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'Places', 'People and characters', and 'Topics', but each is impeccably presented – though, in the second, you won't, I'm afraid, find an entry for the star of *The bride of Frankenstein* and *The walking dead* under either K or P.

Christopher Phipps, *librarian and freelance indexer*

Public sector records management: a practical guide. Kelvin Smith. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xii, 259p. ISBN 978-0-7546-4987-8. £45.00.

This book offers guidance on records management in the United Kingdom. It contains nothing of interest to indexers; indeed, it is curiously limited in its treatment of retrieval tools in general.

The book has an index, adequate if not prize-worthy. 'Retrieval', 'information retrieval', 'indexing' and 'indexes' do not appear as headings; the nearest seems to be 'access to records'. This, a main heading with numerous subheadings, provides some 24 locators in total. Following these up reveals that most of them lead to the pages of a chapter titled 'Access to records', which deals only with legal rights of access, not with means.

Four of the other references show that the author clearly is aware of the importance of retrieval. On p. 3, 'people in your organisation must be able to locate information when required'. Elsewhere: 'Record keeping systems should aim to make records available quickly and easily' (p. 5); 'Archives should be made physically and intellectually accessible, as legal requirements permit' (p. 148); and in the Model Action Plan included as Appendix 2, practitioners are enjoined to determine whether 'the record keeping system . . . includes guidance on referencing, titling, indexing and protective marking' (p. 242).

Yet remarkably little space has been given to discussion of how retrieval may be facilitated. Just nine of 245 text pages are concerned with the creation of file plans, or business classification schemes, which are regarded as the principal tool. Four possible plan structures are suggested: functional, subject/thematic, organizational and hybrid. The functional approach is recommended.

One paragraph of this section demonstrates awareness that naming may be problematic. It states that 'The plan should incorporate a system of naming conventions so that records are described in a consistent manner over time', and goes on to mention the Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary (IPSV), developed in the UK as 'an encoding scheme for populating subject metadata to index and categorise information across the public sector' (pp. 58–9). But there is no discussion of, for example, the problems involved in creating and maintaining 'naming conventions', or the difficulties that may arise in applying a standardized vocabulary such as the IPSV to a specific local context. Nor is there anything to suggest appreciation of the role indexes may play in 'cutting across the grain' of classification schemes, expanding opportunities to access information from points different from those forming the structure of a scheme.

Quite why retrieval should receive such summary treatment is puzzling, given that its importance obviously is understood. I have found nothing in the text that might provide an explanation.

Linda Sutherland, *freelance indexer*

Consider the source: a critical guide to 100 prominent news and information sites on the Web. James F. Broderick and Darren W. Miller. Medford, New Jersey: Information Today, Inc., 2007. xiii, 457 pp. with index. ISBN: 978-0-910965-77-4 (pbk): \$24.95.

Indexers frequently need to use reference material to verify facts and spellings in the works they are indexing. Although we have probably invested in a solid reference bookshelf of well-thumbed and trusted books, we are more likely to 'Google it' for more current matters.

How then do we assess the credibility of websites that now serve as our virtual 'reference bookshelf'?

Broderick and Miller have done this for us, along with 'a slough of opinions and suggestions' (p. xi), describing and critiquing 100 news and information websites. For each site the authors provide:

- an outline of its origins and history
- an assessment of its main features
- reasons you should (or should not) visit the site
- lesser-known aspects of the site's history or ideological leanings
- interesting factoids, e.g. 'MoveOn.org came into being as a result of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky sex scandal' (p. 193) or 'For the first 113 years of its existence, the *Sydney Morning Herald* did not print news on the front page' (p.335), and
- a 'newspaper' rating ranging from 1 to 5 newspapers (p. xii):
 - 1 – 'disappointing, definitely look elsewhere'
 - 2 – 'some value but not a great return on your time'
 - 3 – 'keep this on your radar'
 - 4 – 'very good information, so log on regularly'
 - 5 – 'superior sites worth checking in with every day.'

There are five top-rated sites: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Christian Science Monitor*, Columbia Broadcasting Service (CBS), *Guardian Unlimited*, and National Public Radio (NPR). These are not unexpected, but it is certainly a relief to find a cornucopia of the world's leading newspapers and news organizations ranked at 4 or 4 ½. Two sites, perhaps not unexpectedly, rate only a half newspaper each: Fox News and Rush Limbaugh.

Why did the authors select just 100 sites for critique, and more importantly, how did these particular ones make the cut? Broderick and Miller 'decided to focus on those sites that had achieved a certain prominence or reputation' and 'to limit our reviews to sites that remain largely free' (p. xiii).¹

Not surprisingly, there is a heavy preponderance of sites of U.S. origin but other English-language newspapers and organizations are well represented (e.g. *Irish Times*, *Globe and Mail*, *Jerusalem Post*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Times of India*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Reuters, Associated Press).

The sites are arranged in alphabetic order from Agence France-Presse (1 'newspaper') and Al Jazeera (3 ½ 'newspapers') to The Write News (1 ½ 'newspapers') and Yahoo! News (3 'newspapers'). An appendix ranks the sites for easy comparison, and Wendy Catalano has done a nice job with the index,² further 'classifying' the sites by their primary focus, e.g. celebrity news, financial, government-related, muckracking, political, sports coverage.

In addition to the visual 'newspaper' ranking at the end of each review, the authors also offer pithy summations such as: (Ed: site rating added in square parenthesis)

- 'Amnesty.org [3½] holds its audience captive' (p. 35)
- The Sports Illustrated Site site [2½] is the equivalent of a baseball team playing .500 ball: just enough wins to keep you coming back for more' (p. 331)
- 'The Write News has the right idea [1½] – but not always all the right stuff' (p.431)
- Aussie Aussie Aussie! Oi oi oi! Here's to a newspaper [4½ for *Sydney Morning Herald*] that gets IT'
- 'Google News [2½] serves its purpose, but it doesn't make you goggle at it.'

This book is both a serious and rewarding guide to the credibility and usefulness of news and information websites, carefully differentiates news and opinion, and makes for informative and entertaining browsing. Long a mantra for journalists and writers, the eponymous *Consider the source* is a valuable starting point to help indexers appraise their online resources.

And in case you think this guide was outdated before it was

published, the authors provide updated information and critiques about the sites discussed in this book at www.TheReportersWell.com.

Frances S. Lennie

Notes

1. Wikipedia, about which much has been written elsewhere, would meet both criteria if it were a news organization, but it is not and is therefore not included in this book.
2. My only quibble with the index, and something over which the indexer probably had no control, is its layout. A smaller type size would have prevented the breaking of entries in order to accommodate non-breakable URLs, and turnover lines should have been more tightly linked. This would make the index visually more appealing and much easier to use.

The University of Google: Education in the (post) information age
Tara Brabazon. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 234pp. 24cm. Select bibliog., index. ISBN 978-0-7546-7097-1 (HBK) £30.00

I really am not sure what to write about this book. I read quite a lot of it on the bus, and several times I was so engrossed I nearly missed my stop. Sometimes I found it infuriating, sometimes I found myself nodding in agreement and recognition of the scenes described, other times I found it dull.

Brabazon sets out to critique university education in the '[post]information age', from her own perspective as a teacher of media studies. She begins by establishing herself as a good sort, a dedicated university teacher anxious to help her students succeed and, apparently, willing to work herself into the ground to do so – although she feels, quite rightly, that this should not be expected of her. Having said that, I did, with a touch of post-modern irony, look her up on Google and found that not only is she a university professor – enough of a day job for most people – but she also has several books in preparation, runs a media studies collective and is studying for the latest of several MA degrees.

She offers a critique of mass-access higher education and in particular of e-learning, starting with reliance on Internet search engines and moving on to question the introduction of computer-based learning environments and e-lectures. In parts I found her arguments to be unclear – was she criticizing the students, the system or wider policy? I think it is all three, but there is little point attacking students for low expectations and poor academic behaviour if they are products of a school system which has given them the belief that a degree is theirs almost by right and failed to introduce them to the principles of information retrieval in any context. I have received many emails over the past few years from people whose job title includes the word 'researcher' asking me how they can get hold of a particular journal article. I always hope I am insulting them when I write back to say 'go to a library and ask a librarian, or look at the British Library website'.

One problem with Brabazon's book is that she has recently moved from working in Australia to the UK, so the book is largely based on experiences in Australia, but this is not always immediately clear. At times I also felt that she underplayed the political context of her arguments. She is at her best when she talks about her work with students, in particular teaching them to make an 'information scaffold' on which to build their work. I did find it sad, though, that she does not appear to encourage them to do much library browsing. She suggests that search engines make information retrieval seductively easy, but that students are failing to approach material critically. I'm not sure this is actually a problem with the medium – more that students need to learn this skill however they obtain their material.

The book is quite clearly structured. I am dubious about her use of analogies – yoga and H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. They do not work well if you are unfamiliar with the base material. At times I found myself wondering whether she was trying to write a polemic or a scholarly book. The work is frequently polemical in tone but it is heavily footnoted and referenced. This is something that I find intensely irritating but apparently extensive 'footnotage' is a sign of scholarship. Or you could always write about the noted material in the text so that it is properly integrated into your argument and the poor reader doesn't have to keep jumping about.

At the end of the book, and having read it thoroughly once and then skimmed it again to make notes for this review, I'm still not really sure what the point is. Is she defending media studies? Attacking poor-quality higher education? Identifying cultural changes since 9/11? Overall this book could have made a series of engaging and thought-provoking conference papers but, for me at least, it didn't hang together as a whole. Another reader will, of course, experience it differently (with a nod to Roland Barthes).

And now the index which is, frankly, ghastly. I suspect this is down to the publisher, because nowhere here do I see the remotely free hand of a professional indexer. Earlier I mentioned Brabazon's concept of the information scaffold, discussed in detail over many pages. No, it's not in the index. The index comprises mostly names. Names in indexes are useful if you know who they are; concepts in indexes are useful if you have some idea of what you are looking for. Titles of works cited are given as subheads under the author's name giving entries like:

Cooper, Maxine 86
Values in Education 86.

There are long strings of undifferentiated locators – 29 for 'curriculum' which also has 'see also enacted curriculum 29–30, 147'. Both of these are included in the locators for the main heading and there is no separate main heading for enacted curriculum. On p. 162 Brabazon writes 'Information management requires not only attention to content, but retrievability.'

So would I recommend this book? No. I'd say use the time to look for treasure in a library or bookshop. Unless you want an object lesson in how not to create an index, that is.

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