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## ABOUT FREE PINT

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 & 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



Last week I attended a vendor/user debate held by the City Information Group <<http://www.cityinformation.org.uk/>>. Issues discussed included how vendors continually keep sensitive to the market, and how they can best involve end-users in product development. Most vendors said they used a feedback chain upwards from customer service and sales teams, with some having user panels and boards. Both vendors and

users agreed, however, that one of the most effective ways was through direct contact with clients at trade conferences and exhibitions.

Katherine Allen's piece today describes how and why the London-based Online Information exhibition and conference has developed a virtual 'Online Information Online'. She raises the important point that although nothing can replace the immediacy of face-to-face interaction, online interaction at a virtual event can help to spot hot topics and trends that can feed into a live event. Libby Miller and Simon Price of the Bristol Institute of Learning Research and Technology make the same point in their interesting piece on the semantic web and social networking in our other article today. Online applications like <<http://www.foaf-project.org/>> can help to make connections between people that may not have otherwise occurred.

One of the ways that end-users can have an impact on product development, or raise a debate that may not always get through the customer service chain, is to get involved in our own VIP Lounge <<http://web.vivavip.com/forum/Lounge/>>. Business information vendors can keep users briefed by posting press releases up on the VIP Wire too <<http://web.vivavip.com/forum/Wire/>>. You can also have your own RSS content feed of these press releases.

VIP is a truly interactive information industry journal because product reviews and articles are driven by your suggestions and feedback. You can either post to the Lounge or email editor Pam Foster in confidence. As a direct result of feedback, VIP did an in-depth review of social networking software in the January 2004 issue. If you are not a subscriber and missed it you can always purchase back issues <<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>.

Just as information and IT professionals naturally demand input into products in which they are investing, we should also be taking opportunities to respond to important developments in the news that will impact on our industry. The story broken last week by David Henke in the Guardian <<http://digbig.com/4bfec>> of the UK Government's proposed significant increases in FOI charging, will effectively mean that only the very largest organisations will be able to afford to gain access to documents. The story was picked up by the Washington Post too. Our FreePint consultant FOI experts Paul Pedley and Steve Wood are busy lobbying on the matter. If you want to get involved, you can read more at <<http://www.keepinglegal.com>> and <<http://foia.blogspot.com>>, and download a letter to send to your MP.

Please also send this copy of FreePint to any of your colleagues and friends who might find it interesting.

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The FreePint Jobs Update is being circulated widely every two weeks. This free newsletter now has 1,900 direct subscribers and is posted at the Bar and in the Bar Digest (circulation 11,000).

To see the Jobs Update No.73 visit <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28709> and to subscribe, modify your account at <http://web.freepint.com>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

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NB: There are 29 other jobs in the current edition of the Jobs Update  
<http://www.freepint.com/go/b28709>.

**Sharpening Skills and Virtual Copyright Workshop**

- "Sharpening Skills; Acquiring Knowledge" ISBN 1-904769-04-7:  
This report looks at the skills to acquire during a career in information and research services.
- Virtual workshop on the new copyright laws:  
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**"Marketing for the Info-Entrepreneur: Top Techniques to Build Your Business" ISBN 1-904769-05-5**

This new report by Mary Ellen Bates provides techniques to build the profile of your information services within your client base, whether you are a new info-entrepreneur, someone who has been in business for several years, or even someone who is working within an information centre and needs to promote your services within your organisation.

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## MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES by Roger Mills



Roger Mills is Plant Sciences Librarian for Oxford University Library Services and a life-long supporter of public transport.

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

- German Rail's site <http://reiseauskunft.bahn.de/bin/query.exe/en> is by far the best for train information and online booking throughout Europe, including the UK.
- <http://www.busstation.net/busstneus.htm> is excellent for worldwide bus and coach travel information links.
- <http://www.oxford-chiltern-bus-page.co.uk> is my favourite for local bus travel news: up-to-date, informative and well illustrated; a model of its kind.
- The Man in Seat 61 <http://www.seat61.com/> is a great source of advice and links for travel by train and ship throughout Europe and beyond - unofficial but extremely helpful.
- <http://www.pti.org.uk/> is the official site for UK public transport information, with bus, rail, coach, air and ferry timetables and fares across the country.

### Sign up to Factiva's Newsletter

Keep up to date on Factiva and information industry trends by signing up for the free InfoPro Alliance newsletter. This monthly email will provide you with tips on how to better use Factiva, more information about Factiva sources, and link you to other items of interest to global information professionals.

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### What is the ResourceShelf?

<http://www.resourceshelf.com>

ResourceShelf is a free daily update containing news of interest to information professionals around the world.

Topics include the latest news with web search engines, research tips, new web resources, and much more.

### VIP No.5 Now Available

The latest issue of VIP reviews WorldData (from the EIU, EcoWin and Alacra) and Advanced Country Analysis & Forecast (an integrated intelligence service from WMRC).

<http://www.freepint.com/go/b28563>

## FREE PINT BAR In Association with Factiva a Dow Jones & Reuters Company

The big news for the FreePint Bar is that we are now offering XML/RSS content feeds for our forums. This means that you don't have to remember to visit the Bar to see the latest 10 items (excluding replies). If you'd like to find out more about how to access the feeds, see <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28803>. Remember, if you want to see all the postings (not just the latest 10) and to include replies as well as initial posts, then it's still best to subscribe to the twice-weekly FreePint Bar Digest. To sign up, modify your account at <http://web.freepint.com/>.

Two words you wouldn't normally associate with each other -- 'library' and 'software' -- have together been by far the most popular topics at the Bar. Lengthy threads have developed, with valuable experience being shared. Topics include whether or not to build a library catalogue using Microsoft Access <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27882> and where to start when choosing software to manage a library collection <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28513>. There's advice on library enquiry tracking software <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28743>; or you can read the many opinions expressed about choosing library management software <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28107>.

One FreePinter, an ex-television co-star of mine in fact (see <http://www.freepint.com/press.htm#bare> if you don't know what I'm talking about) has taken the trouble to put together a site which pulls together information and opinion on library-related software. Take a look at LibraryReview.com <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28598>.

There have been various other disparate questions at the Bar, including how to generate a list of URLs from a Web site <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28762>. Is there a definitive list of UK eShopping portals <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28754>? Do you have a comment on the changing face of journal-article delivery now that Google is moving into that space <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28732>? Or can you recommend a personalised and email-based journal contents alerting service, with access to abstracts <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28432>?

Finally, if you're an independent information professional, then you may be interested in the thread which is talking about consultant fees <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28571>. This is a topic you rarely see discussed in the open, so it's useful stuff. There is also now a selection of photos online of my visit to the recent conference of the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP) <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28767>. I was demonstrating the Willco community hosting system, for which we've just launched the "Willco Portico". The Portico is where we are posting news about enhancements to the Willco system, as well as tips for community operators and publishers <http://www.willco.com/go/p1>. There is also an XML/RSS feed.

William Hann [william.hann@freepint.com](mailto:william.hann@freepint.com)  
Managing Editor, FreePint

27<sup>th</sup> May 2004 - 3

## TIPS ARTICLE

### "Online Information Online - behind the scenes of a virtual event" By Katherine Allen



Katherine Allen is Director of the Information Division at VNU Exhibitions Europe, leading the team responsible for information events including Online Information, the world's number one event for information content and information management solutions, and Content Management Europe, Europe's definitive content management event, as well as the new virtual event Online Information Online. VNU Exhibitions also partner with Resources Exhibitions as organisers of the Library and Information Show. Katherine is also a columnist for Information World Review.

VNU Exhibitions Europe (formerly Imark Communications), a company of VNU Business Media, is a B2B information provider specialising in producing highly focused trade exhibitions for the IT, telecoms and information industries. VNU also publishes Information World Review, the information industry's news magazine, as well as Computing, IT Week, Accountancy Age and Financial Director.

For more information, contact Joanne McKeirnan, telephone +44 (0)20 7316 9581, joanne.mckeirnan@vnuexhibitions.co.uk; <<http://www.online-information.co.uk>>.

#### Why a virtual exhibition?

Online Information Online is the first virtual event for the information industry, and was launched this month. This article gives a flavour of the processes behind the development of the site and provides some insight into the synergy between the virtual event and London's Online Information exhibition, which we have organised for 27 years.

Live events such as Online Information offer unique benefits to visitors and exhibitors. These include the chance to perform hands-on comparisons of a range of competitive products, to quiz vendors about specific needs, to attend free education sessions, and to network with professional peers and industry experts. Nothing can replace the immediacy of the face-to-face interaction gained at a live event, but increasingly, people are demanding access to the information they want via multiple channels. The exhibition world is no exception. FreePint readers, among others, have voiced the desire for events to change with the times and to innovate in order to remain relevant.

With this in mind, we have created 'Online Information Online', a virtual exhibition which complements the live event, with functionality designed specifically to meet users' needs in a 24-7 world. Our goal was to provide a tool which, over time, will grow to be a unique collection of resources for the information industry, accessible via the internet from anywhere in the world. The virtual event features two exhibition halls: information content and information management, with exhibitors including Factiva, Ovid, Thomson Dialog, RedDot Solutions, Web-Labs, Scope e-Knowledge Center, Mondosoft, Sitekit Solutions, Euromonitor, Swets Information Services, VIP and CILIP already signed up.

The concept of a virtual event takes key building blocks of the traditional trade show and translates them into an internet format. So, at a virtual event, you can visit exhibitors' stands or booths to find out more about their products and services, you can interact with exhibitors to find out the answers to your questions, and you can view presentations and then take away product information and brochures. Just as you would in a live event, you'll find educational material and have access to expert opinion. Not surprisingly, each of these building blocks had to be specifically adapted to work in a web environment.

Virtual exhibitions have been around for some time, but in the early days the services available tended to focus on clunky visual representations of an exhibit 'hall' without investing enough time and thought to the content of the event. As event organisers, we have been monitoring developments in the virtual exhibition space for some time but chose to wait until the concept was sufficiently mature - and sufficiently focused on the needs of the users - before developing 'Online Information Online'.

#### Content Feeds for the VIP Lounge and VIP Wire

Content feeds (XML/RSS) are now available for a range of FreePint forums, including the Bar, Student Bar, VIP Lounge and VIP Wire.

Find out more about how to monitor postings remotely, by visiting:

<http://www.vivaVIP.com/feed/>  
<http://www.FreePint.com/feed/>

#### Building the site

The first challenge was to create the look and feel of the virtual exhibition. The hall needed to exploit the familiar metaphor of an exhibit hall, but at the same time provide easy-to-use navigation. Our technology partners Miramedia painstakingly built an entire 3D model of the 'building', so that views can be created from any angle.

Next the exhibitors' stands needed to be developed. We wanted these to be immediately recognisable as booths. At the same time the stands needed to provide plenty of visitor functionality in an easy-to-understand way, and to allow each exhibitor to customise their stand with logos and corporate colours.

Thirdly, we wanted to bring to the site some of the tools which are familiar to e-shoppers. So, for example, when you enter Online Information Online, the site automatically creates a 'Personal Event Guide' for you based on your specific interests. And at any point in your visit, you can download brochures, white papers, product information, or educational papers to 'My Bag' which allows you keep everything together in one place until you need them.

We then needed to address search and navigation, being very aware that the Online Information Online audience knows a thing or two about search! Our search partners Mondosoft, whose clients include the Vatican and Marks and Spencer, provided an enterprise search engine which delivers categorised search results in context, so users will know what is relevant to them. In addition, for visitors who prefer to search in a more structured way using the Product Finder tool, we created a taxonomy of exhibitors and their products and services.

The content of the virtual event is of prime importance. The show features a news feed from Information World Review, and contains an Education Centre where visitors can download reports and white papers, find materials for professional development, read conference and seminar papers from the live event and opinion from influential thinkers such as information architecture expert Peter Morville.

#### Virtual events and live events working together

We also felt that it was important that the virtual

**Related FreePint links:**

- 'Information and Libraries' articles and resources in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p69>>
- Post a message to the author, Katherine Allen, 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/270504.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

event and the live event complement one another. For any live event, there will be people who would like to attend but simply cannot make it, perhaps due to pressure of time or travel difficulties. In addition, visitors who do attend the live update are likely to want updates and follow-ups at any time during the year. Online Information Online should provide a resource for both these groups as well as a useful tool for visitors to pre-plan their time before the live event in December.

One unexpected outcome we encountered was the degree to which the two event formats cross-pollinate one another. The virtual event provides us with a powerful market research tool which allows us to spot information professionals' hot topics as they emerge; these can then be featured in the live event in December. Conversely, the live event, with its networking and debates, generates issues which can be developed throughout the year in the virtual space.

Developing Online Information Online has been a voyage of discovery, which has driven us to think about the structure of the live Online Information show as well as the format of the virtual event. Our aim is to provide a trusted reference tool for the information community, and to this end we really do encourage feedback and suggestions from visitors.

Online Information Online can be found at <<http://www.online-information.co.uk/online>>. We hope to welcome you there soon!

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**EVENTS****United Kingdom:**

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8th June <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e319>>
- The LMS Debate 8th June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e320>>
- The Utility Computing Summit 2004  
14th - 16th June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e325>>
- STN User Days 16th and 23th June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e327>>
- 3rd European Conference on Information Warfare and Security  
28th - 29th June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e255>>
- Creativity and Innovation: The 4th Gurteen Knowledge Conference  
29th June <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e321>>
- European Conference on Management, Leadership and Governance related to Information Systems 1st - 2nd July  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e256>>

**Canada:**

- e-Business WorldExpo Hosted by WowGao  
16th - 17th June  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e280>>
- e-Entertainment WorldExpo Hosted by WowGao  
21st - 22nd July  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e279>>
- Wireless & Mobile WorldExpo  
21st - 22nd July  
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/e287>>

This is just a selection from the 20 listings in FreePint Events. For a free listing, complete the form at <<http://www.freepint.com/events>>.

Penny <[penny@freepint.com](mailto:penny@freepint.com)>



Stephen D'Arcy (BA Hons. Inf. Dip) is a research analyst for Magus Research <<http://www.magus.co.uk>>, a company that specialises in Information architecture and visual design, Information integration, bespoke content management and business-to-business online information systems and services for multinational corporations. Before working for Magus he worked for Vrisko Ltd, an enterprise search software company and before that for the Financial Times.

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- "Information First: Integrating Knowledge and Information Architecture for Business Advantage" ISBN 0750658584, published by Butterworth Heinemann.

## FREE PINT BOOKSHELF

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

### "Information First: Integrating Knowledge and Information Architecture for Business Advantage"

Written by Roger Evernden and Elaine Evernden

Reviewed by Stephen D'Arcy

Last month, one of the main themes of the EBIC 2004 conference in Lisbon was Information Architecture. It's interesting that Information Architecture (IA) has become a staple topic on the conference circuit, but the question I was asking myself when I volunteered to review 'Information First' was: is Information Architecture any different from the same issues and theories surrounding 'Strategic Information Management', 'Knowledge Management' or even 'Knowledge Architecture'? Or is it simply this year's fashion?

Certainly, IA isn't something new; it's a mixture of technology, substance, style, access and location. 'Information First' is a 'big picture' book; it combines techniques from KM and IA and is primarily aimed at Information and Knowledge professionals. The author, Roger Evernden, is an acknowledged expert in techniques for the effective use of corporate information, specializing in IA and KM. To complement the book there's a website <<http://www.4thresource.com>> that outlines some of the ideas, as well as pointing users to other resources and theorists.

The first half of the book explores what IA is all about. The author draws heavily on the use of analogies and metaphors: IA is like cooking a meal, using the right ingredients; or it's like construction, using the right materials for the job; etc. The over-dependence on analogies seems to be because IA is a slippery concept for people to grasp. Once you understand what IA is, you can then decide what changes are required and why changes are required, using why-why diagrams; when changes are required, using timescales and deadlines; and how to change, using action plans.

The core of the book, Evernden's eight essential factors for information management: categories, understanding, presentation, evolution, knowledge, responsibility, process and meta-levels, all underpin each chapter in the book. These can then be used to discover the relationships and values in ownership, responsibility and evolution of information. They

are all umbrella disciplines, drawn from a number of other theories and approaches, and the author makes no apology for this.

The second half tackles the more practical aspects of IA. It's here where I think the value of the book lies: where information professionals can dip in and out for ideas and techniques that they can adopt and use in their own libraries or information departments. Creating information maps and audits, action plans, checklists and examples of information categories and of architecture scopes.

Overall, because this book best describes strategic tools for Information Architecture, the 'big picture' method, it lacks in-depth tactical detail. It's a good introduction to the discipline, but I can't help feeling that more on taxonomies and KM would have been useful. Explicit knowledge only is dealt with here, and if information is the most important part of the IA layer then the taxonomy applied is essential, but there's no mention of taxonomies in the book. I think a more detailed exploration into what makes a good taxonomy, what tools are available and what meta data standards are out there would have been useful when discussing IA.

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If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact <[penny@freepint.com](mailto:penny@freepint.com)> or sign up for the Author Update at <<http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>>.

## FREE PINT

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

### "The Semantic Web is Your Friend" By Libby Miller and Simon Price

Libby Miller is a Semantic Web developer working at ILRT at the University of Bristol, where she leads the Semantic Web group, and works on the EU funded SWAD-Europe project. She leads the RDF Interest group taskforce on calendaring, and is also interested in image annotation and RDF query. Dan Brickley and Libby are the co-creators of FOAF.



Simon Price is a technical consultant in the ILRT Internet Development group where he is currently working on applications of FOAF to support research. Simon is also a member of the Machine Learning and Intelligent Systems groups at the university where he is investigating applications of machine learning to the Semantic Web <<http://www.ilrt.bristol.ac.uk>>.

The Semantic Web

<<http://www.w3.org/2001/sw/>> is an initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to enable, "... an extension of the current Web in which information is given well-defined meaning, better enabling computers and people to work in cooperation". At the technological level it "... provides a common framework that allows DATA to be shared and reused across application, enterprise, and community boundaries".

True as that may be, the Semantic Web is probably best understood in terms of its applications; by what it lets you do rather than by its underlying technology. This approach was used to good effect in a 2001 article <<http://digbig.com/4bfbf>> in Scientific American, by Tim Berners-Lee (inventor of the Web) and colleagues, to provide a highly readable introduction to the Semantic Web. Now, three years on, the Semantic Web is rapidly making the transition from research to mainstream application <<http://www.w3.org/2001/sw/interest/>> and it seems appropriate to take a look at what this means for information researchers.

#### Jargon busting

Typical of an emerging technology, the Semantic Web literature is veiled in a bewildering array of technical jargon. So much so that a time-pressed researcher might be forgiven for concluding that the Semantic Web is something for geeks and that it has no bearing on real work and real people; that it (unrealistically) requires everyone to create all online content in the RDF (Resource Description Framework) Semantic Web language. This, of course, could not be further from the truth. Take the Weblogs (Blogs) phenomenon as an example. Few users of Weblogs are aware that they are publishing, syndicating and aggregating data onto the Semantic Web as well as the human-readable Web. Weblog technology revolves around the RSS (Rich Site Summary or RDF Site Summary) family of languages that vary in their human-readability but are united in their machine readability.

This resultant machine processibility is exploited to connect even the most human-centric RSS vocabularies into the Semantic Web directly, or through automated transformation to RDF. Weblogs thus form a valuable (and vast) source of richly interconnected information (e.g. <<http://www.feedster.com/>>) that requires little or no knowledge of the Semantic Web in order to create and use it.

For the information researcher, the Semantic Web view of this data enables seamless fusion of Weblog data with data from completely different sources such as dictionaries, thesauri, catalogues, databases as well as the 'traditional' Web. Where all this will lead is uncertain but the jargon is no obstacle to its creation and use.

#### Bottom-up revolution

What seems certain is that both evolution and revolution will occur, and that the latter is all too easily overlooked. For instance, given the proliferation of data about data (metadata) that

#### Email newsletter and forum hosting from Willco

Willco manages the subscriptions and distribution of email newsletters for some fifty publishers, including FreePint.

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underpins the Semantic Web, it is tempting to focus in on the obvious prospect of a better-than-Google search engine. Such a "semantic search" engine is able to determine whether the query "orange" refers to the colour, the fruit, the mobile phone company, or a chemical weapon used by the United States. As clever and useful as this may be, it is only an evolutionary enhancement of something that is already possible on the Web today. By looking in a little more detail at what is happening on the Semantic Web today, it is possible to gain a deeper insight into where revolution is starting to occur. In this article we will do just that; we will take a look at one of the most exciting new developments on the Semantic Web. Joined-up information about people, emanating not from some centralistic database but from individuals themselves.

#### I don't know but I know someone who does

In many ways, the explosive growth of social networking software, sites and data is representative of the way the Semantic Web is emerging. Weblogs were the first wave of this evolution/revolution; they allowed individuals to publish data in a sufficiently structured format for machine processing of that data to be

## GOLD

A nostalgic look back at FreePint, from this time last year to six years ago:

- FreePint No.137 15th May 2003. "Net the Ancestors: the Internet and Family History" and "Business Continuity and Recovery - An Asian Perspective" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/150503.htm>
- FreePint No.112 16th May 2002. "Video Games Industry Research" and "Weblogs and Blogging - Part 2" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/160502.htm>
- FreePint No.87 10th May 2001. "2001 - The Internet Election?" and "Information Provision for the Information Providers" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/100501.htm>
- FreePint No.62, 11th May 2000. "Idiots' guide to UK employment law sites on the Internet" and "Gimme a G for Global, a G for Geography" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/110500.htm>
- FreePint No.38, 13th May 1999. "Patent information on the Internet - can you afford to ignore it?" and "Lurking on Lists" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/130599.htm>
- FreePint No.14, 14th May 1998. "Six Opinions on Internet World UK" and "Deafblind access to the Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/140598.htm>

**Related FreePint links:**

- 'Internet Webmaster' articles in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p182>>
- Post a message to the author, Libby Miller or Simon Price, 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/270504.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

relatively trivial. Communities formed around weblogs in a bottom-up fashion, defined implicitly through syndication and through the lists of other weblogs ("blogrolls") that frequently accompanied weblogs. The next step, perhaps more revolutionary than evolutionary, is to explicitly define these (and other) communities in a way that is more easily machine processible. The Friend Of A Friend (FOAF) project <<http://www.foaf-project.org/>> is one such initiative that is making this possible and, like weblogs, it does this from the bottom up.

One of the aims of the FOAF project is to improve the chances of happy accidents by describing the connections between people (and the things that they care about such as documents and places).

FOAF is a vocabulary for describing people, used analogously to Dublin Core metadata for documents. The idea is to use FOAF to describe the sorts of things you would put on your homepage - your friends, your interests, your pictures - in a structured fashion that machines find easy to process. What you get from this is a network of people instead of a network of web pages: the Web now contains descriptions of real things in the world - people - and because the Semantic Web is designed to be open and extensible, information about what these people do (their calendar), what they own (cars, houses, pets), what they create (documents, pictures, weblogs), can all be described as well. Several million FOAF documents are out there on the Web already, created both by individuals and by various social software and networking sites. FOAF documents can be created by hand, but increasingly, FOAF is being created from existing databases or by mining the existing Web.

When people need to know something and the area is outside their expertise, they need a way into the information landscape. They need to find out what the main topics of interest are; who is well thought of; what where the important issues and papers in the area. People often serve as conduits for this type of information, with personal contacts serving as a way into an area and the key individuals within a field serving as a way of finding the main issues.

FOAF applications cannot replace the subtle social interactions which characterise personal

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information exchange, but they can help to make connections that might not otherwise have occurred: for example, by enabling certain sorts of information to be accurately processed by computers and therefore much easier to search.

Privacy and trust are clearly issues in FOAF as with all digital information on the Web or elsewhere. Organisations of various sorts already intensely mine the Web for information about individuals, email spammers being the most frequent example. FOAF includes protection against email spammers but in wider terms the very network of connections described in FOAF is likely to be its greatest asset in assessing reliability and quality of digital information on the Web.

**Conclusion**

From the perspective of the information researcher, the Semantic Web promises to provide and exploit joined-up information that goes way beyond the Web's traditional page-to-page links. Analysing the impact this will have on the day-to-day work of information professionals is not trivial. As with most new technologies, the Semantic Web is likely to create entirely new ways of working while simultaneously rendering others obsolete. Applications like FOAF are at the vanguard of the Semantic Web, enabling a glimpse of what might be achieved. Their implicit and explicit definition of social networks offers the information researcher a wealth of new channels into the information cloud around individuals and communities.

Other useful links include:

<<http://infomesh.net/2001/swintro/>>  
<<http://logicerror.com/semanticWeb>>  
<[http://www.ilrt.bris.ac.uk/projects/semantic\\_web](http://www.ilrt.bris.ac.uk/projects/semantic_web)>.