

Consumer Intelligence Innovation Change Trends in Business Information

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About FreePint

FreePint is a global network of people who find, use, manage and share work-related information. Members receive this free twice-monthly newsletter, which is packed with tips, features and resources.

Joining FreePint is free at <<http://www.freepint.com/>>, and connects information practitioners around the world with resources, events and answers to their tricky research and information questions at the FreePint Bar, our free online forum: <<http://www.freepint.com/bar/>>.

The FreePint Newsletter is available online in several formats and can be read, saved and forwarded at <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/>>.

Editorial



I could sense from their unease how frustrated a nearby delegate had become during a session on new technologies -- including podcasts, wireless technologies and mobile devices -- at the recent AIIP conference in Florida, USA <<http://www.aiip.org/>>. As soon as the session ended, the person leapt up, raced to the front, and collared the startled presenter with the demand: "How am I supposed to cope with all this diversity?!".

It is indeed overwhelming to appreciate the relevance to your work of all the diverse technologies and tools on the Internet. But it is incredibly important (especially for independents and small businesses) to grab the competitive advantages presented by making use of these tools. Here at FreePint we're now making daily use of instant messaging, Internet telephony, shared calendars and wikis. These tools are helping us to collaborate with colleagues around the world -- for example, our one-hour four-way Internet telephone conference call yesterday, which was crystal clear, free, and incredibly useful to the FreePint enhancements we're working on at the moment.

Of course, it's easier to make use of a tool if you have the right equipment, such as a broadband connection. For instance, I now 'get' Podcasts, after winning an iPod from Thomson Business Intelligence <<http://www.thomsonbusinessintelligence.com/>> at the AIIP conference; thank you to them for such a generous prize. FreePint's sister company Willco was also extremely honoured to receive the AIIP President's Award, and we've made a selection of photos from the conference available online <<http://www.freepint.com/portal/events/>>.

Information work itself is becoming increasingly diverse too, which was clearly evident from the 30-second 'elevator pitches' each delegate gave at the AIIP conference. Not only a diversity of geography and technical ability, but in the range of other skills on which information work calls. Patrice Curtis' article in today's FreePint describes how customer intelligence obtained from social media uses many skills from investigative journalism, and applies them in a new way to digital interactions and the e-paper trail they leave.

A knowledge of diverse sources is another key skill of information work, and VIP's editor Pam Foster tells us today how free content is causing ripples for those vendors who rely on traditional paid-for business models.

Whatever kind it is -- people, technology, skills, sources -- diversity makes organisations strong, because it makes them more able to cope with the changes that the Internet brings. You can see shifts in social media as a threat, or you can find out a bit about the technologies and harness them as practical tools to support you and your organisation in an increasingly diverse work environment.

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FreePint is a Registered Trademark of Free Pint Limited (R)

Eric Pozza is a Librarian and jazz lover in Canberra, Australia...

Submit your top five favourite Web sites. See the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>

My Favourite Tipples

by Eric Pozza

Web publishing can be surprisingly cheap and effective. These are key services I use to publish Canberra Jazz (CJ) for a cost of only USD 18pa <<http://canberrajazz.net>>:

- Open Source Web Design <<http://www.oswd.org/>> - over 1,500 open source professional-quality web templates. I used Leaves by Anthony for CJ.
- Bloglines <<http://bloglines.com>> - the hugely popular blog service supports the CJBlog for reviews of concerts and other jottings, with an Atom feed and ad-free publishing by FTP to my site.
- Feedigest <<http://www.feedigest.com>> - publish a single feed, or your own selection of feeds, to a webpage using JavaScript or other. Feedigest publishes CJNews, and a combined feed for CJNews and CJBlog.
- Yahoo! Groups <<http://yahogroups.com>> - create online communities with mailing lists, databases, calendars and more. Public groups include RSS feeds. YG supports both CJCommunity and CJNews.
- Doteasy <<http://doteasy.com>> - buy a domain name for \$18pa and you can mount your site at Doteasy. It's ad-free and cost-free for smaller sites.
- Open Source Web Design <<http://www.oswd.org/>> - over 1,500 open source professional-quality web templates. I used Leaves by Anthony for CJ.
- Bloglines <<http://bloglines.com>> - the hugely popular blog service supports the CJBlog for reviews of concerts and other jottings, with an Atom feed and ad-free publishing by FTP to my site.
- Feedigest <<http://www.feedigest.com>> - publish a single feed, or your own selection of feeds, to a webpage using JavaScript or other. Feedigest publishes CJNews, and a combined feed for CJNews and CJBlog.



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Blogs and Social Media Forum, 17 May 2006, Hilton London Metropole Understanding the Impact of Blogs, Wikis and RSS.

Join the debate at the new conference from the organisers of Online Information. Case studies include: Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein, Johnson & Johnson, Sun Microsystems and Allen & Overy.

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VIP reviews Snapdata and Euromonitor

April's issue of VIP includes in-depth reviews of the market research services offered by Snapdata and Euromonitor. May's issue will look at Business Insights, Datamonitor and Verdict. An overview will compare all five products.

<<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>

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The Jinfo Newsletter is published free every two weeks, and contains a list of the latest vacancies along with job-seeking advice. The latest article is entitled "Could Job-sharing be the Answer?". Read it online and subscribe free at <http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/>.

These are just a selection of the jobs in the current edition of the Jinfo Newsletter <http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/> and over 164 in the Jinfo database

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Recruiter: Jones Lang LaSalle

<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j5192>

Strategic Analyst

Strategy Analyst? Good knowledge of FMCG/retail industry? Interesting well paid role available at leading accountancy firm.

Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j5203>



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Latest press releases in the information industry are found at the VIP Wire. Post for free and share your news with a targeted audience:

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"VIP Wire is a great news distribution outlet for myclients in the information industry", Theresa Horscroft, Managing Director of Eureka Communications, UK PR agency for OneSource

Blogs & Social Media Forum

Wednesday 17 May 2006
Hilton London Metropole

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Understanding the Impact of Blogs, Wikis and RSS - Join the debate at the new conference from the organisers of Online Information.

Effective communication is a challenge for everybody in today's organisations and social media is all about communication. Knowing what's being said both inside and outside your organisation is critical and must be understood and managed effectively. But what exactly is involved?

Examining the impact of wikis, blogs & RSS, the one day forum will combine expert industry insight from leading thinkers in the field of social media technologies with real life case studies covering:

- Choosing the medium, wikis, blogs, RSS - where is the value?
- The risk and reward of using social media
- Find out how these tools can be used in organisations for business benefit both internally and externally through real life case studies
Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein, Johnson & Johnson, Sun Microsystems and Allen & Overy
- Understand the cultural challenges surrounding the use of social media
- Hear about ways you can use podcasting as a business tool
- Future predictions - what lies ahead for social media and web 2.0?

The Forum is breaking away from the traditional conference format to help maximise interaction and networking with an open space workshop format - see website for further details at www.socialmediaforum.co.uk

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It is difficult to know which postings to include in this Bar Summary when there are so many choose from. If you would like to see a full list of postings please visit the Bar Browser

<<http://web.freepint.com/forum/bar/browser/>>, where you can browse by category and/or date.

Starting with a couple of legal-related postings: How does one make blog contributors aware that "they are consenting to having their posts reproduced in some commercial form, e.g. that posts may be used to form another work, and they are contributing freely?"

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39593>>. Also, does an information and advice service need professional indemnity insurance?

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39601>>. The latest issue of VIP has just been published. It reviews two market research products - Snapshots and Euromonitor

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39414>>. And VIP Eye No.56 considers VC investments in social networking companies and the Web 2.0 'bubble'

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39396>>. Do you know of a PR agency that has experience/clients in business/scientific information publishing?

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39467>>. Or perhaps you can help with information on the current and predicted future size of the digital video industry?

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39346>>. Fancy getting out and about? FreePint Events is full of international information-

related events, including the RFID Forum in Ontario, Canada, and the BIALL Annual Conference 2006 in Brighton, UK, both taking place on June 7th

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39413>>.

Can you help this FreePinter locate freelance law librarians/legal researchers who might be interested in working for a Saudi firm who are in the process of establishing a global database for Law Librarians across the world?

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39219>>.

The first May issue of the Jinfo Newsletter is online and includes an article entitled "Could Job-sharing be the Answer?" plus forty four of the latest information-related jobs

<<http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/>>.

This periodicals librarian is considering switching subscription vendors and would like to know if anyone has experience of using EBSCO, Prenax, Huber and Lang Subscription Agency, InfoCandy or SWETS.
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39600>>.

And, lastly: do you know of any software that may automate the process of trawling the internet for government tender opportunities in the police/military sector?

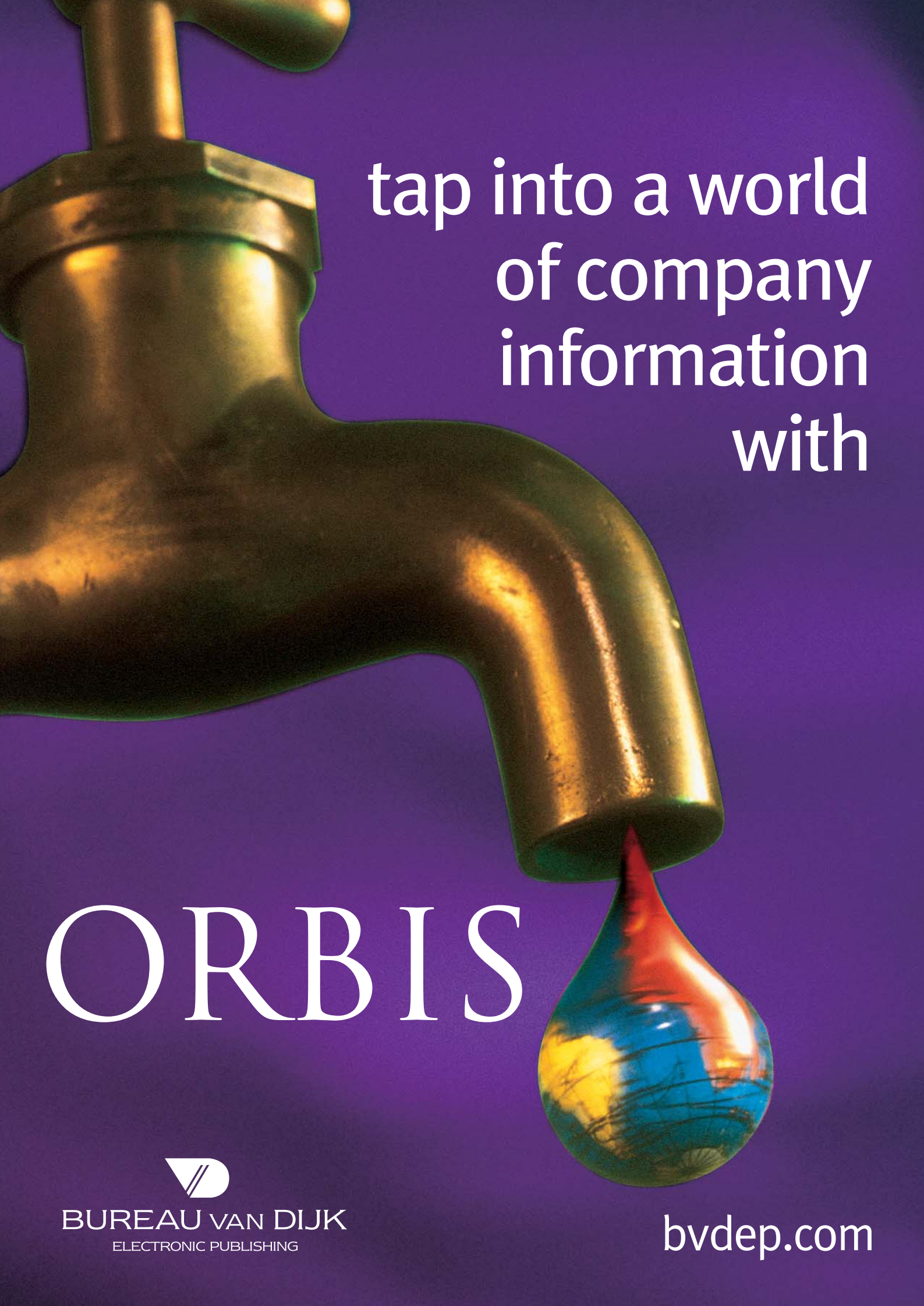
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39598>>;

Perhaps you know of an alternative to the organisational tool 'Backpack'?

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39254>>; Or

maybe you are aware of an online English-Italian-English glossary, which deals with football/soccer?

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b39459>>.



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"Gleaning consumer intelligence from blogs and podcasts"

By Patrice K. Curtis



Patrice Curtis is the founder of Curtis Research Group, which provides market intelligence to small- and mid-size businesses, global corporations, and national non-profits. The firm supports public relations, sales, marketing, and product development efforts by supplying specific information that organizations need in order to grow. Ms. Curtis lectures at the San Francisco Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center and will speak at the Podcast and Portable Media Expo in September 2006; Curtis Research will publish the upcoming syndicated "Podcast Advertising Networks" in June 2006. Detailed information about the services of Curtis Research is available at <http://www.curtisresearch.com>.

Introduction

Blogs and podcasts provide intelligence for consumer trend monitoring. In conjunction with your existing consumer intelligence (CI) resources, social media can highlight significant issues that affect your brands, identify competitor weaknesses, opportunities in the marketplace and those specific to a brand. Monitoring blogs and podcasts can help you develop actionable solutions to fuel your organization.

Although social media includes blogs, podcasts, wikis and more, this article will just explore the first two, and will demonstrate how monitoring and analyzing what consumers create on blogs and podcasts can enrich our understanding of their needs and desires, and thus support our CI efforts. We will start with a brief explanation of blogs and podcasts; identify a few tools that will ease monitoring requirements; and conclude with a few ideas for analyzing blogs and podcasts to identify consumer signals and trends.

Social Media Space

Your company may have a competitive intelligence system in place, but now you need to incorporate online social media sources as well. Social media - weblogs (blogs) and podcasts - provide a powerful peek into the minds of consumers as content creators. Because of this, the social media space represents a powerful resource in the search for deep insights into consumers.

The term 'social media' refers to World Wide Web services that let people collaborate and share content online. Blogs and podcasts are popular services that now have millions of people sharing and collaborating online, both for personal and professional use. Recent FreePint articles have covered the technology underlying social media, as well as some handy and informative applications of them [e.g. <http://digbig.com/4hjxx>]. Both have

grown dramatically in usage in the past two years. For example, there are currently an estimated 6 million podcast listeners, and some observers believe that number will swell to over 50 million by 2010.

Today, blogs and podcasts have grown to form the cornerstone of social media. The power to create their own content has empowered consumers of everything from designer purses and high-tech gadgets to enterprise-wide IT solutions, to state their point of view unequivocally and directly to anyone who will listen. And to guide readers and listeners to those opinions, social media search engines and content aggregators have sprung up, to make consumer-created content (a subset of user-generated content) easier to find.

Emerging opportunities

Consumer intelligence is both process and product. Social media are a rich vein to mine for insight into what customers want and need, as well as to understand how they behave. To turn this raw material into decisions and actions, we need to be able to identify the social media our customers are using, and then apply a set of tools and processes to acquire and manage, over time, the abundant flow of information.

Strong intelligence products -- reports, graphs, presentations and the like -- tell a story. Effective knowledge workers create order from the chaotic, esoteric, and unrelated. Blogs and podcasts, if we listen dispassionately and with an open mind, make our storytelling easier: our intelligence products can incorporate stories pulled directly from what consumers say, rather than strictly from what we observe.

A typical scenario I've encountered is a healthcare client who wants to protect their brand and extend their reach within existing shareholders. For example, in providing monitoring services for hospitals, I have found that local and regional newspapers and TV stations often play up

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relatively rare negative events, such as lawsuits, parking problems, and noise issues. An occasional article will be positive, perhaps discussing the availability of new procedures and new medical equipment. But in monitoring blogs, I discovered patient-driven stories: couples who had babies at a hospital provided glowing stories, sometimes rich in detail about the wonderful care mother and baby received during their stay. Patients for other procedures provided insight as to what could be improved, in an informative rather than accusatory tone. This feedback allowed hospital executives to emphasize a different story when speaking with their shareholders, and provided an opportunity to reach out to these consumers who otherwise would have been unknown.

Even beyond the consumer's statement, social media give us information about the information: who is participating in the discussion, for instance, and what kind of vocabulary they use to express themselves. Two examples of how the meta-information can enrich the overall intelligence: Demographics and Language and vocabulary

Demographics

Each social media website will appeal to a specific demographic, which must be kept in mind when analyzing content creator activities. For example, while there are certainly some 50-something grandmothers uploading cell phone photos, most content creators of this sort will be younger.

Language and vocabulary

Social media search engines provide important data through tag clouds and through lists, such as the week's top ten tags and/or blogs. Tags are words that content creators use to describe their works <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tag_cloud>; in effect, they are keywords, guides that lead content users to the posts of content creators. Analyzing tag clouds - groups of tags within content - provides powerful

insight into what blog and podcast content creators and users are interested in. It's also important to note that a flurry of activity (blog posts and discussion in podcasts) around an area of interest can peak quickly; without ongoing monitoring you risk ending up with a 'false positive' for a sustained trend.

Working backwards to characterise a community

As with any audience-focused research initiative, it's critical to understand the nature of the audience. Analysis of blogs, podcasts and the data surrounding them is an excellent way to gain an understanding of the individuals who use those particular nodes of social media, and thus put the information into context.

Tag clouds, for example, can be used to build up a picture of the demographics of particular sites. For example, if you look at the tag cloud on del.icio.us <<http://del.icio.us/tag/>> you would see a heavy weighting of technology-related words, such as: ajax, apple, css, linux and Web 2.0. Knowing this helps you to analyze what type of consumer uses that site, and correlate it to the site's popular tags.

Social media sites may also provide an analysis of their site users. A number of options exist to analyze the podcast space. Podcast Alley <<http://www.podcastalley.com>>, for example, provides a Top Ten and All-Time Most Popular list. Podzinger <<http://www.podzinger.com/ZingIndex.jsp>> provides lists of the Most Listened to Podcasts, and Most Viewed Video Podcasts. Podcast.Net <<http://www.podcast.net/browsetags>> is another good site to check.

BlogPulse provides some of the best tools to ferret out trends. You can find trends created by BlogPulse Trends <<http://www.blogpulse.com/trends.html>> or you can create your own Trend Search <<http://www.blogpulse.com/trend>>. Daypop provides a variety of statistics related to specific blog URLs. The statistics includes Word Bursts and Top Wishlist <<http://www.daypop.com/blogstats>>.

Bloglines

<<http://www.bloglines.com/topblogs>> provides information on the Most Popular Feeds, the Most Popular Links, and the Newest Feeds, ranked by the number of mentions. Green and red arrows denote change in popularity in the last 24 hours.

If you are interested in visual information, try Flickr and PhotoBlog.net.

'Interestingness'

<<http://www.houserdesign.com/flickr>> provides an easy way to view Flickr photos. Another option is PhotoBlog.net <<http://photoblog.net/?action=keywords>>, which provides the current Top 100, the most popular in the last 30 days, and the all-time favorites.

By maintaining a list of tags along with the source for each list, you can begin to build a database that allows you to cross-reference and correlate individual tags or category tag clouds that will clearly illuminate consumer interests as articulated in the social media space.

Like much of the web, corporate blogs of social media web sites can be a good place to keep track of what the company is exploring for future product and service roll-outs. These blogs also provide excellent signposts of the direction social media sites are moving in response to user (consumer) needs. For example, BlogPulse's blog is geared toward pointing us in the direction of trends we might otherwise not catch <<http://blog.blogpulse.com/>>.

Finally, experts within specific industries, such as public relations, actively monitor and comment on the social media space. Podcasts such as For Immediate Release <<http://www.forimmediaterelease.biz/>> and On The Record <<http://www.ontherecordpodcast.com>> provide rich information on the convergence of public relations and social media (though not exclusively). Global advertising agencies have blogs that speak to how the social media space is changing advertising.

Finding active consumers

To find active consumers -- those creating content in the social media space -- we

need to bridge the divide between the language of our organizations and the language of content creators.

First, identify keywords that will lead you to the information you seek. Your search terms are critical, so err on the side of too many rather than too few.

Next, find out what sort of results you get from searching blog and podcast search engines. While you should search blogs from Google

<<http://blogsearch.google.com/>> or Yahoo! <<http://digbig.com/4hdys>>, a social media search engine offers deeper results. Here are some of the more popular search engines.

- IceRocket <<http://www.icerocket.com>>
- Technorati <<http://www.technorati.com>>
- Google <<http://blogsearch.google.com/blogsearch>>
- BlogPulse <<http://www.blogpulse.com>>
- Blogger (Google-owned) <<http://www.blogger.com/start>>
- Bloglines <<http://www.bloglines.com>>
- Feedster <<http://www.feedster.com>>
- del.icio.us <<http://del.icio.us/>>
- Podcast Alley <<http://www.podcastalley.com>>
- Podcast.Net <<http://www.podcast.net>>
- Podzinger <<http://www.podzinger.com>>

The final step, before we beginning monitoring, is to match keywords with the tags created by active consumers. Content creators - active consumers - rely on tags to help other consumers find them. Tags have become the glue that connects content creators and content readers/listeners, and is a critical component in monitoring consumer trends. Over time, the use of tags results in a 'folksonomy', a user- defined, keyword system in which tags are defined by users rather than by a provided vocabulary. Unfortunately, folksonomies often diverge from keywords that researchers might use.

Because tag clouds provide an excellent way to identify the most popular terms, you can use them in reverse. Rather than matching keywords you choose in advance, let them lead you to toward what seems popular.

One of the best websites to see tags in action is Squidoo http://www.squidoo.com/browse/top_lenses. This site allows users to set up a web page where they control the content. Squidoo has a number of tag clouds that will help get you up to speed. Each web page (Squidoo calls them lenses) has the tags prominently displayed. In addition, the site has a number of tag clouds compiled based on popularity, category, etc. You could be lost in the clouds for hours, but you will come out with a better understanding of tags, tag clouds, and consumers active in the social media space.

Matching your keywords with folksonomies will be a fascinating process: you may find your assumptions about the way your organization identifies a potential or existing market may differ significantly from the way consumers describe that same market.

For example, a client wanted to add a label to their product that emphasized it as an excellent source of calcium for those who are lactose intolerant. However, research in the blogosphere revealed that, while a critical consideration, it was not sufficient to make a consumer buy. Consumers made purchasing decisions based on taste and texture factors.

Once we have identified tags, and the search engines and aggregators that cater to the consumer we seek, it is to time employ tools that will make it easier to monitor available data.

Monitoring tools

Aggregators, online news readers, browser plug-ins, and third-party companies provide tools that will simplify our monitoring.

Aggregators and news readers - Two tools that will really simplify our social media monitoring are aggregators and news readers. Both serve the same function: they allow us to subscribe to information that is then 'pushed' to us via RSS feeds, rather than requiring that we visit individual blogs, search engines, or aggregators.

News readers are software that you download to your desktop. Aggregators provide results through a website. For a list of several news readers for Mac and Windows, try the no-frills list from RSS Info <<http://blogspace.com/rss/readers>>. You can subscribe to an RSS feed for each individual term, simplifying your monitoring.

Google <<http://www.google.com/reader>>, Bloglines <<http://www.bloglines.com>>, and Yahoo! <<http://my.yahoo.com/s/rss-faq.html>>, <<http://news.yahoo.com/rss>> are examples of aggregators. All require that you have an account.

Unlike news readers or aggregators, a browser plug-in does not require opening a piece of software or surfing to a particular website. A plug-in exists within your browser as a separate window, and works behind the scenes, constantly updating your RSS feeds. Pluck <<http://www.pluck.com/products/rss-reader.html>>, Sage and diggbar (a Firefox add-on to search Digg <<http://www.digg.com>>) are three examples of plug-ins.

Despite the popularity of RSS feeds, you may still find that a site does not offer a feed for a particular web page.

QuickBrowse

<<http://www.quickbrowse.com>> provides a simple way to grab many web pages at once and have them displayed in one long web page that you access either online or that is emailed to you daily at a time of your choosing.

Conclusion

Consumers have always wanted to be heard, have always wanted their desires to be taken into account in the creation of new products - haven't you? Consumer trends begin life through a series of small or big signals. Through monitoring and analyzing the social media space, of which blogs and podcasts are a critical part, information professionals can provide a valuable, valid new voice within consumer trend monitoring - the consumer's story directly from the consumer.



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Written by Ilkka Tuomi

Reviewed by Graham Stewart



Graham Stewart is a freelance writer with a sordid past in IT development. His client list includes Reuters, Vodafone, Microsoft, and Citrix. In his spare time he works as an editor for the Internet's number one technical podcasting site at <http://www.itconversations.com>. His personal blog can be found at <http://wotiwrote.tranmega.co.uk>.

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- "Networks of Innovation: Change and Meaning in the Age of the Internet" ISBN 019926905X published by Oxford University Press

The hardback version of this book appeared in 2002 and the paperback now appears from Oxford unchanged. There is not even a new foreword that seeks to justify the lack of updates. The assumption must be, therefore, that the book's contents have aged at a slower rate than the "dog years" at which Tuomi tells us life is lived on the Net. To be fair to Tuomi, however, many of his main arguments have been proved correct in the intervening years.

It's worth stating immediately that this is not a book for the general reader. Although Tuomi presents a coherent and telling history of the development of many of the Internet's major components, there are more lay-accessible books covering the same ground. (Where Wizards Stay up Late by Katie Hafner, for instance.) The book contains ideas and information that would appeal to readers interested in the Internet's history and future, but this information tends to be buried within what is first and foremost an academic thesis on the socio-economic forces at work in technological innovation.

What, then, are the major claims contained in Tuomi's text? Firstly, Tuomi believes that, "the traditional models of innovation are often misleading, and that they will become increasingly misleading in the future." He is keen to avoid looking at innovation in abstract terms and wishes to place innovative events within a clear social and economic context. This leads to his second main argument, which is that "innovation occurs when social practice changes." By this, Tuomi means specifically events which offer new opportunities for collaboration. Mobility -- both technological and of people and resources -- is key here. The book's final thesis is that, despite a seeming contradiction that sees innovation stemming from communities duplicating existing social practice, "there are two distinctive ways that new

communities and new technological practices can emerge. One is based on increasing specialization, and the other on combination of existing resources." The bulk of the book concerns itself with examining many of the collaborative successes of the Internet and especially those applications, such as email and the World Wide Web, where collaboration produced results very different from the original intentions encapsulated in the initial creative work. Tuomi concentrates on the development of Linux, which is predictable, given the year of the book's first publication. Linux is an important example of open source collaboration, of course, but the Internet continues to throw up a slew of mash-ups and disruptively innovative applications in ways which underscore the accuracy of Tuomi's thinking. Again, some sort of updated analysis would have served both author and reader well. The book contains many tables and diagrams, for instance, with data presented for periods ending in the late 90s. However relevant this data is to his argument, it would be more helpful to have data brought up-to-date.

Ilkka Tuomi trained as a theoretical physicist but is best known for his work on knowledge management and technological innovation. He has written many essays and articles on technology, the most famous of which is probably The Lives and Deaths of Moore's Law, in which he argued that Moore's Law was a sloppily applied example of technological determinism. Tuomi is currently the CEO of an independent research institute in his native Finland. He lists one of his hobbies as phenomenological epistemology. You may be surprised to learn that the book contains very few jokes.

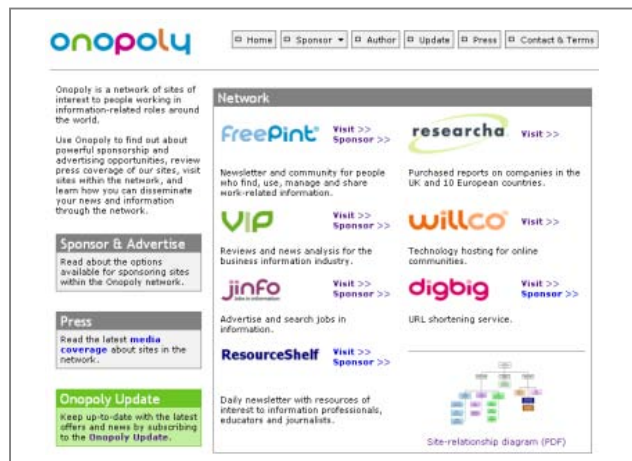




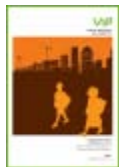
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"Trends in business information, provision and use"

Reviewed by Pam Foster



Pam Foster is the Editor of VIP and VIP Eye <<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>, and has been actively involved in the business information industry as a writer and reviewer for nearly twenty years.

Pam previously played a major role in Headland Business Information since its inception, as editor of its newsletters and directories. More recently, she has acted as a consultant to several large information companies.

She has an extensive network of contacts in the international business information sector amongst producers and users.

A qualified information professional, Pam also has a social science degree.

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The VIP publications, VIP and VIP Eye, are concerned with the business information industry - its products, its providers and its users <<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>. VIP Eye provides news and analysis of the sector every two weeks and this article analyses the VIP Eye content for the first quarter of 2006, to reveal a number of emerging trends:

Boom in M&A extends to business information sector

The first quarter of 2006 witnessed a boom in the number of mergers & acquisitions in Europe, representing \$433 billion worth of deals - double the amount for the same period last year. According to the weekly newspaper Financial News (3 April 2006), Europe's M&A market will outstrip the US as the boom continues into next year. The business information sector is playing its part, although deal activity extends beyond Europe. The following describes some of the more important deals for the first quarter of 2006:

- FactSet buys europrospectus to gain hard-to-find equity, fixed income and derivatives prospectuses. FactSet <<http://www.factset.com/>>, the US aggregator of financial and economic data, has bought the UK-based company europrospectus.com <<http://www.europrospectus.com/>> for approximately \$7.5 million. europrospectus.com provides access to hard-to-find prospectuses and the clauses within them, via text, field and clause searches. Its web product, prospectus+, offers over 25,000 prospectuses of debt, equity, warrant and M&A deals, to which about 2,500 new ones are added every week. The acquisition will enable europrospectus to expand its service to a much wider market and, at the same time, will provide FactSet with access to hard-to-find equity, fixed income and derivatives prospectuses. prospectus+, together with Perfect Information's prospectus product,

Perfect DEBT, were the subjects of a comparative and in-depth review, published in the September 2005 issue of VIP. Further information and a Table of Contents for VIP no.22 are available at: <<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>.

- Merger talks put Hemscott's plans on hold. Hemscott's <<http://www.hemscott.com/>> plans for a de-listing have been put on hold amid talks of a merger. At the beginning of the year, the financial information company announced that it was planning to de-list from AIM in order to take the company private again. Since then, exploratory discussions have developed with a third party which could lead to a merger. As a result of this uncertainty, the Board believes it would be inappropriate to proceed with the proposal for the tender offer and the cancellation of trading on AIM, until the outcome of these discussions has been determined. Before talk of a merger emerged, the Hemscott Board was seeking appropriate shareholder consents to proceed with the tender offer at 40p per share. Minority shareholders attacked Hemscott Chairman Michael Grade as they believed that the share price offer was too low. The company's majority shareholders, Veronis, Suhler Stevenson, and Finmedia were reported as being happy to hold on to their shares.
- US consortium displays interest in acquiring Equifax. A consortium of US equity firms, including Hellman & Friedman <<http://www.hf.com/>> and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts <<http://www.kkr.com/>>, are reported to be getting together a GBP6 billion bid for the credit checking service Experian <<http://www.experian.com/>>. Last year, GUS, the owner of Experian, said that it was looking to benefit shareholders by dismantling the company. Analysts have valued Experian at GBP6.4 billion. Over the last few years, Experian has moved

Related FreePint links:

"European Unions: what you need to know about international mergers and acquisitions" by Jill Fenton
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into other markets besides credit checking, thanks to GBP1 billion worth of acquisitions. Last year, it reported sales of GBP2.7 billion.

- D&B acquires Open Ratings. D&B <<http://www.dnb.com/>> has acquired Open Ratings <<http://www.openratings.com/>> for \$8 million in cash. Open Ratings provides web-based supply risk management products and is a good fit for D&B, who will combine Open Rating's analytical capabilities in supply risk management with its DUNSRIGHT capabilities. D&B says that it expects the deal to reduce its 2006 earnings by about 2 cents a share, most of which will be in the first half, and add to its 2007 earnings.
- Sale of mergermarket confirmed. dot.com investor NewMedia Spark <<http://www.newmediaspark.com/>> has confirmed that mergermarket <<http://www.mergermarket.com/>>, one of its main holdings, is up for sale. mergermarket's products include a M&A data service and a number of products that service the hedge fund sector. Over the last seven years, the business has expanded to provide coverage across Europe, Americas, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific regions. The NewMedia Spark Board says that it believes that were a disposal to occur, it would be at a significant premium to the GBP13 million book value of its fully diluted 24% stake in mergermarket, reported in its interim accounts as at 30 September 2005. The three founder members of mergermarket own less than half of the equity, with the other more than 50% being owned by NewMedia Spark and Beringea. <<http://www.beringea.com/>>. Potential buyers had until the end of April to submit preliminary bids.

Content is increasingly being given away for free

New business models mean that information companies are increasingly offering free content. HighBeam has increased, substantially, the amount of free content it offers. Congoo, a new search engine, provides free content from premium providers, and Google Finance provides a mix of free data, interactive charts and blog postings.

From the outset, HighBeam <<http://www.highbeam.com/>> has always adopted a hybrid business model, offering a mix of paid for and free access to research tools and a collection of proprietary databases, including the HighBeam Library (formerly eLibrary.com), which comprises an archive of more than 35 million documents from more than 3,000 sources, going back as far as 20 years.

The company has added more free content, and it now offers 1.5 million free full-text articles to both registered and unregistered users. The items are from more than 200 sources which include well known titles such as Business Wire, Financial Management, and USA Today. Additionally, HighBeam has begun spidering and linking to free publications on the open web, covering areas in which users have expressed an interest. Searches retrieve a mix of free and premium content. However, a 'modify results' box enables you to view only the free items.

HighBeam will be hoping that its new free content will attract more fee-paying subscribers to the service. Membership is low cost at \$19.95 per month or \$99.95 a year. Further information about HighBeam and its free content is available in VIP Eye, No 51, 10 February 2006.

Congoo <<http://www.congoo.com/>> is a new search engine that provides individuals with free access to premium sources of business information from the likes of FT.com, Business Wire,

TheStreet.com, Institutional Investor, Morningstar, and PR Newswire, as well as trade mags such as Adweek, Brandweek.com, Billboard.com, and Editor & Publisher.

In order to access the free content, users need to download NetPass, a free web toolbar that can be installed on both Explorer and Firefox. Publishers vary in the number of free items they offer each month, with some providing 10 and others 15. Congoos says that many additional sources of premium content will be added during the coming weeks and months.

Congoos looks to be an attractive proposition for users who require occasional business information from reputable sources. Further information on Congoos and its sources is available in *VIP Eye*, No. 54, 27 March 2006.

Google has launched a beta version of Google Finance [<http://finance.google.com/finance>](http://finance.google.com/finance), a new service aimed at investors. The initial service provides information on North American stocks only but coverage will be extended to Europe and other regions shortly.

The interface is simple and navigation is easy. At first glance the site looks very similar to rival sites offered by Yahoo! and MSN but closer inspection reveals some attractive differences. Stock charts are interactive, for instance, and, by scrolling over the chart, users can display historic price and volume data, dating back several years. The chart is also linked to a display of news stories. However, there is no advanced charting functionality available.

Unlike Yahoo! Finance, Google Finance allows users to search by company name. On Yahoo! the search is restricted to ticker only. More importantly, unlike Yahoo!, Google Finance also provides some data on

private companies and public companies that aren't listed on US exchanges, such as Boots Group Plc. The addition of blog postings will be welcomed by users, as they can often be an important and useful source of content and opinion on companies and their brands.

The source of the data is a mix of licensed content and content crawled and indexed from the web. Company profile, financial and management data is from Reuters, with other data supplied by a variety of sources

HighBeam, Congoos and Google Finance, plus others like them, are likely to prove popular with small and medium-sized users of business information. Traditional aggregators may find themselves increasingly squeezed by such services and, in particular, they may well experience declining revenues for their pay-as-you-go services, as users defect to free and hybrid services.

Providers increasingly meeting demands for Eastern European data

Demand for data on Eastern European companies and banks is being met by new products from Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing (BvDEP) and the Interfax Centre for Economic Analysis (Interfax-CEA).

RUSLANA, from BvDEP [<http://www.bvdep.com/>](http://www.bvdep.com/), provides standardised and "as reported" data for nearly 1 million companies. This total includes approximately 600,000 Russian companies and over 260,000 Ukrainian companies, with summary data available for a further 100,000 Ukrainian corporations. Data is supplied by Creditreform, an existing partner of BvDEP.

Added value is provided by supplementary data which includes BvDEP's ownership research, a news section that includes M&A

activity, management, import/export details, and stock price data. Up to 10 years of information is provided for each company.

RUSLANA is the first product to be launched on BvDEP's new platform. The new front-end is described as being more streamlined and intuitive, while still retaining the advanced search, analytical and graphical functionality, for which BvDEP is best known. The new platform will be the feature of an in-depth review in a forthcoming issue of VIP
<<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>.

Further information about RUSLANA and BvDEP's new platform is available in VIP Eye, No. 52, 24 February 2006.

The Interfax-1000-CIS Banks Review, from Interfax-CEA, compares all of the major banks in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and other CIS countries, in terms of asset value and other financial indicators. It provides information on assets, capital, loan portfolios and funds raised for 1,000 CIS banks (815 Russian; 185 from other CIS countries). Further information is available in VIP Eye, No. 52, 24 February 2006.

Although a mature sector, recent activity proves that the business information industry is still evolving. The next quarter will witness further consolidation and the issue of free content will continue to play a part in changing business models. As usual, we'll be reporting on and analysing these changes as they happen.

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- "RFID Forum" 7th - 8th June
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- "The European Conference on Information Warfare and Security" 1st - 2nd June 2006
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A look back at what FreePint covered at this time in previous years:

- FreePint No.182 12th May 2005. "Ready, Steady, Go! Finding the right time for job hunting" and "Analysing corporate websites for competitive intelligence"
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/120505.htm>
- FreePint No.159 6th May 2004. "Working in Older Age" and "Marketing for the Info-Entrepreneur"
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/060504.htm>
- FreePint No.136 1st May 2003. "Risk Management: An Additional Axis For Information Professionals?" and "UK Freedom of Information Act 2000: The Road To Implementation"
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/010503.htm>
- FreePint No.111, 2nd May 2002. "International Law" and "Weblogs and Blogging - Part 1"
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/020502.htm>
- FreePint No.87, 10th May 2001. "2001 - The Internet Election?" and "Information Provision for the Information Providers"
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/100501.htm>
- FreePint No.62, 11th May 2000. "Idiots' guide to UK employment law sites on the Internet" and "Gimme a G for Global, a G for Geography"
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/110500.htm>
- FreePint No.38, 13th May 1999. "Patent information on the Internet - can you afford to ignore it?" and "Lurking on Lists"
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/130599.htm>
- FreePint No.14, 14th May 1998. "Six Opinions on Internet World UK" and "Deafblind access to the Web"
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