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ABOUT FREE PINT

Free Pint is an online community of information researchers. Members receive this free newsletter every two weeks packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at <http://www.freepint.com/> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs & events, with answers to research questions and networking at the Free Pint Bar.

Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out. To receive a fully formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

EDITORIAL

When the media talk about the collapse of Enron, they focus on financial loss by individuals. That is measurable, and everybody can empathise with what it might mean to personally lose a lot of money.

The information world is currently having its own 'Enron'. It's happening as we speak. It again appears to be due to 'interesting' financial practices, and involves an awful lot of money <http://www.suntimes.com/output/business/cst-fin-divine03.html>.

The difference this time though is that the real cost is NOT going to be the direct financial loss by the individual organisations involved. It is NOT going to be measurable and there won't be stories of how individuals have lost their life savings. The real cost of this disgusting debacle is going to be the immeasurable impact on education and research.

So, who is going to take the blame for this? Who is going to put up their hands and admit they have caused this problem? Who is going to apologise for all the stress and daily headache this is causing information professionals around the world? Who will take the brunt of the anger? Why, information professionals of course.

If you walk into an information centre or library today and they simply don't have the publications you read and need every day, every week or every month, then who would you moan to? Will you be placated by being offered a table of contents instead, and being asked to choose which items you want to read? Then being told you'll have to wait while an inter-library loan is arranged?

If you've been affected by this then SPEAK UP --- whether you're an information professional with a headache or a reader without a read. Contact journalists and the media; discuss the issue with people outside the information profession; let your readers know exactly why the publications aren't available.

Let's use this publicity opportunity to demonstrate exactly how fundamentally important the provision of information is. In the Enron case everyone could appreciate the financial impact, so let's make sure that in this case everyone understands what happens when information ceases to flow. There's always a silver lining, and I believe this is it. Publicity for the information profession is some recompense.

To keep up to date with the latest on this, keep an eye on the ResourceShelf <http://www.resourceshelf.com/> and of course feel free to use the Free Pint Bar to contact others in the same situation <http://www.freepint.com/bar/>.

Since there are no subscription fees for Free Pint, there's no delay in bringing you some great articles, reviews and jobs in today's newsletter. Of particular note is the feature article with insider tricks on patent searching, by the presenter who will shortly be running our Patent Information Exchange. The session on Communities of Practice last week was very well received. We were delighted with the new central venue, which will really prove its worth for next week's extremely popular session on Electronic Copyright.

William

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FREE PINT JOBS
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

As well as the selected listings below, check out the weekly Bar posting which lists the latest additions to Free Pint Jobs. This week's can be found at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b22182> and last week's at <http://www.freepint.com/go/22080>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Researcher - Financial (3-11pm)
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2211>
City based leading international business information provider has several openings for researchers with a European language. Recruiter: Recruit Media

Records Specialist - Kent
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2252>
3 long- term document and records management temp roles available in Kent - use your electronic docs management experience. Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Senior Librarian - Titles Team
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2254>
Supervise library assistants, reserve and lend transmission tapes, provide an ordering service, advise on copyright, etc. Recruiter: BBC

Senior Document Assistant
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2255>
Supervise information assistants performing a range of clerical, admin and technical support duties. Recruiter: BBC

Stores Assistants
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2256>
Operate technical equipment for erasing and evaluation purposes. Deal with the requisition, receipt, shelving and despatch of material. Recruiter: BBC

Document Assistants
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2257>
Support acquisition as well as cataloguing, documentation, selection and disposal. Input and derive information using computer systems. Recruiter: BBC

Senior Library Assistants
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2258>
Identify and process material and paperwork received by the library. Process and input key programme data. Recruiter: BBC

Strategic Research Analyst
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2259>
Exciting new opportunity for Business-to-Business Marketing Analyst in developmental role. Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

[The above jobs are paid listings]

Find out more today at <http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

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B1G1F and B2G2F? What does it mean?

Why, 'buy 1, get 1 free' on company reports, and 'buy 2, get 2 free' on advertising, of course.

Not for much longer though ... <http://www.freepint.com/shop>

A.S.K HOLLIS 2003 - EXTRA COPIES ARE HALF PRICE!

This definitive directory of UK associations contains fully updated profiles on over 6,000 organisations covering all aspects of life - trade & professional bodies, pressure groups, hobbies & interests, medical & health support groups, learned societies, etc. Over 1,000 pages, easy to use, clear page layout. First copy costs 180 pounds (incl UK delivery) with extra copies at half price - great for library groups! See http://www.hollis-pr.com/publications/ask.htm for more details.

Free Pint Deep Linking & Website Evaluation Exchange

13th March 2003, Central London

"Looking at the question of how to measure the quality, credibility and trustworthiness of web sites; and minimizing the potential legal risks involved in 'deep linking'."

<http://www.freepint.com/exchange>

THE place for news and resources

ResourceShelf.com is great for information professionals. It's great for journalists and educators too. In fact, it's just great.

ResourceShelf is Gary Price's daily newsletter with links to the latest resources and news of interest to researchers everywhere.

Visit <http://www.resourceshelf.com> regularly, and sign up for the free weekly email update.

MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES
from Sara Egan

Sara Egan is a business information researcher and writer, specialising in the provision of information for the small business and export markets.

Tell us about your favourite Web sites. Check out the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>, then email <penny@freepint.com>.

- About.com <http://about.com/> - Dubbed 'what you need to know about', this site is great for finding hints, tips and articles on a range of subjects from arts and travel to small business information.

- The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/> - Jam-packed with features, special reports, reviews and opinion. For the latest on the arts, culture, business and politics, this is the place to come.

- The Economist <http://www.economist.co.uk/> - A firm favourite for a healthy diet of up-to-date business news stories and reviews. Research tools include a fully searchable archive of articles by subject, surveys, practical guides and country briefings.

- Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/> - If words are your thing then you are sure to love this site. Full of useful tools and resources for writers including the word of the day which is great for improving your vocabulary.

- Dilbert <http://www.dilbert.com/> - Dilbert is bound to put a smile back on your face with his amusing look at the trials of life in the corporate world. Includes fun desktop goodies, a daily comic strip and e-cards.

FREE PINT BAR
In Association with Factiva
a Dow Jones & Reuters Company

Need help with a research question? Post it alongside the 19,000 others at the Free Pint Bar. Help is free and usually comes from other Free Pinters very quickly <http://www.freepint.com/bar>.

If you're studying on an information-related course, then make the most of the Student Bar <http://www.freepint.com/student>. Great for help with projects, career suggestions, etc. If you don't use it, you might lose it!

To get a digest of postings twice a week, modify your account online at <http://www.freepint.com/member> or email <subs@freepint.com>.

Free Pint Financials – All UK Companies and Directors

Free to search, pay-as-you-go, comprehensive. Three good reasons to choose Free Pint Financials for UK company and director research: <http://www.freepint.com/icc>

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EVENTS
<http://www.freepint.com/events>

Coming up ... Free Pint exchanges taking place in London:

Electronic Copyright Exchange presented by Paul Pedley, back by popular demand. On the 13th February 2003 <http://www.freepint.com/go/e172>.

Patent Information Exchange presented by Stephen Adams (Managing Director of Magister Ltd.) on the 27th February 2003 <http://www.freepint.com/go/e173>. See today's feature article for a taster.

Intranets Exchange presented by Paul Pedley on the 6th March 2003 <http://www.freepint.com/go/e174>.

On the 9th - 12th February the World eLearning Conference is taking place in Edinburgh. Designed for "practitioners, consultants, academics and government officials on global developments and promising practices and products in eLearning" <http://www.freepint.com/go/e153>.

Submit details of your event today for free promotion. Simply complete the form at <http://www.freepint.com/events>.

Free Pint Forthcoming Articles

* Vendors * Selecting a Content Management System * Internet Resources on IT * Alternative Search Strategies * Prospect Research * Scenario Planning * Children and the Internet * * Military History * Information Literacy in a Corporate Environment * France: Business and Economic Sources * Toxicology Sources *

If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact <penny@freepint.com> or sign up for the Author Update at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

TIPS ARTICLE
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/060203.htm#tips>

"Online Library Catalogues"
By John Sherwell

After studying chemistry, John Sherwell qualified as a librarian and has worked for over 30 years in library and information units in the food and pharmaceutical industries. Whilst with SmithKline Beecham/GlaxoSmithKl ine he was responsible for introducing and supporting two major transnational automated library systems. In recent years he has specialised in extending the role of the library catalogue, to deliver a full range of library services and information to the desktop. In 2002 he left GSK and established his own consultancy, Digital Library Solutions, and can be contacted via its website at <http://www.dlsolution s.info/>.

The catalogues of major libraries - whether National, Academic, Public or Specialised - have always been a rich source of material for the researcher. Unfortunately until recently their value has been restricted by their physical form, most commonly a large card catalogue or a set of printed volumes. Though a local card catalogue is relatively easy to keep up to date, its use has required a visit to the library concerned. A printed catalogue is at least more portable, but is likely to be out of date as soon as it is produced. The advent of computers, with their ability to process large amounts of information and output it in a variety of formats, seemed to propose a solution. Early computerized catalogues were not interactive, and at one stage the height of sophistication was the Computer Output Microfiche (COM) catalogue. It required advances in software (Library Management Systems), search protocols (Z39.50), hardware (cheap PCs) and telecommunications (fast networks, particularly the Internet) to finally bring the library to the customer, wherever he or she may be located.

With modern library systems adopting a web interface to search and display information, it was not only possible to distribute access internally within a particular organisation, but to provide access outside the organisation via the Internet. All over the world, National, Academic and Public libraries have been sharing access to their holdings via their Web sites. Where considerations of confidentiality permit, libraries in a variety of specialised organisations have been doing the same. Within just a few years, the researcher can now access thousands of libraries across the world without leaving the office.

A search on Google for Online Library Catalogues proved to be quite a revelation. There is certainly no difficulty in identifying available online library catalogues - as well as individual catalogues, the search returned sites which were indexes to literally thousands of catalogues. I suspect that a similar search carried out five years ago would have produced a very different result.

The first site checked was Libdex, at <http://www.libdex.com>. This claims to index some 18,000 library home pages and web-based catalogues in all sectors - National, Public, Academic and Special. It is possible to search for a specific library, or browse by country or library system vendor. Selecting the Country browse option shows a listing of around 150 countries from Albania to Zimbabwe, whilst the System Vendor option covers over 100 different library software packages. A search under Bulgaria lists eight online library catalogues; a larger country such as Canada has hundreds of entries and is subdivided geographically. Selecting an entry displays a page of information about the library, in most cases with a link to the corresponding library's web page.

A similar index is the Unesco Libraries Portal, accessed at <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_bib/Li braries/>. This lists over 9000 libraries in the academic, government, national, public and institutional sectors. Within each sector there is a further categorization by location or subject as appropriate. Each entry has a short annotation, with a link to the libraries' web-based catalogues in the majority of cases. Cross-checking a small sample of some less well-known Unesco entries against the Libdex site showed that the majority did not appear in the latter. The Unesco site appeared to be more comprehensive for governmental and specialized libraries, so both the sites should be used when trying to track down particular libraries. As well as the library listing, another geographically-arranged section <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_bib/Re ference/Portals/> covers portals - for example the Co-East service in the UK or the Kentucky Virtual Library in the US.

Another site attempting to cover all library sectors is Libweb, to be found at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/libweb>. This lists some 6500 library web sites in 115 countries, and has search options by sector and country. The main categorization is geographic, with a breakdown by sector available for the US. There are no scope notes, just a link direct to the library's web page. There is a keyword search option, retrieving a set of potentially relevant items. The hit list has links to connect to each library's web sites, and to an information page which usefully notes when the URL was last checked. A similar site is maintained by Metronet, a library consortium serving the twin towns of Minneapolis and St Pauls, in the US <http://metronet.lib.mn.us/lc/>. Although listing predominantly US libraries (which are subdivided by state), there is also a significant international content, which is broken down by country. The site also includes introductory material on online catalogues, the World Wide Web, special collections and public databases.

As well as these general listings, there are others covering specific library sectors. For example, a comprehensive site listing National

Related Free Pint links:

- 'Information and Libraries' articles in the Free Pint Portal <http://www.freepint.com/go/p69>

- Post a message to the author, John Sherwell, or suggest further resources at the Free Pint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>

- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <http://www.freepint.com/issues/060203.htm - feature>

- Access the entire archive of Free Pint content http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/

libraries worldwide is maintained by the University of Queensland at <http://www.library.uq.edu.au/natlibs/>. As well as the better known candidates such as the Library of Congress, British Library and National Library of Australia, this has listings for some 80 countries. In most cases, there is a link to a web-based catalogue, though for a minority there is only a Telnet version available.

The academic sector is well served by listings. In the UK, a listing of online library catalogues in Higher Educational institutions is provided by NISS (National Information Services and Systems) at <http://www.niss.ac.uk/lis/opacs.html>. Alphabetic and geographic indexes are provided, with an additional index (OPACS in Britain and Ireland) which provides a selection of additional sites in the research and public sectors. Each of the institutions listed has an informative page giving collection statistics and contact details, with a link to its online catalogue. An alternative approach is taken by the COPAC web site <http://www.copac.ac.uk> which provides an interface searching across the combined catalogues of the 22 largest university research libraries and the British Library.

The public library sector also has its listings. One covering UK public libraries is the UK Public Libraries page <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ac940/weblibs.html>, which provides links to the various library authorities' home pages, most of which also give access to the libraries online catalogue. A few specialized and national libraries are also listed. School libraries are not neglected, with a school librarian in Philadelphia maintaining a site dedicated to school library web pages in over forty countries <http://www.sldirectory.com>.

So without moving from his or her desk, a researcher has access to over 20000 library catalogues and web sites, something that could never have been achieved in a lifetime before the advent of the Internet.

FREE PINT GOLD

David Scrimgeour's tips article last year helped with finding German business information on the Web, looking at market research, databases, government & public sources and business intelligence. Duncan Parry's feature covered "how pay-per-click engines work, and how can you use them to promote your website for a low cost".

- Free Pint No.105 7th February 2002. "Business Information in Germany" and "Pay Per Click Search Engines and Promoting your Website" http://www.freepint.com/issues/070202.htm

Duncan also wrote two years ago, looking at ADSL, and Andrew Cox and Heba Mohammed wrote about E-books.

- Free Pint No.80, 1st February 2001. "An adventure in ADSL: the Superhighway finally becomes 'super'?" and "E-Books" http://www.freepint.com/issues/010201.htm

Our tips article in 2000 gave Martin White's selection of classical music Web Sites, whilst David Mort gave us some hints on finding market research agencies on the Web.

- Free Pint No.55, 3rd February 2000. "Classical Music Web Sites" and "Researching the Researchers - Finding Market Research Agencies on the Web" http://www.freepint.com/issues/030200.htm

Four years ago, Gina Armfield shared some of the ways in which the Internet helped her in her research projects at home. "Who is the world's oldest surfer?" was asked by John Lewell as he covered Internet resources for seniors.

- Free Pint No.31, 4th February 1999. "Researching from home" and "Internet Resources for Seniors" http://www.freepint.com/issues/040299.htm

William Hann took at look at how to "incorporate information into your reports, articles, training courses, proposals" in his tips article in 1998, and Roddy MacLeod covered engineering resources.

- Free Pint No.7, 5th February 1998. "Fabricating Information" and "Engineering resources: examples and sources" http://www.freepint.com/issues/050298.htm

FREE PINT BOOKSHELF
<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

"Web Metrics: Proven Methods For Measuring Website Success"
Written by Jim Sterne
Reviewed by Steve Wood

Steve Wood is a Lecturer in Information Management at the School of Business Information, Liverpool John Moores University <http://www.livjm.ac.uk/>.

Steve lectures on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on web development and management, knowledge management, network management and information policy. Research interests include knowledge management and freedom of information legislation. Before moving into academia Steve worked for HM Treasury as Intranet and extranet manager.

Related links:

- Find out more about this book online at the Free Pint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/metrics.htm>

- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0471220728/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0471220728/freepint00>

- "Web Metrics: Proven Methods for Measuring Web Site Success: Proven Methods for Measuring Web Site Success" ISBN 0471220728, published by John Wiley & Sons Inc, written by Jim Sterne

As e-commerce moves into a more mature stage of development, web managers are becoming aware of the need for purposeful web strategies that focus on building relationships around understanding of the behaviour and needs of customers. At the heart of any successful web strategy will be clearly defined measures for success that can feed back into the lifecycle development of the website. All websites generate vast amounts of data. Understanding the data in context and developing knowledge that can be applied to key business processes is the key.

This text by Jim Sterne is a detailed attempt to provide a guide to developing business-focused web metrics that will clearly integrate with key online business goals. At 430 pages this text is the most comprehensive and detailed I have seen on the subject. Sterne's background is Internet marketing and draws on experience from working with Eastman Kodak, Ericsson and IBM. The perspective, although marketing focused, is based on sound technological understanding and explanation.

The book reflects the concept that measurement processes must be repeatable and should relate to the overall strategy process model. Focus of the book is clearly set out at the start as being about "measuring your success with customers"; it is not a book about technology. Therefore it does not contain much detail about configuring web servers or using the many web statistics software packages or services, such as WebTrends <http://www.webtrends.com>.

In terms of a structured approach we are guided through stages in understanding and developing a coherent 'measurement of success' strategy. Working through measurement steps in a logical way, Sterne first develops definitions and an understanding of measurement, then presents ways to win over senior managers to the cause - investing in web measurement, related to ROI. The text then builds up a portfolio of measurement techniques, starting with the method of log analysis -- 'sawing logs' as Sterne calls it! However, log analysis is only the start of the measurement process.

Sterne does a valuable job in relating measurement to issues such as improving navigation and usability and how customer relationship management strategies should be integrated and/or informed. In the key chapter "How good are you at buying noise", Sterne develops a clear approach to measuring how much is paid to get people to turn up, and the value of each visit. This is then developed into strategies related to customer conversion and maximising customer information via personalisation.

The supporting material includes many explanatory diagrams and screenshots from server logs, visitor analysis software and current websites. In the penultimate chapter, Sterne uses a 'field study' based on acknowledged leader in this field, Compaq, to show how these concepts have been translated into value driven action.

Slightly disappointing for Free Pint readers will be the lack of coverage of intranets and extranets, often left out in this type of text. Although some of the principles can clearly be applied to intranet/extranet scenarios, it would be highly valuable to develop some web metric case studies on this area. Looking at metrics issues related to community of practice management on intranets, for example.

On a practical note, the book lacks a bibliography or key reference list at the end of each chapter; the many websites that are listed throughout the text are drawn out into a list as a quick reference tool on the companion website. The website contains little else and would seem to represent a missed opportunity to bring some of the issues alive using interactivity. In terms of a learning approach, pedagogical structure is lacking (review questions, chapter summaries) but, as Sterne states, the target audience is executives, web and marketing managers, rather than students. This can't be highlighted as a major drawback.

Overall, I would recommend the book. It is certainly a leader in a field that is developing into an important but increasingly complex topic. Sterne's knowledge of the topic is evident throughout, based on real business scenarios with customer relationships at the heart. The principles in the book can be applied to any scenario - an SME using free analysis tools to multinationals spending millions on CRM strategies. However, it may be that the marketing style in which Sterne writes is not for everyone, and sometimes it is hard to see through some of jargon-heavy discussions. It is a text that will need to be read alongside the many white papers on the topic that vendors produce and general texts on performance management, such as 'The Balanced Scorecard' by Robert Kaplan.

FEATURE ARTICLE
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/060203.htm#feature>

"Patent Searching Without Words - Why Do It, How To Do It?"
By Stephen Adams

Stephen Adams (B.Sc. Chemistry, M.Sc. Information Science) is Managing Director of Magister Ltd. He has worked in the information industry for over 20 years, specialising in patents since 1988. He is a Chartered Member of CILIP and a Director-at-Large of PIUG Inc., the International Society for Patent Information.

Magister Ltd. is an information consultancy specialising in patents. The company works with patent database producers, online hosts and users of patent information, to promote best practices in patent search and retrieval. The company website is at www.magister.co.uk

[Stephen Adams is running the 'Free Pint Patent Information Exchange' in London on February 27th 2003
<http://www.freepint.com/exchange>]

Introduction

In January 2002, Ron Kaminecki of Dialog wrote an article in Free Pint <http://www.freepint.com/issues/100102.htm#tips> in which he described some of the basic principles and sources for patent searching. I would like to extend his work a little, and describe some alternative approaches.

In the commercial world, there are two important reasons why a company should consult the patent literature. Firstly, to be forewarned about the risk of accidentally infringing someone else's patent. Secondly, if the search draws a blank and it appears that no-one else has patent protection, this fact will help a patent attorney in the process of drafting your own application.

In both cases, our fundamental target is the same - to identify one or more patents which are 'about' the same invention. Our search strategy must try to describe the technology using search terms which will capture other documents with the same degree of 'about-ness'. To put it another way, we are looking for concepts rather than a mere match of words.

The problem with words

There are several reasons why words may be insufficient when doing a search in patent documents:

Firstly, there is the question of terminology. A patent document is unlike any other technical article, since it performs a dual function - as a legally binding description of the scope of a piece of intellectual property, and as a technical disclosure to third parties of how the invention works. Consequently, the language used is a compromise between legal and technical jargon. A patent agent will never call a spade a spade if they can call it a 'substantially planar earth-moving implement with coaxial leveraging means'.

Secondly, we have to consider the question of language itself. Although laws do vary across the world, we will find that a comprehensive search must consider patents from other countries, most of which will not be in our mother tongue. This raises questions about multi-lingual synonyms, and there may also be issues relating to the representation of the language itself - for example, how do we search in different character sets? What are the standards for transliteration? Do we need to consider case-sensitivity?

Thirdly, there may be little or no text to search in the first place! We should not assume that patent collections on the Internet are all complete. Some sites contain complete texts

(e.g. the US Patent and Trademark Office site, <http://www.uspto.gov>) whilst others are only abstracts and titles (such as the European Patent Office's esp@cenet site, <http://gb.espacenet.com>). Even files which do contain full texts may not contain them for the whole time-range of the file; the USPTO system provides access to US patents since 1790 but has no text at all prior to 1976.

Fourthly, and perhaps the most important of all, we should remember that we are searching for 'about-ness' - so we should conduct our search in a way that will capture similar documents, irrespective of how the concepts are discussed. A large percentage of all patent documents contain non-word information in the form of technical drawings, chemical or mathematical formulae, electrical circuit diagrams, biochemical genetic sequences and even photographs. If we are completely reliant upon words to find relevant documents, we will almost certainly miss some which discuss our topic but use a non-word mechanism to do so. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a thousand word-based search terms will not retrieve it!

Classification tools

Given these shortcomings of word-based searching, we need to consider how to search patents in another way entirely. The best-established alternative method is by patent classification. Neither words nor classes are a panacea; many searchers will use both in parallel to improve their strategy.

The most commonly used patent classifications are the International Patent Classification (IPC), which is used on the patent documents of about 90 countries, and the US Patent Classification (USC) which is only applied to granted US patents and, more recently, to US unexamined applications. In addition to these two, the IPC has at least two widely-used 'dialects', that is, classification schemes which are based upon the IPC but which develop the class structure to take account of local subject variation and to provide a finer break-down of technology. These two dialects are the European Classification (ECLA) scheme used by the European Patent Office (EPO) and the File Index (FI) scheme used by the Japanese Patent Office.

One of the big advantages when searching classes is improved coverage. As patent offices have tried to digitise their search files, the older segments have often been limited to simple bibliographic elements such as a publication number and a classification mark, rather than expensive OCR scanning of the entire text. This has implications for searching. Suppose that I go to the USPTO site and I want to locate patents about "preparation of potash by purification of a mixture, using water as a solvent". If I search by words alone, I might find some patents, but conclude that there is nothing sufficiently close to prevent me filing my own application. However,

the retrieved documents will all be limited to the text-based portion of the file. If I use the US classification system, based on the help tools at <http://www.uspto.gov/go/classification/>, I might re-run my strategy using the class number 423/208, which covers the processes of "water leaching and formation of water-soluble compounds, applied to mixtures in order to extract alkali metal compounds, including those of potassium". This is slightly broader than ideal, but will capture my topic. If I re-run my search, I now find 215 patents, of which only 42 (approximately 20%) are post-1976 and hence retrievable by word-based searching. The remaining 173 patents date from 1975 right back to 1790, and any one of them may contain useful teaching which could prevent my patent application from being granted.

The same arguments apply to other patent searching sites. I can use the Patent Abstracts of Japan (PAJ) service to search in titles or abstracts at the Japanese Patent Office site, but I will only retrieve answers from Japanese patent applications since 1976. If I use the FI system, via the help tools (<http://www.ipdl.jpo.go.jp/homepg_e.ipdl>, select 'FI/F-term search (English)'), I will be able to conduct a search not only in Japanese patents back to 1885, but also include utility models, which are completely missing from the PAJ system.

These two systems will help us if we only want to search US or Japanese patents. In order to do an effective multi-country search, the best systems are the IPC and ECLA.

The IPC has been operating since 1968. The system is revised periodically, and the most recent editions are the sixth (1995-1999) and the seventh (2000-date). The full texts of the classification schedules are found at a special sub-domain of the WIPO site, at <http://classifications.wipo.int>, then select 'International Patent Classification'. There is a range of introductory material describing how the system works, together with the full classification hierarchies. For the seventh edition only, there is

a Catchword Index. This enables a searcher to enter a 'back-of-book' term which suggests one or more IPC classes which might be appropriate. For example, if we look up the word 'Potassium' in the Catchword Index, it suggests that the main sub-class C01B could contain the detailed class(es) for our subject. We can then link across to the schedules and examine these candidates before using them in a search.

Since the IPC is applied by many countries, we could take our strategy across to virtually any of the major patent office websites (e.g. Canada, <http://patents1.ic.gc.ca/intro-e.html>, Germany, <http://www.depatisnet.de>, Spain, <http://www.oepm.es/internet/bases_datos/inven.htm>, Australia, <http://pericles.ipaustralia.gov.au/ols/searching/patsearch/search_page.jsp> and so on) and search in the national documents of these countries.

The final major system is ECLA. This is available as part of the PlusPat file on Questel-Orbit, and also implemented on the esp@cenet search site, in the Worldwide search file. One of the big advantages is that it is applied back to at least 1920 for some countries. It is now possible to use the esp@cenet system to help to discover ECLA marks, and use the classification schedules as a search tool. Select the ClassPat link from the home page (or go directly to <http://l2.espacenet.com/eclasrch>), and enter a range of subject words. These are matched against the ECLA system, and the user receives a list of suggested ECLA classes for searching that subject. This does not replace the need to carefully consider which is the best mark, but it does take away some of the effort of learning the system, particularly for beginners.

To conclude, support tools for learning patent classifications cannot be said to be the most user-friendly, although they have improved in recent years. However, taking a little effort to learn about this alternative method of searching can pay real dividends in improving the precision and recall of your searches.

GOODBYE

Thanks for reading today's newsletter, and we hope you got a lot out of it. Don't forget to make a fuss if you've been affected by the subscription management mess in any way.

See you in two weeks!

William Hann, Managing Editor
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