Tales from the Terminal Room
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Tales from the Terminal Room (TFTTR) is an electronic newsletter that includes reviews and comparisons of information sources; useful tools for managing information; technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications. Many of the items and articles will have already appeared on Karen Blakeman's Blog at http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/

Tales from the Terminal Room can be delivered via email as plain text or as a PDF with active links. You can join the distribution list by going to http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/ and filling in the form. You will be sent an email asking you to confirm that you want to be added to the list. TFTTR is also available as an RSS feed. The URL for the feed is http://www.rba.co.uk/rss/tfttr.xml

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In this issue:

Tales from the Terminal room is back!

As many of you have noticed the last newsletter went out in January 2009. So much was happening in 2009: I had many new business and personal projects to set up and my voluntary work for UKeiG took up all of my spare time. I am no longer a member of the UKeiG management committee; I have done the maximum number of years allowed under the rules and regs and, in any case, it is time for new blood and fresh young minds to drive the Group forward. That means I can now get back to TFTTR and hopefully keep up the monthly schedule.

Most of the information in this newsletter has already appeared in my blog at http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/ so if you subscribe to the blog RSS feed you may want to unsubscribe from TFTTR. You may want to unsubscribe anyway. Use the form at http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/ or email me at tfttr@rba.co.uk

Search Tools

Your Google results are about to get weirder

Persuading Google to recreate the same list of results for a search is impossible. Google continually updates its database and index with new and updated pages. Even a few minutes between repeat searches can make a significant difference. Add into this mix the fact that your search will probably be diverted to a different server from the one that gave you your initial results (Google has thousands of servers) and that the second server may have been updated at a different time with different pages. Oh, and Google may have decided to play around with the ranking algorithms and display options on this particular server as an experiment. And are you sure you have entered your search terms in exactly the same order as before, because that can make a difference as well? And we haven't even started to consider the difference of searching in Google.co.uk vs. Google.com vs. Google.ca etc.

Now we have Google personalized search, and by 'we' I mean all of us by default.
Search personalization is nothing new. In 2005 Google announced a new feature that was enabled if you were logged in with your Google account: web history and personal search (see Official Google Blog: Search gets personal http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2005/06/search-gets-personal.html). If you were logged in to your Google account and had your web history enabled – a record of your searches and sites that you selected from your results – future search results would be adjusted, or personalized, accordingly. And then we had (have) Google Searchwiki (see Begone Searchwiki http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2008/12/11/begone-searchwiki/). Searchwiki – you have to opt-in for this – enables you to delete results from your search results, or move a result up or down in the list depending on how relevant you think it is. Your actions are saved and remembered when you next run the search.

The new Google personalized search is different. You do not have to be signed in to a Google account and by default it is switched on. The claim is that Google is "helping people get better search results":

> *"For example, since I always search for [recipes] and often click on results from epicurious.com, Google might rank epicurious.com higher on the results page the next time I look for recipes. Other times, when I'm looking for news about Cornell University's sports teams, I search for [big red]. Because I frequently click on www.cornellbigred.com, Google might show me this result first, instead of the Big Red soda company or others."*

The customization is based on 180 days of search activity linked to an anonymous cookie in your browser. See the "Official Google Blog: Personalized Search for everyone" http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/12/personalized-search-for-everyone.html for further details. This might sound like a useful feature, but think it through. Let us say that in the run-up to Christmas your boss asked you to look up recipes for chocolate desserts, cakes or puddings for the office party. When your results lists came up you repeatedly clicked on links for recipes or videos of how to make that extra complicated chocolate soufflé. In your regular day job, though,

you research the pharmacological properties of the various compounds to be found in cocoa. Your results are now starting to come up with some very odd results. In practice, this should not happen because the customization is based on 180 days of search activity linked to an anonymous cookie in your browser. However, for those of us who research a wide range of subjects and for a variety of information types and formats, Google's personalized search could lose the plot very quickly.

There is then the question of which computer are you using? Do you always use the same computer at work or at home (we have three here)? What are you going to see when you go to an Internet cafe? And what results will Google present you with if you are a CILIP member and use the IT facilities in the members' information centre?

Whatever PC you use for your Google search, look in the top right hand corner of the results page. You should see an option for Web History:
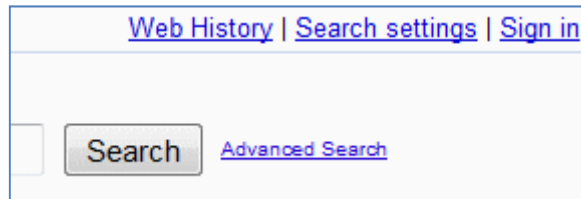
Click on Web History and then Disable Customisations based on search activity:
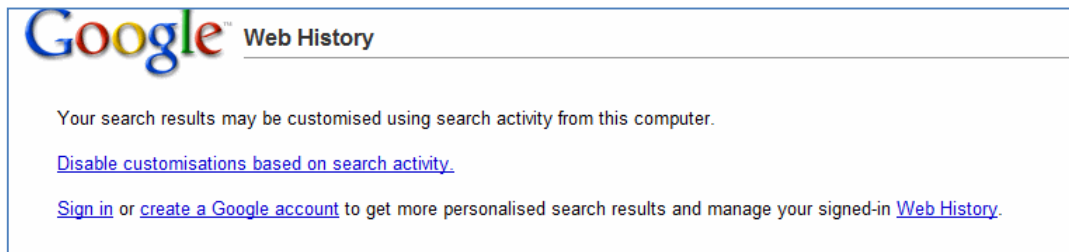
When this first went live, I found that disabling the customisation was not saved from one session to the next. This seemed to have been fixed but I now see that it has reverted to being switched on by default. If you want to ensure that customisation has been disabled I would recommend that you check the setting at the start of each day.

Google experiments with Image Swirl

Having made Google Labs Image Options (including colour) and Similar Images available as part of their standard image search, Google are now playing around with Image Swirl (http://image-swirl.googlelabs.com/) in Google Labs. According to Google it "builds on new computer vision research to cluster similar images into representative groups in a fun, exploratory interface". In practice it is a combination of similar images and the Wonderwheel.

One of my image test searches is Edvard Munch and Swirl came back with 12 "stacks" of thumbnails (12 is the standard number of stacks):
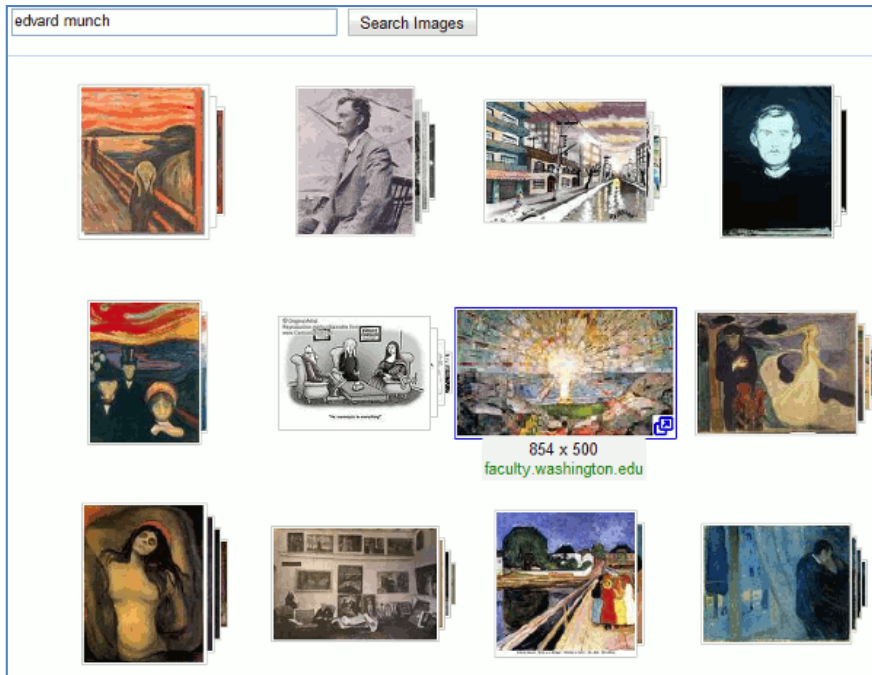
Click on a group of stacked images and another set of images "swirl" into view in the form of the wonderwheel:

And you can keep on clicking on groups/stacks of images but still keep the "history" of your selections.

By the time I had reached my 3rd 'swirl' I expected to see slightly different versions of the same image or images with similar colour composition. On the contrary, one of my Edvard Munch level 3 selections did have some duplicates but also a series of landscapes with different colours and similar 'patterns'. In one set, for example, each image had paths or what could be interpreted as paths as a major component of the image.

I do like Swirl. It is a fascinating way to explore images (beware, it is addictive!) and the feedback I have had from participants of my workshops has been positive. This is definitely a Google Labs project to watch and experiment with.

Phil Bradley has also reviewed Google Swirl (http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2009/11/google-image-swirl.html) and comments "Bing is going to have their work cut out to try and catch up." Far too polite, Phil. I'd say "Bing, eat your heart out!"

Potholes.co.uk

The snow of a few weeks ago has now cleared from Caversham and the lower half of the road on Donkin Hill looks as though it has been repeatedly bombed. Major cracks, huge potholes and an alarming amount of subsidence are now in evidence. It is a scene that is going to be repeated over the whole of the UK now that the snow and ice have retreated to reveal the damage caused by the freezing weather. I was out with my camera and reporting the state of the road to the council via FixMyStreet (see below for information on that site) and I am sure our local Council will be inundated with similar reports from around Reading.

Potholes.co.uk (http://www.potholes.co.uk/) is run by Warranty Direct who specialises in used car warranty, new car warranty and extended warranty. It is a "Campaign website to highlight poor state of British roads and help motorists seek compensation from Councils". Type in the first part of a postcode or the name of a town to view a Google map showing the location of any potholes in the area. Click on a marker to see a more detailed description of the problem.

To report a pothole you need to register and sign in. First enter a title and description and then the street name and town. A Google map should appear with a marker and you can then drag the marker to the exact location of the pothole(s). You can also upload a photo. Once you have submitted your report you are taken to a page where you are encouraged to report the problem to the local council.
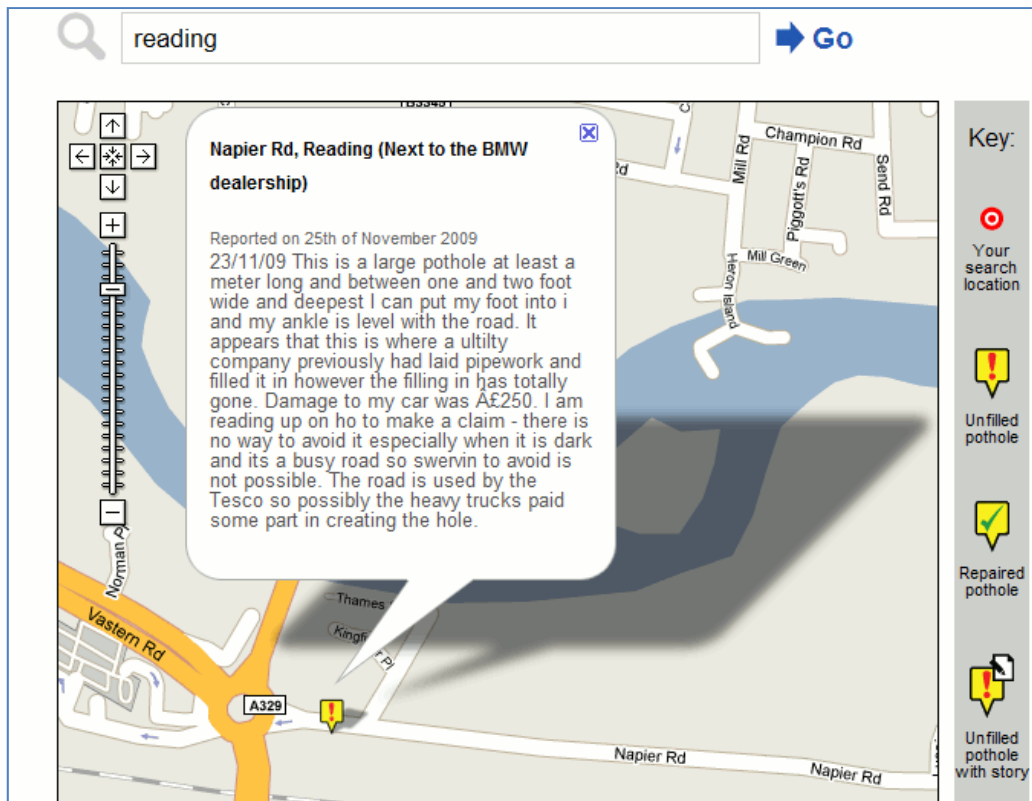
There is a blog at http://www.potholes.co.uk/oursays where they talk about pothole issues and highlight news stories. Potholes.co.uk is also on Twitter at http://twitter.com/potholesuk/

I am not sure how useful this site really is for motorists as it is dependent on people reporting potholes to the web site, so it is not comprehensive. It is also not clear who marks the potholes as filled when the repairs are made. Feedback on both of those points would be welcomed. Thanks to @cllrdaisybenson for the tweet that alerted me to the site.

FixMyStreet

FixMyStreet http://www.fixmystreet.com/ is another service from those excellent people at Mysociety.org. So you've got a problem in your neighbourhood that you thought your local council would have dealt with by now? Road drains not clearing? Broken man-hole cover? Industrial waste dumped in your street? Your council may not know about it so this is your opportunity to tell them or chase up an ongoing problem.

All you have to do is enter the postcode, street name or area. You should then see a map showing existing and previous problems.

To report a new problem, click on the location of the problem on the map. A purple flag will appear and then you fill in the boxes: category (drop down menu), details of the problem, upload a photo if available, and email address and telephone number. Then click on Submit. FixMyStreet will send your report to the council on your behalf.

You can also subscribe to problem alerts. These can be delivered by RSS feeds or emails alerting you to problems within 7.3 km of your post code (the default), or 2, 5,10 or 20 km. Alternatively you can choose to receive all alerts in the area covered by your council or ward.

Information on other MySociety.org projects such as They Work For You http://www.theyworkforyou.com/ (details of your MP and their activities) and What do they Know http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/ (Freedom of Information) are available at http://www.mysociety.org/projects/

UK's Tweeting Councillors

When heavy snow hit us in Caversham, I could watch from my office window the traffic - or rather lack of it - on Briants Avenue through a gap in the houses opposite. There was also a very obvious lack of buses. Our local radio stations provide good general information and updates on the weather, roads and public services but the #rdg hashtag in Twitter was the quickest and best way of obtaining detailed local news. I have a #rdg column in my Tweetdeck and spotted that one of Reading Borough's councillors, @CllrDaisyBenson, is on Twitter and very active. A couple of tweets later I discovered that three of her Lib Dem colleagues are on Twitter and about the same time I found the CllrTweeps web site – Finding and following the UK's Tweeting councillors at http://www.cllrtweeps.com/

The list was started by @CllrTweeps who is @JamesCousins. The project is currently being developed by James Cousins and @DafyddBach. Not surprisingly the wonderful @Liz_Azyan has been involved with the list and is credited with identifying a lot of the councillors.

You can search the list by council, party and "tweeps" – an alphabetical list of tweeting councillors. If you are a tweeting UK councillor and not on the list, details of how to add your user name are at http://www.cllrtweeps.com/about/

Business Information Resources

Switzerland in Figures

This is a very useful three page PDF summary of Swiss statistics from UBS (http://www.ubs.com/1/e/wealthmanagement/wealth_management_research/switzerland_in_figures.html). It contains more than 1,600 facts and figures on the Swiss economy and each of the cantons, and an international overview of key data. Data includes population, employment, the financial situation, indebtedness, tax levels, and figures on the economy and living standards. This is the 2009 edition.

The Swiss Cantons	ZH	BE	LU	UR	SZ
Data normally refer to the year 2008					
Year of entry into Swiss Confederation	1351	1353	1332	1291	1291
Number of communities[7]	171	392	88	20	30
Deputies in National Council	34	26	10	1	4
Area[1] in km²	1,729	5,959	1,493	1 077	908
Agriculturally productive land in %[1]	43.4	43.3	54.8	24.4	41.0
Population[8]					
Residents in 1000	1,347.8	974.5	366.5	34.6	141.9
Change 1990–2008 in %	+16.5	+2.6	+14.3	+1.7	+28.0
Foreigners in 1000	319.6	128.1	60.4	3.5	26.0
Share of foreigners in %	23.7	13.1	16.5	10.1	18.3
Densitiy of population: residents per km²	780	164	245	32	156
Total fertility rate[11, 26]	1.47	1.41	1.48	1.47	1.50
Old-age ratio[52]	25.3	30.0	25.6	28.3	23.5
Public finance and taxes					
Cantonal revenues[10], in CHF millions	11,223	9,922	3,286	393	1,073
Cantonal expenditure[10], in CHF millions	10,909	9,820	3,092	368	1,045
Balance revenues/expenditure[10], in CHF millions	+314	+102	+194	+25	+28
Cantonal debt[11, 12], in CHF millions	7,983	6,481	1,744	193	425
Per capita, in CHF	6,035	6,683	4,820	5,595	3,041
Tax burden income[15] CHF 50,000, in %	4.71	5.79	5.43	6.31	4.45
income[15] CHF 100,000, in %	9.72	12.90	10.72	11.56	7.93

Thanks to Gary Price for the alert (http://www.resourceshelf.com/2010/01/10/switzerland-in-figures/)

GBRDirect – search the European Business Register

http://www.globalbusinessregister.co.uk/

If you want to check the credentials of a company then the first port of call has to be the official company register of the country in which the company is based. Many of the registers are on the web and allow you to search and view some of the information free of charge. (See my own list at http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/registers.htm. Also Company registration around the world (http://www.commercial-register.sg.ch/home/worldwide.html) and Worldwide registries http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/links/introduction.shtml#reg). This approach does not always yield results and often proves to be more difficult than anticipated. It assumes that the company or organisation is required or has volunteered to register, which is not always the case. For example, in the UK, sole traders do not have to register and therefore will not be found at Companies House. Then there is the problem of navigating a company registry web site that may be in a language other than your own. Even if you manage to work your way through the navigation and search options you will usually find that the data is in the local language. And this all assumes that you know where the company is based: if you don't you have to trawl through possible registries one by one.

There are many services that provide you with easy search options and access to translated official company information but these can be expensive, and there are occasions when you need to see the original registration documents and filings. A partial solution for Europe is the European Business Register (http://www.ebr.org/). This is a network of many of the European company registers offering a "one-stop-shop" for company information. Access to the register is via "partners"; you can identify the partner for your country at http://www.ebr.org/partners.htm. For the UK and Ireland the partner is the Global Business Register http://www.globalbusinessregister.co.uk/ or GBRDirect.

Currently GBRDirect connects to the national corporate registries in:

> Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Jersey, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Republic of Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

In order to use GBRDirect you first have to register and also "top-up" your account using a debit or credit card. All documents are priced and so is a successful search, which costs £1.50. You are not charged for a list of results but as soon as you click on an entry in the list your search is deemed to be successful and you are charged for it. Once on the 'company' screen, available documents and their prices are listed.

Prices vary depending on the type of document you wish to view and the country. A price list and the type of documents available for each country can be found at http://www.globalbusinessregister.co.uk/GBRDirect%20co%20uk%20Pricelist.pdf

As well as a company search you can also carry out a search for company officials in Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Sweden and the UK.

Company Details

IDENTIFICATION

Country: 24256790

Company Name: NOVO NORDISK A/S

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Authority: DCCA (Danish Commerce and Companies Agency)

Location: 2880 Bagsværd

EBR ONLINE PRODUCTS

PRODUCT NAME	PRICE (£)	PURCHASE
COMPANY PROFILE	£8.00 + £0.00 VAT	PURCHASE
COMPANY APPOINTMENTS	£10.00 + £0.00 VAT	PURCHASE

EBR OFFLINE PRODUCTS   No OffLine Products available

NATIONAL REGISTRY PRODUCTS   No National Registry Products available

EBR®
EUROPEAN BUSINESS REGISTER
This report was produced on Tuesday, January 05, 2010 at 9:28 AM and delivered from the European Business Register (EBR).

On the plus side this service enables you to quickly search many of the European registers through a single interface. On the down side you still have to know the country in which the company is based and the documents will be in the local language. You may also end up paying for information that is available free of charge direct from the national registry and at the time of my original review the European Business Register seemed to go down with alarming regularity. About half of my searches failed because "The EBR Service is not available at the moment".

GBRDirect's Robert Leslie responded to my original blog posting and on the issue of reliability as follows:

> ".. I acknowledge that there are some issues that appear to be reliability related. The service is new and we are working through these issues as fast as we can. Some are technical, some relate to things such as opening hours, some to description of documents across jurisdictions as they are not standard in many cases. We are essentially dealing with government departments in all the countries we connect to and in some cases (not all I might add) the realisation that Internet customers want access 24×7x365 has not sunk in yet.
>
> We operate an email support service and if anyone who is trying to use the service is having difficulties they are free to contact us at support@gbrdirect.co.uk and we will respond as quickly as we can – usually minutes during business hours. Support is limited to English only currently."

On future developments he commented:

> "In the first half of 2010 we hope to add multilanguage support to the site so users in Europe will be able to search in their own languages. We will be adding an index of all companies in all countries (24 million of them!) connected to the network that will allow for searching across jurisdictions. This will allow, initially, to find a company in a particular country connected to the network. The next step will need to be performed, as it is currently, where you search for the identified company in the country on their Live national register database. But hopefully this will eliminate the need to manually search multiple countries before you find the company you are looking for."

Definitely a service to watch and consider if you need easy access to official company information.

Flexible Support for Business to become "supersite"

In February 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government's Flexible Support for Business (http://fs4b.wales.gov.uk/) will become a "supersite". The aim is to provide Wales's businesses with "an unprecedented level of tailored online information and support". The site will supersede the current FS4B web site but will remain at the current web address.

According to the press release:

> *"The FS4B Supersite is designed to be integrated with the Assembly Government's other business support services to enable businesses and citizens to move as smoothly as possible between online and offline support.*
>
> *The Site will also provide a raft of guidance, tools and directories which professional advisors, relationship managers and customer service staff can use to enhance the support they offer to their clients."*

The supersite will provide information and advice on investment funding, doing VAT online, and local government (e.g. applying for licences). There will also be news of start up events, free information and advice for small businesses, and access to investment and specialist support for larger companies.

I'm intrigued by this so-called supersite. The existing FS4B web site is excellent and appears to already do much of what it is claimed the new one will offer. I assume there will be more "seamless" integration with online services for business - for example VAT - and perhaps personalization options. My main worry is that super-sizing the site might make it more difficult to find relevant resources and help. I look forward to the launch with interest.

Health for Work Adviceline for Small Businesses

This new service is part of the UK government's initiative to help people stay in work or return to work more quickly when they develop a health condition or impairment. The free Health for Work Adviceline for Small Business (http://www.health4work.nhs.uk/) helps small businesses to quickly and effectively address the issue of employee health, minimise the impact of staff illness, and provide essential support to staff with physical or mental health issues.

The adviceline provides expert support to help:

- get an employee back to work after long-term sickness
- manage the impact on the business when an employee takes time off work through ill health
- support an employee and benefit from their abilities if they are at work with health issues
- encourage and support an employee who is off work, yet wants to return and contribute to the business
- develop a working culture where work-related illness is less likely to occur
-
The adviceline is an 0800 number (0800 077 8844). If you are based in Scotland, you can obtain free advice at Healthy Working Lives (http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/) or their adviceline on 0800 019 221. For businesses in Wales the Health at Work Adviceline Wales is on 0800 107 0900, web site http://www.healthyworkingwales.com/

BL launches business essentials wiki

The British Library's Business and IP Centre has launched a wiki: Business Essentials on the Web (http://bl-business-essentials.wikispaces.com).

The wiki aims to provide business information that is aimed at entrepreneurs and SMEs. Topics covered currently include business planning, grants and finance, marketing and PR as well as industry specific pages. One of the industries listed is "Giftware" and coincidentally I was asked about this during my recent business information workshop. "Our client thinks that there is a single database that will give them all the data they need on giftware" said one of the participants. The bad news is that there does not seem to be a single source: the good news is that this wiki does list associations and web sites of organisations that are involved in the sector. So this wiki has already proved its worth to me.

Anyone can join the wiki community, edit and add a listing; a brave move but I have not yet seen any "vandalism" or spam. If there have been any inappropriate entries then BIPC have been very quick off the mark in removing them. An excellent starting point for relevant information on setting up and running a business, and highly recommended for SMEs and startups.

These things are sent to try us

IE6... Die!!

Google has announced that from March 1, 2010 it will start to phase out support for Internet Explorer 6 in Google Docs and Google Sites. IE 6 users who have visited YouTube (owned by Google) over the last 6-8 months will already have seen notices telling them to switch to a more up to date browser but now that policy to stop supporting the browser is spreading to Google's other services. Microsoft has said that it will continue to support the browser with updates until 2014 (BBC News Microsoft backs long life for IE6 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8196242.stm), which hardly encourages organisations to upgrade. Hopefully, Google's announcement will sound the death knell for this antique.

I am still gobsmacked by the number of organisations that still use IE6. About 20% of the in-house workshops I do have to be run on computers using IE6. Many people highlight local government as the major culprit but there are major international corporations who are still using it. The most common excuse I am given is that in order for them to use bespoke internal databases they have to program an interface between the browser and the databases. Changing the browser means rewriting the code. The scariest set-up I have come across was in an international investment bank whose CIO told me that the easiest way for them to connect a browser to a key database was to make use of a security loophole in IE 6, which means that they can't install security updates! And just when I thought it could not get any worse a comment to my blog posting on the subject revealed that my local council, Reading Borough Council, have 1,500 PCs running Windows 2000 the security patch support for which runs out in July!

You may think that removing IE 6 support from Google Docs and sites won't affect the general user. Check the results from your Google searches over the next few weeks. I bet there will be formatted files such as PDFs, spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations in the mix. If you want to preview the file before downloading the HTML option is still there for some, but an increasing number are being previewed in Google Docs. And when it comes to accessing web sites it is not just Google services and applications that suffer under IE 6. Forget about fancy Web 2 applications: I am finding in my business information workshops that essential features of many web sites are not displayed in IE 6 .

For the web to move on and integrate new technologies IE6 really must die (http://mashable.com/2009/07/16/ie6-must-die/)
Steve Dale has just also posted about this issue: Communities and Collaboration – Say No To Internet Explorer 6 (IE6) http://steve-dale.net/2010/01/31/say-no-to-internet-explorer-6-ie6/

Gizmo of the Month

Twittinesis

http://www.twittinesis.com/

Want to permanently record or back up your tweets? Try Twittinesis. Twittinesis will back publish your tweets to your blog in summary format every 24 hours. Twittinesis works with all of the major blog hosting services, as well as with custom hosting solutions. To see what the results look like see my own tweets backup at http://karenblakeman.livejournal.com/ You will notice that there is another service called LoudTwitter (http://www.loudtwitter.com/) which does the same thing. I use both and live with the duplication in case one of them goes down, as LoudTwitter has several times this year.

Note that this only backs up your own tweets and not those of other people in your twitterstream.

Meetings and Seminars

Seminar: Web 2.0 - The Truth Behind the Hype
Date: Monday, 1st March 2010. 6.30-8 pm. Doors open 6 pm
Venue: Hammonds, Rutland House, 148 Edmund Street, Birmingham B3 2JR
Organiser: CLSIG
Presenters: Karen Blakeman and Phil Duffy
Outline: Karen Blakeman and Phil Duffy debate the pros and cons of using web 2.0 tools and technologies
Cost: £10 for CLSIG members, £15 for non-members and half-price for the unemployed. To book or for more information please email events@clsig.org.uk .
URL: http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/special-interest-groups/clsig/events/pages/default.aspx

Seminar: How to research on the Internet: The absolute essentials in just one day
Date: Tuesday, 9th March 2010
Venue: Ibis Hotel, Cardington Street, Euston, London NW1 2LW
Organiser: Rod Laird Organisation
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Outline: Topics covered will include: How to save time by knowing how to search Google effectively; which are the best sites for business research and how do you access them; how to use Web 2.0, social and professional networks for research; how to dig behind the URL to check who is behind the web site and the data; using statistics found on the Internet. Please note: **no** hands on sessions in the program so bring your own laptop if you want try things as we go along. The hotel has charged for wifi.
Cost: £345 + VAT
URL: http://rodlaird.hostinguk.org/default.asp?page=840

Workshop: Counting on Statistics for Market Research: finding, evaluating and using resources
Date: Wednesday, 21st April 2010, 9.30 – 16.30
Venue: Netskills, Newcastle
Organiser: UKeiG
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Outline: Finding reliable statistics, industry and market data that exactly meet your needs can be difficult at the best of times. Free information, if it is available, may have to be gathered from multiple sources and even priced services have their limitations and drawbacks. This one day workshop gives practical guidance on how to find and evaluate web based statistical information and market research. Social and professional networking services such as blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are considered both as sources of information and as a means of identifying real people who can help you. It will also look at options for gathering your own data.
Cost: UKeiG members £180 + VAT at the current rate; others £220 + VAT at the current rate
URL: http://www.ukeig.org.uk/training/2010/StatsApril.html

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