UpFront with Barbara Quint

Answers, Answers Everywhere, but Don't Eat the Peanut Butter

by BARBARA QUINT

Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Teddy Roosevelt's daughter, was a prominent Washington hostess for decades. She was also a terror. Responding to critics about her caustic wit and fearless frankness—not to mention her outlandish behavior—the great president responded, "I can either run the country or I can attend to Alice, but I cannot possibly do both."

Longworth used to say, "If you don't have anything nice to say about someone, come sit right over here by me." Though I certainly can't aspire to anywhere near as towering a status as she—I am no terror (sigh)—I still have enough lust for battle to relish the opportunity that a nice, big controversy gives to us old warhorses. When it comes to a choice between excessive civility and chastising villainy, I echo the sentiments (if not the context) of one of my other idols, Mae West, who proudly proclaimed, "When I'm good, I'm very, very good, but when I'm bad, I'm better."

The Wisdom of Crowds?

So when I saw a recent press release by Answers.com announcing that it would begin integrating content from Yahoo! Answers, a service that accepts free replies from an estimated 65 million Yahoo! users and lets users vote on the quality of the "answer," I slipped on my helmet and reached for my bazooka. Voting to determine truth? Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war! Community-generated answers! The wisdom of crowds! Pshaw.

A quick check of Yahoo! Answers (http://answers.yahoo.com) produced a Best Answers box at the top of the page. After two clicks, I found a question from someone wondering which of the dozen or so condiments she had opened belonged in the fridge. Someone who claimed to work in a cafeteria supplied an answer for each item. Peanut butter received an "OK" to store on a shelf; no refrigeration required.

Whoa. Stop the turnip truck and let me jump off. In my entire life, I have never, ever been sicker than the weekend I ate a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich made from an opened jar of peanut butter from a cupboard. (Well, never say "never, ever," but as for that youthful indiscretion with an antique Easter egg, I was not even conscious through most of that experience.)

Now, here's what can happen when you use unauthoritative answers. Yahoo! Answers doesn't require a citable source. As I recall, the respondent didn't have a first name of distinguishing gender. Answers.com has always prided itself on using traditional reference sources. When I interviewed CEO Bob Rosenschein, he told me about the lengthy internal debate that preceded the addition of the semiauthoritative (by Web standards) Wikipedia. In November 2006, the company bought FAQ Farm, a growing Q&A database of about 280,000 unique questions and answers from more than 100,000 registered, contributing "FAQ Farmers." Answers.com will integrate those questions and answers into its own "library of licensed, branded, attributable reference titles" and also add its traditional content to the FAQ Farm service. The company already has a Google feed that supplies open Web search results for questions that its superauthoritative sources can't handle.

> *Answers.com has always prided itself on using traditional reference sources.*

The Difference Between Peanut Butters

Oddly enough, when I went to Answers.com looking for "peanut butter refrigeration," I found myself in a Google search of the open Web. It turns out that Answers.com has three "pails" or "buckets" of data: its own highly sourced aggregation, a growing collection of user-generated Q&A content, and good old Google hitting up the good old Web. A quick tour of the Google Web section turned up more sites that recommended the nearly lethal practice, but it also provided sources such as http://busycooks.about.com/library/print03/prefrig5.htm and a document on food storage from www.consumerreports.org that distinguished between peanut butter types. Unlike the highly homogenized commercial types such as Skippy or Jiff, natural or homemade peanut butters have separated nut oil that users need to stir back into the peanut butter. After opening a jar of natural peanut butter, the safety-minded consumer should refrigerate the jar or run the risk of food poisoning. The best sources recommended tossing commercial peanut butter of any type after 6 months (regardless of refrigeration) and homemade peanut butter in a few weeks.

My pursuit of authoritative sources also took me to .gov sites, the weightiest of digital tomes. And what could be more

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NewsBreak Update

Online Video Still Dominates the News

by PAULA J. HANE

In my November 2006 column, I covered a flood of online video news. Recently, nearly nonstop announcements about video services are appearing as companies endeavor to make money from the content—much of it user generated—flooding onto the Net. Not surprisingly, the dominant themes in most of the announcements are monetization and entertainment.

Paula J. Hane

At press time, YouTube, the video sharing site owned by Google, announced a deal with Verizon to deliver YouTube videos to Verizon mobile phone users (at least to those subscribing to a $15-per-month service called V CAST). The thought of watching video on a small wireless phone screen isn't appealing to me, but the young and mobile crowd is surely a market.

YouTube recently came under fire for allegedly posting copyrighted videos without permission. It is now required to remove content when notified, which could be an endless and frustrating process.

Brightcove, an online video solutions firm started by Jeremy Allaire, launched a consumer destination site. It lets content owners launch their own commercial Internet video channels at no cost and generate revenue through advertising and video download sales. Brightcove also partnered with AOL to give content owners the option to sell their pay-media downloads through the AOL Video portal.

Expert Village, which claims to be the largest producer of how-to videos for the Internet, launched its new how-to video sharing Web site. The site has added support for Web 2.0 features, including video embedding, social networking, social bookmarking, and tagging. Those Web sites and blogs that seek how-to video footage of industry experts

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demonstrating everything from child safety to cooking and paragliding techniques can now embed video from Expert Village at no cost.

We're seeing expected consolidation in the user-generated video market. GoFish Corp., formerly Unibio, announced the closing of a stock-for-stock merger with GoFish Technologies. The combined company will operate under the name GoFish Corp. and will assume and execute GoFish Technologies' user-generated video business plan as its sole business.

ClipBlast! recently reported that it will index video for Web sites, and the company introduced a free downloadable search bar so Web site owners can quickly implement video site search. ClipBlast!'s technology lets users search for video clips from within a single site, vlog, video podcast, or across the entire Web. For site owners, ClipBlast! offers back-end video search technology that organizes video libraries, enabling content to be monetized.

In case you missed it last fall (I did), a metasearch engine for videos made its debut. Still in beta, PureVideo Search combines a crawl-based search with a feed-based search and returns results from the entire Web. PureVideo Networks' proprietary analysis determines rankings, displaying each result with an associated thumbnail image and a link to view the video at the respective publisher site. The site offers users more than 35 categorized charts that display the most popular videos from sites such as Yahoo! Music, Fox Sports, YouTube, MySpace, CNN, C-SPAN, BBC America, CBS News, digg, and more.

Lycos rolled out its new Lycos Cinema Screening Room platform (http://cinema.lycos.com). The company reported that the Screening Room is the Internet's first video-based socialization product to combine various Web 2.0 applications into one platform, letting multiple users watch and chat simultaneously about video content in real time. Users can host their own Screening Room and invite others to watch. Lycos teamed up with blinkx for the new search engine and platform.

> ***The company reported that the Screening Room is the Internet's first video-based socialization product to combine various Web 2.0 applications into one platform, letting multiple users watch and chat simultaneously about video content in real time.***

My first reaction to this platform was that it was yet another attempt to lure the masses and make money. One information industry colleague commented: "A friend and I have been social networking around quality video for years—from *Law & Order* to *24*. We use another platform though, the telephone and commercial interruptions." But a closer look at the Lycos product suggests this could actually have interesting applications and appeal, especially for independent filmmakers.

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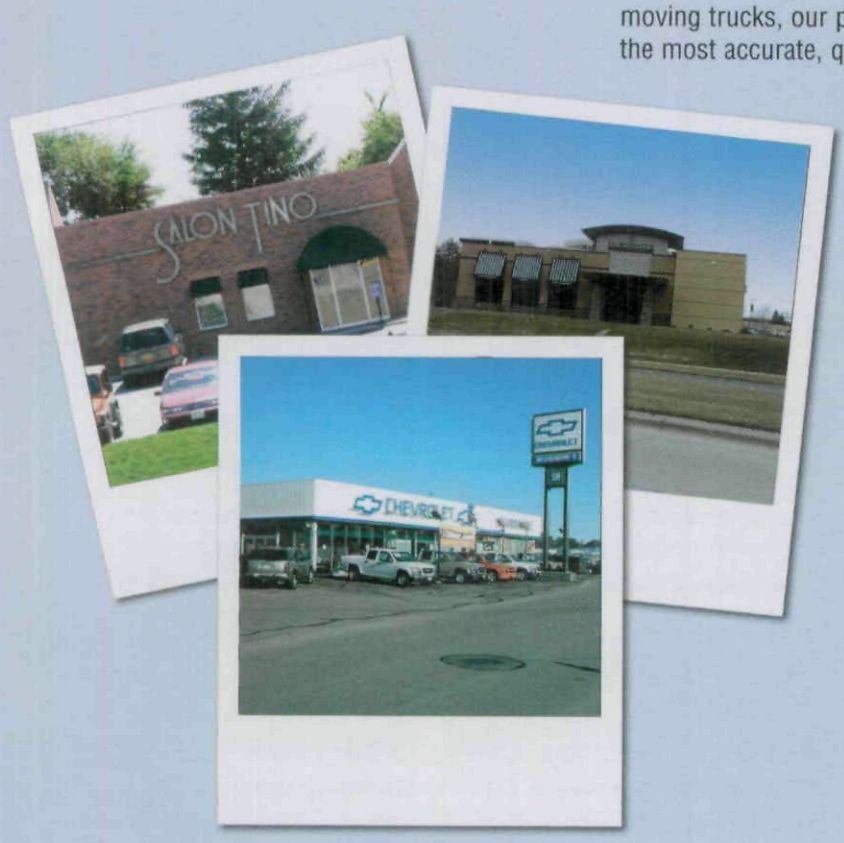

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Even the enterprise space has video products. Reality Digital added social networking capabilities to its Opus platform, a hosted "white label" solution for monetizing user-generated content (UGC) within an online business environment. Reality Digital said it is the first to market a three-in-one hosted UGC service for enterprise customers that encompasses Web 2.0 functionalities: video, advertising, and blogging.

Corporate Blog Validation?

And speaking of corporate blogging: The Associated Press reported that Christopher Cox—in the first official communication posted to a blog by a chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)—said he was intrigued with letting companies use Weblogs to disseminate important corporate information. Responding to the suggestion by Jonathan Schwartz, CEO of Sun Microsystems, to let blog postings satisfy the widespread dissemination requirements of the SEC, Cox wrote that "among the questions that would need to be addressed is whether there exist effective means to guarantee that a corporation uses its website in ways that assure broad non-exclusionary access." Approval by the SEC could be, as one blogger suggested, the tipping point for corporate blogging.

In other blog-related news, Reuters said it will now offer Pluck's BlogBurst blog syndication service to its media partners worldwide. Reuters also invested in the privately held Pluck. BlogBurst supplies content from more than 2,800 blogs to major news outlets including *The Washington Post*, Gannett News, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, etc.

Search Engine News

Google has acquired JotSpot, a provider of wiki tools that has both a paid version for corporate users and a free service. It will be interesting to see how Google meshes JotSpot with its existing tools and services.

The University of Virginia has joined Google's library-digitization project. Google will scan selections from Virginia's collection of books on American history, literature, and the humanities. Already participating in the project are the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor, the University of Oxford, the University of California system, The New York Public Library, Harvard and Stanford universities, and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

Google confirmed its growing emphasis on offline advertising with two recent initiatives. It launched a test of print advertising that lets advertisers place ads in daily newspapers by logging on to a Web site and bidding for space. And the company is sharply increasing the scope of its radio ad-sales business. TV and direct-mail ads are likely to come next.

Not to be outdone, Yahoo! announced a partnership deal with 176 newspapers to share content, advertising, and technology. The consortium of seven newspaper chains includes the MediaNews Group, Hearst Communications, Belo, E.W. Scripps, the Journal Register Co., Lee Enterprises, and Cox Enterprises. The deal should help Yahoo! tap into the local ad market. It should also help newspapers that have struggled with recent losses of ads—lost to the online companies with which they are now partnering. To me, these recent deals serve as reminders that companies such as Yahoo! and Google are in the ad business rather than the search engine business.

Yahoo! is acquiring Bix.com, a site that lets users and advertisers create, enter into, and judge online contests. The acquisition serves to push Yahoo! further into the social media arena.

In October 2006, Exalead announced that its Web search engine is now searching 8,025,871,479 Web pages (the actual count is posted on the home page)—up from 4 billion in February 2006. Exalead also launched a new interface, which had

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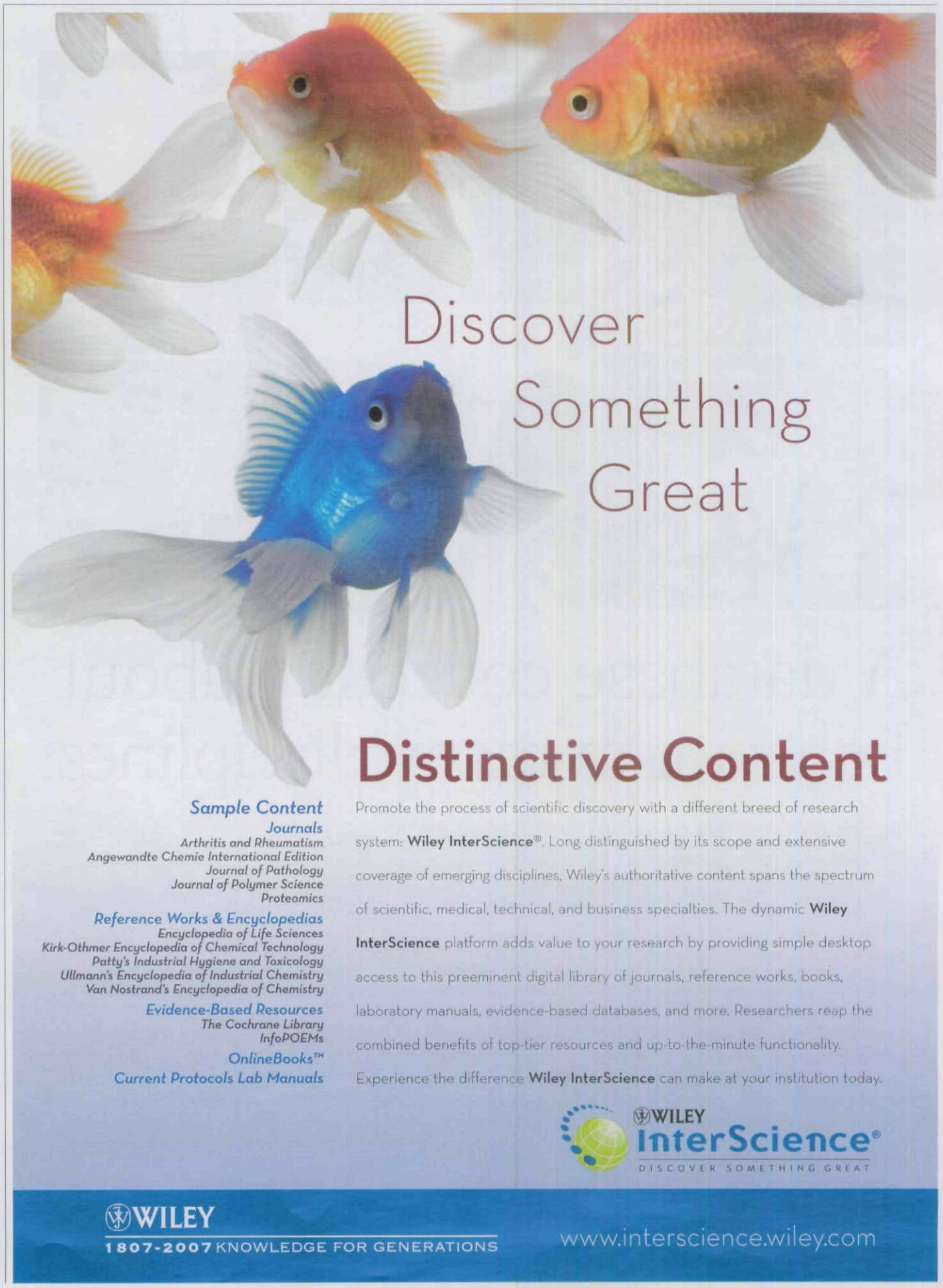

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been in beta, and has added image searching. The search engine still provides the thumbnails of pages and many advanced search features not available from other search engines. The new interface offers a cleaner results display and some redesign—thumbnails are on the left, and the "refine your search" box is on the right. If you haven't tried this yet, it's definitely worth checking out. Exalead also provides search software for desktop, workgroup, and enterprise environments. It even offers a free downloadable version of its exalead one:desktop software product, which can index up to 100,000 documents.

Last fall, Quintura launched a free desktop software application. Now it has added a new Web service—its visual Find Engine, which uses advanced Neural Networking techniques. While viewing the Quintura Cloud, users can visually navigate and refine to find relevant information faster and more efficiently. Visualization becomes the center of the user experience. Though I'm not enamored with tag clouds, this is still in beta, and this kind of visual engine is certainly a development to watch.

Factiva Integrates Mapping Solution

Speaking of visualization, Factiva SalesWorks, which first launched in January 2005 and was significantly enhanced in July 2006 (see the NewsBreak), has now linked company data from Factiva SalesWorks to Microsoft Virtual Earth (Microsoft's mapping and location service) to create a visual company mapping solution. Factiva SalesWorks is a sales intelligence tool that includes a collection of company, industry, and executive news and information designed specifically to help salespeople increase productivity.

Users can generate prospecting lists based on criteria such as industry sector, revenue, number of employees, and recent key news events and then plot the resulting list of prospects on a map. Standard mapping features such as driving directions and zoom in and out functions are also included.

Links

www.youtube.com

www.brightcove.com

www.expertvillage.com

www.gofish.com

www.clipblast.com

www.purevideo.com

www.realitydigital.com

http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan/entry/sunlight_on_a_cloudy_day...#comments [Christopher Cox's comment on Schwartz's blog]

www.blogburst.com

www.pluck.com

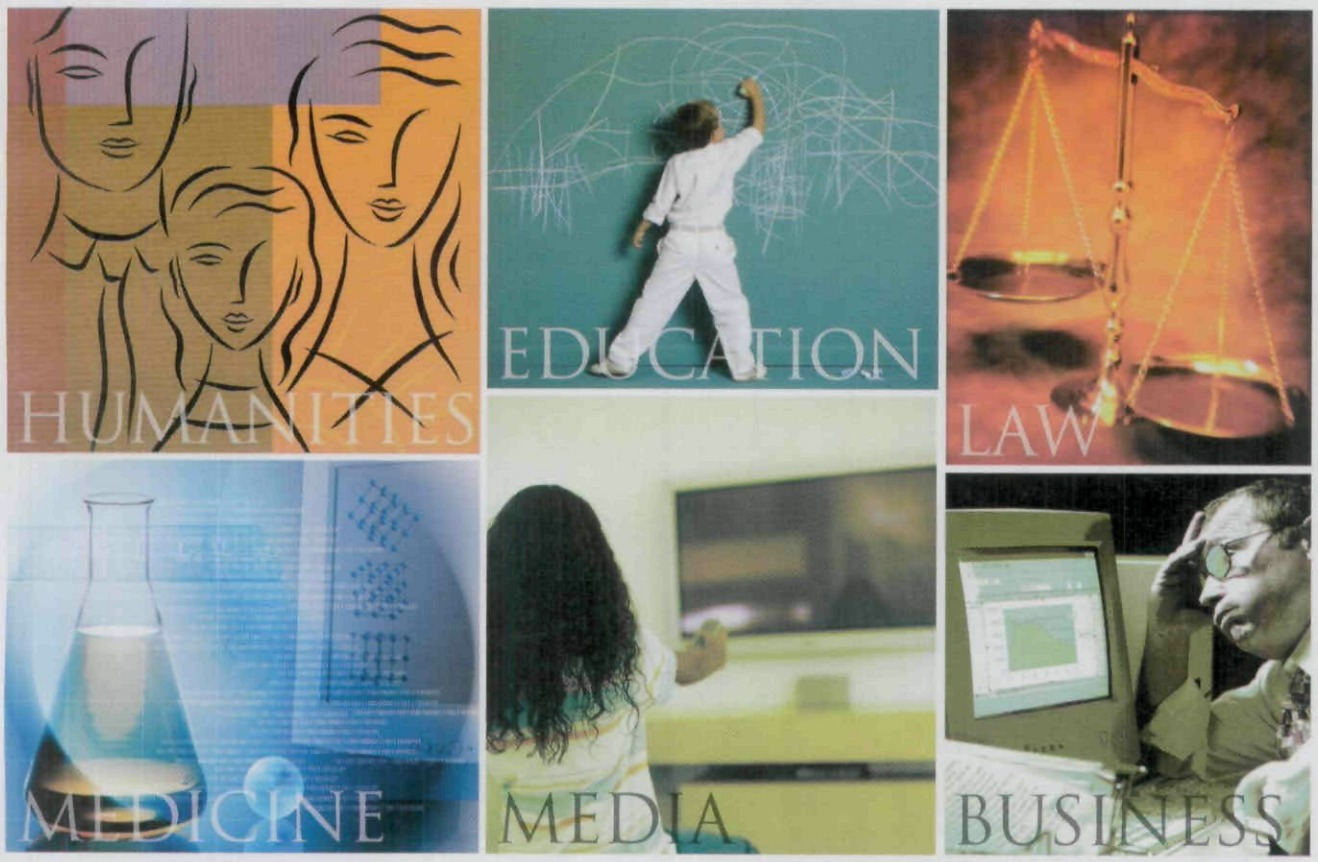
www.exalead.com

www.quintura.com

www.infotoday.com/newsbreaks/nb060724-1.shtml [Factiva SalesWorks NewsBreak]

http://secondlife.com

www.infoisland.org



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Second Life Backlash

Last month, I reported on several news agencies opening newsrooms within Second Life, an online, 3-D virtual reality world. At that time, I wrote that it was quite enough for me to keep up with news in the real world. Now, apparently, some journalists are protesting the ultratrendy development. Sun Microsystems held a developer Q&A in Second Life, but it was about a real-world software development—and, much to the journalists' dismay, there was no real-life conference call or Webcast for alternative access. Other tech companies have held press conferences and events within Second Life. Here's what one ZDNet blogger wrote: "Second Life has gone from zero to cliché in record time as people sit around admiring their avatars. The dirty little secret: It's a productivity drain." One blogger wrote that Second Life has become an "arena for PR stunts."

Whether you think Second Life is an inevitable social trend or a fad, it can't hurt to offer library services (such as the Alliance Library System's Info Island Library that I discussed last month) to those who frequent the environment—go where your users are. [*Editor's Note:* For more on the Info Island Library, see the January 2007 issue of *Computers in Libraries*.]

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generator that provides links between prospective buyers and qualified suppliers in more than 125 business products and services categories. The closing is expected to be finalized this month, according to The Jordan, Edmiston Group, the financial advisor that represented RBI for this transaction.

Source: The Jordan, Edmiston Group, Inc. (www.jegi.com)

Google Selects Winners in Global Code Jam

Petr Mitrichev of Russia won Google's fourth annual Global Code Jam competition and claimed the $10,000 first prize. Mitrichev's work was chosen as the best out of more than 21,000 registered competitors from more than 100 countries. Ying Wang from the U.S. won the second prize of $5,000. The Global Code Jam, which is produced with TopCoder (a leader in online programming, skills assessment, and competitive software development), celebrates the art of computer science and coding.

Source: Google, Inc. (www.google.com)

Outsell Offers Insider's Look at Growth of Search, Aggregation, and Syndication

In a recent MarketView report, Outsell announced that the search, aggregation, and syndication segment will reach $68 billion, representing a 4-year compound annual growth of 17 percent through 2009. The "Search, Aggregation & Syndication: 2006 Market Size, Share, Forecast and Trend Report" tapped information from companies including Google, Yahoo!, Baidu.com, LexisNexis, Factiva, EBSCO Industries, Follett Educational Services, and Ingram Book Group.

Source: Outsell, Inc. (www.outsellinc.com)

Pew Internet Releases Report on Web 2.0

The Pew Internet & American Life Project issued a report on Web 2.0, one of the hottest buzzwords in the Internet community.

Originally introduced in 2004 by Dale Dougherty, the phrase "Web 2.0" has now become ambiguous. In fact, Pew report authors Mary Madden and Susannah Fox said, "It is OK if you've heard the term and nodded in recognition without having the faintest idea of what it really means." So Pew Internet conducted surveys to determine how many Internet users use Web 2.0 sites and services.

According to one survey, online photo sharing is on the rise with 34 percent of Internet users reporting that they have developed or shared photos online (up from only 20 percent in 2001). Between August 2005 and August 2006, the Web 2.0 photo sharing site Photobucket increased its client base from 3 percent to 20 percent, while Kodakgallery, a Web 1.0 site, remained at about 3 percent.

As a legendary Web 2.0 site, Wikipedia has made extraordinary gains as an online encyclopedia and now draws 21 percent of Internet users, up from 3 percent a year ago. By comparison, Encarta.com's hit rate has decreased by 50 percent, now bringing in less than 1 percent. Wikipedia is also attracting more young users than Encarta. Nearly a quarter of Wikipedia's hits come from users under age 25, compared with 15 percent for Encarta.

While Web 2.0 and user-generated content are changing how people share photos and find information, email is still the most common Internet activity. More than half (53 percent) of Internet users are emailing daily, which is up only 1 percent since 2000. However, only 38 percent of Internet users use search engines daily—the second most reported activity.

Email still outdistanced social networking sites, although MySpace made substantial gains in 2006. At the beginning of the year, less than 0.25 percent of Internet users visited MySpace; by August, that figure grew to almost 5 percent.

—Michael Baumann

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