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Discussion,
Tips, Reviews
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FreePint is a global network of people who find, use, manage and share work-related information. Members receive this free twice-monthly newsletter, which is packed with tips, features and resources.

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The FreePint Newsletter is available online in several formats and can be read, saved and forwarded at <http://www.freepint.com/issues/>.

Editorial

Nearly 10 years ago, my then-fiance arrived at the airport with his bicycle packed in a big box and little else. After an agonizing, two-year long-distance relationship, I was nearly delirious with joy to be with him permanently. It was one of the happiest days of my life.

This summer will mark our diamond-jewellery anniversary and nearly a decade of my stepping over his dirty laundry in front of the shower (how can he not see it for three days in a row?), his putting up with my snarky comments, and too many little aggravations to name here.

I love him more than ever, but any couple will tell you it's not clean bathroom floors and kind words all the time. When two parties combine different genders, different upbringings and different nationalities, they've got to learn how to get along.

Anyone who's worked in a library-cum-IT environment knows all about how rocky a merger can be. That's why we asked Allan Foster to write about what happens when a computer department merges with a library -- an event that, increasingly, more information professionals are facing these days.

In this issue, we also have a review of "Real World Research Skills: An Introduction to Factual, International, Judicial, Legislative, and Regulatory Research" from Deborah A. Liptak. And as this is the last issue of 2006, we asked Karen Loasby to take a retrospective look at the world of information architecture over the last five years.

The end of the year is always a good time to review progress, so take a few minutes to tell us what you think about FreePint. We'd like to know how we've done in 2006 and what you'd like to see in 2007. Please send your comments to me, or if you prefer to submit anonymously, use the suggestion box feature on the FreePint website <http://www.freepint.com/suggestionbox.htm>.

Until then, happy holidays and see you again next year.
Sincerely,

Monique Cuvelier
Editor, FreePint
e: monique.cuvelier@freepint.com
w: <http://www.onopoly.com/support/team/>

My Favourite Tipples

by Cynthia Padilla

Cynthia Padilla is an information professional specializing in research and analysis of international laws, regulations, and policies. Current project: potential liabilities for financial companies in Saudi Arabia.

Submit your top five favourite Web sites. See the guidelines at

http://www.onopoly.com/author.htm

Whether keeping up with international issues for work or pleasure, I have found the following sites useful:

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/bls/other.htm> lists international statistical agencies on the Web.

- Kidon Media-Link <http://www.kidon.com/media-link/index.php> offers links to all forms of media worldwide: newspapers, magazines, television, radio and news agencies. You can search by country or by language.

- The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) <http://www.gemconsortium.org/> measures entrepreneurial activity in a global context. Handy if you need to understand the relationship between entrepreneurial activity and national economic growth.

- LIBWEB <http://lists.webjunction.org/libweb/> lists libraries from over 135 countries.

- Asknumbers.com <http://www.asknumbers.com/> is an online conversion site. Convert weights, distance, currency, computer storage, temperature, cooking, clothing and much more.

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- The Big Three, Compared: How do Factiva, LexisNexis and Thomson Business Intelligence stack up in areas that matter to information practitioners and information seekers?

- First Glance at Second Life: Jill Hurst-Wahl shares her experience as a Second Life denizen

- Backward Glance at Online Information: Pam Foster comments on news, surprises and celebrations of the annual information industry exposition

- Speaking Up: Users comment frankly, if anonymously, on what they like and loathe about major vendors' offerings

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- **Jan** - Reviews: FactSet & Capital IQ
- **Feb** - Asia-Pacific: Business information needs and resources for exploring and working along the Rim.

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Country: Bermuda
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j6202>

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Monique Cuvelier is Editor of the FreePint Newsletter. She has served as editor of several publications and her writing has appeared in Publish, USA Today, Bankrate and many others.

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Many information professionals have been busy with conferences and award ceremonies these last couple weeks, but the FreePint Bar is still bustling. Read below for summaries, and then drop by for discussion <http://www.freepint.com/bar/>.

- In the movies, there's no cure for becoming a zombie, but one poster hopes there's help in the internet world. His domain is being spoofed in e-mail headers to send spam, and he's scouting for effective remedies. Lend comforting words here http://www.freepint.com/go/b83277

- Christmas is cash-in time for pubs across the UK, and one Bar member wants to look more deeply into the Scottish pub market. Her request has ordered up a list of useful resources. Check them out http://www.freepint.com/go/b83318

- Rankings of content management systems are hairy, but a couple of Baristas are trying to choose a dependable product. One is looking for an alternative for the education sector: http://www.freepint.com/go/b84882, and another http://www.freepint.com/go/b85541 is looking for a general source. The latest issue of VIP http://www.vivaVIP.com/, which compares the Big Three business-information products, includes review methodology for complex products, which could be helpful to apply to CMS evaluations. Be sure to check it out.

- If you were to employ a historian to deal with local studies and genealogy enquiries, how would you describe that person? Help this FreePinter come up with a job description for a pending job vacancy at a public library http://www.freepint.com/go/b82463.

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September, 2006

Comment

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"Convergence Counselling: Integration of IT Departments and Libraries"

By Allan Foster

Allan Foster <http://www.allanfoster.co.uk> has had a 36-year professional career which has taken him across public library, polytechnic, university and special library sectors. Most recently he has been Director of Information Services at Keele University responsible for libraries, IT and media services. He is a frequent speaker at conferences, seminars and professional meetings nationally and internationally and a prolific author. He has been a consultant to a number of companies and public sector organisations in the UK, mainland Europe, Asia and South America, and is external examiner at two UK universities. He has a degree in social sciences and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals. From 1st November 2005 he's consulting, writing, teaching and doing applied research in the information sector.

Integrating libraries and computer services, often together with other service units, has been one of the most interesting developments in universities, particularly in the UK and USA, in the last 20 years. Pioneering initiatives using the concept of the 'chief information officer' role can be traced back to the early 1980s to Columbia University and Carnegie Mellon University.

However, it became much more widely adopted in the UK in the late 1980s and first half of the 1990s. This was encouraged in part by the influential Follett Committee Report <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/papers/follett/report>, published in 1993, which pushed UK university libraries to re-evaluate their changing roles and how they work with information technology. More recently, there's been a dynamic in the USA to create services that are 'greater than the sum of its parts', as spelled out in this article from Chris Ferguson, dean of Information Resources at Pacific Lutheran University in Washington, USA <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0432.pdf>.

The shape of this so-called 'convergence' is highly variable -- almost as variable as the reasons for doing it in the first place. And convergence has had a somewhat mixed record of success.

Crossed functions

Whatever the motivation behind it, there is no doubt that this kind of integration, in one flavour or another, has become a popular strategy, with more than 70 per cent of universities in the UK adopting some kind of serious convergence and common management. By 'serious', I mean at least having a single person devoting most of her/his time to the leadership of these services. The functions embraced by these structures include, in order of frequency:

* Library * Academic computing service * Audio-visual/media/educational development unit * Administrative computing * Website management * Telephone services * Reprographic services (photocopying, printing, etc.) * Teaching/learning initiatives and/or staff development

In the US, the responsibility for broadcasting services (campus television and radio stations) can be added to this list. In the UK, unusually, one university's converged service at one time embraced student services (including careers advice), child care and the chaplaincy. In-house spiritual guidance would be very useful for those managers struggling with the task of defining an information strategy for their institutions in this environment!

Fundamentally, four imperatives, matters of both principle and expedience, have driven universities down this road. Briefly, these are:

1. Pedagogy and customer orientation

Changes in teaching and learning methods demand new arrangements for the delivery of support services. Learners (or researchers, come to that) have no respect for the increasingly artificial barriers between

these services. In tune with the current age, the customer (student, researcher, member of staff) is rightly king. The strong customer service orientation of many academic libraries can be a powerful influence on the unified, mixed professional teams that have emerged.

2. Strategic and managerial leadership

These services need professional management and can be more effectively administered collectively. This major collective activity, usually consuming between 4 and 6 per cent of a university's total budget, needs to be represented on the institution's senior management team. This is more easily achieved through an executive head or a more or less full-time senior academic leader.

Several universities also have converged because of the actual or imagined weaknesses in the management of the individual services. The 'managerial fix' is hardly the best of motives for convergence, but it can be a practical driver for much needed change. Indeed, some thought leaders have said that the necessary radical change in their own institutions couldn't have been brought about without the engine of convergence. Read more in this interview with Mel Collier, previous director of the International Institute for Electronic Library Research at De Montfort University http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue14/view-hill.

The University of Kansas proved that the change process involved with an organisational convergence initiative can be extremely important in helping the participants identify new approaches to supporting teaching and

research <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERB0602.pdf>.

3. The resource imperative and economics of scale

Linked to the above, integrating services can generate resource synergies, such as the economies of scale in blending administrative and secretarial support. The downside is it gives heads of universities or their finance directors the opportunity to say things along the lines of, 'Well, your budget is GBP 10 million, so it will be easy for you to save GBP 150,000!' In some cases convergence has provided a good opportunity to deskill technical support, putting more flexible effort into user support, liaison and training, with commensurate savings in expensive central staffing.

4. Technological

The starting point for many debates about convergence is the trend for computing services and libraries to be driven together in an increasingly digital world. The fundamental change for computer centres (few institutions use this term anymore) over the past 25 years has been from offering centralised, mainframe-based services, oriented to a small and elite group of researchers, to providing a much wider range of services to the entire university community. This wide clientele requires a very different kind of support, usually PC- and networked-based. Additionally, many universities have built explicit objectives for the development of information literacy (technology and content) skills into a common curriculum for all students and staff.

At another level, the powerful networks that underpin the institutional IT infrastructure have brought with them an ever-growing demand for information services. In their turn, libraries have increasingly embraced electronic sources and delivery services. Once again, this has brought computing services and libraries into the same arena.

Managerial structures

Clive Field pointed out in his article "Theory and Practice: Reflections on Convergence in United Kingdom Universities" <http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/aw/liber/lq-3-01/10field.pdf> that it's possible to distinguish between 'organisational or formal convergence', in which services are brought together for management purposes, and 'operational or informal convergence' in which the detailed functions or operations of the services are changed or merged.

He says: 'It isn't strictly necessary to have organisational convergence for operational convergence to take place; for instance, heads of services can work collaboratively -- say, on joint strategic planning, end-user training or provision of student PCs -- without any integration of management occurring'. It is also the case that services can be organisationally converged while demonstrating little operational convergence.

The management arrangements for converged services differ greatly. Sometimes a senior academic leader is 'chairman', with the librarian and the director of computing reporting directly. Or there may be an executive director as overall manager, with computing and library services

operating separately, probably in different buildings on the main campus. A third possibility is an executive director and some operational convergence, probably in the user services area. The services occupy the same building, but this is unlikely to be purpose-built. Many, perhaps most, services have variants of these models, but the above can be seen as points along a continuum.

Setting aside the strategic planning and management role, what kinds of operational convergence are possible? A number of important areas can be developed, including:

1. Liaison with academic departments, and involvement with programme design. Many academic libraries have developed responsive relationships with departments through their subject librarians. Computer services generally have not followed this approach. Is it possible for faculty and subject librarians to take over a more general

role, representing the converged information services? A number have shown that this is possible, albeit with a new breed of IT-savvy LIS professionals.

2. Inquiry and help desk services. Shared buildings provide great possibilities for common services. This could be one of the obvious ways of trying to develop the multi-skilled 'learning support' professionals, explained further in the M3/93 Fielden Report from the Higher Education Funding Council for England <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/HEFCE/1994/m3_93.htm>, supported by a variety of commentators. There is a major issue with the education and training of staff who can work effectively in such a converged environment. Where will such staff come from? Are the university schools of library and information science producing sufficiently flexible and skilled professionals to occupy such roles? The signs are mixed.

3. Training in information use and IT skills. Combined training creates the potential for imaginative programme design, both at an induction and advanced level. Most universities routinely provide training for staff and students in the use of networked e-resources alongside more conventional software packages. This can and should be a joint and coordinated effort between library and computer services colleagues. The production of integrated documentation across a range of software and data products supported by the converged department also offers opportunities for effective promotion and dissemination.

4. Development projects and information services. Many projects require the collaboration of computer and library staff. Obvious examples

include the evaluation, implementation and maintenance of virtual learning environments (VLEs), of computerised library management systems, and the set-up and maintenance of the university's website. The management of some university websites is a team effort between the marketing/communications people, IT specialists and professional librarians. They each bring important and complementary skills to the design and maintenance of the system, and they can work productively together. There is no doubt that such projects, and the determination of priorities within and between them, are more easily managed in a converged environment.

De-convergence

A number of downside factors have restricted the success of converged services or sometimes led to a process of de-convergence.

* Forced marriages often don't work; they have a much better chance of it succeeding if it's not just a 'top down' strategy but a mutual agreement between all or most of the staff involved that this is a more productive way of organising themselves.

- Over- (and expensive) management is always a threat.

- Recruiting top staff may be inhibited because of perceived professional-role confusion.

- A large information services budget will be visible and possibly vulnerable.

- The lack of staff mobility can frustrate change.

- Physically separating the services can cause logistic difficulties.

- There can be genuine role confusion between colleagues who don't -- or can't -- understand an integrated philosophy.

Few people will rehearse the objections of Fred Ratcliffe and David Hartley, respectively librarian and director of the University Computing Service at Cambridge, in a joint letter to The Times Higher Education Supplement in March 1993. While recognising the growing complementarities of the library and computing services, Ratcliffe and Hartley cautioned against convergence and ended up with the extraordinary statement that 'At the very least the priorities and management needs in two such diverse bodies are incompatible'.

Of course, convergence can never be a simple panacea for universities or any other organisation. The decision to adopt this approach will depend on many local circumstances: institutional culture, organisational politics (and power!), history, geography, managerial structures and, most important of all, personalities.

A number of universities who adopted convergence in the 1980s have since de-converged, including my own university when I left towards the end of 2005. As always, there were situational reasons for this but I was very disappointed when I heard of the

decision and still believe that it was a serious mistake. I remain convinced that, for many universities, there is a clear balance of advantage for some kind of converged model. But as Mandy Rice-Davies <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandy_Rice-Davies>, one of the dramatis personae in the Profumo scandal which rocked the UK Government in the early 1960s, famously said 'he would say that, wouldn't he'.

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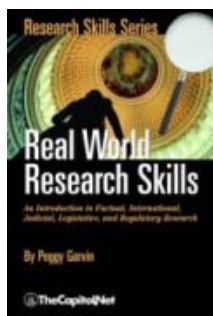
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"Real World Research Skills: An Introduction to Factual, International, Judicial, Legislative, and Regulatory Research"

Written by Peggy Garvin
Reviewed by Deborah A. Liptak

Do you need proof that great things do indeed come in small packages? Real World Research Skills begins with a chapter on information literacy skills and evaluation, which are the building blocks for formulating basic questions and making informed decisions. Peggy Garvin states in the introduction that this book will cover United States government online sources for factual, international, judicial, legislative and regulatory sources. She sticks to this topic and uses practical examples from current legislative and regulatory websites. I was familiar with the majority of the websites presented and the links are current and up to date.

Garvin is well suited to write this book. She has a Master's degree in Library Science from Syracuse University and over 20 years experience in libraries. She edits the "United States Government Internet Manual" (Lanham, MD : Bernan Press, c2006), contributes to "The Congressional Deskbook", (Alexandria, VA : TheCapitol.Net, Inc., c2005), and writes a monthly column, The Government Domain, for LLRX.

Her book is easy to read and uses an outline form. Icons alert the reader to features such as the search guide, research tips, information resources, a checklist and reference information. Special features include charts, graphs and illustrations of the legislative process, the judicial system and regulatory system. Links to tutorials, processes and rulemaking, and search tips for selected government sites are included. The book is well indexed, which is essential in a reference book.

The supplementary 12-page Table of Web Sites adds extra value.

Because a novice researcher often needs to consult state and international resources guides to track legislation effectively, "Real World Research Skills" provides them with accurate direction. Expert and insider information, advice and tips include when to consult a person as an information source, how to plan an information gathering call and how to obtain the information you need during the conversation.

"Real World Research Skills" is as thorough as other books on this topic:

- "U.S. Government on the Web: Getting the Information You Need", by Peter Hernon, Robert E. Dugan, & John A. Shuler, Westport, CT., Libraries Unlimited, 2003.

- "Government Online: One-Click Access to 3,400 Federal and State Web Sites", by John Maxymuk, New York, Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2001.

- "Government Information on the Internet", by Greg R. Notess & Peggy Garvin, Lanham, MD., Bernan, 2002). It is also very current, although Google's U.S. Government Search <http://www.google.com/ig/usgov> has replaced Google's Uncle Sam <http://www.google.com/unclesam> since its publication.

Deborah A. Liptak, MLIS, <deb@debsinfo2go.us> is the owner of info2go, a 'Reference Librarian for Rent' service to individuals and small businesses, which occasionally need research and answers to specific questions and do not employ a corporate librarian or researcher. Info2go specialises in locating and delivering government documents, public records and primary research beyond what is available on Google Books, WorldCat or FirstSearch. Deb publishes Need to Know by info2go, a monthly newsletter <http://www.debsinfo2go.us/needtoknow/needtoknowindex.html> and RSS feed <http://www.debsinfo2go.us/needtoknow/needtoknow.xml>.

Little wonder, considering TheCapitol.Net is the book's publisher, which has its roots in Congressional Quarterly. They are well-known experts in congressional operations, legislative and budget process, communication and advocacy and other related topics. They offer training courses and publications to government and business leaders since the late 1970s. TheCapitol.Net offers eight educational tracks. "Real World Research Skills", part of their Research Skills Track, is a no-frills text on United States Federal Government research, and for its small size and reasonable price, I believe it delivers a big bang for the buck.

Related FreePint links:

- "Real World Research Skills: An Introduction to Factual, International, Judicial, Legislative, and Regulatory Research" published by The Capitol.Net

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

- "Insurance: a review of websites" By Trevor Harvey <http://www.freepint.com/issues/161003.htm#tips>

- "Promoting Information and Search Skills" By Jean Bedord <http://www.freepint.com/issues/300605.htm#feature>

- "Legal Resources on the Web" by Elizabeth Elliott <http://www.freepint.com/issues/030998.htm#feature>

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Related links:

- "Real World Research Skills" companion website <http://www.RealWorldResearchSkills.com>

- The Virtual Chase, Database of Sources, Legal Research, Legal Resources <http://www.virtualchase.com/topics/legal_research_index.shtml>

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"2001 to 2006: Five Years of Information Architecture"

By Karen Loasby

Karen Loasby is Information Architecture Team Leader for BBC Future Media and Technology.

In 2001, FreePint featured an article on the still-new concept of information architecture (IA) in "Information Architecture and web Usability Resources" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/190701.htm#tips>. Five years on, IA may still be an unfamiliar term for many, but it is a booming field bustling with conferences, books and rather desperate recruitment consultants struggling to fill a myriad of vacancies.

Some things haven't changed since Hal P. Kirkwood wrote his article. He described information architecture as a 'more thoughtful approach to web design' and portrayed information architects as pitched against designers and developers who wanted to 'ensure that their sites were cool or hot'.

The topics of the day were understanding your audience, site organisation, navigation and labelling. There were plenty of badly organised websites, so there was plenty of work to be done. There still is. Most companies have a more grown-up attitude to their websites, but that doesn't mean the crimes of executive-centred design and organising your site like your organisation have gone away.

However, five years is a long time on the web. Some topics we consider staples in today's IA are startlingly absent from that early article: facets, content management, folksonomies and Web 2.0.

Faceted classification is hardly a new idea -- people have been categorising data with multiple classifications, rather than hierarchies such as the Dewey Decimal system, for years. But it wasn't

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- Heavier Responders in Online Survey Research: Professional Panel Management Matters

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a concept represented in the average early website. In 2001, most IA literature considered 'search' and 'browse' to be entirely separate concepts and that to 'browse' was inevitably through a hierarchical structure. Many in the web world were uncomfortable with hierarchies. They feared that they represented an authoritarian interpretation of the world and, more practically, they didn't necessarily help people find what they were looking for. Faceted approaches alleviated some of those fears, and in 2005 there were eight sessions at the American Society for Information Science and Technology's Information Architecture Summit <http://www.iasummit.org/> that discussed the use of facets in search and browse.

The 2005 IA Summit also showed the progress of web content management. In 2001 CMS Watch <http://www.cmswatch.com/> was only new, but by 2005 hand-coding a large-scale website was no longer deemed a sane thing to do (this is not the same as saying that no one was doing it). For IAs this meant new topics: content modelling, content reuse and a renewed interest in metadata.

Some in the industry were concerned by the prevalence of words like 'audit', 'control' and 'management' creeping into their working life. They were relieved by the arrival of Web 2.0 in 2004. It remains a popular buzzword. Its precise definition is disputed but it can be considered to describe a different interaction model, a particular technological approach and a distinct philosophy (one of an open, democratic, collaborative web). It can also be considered one big game of buzzword bingo, encompassing Ajax, RIAs, web apps, a web of data, APIs, the long tail, RSS, CSS, perpetual beta, social software, mash- ups, podcasts, hackability, network effects, blogging, wisdom of the crowds, citizen journalists and emergent everything.

Now there is a uniting visual style of Web 2.0 architecture, and wannabes can be identified by their use of star-shaped badges, soft shadows, large type, reflections and gradients. The style has become somewhat ubiquitous and has attracted the associated mockery. Look beyond the superficial details, though, and Web 2.0 has created huge opportunities for information architects through the enthusiasm for ideas such as the web of

data and an increased focus on semantically valid mark-up. It has also raised concerns that the focus on the user creating and organising the content dismisses the importance of the IA role.

One feature of Web 2.0 that has been of particular interest to IAs is a folksonomy. A folksonomy is a neologism for collaboratively created, free-text tags and was coined by Thomas Vander Val in 2005 . Many IAs first encountered folksonomies on the photo sharing website Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/> or the bookmarking application del.icio.us <http://del.icio.us/>.

Many implementations of folksonomies include a 'tagcloud'; a list where the popularity of tags is indicated by font size. The Flickr tagcloud shows that photos of weddings, friends and flowers are popular. This is not meant to be an earth-shattering revelation, but it tells something of the personality of the site. Folksonomies are simple, cheap and helpful but most of all they represent the real language of taggers with all its richness and quirks.

Many IAs have asked the question, 'Do they make folksonomies controlled vocabularies?' Or, 'When should each be used?' The philosophy behind folksonomies is essentially relativist with all tagging having equivalent weight and 'truth'. Harlem.org have touched on the issue that folksonomies ignore the need for objective metadata. They are concerned about the metadata attached to Jazz Music <http://www.harlem.org/itunes/index.html> since everyone's ideas about

who wrote a song are not necessarily equal. Controlled vocabularies are important where your audience expects you to 'know' what the content is about (titles and authors) and folksonomies are invaluable for subjective facets where the site authors cannot know how to describe the content e.g. mood or quality.

The interest in folksonomies was partly a symptom of a continuing interest in navigation and how people find information. This focus is often what defines the information architect as distinct from the similar concept of interaction designer. Peter Morville, president of Semantic Studios and a leader in information architecture, coined the term 'findability' to encompass this particular IA passion: the quality of being locatable or navigable. Morville says on <http://www.findability.org/> the scale and distribution of the web presents 'unique and important findability challenges' but 'the concept of findability is universal and timeless'.

He also promoted 'pace layering', or the theory that different parts and layers of a product (or building or organisation or culture) change at different rates but also influence each other. This seems particularly pertinent for those trying to solve the folksonomy- taxonomy problem. Less seriously he sparked a fad for new words ending in '-ability'.

Tackling findability has forced IAs out of the web space as user research shows the web is just part of people's information-finding strategies. At the IA Summit in 2006 Peter Merholz, information architect and president of

Adaptive Path, appealed to the audience to think bigger than the web and consider 'cross channel' IA. The poster child of cross channel IA is MAYA Design's work on the Carnegie Library.

Now that there is a larger and more identifiable IA community, it's easier to keep tabs on developments over the next five years. The formal community is spearheaded by the Information Architecture Institute <http://www.iainstitute.org/>. Founded in 2002, the IA Institute is a non-profit organisation 'dedicated to advancing and promoting information architecture', with over 1000 members in 60 countries. They run a mentoring program, conduct research, run a jobs board, and are building a repository of tools and templates, amongst other activities.

The American Society for Information Science and Technology continues to organise the IA Summit, which first launched in 2000. In 2006, the summit had over 550 attendees, which is a lot of information-architecture geeks in one hotel. Outside North America, conferences and retreats have been held in Europe, Australia and Chile.

The IA Institute also organised Idea 2006 <http://www.ideaconference.org/> ('A conference on designing complex information spaces of all kinds'), which brought together museum design, information visualisation, librarians, environmental design, user research, engineering, interaction design and product strategy in the Seattle Public Library.

IAs also have more informal (and cheaper!) gatherings. IA groups and cocktail hours are casual, open and a good way for newcomers to the field to immerse themselves. They tend to involve meeting up for a drink and to chat about work. Some have agendas and speakers. Some don't. At <http://ia.meetup.com/> and <http://groups.yahoo.com/> you can search for groups in your area. There are big groups in New York, Brussels, Copenhagen, London and Amsterdam.

The community is also unsurprisingly visible on the web. The SIGIA-L mailing list <http://www.info-arch.org/lists/sigia-l/> has been joined by a community Wiki <http://www.iawiki.net/>, an online magazine <http://www.boxesandarrows.com/> and a multitude of personal blogs. The blogs often feature some of the best discussions and are a good place to spot new concepts and directions. IAwiki provides an intimidating list of the blogs at <http://www.iawiki.net/BlogsOfNote/>. The blogs usually have RSS feeds, so subscribe to them through an RSS reader, and you'll only have to check in one place.

More old-fashioned forms of communication still turn out useful and topical information on IA. Morville and Lou Rosenfeld are onto their third edition of "Information Architecture for the World Wide Web" (or The Polar Bear Book, named after the sketch of a polar bear on the cover, as it is more commonly known). Many members of the field have now published books including Christina Wodtke, Jesse

James Garrett, Peter Van Dijck, Adam Greenfield, Ann Rockley and Dan Brown.

Peter Morville has also published "Ambient Findability". Its tagline 'What We Find Changes Who We Become' is somewhat more poetic than 'Designing Large-Scale Web Sites' the tagline for The Polar Bear Book, perhaps another symptom of the early IAs desire to start 'thinking big'. Lou Rosenfeld is not only still writing but is publishing too. Rosenfeld Media <http://rosenfeldmedia.com/> is dedicated to publishing user-experience design books and has titles lined up on search analytics, card-sorting and alignment diagrams.

Thanks to academia, information architecture is set to keep developing. It's now taught within the context of a number of degree courses, including information science, human-computer interaction, product design and business studies. Full degrees dedicated to information architecture remain rare. Kent State University's MSc was around in 2001. There is also Illinois Institute of Technology's MSc in Information Architecture and in the UK, Manchester Metropolitan University led the way with a three-year undergraduate course.

However prevalent IA workers are these days, the community remains dogged by attempts to define information architecture and to distinguish it from other disciplines. IAI attempts a definition <http://www.iainstitute.org/pg/about_us.php>:

1. The structural design of shared information environments.

2. The art and science of organising and labelling websites, intranets, online communities and software to support usability and findability.

3. An emerging community of practice focused on bringing principles of design and architecture to the digital landscape.

They follow these definitions with a caveat; 'our craft is new and still taking shape. We're clear on the centre but fuzzy at the boundaries.' This uncertainty isn't helped by the multitude of job titles touching on the same space: interaction designer, user experience designer, experience architect, etc.

But I know an IA spirit when I see one. They have a passion for the complex combined with a desire to help out. They are the sort who, on discovering the library books pulled from their shelves, would relish sorting the mess out rather than bemoaning the terrible transgression.

In 2011 those people will still be sorting those problems out -- whatever their job title has become. I'll be there to look back.

Events

United Kingdom:

- "Managing your career" 19 January
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e780>

- "JISC Conference 2007" 13 March
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e708>

- "Competitive Intelligence Basics Workshop"
  26 - 27 March
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e782>

Australia and Territories:

- "Information Online 2007" 30 January - 1
  February
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e689>

Germany:

- "Global Outsourcing Locations Strategies
  Summit" 8 - 11 March
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e778>

Sweden:

- "The 13th Nordic Conference on Information
  and Documentation 2007" 18 - 19 June
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e703>

United States:

- "ASIDIC Spring 2007 Meeting" 11 - 13 March
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e784>

Denmark:

- "dcif/SCIP Competitive Intelligence Conference"
  24 - 27 October
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e783>

Gold

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- FreePint No.196 15th December 2005.
  "Information Sources for Social Exclusion On
  The Web" and "Online Information Conference
  2005"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/151205.htm

- FreePint No.173 16th December 2004.
  Outsourcing Research to India" and "The Open
  Archive Initiative (OAI) and Google Scholar"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/161204.htm>

- FreePint No.150 11th December 2003. "Taking a
  look at media information professionals and
  asking: what makes a successful conference?"
  and "From Fortune 500 to Handelsblatt's
  European 500 two years on - a final look at
  some useful European and International
  Rankings"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/111203.htm

- FreePint No.127, 12th December 2002. "Home
  Pages: Websites for the Homeworker" and
  "Archive Television - A Survey of Websites"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/121202.htm

- FreePint No.102, 13th December 2001.
  "Tracking the Net" and "Free Pint In 2001"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/131201.htm

- FreePint No.77, 14th December 2000. "A Look
  at Online Auctions" and "Horseracing on the
  Web"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/141200.htm

- FreePint No.52, 16th December 1999. "Free Pint
  in 1999" and "Review of Online Information 99"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/161299.htm

- FreePint No.28, 17th December 1998. "Review
  of Online Information 98" and "Free Pint in
  1998"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/171298.htm

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