
Web Watch: Useful and noteworthy websites

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This is the second in an irregular series that will highlight websites and webpages of interest to librarians. The sites are labelled according to the type of content they provide, and include current issues, task-based sites, information-rich sites, and sites about services.

CURRENT CONTENT: OIL SPILLS

The BP oil spill in American waters is a major ecological disaster. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority provides resources about oil spills for educational and community information purposes (<http://www.tinyurl.com/OilEduc>). These include posters, an animated storyboard (requires Free Shockwave/Flash Player or plug-in), and classroom projects, as well as information on the effect of oil on wildlife and the viscosity of oils.

Earth Science Australia (<http://www.earthsci.org/index.html>) has an overview page on oil spills adapted from information provided by the Australian Institute of Petroleum.¹ It covers sources of oil in oceans, oil spill prevention and combat techniques.

A *Business Spectator* article by Matt Daily of Reuters examines the financial aspects of the BP oil spill (<http://www.tinyurl.com/OilBus>).² This webpage offers a summary, full story and background, with links to other stories on the same topic.

The United States National Library of Medicine presents a collection of links from the Disaster Information Management Research Center to websites that cover topics relating to the health effects of oil spills (<http://www.sis.nlm.nih.gov/dimrc/oilspills.html>). Topics covered include occupational hazards, seafood and wildlife. There are links to websites in Spanish and Vietnamese, and four social media sites from two organisations are included.

TASK-BASED: FILE TRANSFER

<http://www.Senduit.com> is a free file transfer service which enables you to upload a file (up to 100MB in size) that you wish to share with one or more other people. You set the expiry time (between 30 minutes and seven days) and are then given a custom URL address to send to the intended recipient. The recipient simply clicks on the URL to access the file.

<http://www.Yousendit.com> is a similar service, and offers free transfer of files up to 100MB in size. It also offers three paid options (<http://www.yousendit.com/compare-plans>) for individuals and organisations that need to send larger files, to control the expiration date, and to have advanced security options. This makes it a “freemium” service (free for the basic service, with paid premium options).

Services which go beyond file transfer to offer long-term storage and group collaboration include <http://www.dropio.com> and <http://www.dropbox.com>.

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¹ Earth Science Australia is a site for enthusiasts, with a tag line: “since 1996 – for people with an interest in earth science”. It is funded by JISC (<http://www.jisc.ac.uk>), receives server space from The Geological Society of Australia and is a “school zone five star site”.

² Daily M, “BP Oil Spill Costs Continue to Mount”, *Business Spectator* (5 May 2010). When found via a Google search, you get immediate access to the full content of this article. When entering directly from the URL, however, you have to register (which is free).

TASK-BASED: ONLINE TRANSLATION TOOLS

I often use <http://www.babelfish.yahoo.com> to answer questions such as “What does Stein mean in Rubenstein and Goldstein?” (the answer is stone) or “How do I say ‘my daughter is allergic to peanuts’ in French?” To get a translation you simply type in the word, select the “from” and “to” languages, eg “English to French”, and the answer is provided. You can also translate paragraphs of text or a whole webpage.

I have had a few problems. For example, BabelFish translated “espèce” – a payment method – as “species”. It was only when I was in New Caledonia that I realised this meant “cash”. Apparently the word “specie” has been used in a similar way in English, but I was not familiar with it.

Languages include both simplified and traditional Chinese, Korean, Portuguese and Russian. When I have to translate something from a language that is not covered by BabelFish – eg Afrikaans – I have discovered that a web search for “Afrikaans translation” usually retrieves a useful webpage.

Google has a similar service to BabelFish with a wide range of languages available. Selecting “Language tools” from the Google homepage provides the options: to translate an English phrase to another language for searching the web in the other language; to translate text; or to translate a webpage. Google’s translation service also comes into play when you select “Translate this page” next to a hit within your search results. If you hover over the text in a translated webpage, a dialog box opens suggesting “Contribute a better translation”. You can then type over the translation with your suggested alternative.

TASK-BASED: ACCOMMODATION BOOKINGS

The web has revolutionised the way we find out about travel opportunities, and how we book them. Accommodation sites such as <http://www.Wotif.com> provide quick comparisons of hotels showing current availability and special prices. Wotif charges a fee for bookings through its site. Other accommodation booking sites include <http://www.takeabreak.com>, <http://www.stayz.com.au>, <http://www.ubid4rooms.com> (where you bid the price you are willing to pay) and <http://www.needitnow.com> (for last-minute bookings).

<http://www.TripAdvisor.com> provides customer feedback on hotels. I booked a hotel in Noumea after reading reviews on the site. One review had noted problems with noise from the street on Saturday nights and, sure enough, at 8 pm cars started driving past with their windows open and their radios blaring. I had been warned (all the good points were as the reviews stated too).

When checking the site for this article I noticed they had a photo of a place I had stayed, but no comments. To add my feedback I had to provide an email address. I registered by using my Facebook details – their preferred method – but still had to add more information for my profile, and then answer questions about the location and nature of the hotel. When checking the review I was surprised to see that an image from my Facebook page was also used (http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g317050-d1130159-Reviews-Liloreve-Lifou_Loyalty_Islands.html). Contributors can choose whether to respond to readers’ enquiries or not. A day after I entered feedback I received an email asking me to confirm that it was me who had submitted the report. These precautions are aimed at ensuring that the feedback on the site is genuine.

CONTENT-BASED: PHARMACEUTICAL NAMES

Many names may be used to describe the same drug. Different countries have different official names, there are generic names and trade names, and then there are slang or common names. The websites listed below provide some guidance in finding which words refer to which drugs.

The British National Formulary website provides a comparison of the Recommended International Non-proprietary Name (rINN) – required by European law – and the British Approved Name (BAN) for pharmaceuticals (<http://www.bnf.org/bnf/extra/current/450049.htm>). There is information on this topic from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) at <http://www.tinyurl.com/BANrINN>.

The National Prescribing Service website (http://www.nps.org.au/consumers/tools_and_tips/medicine_name_finder) allows you to search by brand name and find the active ingredient of a

product, or to search by active ingredient and find a list of brand names of drugs containing that ingredient. The search covers prescription medicines listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Merck Manuals Online Medical Library (<http://www.merck.com/mmhe/appendixes/ap3/ap3a.html>) has a section on drug names that includes an explanation of the difference between generic names and trade names, and two tables in which you can look up a generic name and find some of the associated trade names, or vice versa.

The United Kingdom Narconon (<http://www.drugrehab.co.uk/street-drug-names.htm>) and Family Drug Support (http://www.fds.org.au/street_names.html) websites provide lists of street drug names.

The MedlinePlus Drugs, Supplements, and Herbal Information webpage (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html>) provides information about herbal medicines along with comprehensive lists of synonyms. For example, “Garlic” has 11 lines of synonyms and Echinacea has five lines, including trade names.

To find out what abbreviations refer to you can try:

- Wikipedia – “List of Medical Abbreviations”:
http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_medical_abbreviations:_A;
- <http://www.Abbreviations.com> – “Hospitals Abbreviations”:
<http://www.abbreviations.com/acronyms/HOSP/1;>
- CAD (Clinical Abbreviations Dictionary):<http://www.cad.anp.net.au>; and
- mediLexicon – “Medical Abbreviations Dictionary”:
<http://www.medilexicon.com/medicalabbreviations.php>.

Consumer Medicines Information sheets from the manufacturers on drug use, side effects and precautions are available from many websites, including the Better Health Channel (http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcsite.nsf/pages/bhc_medicinesguide?opendocument). Who Named It? (<http://www.whonamedit.com/azeponyms.cfm/A.html>) provides information about eponyms – diseases, tests, bacteria and so on that have been named after a person. They include “Aarskog’s syndrome”, “Abbott’s tube” and “Abeshouses’s triad”.

CONTENT-BASED: LIVING LIBRARIES

Living libraries are an extraordinary concept that has spread from Scandinavia around the world, with successful implementation in Australia in recent years. There is a strong online presence for this flesh-and-blood experience (<http://www.livinglibraries.org.au>).³

The website explains: “Living Libraries Australia is a national strategy for connecting and strengthening local communities through conversation.” To encourage community understanding – especially between people with different views or different origins – Living libraries are a somewhat formal way of enabling contact. People with a story to tell are made available as “Books”, and others who wish to talk to them come in as “Borrowers”.

The website provides general information about the concept, as well as a resource pack for people who wish to set up their own program. There is also specific information about youth programs (<http://www.livinglibraries.org.au/images/uploads/youth.toolkit.finalv7.pdf>), which can be established in schools or public libraries.

CONTENT-BASED: IT DIED

Reading a batch of old *New Scientists* from a library sale, it was interesting to follow up on the “next greatest thing” type of article to see what had happened to new developments. In many cases they had gone nowhere.

The web is similar. We see the start of many exciting projects, but do not always hear the end result. <http://www.Itdied.com> is a website that helps you track the removal of sites and services from the web. It is a reminder to those of us who contribute to public sites that shared content is not guaranteed to last forever. When social networking site <http://www.Flip.com> was closed they

³ When attempting to open the file flashdvd.swf. select “Cancel” and you will return to the homepage without loading the video.

suggested to users that they preserve their scrapbooking projects by printing them. In 2009, the Magnolia bookmarking system became unrecoverable due to loss of primary user data storage and unusable backups. In other cases it has been possible to transfer data. For example, Furl is no longer available but users have been able to transfer bookmarks directly into <http://www.Diigo.com>.

With the move to cloud computing we are putting more and more of our data into the hands of others, trusting that they will manage the preservation of data better than some of these services have. Wise users will keep their own backups of important content. (Cloud computing is computing in which people use computer resources owned by someone else on distant servers for data storage and management, meaning less has to be stored on local computers. It includes applications such as Flickr, Delicious and GoogleDocs.)

CONTENT-BASED: VISUALISATION

The Information is Beautiful website shows how ideas, issues, knowledge and data can be visualised. For example, they have a map of the world showing “touristyness”, and another with flags showing what each country is best at (sugar beet, hospital beds, expensive internet, library books – they made sure they found something). One useful one is on alternative medicine efficacy (<http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/play/snake-oil-supplements>). Bubbles are ranked according to the amount of evidence supporting the use of a certain supplement for a certain condition. “Fish oil” ranks as having “strong” evidence for high blood pressure and secondary heart disease, but only “good” evidence for behaviour and general health. The size of the bubbles shows popularity according to the number of Google hits, and red bubbles show those supplements for which there are new studies with promising results.

SERVICE-BASED: GOGET CAR SHARE

GoGet (<http://www.goget.com.au>) is a car hire service that can be used as an alternative to owning a car. Users register and pay a joining fee, then go online and book a car whenever required. Cars are parked in reserved spaces and are accessed using a swipe card. Apparently some organisations now use this service as an alternative to running their own fleet. Cars are most common in Sydney, where they are clustered around the centre of the city, spreading from Dulwich Hill to Bondi Beach and St Leonards. At this stage Melbourne and Brisbane have nine locations and Adelaide has two. You can register your interest in the establishment of a location near you. I have met two people who have used this service and say it works well for them.

FOR FUN: CHEESY FONTS, SUDOKU, TWITTER AND THE SMELL OF BOOKS

For a trivial challenge, at <http://www.cheeseorfont.mogrify.org> you have to decide whether a name refers to a cheese or a font. It is surprisingly difficult. Examples include Ferdosi (a font) and Ragusano (a cheese).

Sudoku fans can get printable puzzles at <http://www.puzzles.about.com/od/sudokupuzzles/a/ExpertSudoku.htm> (starting with Very Easy) and advice at <http://www.monkeysee.com/play/5139-the-scanning-technique-in-sudoku> and http://www.sudokuessentials.com/how_to_play_sudoku.html.

I have recently left Twitter, to make more time in my life. My biggest regret is not getting my regular fix from the FakeAPStylebook, which provided advice including “et cetera – A Latin term meaning ‘I can’t think of anything else to say’” and “The unknown perpetrator of a crime is the ‘suspect’, unless you write for the Daily Bugle, in which case it’s ‘Spider-Man’”. You can find it at <http://www.twitter.com/FakeAPStylebook>.

And for those who do not think an ebook has the same smell and feel as a real book, try <http://www.smellofbooks.com>.