FreePint®

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HTML Version
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/190106.htm>

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<http://www.freepint.com/issues/190106.pdf>

About FreePint

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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/>.

Editorial

Having just re-read the Editorial in the last issue of FreePint, I can't help noticing its very positive tone. This is due to it having been published just five days into the new year, when resolutions were newly formulated and, therefore, unbroken.

Two weeks later and things have moved on. The focus on 'favourites' has been replaced by a focus on 'dislikes', and reality has overtaken good intention.

As an example, an analysis of the many responses to our 'Understanding the FreePint Community' survey <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36367>, shows that whereas 92.4% of respondents read the FreePint Newsletter, it appears that the 'FreePint Gold' section is not just unread, but unliked. It's good to know, and shows the value of the feedback-gathering process.

There is also discontent in the business information world, as Pam Foster reports in her article today. Pam is Editor of FreePint's sister publication VIP <http://www.vivavip.com/>, which actively seeks the opinions of its readership of nearly 1,000 senior decision-makers with budgetary control for choosing information products. The discontent centres around the Financial Times' embargo on content delivered through vendors, which is hitting UK users harder than those in the US.

Whilst there is praise for the regular newsletter summary of the latest happenings at the FreePint Bar, the commonest Bar-related member-survey dislike is enquirers who don't summarise the responses they receive (either offline or online) and post them with a 'thank you'. This one small change in user behaviour would greatly enhance the goodwill for all users at the Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar/>.

I'm a great believer in voicing my dislikes (in an appropriate manner) in the hope that things will improve, however gradually and imperceptibly. In my tenth year of self-employment, I am starting to see how lots of small improvements can, over time, grow into something which really matches user (and customer) expectations and needs.

If you'd like to be more involved in improving the FreePint and VIP services, then it's not too late to make your opinions heard; either in the FreePint member survey, or as a member of the VIP readership:

- FreePint Member Survey:
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36367>
- VIP for business information:
  <http://www.vivaVIP.com/>

William Hann
Managing Editor and Founder, FreePint

E: william.hann@freepint.com
T: 0870 141 7474
I: +44 870 141 7474
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Operating as Prior Knowledge, Vernon Prior presents seminars on competitive intelligence, mainly throughout Asia and the Middle East. More details may be found at <http://www.theknowledge-brokers.com>

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

My Favourite Tipples
by Vernon Prior

- CEO Express <http://www.ceoexpress.com> describes itself as 'connecting busy executives to information that matters'. It is a very comprehensive site for business news and information, with links to online publications and technology sites.

- The Economist Style Guide <http://www.economist.co.uk/research/StyleGuide/> offers advice on good writing practice. It includes tips on how to avoid common errors and blunders, and an online quiz to test your writing skills.

- Open Business Club <http://www.OpenBC.com> is a networking site for entrepreneurs, business managers, and freelancers. It helps you to find new business contacts or partners and identify new markets and business opportunities.

- Resource Discovery Network Virtual Training Suite <http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk> is a comprehensive set of free online tutorials designed to help students, lecturers and researchers improve their Internet literacy and IT skills.

- The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) <http://www.scip.org> provides training, networking facilities, a newsletter, job vacancies and an events diary, as well as providing access to a variety of CI resources.

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The current issue of VIP compares pay-as-you-go services from four major providers - Alacra, Dialog, Factiva and LexisNexis.

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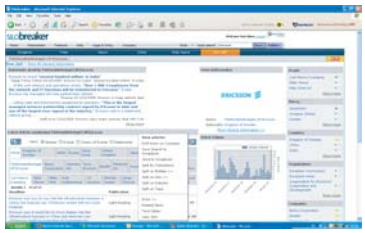

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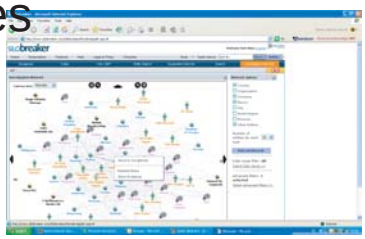

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Jinfo :: Jobs in information

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The Jinfo service enables you to search and advertise information-related job vacancies.

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FreePint Bar

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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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Welcome to another summary of the latest postings to the FreePint Bar.

A couple of FreePinters are researching Internet use amongst librarians. One of them wants to "develop a picture of change over time" <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36652> and the other wants your thoughts and recollections to include in a chapter of a book. Can you help? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36648>.

Do you have experience of setting up a network of information professionals? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36735>. Or do you know if there is a list of researchers in South America, the Caribbean and Central America? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36737>.

Are you in the recruitment industry or perhaps you are looking for a job? The latest edition of the Jinfo Newsletter has just been published and includes all the latest job listings and advice on "How to leave gracefully" <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36718>.

Starting on January 16th, the Financial Times is giving away free Compact Books. Every Monday for six weeks the FT will provide a complimentary Compact Book along with the paper. Read about it at the VIP Lounge <http://www.vivavip.com/go/l242>.

VIP Eye No.49 has also just been published and looks at the latest business information vendor news from companies including LexisNexis, Factiva, Pearson, infoUSA, Thomson and WSJ.com <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36650>.

Can you help with these postings:

- What is a COT code? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36678>.
- Are there statistics on flight delays or cancellations? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36715>.

This posting has had no replies yet: Is there a study that compares the price of a "basket of goods" across discount chains and supermarkets? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36653>.

Can you recommend voice recognition software? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36706>. How about software to catalogue Journals? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36656>.

And finally, do you advertise with Google? If so, do you know how to get Google campaign information automatically? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36729>.

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

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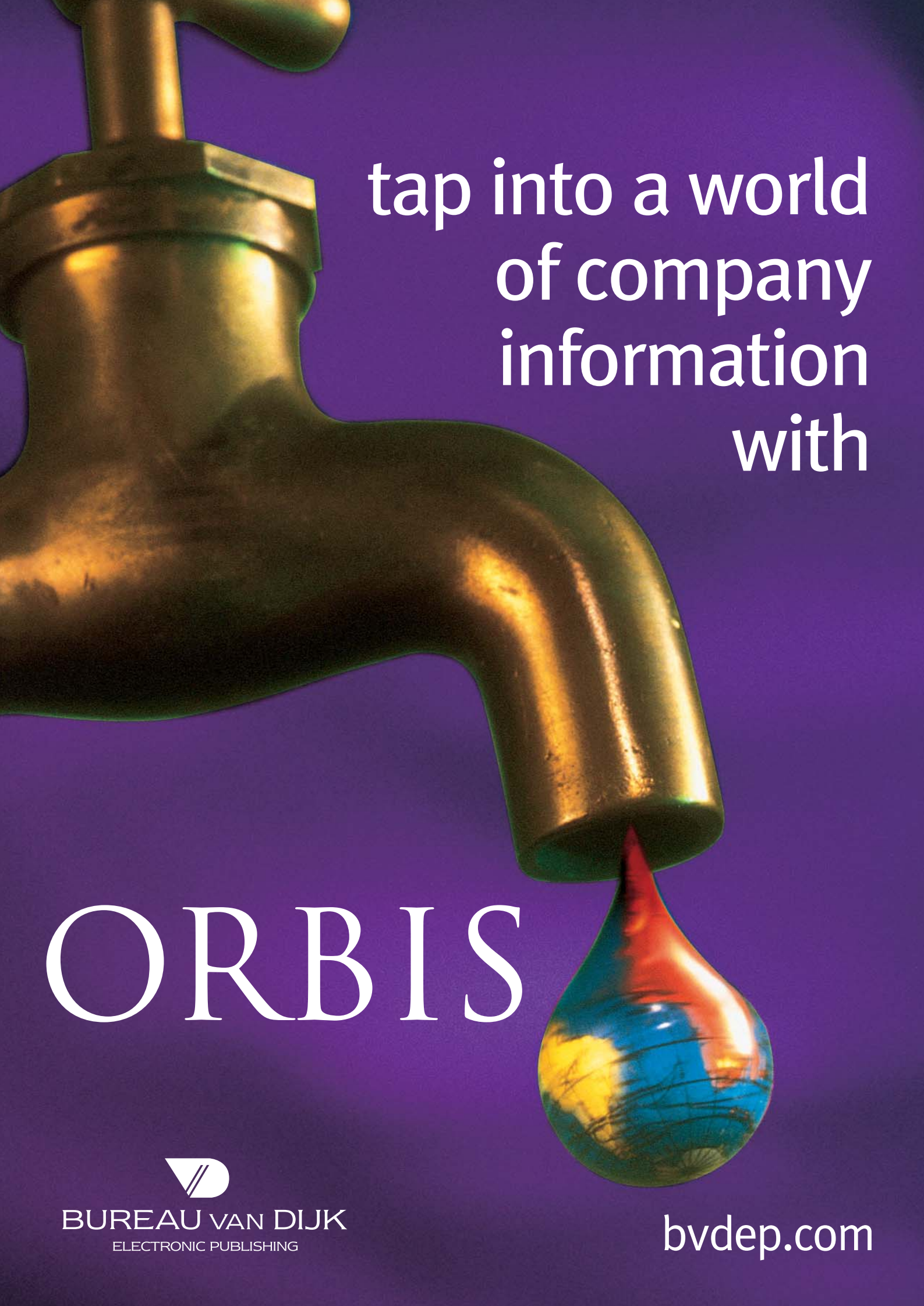
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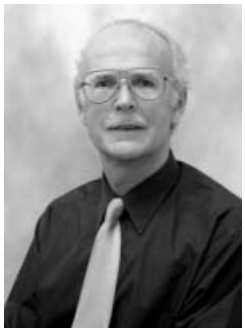
"Engineering: the changing information landscape"

By Roddy MacLeod



Roddy MacLeod is Senior Subject Librarian at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh. He edits the Internet Resources Newsletter <http://www.hw.ac.uk/libwww/irn/>, and manages the PerX Project <http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/perx/>. He co-edited the 4th edition of 'Information sources in engineering' published by KG Saur in 2005, and has written extensively on information in engineering.

Email: Home page: <http://www.hw.ac.uk/libwww/libram/roddy.html>

My first FreePint article on engineering portals appeared back in issue No. 66 (6th July 2000). Quite a number of things have changed since that time. The first part of this article revisits some of the resources I shared back then. The second section is an analysis of some useful engineering-related digital repositories which have emerged over the past five years. Finally, the third section comments on the changing engineering information landscape.

Part 1 - Visit to the Past

Just over five years ago I wrote an article entitled "Panorama of Engineering Portals" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/060700.htm#tips>, which appeared in Free Pint No.66. Of the 'portals' identified (and I recognise that today, most of these resources would no longer be categorised under that heading), many are no longer available. Those which seem to have completely disappeared include: Engineering Direct, Engineers Online (the UK service), Engineering UK, Internet Connections for Engineering, and the CASTI 'portal'.

Others, though still available, have shifted their focus or content. For example: i-engineering.com is now an enabler of integrated e- business technology solutions; 4engineers.com now offers little or no engineering content; the Engineers4engineers domain has been 'parked'; the MyPlant domain name is currently for sale; ER-Online has not been updated for a long time; IndustryCommunity appears to be in abeyance; the EELS service has been frozen for some years; and E4Engineering has been subsumed into The Engineer <http://www.theengineer.co.uk>, the well-known trade journal.

The disappearance of so many resources which were once regarded as high level sites is disappointing, but shows that the engineering information landscape is constantly evolving.

Part 2 - Brave New World

In the meantime, several very useful engineering resources have emerged, particularly some which can be classified, loosely, as digital repositories.

What does that loose classification point to? Without getting too mired in definitions, I quote Peters [1], who wrote: "Digital repositories, like digital libraries, mean many things to many people". For present purposes, it should be noted that 'repository' is generally accepted to mean a central place where data is stored and maintained, and 'metadata repository' is a repository of data about data.

With that definition in mind, the Listing of Engineering Repository Sources <http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/perx/sourceslisting.htm> is a goldmine of repositories. The Listing is one of the recent deliverables of the PerX (Pilot Engineering Repository Xsearch) Project <http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/perx/>, which is part of the JISC-funded Digital Repositories Programme <http://digbig.com/4fyye>. It identifies the most significant repositories and metadata repositories relevant to engineering, and categorises them by type and coverage.

All of the following examples have been selected from that Listing, where many more can be found.

For all intents and purposes, the following repositories and metadata repositories are online databases, some of which provide open access to their content, and some of which may link, by various means, to the full text. More importantly, they are excellent sources of engineering information in their own areas and can all be searched for free!

Due to the rapid uptake of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) within academia, there is currently much interest in digital learning materials, sometimes referred to as learning objects or learning modules. Learning and teaching repositories help ensure the sharing and reuse of such materials. Descriptions of four sources of information about learning materials in engineering follow.

The Geotechnical, Rock & Water (GROW) Digital Library <http://www.grow.arizona.edu/> is based at the University of Arizona, and is part of the

Survey :: Understanding FreePint as an Online Community

We're trying to build a better understanding of the composition and needs of the FreePint community.

Please take two minutes to complete our survey: <http://www.freepint.com/go/b36367>

Related FreePint links

'Engineering' articles in the FreePint Portal <http://www.freepint.com/go/p45>

Post a message to the author, Roddy MacLeod or suggest further resources at the FreePint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>

Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <http://www.freepint.com/issues/190106.htm#tips>

Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

National Science, Mathematics and Technology Digital Library (NSDL) <http://nsdl.org/>. In addition to providing details about, and links to, approximately 1,000 learning resources produced elsewhere, the GROW Team has also developed over 200 interactive learning objects in civil engineering. All of these are available from this website.

Also part of the NSDL is the Digital Library Network for Engineering and Technology (DLNET) <http://www.dlnet.vt.edu/>. DLNET is a learning object repository with facilities for searching, downloading, submitting and reviewing learning objects in engineering. Over 1,000 learning objects have been catalogued, but I do not find it the easiest of sites to browse.

The SMETE Digital Library <http://www.smete.org/smete/> (which was just emerging when I mentioned it in Free Pint No.66) is easier to use, though it covers broader ground than just engineering. SMETE gives access to learning resources of various kinds, and also provides a federated search facility for content from the National Engineering Education Delivery System (NEEDS) <http://www.needs.org/needs/> and MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching) <http://www.merlot.org/Home.po>.

In the UK, the Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre provides a searchable Resource Database <http://www.engsc.ac.uk/er/resources/index.asp> of over 1,000 learning and teaching resources.

Two examples of multimedia repositories are the Structural Engineering Slide Library <http://nisee.berkeley.edu/godden/godden_intro.html> at the University of California Berkeley, featuring 550 images collected between 1950 and 1980 and used in undergraduate courses in structural analysis and design; and the CALVisual for Construction Image Archive <http://www.engsc.ac.uk/resources/calvisual/> consisting of images of bricks, bridges, concrete, damp, defects, scaffolding, etc.

As identified in PerX's Engineering Digital Repositories Landscape Analysis <http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/perx/analysis.htm>, a number of substantial engineering technical report repositories give access to reports published in the USA, for example the NASA Technical Report Server (NTRS) <http://ntrs.nasa.gov/> and the Caltech Earthquake Engineering Research Laboratory Technical Reports service <http://caltecheerl.library.caltech.edu/>. Also available is Public STINET (Scientific and Technical Information Network) <http://stinet.dtic.mil/> from the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC).

There are, however, few equivalents for the UK. One exception is the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC) ePublication Archive <http://epubs.cclrc.ac.uk/>. Nearly 1,000 Rutherford Appleton Laboratory Technical Reports are detailed in this database, along with information on other academic outputs of the CCLRC (pre-print journal articles, conference presentations/papers, book chapters, theses and final project reports, etc.). Where copyright permits, the full text is available.

A fast growing number of UK universities are developing institutional repositories. An example, with good coverage in engineering. is Cranfield University's QUEprints <http://dspace.lib.cranfield.ac.uk/>, which gives details of, and links to, over 800 items (staff publications, theses, reports, etc.) produced by academics at that institution.

A useful repository has been made available by the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE). The ASEE Conference Proceedings Search <http://www.asee.org/about/events/conferences/search.cfm> provides access to papers presented at ASEE conferences from 1996-2005.

Other useful and freely searchable digital repositories include the ASCE Research Library <http://ascelibrary.org/> from the American

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Society of Civil Engineers. This provides details of, and access to, more than 18,500 full-text papers from ASCE Journals and Proceedings. In the UK, the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) Virtual Library <http://www.iceknowledge.com/> is "the largest repository of full text civil engineering papers in the world" with an archive of technical papers from 1836 to the present day. The full text is available to subscribers, or by pay-per-view.

The SPE (Society of Petroleum Engineers) eLibrary <http://www.spe.org/elibrary/app/search.do> is a repository of technical papers presented at SPE-sponsored conferences and in SPE's technical journals since the 1950s, consisting of more than 40,000 documents on drilling, exploration, production, and so on.

In other areas of engineering, the SPIE Digital Library <http://www.spiedl.org/> includes more than 200,000 optics and photonics technical papers from SPIE journals and conference proceedings from 1990 onwards. Full-text is available only to subscribers, but non-subscribers can search, browse and view the bibliographic information and abstracts free of charge. The Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) Digital Library <http://www.sae.org/products/digitallibrary.htm> covers SAE Standards and Technical Papers. Once again, although the Digital Library is a subscription-based service, its content can be freely searched.

The final metadata repository I will mention may already be familiar:

IEEE Xplore <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/> contains documents from IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) journals, transactions, magazines, letters, conference proceedings and standards, as well as IEE (Institution of Electrical Engineers) publications. Metadata is freely searchable, with access to the full text via subscription or online article purchase.

Unlike some disciplines, engineering has been slow to develop open access journals. One of only a few initiatives is Petroleum Journals Online <http://petroleumjournalsonline.com/>, which is developing six open access journals in petrophysics, production geology, drilling, production, reservoir engineering, and petroleum management and economics.

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Part 3 - Trend Talk

One thing which seems to have modified the landscape of engineering information since I described it in 2000 is that there has been a clearout of several services which offered little more than directories of websites. More recently, a new breed of service, often based around a professional society or publicly funded initiative, has emerged, providing access to scholarly and research output of various kinds. Engineering papers, reports, standards, learning materials, images and more can be identified using these various services. Information (bibliographic details) about the content is free, and sometimes the content itself is freely available; otherwise the content is available to subscribers and/or by pay-per-view.

My personal view of the current engineering landscape is that it remains very complicated and fragmented. Many more sources could actually be added to the above list, and considerable effort is still required to locate relevant publications and other materials.

I predict that by the time I once more write for FreePint on this subject, the engineering information landscape will have changed yet again. In the future, services will evolve to take advantage of emerging Web 2.0 technologies. Community-driven services will be the order of the day, supplemented by aggregation facilities using metasearch and syndication protocols, and much more. Eventually, finding engineering information will become a simpler and less frustrating process, though such a transformation will require considerable effort, investment and co-ordination.

Reference: 1] Peters, T.A. (2002). Digital repositories: Individual, discipline-based, institutional, consortial, or national? The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 28(6), pp. 414-417.

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S-001

"The Library and Information Professional's Internet Companion"

Reviewed by Adrian Janes

Adrian Janes began his career in academic libraries. Since 1997 he has been a reference/information librarian with the London Borough of Havering library service. Among his influences are Gary Price, Samuel Beckett and Iggy and the Stooges.

This is a very wide-ranging book which touches on virtually every aspect of the Internet, from email to web page design, search engines to the Semantic Web. Given this range, and the book's relative shortness, in-depth discussion is not a strength. Rather, the subjects covered are treated in a series of concise introductions. These are supported with plentiful Web and bibliographic references.

The structure of the book does not always seem logical. For example, connecting to the Internet is not discussed until Chapter 8. However, I would suggest that, although it can work as a cover-to-cover read, this book is better treated as a resource to dip into. The authors have clearly striven to cover both the well-established aspects of the Internet as well as to anticipate some technologies (such as Instant Messaging) that seem likely to have an increasing impact on library and information work. So you are very likely to find, at least, some mention of any significant Internet-related technology, besides pointers to further information.

In a way, the book thus seems oddly contradictory, treating email and basic searching strategies alongside very contemporary subjects like blogs, wikis and RSS (Rich Site Summary - it's good for explaining many mysterious abbreviations). Surely the former are things we've been working with for years or, in the case of younger professionals, have grown up with so as to take them for granted? However, I would argue that the inclusion of such topics confirms the book's comprehensiveness, as well as providing some valuable reminders of first principles.

I was pleased that there are at least hints at the Internet's limitations, and the continuing relevance of books and libraries in which to house them. Nonetheless, the overriding impression is of the assumed superiority of electronic information sources and means of delivery. Given the book's intended audience, I would have liked to see more discussion of the pros and cons of print and online. Working in a public library, it is perhaps more striking than in other environments how so many people make that assumption, and thus the authority of what a website (merely because it is a website) puts before them. Unfortunately, unlike the academic libraries from which the authors draw many of their examples, it is not often possible to engage in education in information literacy, which might promote a more balanced attitude and more successful quests for reliable information.

But what this book chiefly aims to do is at least acquaint information professionals with the possibilities of the Internet rather than to debate it, and in this it is certainly successful.

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

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

She has an extensive network of contacts in the international business information sector amongst producers and users. A qualified information professional, Pam also has a social science degree.

Contact Pam Foster by email to <pam.foster@vivavip.com>.

"Trends in business information, provision and use"

By Pam Foster

The VIP publications, VIP and VIP Eye, are concerned with the business information industry - its products, its providers and its users. An analysis of their content for the fourth quarter of 2005 reveals a number of emerging trends:

Newspapers are struggling to find satisfactory business models

Many newspapers are experiencing falling subscriptions as more and more readers, especially younger people, shift their reading habits to the web. Consequently, some newspapers are attempting to protect their content by pursuing strategies that are unpopular with online users.

In an effort to drive up sales of its FT.com service, the Financial Times has enforced an embargo of its news content on all vendors. Today's FT content is available from noon (UK time) onwards. While this arrangement will have minimal impact on North American users, it has obvious implications for UK and other European users. Individuals and organisations that need the FT's electronic content early in the day will be forced to take out a subscription to FT.com.

According to Pearson's 2005 half-yearly results, sales of the Financial Times newspaper are falling, while sales of FT.com increased by more than 20%. However, some critics of the Financial Times claim that its declining newspaper circulation is not simply due to the influence of the web but is more to do with coverage. Critics claim that the paper has become too broad, concerning itself with countries and politics, rather than with news and analysis of companies and markets.

In an attempt to make money from its premium content, The New York Times has launched TimesSelect which provides subscribers with exclusive online access to 22 Op-Ed Business, Metro and Sports columnists of the New York Times and the International Herald Tribune, plus the NYT archive and other material. The vast majority of the NYTimes.com site is still freely available.

A few days after TimesSelect was launched, most of its content could be found on the web for free, thanks to the activities of bloggers who either summarised the copyrighted content for their readers or provided the full text of the material.

At a time when newspapers are facing declining ad revenues, the New York Times' strategy appears to be ill thought out. TimesSelect reduces the online exposure of the newspaper's top columnists, which will surely serve to drive traffic away from the New York Times site which will, in turn, concern the site's advertisers.

Newspapers in general need to adapt to meet the changing needs of their audiences if they are to compete with other web-based news services.

Further information on the strategies of both the Financial Times and New York Times is available in VIP Eye, Nos. 43 and 45 <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

Plenty of acquisitions, alliances and partnerships

The final quarter of 2005 was marked by some important acquisitions, alliances and partnerships, as companies sought to strengthen and enhance their products, and underlying technology.

VeriSign acquired Moreover a few days after it purchased Weblogs.com. The technology behind Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds and blogs is beginning to prove its usefulness in areas outside the blogosphere. VeriSign recognises that the ping, which is a mechanism used by bloggers to alert their audiences that they have added new content, is set to be a major force in changing web-based publishing models. By migrating Weblogs.com's ping service to its scalable ping infrastructure, VeriSign will be able to offer users of RSS feeds and real-time content a more robust platform.

At the same time, the Moreover acquisition will enable VeriSign to combine Moreover's content aggregation services with its global feed management infrastructure, to offer a real-time content platform to bloggers, publishers, enterprises and web portals.

Moreover aggregates over 12,000 online news sources and monitors millions of blogs to provide real-time news and comments related to business intelligence. A ping server takes pings from

content sources, blogs and the like, and these content aggregation services will utilise VeriSign's ping server infrastructure to increase the reliability and intelligence of its content distribution network.

Fuller details and analysis of the VeriSign acquisitions are published in VIP Eye, No. 44 <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

An in-depth review of CI-Newsdesk, Moreover's current awareness product, is published in the October 2005 issue of VIP <http://www.vivavip.com/vip>.

Hemscott bought Corporate Fundamentals, a Boston-based financial data company. The purchase is the third US data company to be acquired by Hemscott in a little over 12 months. All three acquisitions provide opportunities for Hemscott to improve its content and capitalise on the proprietary software belonging to each of the three companies.

The main attraction of Corporate Fundamentals is that it has its own proprietary technology that Hemscott will be able to utilise in enhancing and extending its own company information and data services, and which will provide a platform for future expansion of its data assets. Hemscott will also use the technology to deliver customised data collection to its clients.

The acquisition will enable Hemscott to make cost savings, as Corporate Fundamentals' data collection operations are based in India and Hemscott plans to extend the facility to its own needs.

Hemscott's other recent acquisitions include CoreData, a provider of US and Canadian company financial data, and bigdough, a US provider of information on fund managers, analysts and journalists.

Further information and analysis of the Hemscott acquisitions is published in VIP Eye, No. 46 <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

Reuters bought EcoWin, a Swedish private company that specialises in global macroeconomic data and analysis. The purchase is part of Reuters's growth strategy, which includes a focus on high value content to supplement the news, company information, research and analysis currently supplied by Reuters.

The EcoWin economic database comprises 5 million economic and financial time series, sourced from over 80 primary sources, covering more than 100 countries. The data is a good fit for Reuters as its clients need and use macroeconomic data.

Further information and analysis of the EcoWin purchase is published in VIP Eye, No.43 <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

LexisNexis and The Wall Street Journal forged an alliance which both companies claim will benefit the legal profession by providing it with business news and legal research.

Under the terms of the agreement, LexisNexis will become the exclusive distributor of law firms' subscriptions to The Wall Street Journal Online. In return, The Wall Street Journal Online will enhance its coverage of the legal sector by introducing a new page specifically aimed at lawyers. Online Journal subscriptions, available through LexisNexis, will also offer co-branding, cross-linking and access to legal content on the Lexis.com service.

The new arrangement, which is known as The Wall Street Journal Online in association with LexisNexis, is due to launch in January 2006.

Linking up with a major information provider is a shrewd move by The Wall Street Journal and one that should result in an increased subscriber base within the US legal community.

Further information and analysis on the LexisNexis/WSJ.com alliance is published in VIP Eye, No. 46 <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

Other major acquisitions and partnerships that were announced in the last quarter of 2005 include:

- Acquisition of IS.Teledata by Interactive data (please see VIP Eye, No.45 for further information)
- Acquisition of Millard Group by infoUSA, owner of OneSource (please see VIP Eye, No.45 for further information)
- Factiva partnership with Quilogy (please see VIP Eye, No. 45 for further information)
- Acquisition of Economy.com by Moody's (please see VIP Eye, No. 46 for further information)

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- Thomson Financial partnership with Interfax Business Service (please see VIP Eye, No.46 for further information)

A slow quarter for new products

Not many major new products were launched in the last quarter of 2005; most product news related to enhancements made to existing services. However, Euromonitor, Bureau van Dijk and IBM each launched major new additions to their existing portfolio of products.

Euromonitor has built on its country research data to develop and launch Country Insights, which provides analyses of political, economic, social and demographic trends at the national, regional and global levels. The new service combines articles, features and company profiles, with graphs, charts and rankings. Country Insights provides data for 205 countries. Currently, full data is available for 71 countries with the highest GDP.

An in-depth review of Country Insights, together with a review of Euromonitor's newly enhanced Global Markets Information Database (GMID), is published in the November 2005 issue of VIP <http://www.vivavip.com/vip>.

Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing (BvDEP) will soon be offering MINT GLOBAL, which will provide end-user access to the ORBIS database on the MINT platform. ORBIS provides data and news on more than 15 million companies worldwide. The MINT interface is simpler to use than BvDEP's classic interface. VIP published a review of MINT UK in the November 2004 issue. The review describes the product as having "an attractive, simple interface which is very easy to navigate".

Still under development, MINT SPAIN will shortly join MINT GLOBAL and MINT UK.

Further information on MINT GLOBAL is available in VIP Eye, No.46 <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

IBM, in co-operation with Factiva and Nstein Technologies, has launched Public Image Monitoring, a new piece of software that enables organisations to analyse commentary and information from consumer generated content such as blogs, consumer review sites, newsgroups, articles and news sites.

IBM says that Public Image Monitoring will be used by businesses to better understand how they are viewed by customers, investors and other stakeholders who have an impact on their brand reputation, by enabling them to detect early trends and emerging problems.

Further information and analysis of IBM's Public Image Monitoring product is published in VIP Eye, No.45 <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

Sector performing well but larger companies need to adapt

In the UK, some of the larger business information vendors aren't performing as well as their smaller competitors.

For the first time since the end of the 1990s, the UK business information sector has posted double digit profit figures for the latest financial year. A new survey by IRN Research* shows that after strong performances in 2000 and 2001, UK sales have declined 2.9% in the business information sector, year-on-year from 2002 to 2004. However, the IRN report points out that when two of the leading players - Reuters and Reed Elsevier - are excluded from the calculation, combined sales of the remaining companies increased by over 4%.

Average pre-tax profit margins for UK business information companies more than doubled in 2004, reaching 10% compared to only 4.2% in the previous year.

A separate IRN analysis of the interim results of European online companies in 2005, points to a good year with all the major companies registering double digit profit margins and sales growth of approximately 7%.

A further report, published by Outsell**, on Search Aggregation and Distribution Services (SADS) also singles out larger companies. Outsell's survey includes search engines, aggregators/hosts, subscription services providers and book distributors. As well as including established players such as LexisNexis, Dialog, Google, Yahoo!, etc., the survey also includes newer players such as Chinese search engine SINA.

Outsell forecasts that SADS will continue to outperform the general information industry's 9.8% growth rate, by growing 18% in 2005, and achieving a 17% compound annual growth rate from the 2005 - 2008 period.

However, Outsell predicts that changing attitudes toward search mean that users will shift to more targeted and effective means of obtaining important information. It offers some important advice for the larger companies. In order to survive, Outsell says that top SADS companies will need to respond to new customer demands for proactive personalised content delivery, RSS-powered self-aggregation, specialised vertical search, and content integrated into users' business applications.

* European Online Information Report is published by IRN in the spring of each year. Further information is available from David Mort. email: <dmort@irn-research.com>. web: <http://www.irn-research.com>.

** Search, Aggregation & Distribution Services Segment 2005 - Search Revolution Fuels Information Industry Upheaval, is available from Outsell. Tel. + 1 650 342 6060. email: <info@outsellinc.com>. web: <http://www.outsellinc.com/>.

Further analysis of the results of both the IRN and Outsell Surveys is available in VIP Eye, Nos 46 and 45 respectively <http://www.vivavip.com/eye>.

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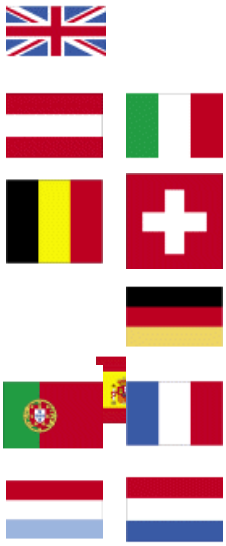

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A look back at what FreePint covered at this time in previous years:

- FreePint No.175 27th January 2005. "Professional Networking Online" and "Business awards: a review of the UK market" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/270105.htm>

  FreePint No.152 22nd January 2004. "Choosing and Changing Your Web Host" and "Global Resources for Forest Information" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/220104.htm>
- FreePint No.129 23rd January 2003. "Deep Linking" and "The 8 A's of Information" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/230103.htm>
- FreePint No.104, 24th January 2002. "Winter Olympic Adventures Online" and "Using Wireless Technology - where does the library fit in?" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/240102.htm>
- FreePint No.79, 18th January 2001. "Internet Resources for the Voluntary Sector" and "Online Business News: A Tale of Boom and Bust?" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/180101.htm>
- FreePint No.54, 20th January 2000. "Search Engine Promotion" and "Architecture: the science and art of finding it on the Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/200100.htm>
- FreePint No.30, 21st January 1999. "Information quality on the Internet" and "Computer Assisted Journalism" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/210199.htm>
- * FreePint No.6, 22nd January 1998. "Diagnosing Web Problems" and "The Best Medical Information on the Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/220198.htm>

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Contributors to this issue

William Hann (Managing Editor, FreePint), Penny Hann (Production Editor, FreePint), Pam Foster (Editor, VIP), Roddy Macleod, Vernon Prior, Adrian Janes, Plain Text <http://www.plain-text.co.uk/> (proofreading).

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