

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large

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Perspective

Go Away!

Psst. You, trying to read *Cites & Insights* on the screen while having lunch at your desk. Yes, you over there, on your 16th month of 10-hour days with *nary an absence*. Hey, you with e-texts loaded on your PDA so you can fit in some leisure reading while you're waiting for your fast food order, or catch up on professional reading during slow spots in a meeting, or... And particularly you with the 20 email newsletters and 1,000-line Favorites file, spending all your evening and weekend hours *keeping up so you won't get behind*.

Cool it. Take a break. Do something else. After you've taken a break, start planning a vacation (if you don't already have one or two planned). I don't mean spending an hour or two browsing travel Web sites or thinking about what you might do if only you weren't so busy and couldn't possibly think of actually leaving since after all how would that look if you weren't there every day staying on top of stuff and showing how urgent life really is anyway who are you to say that I should interrupt my hard climb up the economic ladder who has time for all that nonsense I thought it was your job to summarize PC reviews and interesting articles so I could crowd even more into my busy day certainly not to tell me that I need leisure time that's for old folks and wimps better get another cup of coffee there's a long day ahead

I haven't bugged you about this since August 1999. By August, it's a little late to plan a summer vacation, and I know many of you are trapped by the academic calendar (although if you don't have school-age children, you might try nudging the door of that trap a little). April happens to be a wonderful time to take vacations, but also a logical time to plan summer vacations: far enough ahead to get good air fares and have a shot at the accommodations you want. In the meantime, it's spring (with a vengeance around these parts, and certainly approaching elsewhere)—time to enjoy the returning blossoms and other signs of life around you. We're also three months past New Years. By now you should be over

the disappointment of failed resolutions and ready to try out more modest changes.

We Interrupt This Harangue

A message to those of you who really are too *busy busy* to take this seriously. Don't just skip the rest of this essay. Do yourself a favor: stop reading *Cites & Insights* altogether. If you're that important, I'm too far below your level to be worth reading. I don't understand how deadly serious life is and the importance of every waking moment to the furtherance of your career. I haven't even been willing to reformat *Cites & Insights* as a single-column text so that you can zip through it on the screen or, better yet, in plain HTML so you can dump it onto your PDA. I *just don't get it*, and it's not likely that I'll start. You're reading the wrong publication. Sorry. I would say I'll miss you, but since I don't know who reads this (other than the 200+ on the CI:CAL Alert list), I won't know you're gone. My loss, I know. Goodbye. I hope your seriousness and intensity don't cause an early heart attack (although the odds aren't good).

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Step 1: Fresh Air

I'm writing this section on March 10, when spring seems to have sprung in Silicon Valley. Trees are in serious bloom, gardens are awash with color, we'll probably walk a mile and a half to dinner this evening and another mile and a half back, without hauling along umbrellas and flashlights for a change. I bet the weather's also improving where you live.

Isn't it time to go out and see? Take an hour to explore your neighborhood. Go to the nearest city or county park. Surely you can spare an hour or two.

Don't take along your notebook computer. The point is to take a break, not move your work outdoors. Leave your PDA and cell phone home (I know some of you can't bear the thought of leaving the cell phone home, but it's worth a try). Concentrate on nature for a little while. Better yet, don't concentrate—just appreciate. There's no need to think about the miracle of spring, as long as you take part in it.

Step 2: Go Away

Go somewhere new this summer (or this spring, if you have that flexibility). You may be one of those sane people who do take at least one real vacation a year—but who tend to take the *same* vacation every year. Traditional vacations can be refreshing, peaceful, and eminently worthwhile. But once in a while you need to do something new.

We live in a pleasant neighborhood, with great little restaurants, beautiful parks nearby, wonderful climate, and all the glories and diversions of Northern California an hour or two away. I'd be surprised if any *Cites & Insights* reader is more than two hours away from spectacular scenery, new places to see, and new activities to enjoy. You can make a great vacation from a series of day trips—but sometimes even that's not enough.

Plan a true getaway, one lasting at least a week. Go somewhere you've never been. Go out of state at least—and maybe try another country, another continent. That doesn't have to cost a fortune. You'd be surprised how cheaply you can go to Iceland as a stopover on your way to Europe, for example. Central America continues to be a bargain, with the world's second longest barrier reef off Belize and the natural beauty of Costa Rica. Going a little further, and without even hunting for bargains, I see \$529 for 6 nights in Ireland or Prague (including air, land, and lodging—hotels in Prague, bed & breakfast in Ireland).

I won't tell you where to go or how to go. My wife and I are seeing the world by cruise ship, little by little, as time and funds allow. We love it, and cruises don't necessarily cost any more than regular vacations, but we wouldn't recommend them to everyone. (For one, we've learned that we're not cut out for the megaships of Carnival, Princess, Royal Caribbean or NCL—and those are where you find the best bargains.) Amtrak has much to recommend it, and if you travel to Europe you can buy railpasses to get around in comfort and style. A good travel agent

can help you determine the vacation that makes sense for you—but expect to pay for that advice, unless you're booking a cruise or a tour package. The airlines have reduced commissions to a level that won't support travel agencies, no matter how much you spend on plane tickets.

When I say "get away," I mean dropping out to some extent. Maybe you need to leave contact information, but one sign of a good vacation is what's *not* there. Score one for leaving your notebook computer home. Score another for omitting your PDA—and a big one for leaving your cell phone at home, if that's feasible. Maybe it is impossible for you to be out of touch for a week—but it's worth a try.

Why does this matter? Because we all need to be refreshed at times and most of us need to broaden our horizons. Timothy Leary's methods may have been suspect, but dropping out for a few days is part of turning on your spirit *without* illegal chemicals.

Step 3: Contemplate

You can do this any time, but a vacation may help clear your head. I'm suggesting again what I suggested in August 1999. Take half an hour once a week with no computer, nothing to read, no work, no household chores, no TV—just yourself. Relax. Think about who you are, that vacation you've planned, the special qualities of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. Think deep thoughts if that's your style, or think about nothing much at all. If half an hour is too hard, try fifteen minutes.

Here's a thought, for those who watch series TV. (I do, and I've stopped thinking of those series as guilty pleasures—there's no reason for guilt, even for a weekly bit of pure fluff.) Choose one rerun a week that you've already seen. Use that half hour (or half of an hour slot) to try a little contemplation. That will give you a time slot 30 weeks out of the year, and if you find it valuable, you'll find another half hour in the 22 new-episode weeks.

This may be the toughest step of all. Once you go for a walk or drive to a park, you're committed. Once you have unrefundable plane or cruise tickets, you're committed: you'll go and you'll probably enjoy it. But at home there's *always* something else to do, something to distract you from yourself. I believe a little semi-regular contemplation will improve your mood and might help you live longer—but that doesn't make it easy. If you fail to carry out step 3, the worst you can do is feel guilty about it.

Step 4: Repeat

Going away—for an hour, a week, or half an hour's inner voyage—should reduce your frustrations and

improve your energy. These aren't vaccines: one cycle and you're set for life. They won't work for everybody, and most of us need them on a regular basis.


Do I practice what I preach? Two out of three ain't bad. Even in winter (or what passes for winter in this benighted climate), we walk to dinner and back at least once a weekend (typically 20 to 40 minutes each way) and take a neighborhood walk on other weekend days and holidays. We visit regional parks (not as often as we should); this area is too lovely to ignore nature.


As for step 2, have you wondered why this issue of *Cites & Insights* is late and thin, even though it may seem less timely than usual? We're cheating this year, going back to places we've already been—but it's been five years in one case, a decade in the other. On the days I would normally edit and post *Cites & Insights*, we were somewhere in the Society Islands—Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine, Raiatea, and Bora Bora. Five years ago, we were on the *Wind Song*, a glorious wind cruiser (cruise ship with 20,000 square feet of computer-controlled sails when the wind's blowing 10 knots or more); this time, we were (rather, *will be* as this is written) there a few days longer, on Renaissance's R3.

Contemplation? I'm still working on that one. I figure I have another four decades to get it right.

PC Values: April 2001


April's standard configuration includes 128MB SDRAM, 24x or faster CD-ROM, AGP (128-bit) accelerator with 32MB SGRAM, V.90 modem or Ethernet adapter, a 15.9-16" viewable display (usually called 17"), and wavetable sound with stereo speakers.


 **Top, Budget:** Dell Dimension L933: Pentium III-933, 20GB HD. *Minuses:* 64M SDRAM, no dedicated graphics RAM. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, CD-RW drive, Altec Lansing 3-piece speaker system. \$999, VR 2.91 (+16% since 1/2001, +76% since 10/2000).

 **Top, Midrange:** Gateway Select 1300cl: Athlon-1300, 40GB HD. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, Boston Acoustics speakers, CD-RW drive. \$1,499, VR 2.29 (+21% since 1/2001, +51% since 10/2000).

 **Top, Power:** MicronPC Millennia Max XP: Athlon-1300, 60GB 7200RPM HD. *Pluses:* 18"-

viewable display with 64MB graphics RAM, DVD-ROM. *Pluses:* MS Office 2000 SBE, Altec Lansing 3-piece speaker system. \$2,168, VR 1.53 (-7% since 1/2001, +1% since 10/2000).

 **Other, Budget:** CyberPower Athlon Lightning DVD 1.1: Athlon-1100, 30GB HD. *Pluses:* 256MB RAM, DVD-ROM, 18" display. *Extras:* Corel WordPerfect Office 2000, Altec Lansing 3-piece speaker system, CD-RW drive. \$1,135, VR 3.62 (not comparable with 1/2001 or 10/2000).

 **Other, Midrange:** CyberPower Gamer Xtreme 1.1: Athlon-1100, 40GB HD. *Pluses:* DVD-ROM, 18" display with 64MB display RAM. *Extras:* Corel WordPerfect Office 2000, Altec Lansing 3-piece speaker system. \$1,459, VR 2.43 (+41% since 1/2001, +69% since 10/2000).

Following Up

Corrections, amplifications, apologies, sequels and other direct additions to essays and other topics from the last month or two.

Bits and Bytes: An Error Admitted

When I noted *PC Magazine's* "Broadband" as an article worth reading (*Cites & Insights* 1:2, p. 13), I noted, "I admit to considerable surprise at the repeated assertion that V.90 modems have an 'average actual throughput' of 5Kbps ... I'll be looking for a possible correction."

That correction arrived two issues later, but in a surprisingly offhand way: not as a highlighted correction box, but as a minor editorial response to a letter. The letter-writer was astonished by the low connection rates achieved by broadband ISPs. "The chart claims that not one DSL, cable, or other broadband ISP achieved over 90-kilobit-per-second throughput. How can this be? The chart even states, 'For comparison, the average actual throughput of a 56K modem is 5 Kbps.' Didn't you mean 5 KBps, not 5 Kbps?"

The response. "Yes, you are correct. Kbps is indeed the industry-standard notation for kilobits per second. The charts...should have displayed our findings in KBps (kilobytes per second)." That's more like it—but it's a surprisingly hidden acknowledgment of a major error.

Gingerly Speaking

Pity the poor *Cites & Insights* reader who expects nothing but computing technology and keeps getting commentary on media and other issues. Why would I have given “It” a quick take in March, when “Ginger” (using the alternate non-name) almost certainly isn’t PC technology? The commentary said more about *[Inside]*’s article than it did about Dean Kamen’s supposedly revolutionary invention. That’s reasonable, given that nobody knows what Ginger is.

[Inside] went past their purview, which is supposed to be the business of media. They moved from covering the media story to covering the story itself, possibly because it was a way to get some hype for *[Inside]* (which isn’t doing that well). Note the circularity of this situation. After the article I discussed last month, the situation went from silly to absurd.

The *[Inside]* writer appeared on half a dozen TV shows and, in combination with a *Wired* writer, kept the hype going on this invention that would “change the world.” *Brill’s Content*, another magazine-about-media that tends to confuse itself with its mission, did its own story about the stories about Ginger and arranged an “exclusive interview” with Dean Kamen. (Why would a magazine that’s *about* media tout an “exclusive interview”? Because *Brill’s Content* needs more hype.) If you’re getting dizzy by this point, take a rest or skip to the next piece.

If you believe the *Brill’s Content* story, the book proposal that began all this nonsense isn’t quite as rosy as the stories that followed. The full proposal shows Jobs, Bezos, and Doerr—all key figures in the hype—as all being deeply critical of what they were shown. Note that I’m just quoting from a *Brill’s Content* article; if the truth is out there, it’s hidden somewhere in Manchester, New Hampshire (Dean Kamen’s home).

Kamen—whose record as a medical device inventor is strong—comes off as hating the whole situation. He’s more interested in talking about FIRST, a robotics competition for middle- and high-school students, “to promote the notion that scientists ought to be celebrities.” Kamen claims that the other project—Ginger, It, whatever—is confidential, that he doesn’t want to talk about it, that it’s “hype about a product that doesn’t even exist yet.” There are new patents (and Kamen definitely knows patents) to be filed, and it’s dangerous to discuss the ideas in a patent before it’s filed.

Maybe some product will show up down the road. Maybe it will be significant. Maybe it will involve a cost-effective Stirling engine, one of those long-time dreams that can’t seem to move from laboratory to mass production. Kamen got a lot

more publicity for his new wheelchair, not yet FDA approved. That’s that—except for the next act.

The same day that I downloaded the Kamen article (“Overdoing IT,” Mark Boal, to appear in the April 2001 *Brill’s Content*), I happened upon a streaming technology TV show discussing “It.” There was *another* reporter from *[Inside]*, stating flatly that he was *certain* what “It” was based on patent applications and his other investigative journalism. No need to even call Dean Kamen (which he didn’t do): the truth was obvious from the patent. “It” was (is, will be?) a hydrogen-powered scooter with a high-speed flywheel making it “impossible to fall off, even if you tried.” “Hydrogen-powered” in this case may mean a Stirling engine fueled by a hydrogen fuel cell. Interestingly, this time around the *[Inside]* reporter didn’t even pretend to care about journalism issues; now, *[Inside]* was practicing technology journalism, not journalism about journalism.

Practicing appears to be the right word. Maybe some day they’ll get it right. Meanwhile, well, I’ve gone and added to the hype, haven’t I? Such is life in today’s over-mediated environment.

A followup to this followup—I know, but stuff happens. The other reporter from *[Inside]* (noted just above) was doubtless Adam L. Penenberg, who shows up in the March 20, 2001 *[Inside]* with a seven-page story that seems to have a one-page title (63 words beginning “What will it do?”) and this flatly-asserted tease: “Solving the media mystery of the new century.” While it’s an interesting story and expands on the TV piece, it only solves the mystery if you accept a wide series of conjectures as 100% true. At least the bizarre notion that “It” or Ginger would cause cities to be redesigned has an odd gloss. According to the March 20 article, if Ginger is indeed powered by a hydrogen-powered Stirling engine and “if vehicles running on hydrogen...were to become as popular as Kamen and his investors believe they could be, whole cities would have to be redesigned” to provide the hydrogen supply.

My SkepticMeter moves to the full On position with a formulation like this. I suggest that hydrogen-powered scooters just might not become overwhelmingly popular if the only place you could use them is in redesigned cities. Only the most extreme gadget freaks will buy devices that won’t work under current circumstances.

:CueCat Ubiquity and Other Dreams

Deborah Louise offers a good story on the predictable path of the :CueCat in a recent San Jose *Mercury News*. Some highlights:

- When the president of the company wrote about :CueCat last October, he claimed that 600,000 users had swiped 5.5 million codes in a month. That sounds right: if you go to the trouble of installing the silly device, chances are you'll scan everything in sight for a day or two, just to see how it works. Four months later, there were 1.3 million registered users—and they scanned just over 900,000 bar codes. Twice as many users, one-sixth as many uses.
- *Forbes* is one of the three magazines initially featuring :CueCat codes, in addition to *Wired* and one of the Sunday supplements. Early on, you'd see more than a dozen barcoded ads in a typical *Forbes*; now that's down to three. *Wired* is down to *none*—at least in articles, because the publisher doesn't see the added value.
- The company planned to make money by collecting commissions from online sales generated by “scan-happy customers.” Now it plans to make most of its income by charging \$200 a year to link bar codes to Web sites.

The head of the company is upbeat; it's going to be great. What would you expect him to say? “We really blew it, nobody wants this turkey, and we're going to lose every cent of venture capital stupidly invested here”? Maybe in *Dilbert*, but not in the real world. He touts success stories like free distribution through Radio Shack, “where 50 percent of those who got them for free installed them.” Hmm. You go to the trouble of asking for this device, and there's an *even chance* that you'll take a few minutes to try it out? I can see the car ad now: “One out of two new car buyers who requested a test drive in the new SnazzMobile *actually started it and drove it off the lot!*” I'll end with a quote from a newsgroup last fall that sums up the wonder of :CueCat:

“So, basically, with this device I get a direct link to spam rather than having to wait for it to find my inbox?”

Press Watch I: Articles Worth Reading

Breen, Christopher, “The great giveaway,” *Macworld* (April 2001), pp. 32-8.

The first sentence of the second paragraph seems a bit outdated: “Getting goods for free has never been easier, thanks to the explosive growth of the World Wide Web.” Just how long is the lead time for *Macworld* anyway? If you

can get past occasionally silly writing and the probability that some of these offers will be gone (or not free) by the time you look, the article is worth reading. While the discussion is (appropriately) Maccentric, some of the sites and offers don't depend on your computer's operating system.

Dvorak, John, “Thinner, flatter CRTs are on the horizon,” *Computer Shopper* 21:3 (March 2001), p. 54.

Yes, I'm recommending a John Dvorak column, partly because it resurrects a technology I'd almost forgotten about. Field emitter displays *could* bring the advantages of CRTs to flat low-power screens. Briefly, FED technology uses huge numbers of tiny cathodes placed directly behind the phosphor layer—the “gun” becomes millions of tiny guns, and the path is a couple of millimeters (the whole screen is 8mm thick, or about one-third of an inch).

As Dvorak notes, FEDs have been in development for nine years “and in discussion for decades.” The technology makes sense and avoids some of the problems with LCDs and most other flat-panel technologies. But, as with so many other wonderful notions, it never seemed to emerge from the lab. Supposedly, that's about to change, with production screens “in our hands this year.” Look for something called a “ThinCRT.” Ideally, it should offer CRT brightness, contrast, wide viewing angle, and speed—and possibly less power than an LCD, since it doesn't require backlighting. Let's hope it's real this time.

Trends and Quick Takes

The Internet is Life!

Several indicators have suggested that infatuation with the Internet may be just that for most people: infatuation, an obsession that declines to a much lower level of long-term use. Although I believed that, I was nonetheless astonished by a breakdown of the U.S. Web at-home audience by connection speed and age that appears in the February 6, 2001 *[INSIDE]*. The item consists of four pie charts for 56Kbps, DSL, Cable Modem, and Overall use, with wedges in each chart for age groups (2-11, 12-17, 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64, and 65+). Below each chart is the audience size—and the average time spent online in hours per month. The source is Nielsen/NetRatings; the survey period is April 2000.

The biggest wedge in every pie is the 35-49 group (29.5% to 31.7%), with 25-34 consistently second and 50-64 barely behind them (except for cable modem users, where the younger group con-

siderably outranks the older group). Those three groups consistently make up roughly two-thirds of all users. None of this is particularly surprising. You may be surprised by the tiny totals for two of the four charts, although you should not be: 609,009 for DSL, 1,936,600 for cable modem—as compared to 40 million for 56K modem and 79 million overall (including 36 million users who don't even have V.90 modems).

DSL users averaged 22.5 hours online each month. That's quite a bit (but considerably less than an hour a day), but if you've gone through the pain and expense to get DSL, you probably have a reason. Cable drops to 14 hours per month: less than half an hour a day. The other two charts are roughly equal: about ten hours a month—20 minutes a day.

Hmm. Maybe I'm more average than I thought, at least in this respect.

Amazon Honor System

When I heard about this new Amazon initiative, almost simultaneously through several different sources on February 6, I wasn't sure quite how to react. Frankly, I'm still not.

The "service" is simple enough to describe, geared mostly to Web sites whose owners could use some revenue but don't want to deal with merchant accounts, minimum prices large enough to justify credit card use, or the other hassles of e-commerce. Let's use a fledgling Web zine by an author with a reasonable reputation, currently free but (mildly) soliciting donations—oh, say, *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* (CI:CAL).

The owner (me) puts a box on my home page (or somewhere else), saying something like "If you like what you see, a donation would be appreciated. Click here." That click takes you to a CI:CAL page explaining why I want donations and so on. One more click, and you're at Amazon.com, making the donation. The sum can be anywhere from \$1 to \$50. The system only works if you're one of Amazon's 30 million registered customers with credit card information already on file. In a sense, it extends Amazon's one-click model to lots of other people. You (the donor) have 30 days to rescind the donation; after that, the amount gets deposited directly into my account.

Except that Amazon keeps \$0.15 and 15% of each donation. So if I ask you for \$6, I get \$4.95 and Amazon keeps \$1.05. Fifteen percent represents a much higher fee than some other ecash systems such as PayPal, but it's easier to set up and involves no upfront costs.

What's not to like? If you think Amazon's a great outfit and have no qualms about helping it to profit, not much. Amazon claims that it won't keep records of visitors to sites that participate in the Amazon Honor System (although that raises the question of how they can honor a request to renege on a donation). A handful of sites such as Satire-Wire, Bartleby.com, and The Chank Co. (a type design house) have already signed on.

A visit to this zine's home page reveals that there is *not* an Amazon Honor System box (yet). I'm not a great fan of Jeff Bezos. I'm acutely aware that Amazon has (in the past, at least) played games with the truth about certain publications (and ignored author corrections), and...well, the whole scheme makes me nervous. Maybe it's a great idea.

"Within Two Years..."

A little over two years ago, John Dvorak stated flatly that the music industry would be "destroyed" within two years. Dvorak continues to count on the short memory of readers. In his industry-gossip column in the March 6, 2001 *PC Magazine*, he says flatly that "within two years, everyone will be using" Toccata's new all-digital audio amplification chipsets. Who knows? Maybe this time he's right. Maybe not.

MP3.com and Edison

Don't confuse MP3.com with Napster. Setting aside MyMP3 (the music streaming service that got MP3.com in trouble with RIAA, a problem that's been expensively resolved), MP3.com has been a force for good in the entertainment field. The company has featured thousands of little-known artists with free MP3 samplers that encourage listeners to click on the site and buy the moderately-priced CDs. The company even sent out five free CD-ROMs, four of them volumes of *103 of the best songs you've never heard*: six hours (or so) of songs with links to buy the CDs (and extras such as music videos).

The February 2001 *Stereophile* mentions a new initiative that's even more interesting. MP3.com is hosting historic recordings, beginning with cylinders from the Edison National Historic Site. Music historian Michael Loughlin says "There are millions of recordings made from 1887 to 1926 that the world should be able to listen to"—1926 being the supposed safety point for copyright. (The article incorrectly states that U.S. copyright law "now protects intellectual property for a maximum of 75 years.") "Millions" seems high to me, but the RLG Union Catalog includes records for pre-LP sound recordings numbering in the high hundreds of thousands.

According to this coverage, MP3.com has archived “more than 109,000 artists performing 698,000 songs.” I have no way to verify that claim, but I was able to listen to a couple of 1910-era recordings, free for the asking. That price is what MP3.com plans to charge for all of these early recordings. Says CEO Michael Robertson, “It’s a great testament to the power of the Internet that users around the world can now download these truly amazing historical recordings for free.” I wish MP3.com well; this is a first-rate service if they can keep it going.

Money and Music

Here’s the entirety of a news item in *The Industry Standard* 4:8 (February 26, 2001):

Toshiba and music labels EMI, Universal and Warner are teaming up to distribute music online in Japan. A Toshiba subsidiary will supply new singles from the labels for about \$3, roughly a third of what it costs to buy a CD single.

By any rational standard of cost and profit, mainstream CD *albums* should be priced at around \$9. That would be roughly comparable to what LPs cost (in dollars of their day) just before CDs took over. It’s cheaper to make CDs than it is to make LPs. Shipping is cheaper. Breakage is nearly nonexistent.

\$9 for a CD *single*? \$3 for a one-song download? Napster may represent piracy, but the major labels appear to be flying the skull and crossbones.

Which brings us to “Can Napster change its tune?” in the same issue (pp. 39-42). It’s an odd article, drawing economic comparisons between recorded music (a mature industry) and the software giants Oracle and Microsoft in an effort to suggest that digital distribution of music “may represent a singular opportunity to expand [the music] business.” How so? Because people will pay *more* for compressed digital music than the outlandish prices of CDs?

The “relatively modest \$38 billion” worldwide recorded music industry is a growing industry, growing at roughly the same rate as the similarly mature book industry. It grew three percent last year—not thrilling, but not bad for an industry that believes Napster can “do them in if left unchecked.” (Or for an industry that John Dvorak wrote off two years ago.) The article is worth reading, but read it carefully. Maybe you’ll see the case for digital distribution expanding the music industry. I don’t.

Free as Air...

Enjoy free access to Britannica.com while you can. It won’t be free much longer—at least not entirely free.

If this comes as a surprise, you haven’t been paying attention. Britannica planned to make its money from sponsors and ads, but that’s a tough sell these days. New material for the online site was first to go, as the company laid off 20% of its staff last November. Another nine (the San Francisco office) disappeared this February, and another 68—roughly one-third of the U.S. staff—is on its way out. The company describes “a new emphasis on subscription-supported products.”

The announcement engendered a brief discussion on Web4Lib, with some folks noting that banner ads are proving to be a flop while others sighed for the loss of free goods. Mike Madin of Academic Info (which has lost 90% of its ad revenue since last fall) suggests an “odd irony”: “When you pay for a print subscription advertising is assumed but with free online content ads are anathema.” That’s an easy one: Print ads work differently from online ads. They don’t jump out at you, you can go past them, and they have space enough to offer meaningful content on their own. I’m perfectly willing to deal with magazines that are 66% advertising; I won’t deal with a Web site that’s 33% advertising. Different media work differently—and it’s proving surprisingly difficult for digital media to find economic models that work.

Salon Premium?

I’ve always had mixed feelings about *Salon*. On one hand, it and *Slate* seem to be the most robust attempts to make a “Web magazine” work. On the other hand, unlike most critics, I don’t think all that much of the writing in *Salon*. Nonetheless, I wish them well: even a second-rate opinion magazine has its place.

A message from *Salon*’s editor on March 20, 2001 announces *Salon Premium*—a subscription-based version of *Salon*, without ads and with special bonus features. At the same time, he announces that regular readers will be treated to the massive new ads you already see on C|Net, as *Salon* continues “to explore innovative approaches to marketing online.”

Too much of our public life is banal and dull-witted; we are surrounded by a media universe that is a daily insult to our intelligence. This is why we hold dear such treasures as our local public radio stations—they help keep us from mentally decomposing.

That’s editor David Talbot speaking. He follows with a paragraph so remarkably self-congratulatory that a reprint might be regarded as satire. Just one excerpt: “*Salon* has been the Washington watchdog that the nation needs, barking loudly over the sale of government to the rich and powerful.”

If *Salon* is worth \$30 a year to you, you're probably upset by what I've said here. That's fine: make sure to sign up for *Salon Premium*, so your "essential daily destination" will prosper. I have a sense of déjà vu, however. I remember when *Slate* (begun about the same time as *Salon*) went to a \$20 annual subscription. It was a disaster for their readership numbers. *Slate* restored current articles to free access, reserving archives and discussions for subscribers. Then the subscriptions were shut down, restoring total free access. *Salon* looks to be aiming for the second stage of *Slate's* attempt: free access but with special features for subscribers. Will it work any better? Possibly, if only because the new *Salon* ads should be so much more aggravating than those in *Slate*.

The third "big S" in the Web content business, *Suck*, had the archival records to point out Scott Rosenberg's *Salon* article back in March 1998, when *Slate* tried a subscription model. Rosenberg seemed to assume that the only reason for *Slate's* existence was so that Microsoft could try out Internet business models—after all, "Gates and company have no particularly deep-seated need to publish a thoughtful magazine with long articles on tax policy, dialogues on NATO expansion and the occasional poem." Would that I had Rosenberg's ability to see into Bill Gates' mind. Maybe I could explain away his \$1.25 billion/year contribution to world health efforts: certainly, he can't actually *care* about these matters!

Rosenberg felt that any failure in *Slate's* subscription attempts would be used to write off the Web as a content medium once again. He did have evidence, a remarkably stupid column from another Web technology columnist. He was right to argue that this other column was wrong. But then he goes on. "The magazine's decision to start charging for access to nearly all of its content constitutes a kind of secession from the Web. This is a connective medium: Unlike so much computer jargon, the name 'Web' isn't an acronym but a valid metaphor. In 'closing the gate' to non-paying readers, *Slate* has also cut itself off from the rest of the Web."

Fact: *Slate's* experiment failed. Fact: Nobody—nobody—wrote about that failure as meaning that content was dead on the Web. Fact: *Slate*—although considerably modified, not always for the better—continues to operate as a coherent magazine, not a bizarre set of news links on one side and article links in the middle. *Salon's* trying to be a portal (and failing miserably); *Slate*, for better or for worse, is a temporary destination. And now *Salon* needs subscription dollars—possibly because its budget is much larger than *Slate's*, but also because *Salon* continues to spend absurdly large amounts on promo-

tion. And now we watch *Salon* secede from the Web, by its own lights. Interesting

There's a direct relationship between this item and the previous one. "It's proving surprisingly difficult for digital media to find economic models that work." So far, that's particularly true for individual subscription models.

Perspective

Copyrights and Wrongs

Sometime in mid-March, a Web4Lib participant posted an enthusiastic note about the Computers in Libraries conference and, in particular, Roy Tennant's speech in which he'd declared "Copyright is Dead." I found a convenient high horse to climb on, assailed the notion, and semi-inadvertently helped to kick off a vibrant discussion that took many turnings. I was reminded why I don't use PowerPoint for speeches if I can avoid it (Roy used that terse three-word assertion as a single slide—as he noted later, "to a) get the audience's attention and b) help them remember your thesis. Then you qualify it in your remarks and in subsequent slides.")

I won't recount the Web4Lib thread here. I explicitly raised ethics as an issue. Several others recognized that ethical questions and the likelihood of successful legal enforcement were different issues—but there were also those who raised the usual anti-copyright arguments. For example, Evil Big Media Conglomerates charge too much for CDs—so it's OK to rip them off. Some recent laws would essentially negate fair use and move from copyright to contract, putting all the power in the hands of publishers—so it's OK to rip them off while we can. The price of originals versus the cost of copying is somehow relevant to whether it's ethical to copy. If the original creators of the work have signed away copyright, then there's no longer an ethical issue. If enforcement is impossible, then the law (and the ethics associated with it) is meaningless. One way or another (including my first example, "two wrongs make a right"—if an owner of intellectual property is acting unethically, then it's OK to act unethically in return. Quite a few others recognized the nuances involved.

Instead of pursuing the discussion, I thought I'd set out a handful of scenarios involving intellectual property. I leave it to you to consider the ethics of each situation. For the first few, let's take one of Roy Tennant's columns in *Library Journal*—since, as he notes, those columns are posted on *LJ's* Web site for anyone to read or download.

- I find one of the columns so magnificent that I extol its virtues on my own Web site and provide a link to it.
- As part of my new *Libraries 2.0* commercial Web site, I link to the column—but bring it up within my own frame, so that it appears to be material prepared for *Libraries 2.0*.
- Rather than linking to it, I download it and include it—in full, including Roy’s byline—in the next *Cites & Insights*.
- I think it’s a wonderful article, so I mention it in “Press Watch I” with a brief description, a pointer, and some commentary.
- I realize that I really wish I had said it first—so I download it, strip off the byline, and include it in *Cites & Insights*—or, better yet, send it off to another publication under my own name.
- For an article in *Libraries 2.0*, I use each of the facts and interpretations in Roy’s article, but I revise the sentences so that it’s not a word-for-word copy. I run it under my own byline.

Which of those cases raises ethical issues? Which raise legal issues?

Consider a few other examples

- I buy a DVD and take it home to play on my Linux PC. Oops: there’s no DVD software for Linux. So I download DeCSS, which indirectly makes it possible for me to enjoy the DVD.
- I think CDs cost too much, so I find the songs I want using Gnutella or other peer-to-peer technology. I’m deaf enough to think that 128K MP3 is high fidelity, so I’m happy.
- I burn those Gnutella-acquired MP3s onto CDs and give them to my friends.
- I encode my own favorite songs, from CDs that I’ve purchased, in high-rate MP3 (256K), then create my own custom CDs to use with my portable MP3/CD player.
- I copy my own favorite songs in .WAV form (essentially audio CD format) and burn them onto audio CDs for my own use.
- My mix of songs is so great that friends offer to buy copies, which I sell to them for a reasonable price—say, \$6 for an 80-minute mix CD.

That’s an even dozen scenarios. In at least two cases, I believe that the legal situation and ethical situation are at odds. In a future edition, I’ll offer my own opinion as to the ethical issues. Since I’m not a lawyer, I won’t attempt to assess the legalities (although there are only one or two questionable cases). This topic is open for discussion on CICAL Discuss.

Press Watch II: Commentary

Greenman, Catherine, “Different strokes,” *FamilyPC* 8:2 (February 2001), pp. 80-4.

Overall, this is an interesting comparison: at this point, are families better off with Macs or Windows computers? That’s never an easy question. This rundown considers five areas: operating systems, software and peripherals, cost, design, and education. Most of the discussions make good sense for families with children. They give the advantage to the Mac for design, to Windows for software/peripherals and cost; the other two categories are draws. Their bottom line is that Windows PCs make slightly better sense.

Why does the article go here? Maybe it belongs in Press Watch I, but I was perturbed by one specific comparison—the \$799 entry-level iMac and an equivalently priced Gateway. The iMac has a 350MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 7GB disc, CD-ROM, and 15" (14"-viewable) display. The Gateway has a 700MHz processor and 10GB disc; otherwise, it’s comparable. So far so good—but the writer feels compelled to say that “the Gateway uses an Intel Celeron chip, a second-tier processor.” Oddly, she never mentions that the iMac uses a G3 processor. Today’s Celeron (with L2 cache, as in every Celeron since mid-1999) is so close in performance to the Pentium-III that it’s equivalent for most business processing. If the Celeron is second-tier, then so is the G3. I suspect the writer thinks that the Celeron is like the AMD K7-2 (which really is a second-tier CPU). It’s the kind of misleading comment that throws me off an article. Otherwise, it’s pretty good.

Repinski, Karyn, “A walk on the bright side,” *FamilyPC* 8:3 (March 2001), p. 33.

I’ve sworn not to waste time making fun of the first third of *FamilyPC*’s so-called editorial space—page after page of minimally-annotated Web links clustered around the topic *du jour*. But this one’s too good to pass up. The theme is five steps to “shake off the winter doldrums and find a new, energized you.” Naturally, each of those steps involves clicking on links.

How does the Web make your life better? First you buy a \$135 bright pink cashmere sweater from landsend.com. Only silly Luddites would want to go to an actual store to see what the color *really* is, whether the size fits right, and how well the

sweater's made. Second you *buy makeup sight unseen* on clinique.com.

It gets better. Step three: try a new perfume. Sample? That's old thinking. At ivillage.com, you take "the fast-and-easy quiz...designed by a master perfumer," which determines your "fragrance personality." Buying perfume without smelling it: that's even better than buying makeup without seeing it.

The last two steps get a little confusing. First you need a massage. That's hard to do over the Web (I don't even want to hear about Internet sex), but the American Massage Therapy Association's site can locate a nearby licensed practitioner. Finally, try dancing—either by locating a nearby studio or by paying for *virtual dance classes* at bustamove.com.

Next month: sniffing virtual flowers and hiking up Web park trails. That should cheer up the old electrons!

The Convergence Chronicles

The percentages will get you if you don't watch out. That's the lesson you need to remember every time you deal with convergence and other hot new claims. Take a combination of graph and story in the February 20, 2001 *[Inside]*. The graph shows a dramatic story: Video-on-demand is projected to show at least a 25% annual growth rate over the next five years, while home video's growth rate will slow from 10% to less than 5%. The chart also shows domestic theater rentals (what the studios get from first-run movies). The picture is clear: video on demand matters more than everything else put together.

Then you read the story. Talent guilds—writers, actors, producers—feel that they were cheated out of proportionate revenue for home video. They don't want to make the same mistake for video on demand. Halfway through the story, there's a key paragraph that adds flavor to that dramatic chart:

The Kagan Group, an industry research firm, estimates that film studio revenue from video-on-demand, pay-per-view and direct-broadcast satellite combined contributed a mere \$583 million to overall studio revenue of \$33 billion in 2000. But Kagan estimates that figure will nearly quintuple by 2005, as growth in home-video rentals...slows.

What portion of that \$583 million—1.8% of total revenue—is video-on-demand as opposed to PPV and satellite? I'd bet it's less than half, but that's irrelevant. Think about the chart again, recognizing

that video rentals make up more than half of studio revenue: call it \$16 billion. Let's be generous and assume that \$400 of the \$583 million mentioned above is video-on-demand. Now restate the chart in numbers:

Expect to see video-on-demand growing by leaps and bounds, to as much as \$550 million in 2001, \$750 million in 2002, nearly a billion in 2003, \$1.3 billion in 2004, and an astonishing \$1.6 billion in 2005. Meanwhile, home video will barely grow at all—reaching a paltry \$17 billion in 2001, \$18.5 billion in 2002, \$19 billion in 2003, and roughly \$20 billion in 2004 and 2005.

With the most ambitious projections of this industry research firm, in other words, video-on-demand might represent as much as 8% of home video revenues five years from now.

On the other hand, sometimes charts work quite well all by themselves—if you have a little background. The same issue has three charts on page 32 dealing with online music. The top one shows most-visited music sites with unique monthly visitors in December 2000, as rated by Media Metrix. You won't be surprised to see that Napster tops the list, followed closely by MP3.com. You might be surprised at the unique-visitor numbers, given Napster's continuous harping on the 64 million steady users who will be devastated by court decisions. A little over four million, as far as I can tell. In other words, in December 2000, only six percent of Napster's user community visited the site. But arguing on behalf of four million people wouldn't carry the clout of a 64-million claim; I understand that.

Product Watch

Virtual Ink mimio flipChart

Back a ways, I poked fun at a favorable review for a device that let you print out the contents of special whiteboards—if only because we've had a similar device at RLG for quite a few years now. This new gadget is different and considerably more intriguing.

As described in the February 20, 2001 *PC Magazine*, the \$300 flipChart combines a "capture bar" that you can attach to any flip chart (and connect to a PC) with a group of color-coded "smartCaps" for standard markers. The smartCaps contain transmitters to show where the markers are being used. If all goes well, the provided software will show a screen image that matches the current flipchart page fairly well—which you can then save, print, e-mail, put on the Web, or use in presentations.

The old smart whiteboard is big and clunky; it and newer versions tend to be expensive as well.

This device could make a lot more sense if it works as described. When I remember back to one LITA brainstorming session and the time spent folding, hauling, and transcribing all those flipchart pages, it seems like \$300 could be amortized pretty quickly.

Sony's Slimtop Pen Tablet

The March 2001 *PC World* devotes a full page to this charmer, and I can see why. The Sony VAIO Slimtop Pen Tablet PCV-LX900 may not have a sleek name, but it's a great concept for some users. The "Slimtop" part is Sony's slender desktop PC—a Pentium III-1GHz, 128MB SDRAM, CD-RW drive, V.90 modem, Ethernet, and a range of modern I/O ports (but none of the traditional ports). I'm sure there's a substantial hard disk, although the article doesn't mention it. There's also a keyboard.

The "Pen Tablet" part makes this special. It's a 15" LCD display running at 1024x768, with two special features. First, the screen can be adjusted so that it's nearly horizontal. Second, the screen is *touch-sensitive* and a stylus is included. That's right: you can draw right on the screen.

Sure, it's expensive as a straightforward PC: \$3,000. But consider the very last item in the "Product Watch" section of the preview issue of *Cites & Insights* (p. 17). I thought Wacom's PL500 LCD Pen Tablet System was intriguing for the right audience. It's a 9x12" LCD panel with 256 levels of pressure sensitivity. A little geometry shows that 9x12" and 15" diagonal (on a 4x3 display) are two ways of describing the same area. The Wacom cost \$4,000 when it was introduced—*without* the computer. The Wacom might offer more artistic freedom, but the comparison makes the Sony seem like a bargain.

More on the Slimtop Pen Tablet: *PC Magazine* for April 3, 2001 gives the unit a five-dot rating (the highest possible) and provides more detail. The hard disk is 40GB; the touch screen recognizes 256 levels of pressure sensitivity, like the Wacom; "i.Link" input (Sony's name for FireWire) means you can directly connect a digital videocamera. *PC's* take: "Whether you're a video buff or a professional artist, the Pen Tablet PC will bring out your creative side without breaking the bank."

Another Big Flat Display

The March 6, 2001 *PC Magazine* features a half-page review of NEC's PlasmaSync 42MP2, a 42" plasma display. "Very little makes a conference room look more leading-edge than a large, thin, flat display for presentations," and this big gem should make *some* kind of impression. It's thin (3.5") and you can set it on a tabletop (with a \$300 stand), but it's not ex-

actly light: 71 pounds, about as much as a 20"-viewable CRT. It has a 16x9 aspect ratio, designed for wide-screen TV or DVD.

There are a few drawbacks. Native resolution is only 853x480; it will *accept* resolution as high as 1280x1024, but "scaling" in this case means dropping information. For normal computer systems, it's really a 640x480 display writ large. Objective display testing showed color banding, tracking problems, and green-shifted color, and subjective testing showed "flattening" (another sign that the display isn't really displaying 24-bit color). There's also more random noise than on a typical CRT. But it is big, thin, and snazzy. And it costs a mere \$10,000.

Smaller, Cheaper, But Still Big

One issue later (March 20), *PC Magazine* introduces yet another NEC display: the MultiSync FE1250+. It's a 22" display (20" viewable) for \$900, but only as deep as a traditional 19" display. Recommended resolution is 1600x1200, but it handles up to 1920x1440. It's an aperture-grille flat-screen tube (a DiamondTron), but unlike some earlier big flat-screen Trinitrons and Diamondtrons, the stripe pitch is uniform (0.24mm) across the screen. A little calculation suggests that 1600x1200 is not only the recommended resolution but the highest *actual* resolution; still, that's a big, detailed display for less than \$1,000. Weight not given, but I'd guess it's around 70 pounds.

Revolve RoadWriter

Here's another one that could be a blessing or a curse. It costs \$205 to \$265 and requires a Palm PDA (or one of a few competitors). What it is, is a fixed keyboard, nickel hydride batteries with charger, 12-volt "cigarette" adapter, two serial ports—all on a platform atop a 14" flexible gooseneck arm. Mounted in your car. "You need to be sure that mounted PDAs and any other devices do not encroach on the airbag zone." That's the frightening part.

"If your car is your office, the rugged Revolve RoadWriter holds your PDA in a visible location and aids input and communication." While you're weaving in and out of traffic in a Jeep Grand Cherokee (their test vehicle) at 80 miles an hour?

Review Watch

These notes cover *comparative* reviews that seem worth noting, primarily from magazines in the personal computing field. Constant grumbles: *PC World's* rigid review format leaves out much of the work they do, and *Macworld's* reviews are typically so brief as to break down to "trust us, we know what you need."

Connectivity

Freed, Les, "Wireless LANs get to work," *PC Magazine* 20:5 (March 6, 2001), pp. 172-86.

Some university libraries have had wireless LANs for years now. The field is getting more stable and interesting, with 802.11b as a fairly robust standard and quite a few competitors. This review includes six "enterprise-level" and four small-office "solutions"—that is, the combination of access points (base stations) and PC cards that make up a wireless LAN.

Two enterprise systems rank a perfect five dots: Cisco's Aironet 350 Series (\$1,499 for the access point, \$229 per PC card) and Lucent's Orinoco AP-1000 (\$995 and \$160-\$170 respectively). Editors' Choice goes to the latter for the best mix of features and performance, with Cisco a "strong honorable mention."

D-Link's DWL-1000AP (\$199 and \$99) earns four dots and the Editors' Choice among small-office solutions. D-Link also offers \$129 USB network adapters, making it easy to set up a wireless home network.

Desktop Computers

O'Brien, Bill, "Towers of power," *Computer Shopper* 21:3 (March 2001), pp. 108-19.

Five of today's fastest PCs from five of the six biggest companies, with Dell not accounted for. Three of the systems use the Pentium 4-1.5GHz and cost \$3,500 to \$4,200; the other two use AMD's Athlon-1.2GHz and cost \$2,500 to \$2,700. Each system receives an individual writeup along with specification and performance charts. They're all impressive systems: 18" displays (except for IBM's 20" monster), big high-speed disks, CD-RW and DVD-ROM drives, and even FireWire ports on the Compaq, Gateway, and HP systems. Of the three Pentium systems, the Gateway offered the best balance of features and performance—but O'Brien finds that all of the 1.5GHz Pentium 4 systems are too

expensive for their performance, at least until new software uses the Pentium-4's architecture. Not surprisingly, then, the Best Buy is micronpc's \$2,699 Millennium Max XP, an Athlon system.

Displays and Projectors

Poor, Alfred, "Lighter gets brighter," *PC Magazine* 20:6 (March 20, 2001), pp. 38-40.

Compact video projectors keep getting better, if not either lighter or cheaper. This brief roundup includes four units in the five-pound range: not the absolute lightest, but possibly the best balance of light weight and high performance. Two units use LCD technology; two use TI's DLP technology. Surprisingly, the ratings show a three-way tie. InFocus' \$4,500 Proxima UltraLight DX2, NEC's \$4,800 MultiSync LT155, and ViewSonic's \$4,500 PJ1075 LiteBird all earn four-dot ratings. I would make some remark about the expense of these units—but RLG owns two lightweight projectors, I've just been on the road with one of them, and—both for flexible use in house and reasonable portability—lightweight projectors do seem to offer good value for institutions that need them.

Graphics Hardware & Software

Metz, Cade, "Image makers," *PC Magazine* 20:6 (March 20, 2001), pp. 158-66.

This roundup of today's most popular drawing and image-editing programs concludes that "one graphic program isn't enough." Four of the six reviewed programs tie for four dots (Adobe Illustrator 9.0 and Photoshop 6.0, CorelDraw 10 Graphics Suite, and Macromedia Fireworks 4), but none of them scores best for all the stuff high-end computer artists need to do.

Editors' Choice is Photoshop, CorelDraw, and Fireworks: not a tie, but the combination (roughly \$1,400 total street price). Surprisingly, CorelDraw now offers more power and flexibility than Illustrator—but Photoshop beats Photo-Paint (part of CorelDraw) hands down, and Fireworks is the best way to move images to the Web.

Ozer, Jan, "The look of OpenGL," *PC Magazine* 20:6 (March 20, 2001), pp. 24-6.

This group review falls into one of those special categories: If you need a graphics card this powerful, you probably already know it. These cards support high-end CAD/CAM, film animation, and similar graphics workstation tasks. The cheapest is \$1,130; the most expensive, \$2,000 to \$2,400. That price

buys you the only five-dot card, 3Dlabs Wildcat II 5110. I can't offer any useful comments on equipment like this; the article appears well done.

Music & Sound

Perenson, Melissa J., "CD and MP3: a match made in music heaven," *PC World* 19:4 (April 2001), p. 70

This one-page writeup covers three portable audio CD players that handle CD-Rs containing MP3 files. The advantages of such players seem fairly clear: if 128K MP3 sounds good enough (which it probably is for most portable use), a single CD-R will hold at least 10 hours of music, and the same player can handle your regular CDs. Additionally, these players cost considerably less than dedicated MP3 portables, possibly because they don't need as much pricey memory (and CD drives are dirt cheap). On the other hand—and not mentioned in this roundup—these devices are necessarily much larger and heavier than dedicated MP3 players.

The cheapest unit, D-Link's \$120 DMP-CD100, doesn't cost much more than a typical CD portable but doesn't sound that great and has only 10 seconds of shock protection. At the other extreme, the D'music MP3 CD Player SM-200C+ from Pine costs \$229, offers good sound quality and excellent player controls, and has an adequate 50-second shock protection buffer. The reviewer likes the middle unit best: TDK's \$180 Mojo, which includes methods to build playlists and a huge 8-minute (i.e., 8MB) buffer.

Personal Digital Assistants

Broida, Rick, and others, "Your life in your hands," *Computer Shopper* 21:3 (March 2001), pp. 120-26.

I find the "gotta get it now" tone of many *Computer Shopper* reviews annoying, but this is a useful comparison of five contemporary PDAs—three Palm OS units and two Pocket PCs. It's a strongly upbeat set of individual reviews, with three of five units getting Best Buy awards. Compaq's \$499 iPaq H3650 Pocket PC has a great color display, fast processor, and 32MB of RAM, and has a speaker that doubles as a navigation button. Handspring's \$299 Visor Platinum is fast as Palm OS devices go (faster than any Palm unit) and has a snazzy new metallic case, but not a color screen. Finally, Palm's \$449 VIIx includes integrated wireless data access—and you can plan to spend roughly \$1,000 the first year you own it, given the costs of the wireless service.

Brown, Bruce, and Marge Brown, "Expanding possibilities," *PC Magazine* 20:5 (March 6, 2001), pp. 188-200.

From Palms to Pocket PCs, PDAs seem to be everywhere: roughly eight million were sold last year. This report considers fifteen units ranging from cheap, tiny, limited units like the \$100 Royal daVinci DV3 up to HP's \$1,000 Jornada 720. Discussions of applications and accessories follow the brief individual reviews; there's no Editors' Choice.

Three units do earn top ratings, however. Handspring's \$450 Visor Prism offers 16-bit color for a Palm OS device, but you're stuck with 160x160 resolution. The \$300 TRGpro is "a hand-held for big businesses using the Palm OS." HP's \$1,000 Jornada 720 runs MS Windows for Handheld PCs 2000 3.0; at 1.1 pounds and with a small keyboard, it's somewhere between a notebook and a PDA—and at 1.3x7.4x3.7", it won't fit in most pockets.

What about the true low end? The \$180 REX 6000 is the smallest usable PDA you can buy (2.1x3.4x0.2", 1.2oz.) and earns four dots, as does Palm's \$150 m100; the cheapest, Royal's \$100 daVinci DV3, earns two dots—lowest in the roundup.

Thornton, Carla, "Palm vs. Pocket PC," *PC World* 19:4 (April 2001), pp. 92-102.

I found this roundup—which includes seven Palm OS PDAs, three Pocket PC and Windows for Handheld PC units, and two unique models—a bit frustrating, but you might find it particularly useful for the same reason. Instead of individual writeups for the twelve units, the article discusses six categories of PDA use and identifies the best and worst units for that particular category. It gets a little silly in one case, the RIM BlackBerry 957: it's worst as an organizer, a notetaker, and a money manager—but then, it's primarily an e-mail unit.

The more expensive Best Buy in this roundup is Casio's \$499 Cassiopeia EM-500, a Pocket PC unit with 16MB RAM and a 240x320 pixel screen offering 64K colors—although it has poor battery life. For those on a budget, the \$249 Handspring Visor Deluxe gets the nod; it has 8MB RAM and a 160x160 pixel monochrome screen.

There are no performance tests here, and that may make sense—since Palm and Pocket PC units have almost no common applications, how can you do meaningful comparisons? The features comparison is interesting and includes a particularly nice measurement, "active screen area" in square inches. As you might expect, the Palm m100 has the smallest screen: 3.3 square inches, roughly two-thirds the usual size of a Palm OS screen (4.8 square inches). Pocket PC screens are both larger and denser: just

under 7 square inches, but with three times as many pixels. At the other extreme, and pushing the limits of PDA definition, HP's Jornada 720 uses 12.5 square inches for its half-VGA (640x240) screen. If you're keeping track, that represents 110 pixels per inch as compared to Palm OS's typical 73 pixels per inch (88 pixels per inch on the m100).

Printers

Cekan, Lisa, "Farewell, photo lab?" *PC World* 19:4 (April 2001), pp. 129-32.

Four specialized printers, each designed strictly for snapshots. Three of the four use dye-sublimation printing, an inherently expensive process that should yield durable prints with smooth color gradations (it doesn't use dithering); the fourth is a bizarre little unit that transfers digital photographs to Polaroid film. If you're on an extreme budget, Acer's FotoPirsa 300P costs \$99 and produces pretty good prints—but, although it's lighter and smaller than some others, it won't print directly from the storage media used in digital cameras (you need a PC). Canon's \$449 Digital Printer CD-300 will, and it can produce panoramic prints as much as 9.8 inches wide, but it's on the slow side—and for \$50 more, you could buy an HP PhotoSmart 1218 and get better photos and regular printing in the same unit (although inkjet photo prints may fade faster). The Polaroid unit is unusually portable but sort of a joke: the prints are small and fuzzy, but cost more than any of the others.

Finally, Sony's \$299 DPP-SV55 earns the Best Buy. It has exceptional print quality, runs faster than the other dye-sub units, offers a USB connection (two others use parallel ports—and the Polaroid doesn't work with a PC at all!), and produces the largest regular prints of the lot (4x6"). These are all specialized units, to be sure, and each print costs more than twice as much as a typical photographic print: at least \$0.80 each.

Kirkpatrick, Keith, "Stop the presses!" *FamilyPC* 8:3 (March 2001), pp. 98-101.

Six inkjet printers costing less than \$300 each—or, in five of the six cases, less than \$200. The highest-rated printer is Epson's \$149 Stylus Color 880, which is one of the fastest and produces excellent output. The most expensive printer, Kodak's \$300 Personal Picture Maker 200, doesn't produce great output but will produce pictures directly from CompactFlash or SmartMedia cards: no PC required. Finally, the \$150 Xerox DocuPrint M760 doesn't produce great photos, but it's faster than the Epson.

Spyware

Seltzer, Larry, "Monitoring software," *PC Magazine* 20:5 (March 6, 2001), pp. 26-8.

Back in the good old days, when *PC Magazine* seemed aimed more at PC owners than at business-folk, this article might have been a warning rather than a review. Warning: 74% of corporations monitor what employees do on their computers—and this review discusses some of the software used to do that.

It's an unsettling story. Of course businesses (and libraries and universities and nonprofits) have the right to track use of workplace computers. As the article says, "The law is clear." The justification? "The main reason to run monitoring software is productivity. These programs monitor your company's systems to see what programs employees run, when they run them, how long they actually use them, what Web sites they visit, and so on."

Scoff if you wish: "I'll just leave Word open all day." Some spyware actually tracks keystrokes and mouse events. I'm not sure whether thinking is tracked, but then thinking in the workplace may be subversive anyway. I won't summarize the ratings.

The Details

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Hanlon's Razor: Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity.

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