."

The site covers public hospitals and private hospitals which participate voluntarily. You can browse using the map, or search by service (eg "childbirth", which leads to "Obstetrics"), hospital, place or postcode. The pages link to hospital websites and provide information about how the data is collected.

MYSCHOOL

At the MySchool website (http://www.myschool.edu.au) you have to accept the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy and fill in a Captcha code before you are allowed to search the site.

MySchool provides demographic information about students enrolled in each school, including language background and numbers of girls and boys. It also graphically presents student achievement in standardised tests and allows comparison with similar schools. One of the most important graphs is that showing student gains between years 7 and 9, as this is an indication of the "value-add" that schools provide.

The "About MySchool" factsheet is available in 21 community languages at http://www.acara.edu.au/myschool/more_information.html.

NATIONAL PUBLIC TOILET MAP

Another very practical and useful resource is the National Public Toilet Map (http://www.toiletmap.gov.au) which lets you find public toilets throughout Australia. You can browse using the map, search by postcode or suburb name, or even use the trip planner to identify toilet stops for a whole journey!

LEGAL INFORMATION FOR NEW ARRIVALS

Arriving in a foreign land is a daunting enough prospect without having to seek out all the information you could need – in a language other than your own. Commonwealth (http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia), State and Territory governments offer a lot of information in many languages.

Many non-government organisations also offer assistance, one example follows.

The NSW Legal Assistance Forum (NLAF) provides links to legal resources for newly arrived migrants and refugees (http://www.nlaf.org.au/reports/new_arrivals.html). All resources are in English, with some also translated into other languages, especially Arabic, Chinese and Vietnamese. The employment law factsheet is available in about 30 languages including Dari, Nepali and Tongan.

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[1] All websites and webpages referred to in this article were viewed December 2011.

The resources have been selected for their relevance to new arrivals (including pre-arrival information) but would also be useful to many Australian residents.

Other resources available from NLAF include:
- plain language law resources for victims of natural disasters (http://www.nlaf.org.au/reports/victims_of_natural_disasters.html);
- *Civil Law Outreach to Prisoners: What Works?* (http://www.nlaf.org.au/reports/civil_law_outreach_to_prisons_what%20works.pdf);
- *Resource/Reference Guide for Sudanese People* (http://www.nlaf.org.au/reports/referral_guide.pdf);
- *Checklist for Working with CALD Communities* (http://www.nlaf.org.au/groups/cald/CALDChecklist.pdf).

ACTIVISM AND SLACKTIVISM

The internet is now host to many activist websites with associated mailing lists. Some have very broad agendas, while others focus on more specific aims. There are varying views on their effectiveness. Some echo Margaret Mead's comment "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" (http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/33522.html), while others question the value of internet e–petitions and the like, labelling this brand of political activism as "slacktivism" (or somewhat less pejoratively as "clicktivism").

Snopes.com (http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/petition/internet.asp) wrote: "Slacktivism comes in many forms, but its defining characteristic is its central theme of doing good with little or no effort on the part of the person inspired to participate, through the mechanisms of forwarding, exhorting, collecting, or e-signing."

AVAAZ.ORG

Avaaz (http://www.avaaz.org/en), which means "voice" or "song" in many languages, was launched in 2007. Avaaz describes itself as "a 10-million-person global campaign network that works to ensure that the views and values of the world's people shape global decision-making". Avaaz sets its priorities through member polls. It campaigns in 14 languages on "global, regional and national issues, from corruption and poverty to conflict and climate change".

Avaaz action includes "signing petitions, funding media campaigns and direct actions, emailing, calling and lobbying governments, and organizing 'offline' protests and events". The use of the internet means that Avaaz can mobilise instant campaigns.

Campaigns in 2011 included fighting the EU block on herbal medicines, applauding the Australian proposal to tackle climate change through carbon pricing, stopping the crackdown on Wikileaks, stopping Uganda's anti-gay Bill (it was shelved) and stopping Rupert Murdoch's bid to own nearly half the British media.

Concerns were expressed by some on the internet about the leaking of email addresses used in Avaaz petitions and their use by spammers (http://www.verbo.se/dont-sign-avaazorg-petitions).

GETUP

GetUp: Action for Australia is "[a]n independent movement to build a progressive Australia and bring participation back into our democracy" (http://www.getup.org.au). It has over 500,000 members (50,000 of whom have made donations) and a prominent Australian media presence. Campaigns in 2011 included poker machine reform (helping problem gamblers), promotion of marriage equality, promotion of humane onshore processing and stopping coal seam gas mining.

GetUp has a real-time "[w]hat's happening right now" feed which shows first names of people who have just signed a petition. There is also a page on which GetUp members can make campaign suggestions (http://www.suggest.getup.org.au/forums/60819-getup-campaign-suggestions).

CHANGE.ORG

Change.org (http://www.change.org) describes itself as "an online advocacy platform that empowers anyone, anywhere to start, join, and win campaigns for social change. Millions of people sign petitions on Change.org each month on thousands of issues."

Change.org provides free advocacy tools and provides training and support to people who start campaigns. Although it assists not-for-profit organisations, it is not, itself, a not-for-profit organisation. It has a number of charity partners including Oxfam.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Campaigns are also run by individual organisations, eg Amnesty currently has a Stop Violence Against Women campaign (http://www.amnesty.org.au/svaw) and one encouraging the government to continue support for traditional Aboriginal homelands (http://www.amnesty.org.au/action/action/26569). Clicking the "Act Now" button here leads to a page at which you can write an individualised letter to the relevant minister.

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS' ORAL HISTORIES

Oral history interviews have been recorded to mark the first anniversary of the government's apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants – adults who as children were placed in care in Australia or were sent here from the UK and Malta under sponsored child migration schemes.

The oral histories are online at http://www.nla.gov.au/digicoll/ListentotheForgottenAustralians.html and include recordings, bibliographic records and timed summaries. The summaries include keywords such as "gatherings", "character traits", "compensation", "apology in Brisbane" and "children" for every minute or two of the recordings.

OPENING OLD WINDOWS, COB-WEBS AND NOT-SO-OPTIMAL SEARCHES

"Chain of Fools: An Exploration of Windows Upgrade Procedures" (http://www.rasteri.blogspot.com/2011/03/chain-of-fools-upgrading-through-every.html) is an easy-to-watch review of Windows from version 1 to 7. It provides a nostalgic reminder for those of us who lived through these versions, and would be educational for children and young adults who have known only the most modern operating systems.

You can explore an interactive history of web technologies and browsers at http://www.evolutionofweb.appspot.com. The technologies start with HTTP and HTML, and move through Cookies and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) to Geolocation. The site is available in English, Chinese, French, Japanese, Portuguese and Russian.

There is also a good (text-based) summary of search engines at http://www.searchenginehistory.com, and for a different take on ebooks, you can see an early e-reader at http://www.cheezburger.com/View/5665235200.

"9 Useless SEO Strategies!" by William Higareda (http://www.biznik.com/articles/9-useless-seo-strategies) provides a text-based history of search optimisation strategies, many of which no longer work as the search engines became aware of the ways in which people were trying to promote their own searches in the rankings. Strategies to avoid include keyword stuffing, automated submission tools, reciprocal links and duplication of content. Search engines today focus mainly on socially driven content.

The chemists among us may enjoy the Periodic Table of Visualisation Methods (http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic_table/periodic_table.html) which groups different types of visualisation in the rows and columns of the periodic table. Hovering over the cells provides images of the different techniques.

GAMING IN LIBRARIES

Scott Nicholson from Syracuse University presented an online course on gaming in libraries and made the presentations available on YouTube. The course covered the history of games in libraries, how to set up a gaming program and justification for having games in libraries (http://www.youtube.com/watch?index=0&feature=PlayList&v=L5LVBy4aEMY&list=PL3A2144083FCD6240).

Two recommended websites are the Syracuse University game lab (http://www.gamelab.syr.edu) and the Library Gaming Toolkit put out by American Library Association and sponsored by the Verizon Foundation (http://www.librarygamingtoolkit.org). The website "Board Games with Scott" (http://www.boardgameswithscott.com) shows how to play 70 board games.

HAVING A FON-T TIME?

The kerning game (http://www.type.method.ac) is fun and quick – it tests your ability to kern type (ie adjust the spaces between the letters for maximum readability).

Font lovers will also enjoy the humour at "The Very Best Font And Typography Humor" (http://www.buzzfeed.com/expresident/the-very-best-of-awful-font-and-typography-humor).

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