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Internet Waves – April 2002

*All in a Day's Work*

By

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Since I work in a very non-standard, "non-traditional" job for a librarian, I am often asked about what I do and how I do it. Well, let me try to describe a typical workday.

In comes an e-mail from my boss. (She lives in New Jersey. I live in Florida. Our office is in San Francisco. We both telecommute full-time.) She would like me to set up a new topic area in our Guide (<http://www.business2.com/webguide/>) for Web Services.

*Pls. do this as a carefully planned project. Analyze what we have and what we need. We want the best guide to web services online. Put this as priority one for the next few days.*

OK. That's pretty clear. What isn't clear is what Web Services is/are. Now I'm not totally clueless. I read a ton of tech magazines online and in print, so I have kind of a vague idea. But I'm not entirely sure I would be able to verbalize it. Best thing to do at this point is to try and find a couple good articles about Web Services and see what I can learn.

As a matter of fact, our own magazine home page turns out to be an excellent place to start. I find an article with the intriguing title, "What the \*&%@!! Are Web Services? (And Why You Should Care!)" (<http://www.business2.com/articles/web/0,1653,38028,FF.html>) Hmm...this probably explains why the boss felt we needed a Web Services topic in the Guide. I'm not totally clueless. I read through the article and then head over to Magportal (<http://www.magportal.com/>), my favorite fishing hole for general, free, full-text magazine articles.

Magportal indexes an eclectic roster of free, online magazines; the current listing (as of the end of February 2002 - [http://www.magportal.com/help/user/which\\_mags.html](http://www.magportal.com/help/user/which_mags.html)) includes everything from AboutSafety to Wired. The search engine here is kind of lame; it doesn't do stemming/wildcards, it doesn't do phrase searching...it doesn't even do "or" – only "and." The User's Guide (<http://www.magportal.com/help/user/search.html>) does offer this offbeat tip: "If one of the words in your query is more important to you

than the others, you can repeat that word several times in the query to force articles containing that word to have a higher quality ranking."

I search on the words "web" and "services," realizing that I'm going to get a lot of irrelevant stuff. The search engine returns almost 6,000 hits; fortunately, they are ranked for relevancy, and pretty much all of the good ones can be found within the first few pages. (You can also choose to rank the results by date, publication title or category; Magportal groups publications into topical categories – e.g., Business, Health, etc. – and you also have the option of confining your search to a single category.)

I find another good introductory article about Web Services from Darwin -- "Essential Guide to Web Services" (<http://www.darwinmag.com/read/010102/essential.html>). For a more concise definition that kind of pulls everything together, I make a brief pit stop at Whatis.com (<http://whatis.techtarget.com/>):

*Web Services (sometimes called application services) are services (usually including some combination of programming and data, but possibly including human resources as well) that are made available from a business's Web server for Web users or other Web-connected programs....Web Services range from such major services as storage management and customer relationship management (CRM) down to much more limited services such as the furnishing of a stock quote and the checking of bids for an auction item. The accelerating creation and availability of these services is a major Web trend.*  
([http://searchwebservices.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid26\\_gci750567,00.html](http://searchwebservices.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid26_gci750567,00.html))

We have a top-level topic in our Web Guide called Services. I login to our DMT (Data Management Tool) server (which lives in an AOL server farm in Reston, VA), and I create a subtopic under Services for Web Services. Under this new topic, I add both the Darwin article and the Business 2.0 article in our standard format for periodical articles: magazine and article title, URL, brief description of the content, date. Then I go out hunting for "important" Web Services sites.

I visit both Yahoo! and the Open Directory (<http://www.dmoz.org/>) to see if any good sites are listed there. Both directories do, in fact, have Web Services topics, and I browse through the sites they have listed, visit and browse through the likeliest prospects, and select a few of the best ones for our Guide. I enter them one at a time under the new Web Services topic in the DMT in our standard format for websites: name, URL, brief description of what's there. Then I try other favorite fishing holes for other good sites. I find a ZDNet Tech Update on Web Services (<http://techupdate.zdnet.com/techupdate/filters/rc/0,14177,6020474,00.html>), and a page of articles about "Charting Web Services Opportunities" at Gartner, a major IT research and advisory firm ([http://www4.gartner.com/1\\_researchanalysis/focus\\_areas/ipws/ipws022202/ipws022202.jsp](http://www4.gartner.com/1_researchanalysis/focus_areas/ipws/ipws022202/ipws022202.jsp)). Most of the content at Gartner is available to paid subscribers only, but there's enough good free stuff to make it a worthwhile bookmark.

From my reading, I've figured out that the three big players in the Web Services space are IBM (<http://www-106.ibm.com/developerworks/webservices/>), Microsoft (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/library/default.asp?url=/nhp/Default.asp?contentid=28000442>) and Sun Microsystems (<http://www.sun.com/sunone/>). I visit the websites

of each company, find their main Web Services pages, and add these to my Web Services topic, which is now looking pretty good. I start thinking about possible subtopics. Three standard ones we use are Issues & Commentary, Major Players, and A to Z Businesses. Since I already know three of the major players, I create the Major Players subtopic and add links there to the IBM, Microsoft and Sun sites that I put under the main Web Services topic. For good measure, I add Hewlett-Packard ([http://www.bluestone.com/products/hp\\_web\\_services/default.htm](http://www.bluestone.com/products/hp_web_services/default.htm)) and Oracle (<http://otn.oracle.com/tech/webservices/content.html>), two other large companies who want a piece of the Web Services action.

We use our Issues & Commentary subtopic for periodical articles, reports, papers, etc., exploring different aspects of a topic, suggesting strategies, providing commentary, reviewing products. I go back out on the Web in search of suitable material, keeping in mind that the audience for our magazine/website is largely business people and not technology geeks. Back at Magportal, I pick up a couple good, recent articles in addition to the two I discovered there initially. I search our own repository at Business 2.0 (<http://www.business2.com/>) where, in addition to content from our publication, we've got about five years worth of full-text articles from Fortune, Fortune Small Business and Money, and also some stuff from CNET. I find one good article from Fortune: The End of Software as We Know It (<http://www.business2.com/articles/mag/0,1640,36118,FF.html>), and one from CNET: Putting Trust in Web Services (<http://news.com.com/2100-1001-840586.html>), and I add those.

Time for the serious stuff. I head for CMP Media LLV (<http://www.cmp.com/>), a major trade magazine publisher in the technology industry (Dr. Dobb's Journal, EE Times, InformationWeek, Network Computing...) and use the search box on the front page to search through all their publications for "Web Services." Weeding through some real geeky stuff, I harvest a good InformationWeek article, Decoding Web Services (<http://informationweek.com/story/IWK20010928S0008>), and one from InternetWeek: Soap Dish: Assessing Web Services (<http://www.internetweek.com/transtoday01/ttoday111201.htm>). The latter article mentions a number of small companies that offer Web Services products, and I keep this in mind for the A to Z Businesses subtopic that I will be creating later.

Next I browse to IDG.net (<http://idg.net/>), which publishes a wide range of magazines for business managers, Internet professionals, technology professionals and enthusiasts (CIO Magazine, Computerworld, PC World...) and maintains more than 300 content-rich websites. From the top page, all of these riches can be searched simultaneously. I find good articles from CIO Magazine, Computerworld, ITWorld, JavaWorld and PC World. After checking a couple smaller sites, I wrap up my Issues & Commentary subtopic and then work on A to Z Businesses, including all the major players and the websites of all the smaller companies I find in the InternetWeek article mentioned above. Good enough for now.

Because of the nature of the subject matter, I decide to create a subtopic for White Papers, and go out hunting for some good ones. In the realm of Information Technology, white papers are briefs or reports issued (usually) by vendors to provide in-depth information about technologies, products, issues, standards, policies, or solutions. You can often find these by poking around in company websites, but it's more efficient to track them down at one of the several sites that aggregate them. Two that I like are ITpapers (<http://www.itpapers.com/>), which allows you to search

by keyword or browse by topic area, and Bitpipe (<http://www.bitpipe.com/>), where you can also browse by vendor.

Trolling for white papers, in the context of a project like mine, can be time-consuming. I want only those papers that, again, are not too geeky to be understood by the average businessperson, and that are not so focused on a single product that there's little usable information. I also don't want anything that's too old, for obvious reasons. This means reading through a lot of really turgid material and outright puffery in order to find the good stuff. Also, many of the vendor sites require you to register before you can access their white papers. You may want to use a free Web-based throwaway e-mail address, etc., to thwart potential spamming. Many of these papers are in PDF format, so you'll need the free Adobe Acrobat Reader (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>).

Fortunately, Web Services is hot right now, so I found a nice selection of documents for my White Papers subtopic. I add them to the DMT, using our standard format: company name, paper title, brief summary of contents, date (if available). In addition, we always try to let our users know if something like Acrobat Reader is required to access the material.

After working with this topic for the better part of a day, I know it well enough to realize that we've already got some topics in our Guide that could be cross-referenced here – mainly the protocols and data exchange standards associated with Web Services. Every topic in our Guide has a specific topic ID number. I track down the topic IDs for SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol), UDDI (Universal Description, Discovery and Integration), WSDL (Web Services Description Language) and XML (eXtensible Markup Language), and use these numbers to cross-reference the topics to Web Services.

My Web Services topic is pretty complete, although I'm still considering additional subtopics – maybe one for Case Studies and another for J2EE (Java 2 Platform, Enterprise Edition -- <http://java.sun.com/j2ee/>), a platform for the development of Web Services that provides an alternative to Microsoft's .NET (<http://www.microsoft.com/net/>). You can see the live version here: <http://www.business2.com/webguide/0,,70753,00.html>. It's now on my (staggering) list of topics to keep track of; I'll add to it periodically if I encounter additional quality articles and websites in the course of my browsing and reading.

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If you "do Web stuff" at your shop and you're looking for a good, all-purpose reference for your staff office, consider O'Reilly's *Web Design CD Bookshelf*. It includes the full searchable text of "six best selling O'Reilly Animal Guides" on CD-ROM -- *HTML & XHTML: The Definitive Guide 4th Edition*; *ActionScript: The Definitive Guide*; *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*; *Designing Web Audio: RealAudio, MP3, Flash, and Beatnik*; *Web Design In a Nutshell, 2nd Edition*; and *Cascading Style Sheets: The Definitive Guide* – and a dead-tree copy of *Web Design In a Nutshell, 2nd Edition*. This set retails for \$79.95, but you can pick it up at a discount from online bookstores (Amazon.com had it for \$55.96 when I checked at the end of February) or through your library's vendor (ISBN 0-596-00271-8). See O'Reilly's Web page: <http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/webcdbk/>.

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