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About FreePint

FreePint is an online network of information searchers. Members receive this free newsletter twice a month: it is 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 and events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint 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/subs/>.

ISSN 1460-7220

Editorial

What an emotional roller-coaster it's been since the last issue of FreePint. One day there's celebration and the next there's cause for commiseration.

Last week's Olympic celebrations here in London were overshadowed the following day by the bombings. Thankfully we were unaffected, but it did demonstrate how closely the Internet connects professionals globally in ways that simply weren't possible before the Internet.



As soon as news of the events in London reached colleagues around the world, there were messages of concern on all the information discussion lists. International information groups like the SLA <http://www.sla.org> checked we were OK here in the UK. Within the UK there were regional well-wishing comments from members of CILIP <http://www.cilip.org.uk>. People we only see once a year, but who we talk to regularly over the Internet (such as members of AIIP <http://www.aiip.org/> or the Factiva Advisory Board <http://www.factiva.com/>) wrote immediately to make sure everyone was alright and to tell us their thoughts were with those who were affected. Communication is so greatly enhanced by the Internet that colleagues around the world can become close friends.

An emotional roller-coaster closer to home, and on a much less significant scale: no sooner do we enjoy a minor celebration with the publication of the 100th edition of the Jinfo Newsletter <http://www.jinfo.com/> than I hear last night at SLA Europe's very enjoyable summer soiree <http://www.sla-europe.org/> that a number of respected information professionals are soon to be made redundant. This is not good news and we wish them well over the coming weeks. On a positive note, congratulations to Steve Borley for winning the SLA Europe Information Professional Award.

Today's FreePint is as diffuse as ever, with articles about eBooks, Knowledge Management and 'Section 508'. Thankfully it's not a roller-coaster of an issue -- I'm not sure our nerves could take it.

Finally, welcome to all new members who've signed up recently. Please do to tell your colleagues about FreePint, and we hope you find the latest 'FreePint Index' useful as a handy guide to all FreePint's articles since 1997 <http://www.freepint.com/issues/>.

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Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4212>>

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Recruiter: D A Solutions Ltd
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4218>>

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Recruiter: Glen Recruitment
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4219>>

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[The above jobs are paid listings]

NB: There are 50 other jobs in the current edition of the Jinfo Newsletter
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Submit your top five favourite Web sites. See the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

My Favourite Tipples

by Ann-Marie Ashby

- Office for National Statistics <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>> - lots of free economic and social statistics and access to official UK statistical publications.
- Northcote <<http://www.northcote.co.uk/>> - free access to current and archive copies of UK company annual reports. Registration required but this is free!
- BAILLI <<http://www.bailii.org/>> - easy access to British and Irish public legal information, plus links to WorldLII (worldwide law).
- ESRC Society <<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/>> - free access to all ESRC (Economic & Social Research Council) funded research, and a host of other useful services (email alerts, discussion fora, etc.)
- Chess Cafe <<http://www.chesscafe.com/>> - outside of work time, this is my favourite chess site, including news, studies, and articles from the best Grandmasters.

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FreePint Bar

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I am often surprised at some of the questions that crop up at the FreePint Bar - the last two weeks are no exception. The strangest posting I have come across to date has to be this one:

"I am trying to find out if there is a company that sells artificial perspiration" <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32507>>.

There has been a debate about whether to include a photo on your CV <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32509>> - what do you think?

After reading Jela Webb's article in the FreePint Newsletter <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/160605.htm>>, a FreePinter would like more detailed information on the legal/financial aspects of setting up as an independent consultant <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32495>>. Do you know if there are any training grants or sponsorship for training programmes to self employed people? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32535>>

Do you know of an online source that details all future conferences, events and exhibitions? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32568>>. Or perhaps just specifically for agricultural shows in Europe? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32497>>. FreePint Events has numerous upcoming events specifically for the information industry <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32569>>.

Research on passenger profiles of people using London mainline stations has been requested <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32520>>, and information is needed on the usage of adhesives in the automotive industry <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32534>>.

Are you aware of any market research on the information industry? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32523>>. Perhaps you know where to store digital photos for free on the web <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32540>> or of an alternative to Windows Explorer? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32547>>.

Lastly, can you suggest possible database solutions for assessment tools in a medical education environment? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b32555>>.

I can't wait to see what turns up in the next couple of weeks.

See you next time.

Penny Hann, FreePint
<penny.hann@freepint.com>

The FreePint Bar is where you can get free help with your tricky research questions <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
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Tips Article

"Free Public Domain and Copyrighted e-Books Online" By Sam Vaknin



Sam Vaknin <<http://samvak.tripod.com>> is the author of 'Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited' and 'After the Rain - How the West Lost the East'. He served as a columnist for Central Europe Review, PopMatters, Bellaonline, and eBookWeb, a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory and Suite101. Until recently, he served as the Economic Advisor to the Government of Macedonia. Visit Sam's Web site at <<http://samvak.tripod.com>>.

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Another useful distinction is between indices - lists of links to online books - and repositories, where the books themselves (i.e. the downloadable files) reside.

Finally, it is imperative to distinguish between legal copies of books, whether copyrighted or not - and illegal copies of copyrighted books (such as, famously, the Harry Potter series). The latter are exchanged in peer-to-peer (P2P) networks, made available to members of online discussion groups, and served from FTP servers and Web sites. These are ignored in this article for obvious reasons.

Unusually for FreePint, I start with my own resource, not (only) due to my considerable immodesty - but also because it is an index of indices. The Links and Factoids list <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/linkfactoid>> contains direct and indirect links to well over 40,000 individual books and 300 indices and collections of public domain and copyrighted books available online.

The archives of the Free Online Scholarship - <<http://www.topica.com/lists/suber-fos/read>> - (and its blog - <<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html>>) are equally impressive.

There is no way to cover even an infinitesimal fraction of the riches offered by the Internet. Which to choose out of 7,000 bookmarks in my "e-texts online" folder? I am, therefore, forced to confine myself to the leaders and ignore thousands of worthy - even exciting - alternatives.

By far the largest and best maintained index is John Ockerbloom's Online Books page, with well over 20,000 individual items listed <<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/>>. It offers links to new books almost daily <<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/new.html>>. Browsing through this index is bound to get you virtually everywhere. There is rarely a (legal) book online that is not listed here (including my tomes), offered for free download here: <<http://www.narcissistic-abuse.com/freebooks.html>>.

Athena Books and Literature <<http://un2sg4.unige.ch/athena/html/authors.html>> is another rich guide to virtual bookworms. Here is a useful list of online resources maintained by an Australian: <<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ozlit/index.html>>.

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A comparable treasure is Blackmask <<http://www.blackmask.com/>>. It makes available over 12,000 books in six different file formats and compressed "packagings" (with a considerable collection of pulp fiction not extant through Project Gutenberg). Blackmask is updated a few times weekly <<http://www.blackmask.com/cgi-bin/newlinks/page.cgi?g=New&d=1>>.

Another impressive repository is the University of Virginia Electronic Texts Center <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>>.

Works still copyrighted under the interminable copyright laws of the USA are public domain elsewhere. Two Australian troves of such books are the University of Adelaide's Electronic Texts <<http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/>> and Project Gutenberg Australia <<http://www.gutenberg.net.au/>>. Emphasis on Australian texts is provided by the SETIS project <<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/oztexts/>>.

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A notable collection of reference works (including current ones) and fiction is Bartleby Great Books online <<http://bartleby.com/>>.

Many universities and academic bodies offer free online books published by their presses: CalTech <<http://caltechbook.library.caltech.edu/view/>>, the (US) National Academy <<http://www.nap.edu/about/availpdf.phtml>>, Oxford <<http://www.oup.co.uk/readingroom/>>, Princeton <<http://www.pupress.princeton.edu/books/>>, Harvard <<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/>> and the University of Illinois <<http://www.press.uillinois.edu/epub/books.html>> are a few examples. But no one comes close to the University of California Digital Repository <<http://repositories.cdlib.org/>>.

As I said, there is no end to specialized collections: children's literature <<http://www.allfreeonlinechildrensbooks.com/>>, or <<http://www.mainlesson.com/showbooksbytitle.php>>; books about Islam <<http://www.iidl.net/>> or <<http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/>>; about specific countries such as Canada <<http://collection.nlc-bnc.ca/>> or <<http://www.umanitoba.ca/canlit/>>; specific periods, like the 19th century <<http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/19thcentury.html>> or <<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/nietz/>>; authors such as Zane Gray <<http://www.genordell.com/stores/western/ZaneGrey.htm>> or Jules Verne <<http://jv.gilead.org.il/works.html>>; topics from Astronomy <<http://ads.harvard.edu/books/hsaa/toc.html>> through Physics <<http://www.lightandmatter.com/>> to Zoology <<http://www.herper.com/ebooks/>>.

The head spins. With a modem and a rudimentary PC one gains access today to collections which put to shame the physical libraries of many a university. I know of no better definition of "paradise".

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Bill Raschen is an Information Professional and Web designer whose experience has included project managing and managing intranets for large organizations. He has also acted as a consultant and troubleshooter on matters including the redesign of intranets and the rollout of Content Management Systems. His professional interests include the usability and accessibility of large web resources, and the design of taxonomies. Outside of work, he is a keen amateur astronomer and runner, with a large collection of CDs made by hoodlums from Detroit and Ladbroke Grove.

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- "The Content Management Handbook" ISBN 1590590864, published by Apress.

FreePint Bookshelf

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

"Accessibility for Everybody: Understanding the Section 508 Accessibility Requirements" Reviewed by Bill Raschen

As regular FreePint readers will be aware, 'Section 508' refers to the section of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that was amended in 1998 to include a set of standards for accessible electronic and information technology. In this context, accessibility is defined as the art of making IT applications easy to use. In particular this is designed to benefit users with special needs (for example, those with physical disabilities).

<<http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/index.htm>>

The Section 508 regulations affect not just web-based applications, but IT applications in general. The regulations are complex: although primarily for a U.S. audience, they could also have implications for foreign businesses and contractors that intend to do business within the United States.

In this context, John Paul Mueller's excellent guide to Section 508 provides a weighty (528 pages, 2.8 pounds on the bathroom scales) overview of the main issues created by the legislation. Although primarily targeted at developers, the book, in the words of the author, was written 'with the idea that anyone could read it anywhere and still get something from it'. Despite its bulk, 'Accessibility for Everybody' is very readable, and there is a benign, late '60s tone throughout (borne out by the photo of Mr Mueller on the back cover).

After an initial discussion of the law itself, the book describes the hardware issues that developers will need to know about in order to develop accessible applications. These are accompanied by guidelines on how to create such applications, as well as details of a range of tools to aid accessible development (such as a colour blindness simulator). Mueller also provides a detailed description of Microsoft accessibility features, describing them as 'the best-kept secret of Windows', and showing how they may be used to test the performance of one's applications.

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It is not until the second half of the book that web applications are specifically discussed, with a range of tips on how to design and test accessible sites. These chapters provide quite a detailed description of 'usage cues', ranging from simplistic tagging mechanisms (use of the 'alt' tag, for example) through to more complex guidance on the use of style sheets in developing accessible sites.

As well as appendices detailing useful sources of information for further advice, there is a handy checklist printed on the book's inner covers: 'John's top 20 tips for creating accessible applications'. Tip 7 points out that 'fun is a three-letter word that all developers should include in their vocabulary'. It is a tribute to the author that he practices what he preaches: although weighty, 'Accessibility for Everyone' is an informative and surprisingly entertaining account of the main issues relating to Section 508.

FreePint

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Information Manager, UK

Feature Article



"Knowledge Management Does Not Grow On Bonsai Trees" By Sheena Thompson

Sheena's interest in KM within SMEs has developed through her role as Information Manager at MSC Business Innovation which delivers business growth programmes to SMEs within high tech sectors. Her role involves generating new knowledge through sector specific research while managing the sharing of company knowledge developed over 13 years of experience in this industry. This process is fundamental in building a knowledge bank from which MSC facilitates innovation and stimulates growth within the European Research Area. Undertaking a part-time MSc at Sheffield University has enabled her to further research this discipline. Sheena can be reached at: <sheenathompson-at-mscbgd-dot-co-dot-uk>

The term 'knowledge management' (KM) has followed the life cycle of many management 'fads' and although today its status as a buzz word may have fallen from the cover titles, this should not be thought analogous with its value. Within what is widely termed the 'knowledge economy', KM is now embroiled in the strategic plans of most large enterprises (LEs), recognised for its importance in creating a sustainable competitive advantage.

There is also considerable support for the benefits to SMEs of undertaking KM. Increased productivity and efficiency, sustaining a competitive advantage, preventing loss of knowledge when key personnel leave, organisation growth and increased business awareness are frequently cited. However, while successful KM is widely acclaimed in large organisations, its roll-out into the SME sector is not so.

With 19 million SMEs within Europe, representing 99.8% of all registered businesses, the economy is dependent upon their contribution to wealth creation and employment. Despite this, 36% of all SMEs perish within 3 years of incorporation (Egbu et al, 1999). To survive in the 21st century, SMEs must look up and recognise that it is as important to have the mechanisms in place to manage their knowledge assets strategically, as it is to fight today's fire.

This article examines the uptake of knowledge management within the SME sector, their unique characteristics in relation to KM and, given these considerations, a selection of KM strategies suitable for SMEs.

Defining Knowledge Management

Knowledge, while often used interchangeably with information, is distinguished by its unique characteristics. The distinction is made clearer where knowledge is defined as tacit or explicit. Tacit knowledge is the 'know how' and wisdom mainly located within individuals' minds that is difficult to extract and articulate (Nonaka, 1991). Explicit knowledge is formal and systematic; it can be easily communicated, codified and shared and is thus synonymous with the term information. Within the context of this article, where knowledge is considered to be contained within the heads of employees (tacit knowledge), knowledge management is defined as the process of extracting, representing, and acquiring that knowledge (Nunes et al, 2004).

The prevalence of KM in SMEs

The lack of successful uptake of KM within SMEs is demonstrated by Koh et al (2004) where 90% of SMEs studied did not use knowledge management. Where KM was demonstrable it lacked a formal, systematic approach; most SMEs failed to have an explicit KM strategy.

Why would this be when the opposite is true of large enterprises? According to McAdam et al (2001), KM is still in its emerging stages within the SME sector. There is a lack of proven

techniques available to SMEs and consequently the limited attempts to manage tacit knowledge have been largely unsuccessful. SME principals have also demonstrated a lack of understanding of the value of knowledge in competition, innovation and survival.

It should not thus be inferred that KM is of no value to SMEs. In a study of 108 Finnish SMEs, Salojarvi et al (2005) found an empirical correlation between organisational growth and KM awareness <<http://www.sveiby.com/articles/GrowthandKM.pdf>>.

Characteristics of an SME in relation to KM

Understanding the characteristics of SMEs in relation to KM demonstrates why they cannot be viewed in the same manner as LEs. As Hans-Werner Muller, secretary general of UEAPME stresses, small businesses are not simply 'Bonsai versions' of LEs, they have special needs. This review builds on the framework provided by Wong et al (2004), analysing the characteristics of SMEs which must be considered when designing and implementing KM systems.

Ownership and management

The owner/manager is pivotal to the launch and success of the SME's KM initiative. Their commitment is fundamental to drive KM as a business objective. Being close to the point of delivery they understand key knowledge related issues and have the opportunity to become a role model, steer the change effort and create a culture that promotes knowledge sharing. Allowing employees' autonomy within the workplace is essential for the creation and sharing of tacit knowledge.

However, the owner/manager is often consumed by the running of day-to-day operations and has insufficient time to commit to perceived non-business-critical activities such as KM. Specifically, Nunes et al (2004) found that CEOs focus on "what is going to generate business for me in 18 months time". Their attention is concentrated on short term return on investment, often lacking the long-term view required for successful KM implementation.

Structure

The organisational chart is rarely formalised in SMEs; simple, flatter and less complex structures provide shorter communication channels allowing a faster discourse of KM issues. However, individuals often perform many tasks, which can result in lower specialisation and a lack of thorough understanding of specific roles.

Culture

It is widely believed that the biggest challenge for KM is developing a collaborative culture conducive to knowledge sharing. With their smaller size, SMEs are likely to have a unified culture, with fewer interest groups, where it is easier to

achieve a cultural change. However, fear of exploitation and intolerance of mistakes may induce hoarding behaviours where employees refuse to share knowledge.

Systems, processes and procedures

With less 'red tape', small businesses are often more adaptable to implementing new procedures and don't suffer from 'lock in' to routines and processes. However, a lack of formalisation in procedures, specifically with relation to knowledge sharing and dissemination, can inhibit the implementation of a formal and systematic KM system.

Human resources

With fewer employees, SMEs often know each other more intimately and have more face-to-face contact, which facilitates the implementation of a KM initiative. However, staffing and skills constraints may limit the implementation of a KM strategy. More specifically, a lack of proper understanding of the key concepts of KM by both employees and managers can inhibit uptake.

Financial resources

The lack of investment capital within SMEs is viewed consistently as their major limitation. Not only does this render the set-up and maintenance of ongoing KM systems prohibitive but it often constrains their ability to acquire information from external sources. When considerable investment is required or when business is going badly, owners are usually reluctant to support a KM effort. Thus KM solutions that do not require significant financial commitment must be explored.

Tacit KM strategies and techniques in SMEs

Understanding the unique characteristic of SMEs, it is logical that the KM strategies observed in larger organisations will not be transferable.

Below, techniques suitable for SMEs are identified in relation to the stages of the KM cycle.

Knowledge identification

McAdam et al (2001) found that the SME sector was less advanced in this area of KM, having a more mechanistic approach. While it is widely felt that SMEs could benefit from identifying best practice, McAdam et al (2001) suggest that this approach requires a large project environment, more prevalent in larger organisations. Suitable activities identified include project reviews, audits, interviews with customers to determine satisfaction and recording learning histories.

Knowledge capture

While SMEs are thought to create tacit knowledge more often than large enterprises, methods to capture knowledge are less frequently observed (Koh et al, 2004). McAdam et al (2001) found cross-functional training, job rotation and apprenticeships to be among the most effective

methods of capturing knowledge. Informal processes were found to be the most popular (Refer to The Journal of Knowledge Management 5(3)). With limited geographical dispersion and few people with which to interact, tacit knowledge can be passed person to person through informal interaction.

Knowledge storage

At its most basic level knowledge storage could occur using a simple document repository although SMEs are traditionally weak in the use and exploitation of IT. Limited take-up is thought to be due to the lack of immediate benefits compared to the time spent providing data to the system and a lack of resources to maintain a knowledge repository. Subsequently, SMEs are encouraged to take a scaled down approach to implementing a KM system.

A number of technologies appropriate for SMEs across the tacit knowledge management cycle are proposed by Jashapara (2004) "Knowledge Management: An integrated approach"

Knowledge dissemination

While McAdam et al (2001) found SMEs less advanced in most areas of knowledge sharing -- in particular the people-oriented method -- the nature of SMEs, with their flat structure and low levels of bureaucracy, would suggest that this is an area in which SMEs should excel.

Workshops, forums and training needs analysis are among the most common methods of knowledge dissemination in SMEs. Brainstorming, mentoring schemes and newsletters are also simple methods for sharing knowledge.

The importance of linking appropriate reward structures to KM objectives should not be neglected. Non financial incentives offer the more feasible solution for SMEs, include recognising employees' contributions, giving freedom to explore ideas, providing work challenges and opportunities for personal development and career advancement.

Knowledge creation

Many SMEs lack the resources to conduct research or try out new processes in order to create new knowledge and continue to repeat tried and tested methods, especially in the face of adversity. Ironically, the ability to reflect on knowledge creation can be critical to survival, especially during times of crisis or breakdown when a company's traditional categories of knowledge no longer work (Nonaka, 1991).

Knowledge mapping is one technique for creating knowledge that can be used to identify relevant expertise and knowledge resources. Examples include competence maps, strategy maps and cognitive maps.

Strategic alliances and partnerships are also gaining popularity between SMEs with a number of researchers demonstrating the ability to exploit new sources of knowledge, increase innovation performance and create a competitive advantage (Tamer et al, 2003; Chaston et al, 1999).

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Conclusion

While the features of SMEs deliver challenges to the KM norm, they also offer advantages and should not be viewed as barriers to effectively managing knowledge. The lack of understanding of the benefits of KM however is thought to be a major barrier.

The importance of the owner/manager in this respect recurs across the literature. Commitment to a KM initiative hinges on their ability to recognise the benefits of KM and view their business strategically, taking a long-term focus on achieving a competitive advantage rather than a short-term focus on the generation of profits.

Although, links between KM and organisational growth have been demonstrated more recently, KMs perceived ability to deliver tangible benefits

in the short term is likely to have a greater impact on its prevalence within SMEs. Finding methods of linking KM to financial results, specifically profit, would benefit significantly from further research.

With the benefits of KM in SMEs widely considered to be not just the achievement of a competitive advantage but long-term survival, it would seem that ignorance around the discipline in this sector cannot remain. The Government and trade bodies have a role to play in increasing awareness of KM issues to the most important contributors to the national economy. However, it will be the proactive owner/managers who recognise the need to develop their understanding of KM and take advantage of the guidance available that will prosper in the long term.

Events

United Kingdom:

- "European Conference on IS Management, Leadership and Governance" 7th - 8th July <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e477>>
- "The missing link; managing personal knowledge; not time" 1st - 2nd August <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e528>>
- "STN Training courses - Pharma Focus" 16th - 18th August <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e544>>
- "6th Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services: The Impact and Outcomes of Library and Information Services: Performance measurement for a changing information environment" 22nd - 25th August <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e532>>
- "Digital Resources for the Humanities" 2005 4th - 7th September <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e545>>

Australia and Territories:

- "Intranet Usability" 29th - 31st August <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e541>>
- "neXt 2005 ALIA National Library and Information Technicians Conference" 6th - 9th September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e535>

Canada:

- "2005 Government & Health Technologies Forum" 30th - 31st August <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e537>>

Ireland:

- "6th European Conference on Knowledge Management" 8th - 9th September <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e481>>
- "Evaluating e-learning - a how to guide" 8th September <http://www.freepint.com/go/e492>

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