CONTENTS

HTML Version
    <http://www.freepint.com/issues/311002.htm>

Fully Formatted Acrobat Version
    <http://www.freepint.com/issues/311002.pdf>

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, 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

It's all about your customers. That's who you've got to focus on all the time. By customers I'm not just talking about people who buy things from you, I also mean people in other departments who use your services, someone interviewing you, members of your community, etc.

You've got to give them good reason to want to use your service instead of those of your competitors, offer you that job, buy your products, or partner with you on a project.

Two ways to shine immediately spring to mind ...

The first is through excellent customer service, which I talked about in the last issue. This is the subject of an article I'm currently writing called 'Good Grief', about how customers complaining and giving you grief can be a great opportunity for you to get much closer to them. It's also the reason we're running the 'Customer Service Award' at Online Information 2002. We'll be writing to you separately about that soon, but in the meantime don't forget to make your nomination at <http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2002/>.

The second way to shine, other than by providing a great product and great customer service, is to offer additional 'must have' features and benefits, over and above your standard products. For instance, I think it's great that the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), of which I'm a proud member, have just launched their Information Centre which I visited on its opening this Monday. A great facility, right in central London, which is a valuable additional benefit to membership <http://www.freepint.com/go/b20627>.

We're also trying to get closer to our customers by trying out live customer service on the Free Pint Web site. Whenever you see the 'Live Customer Support' button on the top-left of pages on the site, you'll know we're online, ready to welcome your questions and feedback <http://www.freepint.com/go/b20544>.

So, a way forward in a harsh economic climate is to make yourself stand out by getting closer to your customers. Indeed, in today's issue of Free Pint we have two articles that both recount experiences of using the Web. One on using the Web for job hunting, and the other about what works on the Web, and what doesn't.

Don't forget to check out our forthcoming 'Effective Writing Exchange' workshop in November <http://www.freepint.com/exchange> and watch out for news of our new central London venue for Exchanges in the New Year. Please also spread the word about Free Pint by forwarding this issue to your colleagues.

Regards
William

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FREE PINT JOBS
<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/b20648>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Senior Information Officer - Law
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2090>
Excellent opportunities in law. London, Sheffield, Nottingham.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Head of Library and Information Services
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2085>
Strategic/Developmental role for innovative and qualified Manager. Top City Professional Firm. 55,000 - 60,000 pounds plus benefits.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Law Firm Information Service Post - Maternity Cover
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2105>
Law firm in London seeks energetic information services person to be part of team of five for 6-9 months maternity cover.
Recruiter: Davies Arnold Cooper

[The above jobs are paid listings]

Online Information / Free Pint Customer Service Award
Vote for the organisation that has provided you with the best customer service. In conjunction with Online Information 2002, this award recognises that good customer service from information vendors can make all the difference to information professionals' daily lives. Make your nomination today:
<http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2002/>

Targeted Science and Engineering Information

- Nerac delivers hard-to-find information from worldwide resources within the next business day. Our search experts locate information on published literature, patents, trademarks and advancements in science and technology. Our resources provide targeted results that save you time and money. To learn more, visit our Web site at www.nerac.com, call 860-872-7000 (U.S.), from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET to speak directly with a Nerac representative or e-mail us at info@nerac.com.

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Free Pint Effective Writing Exchange
Thursday 7th November 2002, West London, UK
<http://www.freepint.com/exchange>

"This session will equip delegates with practical principles and guidelines for making online publications more effective through good writing"

MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES
from Penny Leidtke Sienkiewicz

Penny Leidtke Sienkiewicz <on-targetinfo @erols.com> is the principal of On-Target Information Services, a U.S.-based information research and retrieval firm that addresses the information needs of the corporate, financial, and legal communities.

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

- <http://www.freeanswers.com> - searches the knowledge bases of Adobe, Microsoft and Intuit for answers to software questions that you pose in everyday language.

- <http://www.ita.doc.gov> - the main site for the International Trade Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce provides trade statistics, state export data, country and industry information.

- <http://www.labtestsonline.org/index.html> - a peer-reviewed site that explains various lab tests performed in a medical setting, including how and why the test is conducted and how the results are interpreted.

- <http://gungadin.cs.brandeis.edu/~weiluo/ main3.htm> - search the 2001 Medline abstracts for biomedical acronyms or the associated long forms. Results link to the citation or the full abstract or submit long-form searches directly to PubMed.

- <http://edgarscan.pwcglobal.com/servlets/ edgarscan> - free access to the U.S. SEC's EDGAR filings, including extracted financial tables, normalized financials, peer-group analysis, and stock trading data. Financial data can be exported to an Excel spreadsheet. Searchable by name, ticker symbol or SIC code.

- <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/> - Astronomy Picture of the Day. A different image every day with an explanation and links to other pictures.

- <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/ Guides/Internet/Style.html> - part of the tutorial on finding information on the internet, this site provides basic guidelines for citing materials from electronic resources using humanities and scientific styles. Links to the original version of the style at the Columbia University site.

10% Discount on Featured Euromonitor Reference Titles

Free Pinters can now claim a 10% discount when purchasing featured Euromonitor business reference titles via Free Pint.

This month's discount is on the 'World Consumer Lifestyles Databook' billed as ".. the ideal source to consult if you need to understand who consumers are, and the major characteristics of their lifestyles"

Find out more at http://www.freepint.com/shop/euromonitor/

Many Two New White Papers from Factiva

E-Learning for the Enterprise discusses technology-delivered learning as a cost-effective and critical support for many business activities and describes how some companies have successfully embraced e-learning. The Value of Metrics in the Corporate Communications Market offers examples of how the power of information obtained via the desktop environment can translate into tangible ROI measurements. Read them at http://www.factiva.com/redirects/ learning/freepint

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

To have the latest Bar postings sent to you every other day, log in to your account online at <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

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

In Palm Springs on the 4th-6th November, researchers, information managers and librarians are invited to 'Internet Librarian 2002' <http://www.freepint.com/go/e156>.

The 'STN Property Forum' is being held in the UK on the 6th November <http://www.freepint. com/go/e159>. It is free, so why not take a look.

Here at our offices in West London shortly, the 'Free Pint Effective Writing Exchange' will be led by Paul Waddington from writing company Plain Text. This session will equip delegates with practical principles and guidelines for making online publications more effective through good writing <http://www.freepint.com/go/e161>.

At the Belfry, the World Trade Group have organised two events: The 'European Supply Chain Summit' <http://www.freepint.com/go/e128> and the 'World Bioanalytics Summit' <http://www.freepint.com/go/e129>.

Come and see us at 'Online Information 2002' in London on the 3rd-5th December. It is a great meeting place for information professionals, knowledge managers, librarians, academics, publishers, information users and IT professionals <http://www.freepint.com/go/e119>.

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

TIPS ARTICLE

<http://www.freepint.com/issues/311002.htm#tips>

"Job Hunting Resources On The Web"
By Veronica Bezear

Linguist turned information enthusiast, Veronica Bezear works for the National Grid company as an On-line Document Manager. She is currently in the process of changing jobs, and gratefully acknowledges the help of the Jeannette Finney Partnership with the job hunting task.

I am not a professional career counsellor. I have, however, used the Web extensively in my quest to change jobs this year. This article brings together my summary of what worked and what didn't. No promises on definitely right or wrong answers, because in case you'd forgotten, there aren't any absolutes when you're looking for a job, its all about individuals.

I have divided this article into 3 stages: Advice, Advertisements, and Research. Trying these approaches in the wrong order wasted me a distressing amount of time. You might like to consider, before setting off, the best plan for you.

ADVICE

Before starting on your job search, it is worth asking yourself some crushingly obvious questions: Do I know what I'm good at? Do I know what I'm looking for? Do I want another job doing what I'm doing now? It is also worth checking if you think your job hunting skills are up to the task ahead.

If you are unsure in any of these areas, you are probably going to need some training, advice, encouragement or at least extra information. There are a number of possible sources for this, online or otherwise.

Firstly, government websites. The UK Online website, under the 'life stages' page <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page474.asp#5> gives advice on relevant benefits, rights, and legislation. Or you can go directly to the online UK job and job hunting advice centres at <http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk>.

A second option is university websites. All universities have some form of careers service. Most of them publish resources useful not only to their own students but also to any other job hunting graduate. Try the London University's Virtual Careers Library <http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/links/index.htm> or their online helpsheets at <http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/helpshts/help.htm> on topics such as covering letters and interviews.

Thirdly, as well as magazine articles, published books on careers will now often have accompanying websites with useful resources to encourage you to read the book. Some of the best for me were: <http://www.creativecareers.com> - an accompaniment to the book 'Careers for Creative and Unconventional People' by Carol Eikleberry; <http://www.jobhuntersbible.com> - the awesome accompanying website to "What Color is Your Parachute" by Richard Nelson Bolles; and my favourite <http://www.asktheheadhunter.com> a companion site to the book of the same name by Nick Corcodilos, offering a provocative view on the whole process.

A fourth option, of course, is private firms offering career-related services. I have not covered them in more depth here as I am presuming that those intending to go down this route will normally be directed to them by other means - I was fortunate enough to have access to an outplacement service paid for by my employer.

In summary, personally, I spent four fruitless months firing applications off with no responses whatever, before I had some help to focus on my goals, my strategy and my general technique. If nothing mentioned here is an issue for you, move straight on to the next section.

ADVERTISING

This is the traditional approach - employers and agencies advertising job opportunities; job seekers advertising themselves via CVs.

For an overview of this approach try Internet Magazine's summary and site list for employers and job seekers at <http://213.176.1.196:800/Default/www.internet-magazine.com/recruitment/index.asp>.

For a more in-depth UK view on this area try <http://www.onrec.com>, the online site related to Online Recruitment magazine. This has a list of recruitment sites, searchable by specific industry area.

Before you start on these sources, advertising is a great source of leads, but you can waste *a lot* of time browsing vacancy lists. Consideration such as the following can cut down on non-productive time considerably:

- What is your priority? Is it location, role, salary, skills used, or something else -- search on that first, and save the browsing for when you need fresh inspiration.

- Does the site have an intelligent agent which will search for you and notify you when new vacancies matching your criteria come up? -- not 100% foolproof but still useful.

- Does the site cover your desired jobs/salary levels? -- not to insult your intelligence; but are

you searching for arts/media jobs on a site which covers mainly IT work?

- What kind of reputation does the site have? Try a general search via one of the search engines to establish what people are saying about it.

- If posting your CV (a facility now offered by most of the major sites) advice on checking the privacy terms and conditions would appear to be self evident.

Other points perhaps worth making are:

- Keywords - vital to mention the right keywords for your target job. Potential recruiters will be searching a rather large database of CVs (one UK site recently stated its database size has reached 0.5 million CVs). Your details may be way down a list or not mentioned at all if you had not input the right relevant keywords.

- Keeping it updated - this is for relevance, saving you unwanted calls, and ensuring against mistakes with a potential employer if the site includes a facility to apply online for the job. For instance, <http://www.reed.co.uk> offer to store not only a CV but also a covering letter - risky if you are not keeping them up to date as I discovered painfully.

- Commenting on sites dedicated to one agency - I have found contacts with them fruitful. However, this seems to be only a supplement at present to their person-to-person service and they may not be advertising all the vacancies they have on their site. Don't expect to interact with them entirely on-line, many still require an appointment to register.

For the most comprehensive list of sites specifically advertising library and information work, try the following link <http://www.libraryjobpostings.org>. Use either of the overview sites mentioned at the beginning of this section on advertising for listings of more generalist agencies.

Finally, many employers themselves now advertise vacancies on their websites. Some larger organisations offer facilities such as applying online. The main benefit I have found for these types of job pages was to double check on vacancies advertised elsewhere and monitor target employers (I was searching in a particular geographic area). Which brings me neatly on to the third use of the Internet in job hunting -- research.

RESEARCH

This is the approach which most advice sites will be recommending to you, also the most time-consuming. Using the Web for research in job hunting falls into two categories:

Firstly, generating opportunities. We have talked about monitoring the jobs pages of target employers. Also of interest on their websites should be organisational changes announced which may suggest people moving on and jobs becoming available.

Time to mention speculative applications. In all my job hunting this year I was never brave enough to try this, even though it was

professionally recommended to me.

If you feel like trying this approach, the general advice is that your application needs to be well targeted and couched in terms that focus on the employer's needs. A typical example is found at <http://www.careerlab.com/letters/139.htm>.

Another useful opportunity-generating strategy you will hear quoted is contacting people working in the field in which you want to be working for advice. (NB this does not usually mean directly asking for a job). Once again, I did not try this much, but was impressed how a well-targeted keyword search could bring me the details of people I had lost contact with years previously.

The second research use of the Internet is making the most of opportunities. In preparing well-targeted application forms, and interviews, the Internet proved a wonderful source for me on a number of different aspects of the jobs I was going for, making for some very productive interviews that were easier than they would otherwise have been. The best focus seemed to be:

- Why the job is vacant - if it is a new role, why had it been created?

- Further details on the people mentioned in the job description or the interview letter.

- The current problems of the organisation you are joining which they may be expecting you to resolve.

- Further details on specific aspects of the role mentioned in the job description.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I have now found a new job. I did use these approaches in the process, but after much work it was eventually the good old local paper which yielded that vital lead. However I don't think I would have been as successful in my pursuit of it without the facility to research substantially on the Internet around the advertised requirements for the job, prior to application and interview.

There are certainly some very helpful resources out there, including free psychometric tests not even mentioned here. But if you don't want to waste time, just like any form of online searching, it pays to plan out your preferred strategy before you go online. Much further discussion on this is probably appropriate at the Free Pint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>. Hopefully I shall see you there.

FREE PINT BOOKSHELF
<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

"World Without Secrets: Business, Crime and Privacy in the Age of Ubiquitous Computing"
Reviewed by Stephen Lafferty

Stephen Lafferty has an MSc. in Library and Information Management and has previously written on the subject of surveillance and privacy for Free Pint <http://www.freepint.com/issues/030800.htm#feature>.

Related links:

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

- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0471218162/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0471218162/freepint00>

- "World Without Secrets: Business, Crime and Privacy in the Age of Ubiquitous Computing", ISBN 0471218162, published by John\Wiley & Sons Inc, written by Richard Hunter

- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the Free Pint Bookshelf at <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

- Read about other Internet Strategy books on the Free Pint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/strategy.htm>

To propose an information-related book for review, send details to <bookshelf@freepint.com>.

The title of Richard Hunter's book refers to the growing availability of information about the personal lives of consumers living in capitalist democratic states. The book begins with the assumption that "very little of consequence can't and won't be known about anyone or anything". Hunter approaches the subject of the erosion of personal privacy from two angles: the business and the governmental/police justifications for retaining information on individuals. His argument, that citizens in democratic countries had better take responsibility for the power of surveillance technologies while they still can, emerges from the discussion of the increasing possibilities for deriving behaviour patterns from recombining archived data.

Hunter's first point, that people adapt at a slower rate than the introduction of new technologies, is underlined using examples of Amazon.com and Acme-Rent-A-Car of Connecticut. Neither set of consumers, when they began relationships with either company, realised that information collected about their shopping habits and movements would be sold to third parties or used for law enforcement purposes.

Hunter then goes on to demonstrate how organisations that create and retail information, such as Microsoft and record companies, are responding to threats being posed by self-organising groups using the Internet to communicate. Hunter calls these groups 'Network Armies' and provides an analysis of how such groups coalesce and fight their cause, using examples of the Open Source software movement and Linux v. Windows, Napster and digital distribution of music and the anti-capitalist protestors in Seattle and Genoa.

The discussion then moves on to identifying social groups within the 'world without secrets'. Hunter and a team of researchers at Gartner identify four groups: 'Network Armies', the 'Lost and the Lonely', 'Conscientious Objectors' and the 'Engineered Society'. This analysis implies that the world without secrets is inevitable and the area of society to which you belong depends upon whether you support or oppose the authority of the leadership that passes legislation to eliminate barriers to information flow.

The last two chapters are dedicated to discussion of war when all enemy movements are known; and the possibility of a war in cyberspace. Parts of this book were written on or after September 11th 2001 and Hunter considers the development of terrorist network armies and the response that an 'engineered society' can make to such attacks. The New York Electronic Crimes Task Force is used as a model network army for terrorist threats from cyberspace, an Internet version of Interpol with intercontinental crime-fighting agreements.

Richard Hunter believes that a world without secrets is inevitable. He urges his readers to take responsibility for the ways that technologies are implemented through democratic means, such as building in limitations for information usage by the authorities.

This book makes a compelling argument for educating both the authorities and the public about the type and uses of recorded information and is an excellent introduction to contemporary attitudes towards and policies of surveillance. Readers who are interested in the freedoms that they enjoy in their societies should read this along with Simson Garfinkel's 'Database Nation' and Michael Caloyannides 'Desktop Witness' and be careful about to whom they give their personal information.

FREE PINT GOLD

This time last year Anne Ku wrote a tips article on global warming and the web sources available. In our feature article Sheila Webber pinpointed 'a few general marketing resources' and then described 'resources specific to library and information sectors'.

- Free Pint No.99 1st November 2001. "Web Sources for Climate Change and Emissions Trading" and "Marketing Library and Information Services" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/011101.htm>

In issue 74 two years ago, Sam Vaknin looked at Central and Eastern European Web sites and Sheila Webber provided some free portal resources on the web.

- Free Pint 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>

In Richard Eskin's 1999 tips article, you will find a list of key library and information science sources on the Web. Mark Southgate wrote a feature about affiliate and associate programs.

- Free Pint No.49, 4th November 1999. "Key UK Library and Information Science Information Resources" and "Affiliate and Associate Programs" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/041199.htm>

Four years ago, Ben Heald described some of his favourite electronic newsletters, and Ian Watson looked at some sites 'which have proved useful both in my work, in a newspaper library and socially'.

- Free Pint No.25, 29th October 1998. "Delivered to your Desktop" and "Making it part of your life" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/291098.htm>

Penny <penny@freepint.com>

FEATURE ARTICLE
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/311002.htm#feature>

"What Does Well On The Web - A Personal View"
By Susannah Ross

Susannah Ross and Julia Swann run a website consultancy called Select Ideas <http://www.selectideas.co.uk/consult> specialising in small enterprises and individuals. Susannah is the author of "A Simple Guide to Writing for Your Website" (ISBN 013041557X Prentice Hall 2001) and offers training in writing for the Web <http://www.selectideas.co.uk/ross>. She also offers courses in business writing through the writing company Clarity <http://www.clarity.co.uk>.

I hear Jennifer Aldridge has set up a website in Ambridge (home of 'The Archers', in case you don't follow this particular soap). She is making her research on local history available to anyone interested. Provided she has organised her information well and has built a decent website, I'd say her chances of succeeding are pretty good. These are big provisos, but the important thing is that she has identified good reasons for setting up a website: she has something to offer and the Web enables her to reach her market in a way that no other medium can. She is not investing capital or employing people, at least to start with, so if the site fails it will probably be only her pride that is hurt.

How different from the dotcom mania of little more than two years ago. Reams of print have been written about it, and websites have been set up to document it so that we can learn from the mistakes made. One of the fatal mistakes seems to have been the assumption that because technically you could reach millions of people, you would. On top of that huge assumption was piled another: that you could then persuade people to do things they had never done before, like order and pay online for food chopped up and ready to cook for their evening meal. At least with a mailshot you know you will reach people, even if there's no guarantee that your offer will be read, still less taken up.

So, what does well? It helps to start with something that you know can be done. One business that has made good use of the Web, easyJet, started with an idea that had already been tried in the United States: no-frills air travel. It used a website - rather than travel agents or its own offices - to sell tickets as part of a strategy of operating more cheaply than the traditional airlines. The rest of the strategy included aiming to fill every plane and getting people to accept that the main reason for flying was simply to get from A to B. The website was important, but only one of several means to an end.

Established businesses that go online just because they feel they ought to have a presence on the Web usually make a poor show of it. They tend to regard the Web as somewhere to put their PR material. They don't really want to communicate with individuals and they produce sites headed by meaningless slogans like "making life better for people" and filled with waffle that is of little use to the outsider. These sites not only tend to produce less information than a telephone call would elicit, they may actually damage the image of the company.

If the aim is to sell, the Web tends to favour products and services that are easily described, packaged and priced - like travel tickets, CDs and books. That includes pornography, one of the few successful Web businesses, in the sense that porn sites make money. The Web is an effective medium for pornography, I imagine, because it provides easier access to an established market than the traditional plain envelopes or corners of shops. Customers were already willing to pay for it and presumably were only too glad to receive the material directly into a computer at home or at work.

Not everything that does well sells well. News is a product well suited to the Web in that it consists of short bits of information that can be updated every minute, but customers are not used to paying for it in the same way as they are for other products. Although they buy newspapers and magazines, subscribe to television channels and pay the BBC license fee, they tend to expect news to be free at the moment of delivery. There is so much news on the Web that customers will lap it up if it's free, as it is at BBCi, but do without or go elsewhere if it's not. So news does well, but it has to be perceived to be pretty special to sell well or sell at all. The Wall Street Journal is rare in that it has persuaded users to subscribe to read its stories online and is reckoned to be making money from its website.

Surveys suggest that many Web users still do not feel confident enough to pay for things online. So selling online may not be the main function of a business website. Big businesses like Sainsbury's use their websites to cultivate their customers with specialised information, deals and competitions, as well as to sell. The selling is an extension of their existing service. The Wine Society uses the Web to allow members to do what they have always done - buy wine, read about wine, check their reserves - but in a new way, which for some will be more convenient than the telephone or the post.

Where customers feel that the main reason for a particular online operation is to cut costs, rather than improve service, a website can backfire. Some banks give customers a discount to do online what they are used to doing by post or in person. If there is no such incentive or if the process isn't quicker than the traditional means, customers may feel that the organisation is making life easier for itself at their expense and go elsewhere. When my seven-year-old Psion returned from a repair job with a note saying that if I wanted an invoice I could get it online, my heart sank. But the method was so efficient and the printing out so painless that I accepted it. It helped that the rest of their customer service was so good.

A website can be a great asset for small businesses and individuals. They may not want to get into operating online payments, but they can make good use of the Web if they have an easily identifiable product, good credentials and clear aims. Small hotels seem to do well on the Web. A small business I know in Oxfordshire, Shackell Pianos, who sell and restore grand pianos, substantially increased their business when they set up a website. So did my singing teacher Catharine Robinson. Their products are easily found by search engines and the information on their websites cuts out a lot of telephone enquiries.

In fact, it may be easier for small enterprises to do well on the Web as their focus is clearer than that of big businesses, who are tempted to try to do too many different things with their websites. For the same reasons, local websites seem to do well. They have a clear identity, create a feeling of community and are better bets for advertisers than less targeted sites.

To decide what does well on the Web, remember what the Web does well. One of its peculiar strengths is the ability to track users. Amazon does things that only a super-assistant in a book shop could, like tell you what other books were bought by people who bought this one. Another strength is the ability to bring together a range of information that would be almost impossible to assemble in print. A site like CNet selling computer products not only has the manufacturer's description of each product, it also has its own review and comments from customers who have used it.

The test is whether the website does the job better than the alternative. I'm surprised to read surveys showing car hire near the top of the kinds of business that do well on the Web. When I wanted to hire car in Italy for my summer holiday, I struggled with the websites of some of the biggest car hire companies in the world. They asked irrelevant questions, took ages to register the required information and dealt scantily with insurance, local charges and taxes, which tend to

be high in Italy. Then I remembered the telephone and did a deal in a few minutes.

The greatest strength of the Web is its ability to give an almost infinite number of people access to the same information at the same time. The Web provides a hitherto impossible ease of communication to people with a common interest wherever they happen to be. Hence the success of Friends Reunited at one end of the scale and some fairly nasty people at the other. It is good at bringing together and catering for people with every kind of interest, need or hobby.

Which brings us back to Jennifer Aldridge and the local and family history of Ambridge. Her project is just the kind of thing that does well on the Web. All she has to do is make sure that she's got a good website. That, of course, is another story.

GOODBYE

Thanks for reading today's Free Pint. We really enjoy putting it together, and hope you enjoy reading it. Do visit us online for lots more great resources at <http://www.freepint.com>.

See you in two weeks!

William Hann, Managing Editor <william@freepint.com>

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