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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 the fully formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <<http://www.freepint.com/member>>.

EDITORIAL

Voting has now finished for the Online Information/Free Pint Customer Service Award. There were over 150 nominations and we're now sifting through the votes. We'll announce the award winner in the next issue, before presenting it at the Gala Awards Dinner during show week.

Talking of which, it's only three weeks until Online Information 2002 at London's Olympia. We're all really looking forward to it as it's the big event of the year for the information world. We'll be there, of course, in Free Pint's usual spot (stand 292) and you can get your free ticket to the show by visiting <<http://www.online-information.co.uk/>>.

We're organising a number of Information Masterclasses during the week <http://www.online-information.co.uk/online/exh_edu_info.asp>. These join a whole range of free seminars which make attending even more worthwhile. I really hope you will come to the show to help make it as much of a success as previous years. As well as being lots to learn, it's great fun and there's a real buzz. I always feel it's a super way to celebrate the past year and to welcome the challenges of the next.

Talking of education, it reminds me that we're celebrating Free Pint's fifth birthday today, the age for starting school. I do still feel, however, that we're right at the beginning of learning with Free Pint. I mentioned this at the recent CILIP awards ceremony, noting that both Free Pint and the Institute have tremendous opportunities ahead of them. Thanks to CILIP for a smashing day at a great venue <<http://www.freepint.com/press/cilip.htm>>.

We have a real coup in today's newsletter, interviewing usability guru Jakob Nielsen. This alongside the usual mixed bag of articles and reviews should mean that there's something of interest to everyone.

Don't forget to check out the fully formatted Adobe Acrobat version of this newsletter <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/>>. You can have that edition sent to you, along with the HTML version of the Bar Digest, by modifying your account settings at <<http://www.freepint.com/member/>>.

We hope you enjoy today's issue, and will help spread the word about Free Pint by forwarding this edition to your colleagues.

Cheers
William

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Free Pint Jobs is THE place to find and advertise information-related vacancies.

Job seekers can search the database for free, and set up a profile to be notified weekly of relevant new vacancies.

Recruiters will receive significant publicity for listed vacancies, and jobs will be matched against the 750+ stored job seeker profiles.

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

As well as the selected listings below, check out the weekly Bar postings which list the latest additions to Free Pint Jobs. This week's can be found at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b20942> and last week's at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b20759>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

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<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2114>
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Recruiter: Recruit Media

Junior Researcher/Analyst

<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2115>
Excellent opportunity for recently qualified person to be trained to use a full range of business online databases in expanding company in Central London. Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Information Co-ordinator - North Herts

<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2118>
One of many excellent Records/Archives opportunities in London, Herts, Norfolk, Staffs. Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

[The above jobs are paid listings]

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If you'd like some Free Pint beer mats to distribute as well, then just let us know how many, and where to send them:
<http://www.freepint.com/events>

Happy Fifth Birthday Free Pint

As Free Pint celebrates its fifth birthday, there's no let up in the amount of press coverage it receives or the awards it wins.

Keep up to date with all the latest press news at:
<http://www.freepint.com/press.htm>

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MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES from John Farmer

John Farmer is the co-founder of mobile services and applications company Carbon Partners <<http://www.carbonpartners.co.uk>>. He regularly speaks and contributes to articles on the opportunities for companies to use mobile services to communicate with their customers and open new revenue streams.

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

- Internet Archive <<http://www.archive.org/>> - Step back in time to re-visit the web sites of yesteryear! A great resource for tracing past web sites and collating information on companies.
- ClickZ <<http://www.clickz.com/>> - Comprehensive news and article resource, translating many of the key principles of marketing into the various digital media now available.
- Wireless World Forum <<http://www.w2forum.com>> - Case studies, reviews, and analysis of commercial opportunities in the wireless world.
- Club Nokia <<http://www.clubnokia.com>> - Insights into what we'll soon be able to do with our mobile phones, including movies, music and games.
- CamVista <<http://www.camvista.com/>> - For moments of escapism from the office I use these webcams as a window on the rest of the world. Personal favourite is the Isle of Skye in Scotland.

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Two New White Papers from Factiva

E-Learning for the Enterprise discusses technology-delivered learning as a cost-effective and critical support for many business activities and describes how some companies have successfully embraced e-learning. The Value of Metrics in the Corporate Communications Market offers examples of how the power of information obtained via the desktop environment can translate into tangible ROI measurements. Read them at <http://www.factiva.com/redirects/learning/freepint>

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Tricky research questions answered in minutes. Post your request to the Free Pint Bar and see just how quickly it is answered <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>.

Students on information-related courses should make the most of the Student Bar. For help with dissertation titles, experienced advice on courses, and more, visit <<http://www.freepint.com/student>>.

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

EVENTS

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

Two events are taking place at the Belfry in the UK this winter. The 'European Supply Chain Summit' is on the 19th to 21st November <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e128>> and the 'World Bioanalytics Summit' is on the 2nd to 4th December <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e128>>. Both these events have been organised by the World Trade Group.

The 'Online Information 2002 Conference and Exhibition' is where Free Pint will be, along with hundreds of other information companies <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e119>>. It is taking place in London on the 3rd to 5th December. See you there.

Find out more about the Special Libraries Association European Chapter by attending the 'SLA European Chapter Breakfast Meeting' on the 4th December in London <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e163>>.

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

Penny <penny@freepint.com>

TIPS ARTICLE

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/141102.htm#tips>>

**"Teaching In China"
By Karen Huber**

Karen Huber has been a high school librarian in Lewistown, Pennsylvania, for 5 years. She likes reading, learning new computer technology, collecting Internet sites, spending time with her cat, Phoenix (who is really a person in disguise). She also like aerobics, walking, and working on her house.

I went to China for three weeks this summer to teach with 32 other people and used the Internet for information to help me prepare for the job and the culture. We taught in Taian, Shandong province for two weeks and went sightseeing in Beijing for four days afterwards. Education is about providing information and we teachers were to provide information about the US culture and to teach some English.

There were around 400 children ranging in age from 10 to 19; none of us knew what age group we would have before the trip. I chose information, activities, and lessons that could easily be modified into easier or more difficult material. I also visited sites that gave country background, government, travel, and health information.

I hope those interested in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) will find these sites useful, particularly if they are planning on visiting China or working overseas.

Chinese students learn English in school from elementary school. Most are proficient when they reach high school. I taught high school-aged children for the two weeks, so my job was easier than that of some of my colleagues who were assigned the elementary children. I taught new vocabulary, corrected language problems, and led discussions about social issues. Behavior of the Chinese students socially is much like that of their US counterparts, but in general they were more polite and obedient.

The first sites I investigated before I went to China were those that one trip leader suggested from china-sd.net:

Information on Taian City
<<http://www.china-sd.net/eng/sdcities/taian/survey.asp>>
An overview of historical and modern Taian.

Map of Shandong
<<http://www.china-sd.net/eng/sdcities/map/sd.asp>>

Shandong Province on the Internet
<<http://www.china-sd.net/eng/default.asp>>
An overview of modern Shandong Province.

CIA Factbook
<<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>>
This site gives an overview of many countries of the world and covers detailed aspects of life in any country.

I visited the site of the US Embassy in Beijing <<http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/>> so I could register my passport online. I also visited <<http://travel.state.gov/china.html>> which is a consular information sheet about China, up to date and very thorough. Another helpful site is <<http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/index.html>> which includes information about relations between China and the US. I also found a China Travel Guide <<http://www.travelchinaguide.com/>> which covers the culture of China, geography, history,

cuisine, languages, maps, attractions and more in detail.

For health purposes I visited the Center for Disease Control as well as that of my health care provider, Blue Cross <<http://www.bluecares.com/healthtravel/worldwide.html>>, which lists hospitals in Beijing, the nearest to where we were staying, and has downloadable claim forms. CDC has a menu on the left side of the page <<http://www.cdc.gov/>> and I clicked on Traveler's Health. There is a pull-down menu in which to choose the area where you will travel and underneath are several links of concern to travelers, including vaccinations, diseases, outbreaks, traveling with children, pets, and/or those with special needs, precautions to take with food, emergency preparations and reference materials. There are links to current health news, other health organizations, and airport and airline security.

I went to several sites for ideas, forms, and educational games. The elementary ideas and games can always be modified to suit older students. You will need easier activities when teaching students who do not know English as well.

The Teacher Information network <<http://www.teacher.com/>> is a comprehensive site which contains reviews of several good educational sites, organizations, resources, schools on the Internet, links to federal and state departments of education, and sites divided into age group for kids and sites for parents.

Sites for Teachers <<http://www.sitesforteachers.com/>> contains fifteen pages of links to educational sites, a search engine for them, and some subject related links.

Teachnet.com <<http://www.teachnet.com/>> is a site full of activities, lesson plans and ideas. I found blank bingo cards here under 'Power Tools'. Lessons are divided according to subject, there are conference boards, a store, a newsletter, instructions, even cartoons.

Another of our instructors suggested this site: 4th of July Lesson Planning Links <<http://www.amonco.org/july4.html>>. Here are links to lessons, activities, games, recipes, other sites, a bookstore, a message board, and newsletters online. I liked this site because it had many Language Arts activities that could be used with any age group.

Jan Brett's Home Page <<http://www.janbrett.com/>> is maintained by Jan Brett, an American author who also does the illustrations for her books. There are many resources here appropriate for ESL learning on the activities page as well as numerous other activities. There are flashcards, word lists, and educational games from which I got ideas for my trip. In addition, there are recipes, many elementary age activities, printable cards and many other ideas all linked through a central index.

Teachervision.com

Related Free Pint links:

- 'Education' resources in the Free Pint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p39>>
- Post a message to the author, Karen Huber, 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/141102.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of Free Pint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

<<http://www.teachervision.com/>> is another great site that covers many aspects of education. There are free teachers tools, lesson planning center, classroom management, and professional development resources. There are four free newsletters, resources for special needs, even ecards to send. There is free software (shipping & handling fee) and a teacher store.

Although The Graphic Organizer <<http://graphic.org/goindex.html>> has a software advertisement on its homepage, it is one of my favorites. The first link on the left goes right to the index which features different types of organizers in a chart. The links underneath go to explanations of how information is used in graphic organizers. The homepage links to classroom examples how some organizers were used, along with guidelines.

Teach-nology <<http://www.teach-nology.com/>>, my favorite, has a full navigation bar of links:

"> Best Sites > Free Sites > Message Board > Rubrics > Teaching Themes

> Downloads > Games > Motivator > Student Search > Tutorials

> Free Email > Home > Net Secrets > Teaching Ideas > Worksheets

> Free Drive > Lesson Plans > Newsletters > Teacher Tools > Worksheet Makers" (this is from their home page)

Under this bar are topics of interest that include Current Trends, Literature in Education, Law and Education, and Professional Development. There are enough activities and links here to keep anyone interested busy for quite awhile. There are rubrics makers, word searches (which I used), calendars, discussions, educational games; definitely a site worth visiting.

There were also some ESL sites that our other trip leader suggested to us.

OWL, the Online Writing Lab, put online by Purdue University, is at <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/>> for ESL Resources, Handouts and Exercises. The Resource pages take you to links for with students or teachers. The Handouts section covers several detailed aspects of teaching English, wonderful for ideas too, and the Exercises section contains links to parts of speech, numbers, subject and verb agreement, spelling, appositives, and articles; very comprehensive.

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, ERICAE.NET, was a source of several helpful articles on ESL. A keyword search for 'esl' under the 'Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation' link in the 'Library' section brought up the informative articles:

Alcala, Angelo (2000). A framework for developing an effective instructional program for limited English proficient students with limited formal schooling. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 7(9). Available online: <<http://ericae.net/pare/getvn.asp?v=7&n=9>>.

Mullane, Jennifer & Stuart J. McKelvie (2001). Effects of removing the time limit on first and

second language intelligence test performance. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 7(23). Available online: <<http://ericae.net/pare/getvn.asp?v=7&n=23>>.

A simple page query for 'esl' under the 'ERIC Digests' link brought up 48 articles. The 'Library' section alone is very large and contains links to full text, journals, FAQs, How-To articles, digests, and e-journals.

The search link at the top of the homepage leads to an advanced search engine, information on the ERIC system, related sites, sponsors, and the ERIC thesaurus. Links to the test locator, the ERIC system, Educational Resources Information Center, assessment resources, and a site map, lead to large, organized amounts of educational information.

The particular articles we read to prepare for the teaching trip were the educational digests available by searching under 'Digests' or at the following links. The article by Dame I found after we came back and was of interest to me because I am a school librarian.

Coballes-Vega, Carmen
Considerations in Teaching Culturally Diverse Children. ERIC Digest. 1992. <<http://ericae.net/edo/ED341648.htm>>

Dame, Melvina Azar. Serving Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students: Strategies for the School Librarian. ERIC Digest. 1995. <<http://ericae.net/edo/ED390283.htm>>

Domke, Darla. Creative Activities for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. ERIC Digest. 1991. <<http://ericae.net/edo/ED333713.htm>>

Gasparro, Marie and Bernadette Falletta. Creating Drama with Poetry: Teaching English as a Second Language through Dramatization and Improvisation. ERIC Digest. 1994. <<http://ericae.net/edo/ED368214.htm>>

Hudelson, Sarah. Children's Writing in ESL. ERIC Digest. 1988. <<http://ericae.net/edo/ED303046.htm>>

Kagan, Spencer. We Can Talk: Cooperative Learning in the Elementary ESL Classroom. ERIC Digest. 1995. <<http://ericae.net/edo/ED382035.htm>>

Kerka, Sandra. Family and Intergenerational Literacy. ERIC Digest No. 111. 1991. <<http://ericae.net/edo/ED334467.htm>>

The following article can be found by clicking the ERIC system, going to the ERIC system directory, then clicking 'Languages and Linguistics'. Since there are 16 ERIC databases, it is easier to become familiar with the system by doing some searches and finding information by clicking the links.

Rebecca Oxford, University of Maryland. Integrated Skills in the ESL/EFL Classroom.

There is a link on the top of the page that links to other ESL articles. All of these articles are digests, freely distributed from the system.

FREE PINT BOOKSHELF<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>**"Safety Net: Protecting Your Business on the Internet"**

Reviewed by Paul Pedley

Paul Pedley is Head of Research at the Economist Intelligence Unit. He is the author of four books published through Aslib, and writes and trains on legal issues relating to information matters and also on searching the web. Paul is currently writing a book for Facet Publishing - "Essential law for information professionals".

XRelated links:

- Find out more about this book online at the Free Pint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/safety.htm>
- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0471079626/free-pint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0471079626/freepint00>
- "Safety Net: Protecting Your Business on the Internet" ISBN 0471079626, published by John Wiley & Sons Inc, written by Kathleen Sindell
- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the Free Pint Bookshelf at <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

To propose an information-related book for review, send details to bookshelf@freepint.com.

Safety net outlines a number of potential threats to online businesses such as fraud, sabotage, espionage, piracy or identity theft, and it notes that all manner of organisations are candidates for intruders, whether they be business enterprises, not-for-profit organizations or government agencies.

One chapter is entitled "the insecure employee" and looks at how the computer systems of enterprises are assaulted by insiders. Indeed, it points out that in some cases employees can unwittingly access, modify, and erase proprietary data or disclose sensitive information.

Safety net recognises that security breaches are costly both in terms of hard costs such as monetary and productivity losses; but also in terms of public relations where damage is expressed through customer and reputation losses.

The threats can involve not just online financial fraud. Companies can also experience theft of proprietary information and corporate secrets. One section, for example, looks at intellectual property security or digital rights management.

The whole purpose of the book is to make the reader aware of the potential threats that exist. It aims to provide practical solutions to counter those online security threats as it runs through prevention, detection and recovery counter-measures. It lists a top ten of common mistakes that organizations make, such as failing to install updates or patches when security holes are found. This book also deals with how to undertake security risk assessments for your organisation and how to create an effective security policy.

Kathleen Sindell notes that companies can acquire a competitive advantage by ensuring that each customer feels that his or her consumer rights and privacy are protected online; and one of the book's fourteen chapters is devoted to the topic of safeguarding your customer's privacy.

Ms Sindell quotes surveys which show that the majority of businesses have encountered computer breaches, many indeed experience a number of such breaches. She devotes one chapter to the question of how to handle public relations after a cyber attack including preparing and planning for crisis communication, inspiring confidence after an attack, and the question of whether or not to report a cyber-crime.

The book is written in plain English, and remains technically accurate without being full of jargon. It is 329 pages long, is clearly set out and there are illustrations throughout such as flow charts or matrices. There are also a number of checklists, for example for web server security, and an 'after the hack attack' checklist. There is a glossary, and also a 'resource center' which groups together a number of web-based sources of information under themes such as encryption information or intrusion detection.

Free Pint Forthcoming Articles

[Provisional]

* Toxicology Sources on the Web * Working From Home * Internet Resources on IT * Alternative Search Strategies * Cataloguing the Web * Health Informatics * Digital Libraries * Deep Linking * Vendors * Legal Sources * Competitive Intelligence * Patents * France: Business and Economic Sources on the Web * Prospect Research * Archive Television *

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>.

FREE PINT GOLD

This time last year, Sam Vaknin wrote a tips article about digital content on the Web. Alison Turner wrote a feature about finding health information sites.

- Free Pint No.100 15th November 2001. "Digital Content on the Web" and "Untangling The Web For Health Professionals" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/151101.htm>

Two years ago, Tracey Howard-Baker looked at the explosion of the music industry since the conception of the computer. Diana Grimwood-Jones showed us sites that might be of use to small and medium sized businesses.

- Free Pint No.75, 16th November 2000. "Music and the Internet Revolution" and "Business Information for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/161100.htm>

In 1999, Susan Alcock covered water industry sites and Huw Owen took a "whistle stop tour ... in the evolution of the electronic community".

- Free Pint No.50, 18th November 1999. "Information on tap - Web resources on the water industry" and "Electronic Communities" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/181199.htm>

Four years ago, Free Pint's William Hann wrote an article on how to attract as many visitors to a Web site as possible, and Phil Bradley looked at the relationship between CD ROMS and the Web.

- Free Pint No.26, 12th November 1998. "Web Site Promotion Ideas" and "CD-ROMs and the Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/121198.htm>

Penny penny@freepint.com

FEATURE ARTICLE

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/141102.htm#feature>>

"Free Pint talks to Jakob Nielsen"
By Tim Houghton

Tim Houghton is a Director of Parallel54; an online research firm that specialises in monitoring Web site content and reporting on Web site usability. The firm's Website is located at <http://www.parallel54.com>

Getting access to Web-based information can be a time-consuming and frustrating experience even for the comparatively expert members of the Free Pint community. If you have impaired sight or other disabilities it can be a nightmare. Jakob Nielsen, a principal of Nielsen Norman Group, has made it his mission to enhance the usability of the Web. Lecturing, writing and teaching on the subject have made him probably the best known Web usability expert around.

Recently, UsableNet and the Nielsen Norman Group (NNG) released software called LIFT, that promised to enhance Website usability and accessibility. I caught up with Jakob on behalf of Free Pint and asked him to tell me more. But first, let's clarify what we mean by 'accessibility' and 'usability'.

Jakob was at pains to point out that these are not really separate topics but two sides of the same coin. "Accessibility is the technical means of getting to the information. Usability determines how easy it is to do something with it. Simple accessible sites tend to be highly usable also". If one takes a real world example, an accessible library would have decent access ramps and a usable one a decent book index.

Whilst I think we can all recognise the moral argument for allowing as many people as possible to benefit from the Web, is this appeal to altruism enough in the midst of tough economic conditions? Jakob is well aware of the issue. "There has been an increased recognition of the importance of accessibility on the Internet. But interest does not always translate into action". By way of analogy he continues: "Imagine the progress of Web accessibility as a cart pulled by a donkey. There are two basic ways to get the donkey to move the cart, a carrot or a stick".

"The stick approach involves more rules, more lawsuits, more regulation. It's not an approach we're in favour of at NNG. We much prefer the carrot approach. Better accessibility means more customers, more customers means more sales. Also, as these customers are often not targeted by competitors, they are more likely to be loyal and to promote your site to others". The numbers are probably substantial. In the UK alone there were 158,000 adults registered as blind in March 2000 and the number of partially sighted is likely to be several times higher than this. But even this vastly understates the market; Users accessing sites via a WAP phone or a PDA also have a 'partial view' of the Web. It's hard to derive exact numbers but it seems likely that the segment is of a size to interest even the most self-interested Website owner.

So, if it's worth making your site more accessible, how do you do it? To assist Web developers in their task, various 'standards' have been drawn up that provide guidelines on how Web pages should be structured in order to be readable by the maximum number of potential users. The two best known are the so-called

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Recruitment at stand 199 at
Online Information 2002

Arlene Christou and David Wilkinson will be pleased to meet any past, current or future candidates or employers who have had, or wish to have, contact with Glen Recruitment. Come and discuss how things are in the job market and talk about opportunities which may develop in 2003. We will be more than willing to offer guidance and assistance on CV content or interview preparation. You may even be lucky and win a bottle of champagne in our daily draw!!

Section 508 rules

<<http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm>> and the W3C guidelines (of which there is a subset known as the Web Accessibility Initiative which relate specifically to accessibility <<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>>). Section 508 refers to laws in the US applying to access to information for federal agencies, but these laws are increasingly seen as best practice in the corporate sector as well. There are UK and EU guidelines too. See <<http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk>> and <<http://www.techdis.ac.uk/>> for more details.

Whilst the standards are useful, compliance with them is time-consuming and the training required for Web developers is costly. To return to our donkey and cart: "Even with this carrot (commercial self-interest) we found that the donkey still found it difficult to pull the cart. So we developed LIFT: it provides the cart with ball bearings. Suddenly those developers that want to build in accessibility to their sites can do so more easily."

The software comes in three flavours. It can be bought as an add-on for Macromedia Dreamweaver, Microsoft Frontpage or you can submit your site for online checking. It costs from \$299 to \$449, via Usablenet <<http://www.usablenet.com>>. LIFT certainly doesn't have a monopoly on providing a checking facility. SSB technologies provide a checker called AskAlice <<http://askalice.ssbtechnologies.com:8080/askalice/index.html>> and Bobby, another online checking utility has been around since 1996 <<http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp>>. However LIFT's integration with existing Web authoring packages, detailed documentation and 'fix wizards', make the process of amending code less arduous.

Making a Website usable is, however, not simply a matter of complying with standards. It requires inspiration as well as perspiration. I suggested that the software could lead to developers not thinking deeply enough about site design. Jakob agreed that it was a risk, but reckoned this concern was overdone. "Take two examples; I'm old enough to remember the

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introduction of the pocket calculator in schools. There were fears at the time that it would lead to a collapse in numeracy. It hasn't happened. There were similar fears about literacy with regard to the spellchecker in Microsoft Word. In fact seeing your mistakes highlighted as you type can actually be a powerful educational tool. LIFT operates on a similar 'just in time' learning principle. I actually think that the educational aspect of the software is its greatest benefit. This isn't the reason most people will buy it, but hopefully they'll still get the benefit anyway!".

A couple of the team at our firm, Parallel54, have been testing the package and it was interesting that both of them commented on how much they learned about the details of usability and accessibility by working with it. But they did also highlight that it wasn't much use for those working with broadband content (video and audio-rich sites for example). Jakob conceded this point. "We are at an early stage and we simply haven't got the sufficient user test data yet to develop a product. However we have already started working with Macromedia to enhance the usability of Flash content so it is something we are working on"
<http://www.nngroup.com/events/uw2002/tutorial_1.html>.

So, who does Jakob think is going to buy the software? He highlights four principle segments: Educational institutions, as a learning tool; government and local authorities, especially local authorities as they often don't have the budget to send staff on expensive courses. medium sized enterprises, especially those that target "silver surfers" (older Web users); and larger companies for their Intranets. "We've seen LIFT being used as a tool to make Intranets more accessible for employees". This makes sense. Businesses in most countries have to make 'reasonable' efforts to ensure those with disabilities can do the same jobs as others. I imagine making information accessible probably falls within this.

Overall, I think the product does merit consideration. It provides a useful tool for Web developers both to diagnose and to correct HTML

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code and should cut down the hours spent on the more mechanistic aspects of accessibility. However it is an increasingly competitive marketplace so it will be interesting to see how it performs.

On a broader level how does Jakob see the state of Web design currently? Are we getting more usable and accessible Websites?

"Well, to take another analogy, it's like the half full or half empty glass. On the one hand there are still a lot of Websites being built and launched without any user testing at all. There's still an awful lot of bad design around. But on the other hand five years ago no-one was doing any testing. Now, more companies are using usability groups and more intranets are being constructed around user needs rather than departmental or functional hierarchies". Amazon's heavy use of user testing comes in for especial praise. See their separate 'accessible' site as an example of this type of user centric approach
<<http://www.amazon.com/access>>.

I must admit, in advance of our conversation I had a few doubts about the software. Was it just an attempt to cash in on legislative changes? However, I am now persuaded that this product, and others like it, do have a role in the Web developer's toolkit. Hopefully we can look at this whole topic further in future articles. For those wishing to hear more from Jakob Nielsen, Nielsen Norman Group host regular conferences on both sides of the Atlantic
<<http://www.nngroup.com/events/>>.

GOODBYE

Many thanks for reading today's Free Pint. I hope you will join me in raising a virtual glass to celebrate Free Pint's fifth birthday. Why not make it a real celebratory drink, take a digital photo and email it to me? Tell me where you are and how you celebrated and I'll post up the photos on the Free Pint site.

See you in two weeks!

William Hann, Managing Editor
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