Free Pint ®

In This Issue
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Online Version
with Activated Hyperlinks
<http://www.freepint.com/
issues/210202.htm>

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<http://www.freepint.com/
issues/210202.pdf>

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Editorial

When you're running an online community like Free Pint, the development of new services depends a bit on trial and error. Nobody knows what will work and what won't when serving the needs of a particular group of people.

Free Pint's focus has always been on helping people perform research for work purposes. Therefore it was pretty much guaranteed that a place where our members can help each other with tricky research questions was going to be a popular place.

The Free Pint Bar was launched almost three years ago, and since then there have been over 14,000 questions and answers provided by 4,000 different Free Pinters. This has generated an enormous body of knowledge, in a database of some 1.2 million words.

Over time however we have seen similar questions being posted on topics that have already been covered. Since the Bar accounts for a third of the Free Pint Web site traffic, it is high time to offer an alternative browsing method than simply listing postings by date.

Therefore, over the last couple of months I have put my Information Science background to use and attempted to categorise the entire Bar. I have created a list of seven main categories which cover the majority of the 4,000 topics, and I have manually categorised 3,000 threads going back to my very first welcome message.

We have called this new browsable listing of postings by category the "Bar Browser". You can scroll the list of topics by category and by month, and can choose to see the first few words of each posting:

<http://www.freepint.com/
bar/browser>

When starting a new topic at the Bar,

posters are now asked to categorise their question and consult the Bar Category Guide which lists the seven categories and gives many examples under each heading:

<http://www.freepint.com/
bar/category>

The chosen category is then shown alongside the thread in the Bar, and included in the Bar Digest which is now sent to 7600 people three times a week. Simon and I keep an eye on the category chosen for each posting to ensure the integrity of the category system.

I hope you agree that this is a welcome addition to the Bar, and that the many hours spent creating the category system and categorising the existing postings has been worth the effort.

In today's Free Pint we have some great resource-packed articles on creating your own personalised news service, along with Web sites for entrepreneurs. These come with the usual mix of tips, reviews, jobs and event listings.

Don't forget to check out the fully-formatted version of this newsletter at <http://www.freepint.com/issues/> and the new Bar Browser at <http://www.freepint.com/bar/
browser>. If you find this edition useful then do pass a copy to your colleagues.

Best regards
William Hann, Founder and Managing Editor <william@freepint.com>

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 the substantial archive of articles, book reviews, jobs, industry news & events, with answers to your research questions and networking at the Free Pint Bar. Free Pint Regulars (paid-up members) also receive a weekly current awareness newsletter, discounts and publicity.

Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out.

To receive the Adobe Acrobat version as an attachment or a brief notification it's online, visit <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

My Favourite Tipples from Martin White

- <http://www.tagish.co.uk/links/> - Just about every link there is to UK public sector organizations in central and local government.

- <http://www.infonomia.com/english/map/index.asp> - A very novel information resources web site from Spain, including a list of great infonomists.

- <http://www.feynmanonline.com> - A celebration of the life and work of Richard Feynman, probably the most innovative scientific thinker of the 20th century.

- <http://qlinks.net> - A news service of developments within the European Union on information society issues, especially legal and regulatory.

- <http://www.gurteen.com> - Probably the best knowledge management resources site, and superbly engineered using Lotus Domino.

Martin White consults on intranet issues <http://www.intranetfocus.com> and retains his sanity at the organ bench <http://store.yahoo.com/ohscatalog/index.html>.

Email your top five favourite Web sites to <simon@freepint.com> or see the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

Free Pint Gold

This time last year Paul Pedley provided a site-packed article on sources of economics information around the world. Helen Clegg, who coincidentally is also writing for today's issue, gave a unique insight into Aboriginal resources.

- Free Pint No.81, 15th February 2001. "Economics sources" and "Aboriginal Australia on the World Wide Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/150201.htm>

Two years ago there were governmental sites, and an alternative look at Web searching using "web topic collectors".

- Free Pint No.56, 17th February 2000. "UK Political & Government Web Sites" and "Topics and Collections: An Alternative Metaphor for Using the Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/170200.htm>

In 1999 we covered environmental sites, whilst Tim Owen's overview of the Library and Information Commission has been outdated by the LIC's transformation into "Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries" and Tim's move to the Library Association.

- Free Pint No.32, 18th February 1999. "Environmental Information on the Internet" and "New Library: now comes the action" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/180299.htm>

Four years ago there was a review of the "exciting new search engine"

Northern Light who have now dropped their Web search (see <http://www.freepint.com/go/b14964>). This was followed by a look at current awareness resources, a popular topic at the Bar.

- Free Pint No.8, 19th February 1998. "A New Light on the Horizon" and "Current Awareness Research on the Internet" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/190298.htm>

Free Pint Fact

"Server uptime" is the number of days reported by a Web server since it was last rebooted. We used to think that a large uptime was something to strive for, and indeed there are even uptime league tables <http://uptime.netcraft.com/up/today/top.avg.html>.

However, we've subsequently decided that a server which hasn't been rebooted for a long time can't be very busy or isn't being looked after properly. We schedule regular maintenance for the main Free Pint server, to check the status of SQL tables, install new RAM, replace tired network cards, circumvent hacker attacks, etc. Our uptime currently stands at 19 days, and before that it was 61 days. Two months without a reboot is respectable; two years without a reboot is something to keep quiet about.

Free Pint Bar
In Association with Factiva
a Dow Jones & Reuters Company
Reviewed by Simon Collery
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/210202.htm#bar>

Free Pint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>

[Note: To read a posting enter the message number in place of XXXXX in the address
<http://www.freepint.com/go/bXXXXX>]

A Free Pinter asks if anyone remembers a controversy over the reliability of the CIA's World Factbook, thinking that the matter was discussed in the Bar (15793). I remember such a controversy, but not in the Bar. I have just established that it was about NATO's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade 'by accident' and blaming it on inaccurate CIA maps. I was working elsewhere at the time and we used the Factbook a lot, so the incident made us wonder how we could verify our data.

On checking up the story today I notice that the claim that the 'accident' was due to inaccurate maps is hotly disputed. So, is the Factbook unreliable, or can we assume that it was just a convenient scapegoat and that, really, we should trust its data? Perhaps the question is a political one but it seems to have important implications for information users.

In the past couple of weeks, Free Pinters have been researching real world applications of peer to peer, or p2p, search (15649), the term 'know what' in knowledge management (15800), unified messaging platforms in the UK (15633), communities of practice (15873) and the UK telecommunications industry (15874). Postings about ISO9001 (15679) and state owned enterprises in Europe, aside from the UK (15629), are still awaiting answers. So do pop in if you can help out.

Requests for quantitative data on the UK mobile telecoms market (15821), historical share price data (15644), how charitable donations are spent (15625), the number of PCs in Europe (15803), the number of cybercafes in the UK (15805) and the US management consultancy industry (15759) have been answered. But ones about the most popular wireless applications in the UK (15764) and UK coffin manufacturing data (15808) have not.

Business researchers have had most of their needs met, except for a couple of requests for a list of the top Asian business publications (15767) and valuation methods for fund management companies (15627). Other questions have been about service delivery best practices (15623), the UK electoral roll on CD ROM (15672), sample marketing plans (15666), bulk email lists (15760), suppliers of promotional materials and giveaways (15705), European financial services (15806) and importing cognac into the UK (15748).

We've had postings about Tibetan translations (15772), using Thai on Web sites (15792), a French phrase (15611) and the usual few Latin phrases (15621, 15864). There were also postings about the 'correct' abbreviation of PLC (15779) and standards for writing and revising documents (15812).

We had recommendations of resources covering doctoral dissertations (15783), knowledge management hot topics (15751), the history of the UK Housing Association Movement (15689) and some more German sites to add to that recent Free Pint article on the subject (15632). As a Tipple, I reviewed a European online media news portal (15718) and a business and economics portal (15921).

The more technically minded Free Pinters have been

discussing monitor resolutions (15787), opening .dat files (15699), flagging emails in Outlook (15807), creating undisclosed recipient lists (15799), using Windows system tools (15827), using alt tags in Netscape 6 (15841), creating charts in Excel (15741), clearing the IE history folder (15671) and converting .tiff files to text (15885).

There have also been questions about unmetered ISPs in the UK (15726), offering search engine optimisation as part of a Web design and hosting service (15690), software suitable for nursery booking and management (15732), accessing email from anywhere in the world (15781) and tracking down the source of an email where the sender has tried to hide their identity (15877).

There have been miscellaneous questions about freelance graphic designer rates (15875), laptop-type keyboards for PCs (15723), the ten best magazines for a high school library (15765), Web designers that specialise in working for charities (15604), submitting a manuscript to publishers (15869), UK PR and media relations courses (15879), film competitions (15667) and the rules birds follow when flocking (15876).

Free Pint Student Bar
<http://www.freepint.com/student>

[Note: To read a posting enter the message number in place of XXXX in the address
<http://www.freepint.com/go/sXXXX>]

In the Student Bar, a couple of students have been wondering what to do their dissertation on. One is studying library and information (2210), the other marketing (2212). Another student wants help finding bibliographical data (2229) while a fourth needs help completing a survey on Web searching (2177).

Students have also been researching public art on the Web and in the community (2176), the use of subliminal messages in advertising (2186), how job losses affect share prices (2204), increasing market share by offering a free subscription (2207), university funding in the US and the UK (2216), online communities and portals (2219), hospitality and catering data (2221), communities of practice (2226) and the UK telecommunications industry (2227).

Finally, there were questions about househunting in the UK's Northeast (2181), choosing PR as a career (2192), buying cheap computers (2202) and a UK internship for a US library and information science student (2206).

Simon Collery, Content Developer
<simon@freepint.com>

If you have a tricky research question or can help other Free Pinters then do post a message at the Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar> or the Student Bar <http://www.freepint.com/student>.

Factiva Learning Programs Launched

Factiva Learning Programs is a comprehensive suite of global learning tools for the enterprise. The suite of programs includes industry-leading e-training, online tutorials and product demos, regular Web-based seminars, targeted reference materials and acclaimed classroom training for corporate knowledge workers and information professionals. Visit
http://www.factiva.com/learning

Free Pint Jobs
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

As well as the listings below, you might also like to check out the new weekly Bar posting which lists the latest additions to Free Pint Jobs. This week's edition is at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b15938> and last week's is available at <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b15722>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Information Scientist
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1620>
An Information Scientist role to support key internal customer groups and aid the support of the cross-functional product teams.
Recruiter: Pfizer Ltd

Information Assistant
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1628>
Small, dynamic law firm require qualified Lib/Info grad. with 1yr experience to perform range of duties including law/bus research.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Senior Information Officer
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1633>
Qualified, online skills, 1-2 years exp.? Great job in small team at prof. services firm, research, current awareness, marketing service.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment and Services Limited

[The above jobs are paid listings]

Free Pint Jobs is THE place for information-related vacancies. Whether you're job searching or have a position to fill, you should be using Free Pint Jobs.

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

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

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

Spring is nearly with us, and March must surely be one of the busiest months of the year on the information-related conference scene.

At the beginning of the month in the UK, Liverpool hosts the Association of UK Media Librarians' (AUKML) "New media, New markets; Our emerging role" conference <http://www.freepint.com/go/e98>. "Internet Librarian International" is in London, but looking at the Exhibitor Lists on the Web site, the number of exhibitors this year will be well down on last <http://www.freepint.com/go/e114>. Straight afterwards in Glasgow there is the "1st International Conference on IT & Information Literacy (ITIL 2002)" <http://www.freepint.com/go/e75>.

In Europe, TFPL's invitation only "European Business Information Conference (EBIC)" is in Madrid <http://www.freepint.com/go/e85>.

Moving across the water, "Computers in Libraries", the library technology conference and exhibition, takes place in Washington, DC. <http://www.freepint.com/go/e112>. Whilst The Association of Dissemination and Information Centers (ASIDIC) look at the post- dot.com era in St. Augustine, FL, <http://www.freepint.com/go/e115>.

Details of these and many other conferences and exhibitions in the information industry can be found on the Free Pint Events page <http://www.freepint.com/events>.

Submit details of your event for free promotion, and keep us informed about any changes to current listings.

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**" The Revenge of Brand X:
How to Build A Big Time Brand
- on the Web or Anywhere Else"
Written by Rob Frankel
Reviewed by Lindsey Annison**

A hope of success online requires the discussion, and solution, of many issues, several of which are frequently overlooked in the website design and build process - internet marketing/Web PR and branding are two of the most important and oft forgot. A logo and slogan, and "we'll deal with that later" aren't enough.

Branding can have considerable lifetime impact on your online presence, particularly if you get it wrong. When tied in with a holistic mix of essential Web PR strategies, the results from branding can be persuasive!

Rob Frankel is an acknowledged expert on branding, and this book aims to show you how to build a Big Time Brand that works. Have a pen handy - you should be inspired for your company!

Rob is becoming an increasingly regular poster or moderator on some of the most respected 'Internet marketing' lists, sharing his knowledge and occasionally causing a stir. His contributions give the impression that despite his obvious potential to earn as much per hour as the average life insurance policy pays out, he is one of the Net's 'good gurus' and not just in it for a buck. Willing to assist, offer advice, and share expertise, he has a frank but humorous approach, imparting criticism and praise in a way that sort of makes you like the 'guy with the bobbing head'. Join the Frankelbee's and you will know just what I mean!

I do have one complaint about the book. In this day and age, most brands need to be global, but the book is that little bit too American for me, almost ignoring the potential readership around the world. For those of us whose heart does not skip a patriotic beat when "apple pie" or the Stars & Stripes appears on a page, some of the examples included are unclear or lack a certain 'oomph' to us non-Americans. It's a minor irritation compared to the value of the content overall - there are enough well-illustrated case studies and examples to clarify most points.

Action Items are included after each chapter to make you think, although some are there to lead you to an inescapable conclusion - "Rob was right!" - but the thought-process is valuable. His Big Time Branding Laws are written and explained in clear, no-nonsense language and are invaluable.

The first few chapters explain where branding is coming from in the 'New Media' age, and give prime examples of how to get it right, and spectacularly wrong! Evangelists, viral marketing, word of mouse, all come from a strong brand, and empowering your audience to explain the benefits of your products/services to others for themselves is clearly illustrated. Chapter 8 made me think this - "Be guerrilla, believe and be individual" - which all brand-owners should encourage in themselves. The second half of the book focuses more on practical online branding, with site design, tools, affordable brand-building, and the clearest case study of the lot - Rob Frankel's own Franklebiz.

Definitely a book to come back to for timely reminders, reassessment, and to convince any decision-makers around you that branding is not an issue to be left in-house to the techies, marketing, sales or advertising execs!

One for the bookcase, not under the monitor!

Lindsey Annison has been hyperactive on the Internet since 1996, and in business since early 1997 with Cybersavvy UK, specialising in promoting business websites beyond the search engines. Coined the term "Web PR" to cover all aspects of website promotion, advertising, online marketing etc when miffed with weighty emphasis on search engine promotion despite proof of results with her techniques. Is involved with some 1000 email discussion groups regularly, has an inbox of over 1Gb, and promotes many websites just for the hell of it. Affordable campaigns, professionally recognised expertise, belief in the impossible, and modesty - all offered.
<http://www.webpr.co.uk/?fpx>

Want access to past invoices or purchased reports?

Login to the Free Pint membership page to change your subscriptions, modify your Bar preferences, view copies of past invoices and access company reports you've purchased today:
<http://www.freepint.com/member>

Related Free Pint links:

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

- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0071348050/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0967991218/freepint00>

- "The Revenge of Brand X: How to Build A Big Time Brand - on the Web or Anywhere Else" ISBN 0071348050 (UK) ISBN 0967991218 (US) published by McGraw-Hill Education (UK) Frankel & Anderson, Inc (US) written by Rob Frankel

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Tips Article

<http://www.freepint.com/issues/210202.htm#tips>

"Searching for 'The Daily Me'"
By John Garside

'The Daily Me' - those few news stories you know that you yearned to read (after you found and read them).

Recently, online news can be:

1. Up-to-the-minute

2. Customised for *you*

3. 'Edited' by online communities

This article looks at these recent changes and follows through their impact on news gathering and on strategies for fetching your 'Daily Me'.

Up-to-the-Minute - Do you think the news was born yesterday?

Whereas a couple of years ago Web pages were indexed only monthly, now news stories are accessible and searchable in almost real time (within the last few minutes).

DayPop indexes news sites and/or weblogs every hour and detects changes to the page (though not specifically to the results for your search string) <http://www.daypop.com/>.

RocketNews results are typically a few hours old, but it doesn't recognise phrases <http://www.rocketnews.com/>.

AllTheWeb searches 3000 news sources <http://www.alltheweb.com/>.

You can target your search.

Northern Light is strong on press releases and you can narrow down searches to predefined categories and time spans <http://www.northernlight.com/news.html>.

NewsNow is good for British sources <http://www.newsnow.co.uk/>.

Moreover has 334 region and topic categories <http://w.moreover.com/categories/category_list_xml.html>

WorldNews <http://www.worldnews.com/>

Queryserver <http://www.freepint.com/go/b8670>

You can also search newswire sources directly at, say, Researchville. <http://www.researchville.com/1020/>

These news search engines are great for:

• Finding unique keywords and Boolean expressions (e.g. "weaponized anthrax")

• Getting certain 'important' news at the top of the search results (since many search engines have adopted Google's link popularity ranking)

• The second stage of news gathering - checking out

background, calling up related stories, drilling down, authenticating.

BUT, there are still thousands of news stories arriving every day.

The question remains: How can you sip from the water canon?

Customised for You - The Info Maestro

The Internet is better suited to separating and classifying information than any other medium. Information on the Net can be selected, sliced and diced from every angle, tossed and served up to taste.

And now The News can be too.

In Free Pint No.20, Nick Gilbert of the UK portal NewsNow compared news aggregators to "a supermarket going to relevant suppliers and bringing the goods to one location." <http://www.freepint.com/issues/060898.htm>.

Three years on, and the "stock" in your "supermarket's aisles" can be assorted and delivered at the click of a mouse. (This is becoming even easier with the adoption of RSS (Rich Site Summary) headlines. See NewsisFree <http://www.newsisfree.com/>).

Assorted, for example, by:

Media (video, Op-Eds, ...)
<http://www.singingfish.com/>
<http://www.opinion-pages.org/>

Topic (industry intelligence, infoAnarchy, thoughtcrime ...)
<http://www.prnewswire.com/industryfocus.shtml>
<http://www.newsisfree.com/sources/info/1548>
<http://zem.squidly.org/weblog/>

User-set (webloggers who've submitted to Daypop, Mormons ...)
<http://www.mahonri.org/>)
<http://www.daypop.com/top.htm>.

Joseph Pine II wrote in his book 'Mass Customization':

"Anything you can digitise, you can customise. Even mass customised print newspapers are simply a matter of programming."

He cited 'Farm Journal', a Philadelphia-based print publication with a subscriber base of 800,000, as an example.

Based upon customer profiles, the publication prints an average of 7,000 to 10,000 different editions each month, with targeted articles and advertisements based upon each farmer's personal profile.
<http://www.madcapps.com/writings/persNews.htm>

<http://www.agweb.com/userguide.htm>

However, niche and financial news aside, most news does not sort well.

In many cases it's not the "aisle" that's interesting, it's the (news) item.

How can you find those few news stories that you know nothing about, other than that you really want to read them?

Should you program a 'digital butler'?

Web guru Jakob Nielsen thinks this will be:

"An important concept in ten years, but not now. Matching technology is not sufficiently well developed to allow the computer to safely predict what stories will be of most interest to me". Nielsen (1998) <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/981004.html>.

Yahoo's Henry Sohn goes further: rather than the news being sifted and chosen for a passive audience, he sees the Web as an "Interactive medium, and everything else is secondary to that fundamental principle."

'Edited' by Online Communities - "... but I know a man who can"

Instead of top-down distributive media, packaged and shipped to consumers, what if ... a human (one with impeccable taste - yours) scoured the whole Net on your behalf and then gave you a heads up?

Prof. Jim Hall thinks that journalism's professional priesthood is off to the monastery.

"That control, usually manifest in news filtering and agenda setting around what is seen to be in the public interest now accrues largely to the consumer ..." (Online Journalism: a Critical Primer).

According to John Coate, general manager of the San Francisco Chronicle's SF Gate:

There's a "Growing infinitude" of very human editor-provocateurs bubbling under and fomenting "A revolution in how news and opinion circulate through the populace." <http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,45546,00.html>

Some of these "collaborative communities" have been around for a while:

Usenet can be searched with Google <http://groups.google.com/>

Listservs can be checked at Catalist, Topica, Yahoo! Groups and Google -- core search string -- "next message" "previous message" date subject "messages sorted by" (courtesy of Tara Calishain) <http://www.lsoft.com/catalist.html> <http://www.topica.com/> <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

Forums are still difficult or expensive to search, but try Messageking <http://www.messageking.com/>.

Other "affinity groups" are breaking new ground in collaborative filtering - "translating group behaviour into individual reccomendations".

Kuro5hin <http://www.kuro5hin.org/>

Advogato uses "Metrics of Trust" (think: Napster Community's "Add to Hotlist") <http://www.advogato.org/>

Wikis are populist encyclopedias/diaries <http://www.usemod.com/cgi-bin/mb.pl?MeatballWiki>

But the real explosion in personal publishing has come from the webloggers. Web-weaned, lean and timely, the blogs make use of many of the Net's strengths:

- The webbed environment

- Easy publishing, open to the hoi polloi

- Bi-directional hyperlinks

"The best news blogs offer a personal prism that combines pointers to trusted sources of information with a subjective, passion-based journalism."

These "pointers" - the links to news stories - as well as the reciprocal links to other blogs can now be searched.

You can search outbound links using Daypop or Blogfinder <http://www.daypop.com/top.htm> <http://www.blogfinder.com/>

Use Blogdex' Social Network Explorer or Daypop Top 40's "citations" to explore the reciprocal links between blogging "friends" (Think: Amazon's "Customers who bought items in your shopping cart also bought:"

The blogger liked it > you liked it > you like the blogger's links.) <http://blogdex.media.mit.edu/socnet/index.asp?ego=memepool.com>

Blogdex bookmarklets <http://www.shellen.com/2001_12_16_archive.shtml#8036732> <http://www.daypop.com/top.htm>

The good news is that once you pin down any of these 'soul-mate- editors', a nice little trickle of news stories is distilled from the 'funnel'.

Sidebar

'The Daily Me' is attributed to MIT professor Nicholas Negroponte.

True personalization requires an extra step: a recurring set of interactions between news provider and news consumer that permits you to tailor the news to your specific interests. Imagine a publication made up entirely of articles of special interest to you: stories about your hometown, your college, field of study, hobbies and interests, favourite bands, TV shows and sports teams, along with coupons and discounts for all the stuff you need to buy <http://www.well.com/user/jd/personalization.html>.

The INDISPensable News Searching Assistant (table) <http://www.japanacea.com>

Background

Weblogs and the News -- Where News, Journalism and Weblogs Intersect <http://www.well.com/user/jd/weblog/roundup.html>

News sites and user-generated content
<http://yelvington.com/article.php?sid=11>

Tracking Bloggers with Blogdex
<http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,45546,00.html>

Pass Me the Blog, Please
<http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/01/sd0614-blog.html>

Weblogs: A New Source of News
<http://ojr.usc.edu/content/story.cfm?request=588>

Delivering 'The Daily Us'
<http://aace.virginia.edu/aace/conf/webnet/html/156.htm>

Getting personal - New technologies tackle information glut
<http://www.informationhighways.net/mag/mprevious/01may02.html>

Could Blogging Assist KM? [Knowledge Management]
<http://www.wohl.com/wa0156.htm>

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" So you want to start your own business? Web resources that every budding entrepreneur should consult before taking the plunge"
By Helen Clegg

Perhaps you're stuck in a rut at work, looking for a new challenge or simply want to be your own boss - what do you really need to think about and weigh up before you venture out on your own? Even in more difficult economic times, there are always business opportunities and most governments of developed economies are trying hard to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit. This article takes a look at some useful US and UK web resources, which are worth consulting before making that big decision.

Web sites to zoom in on

OK, it's time to do some research on starting your own business, but where do you start? Let's take a look at some of the non-official web sites, i.e. sites which aren't connected with associations or government.

A good place to start is at <http://www.inc.com>. Inc. is a monthly US magazine with a sound reputation, whose target audiences are entrepreneurs and smaller businesses. On the home page in the advice column, there are two main sections of interest - Getting Started and Growing Your Business. Each of these sections has a number of subsections, which include well-written short guides on topics like writing a business plan, starting a business, running a one-person business, customer service, buying a franchise and e-commerce. As Inc. is a US magazine, its content obviously has a US-bias, so although all of it is relevant for US entrepreneurs, this is not the case for those in other geographies, e.g. the information on raising finance and capital. It's worth bearing this in mind when checking out other US web sites as well.

A site with a lot of information, including useful templates is <http://www.morebusiness.com> which is published by Kehra Communications Inc of the US. The site has been quoted in numerous magazines and newspapers as being very useful to entrepreneurs and those contemplating starting up on their own. For instance, it has appeared in web site rankings compiled by both Forbes and Fortune over the last few years. Under the Start-up tab at the top of the home page, there's a link to a Small Business Primer, which has some useful up-beat articles, e.g. Points to Ponder, 12 Steps to Entrepreneurial Success and 12 Steps to a Successful Business. Other useful sections on the site are Running a SmallBiz and Templates, where you'll find templates for press releases, business agreements and business checklists, as well as samples for each category.

A UK web site, which offers plenty of advice for starting your own business is <http://www.startups.co.uk>. The site has a professional look and feel; it's put together and maintained by Crimson Publishing Company Ltd. It has a number of categories including Starting Up, Franchising, Raising Finance, Finding Premises, Taking on Staff, Promoting your Business and Working from Home. In the Starting Up section, one article discusses the type of personality and skills needed to be successful in running your own business - definitely worth reading if you're about to take the plunge in this economic climate. Another feature of the site is the Services section, which links you to details of legal, tax advice and technical hotlines run by

the Startups web site - these are not free, but could be useful if you have a technical question and need an answer immediately. There's a section where you can search and browse for a business for sale too.

Startbusiness <http://www.startbusiness.co.uk> is another commercial UK site. There's no information on this site to say who's behind the venture, but nevertheless it has some good information for budding entrepreneurs. The Site Index is the place to begin. The best information sections here are those entitled Business Plans, Checklist and Books. Other sections such as Startup Statistics and Sacred Cows, don't really add much value, but there's a section called Case Studies, which could prove useful once it's ready.

Back to the other side of the Atlantic, and there's PowerhomeBiz <http://www.powerhomebiz.com> an online magazine published by a company of the same name. It's billed as "offering a wide range of high quality information and tools for home businesses". This site is worth visiting for a dose of motivation. Just check out the Success Stories section, which profiles people who've succeeded in starting up as well as those who have been awarded the title of Small Business Person of the Year by the US Small Business Association. All the stories ooze with enthusiasm, which is what's needed by any entrepreneur. For example, there's a long profile of Geese Police, the small business that David Marcks founded in 1986. Geese Police is now a thriving company which uses dogs to chase geese off corporate properties, parks and golf courses! Other sections on the web site range from Tools & Solutions - basically a list of suppliers, to Small Biz News and Consult Your Guide - a question and answer page. The US Entrepreneur magazine's web site <http://www.entrepreneurmag.com> merits a surf too, covering all the usual topics from Start-Up Basics, Getting Ideas, to Naming your Business and Market Research.

Web sites for the young and young at heart

If you're between the ages of 16-30, then be sure to bookmark Shell Livewire <http://www.shell-livewire.org>, the site run by Shell to accelerate and help young business ideas. But even if you're over 30, it's still a good web site to browse around, as it covers all the basic aspects of entrepreneurship and starting your own business. A lot of the text is in question format too, so you start thinking about the pros and cons of starting up on your own. On the home page, the box labelled "Information to get you started" takes you to web pages highlighting the right skills, the right idea, FAQs and e- commerce. The page on e-commerce leads to a series of questions in pop-up boxes making you seriously contemplate whether your proposed business venture really does require a web presence. The FAQs section is good and covers such areas as who are my potential customers, how will I sell my product or service, why should I keep financial records?

If you know what you want to do and are just looking for more information on business plans, download the handy pdf document called "Writing your First Business Plan". You'll get to it by clicking on the box called "Want to Win 10,000 pounds?" From this page, you can also meet the finalists of the Shell Livewire Business Start Up Awards. Once you've read about them, you'll definitely be inspired and motivated!

The Prince's Trust <http://www.princes-trust.org.uk> was founded by the Prince of Wales in 1976. One of its aims is to help young people in the UK between the ages of 18-30, who want to start their own business. The trust can help with loans, grants and arrange for young entrepreneurs to receive advice from a Business Mentor during their first three years of trading. So far, the trust has helped over 400,000 young people. To read about its achievements, check out the web page called Difference to Me, which is under Exchange Ideas. Although there's no specific information on how to start your own business on the web site, it's a good organization to know about if you are eligible for its support.

Web sites for women only!

A couple more commercial sites, aimed at women, are <http://www.ivillage.co.uk> and <http://www.busygirl.co.uk> . Here's an interesting statistic on women-owned businesses - according to the Startup Statistics section of <http://www.startbusiness.co.uk>, "Businesses owned by women are more likely to operate in credit than male-owned companies (56 per cent:51 per cent)". From the ivillage.co.uk home page, choose the Work & Career channel for more information. This channel has articles on career shifting, the pros and cons of working from home, freelancing and how to start your own business. In the section on how to start your own business, there's a step-by-step guide called SEED - Sustainable Enterprise and Empowerment Dynamics, created by entrepreneur Lynn Franks and billed as "The feminine way to create business".

The SEED program is food for thought and contains some practical exercises too. The Busygirl web site is a good place to go if you're looking specifically for information on Internet start-ups, Internet incubation, venture capital and emerging technologies. There are links to networking forums, details on web training and an online discussion forum too. The site was announced in July 2001 by the Sunday Times as the UK's best site for women entrepreneurs.

Getting serious - web sites belonging to government departments, associations and official organizations

Now to the more traditional resources for entrepreneurs and self- starters - government, official organizations and associations. Again, there are a number of choices, both for US and UK residents. If you're based in the UK, then take a look at the Inland Revenue's web site <http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk>. One of the featured areas is Starting up in Business. This hyperlink takes you to a handy guide on starting your own business and is available in both html and pdf format. As the information is provided by the Inland Revenue, the emphasis is on tax and national insurance issues, but there's plenty of other useful information as well, covering launching, growing and maintaining your business. The National Federation of Enterprise Agencies, <http://www.nfea.com> is a network of independent not-for- profit local enterprise agencies. From this umbrella web site, you can find your local enterprise agency representative and see how they can help.

There's also a hyperlink to a great-sounding web site called Smallbusinessadvice <http://www.smallbusinessadvice.org.uk>, an independent source of information, whose target audiences are entrepreneurs, owner-managers, the self-employed and those thinking of starting or running a business with a staff of less than ten and who are located in England. Resources include business planning guidelines (Getting Started, Business Plans, Free Downloads), e-business information, a business chat room, a business discussion group and links to other useful web sites. Registration is

required for the unique feature of the site - the Business Enquiry Service. Once you have registered, you can send enquiries directly via this service to one of the 200+ accredited business advisers, who are all members of the UK Enterprise Agency Network.

If you're based in the US, then a visit to the web site of the Small Business Administration at <http://www.sba.gov> is worthwhile. Here you'll find sections on Starting your Business, Financing your Business, Business Opportunities as well as an Online Library. Even if you're not based in the US, a visit to the Online Library is a must. The library is divided into Reading Rooms e.g. Laws & Regulations, Reports, Studies & Statistics and Publications. The Publications Reading Room contains the most comprehensive and thoroughly researched guides and fact sheets on the subject of starting your own business - it's a real gold mine. Choose from Marketing Strategies for Growing Businesses, Strategic Planning for Growing Businesses, Pricing your Products and Services Profitably, Business Plan for Home Based Businesses, Checklist for Going into Business or Avoiding Patent, Trademark and Copyright Problems.

All the guides and fact sheets are available in three formats - text, Word 97 or pdf. Tracking back to the section on Starting your Business, there are two useful subsections - Your First Steps, written in question format to really make you think hard, and Business Plans, from where you can download a start-up kit. No business can get off the ground successfully without a good business plan, so it's worth spending some time reading up on how to write them. If you're looking for inspiration again, then go to the Success Stories page - there are lots of short stories to get you motivated. How about "Cookie Dough Balls have Everybody Goin' Ape" or "The Goddess is Alive and Prospering in Marblehead?"

To end this brief review of web resources published by government, official organizations or associations, take a look at the Start Your Own Business Guide researched and written by Ron Immink and Brian O'Kane, which is available on the web site of the Irish Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment <http://www.entemp.ie/syob>. The guide is in four parts - and takes the form of an extended traffic light, but with four lights - Ready, Steady, Go and Keep Going. It really is a first-class guide. There's lots of information and questions to get you thinking. Each traffic light section takes the format of a workbook too, so once you've printed the four sections out, you can start putting your answers

down on paper, knowing that at the end of the exercise, you'll be a lot clearer about the feasibility of your business. So if you want to know what makes an entrepreneur, or how to develop your idea or how to identify future trends, be sure to check this site out.

Don't be stuck in a rut any longer - use the above web resources to weigh up if you really can take the plunge successfully and become your own boss!

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