

Meetings Reports

Google and Beyond

For some of us, Newcastle was a long trek. But for all of us, it was well worth the effort.

There were about 20 delegates at this meeting from various government departments, universities, the NHS and pharmaceutical companies. We all had different needs and experience, but Karen Blakeman was able to make us all feel that we got something useful out of the meeting. Karen is an experienced and knowledgeable trainer and this certainly showed in her professional approach to the thorny problem of searching the Internet. Certainly, her insights really came across as fresh and exciting.

The course itself was held at the Netskills Training Suite at Newcastle University. The facilities were excellent and the course itself was very practical-based and interspersed with excellent explanations. The written material was first-class.

It is difficult to say what we as a group learned. What I found new and interesting may well have been 'old hat' to another delegate and vice versa, but there were some common highlights.

1. Yahoo is a strong alternative to Google in its 'new' iteration.
2. Kartoo is really different and a bit weird.
3. The BUBL site is very good.
4. You can use * to stand for words in a phrase in Google.
5. You can only use Boolean OR in Google, but the full range in Yahoo.
6. ~ before a term looks for synonyms.
7. Advanced search is straightforward, but powerful.
8. Limiting by document format is useful.
9. You can only put 10 terms in a simple Google box – any more will be ignored.
10. There are lots of other search engines and meta search tools – Gigablast, Teoma, Ixquick, Vivissimo, Killerinfo, Zapmeta, etc.

All in all this was an excellent course, well-run and well-organised (as usual by Christine Baker). Karen was interested in what we wanted to know and did her best to cover all the aspects that make a course personal to you rather than general to the group.

Vic Lelliott
Head of Information Services
Napp Pharmaceuticals
vic.elliott@napp.co.uk

Content management and search software: specification, selection and implementation

University of Edinburgh, Thursday 14 October 2004

Martin White ran his popular Content Management course in Edinburgh on 14th October 2004. Over twenty delegates from public and private sector organisations travelled from across Britain to learn from Martin's wide industry experience.

Thursday 14th October 2004 was a beautiful day in Edinburgh. This did not go unnoticed by the delegates. Indeed, the corner conference room of Edinburgh University Library in which the course took place offered good views over the Meadows and its population of trees at different stages of autumnal foliage. Several people took advantage of the lunch break to step outside, sniff the autumn air and kick some leaves in the sunshine. When they returned indoors wistful snippets of conversation on the feasibility of moving (back) to Edinburgh drifted across the room to mix with the more serious discussion of CM technology implementations.

At the start of the morning session the range of delegates' interests, and expertise, in content management was established. Some participants had elected to attend the course for the sake of their own professional development, i.e. to improve their understanding of the main issues around content management. Others were already engaged in content management work and now keen to extend their knowledge to include practical strategies that could be deployed in the work-place.

Whilst the majority of the cohort comprised practising information professionals, the group was also fortunate in having Zach Watt of e-business consultancy Parallel56 in attendance. Zach was able to make important contributions to the discussions from the perspective of a commercial supplier of tailor-made content management systems.

In starting the day by giving the delegates a chance to explain their reasons for electing to attend the course, Martin was able to determine the level at which to deliver his material. Later on, he used information disseminated in the introductory session to draw individuals into the discussion at points when he believed they would have interesting experiences to share with the others.

The content of the course covered five main themes: CMS functionality; technology options; means of writing CMS specifications; criteria for selecting a vendor and issues related to CMS implementation. To draw everything together, Martin ended the day