

## 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.

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### 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

with a review of critical success factors of importance to selecting and implementing a CMS. Of particular value in the concluding session was Martin's assessment of a series of print and web resources on CMS. This gave pointers to the delegates for further enhancement of their growing knowledge of CMS.

For the delegates who had yet to face decisions over content management system implementation the course was an eye-opener. The two main messages of the day were to (1) take care in balancing trade-offs in systems specification, and (2) put as much effort as possible in at the tender specification stage to ensure that the CMS called for is actually suited to the needs of the organisation.

It is testament to Martin's polished delivery style (as well as stamina) that he kept the audience engaged all the way through almost six hours of lecture-style presentation time. He skilfully addressed the main issues, and illuminated his points with entertaining anecdotes. The course was very good value for money, not least because it was presented from the point of view of a well-respected and trusted independent consultant.

For those unable to attend, White's Content management handbook to be published by Facet in early 2005 promises to be a valuable aid to understanding the issues discussed on the course, and to the design of strategies for effective content management within organisations.

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## **Book Reviews**

**The advanced internet searcher's handbook 3rd ed, Phil Bradley. London: Facet Publishing, 2004 ISBN 1-85604-523-4 272pp. £34.95**

This book aims to help you search the internet more effectively by giving you a better understanding of how search engines and related software and utilities work, allowing you to use them to improve your own search techniques. Why read this book? Phil Bradley's answer is that "as an information professional you wouldn't use one reference book to answer all the things you get asked, so why do it with a search engine?" And wouldn't anyone be inclined to read a book with 'advanced' in the title rather than 'dummies' or 'idiots'?

Following an introduction to the internet, there are 3

sections: Mining the internet for information; Becoming an expert searcher; The future. The contents cover a lot of material, including how the different types of search engines work and the advantages and disadvantages of using them. There are chapters on particular search engines, how they can be used effectively, and when they should be used. Phil Bradley also considers the challenges facing publishers, information professionals and end users. He predicts that information professionals will increasingly be turning away from paper-based collections, and organising intranets instead.

In chapter 12 he explains how to quickly assess the level of authority of a particular website or page. He advocates virtual libraries as "a very useful set of resources, which are all too often ignored or badly publicised...it may not be necessary to look anywhere else for the information that is required." Newsgroups and mailing lists he regards also as an under-used resource. Weblogs, news aggregators and 'the hidden web' are covered in chapter 7. Chapter 16 looks at online tools; chapter 15 is on hints and tips to make searching and using the internet a bit easier and a little bit faster. He suggests "you may be able to save yourself several hours each week by incorporating them into your normal daily work routines."

My criticisms are very few. Each chapter lists at its end the URLs mentioned but not the site names. I would find it useful to know which search engines have a built-in spell check function, and how useful this feature is. Any information professional involved in intranet or web design will know of the need to allow for a great variety of not only synonyms but mis-spellings so that users can find the information they seek. I am not the only reviewer for elucidate to criticise Facet Publishing's book indexes. They are just not extensive enough. Chapter 6, on resource or site-specific engines was a bit slender. For the public sector, a site-specific search engine is all the more important in meeting the e-Government Metadata Standard, since there are so few general search engines which can search the metadata required by the e-GMS, and with FOI users will need to be able to distinguish the wheat from the chaff.

The author's style is easy to read. I liked his characterisation of the internet as a grand, gothic, rambling edifice "presided over by a half-insane librarian who is constantly coming up with new classifications and cataloguing schemes..."

Each chapter can be read stand-alone, but if read as a whole you will find very little repetition. The main changes since the last addition are the growing popularity of weblogs, and the continuing advance of Google. Natural-language search engines have all