

***CONVERGENCE: THE FUTURE  
OF INDEXERS AND OTHER  
INFORMATION  
PROFESSIONALS***

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# Helping seekers ...



...from A - Z



# Acacia to zinnia



# Angel fish to Zebra danio



# From ...

aab-1 protein

to

Zucapsaicin

001.05/1

to

999.9/4A1

AS 6/1

to

ZWZ 70/1



# From zoos, aquaria and herbaria to libraries, museums and archives

All sorts of collecting agencies:

- Acquire and accession
- Store
- Catalogue, classify, categorise, label, index
- Make findable and accessible
- Display and promote

And now intranets and websites do too!

Collections Australia Network – <http://www.collectionsaustralia.net>

# Convergence

- A librarian can work on an intranet, and an intranet indexer and thesaurus editor may well be a journalist, technical writer, web manager or editor
- Librarian and indexer roles may be more consultative than hands-on
- Records management – functional keywords supplemented by subject-based taxonomies /thesauruses, or mapping from subject to function
- And now users are keyword tagging at social sharing sites such as de.li.cio.us, flickr, citeulike. BBC and others are harvesting user tagging (folksonomy) for use in formal taxonomies

## ...vs. separate silos

- Philip Resnik and Gary Adams (1996):  
““Conceptual” is something of a recent buzzword in the information retrieval business...for example, a search involving “agriculture” might do well to turn up documents about “farming””.
- Librarians as the problem in IA (in good company with scientists and academics)
- Some IPs are also not broadening out as much as they could do

# Bibliographic database indexing

- Decrease in human indexing and rise in MAI and fully automated indexing and no indexing (free-text, full-text search)
- Decrease in number of databases and number of indexed databases
- Because of lack of user interest, lack of funding, changes in roles of producing bodies

# It's about time!

- Karen Sparck Jones (2004) wrote: 'Operational bibliographic services were very reluctant to allow statistical methods any possible utility, especially given the tiny research experiments, and became substantially committed to the conventional boolean approach. The first Web engine builders had no such prior commitments and picked up the statistical idea...It thus took about twenty-five years for a simple, obvious, useful idea to reach the real world, even the fast-moving information technology one.'

# How well do computers do?

- Google doesn't want to be tested on recall and precision.
- Automatic Linguistic Indexing of Pictures website ([wang.ist.psu.edu/IMAGE/alip.html](http://wang.ist.psu.edu/IMAGE/alip.html)) – skimobile as *ballet*, *doll*, *monument*, *indoor* and *plane*, but not a bad start
- NASA results positive
- ANSTO – microbial cultures as ‘cultural life’
- ‘Auditory evoked potential audiograms of a false killer whale’
  - MAI descriptors were *auditory evoked potentials*; *hearing*; *rubber*; *electrodes* and *gold* – from the phrase ‘responses were received through gold disc electrodes in rubber suction cups’.
  - Manual descriptors were: *auditory evoked potentials*; *sound spectrography*; *auditory thresholds*; *bioacoustics*; and *go/no-go discrimination learning*.

# Bibliographic database indexing – the human factor

- Monitor and improve MAI and automated systems – computers, like children, can be trained
- Identify the bits that humans do better than machines – e.g., broad classification codes to complement free-text search on specific terms
- Identify new areas in which human indexing is the only way to go (high value, high sensitivity)
- Find ways to improve search, e.g., passage level indexing
- Train users to value quality search

# The future

This is all discussed further in *The indexing companion*, CUP, due March 2007, which concludes:

The oyster defends itself against an intruder and produces a pearl. The information world is our oyster – whether it turns out to be a toxic heavy-metal-laden mass, or home to a pearl of great beauty, is yet to be seen. This book/talk points to the pearl.

