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ABOUT FREE PINT

Free Pint is an online community of information researchers. Members receive this free newsletter every two weeks packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

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

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

EDITORIAL

Thank you to everyone who cast their vote for the winner of this year's Free Pint/Online Information Customer Service Award. We had over 150 nominations for 60 different organisations.

I am thrilled with the level of response to the award, and the wonderful things said about the nominated organisations. A panel of three judges has now refereed the entries, and a clear winner has become apparent.

We have decided to announce the winning organisation at the Gala Awards Dinner on Wednesday 4th December at Online Information 2002 at Olympia in London. Full details will then be available on Free Pint's stand (292) at the show on Thursday 5th. The winner will also be announced at the Free Pint Bar and in the editorial of the next issue of the Free Pint Newsletter.

I really hope you can make it to London next week. As well as the large exhibition, there are free seminars, masterclasses, case studies and technology reviews. Of course, if you visit the Free Pint stand you can find out about our exciting plans for 2003. Whilst you're there you'll also be able to replenish your stock of Free Pint beer mats -- we have 10,000 to give away, but it will still be 'first come, first served'. To find out more about the show and reserve your free ticket, visit <<http://www.online-information.co.uk/>>.

Talking of events, don't forget to check out our series of Free Pint Exchanges for the new year. Topics include communities of practice, city information, intranet management, patent searching, electronic copyright, deep linking and intranet governance. A central London venue and new pricing will make the Exchanges even more accessible, and you can find out all about them at <<http://www.freepint.com/exchange>>.

Of course, if you can't make it to London in person then you could always send Free Pint a seasonal greetings card from wherever you are in the world. The postal address is at the bottom of this newsletter.

In today's Free Pint we have a very interesting mix of articles and reviews, including a look at health informatics and a review of a top-notch book about deception on the Web. Alongside today's newsletter we're also sending you a mailing from Factiva (sponsors of the Free Pint Bar) about the enhancements to Factiva.com which they will be announcing at Online Information.

Thank you for reading Free Pint, and for your continued support.

Cheers
William

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FREE PINT JOBS

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

Free Pint Jobs is THE place to find and advertise information-related vacancies.

Job seekers can search the database for free, and set up a profile to be notified weekly of relevant new vacancies.

Recruiters will receive significant publicity for listed vacancies, and jobs will be matched against the 750+ stored job seeker profiles.

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

As well as the selected listings below, check out the weekly Bar postings which list the latest additions to Free Pint Jobs. This week's can be found at <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b21110>> and last week's at <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b20942>>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

DP/CATI Executive

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2136>>
CAPI Surveycraft scriptwriting, high level numeracy, accuracy.
Recruiter: Recruit Media

Assistant Librarian (initial 3 month contract)

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2148>>
Excellent vacancy for confident qualified librarian to work for Govt. Dept. Poss. contract up to one year. 22,000 pounds pro rata. Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Desktop Services Manager

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2152>>
Use your initiative & enthusiasm to manage implementation of portals and desktop services at this bank. Maternity cover post.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

[The above jobs are paid listings]

Targeted Science and Engineering Information

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Meet Free Pint at Online Information 2002 – Next Week

Visit Online Information 2002 in London next week and meet the team behind Free Pint. Plenty of things to find out about at this major show in the information calendar. Free tickets available at: <<http://www.online-information.co.uk/>>

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MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES from Barnaby Durrant

Barnaby Durrant works as editor of 'Work and Money' in the UK editorial team for LookSmart, the publishers of the distributed search directory used on portals such as msn.co.uk, AltaVista, Tiscali and ntl:home.

Tell us about your favourite Web sites. Check out the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>, then email penny@freepint.com.

- Edgar <http://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml> - An acronym for Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis, and Retrieval system, this is the document search engine for the US Securities and Exchange Commission. Look through filings by US publicly quoted companies and find a wealth of information detailing company results, forecasts, strategy and management structure and remuneration.
- Zeal <http://www.zeal.com/> - The Zeal Community offers the opportunity to help build the LookSmart US, UK, Canadian and Australian directories, which are featured on popular portals such as MSN. Members can pursue their own interests by contributing and reviewing Web sites on hobby, religious, social, political, sporting, academic or artistic themes.
- The Royal Festival Hall <http://www.rfh.org.uk/> - South Bank institution hosts classical and pop music concerts, jazz, contemporary dance and musical theatre. Check out the regular schedule of free events in the foyer or book tickets online without a booking fee.
- Mappy <http://www.mappy.com/> - Excellent multi-lingual site from Wanadoo and France Telecom tempts travellers with detailed European itineraries and town maps. Enter your start and finish point and let Mappy find a route with directions, timings, toll information and even an estimate of petrol used.
- Legal Resources in the UK and Ireland <http://www.venables.co.uk/> - Comprehensive resource, maintained by legal consultant Delia Venables, presents links for solicitors and barristers in the UK and Ireland. Browse sections for legal students and companies, and for lawyers seeking services and CPD courses.

Bar Digest Now Twice a Week and in HTML Format

To overcome information overload, the Free Pint Bar Digest is now published twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. You can choose between a plain text version, or HTML format with activated links and table of contents. Set up your free subscription today at: <http://www.freepint.com/member>

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Tricky research questions answered in minutes. Post your request to the Free Pint Bar and see just how quickly it is answered <http://www.freepint.com/bar>.

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To get a digest of postings twice a week, email subs@freepint.com or modify your subscriptions online at <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

Free Pint Exchanges Now In Central London

All Free Pint's Exchanges for the new year have been moved to a convenient and modern central London venue.

Find out about the range of topics on offer, but book early as they fill up quickly: <http://www.freepint.com/exchange>

TIPS ARTICLE

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/281102.htm#tips>>

"Health Informatics on the Web" By Catherine Ebenezer

Catherine Ebenezer is the trust librarian at the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, where, among other things, she maintains a library web site-cum-mental health information gateway: <http://stlis.thenhs.com/hln/s_london/lsw/main/>. After completing her MSc in Information Science (Computerised Library Systems) at University College London in September 2001 she has ventured extensively into print on professional issues.

The only Web-accessible piece to see the light of day so far is a management briefing for the National electronic Library for Health on the NHS IM&T strategy: <<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/management/manto/p/0216InformationforHealth.htm>>.

Health informatics is a growing area that has assumed a higher profile and clearer definition within the last few years. It has grown to prominence with the increasing pressures for improved co-ordination of patient data and implementation of evidence-based practice. In Britain this is associated with the rising political profile of information management and technology in the NHS. Interest in the subject has spread beyond a core of enthusiasts, and informatics skills (or the lack of them) among health professionals have become a matter of concern for health policy-makers. Many aspects of it are well 'out of scope' for me as a health librarian; however, I was drawn into using its online literature through a variety of professional activities relating to knowledge management, information strategy, and use of the Internet within psychiatry.

Historically health informatics within the UK has been an under-funded and under-developed discipline. It has been pursued from different perspectives: either as a (somewhat esoteric) career sideline, 'medical informatics'; by doctors with the requisite knowledge and interest in computing applications as an adjunct to their clinical practice (well represented by articles in the BMJ by Al-Ubaydli and Sims: 'search archive' at <<http://bmj.com>>, and by the journal's 'Information in Practice' articles); or, otherwise, in the guise of 'information management and technology (IM&T)' as the preserve of behind-the-scenes 'suits' serving the purposes of activity monitoring and financial control rather than direct support of patient care.

Enrico Coiera, one of the foremost authorities on health informatics, defines it as the "study of how medical knowledge is created, shaped, shared and applied". It is evident that this vision is much wider than just that of 'computers in medicine'; it extends to the transformation of medicine by the adoption of rational procedures. The tools of informatics "are more likely to be clinical guidelines, formal medical languages, information systems, or communication systems like the Internet". The quotations are taken from the introduction to his 1997 book *Guide to Medical Informatics, the Internet and Telemedicine* (London: Arnold, 1997), selected portions of which are available online at <<http://www.coiera.com>>. The initial chapter, "Informatics basics" is a valuable introduction to the subject.

Robin Mann <<http://bmj.com/cgi/letters/324/7350/S181>> prefers the term 'health informatics' for the discipline, since it crosses clinical and professional boundaries. He suggests that it incorporates all aspects of information management in health care: communication; the use of medical and multiprofessional records; language and nomenclature; team-working; confidentiality and security of records; data quality and management; secondary uses of clinical information for activity analysis; quality monitoring; research and planning; knowledge management; decision support; clinical

information systems and electronic records, and telemedicine, as well as the use of computers.

It is with this all-encompassing definition in mind that the searcher should evaluate and use the many sources of web-based resources in health informatics. An obvious starting point in locating these is the National electronic Library for Health Informatics (NeLH-Info) <<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/nelhi/index.htm>>. At present this has no content of its own and consists largely of a list of links to other sites. These divide approximately into: resources and portals; sites of official bodies; academic centres offering teaching or research opportunities in health informatics; professional organisations in health informatics; international organisations; and specialist journals.

There is a range of different types of material available via portal sites for health informatics. Health Informatics Worldwide <<http://www.hiww.org>> is a regularly updated index of the most relevant links to websites on health informatics. The links are alphabetically ordered by country and location. The site focuses on non-commercial and academic institutions. Health Informatics Europe <<http://www.hi-europe.info/>> edited by Dr Ahmad Risk, a prominent figure in UK health informatics, incorporates an extensive collection of articles, a list of system vendors, a library of current projects, and a European 'who's who' of health informatics. Computers in Mental Health <<http://www.ex.ac.uk/cimh/>> provides admirable coverage of its field: it incorporates a database of software used in mental health, articles and papers, a reading list, and list of links. OpenClinical <<http://www.openclinical.org/home.html>> focuses on knowledge management; it provides a "comprehensive set of resources on advanced knowledge management methods, technologies and applications for healthcare". The Telemedicine Information Service <<http://www.tis.bl.uk/>>, run by the British Library, provides a database, a telephone information service, and an email discussion list.

The most useful aspect of the university sites from the external searcher's point of view is the lists of publications and research projects that they incorporate. Those of the University of Cambridge's Medical Informatics Unit <<http://www.medinfo.cam.ac.uk/>>, City University's MIM (Measurement and Information in Medicine Centre) <<http://www.city.ac.uk/mim/information.htm>>, and the University of Manchester's Medical Informatics Group <<http://www.cs.man.ac.uk/mig/>> are particularly noteworthy. The Manchester site includes a list of medical informatics resources and links which is more comprehensive in some areas than that of the NeLHI. The work of these academic centres often reflects a specialist orientation: the Queen's University, Belfast, Advanced Medical Informatics Initiative <<http://www.chi.unsw.edu.au/>> focuses on medical imaging, and provides extensive lists of

Related Free Pint links:

- 'Healthcare and Medicine' resources in the Free Pint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p64>>
- Post a message to the author, Catherine Ebenezer, or suggest further resources at the Free Pint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/281102.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of Free Pint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

resources in this field, while the emphasis at the University of Leeds' Clinical Information Science Unit CISU: <<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/cisu/>> is on computer-aided diagnosis. At UCL's Knowledge Management Centre <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/kmc/>> the focus is on clinical knowledge management and decision support. The list does not extend to university centres outside the UK; however, one should not miss the Centre for Health Informatics at the University of New South Wales <<http://www.chi.unsw.edu.au/>> which incorporates the Coiera oeuvre.

The pages of professional organisations in health informatics often provide useful resources for newcomers to the subject. The American Medical Informatics Association <<http://www.amia.org/>> includes MEDLINE citations of recent articles, a reading list, and links to informatics journals and conference proceedings. The British Medical Informatics Society <<http://www.bmis.org/>> has a reading list and a self-appraisal facility for informatics competence. The recently established UK Council on the Health Informatics Professions (UKCHIP) <<http://www.ukchip.org/>> has little content as yet but is worth watching. ASSIST: the Organisation of ICT Professionals in Health and Social Care <<http://www.assist.org.uk>> has a useful newsletter containing survey articles on a wide range of topics related to health informatics within the NHS.

Most people working in health informatics in the UK are employed within the National Health Service or are closely associated with it. It is important therefore to know of Department of Health initiatives and involvement in the field. The two major sources for NHS health informatics activity are the NHS Information Policy Unit <<http://www.doh.gov.uk/ipu/index.htm>> which is the body responsible for the development of NHS information strategy, and the NHS Information Authority (NHSIA) <<http://www.nhsia.nhs.uk/def/home.asp>> which has the major role in implementing it. These rather large and unwieldy sites are the key source for strategy documents and working papers on NHS informatics activities.

The NHS Informatics Learning Network site <<http://www.ecommunity.nhs.uk/>>, which is an NHSIA initiative, incorporates several useful resources, including brief survey articles on key topics in health informatics. Many health informatics journals and newsletters are available in full text online: a few, such as the Journal of Medical Internet Research <<http://www.jmir.org/>>, Healthcare Informatics (US) <<http://www.healthcare-informatics.com/>>, Health Management Technology <<http://www.healthmgttech.com/>> and the On-Line Journal of Nursing Informatics <<http://milkman.cac.psu.edu/~dxm12/OJNI.html>> are entirely free.

The Informatics Review <<http://www.informatics-review.com/>> is a free secondary e-journal which present summaries of new articles on health informatics from leading

medical journals. The site also includes an archive of past essays and position papers. A particularly useful list of health informatics e-journals, giving details of provenance and availability via the web, is provided at the Health Canada Office of Health and the Information Highway (OHIH) site: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ohih-bis/res/journal_e.html>. This site also hosts an invaluable bibliographic database of health informatics literature, which can be used in conjunction with MEDLINE <<http://www.pubmed.gov>> and Health Technology Assessment Database (HTA) <<http://144.32.228.3/scripts/WEBC.EXE/NHSCR/D/start>> as a means of locating journal articles. As previously mentioned, the BMJ <<http://bmj.com>> publishes extensively on medical informatics issues, and includes the subject among its subject collections.

Health informatics is an expanding and rapidly-developing subject with a huge amount of web-accessible content. I cannot hope to survey it at all adequately in one short article; I have hardly mentioned the non-UK literature here, for instance. These resources should, however, provide a start for anyone researching the field.

EVENTS

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

The 'City Information Group' have organised their 'CiG Christmas Party 2002' with jazz, cocktails and dancing. It is taking place on the 2nd December in London <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e166>>.

Need I mention 'Online Information 2002'? It is taking place in London on the 3rd to 5th December 2002 and is for anyone in the information industry <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e119>>.

William Hann will be speaking at the 'AIIP President's Breakfast' (Association of Independent Information Professionals) on December 3rd at Online Information <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e168>>.

The 'Special Libraries Association European Chapter' are also having a breakfast meeting on the 4th December. They have invited Margareta Nelke, the current European Special Librarian of the Year to give a talk <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e163>>.

On the 2nd to 4th December is the 'World Bioanalytics Summit' for informatics and lab professionals <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e129>>. 'Health Informatics' is also on the 2nd December and is being held in Birmingham <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e164>>. The Galley Club on the 10th December is an opportunity for publishers and book producers to network and it is taking place in London <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e167>>.

Submit details of your event today for free promotion. Simply complete the form at <<http://www.freepint.com/events>>.

FREE PINT BOOKSHELF<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>**"Web of Deception: Misinformation on the Internet"****Edited by Anne P. Mintz****Reviewed by Cynthia Shamel**

Cynthia Shamel owns and operates Shamel Information Services. She serves as President Elect on the Board of Directors of the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP).

Cynthia specializes in the business of science and technology, offering comprehensive online research services to companies in high tech, pharmaceutical, and biotechnology. She has also written on marketing information services and providing online reference service. Cynthia will be representing AIIP at the Online Information UK meeting in London. Stop by stand number 352 to say hello.

Related links:

- Find out more about this book online at the Free Pint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/deception.htm>
- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0910965609/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0910965609/freepint00>
- "Web of Deception" ISBN 0910965609, published by CyberAge Books, written by Anne P. Mintz (Editor)
- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the Free Pint Bookshelf at <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

According to some, trouble comes to those who search for it.*

Experienced Web searchers can attest, however, that searching for it is not necessarily required. Misinformation and deception will often find you, even if you are not looking for them. "The Web of Deception: Misinformation on the Internet" is about information on the Internet that is intentionally wrong or misleading. In a collection of 11 essays, the contributors, so expertly selected by editor Anne Mintz, explain how to recognize misinformation, how to avoid it, and what to do if you are damaged by it. Since human creativity seems to know no bounds, most Web surfers will sooner or later find trouble or be found by it.

The topics addressed in "The Web of Deception" include web hoaxes, corporate misinformation, medical misinformation, identity and privacy issues, and charity scams. The chapters on legal issues include advice on how to seek remedies for intentional misinformation. The chapters on search engines and the interface between searchers and search engines illuminate the opportunities to manipulate retrieved results.

Each chapter includes instructive examples of deception and consequences. Some would make the reader wonder, how could anyone have ever believed that? For instance, a story attributed to the Associated Press told of environmentalists putting bright orange hunter's vests on deer in the state of Ohio, U.S. The idea was to cause hunters to mistake the vested deer for humans and not shoot. Although an anti-hunting association fabricated the story, it was picked up and repeated by Fox News, ESPN.com and the Wall Street Journal Online. More alarming stories tell of credit card fraud and identity theft with the suggestion that Internet users guard their privacy with encryption and common sense.

This book is useful to all searchers, and especially those who are in a position to train others in Internet searching. All readers will be educated in the pitfalls and hazards of the Web. Most readers will find some chapters more relevant than others, but each chapter has at least one nugget of truth to foster better, safer Web interactions with strategies for avoiding the known pitfalls.

Forward by Steven Forbes. Contributors: Paul Piper, Susan Detwiler, Helene Kassler, Stephen Arnold, Carol Ebbinghouse, Lysbeth Chuck, LaJean Humphries, Susan Feldman, Elizabeth Liddy, Barbara Quint and Anne Mintz.

*based on Proverbs 11:27

Free Pint Forthcoming Articles

[Provisional]

* Internet Resources on IT * Alternative Search Strategies * Digital Libraries * Prospect Research * Archive Television * Deep Linking * Vendors * Legal Sources * Competitive Intelligence * Patents * France: Business and Economic Sources on the Web * Toxicology Sources on the Web * Working From Home *

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

FREE PINT GOLD

In November 2001, Patrick Hartary wrote a tips article on how to find 'free' photo galleries on the Web. Martin White wrote a feature on communities of practice, the topic of his forthcoming Free Pint Exchange in January 2003 <http://www.freepint.com/exchange>.

- Free Pint No.101 29th November 2001. "Picture This: 'Free' Photos on the Web" and "Communities of Practice" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/291101.htm>

Two years ago, our tips article was about railway resources online. It covered a range of things, from freight services to tickets and fares. Our feature article showed us where to look for 'information and images about film and TV'.

- * Free Pint No.76, 30th November 2000. "Britain's Railway Industry Web Sites" and "Web Sources for Film and Television Information" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/301100.htm>

The tips article in 1999 looked at Welfare Information on the Web. Tom Hartley's article pointed out why it is so important that estate agents get themselves on the Web.

- * Free Pint No.51, 2nd December 1999. "UK Help and Welfare Information on the Web" and "Homepages: Househunting on the Internet" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/021299.htm>

Four years ago, Diana Grimwood-Jones wrote a tips article on business management case studies. Katherine Allen's feature gave us a behind the scenes look at Online Information 1998.

- * Free Pint No.27, 26th November 1998. "Business Management Case Studies" and "Online Information 98 Preview" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/261198.htm>

FEATURE ARTICLE

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/281102.htm#feature>>

"Ping, touch, head, tail: or, how to become a systems librarian"

By Joe Tarrant

Joe Tarrant began his career in the library at University College Cork (Ireland) in 1985 and has since worked at UCL, IME Ltd and The Chartered Institute of Bankers, before a move to Clifford Chance LLP in 2000. During his career, he has been a shelfer, acquisitions librarian, cataloguer, looseleaf filer, documentation writer, software tester, helpdesk geek, researcher, webmaster, systems manager and general dogsbody.

Most Free Pint articles review online resources. This one is different: it's a 'How-To' article which lists the resources in passing. I'm assuming that people would want to read more about the hard technical skills rather than just being knowledgeable about library/information systems. Hopefully there's something here for everybody.

Soft Systems Skills

There's a commonly-held belief that librarians and information staff go into systems work (aka 'the Dark Side') to get away from daily encounters with the public. Yet, despite the image, library systems work is heavily about people. There's no escaping your colleagues and you'll find yourself negotiating with vendors, managing user demands, training staff, translating IT terminology to your colleagues, developing good relationships with your colleagues in IT and networking at user groups. It's a people business.

Perhaps surprisingly, traditional library skills, like cataloguing, research and reference interviews, are of real use in systems roles. You'll manage systems better if you've used them yourself. So, if you want to end up in a systems role, it's perhaps best to do some time in a more traditional role.

Reading Materials

Good background reading/commentary on general and library technology issues can be found on Wired, Slashdot, O'Reilly (a technical publisher that gives away a lot of content), information systems tech sites like The Shifted Librarian, the dead-looking but link-heavy Library Geek, the Library Techlog, the library weblogs page, LibraryHQ and many of the sites listed in this article (including Free Pint; ahem...). There are good information systems books and journals out there, like *Computers in Libraries*. You should also poke around your vendors' sites and the sites of any usergroups to which you belong (they're there to be joined, you know). Watch out for useful, free email newsletters like the Cert advisories on network security. Join - and contribute to - your usergroup's listserv/email list.

I can't say this strongly enough: there is no avoiding technical manuals, helpfiles and how-to's. Read them. Re-read them. Get to LIKE reading them. More often than not, the answer you want is written down somewhere. It's usually quicker to find someone else's answer and adapt it, rather than inventing your own.

Hard Systems Skills

Library systems admin consists of five key technical skills: database admin, intranet/web

skills, operating systems, networking and (possibly) hardware. You'll learn a lot faster if you have a home machine of some sort to play on, even just a cast-off P75 or Mac. These days, you can pick up older but quite acceptable desktop computers for under 100 pounds second-hand.

Databases

Most library systems staff manage a database or library system of some kind. Find any manuals and read them. You should always try to have a test server running a copy of your library system, so you can try changes safely and run upgrades in lab conditions without bothering your users. Handy for training purposes too.

If your home computer has a database product - MS Access or Works, Apple Works, Filemaker or even an old version of dBase - you can tinker around. SQL is a common database language and many databases are SQL compatible. 'MySQL' is a free, downloadable SQL application for Unix and Windows (and getting it installed successfully is less than one). The MySQL website is a mine of information on SQL. Whatever your database, get a book and/or download some tutorials from the web, do some preparatory reading and try things out. Start a project and go through the stages. Work out a layout. Make a table. Add some data. Write a report. Do a mailmerge. Export data from one database into another.

Intranet/Web Skills

Most library systems now come with a browser-based public catalogue and most online systems are the same. As systems librarian, you may be asked to customise an interface, perhaps using a stylesheet to give your OPAC your organisation's 'look and feel'. Learn some HTML - and that's hand-coding it yourself with a text-editor, not using Frontpage or Dreamweaver to do the job for you. Again, there are plenty of tutorials online.

Server Operating Systems

This is the serious stuff. You may have to manage your library's server(s). There are two main server operating systems: Windows and Unix. Your server(s) may use one, the other or both, and you may find you have different versions of both (Windows NT and Windows 2000 as well as AIX, Solaris and/or Linux). Server administration requires a knowledge of the tools: using the command line, finding/copying files and monitoring server activity. Library management system problems can be server-based, so learn how to display processes, memory use and processor load on your server and watch them if things begin to go wrong. Read your operating system's manual or built-in help to learn how to set up user logins and shared folders; on your home machine, set up a personal webserver and

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a firewall (ZoneAlarm is a good Windows firewall that's free to personal users); schedule tasks, such as antivirus updates or backups. Download and set up Seti@Home - a command line version for preference. All these operations teach server skills.

You'll probably also need to learn how to write Unix shell-scripts (known as batchfiles in Windowsland). Scripts/batchfiles are executable textfiles containing lists of commands and are used among other things for automating routine server administration, such as backups. Scripting is a basic form of programming; if you enjoy it, try learning Perl which is a great language for text manipulation (e.g. database records and webpages) on Windows and Unix. Entering 'perl -v' at your command line will show if Perl is already installed.

Windows NT/2000/XP

Server versions of Windows NT/2000/XP (same thing, really) look much the same as Windows on your desk PC - they're just used differently. As usual, work things out on your own computer at home or a test server first. Learn to use the Windows Task Manager and the Control Panel's services list to work out what's happening on the machine: processes, memory usage, processor load.

Unix

Unix has a long history and is as much a culture as an operating system - prepare for some surreal links, odd mascots (especially penguins), ancient and obscure arguments (vi versus emacs), lots of online help, newsletters and beginners' pages and a huge variety of brands, ranging from Solaris to different versions of Linux and of BSD. The latter two are cheap/free and very reliable and can be installed on most machines, from 486s to the latest Pentiums and on a wide range of Apple Macs. On the subject of Macs: the latest version of the Macintosh operating system (Mac OS X) is a version of Unix (mostly BSD) beneath its new and much-admired graphical interface and you just have to open a terminal (or three) to get to a standard BSD command prompt and all the usual Unix tools in the /usr/bin directory. Do some research on Linux and hardware requirements before you dive in. Slackware is a good version of Linux for older machines, if that's what you have. Linux CDROMs are available for free with many Linux manuals and on Linux magazine covers so there's no reason not to have your own Unix machine at home if you want one.

Even basic Unix skills look good on a CV. If you really want to learn Unix, stick with the character interface - the terminal - and avoid the graphical interfaces. There are too many of them, whereas the command line environments vary very little. Get a beginner's Unix manual - or read manuals online - and start playing with the basic commands at the command prompt. Start with man (a help command) and then move on to ls, ping, cat, head, tail, touch, grep and, especially, ps and top, which are key server management utilities. Use a text editor - pico is a good one to start with - to write simple scripts and use chmod to make them executable. Use pico and lynx - a

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terminal-based browser - to write and view HTML files in a terminal.

NB: character-based applications (ones that run in a terminal instead of a window) are not always clear about the exit procedure. If you get stuck, try q, bye, quit, control-x or control-c.

Hardware

This covers anything from adding memory to managing a patchpanel to trouble-shooting a networked printer. Too much to cover here, I'm afraid. If you want to play with hardware, switch it all off first, unplug everything, earth yourself and learn on your own first.

Networking

Library systems depend on networking. Read the Unix/Windows help on basic network commands like ping, traceroute, ipconfig, netstat, telnet, ftp and others. At work, ping your server's IP address (available from your administrator or by entering ping, followed by your server's machinename, at your own machine's command line). All machines have two names: a network name and 'localhost'. Entering 'ping localhost' on your own machine, provided it is configured correctly, should also give you a result. Reading a TCP/IP manual will tell you why.

If you have two machines at home, start thinking about connecting them via an Ethernet hub or a cross-over cable. Macs are handy here too - they usually have Ethernet cards as standard.

Five required qualities to make a good systems librarian

1. Observation. All problems happen for a reason: the trick is to spot the pattern. Interrogate your users politely (reference interview skills are transferable!) to find out what they were doing; watch them work and watch/log server activity.

2. Communication. Be a technology information hub for your library/unit. Find out what's happening in your IT department and keep your colleagues and managers informed. Attend those user groups and join email lists.

3. Curiosity. If you see a web page you like or a techie doing something interesting, like managing a server remotely, find out how it's done. Keep your eyes and ears open when visiting the IT

dept and get to know everyone, even the surly one in the corner.

4. Technical literacy - Read The Fine Manual! 'RTFM' - sometimes more crudely expressed - is IT's answer to many simple IT questions.

5. Willingness to get dirty. Reading's great, but it's no substitute for actually building a database or writing a simple backup script. Get your hands dirty at the command line, try things out and learn from your mistakes. Be brave. Start now. Ping that server!

I missed out a pile of stuff - watching developments in the library systems market, RSS, XML, Javascript, networking CDROMs and learning to loathe dot-matrix printers and adhesive address labels with a passion. But don't give up hope - many of the pros don't know enough about a lot of this stuff either. We all have our weak and strong points. You'll find your own as you go along. If you think you're still interested, take a little tongue-in-cheek test ...

Ah, well. That's enough to start with. Welcome to the 'dark side'.

GOODBYE

Thanks for reading today's Free Pint, and we hope you'll send us a seasonal greetings card to the address below. You never know, if it comes a long way or is original then it may result in some promotion for your neck of the woods.

Hope to see you in London next week, or if not then ...

See you in two weeks!

William Hann, Managing Editor
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