Internet News
Column Editor: Kevin Bell; e-mail: kevin14@ntlworld.com

The E-commerce minister, Stephen Timms, has stated in a 'Guardian' interview - http://www.guardian.co.uk/online/insideit/story/0,13270,1083080,00.html - that "he wanted broadband Internet access across the whole of the UK by the end of 2005." A laudable sentiment, tempered somewhat by the fact that the government will not provide any funds to bring this about. Will they be so reluctant to claim the credit if the target is achieved?

The government's activities in promoting Internet usage can be found in the monthly report from the office of the e-Envoy http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/EStrategy/MonthlyReportsArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4004747&chk=KuuvQz . As a result of the Get Started campaign, 37, 000 people attended taster sessions and over 130, 000 people requested further information. One of the slightly more bizarre aspects of the campaign is the crediting of a 'Coronation Street' storyline about a UK online centre with kick-starting the campaign. Perhaps if the Japanese model was adopted - http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3278375.stm – more people would be interested in broadband and the experience would be greatly improved for those currently connected (I use this term advisedly!).

The issue of e-voting is still topical with a report from 'The Times' - http://www.timesonline.co.uk/ showing how vulnerable the current systems are to manipulation and attack. The many areas of potential risk, such as voter identification or software that alters votes, combined with the lack of a verifiable audit trail will have to be totally overcome before any system can gain public confidence. However, there is a potentially more immediate threat to online users, that of web attacks using HTML coding in emails - http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3243635.stm. This form of attack places links in an email that, if clicked, allows the attacker to place programs on the host computer (the Qhost virus). Worryingly, it is claimed that, depending on the email program being used, it is not even necessary for the link to be clicked for it become operational, merely opening the email is sufficient.

If you are at a loose end and feel that sudden urge to increase your awareness of the Information Society, you could do a lot worse than browse on over to the British Council's newsletter page - http://www.britishcouncil.org/info@uk/bulletin.htm#current – and check out the latest, or even some of the archived, newsletters. There really is a wealth of information here, both from the UK and internationally, and something is sure to catch your eye; how about

Biometric Screening at US borders, or EU Cyber-detectives? A particularly interesting link from the newsletter is to KableNet – http://www.kablenet.com/ - "Europe's leading independent authority on e-government and public service IT and telecoms markets". KableNet has lots of current articles, not just from the UK and Europe, but from around the world, relating to e-government. The stories are updated daily and provide a useful current awareness service.

In closing, I wonder why it is that when you type 'internet' into Google and hit 'I feel lucky' the returned page is Microsoft.com?

Intranets and CM
Column Editor: Martin White, Intranet Focus Ltd; e-mail: Martin.white@intranetfocus.com

Increasing intranet usage
I took part in a rather interesting conference in London in December last year which had as its subject Practical Strategies to Encourage the Frequent and Consistent Usage of the Intranet for Demonstrable ROI. This title probably merits an entry in the Guinness Book of Records for the longest conference title, but at least it does set out what the objectives of the conference were. For the record the conference was organised by Marketing Week Conferences, and as a result many of the delegates had a marketing communications background.

One of the topics that came up in the early sessions of the conference was the value of promotions as a way of getting employees to use the intranet. Stuart Butterfield is the web manager responsible for the intranet at HBOS plc. The intranet supports over 60,000 staff and one feature of the intranet is the way in which the company uses competitions to stimulate the use of the intranet.

These competitions are designed in a way that winning them requires an employee to make effective use of the intranet. A typical question might be to ask which charity HBOS has just supported with a grant. Employees have to dig into the intranet to find the information and in doing so will explore areas of the intranet that they might not otherwise use, and at the same time learn about the work of the company. Butterfield reported that the tricks in getting a high level of participation were to offer 'substantial' prizes (£100 plus) and make sure that the fun and the business elements are combined. This results in learning about both the business and the intranet, and also allays the fears of senior managers that staff will just do the fun stuff and not gain anything useful out of the exercise other than a wide-screen TV!

New content management resources

I'm finding that almost all my intranet consulting work is now being driven by clients seeing the implementation of content management software as a way of managing decentralised content contribution. One of the best sites for CMS information is http://www.cmsreview.com/ , the brainchild of Bob Doyle, with www.cmswatch.com from Tony Byrne as a joint leader. Bob has now launched three new web resources. The first is http://www.cms-forum.org/ which is a structured home for the information and intelligence that circulates on www.cms-list.org. The problem with cms-list is that there has been no accessible archive, and the threads are impossible to navigate. The combination of the two is quite inspirational.

The second development is the CMSWiki at http://www.cmswiki.com/. If you don't know what a wiki is then this is a good place to start. Again the aim is to provide access to the global knowledge base of CMS implementation issues, as well as enable vendors to get in on the act. Finally there is the CMS Blog which acts as an integrator for a range of other blogs, based on RSS feeds. (See http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss_primer/ for an excellent introduction to RSS). Add to all these resources. Bob Doyle is also the Editor of the DMOS directory on CMS vendors, and has accumulated a list of links to around 900 vendors at http://dmoz.org/Computers/Software/Internet/Site_Management/Content_Management/

Personas

One of the neat methodologies that I have been using recently to develop the information architecture of intranets has been that of personas. For many years market researchers have concentrated on defining target groups of users, such as "Mothers under 25 with two or more children at school".

Alan Cooper, an American software designer, and the author of Visual Basic 1.0, realised that as technology enabled software companies to provide more functionality for the same price there was an increasing danger that the user experience would be so bad as they tried to cope with new releases that they would prefer to stay with the current version, which would have a huge impact on the sales of software. In his book The Inmates are Running the Asylum, published in 1997, Cooper used some of the outcomes of the market research industry, which was at that time starting to move towards personas.

A concise statement about personas has been developed by Alison Hunt in a seminal article in Online http://www.infotoday.com/online/jul03/head.shtml

To summarise what a persona is

- Personas are hypothetical archetypes, or "stand-ins" for actual users that drive the decision making for interface design projects.

- Personas are not real people, but they represent real people throughout the design process.

- Personas are not "made up"; they are discovered as a by-product of the investigative process.

- Although personas are imaginary, they are defined with significant rigour and precision.

- Names and personal details are made up for personas to make them more realistic.

- Personas are defined by their goals.

- Interfaces are built to satisfy personas' needs and goals.

It is well worth reading some other papers on this methodology at

http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/almstrum/cs373/general/personas.html

http://www.boxesandarrows.com/archives/print/003348.php (May 2003 edition)

http://www.boxesandarrows.com/archives/print/002343.php (March 2002 edition)

Reference Management
Column Editor: Tracy Kent; e-mail:
t.k.kent@bham.ac.uk

(Editor's note: Tracy's column has been carried over from the final issue of the UKOLUG Newsletter as it is still current)

Managing references beyond the library walls….
Palm top access for Endnote 7

Managing references has always been carried out sitting down – whether in a library or a study or research centre. With the latest version of Endnote 7 you can now download references to your Palm top and be anywhere! The new Endnote application for Palm OS handheld devices allows you to search, enter and edit references and then hotsync the references when you return to your desktop.