Towards a Lifelong Learning Culture in Canada
The Office of Learning Technologies (OLT)
(Website review)

Reviewer:
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Site URL:
http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/

Site title:
The Office of Learning Technologies (Canada)

Objectives of the site:
In 1996, the federal government of Canada established within its "Human Resources Development Canada" an Office of Learning Technologies. The stated objective of this Office of Learning Technologies site is to assist this office in its mission to "raise awareness about the opportunities, challenges and benefits of technology-based learning and act as a catalyst for innovation in the area of learning and skills development enabled by technologies."

Intended audience:
The site is a resource for students, developers and instructors involved with technology-based learning, which is defined for the purposes of this site as Distance Education. As the site of a Canadian governmental agency, much of the content of this site is geared toward Canadian citizens and institutions.

Contents:
The easily-navigated "Contents" side-bar contains links to a "What's New" section, as well as "Publications," "Funding" and "Events" sections which pertain specifically to the Office of Learning Technologies, and are not of general interest.

The "For Developers" section contains a useful set of links to Professional Associations worldwide, though the "Funding and Support" and "Information Directories" subsections have a somewhat limited Canadian scope.

In the "For Instructors" area are links to sites centered on some of the technologies involved with both synchronous and asynchronous delivery systems. The external and internal links provided would be of most help to the neophyte, and there is a noticeable dearth of content providing information about larger pedagogic and assessment issues related to teaching and technology.

The "For Learners" section again focuses on those students or prospective students who are new to Distance Education. Links to glossaries and beginner's guides are provided, as well as a limited, hyper-linked list of educational institutions and courses available to the distance learner.

For the general audience member, the "Library" is the most useful area of the site. The listserv database in this area is thorough, and contains 229 listservs with a brief summary of the subject area encompassed by each.

The "Library's" on-line Literature database, which contains 35,000 references and links to 500 full-text online documents, would be a helpful addition to a search for articles and other documents, but is not remarkable. A search for "chat rooms" resulted in 7 results; none were newer than 1997.

Also within the Library section, the Office of Learning Technologies Funded Projects Database would be useful for those seeking funding through this office, or for those looking for project ideas or analogues. The searchable

Who's Who Database contains 250 Distance Learning organizations, most of which are Canadian, and the International Initiatives Database is somewhat limited in its size and scope.

The search interface to these various databases is a little awkward and takes some getting used to. However, the cgi script which powers these searchable databases is quick and stable.

The strongest portions of the Library site, and -- for a general Distance Learning audience -- the strongest portions of the entire site, are the Bibliography, Glossaries, Electronic Journals and Newsstand pages contained within the Library section.

The Bibliography, Glossaries and Electronic Journals pages contain many external links, quite a few of which will certainly find their way into the Web bookmarks of anyone interested in Distance Learning or instructional technology in general.

The Newsstand page features links to timely articles from such publications and organizations as *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Business Wire* and *The Associated Press*. The articles provide -- not only relevant information about developments and trends in Distance Education -- but also a perspective on such developments that is often from outside the discipline.

Connectivity/Technical Aspects:
The site loads quickly and is highly navigable. It also contains a site map and a site search, which makes finding site resources even easier. As a product of the government of Canada, the site also has a French-Canadian twin, identical in all aspects save the language it is written in. Some articles and other documents require the popular Acrobat Reader.

Conclusion:
As the site of a governmental agency promoting technology-based learning largely through the funding of approved initiatives, the content of this site seems to support this funding program, instead of being a general and comprehensive clearinghouse for information related to technology-based learning.

Despite this, there are portions of this site which make it not only a good source to find other, more relevant and comprehensive sites, but also a useful Distance Learning resource in and of itself.