Evaluation Templates

* Bibliography formatting software: An Evaluation template is now in its11th edition available at: http://www.burioni.it/forum/ors-bfs/text/index.html

Updates on Reference Software packages

* *Resource Mate* has made improvements to their demonstration version which include a makeover of their training booklet making it easier to read. The tutorial is available in html or pdf format and can be accessed as Word or RTF.
http://www.resourcemate.com

Bibliography management web services

* A current project of interest to readers of this column is that of *BibShare*, a set of bibliography management web services designed to be used by different text processing systems avoiding the need for different bibliography collections and formats. This is an example of the new generation of applications that have been built using a Service Oriented approach and is free

Current solutions to dealing with different bibliographies are limited in the sense that they are word-processor oriented, whereas users (often in Science and Technical areas) often write documents with different tools. This obligates authors to use different bibliography managers, and even different collections (with subsequent problems such as consistency enforcement, updating, etc.) depending on the word processor used.

Bibshare allows writers to use the same bibliography collection(s) regardless of the word processing system they use. Both personal and external collections can be used to retrieve the bibliographic information to be inserted into documents [original abstract amended]. For more information go to http://www.bibshare.org

Public Sector News

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It is still e-government and Freedom of Information which dominate the public sector at present. Both aim to provide better information and services to the citizen and both are accepted as a good thing. It is important however, that we keep an eye on the resources these two areas can absorb and check that they are being used to best effect. As we do this we will have an eye too on the Gershon review of public sector efficiency which requires us to make 2.5% savings a year up to 2008.

E-Government

This is the year by which we in the public sector are required to be 100% e-enabled. Will we make it? Some reports being published suggest we will and equally as many who predict failure.

The most eagerly anticipated annual review of local government web sites conducted by SOCITM (The Society of Information Technology Management) was published in early March and shows 30% of local authority web sites have moved up a category. (Better Connected – 2005 http://www.socitm.gov.uk.) This report suggests local authorities may struggle with the Priority Service Outcomes set by ODPM last year.

Included in the Priority Service Outcomes are encouraging take up of services. A survey commissioned by the e-citizen National Project suggests that 17.5 million people could be in line to use local government e-services but that many are not aware of them. A campaign to improve take-up is essential. http://www.e-citizen.gov.uk will give you more information and the full report is due for publication in April 2005.

To steer us through this year there is a new face at the Cabinet Office. With the move of Ruth Kelly to Education after the Cabinet reshuffle David Milliband was given the responsibility for e-government along with public sector and civil service reform.

IPSV

I know it sounds rather like an unpleasant disease but the IPSV is actually the Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary and has just been made available in draft form. You can read more about it and view the draft at http://www.esd-toolkit.org

This vocabulary is a merging of the Government Category List with the Local Government Service List and the seamlessUK thesaurus and is designed to aid the indexing of public sector web sites. It will be used in the metadata of web sites and should assist joint working and data sharing as well as providing consistent indexing of local government web sites making them easier to search for the public.

Transport information

In December 2004 the Department for Transport launched the Transport Direct website which is intended to be the beginning of much more transport information delivered in a variety of ways. It is linked to 'Directgov' (http://www.direct.gov.uk) to provide, for instance, transport information alongside hospital or school details. It offers an integrated journey planner to find the fastest ways of traveling by public transport and will eventually be offered on the web, digital TV and mobile devices.

Health information

Health information is now being offered though a digital TV service launched by the Department of Health. http://www.dh.gov.uk has more information about this service known as NHS Direct Interactive. The existing NHS Direct web site receives about 6.5 million visits a year and they take 6.5 million phone calls.

Freedom of Information

We are now nearly 2 months into the new open culture of the Freedom of Information 2000. If my own experience is typical we have much to learn and to unravel. Some high profile examples of the use made of the Act have hit the headlines but I suspect the real cost is being felt in the less news worthy but still time consuming questions. In local government we have as anticipated received requests which although not difficult have been time consuming and we have found the use of the exemptions complex at times. Examples in my own area include requests for information about the number of Belisha beacons, details of buses, maintenance contracts and lots about speed cameras.

It would be nice to think it will settle down but experience in other countries suggests it will get busier before it settles but that there will always be high demand.

In central government the beginning of the Freedom of Information Act sees the end of the 30 year rule for the National Archives and they began the year by releasing more than 50,000 files which were less than 30 years old. Lord Falconer, the Lord Chancellor announced that central government had received 4,000 requests in the first month of the Act.

IDOX conducted a survey of local authorities calling it 'One month on-UK Local Authority responses to an FoI request' and 86% of the 438 authorities approached responded within the 20 days required by the Act. Rather impressive though was that responses were dispatched by no less than 220 unique job titles from Chief Executive to e-government programme manager!

Land Registry

Want to be nosey and find out what the house next door sold for? Well, the Land Registry online service can give you that information (if the property has changed hands since 2000) and all for just £2. http://www.landreg.gov.uk has been piloted for a while but has now been formally launched and is an ideal tool for identifying ownership of properties and prices paid.

With all the concerns about Data Protection it seems strange that this information is being made available so easily but the Land Register has always been a public document. All that has changed is that it is available at the desk top so you can find information it is interesting to know where as before you had to have a very good reason for travelling to check a Land Registry entry.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)

The MLA People's Network is looking for librarians to join its Online Enquiry Service. This service will aims to encourage all 149 library authorities in England to get involved and provide the public with another way of accessing quality information. For more information go to http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk

Government websites

The Economic and Social Research Council have produced a report which gives some interesting figures for those of us involved in e-government and specifically the web based provision of information.

The report shows 40% of internet users visiting news and current affairs web sites but only 28% had used local council information and 21% central government. While only 2% had visited the web site of their own MP, research shows that 44% of the public would like their MP to publish an email address and 42% would like them to have a web site. You can read more about the findings on the ePolitix web site http://www.ePolitix.com

You may find useful the Public Bodies Database which lists the public bodies sponsored by central government and gives contact details, information about their remit and board members. It may be found at http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/ndpb/ndpb.nsf/0/04801FA2F8BF454480256E540049FF84?OpenDocument

Public Sector News is provided by the ALGIS (The Affiliation of Local Government Information Specialists) which represents information professionals providing information services to local authority staff and elected members. For more information go to http://www.algis.org.uk