

Péter's picks & pans



Péter Jacsó
University of Hawaii

Librarians' Index to the
Internet

NUA Internet Surveys

Guinness World
Records

The first pick is the Librarians' Index to the Internet, an excellent pathfinder to quality Web sites that shows the fingerprint of competent librarians. The second pick is an indexing/abstracting database of Internet-related source documents that are linked from informative, excellently structured records. The pan is a very poor digital implementation of a long-time classic in print format, the Guinness World Records, that has been deteriorating lately. The database version just makes it worse.



LIBRARIANS' INDEX TO THE INTERNET

This directory of worthy Web sites, Librarian's Index to the Internet (www.lii.org) is a prime example of the quality that librarians bring to the Web—deploying their expertise in evaluating, selecting, and organizing information resources to make them easily accessible for users. Web directories are a dime a dozen on the Internet. Sooner or later, everyone will share with the world their preferred sites in some zany or pseudo-scientific arrangement. I have been panning them regularly here and in my EXTRA site (www2.hawaii.edu/~jacso) to deter the readers of *ONLINE* from the worst of these efforts, such as Thereference.com, The Free Internet Encyclopedia, or the (not so) Awesome Library. I am delighted when I run into a directory that brings fame to librarianship, not shame. Carole Leita of the Berkeley Public Library and 60 librarians from California (who are deservedly identified on the site) have been doing an excellent job in identifying, describing, and classifying the best sites on the Web—with a slant toward public libraries and California.

Librarians' Index to the Internet **lii.org**
By Librarians, For Everyone!

- ▶ About the Iii
- ▶ Browse All Subjects
- ▶ Best Search Tools

Results for **britannica** - 1 to 12 of 12

Jump to: [Directories](#) | [Databases](#) | [Specific Resources](#) [Results by Subject](#)

Best of...

[Britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com/) - <http://www.britannica.com/>

The complete *Encyclopedia Britannica* and more. "Selected articles from more than 70 of the world's top magazines—including *Newsweek*, *Discover*, and *The Economist* - provide additional feature and current-events coverage. Our guide to the Web's best sites includes more than 125,000 sites, and you can also search the text of more than 100 million Web pages to find more information. The *Books in Print* database is available through [Britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com), and you can follow links from these citations to order books online from Barnes & Noble." Their Web pages search is from [Searchopolis](#), which uses the Inktomi search engine filtered by NZH2. - cl

Subjects: [Encyclopedias -- General](#) | [Searching -- Best subject indexes](#)

The entry about Britannica is atypical in primarily using the publisher's own outdated pitch with a brief librarian commentary.

There are records for nearly 8,000 informative and praiseworthy free Web resources classified by Library of Congress Subject headings and with good, critical summaries. There are a few records when the sales pitch of a site comes through instead of the librarians' voice, but these are the exceptions, such as the record about Britannica.com that is not even true anymore because recently the publisher switched to a partially paid, partially free service, and the complete text of this classic gem is not available free of charge anymore (but even so, it is an outstanding resource, indeed).

The sites are classified into about 40 categories from Arts to Women, with a varying number of subcategories under most categories. For example, the top category Law has 42 subcategories including Affirmative Action, Bankruptcy, Capital Punishment, Censorship, Gun Control, Patents, and Tobacco Industry. As in any ontology, the choice of classes and subclasses, or their naming, can be argued. Is there really a need for the Internet to appear in two top categories (Internet and Internet Searching)? Probably not: The superb cross-referencing and splendid searchability of the directory would justify the decision to have only one entry for the Internet at the

Schneider Succeeds Leita at LII

Carol Leita, the founder and 10-year head of the Internet Librarians' Index, retired in October. Succeeding her will be Karen Schneider, previously assistant director of technology for the Shenendehowa Public Library, Clifton Park, New York, and a columnist for American Libraries. Noting that the LII project is funded by the Library of California, although it is used nationally, Leita said she hoped additional funding could be found to take the burden off the state of California. Also possible might be state-specific versions of LII. At present, some 5% of the sites listed are California-specific.

—Marydee Ojala

Good top categories and subcategories with excellent cross-references and field searching reflect librarians' involvement with LII.

top level, and would make the otherwise smartly and beautifully designed home page less crowded. I would certainly argue for using the noun format: Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals instead of the adjectival form of the terms. These are worth mentioning, as LII paid attention and replaced some of the category terms, and removed some of the sites that earlier I found to pollute this high-quality directory.

There are still sites that I would not include, such as Atlapedia, when there are far superior sites for country profiles and atlases. To the credit of LII, the annotation is critical, and ranks the sites only as "OK," but even that is too much validation for Atlapedia. There is some unevenness in using subdivisions with certain subject headings, but not with others. Maybe the subject heading-subheading combo *America—Discovery and exploration* does not justify having additional geographically subdivided entries *America—Discovery and exploration—French and America—Discovery and exploration—Spanish* that correspond to a single Web site. On the other hand, such highly posted terms as *Homework* with 65 subdivision sites deserve a few subdivisions.

These are minor naggings in light of the excellent collection of Web sites endorsed by competent librarians. The design and functionality of the

browsing, searching, and display features of the software—based on Swish-Enhanced—are among the best you can find on the Web. The interface gives the users direction in such a subtle way that even when they don't feel like asking for it, they will be happy to accept it. You can explore the panoply of top categories and subcategories with the ease of Tarzan jumping from branch to branch, stopping here and there on the way. If you prefer to be taken to your destination without bothering about where to enter the rainforest, the powerful search features will help you. You can limit the search to records where the term occurs in the title field, the descriptor field, or in the summary. This—along with the excellent cross-references—takes off the heat of any academic argument about the taxonomy of LII. You must use LII to really appreciate its beauty and brain.



NUA INTERNET SURVEYS

NUA Internet Surveys (www.nua.com) claims that it is the world's leading resource for Internet trends and statistics—and in my testing, this seemed to be true. One reason for its

NUA
The world's leading resource for Internet trends & statistics

HOME | ABOUT

HOW MANY ONLINE? | GRAPHS AND CHARTS | NUA ANALYSIS

NUA INTERNET SURVEYS BY CATEGORY

SECTORS
[Advertising](#)
[Auto Industry](#)
[Business Use](#)
[Customer Service](#)
[Ecommerce](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Financial Services](#)
[Health/Medical](#)
[Internet Trading](#)
[IT/Computer Ind](#)
[Knowledge Mgmt.](#)
[Marketing/Brands](#)
[Portals/ISPs](#)
[Publishing/Media](#)
[Recruitment](#)
[Retail/Apparel](#)
[Telecom](#)
[Travel](#)

IDC The European IT Forum 2001
Analyze the Future 17-18 September, 2001 • Grimaldi Forum • Monaco
 Meet: Michael Porter, Lester Thurow, Gary Hamel, Carly Fiorina, Michael Capellas, Jeff Bezos

IT/Computer Industry

309 match(es) found.

IT services spending to soar
 Jul 24 2001: Global spending on IT services will hit USD700.3 billion by 2005, up from USD439.9 billion this year.

First ever drop for global PC sales
 Jul 20 2001: Global PC sales declined for the first time ever during the second quarter of 2000, according to Gartner Dataquest.

Busy M&A activity in first half of 2001
 Jul 20 2001: Webmergers reports that 726 Internet companies were acquired in the first half of 2001, in deals worth a total of USD6 billion.

Elearning gaining strength in US

The result list from NUA has succinct and informative headline sentences.

NUA
The world's leading resource for Internet trends & statistics

HOME | ABOUT

HOW MANY ONLINE? | GRAPHS AND CHARTS | NUA ANALYSIS

NUA INTERNET SURVEYS BY CATEGORY

SECTORS
[Advertising](#)
[Auto Industry](#)
[Business Use](#)
[Customer Service](#)
[Ecommerce](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Financial Services](#)
[Health/Medical](#)
[Internet Trading](#)
[IT/Computer Ind](#)
[Knowledge Man.](#)
[Marketing/Brands](#)
[Portals/ISPs](#)
[Publishing/Media](#)
[Recruitment](#)
[Retail/Apparel](#)
[Telecom](#)
[Travel](#)

The Industry Standard: IT services spending to soar

Jul 24 2001: Global spending on IT services will hit USD700.3 billion by 2005, up from USD439.9 billion this year.

This is according to **IDC**, who says that the US will remain the biggest spender on IT services at USD335 billion in 2005, up from USD206.9 billion this year.

Spending in Western Europe will grow from USD127.5 billion to USD192.4 billion in the same period, and spending in Japan will increase from USD53.2 billion to USD75.2 billion. Spending on IT services in the rest of the world will amount to USD52.5 billion to USD97.7 billion.

At present, 41 percent of IT spending goes on tech support and systems integration, **IDC** says.

Informative summaries from NUA are filled with statistics and facts.

superiority is that it collects the information from hundreds of the most trusted (and most expensive) surveys and studies produced by Jupiter, Gartner, Deloitte & Touche, Nielsen, and the like, from insightful traditional and Web-born sources such as the Associated Press, BBC, Red Herring, The Industry Standard, and various publications of information technology publishers such as IDC and Ziff-Davis. Reports from associations, governmental and non-governmental organizations, such as the American Management Association, American Association of University Women, National Science Foundation, the United Nations, and its agencies, round out the sources.

It is like an abstracting/indexing service designed for the 21st century rather than ported to the Web from the 20th century. It uses a distinct classification system where the main categories include Industry Sectors, Societal Issues, Tools, and Demographics. There is a regional classification category for region-specific or country-specific information. The categories are broken down into well-chosen subcategories. For example, the Societal Issues category has such subcategories

as Abuse, Censorship, Privacy, and Security Issues. The Industry Sectors category lists such subcategories as Advertising, Ecommerce, IT/Computer Industry, Portals/ISPs, Internet Trading, Marketing/Brands, Publishing/Media, and Travel. All these include summary records of relevant sources from the Internet perspective of the sector or the demographic group (seniors, women, teenagers).

I can't tell how many records there are in the database, but samples indicate that in each subcategory, on the average, there are hundreds of entries about source documents released since 1997. In terms of Internet Age, that is more than enough retrospectivity.

NUA provides excellent, facts-laden summaries of reports, trend analyses, surveys, articles, and commentaries. It links either to the source documents or to the site of the publisher of the source document. It is much more current than the traditional indexing and abstracting services. Many of the summaries have references to very recent (a few days old) publications.

The result list has a succinct, single-sentence headline about the source document with the date prominently

displayed. It was almost always sufficient to decide if it was worth it to look at the summary, or to keep scrolling. The summaries are very informative. Often, the link to the publisher's site offers a free executive summary, and even the full report. And we are talking about much-respected surveys, not some cheap freebies. For example, the short entry

Women see glass ceiling in tech sector
 Jun11 2001: Sixty percent of [women] who work in the high tech industry would choose another career if they were starting out again, according to a new study.

was informative enough to get my attention and click for the summary that had somewhat-surprising statistics. The link took me to the site of Roper Search for the survey that was commissioned by Deloitte & Touche. There was a longer abstract of the survey findings, a link to the PDF format of the Executive summary, and another to the complete report. The layering of information and the links

leading to more and more complete information are perfect. You will not find this true for all the records in NUA, but even the NUA abstracts alone make the visit worthwhile.

If you don't want to browse by sub-categories, you can choose the simple search or advanced search option. The simple search for the term *decline* found 44 records. You don't need to specify truncation; the software automatically finds *declines* and *declined*, and will subtly highlight the string that matches your term. The advanced search mode allows you to choose from drop-down menus a category and/or a region, and/or a source (organization) in addition to the keywords, to make the search results more focused.

NUA was recently acquired from receivership by the Scope Communications Group, a Dublin, Ireland-based publisher and event producer, affiliated with International Data Group (IDG). Scope must have a very good grasp of how people want to look for information and, if appropriate, dig deeper by the click of a button. The design is utilitarian,

advertisements are not obtrusive, the classification is appropriate, the search options are good, and the summaries are perfect. This is an excellent database for anyone who would like to have stats about any aspects of the Internet.



GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS

There is no such record title yet as The Worst Implementation of a Classic Ready Reference Source, but I submit a nomination: The online edition of the Guinness World Records (www.guinnessworldrecords.com). The book itself is not of the quality of my childhood, and looks more like a book version of Ripley's Believe It Or Not museums. The Web edition Springerized it: That certainly will please members of the Jerry Springer fan club, but may put

off the rest of the world. Then again, there must be a reason that among the favorites you will find The Longest Spaghetti Nose Blow, The Most Cockroaches in a Coffin (20,050 in the company of a warm body), or Items Regurgitated (let me spare you the details).

You will find the old standby records in the book, such as the longest fingernails, most tattooed women, fastest talker, heaviest man, heaviest woman, but oddly, these last three category winners are not in the online version. Even stranger is, that while the book provides the details about the man who ate the most live worms, and the other who stuffed the most hamburgers in his mouth (I hope neither spoke in the heat of setting the record), they did not make it to the Web version. Perhaps to make room for the headless chicken that survived for 18 months after her head was chopped off. An animated, audio-enhanced cartoon helped visualize what the chicken did after the incident, but it was later removed when the site builders woke up from their drinking binge.

Free www.econtentmag.com/ecxtra EContent **xtra** Newsletter...

Delivered **FREE** to your email inbox every week from the news desk of *EContent* magazine. Totally unique and targeted, EContent Xtra reports on the Internet and enterprise content industry.

Stay up-to-date with weekly coverage:

- ★ *Trend analysis*
- ★ *Content industry M&A*
- ★ *New product roll outs*
- ★ *Accurate & exclusive reporting on breaking news*
- ★ *Covering the DRM, content management, syndication, aggregation, pricing, and distribution markets... and more!*



EContent **xtra**

Sponsorships available. Email michaelp@onlineinc.com

Subscribe now at: www.econtentmag.com/ecxtra

The editors of the online version must have lost their heads like the chicken when designing the interface. You are supposed to scroll down a list of adjectives that ends in *est* (biggest, longest, largest, bitterest), pick the most appropriate one, then type in the record title to complement the search, e.g. mushroom with largest. The problem is that the software will find nothing because the official record title is *largest fungi*. I don't know how many people would guess the wording in the record titles, but I am afraid only a minority could do it correctly. The search panel is so tiny, and the fonts are so small and hard to read, that it must have been difficult to make it so bad. In the Opera browser, you can enlarge the entire screen, but in Netscape and Explorer the resizing of text does not work in this case. A very large part of the screen is taken up by a static text area discussing the Martian dust that remained displayed throughout the day as I tested this database.

True, there is keyword search, but it may still leave you out in the cold if you don't know the exact record title. Nothing came up for the search tallest woman or tallest women, and I knew it must be there. So I searched for women (as there were fewer records to browse through than tallest) and found it under tallest living woman. The search defaults to ordered adjacency (pardon the expression) and because the online version does not have the record about the tallest woman who ever lived (Zang Jinlian, 8' 1"—as I know from the print edition), the tallest living woman record did not match the search. Neither will you find the record about the heaviest person no matter how you search. The result list is a single-line cell, so you can't just glance at a list but have to keep clicking to show the title of the next record—a good way to let the arthritis inflame your wrist.

To the credit of the online version, it sometimes corrects an error in the print version. For example, the book claims that the largest mushrooms are to be found in Malheur National Park in Washington State. The *petit malheur* is that it is in Oregon, and the online edition gets it right. Not as

The screenshot shows a web page titled "Longest women's shot put". On the left is a black and white photograph of a woman, Helena Fibingerová, in the middle of a shot put throw. To the right of the photo is a table with the following information:

| who | where | when | what |
|-------|------------------------------------|------|----------------------|
| WHO | Helena Fibingerová | WHEN | 19-2-1977 |
| WHERE | Jablonec, Czechoslovakian Republic | WHAT | 73 ft 10 in, 22.50 m |

Below the table, a text block reads: "The longest women's indoor shot put was 22.50 m. (73 ft. 10 in.), won by Helena Fibingerová (Czechoslovakia) in Jablonec, Czechoslovakia on February 19, 1977." To the right of this text are three buttons labeled "VIDEO", "ICCH", and "DISCUSS".

Someone should check how to spell correctly, or at least decide on a consistent spelling of Czechoslovakia—and know since what date it has been called the Czech Republic.

if it were, though, always accurate with geography. I am sure that a lot of people pine to know who holds the women's indoor record in shot put, and will be delighted to find it. Obviously, the editors of the online edition struggle with the spelling of Czechoslovakia (although they get it right once), and throw in the non-existent name Czechoslovakian Republic for good measure. Neither did they recall from the tennis world that female names end in *-a* in Czech. Navratilova, Kournikova, anyone?

Inaccuracies abound that could have been prevented by common-sense proofreading. According to Guinness, the oldest ruling president in 2000 was the Macedonian president, Kiro Gligorov. In 2000, he was not president. He could not be because he was re-elected in 1994, and one can be president only for two terms in Macedonia, so this record was due to be long broken by the time the 2001 edition was put in press. It is just one of the many signs of sloppy editorial work that is aggravated by the

extremely poor-quality images in the online version.

I first wondered why not one of the Web publishers that employ talented Web designers and far more competent editors (such as Information Please, Bartleby, or Encarta) license this classic source and makes it accessible on the Web. They could do a better job in their sleep. I think the reason is that the Web, with its increasing number of high-quality and well-searchable ready-reference sources and other information sources, will send Guinness into oblivion shortly. I could find answers to almost all of the records that I tested in no time using far better sources and much more capable software. I used to like Guinness, but I am displeased with what I see now.

Péter Jacsó (jacsop@hawaii.edu) is associate professor of Library & Information Science at the University of Hawaii's Department of Information and Computer Sciences.

Comments? Email Letters to the editor to marydee@xmission.com.