Tales from the Terminal Room
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Tales from the Terminal Room (TFTTR) is a monthly newsletter, with the exception of July and August which are published as a single issue. TFTTR includes reviews and comparisons of information sources; updates to the RBA Web site Business Sources and other useful resources; dealing with technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications.

As Christmas and the December/January holidays approach, we have a comparatively lightweight edition of Tales from the Terminal Room this month. We do have a new column, though, called Searching Questions.

As part of our day to day work, we receive a lot of requests for help with searches of various kinds. Although we do not offer a regular information brokerage service, we do sometimes like to see how far we can help with the more difficult types of searches. Many of these pleas for help highlight problems that other searchers frequently encounter; so we decided to introduce a regular feature in TFTTR that covers the relevant issues and how to tackle the searches. The questions will all be genuine enquiries but with changes to the names to protect privacy and confidentiality. We do not guarantee success because, despite what some people think, everything is **not** on the Internet!

Karen Blakeman

In this issue:

Google launches Deskbar

Google has launched a beta version of its new Google Deskbar. The existing Google Toolbar - now at version 2.0 - places a search box in your browser's toolbar. The new Deskbar goes a step further and places a search box in the taskbar on your Windows desktop.

This enables you to carry out a Google search without leaving the application you are in. You just highlight the word or phrase you want to search on, right click with your mouse select copy, and then press Ctrl-Alt-G. Your terms are automatically entered into the deskbar and you click on the binoculars next to it to carry out the search.

The search results are displayed in a small screen called a mini-viewer, but you can easily convert this into your standard browser display.

For further information and to download the Deskbar, go to http://toolbar.google.com/deskbar/index.html

Northern Light resurrected

Northern Light, which closed its Special Collection service in early 2003, has announced that it will be launching a new service called the Business Research Library on January 15. This will be a paid service for enterprise customers, featuring selected Web content as well as 1,900 periodical titles. The "enterprise" service will cost USD 19,500 a year and include unlimited searching and document downloads.

The "premium" content in the periodicals collection will be available as full page-images showing the pictures, tables, and charts in the original articles.

An "individual" version will be launched in March 2004 but no prices have yet been mentioned.

Further information is available at http://www.nlsearch.com/library.html , which also has a full journal list and product brochure.

Trade Union History Online wins Farradane Award

The Union Makes Us Strong: TUC History Online (http://www.unionhistory.info/) was the winner of the 2003 CILIP Jason Farradane Award, sponsored by Kompass. It has been created by partnership between London Metropolitan University and the TUC.

I found TUC History Online fascinating. It traces the history of the trade union movement and provides access to resources that had previously been inaccessible to the public.

The Award is given by CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals for outstanding work in the information field. It is named after Jason Farradane (1906-1989) who was a pioneer of information science and a founder member of the Institute of Information Scientists, which unified with The Library Association to form CILIP.

As one of the judging panel, I was quoted by CILIP as saying "The website is very easy to navigate and works intuitively. We really liked the way that the clever use of technology drew you into the information and the story, without you really noticing it." And I think that sums it up very neatly. Definitely worth a look.

Further information on the award can be found on the CILIP Web site at http://www.cilip.org.uk/news/2003/211103d.html

Online 2003 Best Stand Awards

Every year at the information industry's big bash at Olympia in London, UKOLUG (the UK eInformation Group), who run the exhibition help desk, judge the best stand award. The winners at this year's Online held December on 2nd - 4th were TFPL for the best free standing design and Freshminds for the best shell scheme.

The judging panel starts with a short list based on design and layout of the stand, what immediately catches their eye, and how obvious it is to them who the exhibitor is and what it is they actually do.

The final assessment is carried out by mystery shoppers who judge the attitude, knowledge and helpfulness of the staff on the stand. Both TFPL and Freshminds excelled in these areas. "What's more" said Christine Baker from UKOLUG, "Freshminds made excellent use of a limited space with a simple, yet effective design which stopped us in our tracks and left us wanting to know more about the company and the service they offered."

TFPL http://www.tfpl.com/
Freshminds http://www.freshminds.co.uk/
UKOLUG http://www.ukolug.org.uk/

Information Resources

BvD adds new data to DASH

DASH, the database of companies, directors and shareholdings, which is co-published by Bureau van Dijk (BvD) and Dun & Bradstreet (D&B), now includes new records for unincorporated businesses, companies' branches and senior managers.

DASH will now incorporate information for 3.5 million companies, 5 million directors and 2.5 million shareholders. The new information includes further details of over half a million unincorporated businesses, such as partnerships and sole traders, up to eight new management contacts per company (a million in total) covering job titles such as Sales Manager or Purchasing Supervisor, plus three hundred thousand addresses for companies' branches.

DASH includes the facility to identify the links between individuals and businesses; users can jump between the reports for companies, directors and shareholders.

The new version of DASH is available on free trial by contacting 020 7549 5000 or e-mailing mailto:london@bvdep.com .

Searching Questions

Financials for small private companies in the Netherlands

The first question in this new regular column is about tracking down financials for small private companies in the Netherlands. This is a very common type of enquiry and highlights the problems that one is likely to encounter with research of this nature. Filing and disclosure requirements differ from country to country but, for the most part, small privately owned companies either do not have to publicly disclose any financials at all, or only need to supply the very briefest of details.

Question:
I am currently doing some research into a Dutch company and some of their subsidiaries [names of the companies have been omitted for confidentiality reasons]. While their web site contains a lot of information about the products and services, I am struggling to find financial information about them. I understand that it is a private company in Holland. Do you have any ideas about where I could find profit and turnover, or any financials at all, for such a company?

Answer:
I first of all checked the Bureau van Dijk free directory at http://www.bvdep.com/ and looked for the parent company and some of their subsidiaries. BvD certainly has them in their directory but you have to pay to view any detailed information. The BvD products are available on subscription or via pay-per-view credits, which you need to buy in advance. The free directory did confirm that the companies you are looking at are small companies.

Since the companies you are looking at are small and privately owned you may not find much financial data. All new companies in the Netherlands must register with the trade register of the local Chamber of Commerce of which there are 36. Company documents filed with the trade register are available for inspection free of charge, but there is a fee for copies of documents and postal delivery. Companies must register their address, share capital, date of incorporation, names of directors, and number of employees, as well as periodic financial statements. BVs (the type of company you are looking at) must file

annual accounts with the local trade register of the Chamber of Commerce where they are made available to the public. Small BVs can file abridged accounts.

So how does one get hold of the information, if there is any?

The obvious place to look first is the Dutch central register Kamer van Koophandel (http://www.kvk.nl/) but you have to search the Dutch pages. I did find your companies but there is a fee for anything other than name and address.

Note: If you do not know the location of an official company register, there is a very nice listing by country at:
http://www.hrasg.ch/eng/welt-e.htm

Similarly, Kompass.com (http://www.kompass.com/), which did not have all of your companies, charges for financial items.

Another option is to try Skyminder at http://www.skyminder.com/. You have to register for a user name and password first, but searching is free and you can pay for individual records with a credit card. Again I did a quick check for your companies. It came up with Dun and Bradstreet reports costing around USD 9 each, a comparatively low price which suggests that there is not much information available on your companies.

None of the free directories that I tried gave more than basic name and address information for your companies. So, if you really do need the information quickly, it's time to get your credit card out.

Gizmo of the Month

Ad Muncher
http://www.admuncher.com/

Ad Muncher is a program for Windows that removes adverts and pop ups from Web sites, and blocks banner displaying and pop up generating programs.

It also has options for stopping the automatic playing of background music and those annoying "Messenger Service" pop ups.

When an advert has been blocked the program inserts the text "munched" in its place. You can change this to any text of your choosing, leave it blank or choose to have the alt tags displayed instead.

All options are customisable and I prefer to run it just as an ad blocker and not a pop up blocker. Some sites use pop ups to display help files and important information, and I find it far easier to enable pop ups on an occasional basis via the built-in options in Mozilla or in the Google toolbar for Internet Explorer.

The download file is a mere 157 KB and the minimum system requirements are a Pentium 60 Mhz, 16 MB RAM and 1 MB of free disk space.

The program is free to try out for 30 days and registration thereafter is USD 25

Meetings and Workshops

Forthcoming Courses

Workshop: Advanced Internet Search Strategies
Organiser: Manchester Business School
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: Manchester Business School
Date: Wednesday, 21st January 2004
URL: http://www.mbs.ac.uk/corporate/bis/

Workshop: Business Information on the Net: free vs. fee
Organiser: TFPL
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: TFPL, London
Date: Monday, 9th February 2004
URL: http://www.tfpl.com/

Workshop: Assessing the Quality of Information
Organiser: TFPL
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: TFPL, London
Date: Tuesday, 9th March 2004
URL: http://www.tfpl.com/

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