

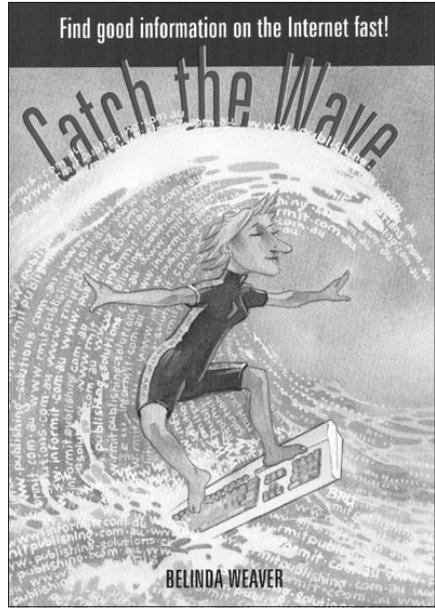
ANNIE McKILLOP
Journalism Liaison Librarian,
Auckland University of Technology

Stop searching, start finding - a handy media research guide

***Catch the Wave: Find good information on the Internet fast!*, by Belinda Weaver. Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2003. pp 270 pp . ISBN 086459 241 8.**

ANOTHER book on finding ‘good information on the internet fast!’? Surely that’s too 1990s – we all use Google these days. And aren’t there too many of these guides already? A subject search alone on Amazon finds 170.

But Belinda Weaver argues forcefully that an information literate (p viii) approach to finding information on the internet means that it is ‘possible to find what you want 99 per cent of the time – without using search engines’, (p ix) and, furthermore, avoid being ‘buried in an avalanche of results’ (p vi). *Catch the Wave*, with its body-pierced Aussie surfer on the cover, explores in impressive



detail how this can be achieved.

Weaver writes convincingly, drawing upon specialist information skills honed while lecturing in journalism, writing regular internet columns (*Brisbane Courier Mail* and *inCite*), contributing to a journalism textbook, maintaining her own journalism websites (Australian journalism, globalisation), discussion list and weblog, and not least, working as a subject librarian at the University of Queensland library.

The danger of writing a book on searching the internet, of course, is that it will be out of date before it is even published. Weaver avoids this by listing established and reputable

sites, and by concentrating on explaining research principles.

The new digital divide, as identified by Hargittai in the online, peer reviewed internet journal *First Monday* (p ix), is now between those who can efficiently and effectively search the internet, and those who just bang any keywords into a search engine and accept what they get uncritically. Rather, says Weaver, internet searchers must ‘think like a journalist’ (p 6) and organise their sources online just as they would offline (p 212). Searching online only wastes time if the search technique is unsophisticated and disorganised, and the all-important question of ‘provenance’ (p viii) is ignored.

So the key to information literacy is to ask the following questions, long before putting finger to keyboard: ‘What are you actually looking for?’ and ‘who is likely to have published the information?’ (p ix). The next step is to formulate a search strategy: search tools, search terms, alternative words, Boolean, truncation. So far, so library; all standard, tried and true advice.

But *Catch the Wave* goes further. Chapters cover internet tools and services – what is the invisible web?; how do you set up alerts?; different types of information and where it is available – need to find media releases?; free scientific information?

The final chapters target specific types of searcher: librarian, journalist, tertiary or school student, and academic. These are perhaps the most useful as they cover likely information needs and refer the reader back to relevant sections in the rest of the book. If you belong to one of those groups this is a good place to start

Weaver’s notable strength is her vast collection of top quality websites, built up over years of searching the internet. Her lists of these at the end of each chapter are an invaluable resource for any serious researcher or casual surfer.

Even the most experienced searcher, for whom much of what Weaver says will be common sense, will be impressed.

The book is intended for an Australian audience and, although there is plenty here for New Zealanders and journalists in the Pacific, the Australian focus does limit its usefulness somewhat.

The principle that understanding how organisations work greatly increases the likelihood of finding quality information is excellent. But a whole chapter devoted to explaining the Australian legal system is of less value.

Weaver’s advice to librarians underpins the book. Knowing which sites to go to on the internet to find information ‘soon becomes auto-

matic' (p 240). There is an assumption here that all sophisticated internet users should develop indepth online knowledge of their subject. This is appropriate for researchers, academics, subject librarians, journalists with a set beat or round, but for the average screen jockey, whose areas of interest shift from day to day, this becomes much more unlikely.

Google plus keywords will just have to be used – and Google does come in as the number one search engine (p 67).

This is a book to dip into, to browse, not to read from cover to cover. And don't be put off by the rather dated cartoons, the tendency to wordiness and repetition of ideas, the sometimes rather low level information ('use the Refresh or Reload button of your browser' (p 204)). For anyone who searches the internet, novice and even expert, this is a thorough and immediately useful book.

References

Australian Journalism

www.journoz.com

Weblog:

www.journoz.com/weblog/

First Monday

www.firstmonday.dk

Hargittai, E. (2002). Second-level Digital Divide: Differences in People's Online Skills. *First Monday*. 7:4. www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_4/hargittai/index.html

(Accessed 3 April 2004).

Weaver, B. (2004). Online columns *FindIT* in the *Courier-Mail*: www.couriermail.news.com.au/infocus/ and *Weaver's Web* in *inCite*: www.informit.com.au/library/authorinfo.asp