

largest providers of subscription and information management solutions, announced today that BioMed Central's Open Access journals will be included in SwetsWise.

Internet News

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Introduction

I would like to introduce myself as your new internet column editor. My background, for the last twelve years, has been as a database designer of bibliographic databases, primarily in the SilverPlatter format. Following my redundancy earlier this year, I will be starting a new career in a secondary school Learning Resource Centre this September.

Peter Chapman suggested a slight change of focus for the column with the change in editor, a return to a focus on a single topic per column. Starting something new can always be a little daunting, and so I was interested in the subject of the upcoming UKOLUG one day course in November, 'An Introduction to Web Usability and Accessibility'.

Quite coincidentally, after this discussion with Peter, an article appeared in FreePint discussing usability. "Usability - ignore it at your peril!" by Sarah Agarwal covers the usability side of things so well, that I just refer you to it if you're looking for an introduction to the subject.

So, coming back to accessibility, the more I have researched this, the broader and deeper the subject becomes. So this column is by its nature a fairly high level overview of the subject area.

Web Accessibility

Web Accessibility is becoming more of a hot topic currently with many countries enacting legislation to overcome disability discrimination; for instance, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in England, Scotland and Wales; the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) in Ireland; and the Section 508 amendment to the Rehabilitation Act in 1998 in the US, which requires Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities.

This quote "The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect." -- Tim Berners-Lee, W3C Director and inventor of the World Wide Web

-- captures the essence of why this is an important and essential aspect of website development and management for all of us.

In England, the RNIB is leading the way with the provision of information about how to make websites accessible. Their 'See it Right' award is made to websites which have been audited and found to be accessible. The directory of 'See it Right' accessible websites is at http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_seeitrightlogo.hcsp#TopOfPage.

One website which has achieved the award is by Waitrose, and if you visit their site at <http://www.waitrose.com/> there is a footer link to accessibility, which provides a clear overview of how the site can be used. A case study explaining how this was achieved is also provided at www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_waitrose.hcsp#TopOfPage.

By now you may reasonably be wondering how you can check how your site, professional or personal, would measure up to the various standards set by w3 or Section508. There are a dizzying number of different validators and checkers out there, some freely available and some purchased software. An extensive list of checkers and validators of various types is listed at www.w3.org/WAI/ER/existingtools.html#General and also at www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=122&View=Print.

As an experiment I used one web page and tested it for compliance using two different accessibility checkers. Bobby™ is a comprehensive web accessibility software tool designed to help expose and repair barriers to accessibility and encourage compliance with existing accessibility guidelines. There is a free portal service at <http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp>, which enables you to test one web page at a time.

I picked a different validator, Hermish.com, from the section508 list of checkers and validators, this also works on one web page at a time. I entered <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about/about.html> into each tool and both returned a comprehensive on screen report detailing where and why the web page falls short of the Priority 1, 2 and 3 accessibility checkpoints established in W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0.

In addition, the report from Hermish.com can also include the page's source code and it highlights the particular html instances of the problems it has

found. Both reports provide links to explanatory help pages detailing how to correct or modify the page to overcome the difficulties encountered.

Comparing the two reports, the Bobby™ help pages were the more detailed, and also provided links to further discussions and illustrations of the consequences of the particular problem being highlighted.

The RNIB's 'web access centre' part of their web site provides a great deal of background and detailed practical information for creating accessible websites. The list of broad topic areas leads to further levels of topic choices, each one containing much detailed and useful information and guidance. In particular, their 'Design and management resources' section links to 'checkpoints and techniques', which gives an A-Z topic list of specific topics and further links to other checklists, such as 'layout and structure', 'linearisation', 'multimedia'. The direct link is www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_checkpointsandtechnique.hcsp#TopOfPage.

If you are looking for a different way of learning about web accessibility, rather than the bite size chunks approach, you may like to take a look at this online book from Mark Pilgrim, <http://diveintoaccessibility.org/>.

If you are looking for a book about designing for web accessibility, there are a handful of titles listed on Amazon, try accessible web sites in the search box. For another range of in-depth resources and links from W3C, visit their Web Accessibility Initiative web site.

Reference Management

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Full text availability

The unanswered question when supporting reference type software is that of "Why can I not link to the full text?" A perfectly valid question and one for which there are several possible responses...

Firstly, you can use the OpenURL links within packages such as Endnote. This provides a short cut to different resources in fulltext whether the original is from an OPAC or a database via the various resolvers available such as TOURS.

A list of possible resolvers can be found on the JISC website at www.jisc.ac.uk

These services, once configured, will provide links to full reprints or access to an electronic Inter Library Loan form. As information professionals we need to ensure that the links from these resolvers are accurate. This can be made difficult with the various bundled deals Institutions sign up to which often embargo electronic access to the latest issues. This is further compounded by the lack of back linkage in that if users find an item of interest in an OPAC there is often no option to download this data into their reference package.

To help in this, the second type of response for finding full text is to use the inbuilt connection files that allow users to connect out to a specific resource – whether database or library catalogue. The connection files are dependant on the Z39.50 protocol which needs to be configured.

Most packages come with a wide range of files but little information about what and how the resource(s) should be searched to obtain full text. You may find examples of keyword searching being interpreted as subject headings or any field being a title field search with word order searching imposed but not made clear. This may well diminish the functionality of this type of connection file. So if you are directing users to using such a service be sure you know what you are searching.

It is also worth checking whether the connection file has been configured to support additional features such as language fields (does each record have a language field completed?) or date range or phrase searching options.

Thirdly, you might try writing your own connection filter to your own full text resource such as your own OPAC or to the Cross Ref database. It would be necessary to provide an adequate, workable connection file to enhance the searching capabilities. The bath profile tried to set a standard on the implementation of Z39.50 when searching bibliographic databases so you may want to check that at www.ukoln.ac.uk

The problems with database indexing generally and the lack of uniformity for truncation, author searching and such like is something that Chris Armstrong's company at www.i-a-l.co.uk have been deliberating on for some time.....

If you do write connection files for databases or opacs you may wish to submit them to the adeptscience knowledge base for wider dissemination at www.adeptscience.co.uk