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About FreePint

FreePint is an online network of information searchers. Members receive this free newsletter twice a month: it is packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at <<http://www.freepint.com/>> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs and events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint Bar.

Please circulate this newsletter, which is best read when printed out. To receive a fully-formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <<http://www.freepint.com/subs/>>.

ISSN 1460-7239

Editorial

There are certain things in this world that everyone seems to find absolutely necessary, but at the same time are completely useless, lack any real consistency and often seem to be downright wrong.



Take, for example, job titles. What's your job title? Did you decide on it or did someone else? Would someone with the same job title as you, but who works somewhere else, do the same job that you do? People really 'care' about job titles, but in truth they're really rather useless.

The information world has as much trouble with job titles as any other industry. One FreePint Bar regular describes how "... I've been librarian, information manager, market intelligence manager, market information researcher, information liaison manager and head of information. The job title hasn't made a jot of difference to what I do. It's the job description that's important".

As you'll see from the Bar Summary below, there are battles being waged with other job titles too, e.g. 'Information Manager vs. Information Specialist' and 'Librarian vs. Information Professional'. There are also a number of questions about what the information industry actually is <<http://digbig.com/4fbvy>>, and whether it's possible to build a career doing research <<http://digbig.com/4fcaa>> or information broking <<http://digbig.com/4fcab>>.

The answer is, of course, that a lot of people make a living doing this kind of work. There are plenty of opportunities in related areas too. Take 'search', for example, which is something that interests most people. It's an area where information skills can really shine. See Stephen Arnold's excellent report on 'How Google's Internet Search is Transforming Application Software' <<http://digbig.com/4fbyt>> or Martin White's report on 'Enterprise Search' <<http://digbig.com/4etwb>>.

Think of all the Web sites that need help with information organisation and navigation, and even online help. Today's feature article talks about this, looking at the good and bad points in the move from CD-ROM provision of information to online. One area of major improvement, for example, is the provision of help pages and support.

You can build your information career by providing such services, and in other ways too: training or consultancy, writing or publishing. When doing your homework, visit the FreePint Web site and read articles about information work <<http://digbig.com/4fcac>>. Whilst you're there, click on the pull-down menu 'Network' and find out about information jobs at Jinfo or the business information industry at VIP, which is currently reviewing Moreover's CI-Newsdesk.

So, there are lots of places to find out about careers in information-related fields, and it is *the* place to work at the moment. Don't limit yourself to a job title when looking for opportunities. Think about what you're good at and what you like doing, and then find out where those skills might be a needed. Thanks to the Internet, knowledge of how information 'works' has never been so much in demand.

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Jinfo :: Jobs in information

<<http://www.jinfo.com/>>

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

The Jinfo Newsletter is published free every two weeks, and contains a list of the latest vacancies along with job-seeking advice. The latest editorial is entitled "Skills for Records Management". Read it online and subscribe free at <<http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/>>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Information Professional (part-time)

STN International, the world-renowned online host, connects those seeking scientific, technical or patent information.

Recruiter: Royal Society of Chemistry
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4511>>

Knowledge Co-ordinator

Knowledge Management support vacancy. Excellent opportunity for bright person with K.M. experience and potential.

Recruiter: Glen Recruitment
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4533>>

Information Officer

The post involves the day-to-day management of sportscotland's intranet, you will also have experience of web-editing.

Recruiter: sportscotland
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4536>>

Knowledge/E-Government Manager

Help us ensure we have access to all the information and knowledge we need to turn our vision into reality.

Recruiter: sportscotland
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4537>>

Part-time Library Manager

Part-time role for qualified librarian to provide info services to law firm in the Midlands, 20-25hrs flexible, 24,000 pro rata.

Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4538>>

Senior Information Officer

A Senior Information Officer is required to work for Cumbria County Council in the Information and Communications Team.

Recruiter: Cumbria County Council
<<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4541>>

[The above jobs are paid listings]

NB: There are 40 other jobs in the current edition of the Jinfo Newsletter <<http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/>> and over 80 in the Jinfo database <<http://www.jinfo.com/>>.

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*** Moreover features in VIP ***

The October issue of VIP features an in-depth review of CI-Newsdesk, a current awareness product from Moreover that provides access to news sources and weblogs. A further item examines the latest enhancements made to LexisNexis Butterworths.

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

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<<http://www.factiva.com/ad/freepint0908>>

"Enterprise Search Guidebook" ISBN 1-904769-10-1 - September 2005

This report sets out the principles and practice of specifying and selecting intranet or enterprise search software.

"It is a complex and serious business and this report clearly explains so, while at the same time giving you a practical road map to success."

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Emily Wilson works for the Business Gateway Information Service <<http://www.bgateway.com>>, providing research to SMEs and start-up companies in Scotland.

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

My Favourite Tipples

by Emily Wilson

- The Global Yellow Pages directory, <<http://www.globalyp.com/>> for whenever you need to find an accountant in Argentina or a zoo in Zambia.
- More research, less junk. I use <<http://mindset.research.yahoo.com/>> to filter out purely commercial sites with little informational value.
- All the labour market data from National Statistics in easily digestible tables, <<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>>.
- Everything you ever wanted to know about imports to the UK, comprehensive and detailed data for free <http://www.uktradeinfo.com/index.cfm?task=tradedata>.
- Trade Association Forum's directory of members <http://www.taforum.org/searchgroup.pl?n=500> is the gateway to a myriad of stats and facts that trade associations hold.

VIP reviews pay-as-you-go products

December's VIP will be looking at pay-as-you-go services. Please send us your comments if you use such services:

<<http://www.vivavip.com/go/1166>>

"Google Legacy -- How Google's Internet Search is Transforming Application Software" September 2005

This unique 290-page report places Google under a microscope, dissects Google's technology, evaluates its potential and determines that Google's future lies beyond search.

<<http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>>

"An extremely well analysed and brilliantly presented book - a must read for all interested".

FreePint Bar

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Do you use the FreePint Bar because you need help with tricky research questions, or do you use it to socialize with other information professionals? Perhaps you just want to see what other people are talking about. If you have never visited the Bar before, you are very welcome indeed and here are some guidelines to help you begin: <<http://www.freepint.com/bar/barguide.html>>.

The information profession seems to be under discussion a lot recently with the following postings: this FreePinter wants to know the best way to break into information brokering <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b34907>>; "Is Internet research viable as a full-time career commercially?" <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b34789>> or what is the difference between information managers and information specialists? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b35119>>.

Perhaps you are more of a computer specialist and can help with these postings: is it possible to flip negative images to positive on an Epson GT 15000 flatbed A3 scanner? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b35122>>; how does one change the size of slides created in Microsoft PowerPoint so that they fit the screen they are projected upon? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b34943>>

At what cost can this FreePinter get a couple of hundred photographs digitised? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b35172>>.

After the last FreePint Newsletter was published, a request for an article on French and Russian business information sources was posted <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b34850>>. Do you have any topic requests or perhaps you fancy writing an article; please email me at <penny.hann@freepint.com> or see <<http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>>.

In response to feedback from the VIP user survey conducted last month, VIP Eye is now sent out in HTML format as well as text <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b34841>>. VIP also has a new format and has just been published, with a review of CI-Newsdesk from Moreover <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b35214>>.

Can you help this FreePinter find resources to help her write and speak about the differences between France and England's use of non-renewable sources? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b35025>>.

Do you know of a site that gives chapter and verse for quotations? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b34712>>. Or perhaps you know where to find information on the UK stamp collecting market? <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b34564>>.

Thank you to everyone who has posted at the Bar and a very warm welcome to all the newcomers too.

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

*The FreePint Bar is where you can get free help with your tricky research questions <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
Twice-weekly email digests of the latest postings can be requested at <<http://www.freepint.com/subs/>>.*



Tips Article

Chris Bradley has worked as an information professional for the past eight years at Watson Wyatt Limited, a global consulting firm focused on human capital and financial management. Watson Wyatt subscribes to numerous online, CD and print resources. Chris holds a PG Diploma in Information Studies from the University of North London and a first degree in modern languages.

"Shifting Platforms - CD to online publishing" By Chris Bradley

There was a time, a few years ago now, when information vendors perceived that CD-ROM technology was the future. So, with greater or lesser success, they unleashed lots of shiny round disks to replace the books that they had been publishing for years. To some extent this was a great achievement, particularly in those instances where the paper version was effectively a database, (albeit one that was impossible to manipulate with any ease). So the Dun and Bradstreet reference books became a formidable marketing tool rather than ungainly multi-volume shelf-fillers. And you didn't need to read the instructions. You might even be able to understand Kompass.

But was the technology driving the product rather than working in tandem with it? One publisher now produces its quarterly magazine as a series of interlinked PDF documents. Very nice technology, but to what end? You now have to navigate in the same way as you might through a book index to find a document, which is illegible when you print it out. And you will need to print it out unless you have a high definition screen and good eyesight. Also, consider the financial implications of this shift: you'll need a PC, printer, CD drive. The chances are you'll already have these, but you'll want a top-end CD or more probably a DVD player and while you're in the shop you spot a CD rewriter. All you needed before was a shelf.

More recently however there has been a shift towards web-based products. Cue here a new batch of buzzwords ('web-enabled', 'portal') and the ever-popular 'functionality'. I have yet to work out what 'granularity' refers to in online databases. I understand the concept in sugar, even in sandpaper, but not in retrieval software.

There are distinct advantages of the web as a platform and one doesn't need to be continually installing disks (and some are monthly); there is not the same problem with networked/non-networked versions or licence agreements, insofar as you have one password per user or have agreed the general number of likely users.

Not wishing to be other than positive, there are some disadvantages which should be mentioned. Aside from the inherent risks of relying on an old bit of telephone cable (and you can never be quite sure whether your spiffing broadband/blue tooth connection isn't relayed via a mouse-nibbled bit of Bakelite from the 1930s, somewhere in darkest Somerset), the dangers of virus attacks (now so well protected behind firewalls that you're lucky to get an outside connection), there are the applications themselves, reminiscent of the walls of cheap 1970s TV sitcoms: wobbly and liable to fall over when you open another window.

With one particular suite of well-known company databases, it isn't possible to switch between them without crashing the system (and a

demonstrator managed to repeatedly do this). Connection time for a different part of the same suite is so long that popping across to India for a cup of tea is a viable proposition.

With the CD, if I wanted to download a list of company names with addresses in a given geographic area, say 500 records, (which isn't an unreasonable or rare request), I wouldn't worry about the cost because I'd paid for upfront. With the new credit system they are now asking for GBP 500, and I've got nine other offices asking for the same search in each of their areas, as they are running a new marketing campaign and are looking for new business, so that's a possible GBP 10,000, which was what I was paying for unlimited access on the CD. I did run one search that suggested I should pay GBP 1.5 million: I didn't proceed, I just used a different product. This ridiculous pricing structure is echoed in another well-respected company's new web interface. This one is so slow that you could grow your own family tree while it attempts to build one, so I'm not wowed by this. And don't get me started on country selection.

Or online help for that matter. In the CD days you were lucky to get anything that remotely resembled a manual, so you patiently worked through the product, swapped tips with colleagues and came up with your own internal instruction manual. Of course, you can still do the same thing, and that's a viable option in a big organisation over a LAN, because you're permanently online anyway. But consider the one-person organisation watching his or her budget being eaten away by the phone company. So they go on a course and that's one less day that they're enriching their service offering.

There are plenty of fine examples of how you can select multiple criteria on a web database without the hair-tearing frustration of waiting. If you consider the big names in news retrieval, there just aren't the same speed issues and it's not as if they are sorting through less material or for a shorter time span. I can search the entire archive on Factiva or Dialog and it takes five seconds. Google searches millions upon millions of web pages and it takes less than a second. So why can't other information providers provide their information as quickly? Do they need to upgrade their servers, their network, or should they have tested their service in a live environment before consigning those nice shiny disks to the dustbin?

Web platforms work: so much is clear from the news providers (but we will leave the minutiae of their other failings for a different rant), so why is it so hard for others?

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{ the ugly truth: }

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Review

<<http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>>

"The Google Legacy: How Google's Internet Search is Transforming Application Software" Reviewed by Martin White

The day that this review is being written, Google is the lead story on the front page of the Financial Times as the company announces an instant voice messaging and online voice calling service. In less than ten years the company has grown from a bright idea of its founders, whilst at Stanford University, to a company processing 300 million searches a day. The fact that it has been able to scale with demand is a tribute to the robustness of the relevance algorithm, the IT infrastructure and the business acumen of the founders.

Yet despite Google being one of the most recognized global brands, it is also a highly secretive organization. A few years ago, I visited Google in San Francisco, and was intrigued both by the grand piano in the reception area and the liberal use of bean bags in the offices. This excellent book really goes behind the scenes and it is a tribute to Steve Arnold, that he has managed to write a book of such detail and insight without the cooperation of Google itself. Indeed, I would not be surprised if Google employees were among the early readers of the book!

The eleven chapters of this 289 page book cover the technology and business objectives of every Google application, from the development of the relevance ranking, Gmail and Google Maps, Google Clustering, Google Scholar and Google's venture into enterprise search with the Google Search Appliance. The final chapters look at privacy issues and attempt to assess the current and future impact of Google on the web business. Appendices list all the Google patents with a brief description of their claims, and all the Google publisher partners. Throughout, there is an effective use of screen shots, and overall, the layout of the book is excellent.

This is not a journalistic approach to Google but the outcome of the author's lifetime involvement with search applications. The result is a level of technical detail and analysis which I cannot see ever being bettered. Equally valuable is that Steve Arnold looks at some of the issues that might yet derail the Google train. After all, I can remember the days when no one could conceive of there being a competitor to AltaVista.

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These could be the problems of scaling the business (far more difficult than scaling the IT!), the activities of competitors (Google is big, Microsoft is bigger still) or someone inventing a better search mousetrap. Steve Arnold observes "One of the basic discoveries from the research conducted for this monograph is that Google may indeed end like so many high-flying Internet companies. However, the legacy of Google has been the vivid demonstration that distributed, parallelized network computing and virtual applications represent the next evolutionary phase in computing, systems and software. Google's architecture can scale".

Not only is there quite a staggering amount of detail in each chapter, presented in a very readable way, but the author and publisher have managed the production process so that, at launch, the book is only a few weeks out of date. The downside is that the book is currently available only as a 24MB download. There are plans to provide an update to the book, to cover a number of significant announcements expected over the next few months.

I thought I knew a fair bit about Google, but it is the tip of the iceberg compared to the knowledge that Steve Arnold has amassed and presented with great clarity in this very highly recommendable book.

FreePint

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ADVERTISERS: www.onopoly.com
ISSN: 1460-7239

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Technology by Willco
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Enterprise Search Guidebook

ISBN: 1-904769-10-1

This report sets out the principles and practice of specifying and selecting intranet or enterprise search software, based on the practical experience of the author.

Many organizations just want a search engine to work the way Google does. This report discusses the differences between web and enterprise search, and as well as search engine software applications outlines the capabilities of the Google and Thunderstone search appliances. The IT requirements of an enterprise search application are discussed and the use of personas to develop user requirements is described.

The report will be of value to any manager seeking to ensure that employees are able to find the information they need to make effective business decisions.



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Feature Article



Catherine Dhanjal, Director, Special Cuts <<http://www.specialcuts.co.uk>>, a media monitoring and press cutting service for the academic, learning, government, information management and library sectors. Clients include Eduserv, Emerald Group Publishing, JISC and Softlink. Special Cuts aspires to be the best press cuttings agency there is for the trade and technical publications in the academic/education, government, learning and information management/library sectors.

FreePint readers can try the Special Cuts service free for a month - quote 'FreePint' and email for more information. Catherine is also Director of TheAnswer <<http://www.theansweruk.com>> which provides public relations and marketing services, specialising in the information management and library sectors.

Catherine has worked in public relations for over ten years and is currently taking an MA in Strategic Communications. Email: Tel: 0798 1271177.

"Measuring Public Relations" By Catherine Dhanjal

News ... all depends. But you'll know it when you see it, says the Discworld's first journalist, William de Worde: Things Written Down (Pratchett [1]). So what is public relations? L'Etang [2] describes it as the practice of presenting the public face of an organisation or individual, the articulation of its aims and objectives, and the official organisational view on issues of relevance to it.

This article focuses on the media relations side of PR: communicating to target audiences through channels such as publications, broadcast and internet programmes. It is generally agreed that public relations plays an important role in the informational part of communications - making people aware of products and their role, perhaps particularly in this decade where many editorial departments have been slashed, leaving less time for journalists' own research than previously. Collection of press cuttings (or media monitoring) remains the most popular way of evaluating how successfully information is communicated by government or private sector PR departments.

Being traditionally 'informational', PR is generally seen to fit into the awareness stage of the three stages of persuasion: awareness, acceptance and action (Smith, 2002 - referenced in Watson & Noble [3]). Media relations might involve activities such as sending press releases, articles or case studies to editorial contacts, taking part in media interviews, or for wider aspects of PR, communicating with clients or potential clients through newsletters, seminars and direct mailers.

I recently bought a solar charger for my mobile telephone and PDA. I had read about the product in a national newspaper - I forget which - and I had also forgotten the name of the manufacturer. However, a search on the internet for 'solar mobile phone charger' brought up a list of companies and I recognised the name Solio <<http://www.solio.com>>, and the charger's distinctive flower petal shape. PR, and, in particular, media relations, played the major role in prompting my interest and awareness in the product, although other elements clinched the deal and took me through to the purchase stage. It's easy enough to measure how many customers visit a website or purchase a product but more complex to measure how effective your PR efforts are. Examining the success of Dyson in bringing his bagless vacuum cleaner to market, Boyle [4] states that: "... journalistic articles can be decisive in product success not only persuading opinion formers to try out something new, but also encouraging more conservative purchasers to follow the lead of the pioneer consumers." She adds, "... significant promotional effects from journalistic interest can therefore only be expected from a long-term series of articles".

In my purchase, external factors also played a part - and the company almost certainly benefits from charity, campaigners and government communications' efforts about solar power. My own situation was also relevant - I saw a role for

a solar charger as I often travel where I have long periods with no means of accessing power points to charge my devices, and I'm interested in solar energy. This brings us back to the importance of press cuttings in highlighting trends in public opinion or legislation on issues, giving the organisation the opportunity to piggyback its PR on those trends or to lobby opinion makers to put its own viewpoint across.

Some organisations still shy away from putting any tools in place to effectively measure public relations. Perceived obstacles to measuring public relations are many and varied - from lack of time and resources for implementing measurement techniques, to lack of understanding of the role of public relations and lack of resources. Some organisations still prefer to judge the effectiveness of their communications on 'gut feel' and to spend more money on implementing PR campaigns rather than using press cuttings and other research services to improve the effectiveness of existing campaigns.

Most organisations wouldn't think about employing people without having clear job specifications, objectives and appraisals and ideally this should be the same for communications and public relations. However, communication also needs to be flexible to react to marketplace and company developments. It (hopefully) involves two-way communication and public relations is just one aspect of dialogue with target audiences. This is partly why Watson and Noble [3] make the point that it is because objective-setting is not simple in public relations that public relations evaluation is also not simple. However, media monitoring is the first essential step in the process to awareness of your own organisation's profile in the media and the public's perception of relevant external factors or issues.

JISC's press and PR manager, Dr Philip Pothén, says: "Media monitoring is vital to JISC for a number of reasons. JISC <<http://www.jisc.ac.uk>> is in the thick of a variety of issues which are the subject of public debate, such as plagiarism, open access publishing, open source,

e-learning, the place of technology in education, and so on. We need to know as it happens how these debates are playing out in the public domain, to be able to explain what our position is in relation to these discussions in a range of publications, both general and specialist, to inform our own communications. We need to know too how JISC is being represented in the press in order to analyse the messages being communicated but also the factual correctness of the coverage itself. It can also help internally by informing JISC staff, Committee members, funders, etc., that their work receives coverage, that it has a very public face and that communication of it is an integral part of the work itself".

Related FreePint links:

- 'Public Relations' articles in the FreePint Portal <http://www.freepint.com/go/p118>
- Post a message to the author, Catherine Dhanjal, 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/271005.htm#feature>
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Pothen touches on the importance of receiving copies of press coverage in allowing the organisation to react to coverage about itself - and to have the opportunity to contact journalists to correct it or add to it; and to allow the organisation to monitor external factors which might impact on them - such as changes in government legislation or public reaction to launch of a competitor's product.

Sarah Walton of Big Giraffe Marketing Services, (Tel: 07796 178305) says: "Copies of media coverage are extremely useful for integrated communications activities - perhaps using articles as direct mailers or stating: see product X reviewed in magazine Y on a banner at an exhibition stand. Third party endorsement via the media can be a very powerful tool in positioning the organisation or product."

She adds: "services like Special Cuts provide quantifiable metrics which can be reported back to the company board and make it easier to monitor the effectiveness of PR activities."

Richard Bagnall, Managing Director of media evaluation specialist Metrica <<http://www.metrice.net>> makes the point that: "Whereas in times past the thud of a hefty book of press cuttings on the desk would earn a PR practitioner a slap on the back, accountability is now the name of the game". Sourcing the relevant coverage is just the first in a long line of tools the PR industry has at its disposal. These can help PR practitioners improve upon current strategies, react to changes in the media environment and ultimately document PR's unique contribution to the bottom line. Along with benchmarking and reviewing past performance, media measurement must be used as a forward-looking planning tool to improve the effectiveness of ongoing PR. After all, if you're failing to plan, you're planning to fail.

Understanding the impact of good and bad communication is fundamental to business survival. Tracking your company's reputation and reportage in the media helps to assess whether your key messages are reaching target audiences so that you can adjust your public relations and wider marketing campaigns or strategy accordingly. This information can then help concentrate your efforts - saving you both time and money.

[1] Pratchett, Terry. The Truth. 2000. Pg 12 & 435 [2] L'Etang, Jacquie. Public Relations in Britain. 2004. Pg 2 [3] Watson, Tom & Noble, Paul. Evaluating Public Relations. 2005. Pg 165, 157 [4] Boyle, Emily. Press and Publicity Management: the Dyson Case, in Corporate Communications: An International Journal. Volume 9, No 3, pg 209-222.

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- FreePint No.170 28th October 2004. "European Industrial Relations Sources" and "How European companies can turn the challenge of environmental regulation into profit" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/281004.htm>>
- FreePint No.148 6th November 2003. "Records Management, the Aunt Sally of your business!" and "Getting UK Immigration Information and Advice" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/061103.htm>>
- FreePint No.124 31st October 2002. "Job Hunting Resources On The Web" and "What Does Well On The Web - A Personal View" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/311002.htm>>
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- FreePint No.74, 2nd November 2000. "Web Sources for Central and Eastern Europe" and "Portals for business information on the Internet" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/021100.htm>>
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