Reference Management Day
UK Online User Group Meeting
Letchworth, 23 June 2004

Who should take responsibility for reference management software within an organisation - computing services or the library? Most of the delegates on this one-day course were librarians interested in evaluating the software on behalf of their researchers. Cocooned in Adept Scientific's training suite on a wild, wet day, we were able to explore the functionality of EndNote and Reference Manager.

The course was led by Tracy Kent, who has developed expertise with both packages through her work as a subject librarian at Birmingham University. She took us through a well-planned programme, interspersing presentations with plenty of time for hands-on, supported by detailed workbooks. We started with looking at what could be achieved by the software. New versions are continually being developed and the latest can store references to e-journals, e-books, multimedia etc as well as traditional bibliographic references.

Next we tried the various methods of inputting data: manual, connection files (e.g. for COPAC, zetoc, or PubMed records), direct export (for ISI and Ovid databases), import filters (for other databases). As a novice this seemed very complex. I could imagine researchers who use a limited number of search tools getting familiar with the import filters, but would students know the provider of a particular database in order to select the correct filter? After an excellent lunch we tackled maintaining the database integrity and outputting into manuscripts or subject bibliographies, and finally the support issues.

It was very useful having a 'real' librarian to discuss these issues with. Tracy willingly shared her experience at Birmingham on details like the best way to run training sessions, and the difficulties that arise from not centrally funding the software. Most of the delegates were trying to compare and contrast the two products, and it was really useful to have an overview at the end from Adept Scientific staff. They saw EndNote as a writer's tool, ideal for a single user, and Reference Manager as a corporate level research tool.

Two small niggles:
Several HEIs have found reference management software useful for undergraduate students, particularly at dissertation level, and I had hoped to compare the Adept products with CSA's RefWorks. It was an expensive day. I attended an information literacy event the same week for a fifth of the cost!

Overall though, it was an enjoyable, well-organised day. Tracy paced it well and managed to answer lots of questions besides allowing us plenty of time for exploring the software.

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Book Reviews

The Internet and Information Skills: a guide for teachers and school librarians
James E. Herring. Facet Publishing. London. 2004 ISBN 1-85604-493-9 192pp. £24.95

Written mainly for teachers and school librarians in secondary/high schools "across the world", this book will probably also be of interest to those in primary/elementary schools and possibly to some in further education. The book's global aspirations are backed by the author's experience in working with schools in a variety of English speaking countries and, throughout the book, examples are drawn from Canada, Australia, the USA and South Africa as well as Scotland and England.

The book is comprehensive in its coverage if patchy in depth. Starting with a brief overview of learning theories and teaching techniques, especially in the context of the Internet, it goes on to an overview of the Internet, especially in the context of teaching and learning. It finishes with a brief chapter on future developments of both the curriculum and the Internet. In between is the real 'meat' of the book covering: evaluation of websites, subject gateways, information skills, the author's PLUS model and the web, developing a school website and developing an instructional website.

It is encouraging to see that the following points recur throughout the book: the usefulness of teacher-librarian co-operation, the importance of information literacy for social as well as educational reasons, and the need to integrate Internet, and other ICT training, into the curriculum. The need for information literacy training within schools was well illustrated at a recent Multimedia Information & Technology Group meeting, 'The Google factor; information seeking, users and the Internet', where it was demonstrated that many students are still entering higher education without adequate information skills. This book aims should help to remedy this.

Each chapter starts with a list of what the reader should expect to achieve by reading it - usually these are a good guide to the chapter's content, but sometimes they are a little ambitious! Chapter 2,

'The Internet', appears to be aimed at those with little knowledge in this area - it would probably take a whole book to properly cover the claims for this chapter, but it does provide a wide ranging introduction. However some basic definitions are missing, for example list-servs and the 'deep web' are both mentioned in the claims, but neither is defined, nor is there a clear explanation of how to use them - that said, useful examples are given for both. This is one of the strengths of this book – it is packed with practical examples and useful screen dumps.

An excellent chapter on website evaluation covers technical, reliability and educational criteria. As in other chapters the views of other writers in this field are summarised but the author also provides his own list of questions to ask relating to the three sets of criteria. The main example provided is the guide from Ed's Oasis, from classroom.com and the author suggests that schools each develop their own guidelines with advice on how to do this.

Subject gateways are covered briefly, with plenty of examples mainly from free, general gateways such as The Virtual Teacher Centre, Schoolzone, The Gateway, Blue Web'n and KidsKonnect. Examples of subject specific and commercial services are also given.

Searching the web is covered in several chapters from the viewpoint of teachers and librarians and their students and in the context of the author's PLUS model of information literacy. Search engines are both defined and categorised and many common search engine features, such as Boolean searching, truncation and limits, are also defined. The subject of effective search strategies is covered in more depth, with some emphasis on selecting the most appropriate search engine/s for the task and a useful list of search engines, matched to various search requirements, is provided, courtesy of noodletools.com. Several models of the search process are presented, all stressing the importance of the planning stage, including definition of purpose before selection of keywords if relevant results are to be obtained. A useful list of planning points is provided and is followed by an example search, on "the causes of volcanoes", extracts of the results of which are displayed for 3 different search engines. Although this is given as an example of a well planned search, of the 9 results displayed from Google only one of them appears to be directly relevant (the results from Dogpile and AskJeeves fair much better). Most of the results shown for Google are fine examples of 'false-drops', and this concept, a very common occurrence in web searches, could usefully have been explained here, but is not mentioned.

Information literacy is defined as much more than just searching for relevant information – it is seen as also encompassing the ability to evaluate what is found, make notes on it, organise it and create and present a new piece of work from it. The final step is self evaluation of the skills used in the project. These steps are set out in more detail in the author's PLUS model, along with other current models.

The two chapters on developing a school, or an instructional, website provide a good, if fairly brief, introduction to the subject and outline a suggested proceedure to follow. Happily the emphasis is on defining purpose and intended audience/s and content, with design following, not preceding, information architecture. Storyboarding is a suggested technique for defining the information architecture. Details of several online style guides are given along with a useful list of design elements to consider. Accessibility is mentioned but not given the importance that might be expected Dreamweaver and Frontpage are the two editing tools featured although it is suggested that at least one member of staff should have some knowledge of HTML.

Overall this book provides a good introduction to the subjects covered and the numerous examples and four page bibliography give easy access to more detailed information, making up for the sometimes patchy coverage.

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Exploiting knowledge in health services
Graham Walton and Andrew Booth (eds). Facet Publishing. London. 2004 ISBN 1-85604-479-3 288pp. £49.95

This volume is a welcome guide to the rapidly changing world of health libraries and information services:

Part I provides the context to health care and health information services
Part II focuses on the principles required for effective delivery of services in a health library or information unit
Part III examines the information sources and skills needed to effectively exploit the health care knowledge base.

Each chapter offers an overview of recently published literature on its topic, as well as case studies where relevant. A useful summary of government plans for the NHS is included in the