Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large

Volume 1, Number 6: June 2001

ISSN 1534-0937

Walt Crawford

You and Me and RLG

Think of this as a three-part essay: a few notes about who you are, even fewer about who I am—and, because it's clear that many of you don't know, an introduction to the Research Libraries Group (RLG). Not that RLG directly supports or in any way controls *Cites & Insights* (it doesn't)—but after 22 years, I can't pretend that working at RLG doesn't influence who I am and how I think.

You...

Who reads *Cites & Insights*? If I'm interpreting the counter right, perhaps 1,000 to 1,400 copies of each issue are downloaded. Since I don't have access to server logs, I have no idea where they're going or how much the count overstates issue downloads.

I do have a core readership of sorts: those who have signed up for CICAL Alerts, the list used to announce each new issue. CICAL Alerts people receive an early head's-up, typically two or three days before I send notices to Web4Lib, PUBLIB, and PACS-L, and I note that the number of apparent downloads during that interval roughly equals the number of CICAL Alerts members. As of May 13, there were 243 members. Excluding 33 e-mail addresses using free mail services and ISP addresses that don't have geographic characteristics, here are some notes about the 210 who remain:

Non-U.S. readers: 24 of you hail from Canada, eight from Australia, and seven from the United Kingdom; there are also readers in France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands (2), Norway, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and Uruguay—16 nations.

States: 15 California addresses, 12 New York, 11 Florida and another 11 Massachusetts, seven Texas, six Michigan, and five each from Indiana, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin—and others in 22 other states and DC.

Libraries and educational institutions: 64 university addresses, seven colleges, six community

colleges, two seminaries, two institutes, one cluster of private colleges, and six health-related portions of academic institutions—but also one high school district and three K12 units. 23 public libraries, eight library consortia, six state and national libraries, and three library-related commercial firms.

Others: Six law firms; 15 health-related institutions; a handful of corporations; and my favorite "charity," The Nature Conservancy.

...Me...

A few of you know me personally—probably more who aren't on CICAL Alert than are. You know why I'm uncomfortable writing about myself: it's not an interesting topic. The rest of you can go to my home page (http://walt.Crawford.home.att.net). There are direct links to the brief biographical statement I supply for speeches (yawn), a complete vita (...zzz...), and, via the archives, even a personal essay (if the bits haven't vanished through boredom).

Inside This Issue

PC Values: June 2001	2
Trends and Quick Takes	3
Ebook Watch	5
Feedback and Following Up	10
The Convergence Chronicles	13
Bibs & Blather	15
Product Watch	15
Press Watch I: Articles Worth Reading	17

I'm middle-aged (ouch!), medium height by California standards, medium build, and have middle-of-the-road political opinions (which makes me a flaming liberal in 2001), with gray hair and an entirely forgettable face. I'm a native of Northern California, have never lived more than 90 miles from where I was born, have always owned the same model car by choice, am in the 24th year of my first and (with any luck) only marriage and have had two employers during my adult life.

I attended the University of California, Berkeley, and was there during most of the memorable Troubles, starting in 1962, graduating in 1967, and leaving in 1979. I've been working with library automation since 1968 and personal computing

technology almost since it existed. I've been writing about these things for 16 years (with a couple of articles before that), thinking about them longer, and reading far more than is good for me. I claim no credentials other than common sense and an ability to admit that I'm frequently wrong and have no special credentials. How's that for a circular disclaimer?

If you feel the need for more, go to my personal Web site, but make sure there's someone to turn off the computer when you lapse into a deep sleep.

...and RLG

How many readers have no idea what the Research Libraries Group (RLG) actually is and does? I *love* the idea, offered in one letter, that I work in a think-tank where I can think deep thoughts about the future of librarianship. The reality is less glamorous but more important.

The Research Libraries Group (RLG) is a member-owned nonprofit in Mountain View, California. It's been around for more than 25 years and in California for 23 years. I've worked at RLG for 22 years as of July 2001. To quote from the corporate site:

The Research Libraries Group, Inc., is a not-forprofit membership corporation of universities, archives, historical societies, museums, and other institutions devoted to improving access to information that supports research and learning.

RLG exists to support its members in containing costs, improving local services, and contributing to the world's collective access to scholarly materials. The mechanisms applied in pursuit of these goals take many shapes but have one thing in common—cooperative action.

For more, go to www.rlg.org. We're a small group: typically between 90 and 100 staff members. That includes the people who run our servers and network, the magnificent people in the RLG Information Center, and everyone else. We're sometimes stretched thin, since we operate the second-largest nonprofit bibliographic network in the world, but we manage. The people at RLG are among the most talented it's been my pleasure to encounter.

RLG has always been a leader in standardization efforts. We're a founding member of the Unicode Consortium, and Eureka now provides Unicode-based display of more than three million bibliographic records with fields in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Cyrillic, Hebrew, and Yiddish. We've been active in NISO since before it took that name, and established what was probably the most stable early Z39.50 server in the business: Zephyr, which still serves all of our end-user search access. We have

had liaisons to MARBI and related groups for more than two decades.

RLG is RLIN, Ariel, Eureka, SHARES, coordination of planning for digital archives, international expertise on standards for digitization (and, earlier, preservation microfilming), the cultural materials initiative, and a lot more. If your library uses Ariel, you're using RLG software. If you have Web access to the English Short Title Catalog, Hand Press Books, Avery Index to Art and Architecture. Anthropological Literature, Bibliography of the History of Art, History of Science, Technology and Medicine, or a handful of other databases including the RLG Union Catalog—you're using RLG's Eureka

If your library needs a contemporary ILL management system, look into RLG's ILL Manager: I believe it's the most standards-compliant and thoughtfully-developed one out there, it's well-designed and can interoperate with legacy systems, and it's priced to make the ISO ILL protocol widely used rather than to make a killing for RLG.

RLG has a small staff carrying out an ambitious program. Few if any of us get paid to think deep thoughts unless they're directly related to our projects. The reading and thinking that goes into *Cites & Insights* (and my speeches, and my articles and columns in *American Libraries*, *EContent*, and *Online*) gets done on my own time, evenings and weekends.

PC Values: June 2001

June's standard configuration is unchanged from May: 128MB SDRAM, 16x or faster CD-ROM, AGP graphics adapter with 32MB RAM, V.90 fax/modem or 10/100 Ethernet adapter, wavetable sound card, speakers, and a 15.6-16" (viewable measure) display. "Pluses" and "Minuses" are shown where applicable, along with hard disk size and software. Top systems were taken from company Web sites on 5/20.2001.

I was astonished to get feedback from someone who had chosen a system based (at least in part) on the listings here. "PC Values" is a tracking mechanism—finding the best "value" and seeing how those values change over time. That doesn't mean that these are the configurations I would either choose or recommend. I'm adding a new feature beginning this month: "One Good Configuration," an example of how I would configure a personal computer if I had \$1,900 to \$2,000 to spend (not including shipping). I'll alternate between the two primary direct sellers, beginning with a Dell system.

- ☐ Top, Budget: Dell Dimension L800cx: Celeron-800, 20GB HD. *Minuses:* No dedicated graphics RAM. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, Harmon Kardon surround sound speakers with subwoofer. \$899, VR 3.00 (+13% since 3/2001, +33% since 12/2000).
- ☐ Top, Midrange: Gateway Select 1300cl Special: Athlon-1300, 60GB 7200RPM HD. *Pluses:* CD-RW instead of CD-ROM. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, Boston Acoustics speakers with subwoofer, Ethernet adapter. \$1,489, VR 2.53 (+20% since 3/2001, +61% since 12/2000).
- ☐ Top, Power: Gateway Performance 1700xl: Pentium 4-1700, 60 GB HD. *Pluses*: 18" display with 64MB display RAM, DVD-ROM. *Extras*: MS Works Suite 2001, CD-RW drive, Boston Acoustics speakers, Ethernet adapter. \$2,274, VR 1.95 (+5% since 3/2001, +25% since 12/2000).
- □ Other, Budget: CyberPower Athlon Lightning DVD: Athlon-1400, 40GB HD. *Pluses*: 256MB RAM, 18" display, DVD-ROM. *Extras*: Wordperfect Office, CD-RW drive, speakers with subwoofer. \$1,149, VR 3.78 (+21% since 3/2001, +97% since 12/2000).
- One Good Configuration: Dell Dimension 8100: Pentium 4-1400, 40GB HD. Pluses: 256MB RDRAM, 18" FD Trinitron display, DVD-ROM. Extras: MS Works Suite 2001, CD-RW drive, Altec Lansing speakers with subwoofer, Ethnernet adapter. Notes: baseline video is nVidia GeForce2MX with 32MB RAM, baseline audio is SB Live! Value—both more than adequate. The biggest upgrade in this system is the top-of-the-line display, and that is where I recommend spending serious money. I also doubled RAM and hard disk size, and took the removable-drive combination I find attractive. \$1,988, VR 2.19.

Trends and Quick Takes Copy-Protected CDs?

ome bad ideas keep popping up. What may be the final issue of [Inside] (April 3, 2001) includes a disturbing article by Charles C. Mann, "Here come the Napster-proof CDs." The idea? Audio compact discs that contain deliberate errors within the data tracks. The theory is that CD players will ignore the errors—but CD-ROM players will

stop playing at that point. If the CD won't play in your CD-ROM drive, you can't rip it to MP3.

It's not really copy protection (presumably, a CD recorder could copy the data tracks, although that's not clear). It wouldn't keep anyone who can find a Radio Shack from ripping tracks, either—all you need to do is plug any old CD player into the audio input that's on every audio card and rip that way. You lose some quality, given two analog-digital conversions, but if you're converting to MP3, who cares? (There are other inconveniences, to be sure.)

It is a truly awful idea. I do most of my music listening while I'm working on the computer. Any CD that doesn't play on my PC is *by definition* defective. There's another thing: quite a few audio CD players use CD-ROM drives (as the article notes). They won't work either. That includes car stereos and some of the most expensive CD players.

This is idiocy. I've probably discussed it before, but the four pages of coverage here say the threat hasn't gone away. I made fun of John Dvorak for his 1998 prediction that the big record companies would all be defunct within two years—but some of them sure do seem to have death wishes.

Clear Thinking about Online Education

The Industry Standard has a weekly "just one question" feature, asking somebody one relevant question. I was surprised by the April 30 question and answer. The subject: Andy Rosenfeld of Unext, an online education firm that's working with GM to offer online MBAs to 88,000 employees.

The question: "What's the main difference between traditional and online education?" The answer—noting again that this is from the founder of a private online education firm:

Facilities-based education is always better for students. They form groups and debate. The cost is that you have to stop working and attend school. There's the importance of online education: You can consume first-rate education while employed.

Would that some university-based programs understood that first sentence a little better!

The Price of CD-Rs

If you burn CD-Rs, you must be delighted by the low prices. You can frequently find name-brand CD-Rs (in moderate quantities) for less than \$0.50 a disc, sometimes down to \$0.25 or less. That's astonishing, all things considered.

Don't assume that those prices will keep heading down, at least unless Philips makes some tough decisions. As reported in the April 2001 *EMedia* (pp. 10-12), Philips holds patents covering CD-R and

charges 3% of the net selling price of each CD-R (after an initial payment that translates to \$30,000).

The 3% isn't the problem. The problem is "with a minimum of 10 Yen" per disc. At today's exchange rates, 10 Yen is 8 cents. Philips is getting aggressive about that royalty: the company terminated Ritek's license, and Ritek happens to be the world's largest CD-R manufacturer.

If you know anything about distribution costs and retail margins in competitive industries, you'll see that an 8 cent minimum royalty is simply not compatible with a 25 cent final sales price.

From Games to Archaeology

The most interesting part of new technology is finding the ways that work—and those ways can be surprising. Here's one, recounted in a half-page *Industry Standard* story (May 7, 2001). Tom Malzbender at Hewlett-Packard has spent the last 12 years working with 3D imaging technology for use in gaming and mechanical design. Last year, he attended an HPhosted lecture by USC's Bruce Zuckerman about using digital photography to study ancient artifacts.

Malzbender saw a possible new use for his imaging technologies. Zuckerman loaned him a 5,000-year-old cuneiform tablet that was so worn that most symbols were unreadable. Combine digital photography and some image processing, and "The writing—all of it—was as clear as black ink on a white page." The technology is now being used to uncover more Babylonian business deals and to reveal the symbols other tablets.

One good use deserves another. For example, the San Francisco Police Department wonders whether the imaging techniques could restore serial numbers scratched off guns; Stanford University dermatologists think it might be useful to detect skin cancer.

Teens, Porn, and the Internet

Melora Ranney (Charles M. Bailey Public Library, Winthrop, Maine) posted a wonderful note to PUB-LIB on May 8, 2001. She'd returned from the annual Maine Libraries Conference and a "teen panel" consisting of an adult expert on teens and violence and four Maine teenagers "who have thus far in their lives used the Internet entirely without filters, both at school and at home. Henry remarked that it was really super to actually have teens talk for themselves as opposed to simply discussing them in their absence." While Ms. Ranney's report includes some other worthwhile topics, I'll just quote one paragraph—one with considerable value in these days that librarians are being urged to ignore the rights of adults in the interest of Protecting The Children:

The most-asked question from the audience was whether or not these teens (freshmen through senior) had experienced sexual or other frightening or evil encounters on the Internet. The teens seemed quite surprised by this, and confused; they said that they and their friends pretty much did not find what they did not want to find, and that they and their friends were uninterested in those materials. When finally asked specifically how often they came across *porn* by mistake, the teen answers ranged from once every few months to once a year.

"We pretty much don't find what we don't want to find." Hmm. Given the number of times I've accidentally stumbled onto "porn" or anything approaching it (even "once a year" would be an exaggeration), that response makes a whole lot more sense than the claims of the filter brigade.

ISMIR 2001

I have no excuse for including this item. The call for participation expires just about the time this issue goes up. There's no possibility that I'll attend the International Symposium on Music Information Retrieval (October 15-17, 2001, Indiana University Bloomington, http://ismire2001.Indiana.edu)—not only is it far outside my own areas of expertise, but it overlaps with the Kentucky Library Association conference (where I will be speaking).

But there's something about "music information retrieval" that brings back long-held interests and curiosity about what's feasible in this area. What area? Consider some of the themes: Estimating similarity of music; problems of recognizing music optically and/or via audio; user interfaces for music IR. To put my own ignorant spin on it: What if you could find "music like this," based on humming a tune. (I'm sure that's a gross oversimplification.)

The keynote speaker, David Cope, is a UC Santa Cruz professor who has written software that can simulate the musical styles of composers—and he's working on a program that "analyzes music for allusions to other music." For some reason, that makes me a little nervous—but also enormously interested.

If your professional interests *can* justify ISMIR attendance, color me envious. Note the Web address above; registration will be \$150.

Vanity Book Reviews?

M.J. Rose's May 8 column in Wired News starts out with a controversial new "business." *ForeWord Magazine* has started ForeWordreviews.com, which will "professionally review books for a fee." Pay \$295; ForeWord assigns your book to a "carefully screened freelance professional" (who gets the magnificent sum of \$50); the review appears on the Web site—

and you can print the review in any marketing or publicity effort (with no requirement to mention that it's a paid review).

After all, as the publisher says, the industry needs new methods of obtaining reviews. "Currently there are over 70,000 print books published annually but only about 10 percent of them wind up getting reviewed—and e-publishing adds tens of thousands more titles each year."

What happens if your \$295 fee results in a negative review? Somehow, although I try to avoid being cynical, I'd have to call that a naïve question.

Collaborative Filtering

I'm no great fan of "people who purchased this book also purchased..." recommendations—but the odd form of "collaborative filtering" that informs Google works wonders. A recent *Feed* piece discusses a new collaborative filtering environment, OpenFolders from OpenCola. If you want to read the whole piece—an interview with Cory Doctorow, who's a fairly new science fiction writer as well as "chief evangelist and spokesmodel" for OpenCola—go to www.feedmag.com, look for "digital culture," and try to track down "the taste test." It's six single-spaced pages, intriguing enough to be worth thinking about.

The short version: once you've signed up, you have a special folder on your PC. You put "things you like" in it and "it will fill up with things that you'll probably like." Why? Because people with "tastes like yours" have paid attention to the items. While Cory Doctorow is awfully fast to dismiss existing ways to evaluate data (an arrogance I see in his science fiction as well—and I have read some of it), the discussion doesn't entirely leave me cold.

Get Yourself an Outfit and Be a Cowboy Too!

Microsoft wants most of us to think we're project managers. Big two-page ads in computer magazines have the following large type: "Have you answered more than 10 questions today? If so, then you're a project manager." Thousands of technical support people, help desk staff, and reference librarians will be mighty surprised by this assertion.

It's simply, really. Microsoft wants you to buy Microsoft Project 2000. Why buy a project scheduler if you're not a project manager? It's a little like the new definition of "ebooks" that includes printon-demand books (and in a few years will probably include any book for which the text was originally in digital form): the easiest way to expand a market is to redefine it.

Ebook Watch

Bad idea in retrospect. A few months agobefore starting Cites & Insights—I set aside three spaces, devoting the first to ebook-related "clippings," the second and third to "media and content" and "gadgets and misc." respectively. That way, I could set aside downloaded and clipped items for a few weeks, then put together worthwhile essays from related groups of items.

Material gathered—faster in the ebook box than on the two shelves—and I didn't get around to dealing with it. For "media and content," that may still make sense: I'm supposed to be writing a mediarelated book, and my "DisContent" column in *EContent* can draw from the sources. But the ebook box was clearly out of hand. It may be amusing to look back after a year and see how few of the glowing projections have come true, but that's about it.

All of which is by way of introduction for the first portion of this month's "Ebook Watch" and, probably, the next two as well. Even after recycling three-quarters of the contents, I still find quite a few items that I believe deserve mention and discussion. I'll try to include key contemporary items as well—and, with any luck, the backlog will be gone by fall. I'll either discuss items chronologically or in topically related groups.

The Digital Reader

That's the title of a March 31, 2000 Salon article by Laura Miller, "in which I borrow an ebook and give up print for two weeks." She had heard that consultant Hugh Look, speaking at Internet Librarian International, had predicted that "reading material in book form" will soon be *replaced* by ebooks (not supplemented but replaced). "I was skeptical. After all, I'm still waiting for my own personal hovercraft."

She called NuvoMedia and asked for a Rocket eBook. "I'd endeavor to do as much of my daily reading as possible on the device, and I'd take it (almost) everywhere I take the printed books and other publications I read. If the demise of the p-book is going to leave a hole in my life, I want to know if the ebook can fill it."

It's a long article by Web-journalism standards (4.5 single-spaced pages) and she did her best to make it a legitimate experiment. She is (or was) part of *Salon*'s Books section, so she sees at least a dozen books and galley proofs every day. She's disposed to like ebooks and says so. She doesn't much care for print newspapers—they "get on my nerves," partly because she finds it essential to remove the sports

and auto sections of the *New York Times* before reading it, finds broadsheets difficult to read, "and the ink always seems to wind up smeared on my face."

She forgave the eBook its ghastly sans serif type and mediocre resolution, she didn't really read many books (a few G.K. Chesterton essays seems to be her only completed task), and she loves the idea of getting all her magazines in eBook form. But she'd be reluctant to buy book-length works in ebook form—and, in the end, she found the best use of the eBook to be downloaded *Salon* content. "That's pretty ironic when you consider that *Salon* is meant to be read on the screen to begin with, and that the only paper I'll be saving will be from our laser printer."

What I draw from the story: even a paper-hating avid reader who doesn't mind the poor readability of the eBook wasn't ready to use it as a book substitute. You may be able to find the essay at www.salon.com/books/feature/2000/03/31/ebook—or you may not, given *Salon*'s status.

The Readability Red Herring

I don't use smileys. If you think I believe that readability is *not* an issue with ebooks, you need to read some of my articles and books. But I'm seeing articles (at least one by a librarian who should know better) dismissing readability as a red herring. Which made a research report from Ohio State University particularly intriguing—or at least the press release on that research report that was posted last August. To quote:

Researchers had 131 undergraduate students read two articles that had appeared in *Time* magazine—some read from the magazine, some read the exact same text after it had been scanned into a computer.

"We were surprised that students found paper texts easier to understand and somewhat more convincing," said P. Karen Murphy, co-author of the study...

This was a classic study design: students completed questionnaires about their knowledge and beliefs on subjects (doctor-assisted suicide and school integration), read the articles, then filled out new questionnaires to show their understanding of the essays and gauge the persuasiveness and interest of the articles. One-third of the students read the magazine and filled out paper questionnaires; one-third read essays on screen and filled out paper questionnaires; and one-third did everything on computer.

While knowledge increased among all three groups and students in all groups tended to move toward the beliefs of the authors, on-screen readers found the texts harder to understand—regardless of students' computer experience. (The computer version even included the illustrations; this appears to

have been a rigorously fair test.) Online readers also found the articles less interesting, less credible, and less persuasive. The method used to fill out questionnaires didn't make any significant difference.

Murphy said that if the college students in this study had difficulty understanding computerized text, such text may present additional hurdles for less competent readers.

Of course this is all a red herring. A big, ugly, complicated red herring.

The Real Ebooks—on Paper?

Be careful when you see huge market projections for ebooks. One of the biggest projected sectors of these projections is print-on-demand books: that is, toner-on-paper books that are produced as needed rather than through mass print runs. I have a *lot* of trouble calling PoD books ebooks—but no trouble at all with the idea that they'll succeed better than true ebooks. As I've discussed here and elsewhere, that's good for libraries, since PoD books *are* books and should work exactly like other print books for library purposes—and, when produced on acid-free paper using well-maintained laser printers and bound properly, should last as long as other books.

An August 10, 2000 story from Inside.com puts some early numbers behind the PoD dominance. As the article says, "You wouldn't know it from the press it doesn't get, but print on demand is the quiet revolution going on behind the scenes." According to Barnes & Noble at the time, PoD is where all the "digital content" revenue is.

Lightning Source, one major digital fulfillment operation at the time, printed *and sold* 500,000 books in the first half of 2000. That's not a big chunk of the billion-copy annual book market—but it looks pretty good compared to downloaded and sold commercial ebooks for dedicated readers (or PCs, for that matter).

There are interesting niches within the PoD niche. It may be a year or five before every large bookstore has a backroom instant-book machine, but centralized PoD operations already make sense to replace bound galleys for early review copies, for short-run large-type editions, for course readers and for a number of other uses.

The Brass of Microsoft

As the limited realities of ebooks set in, I'm seeing a number of articles engaging in straw-man attacks. Typically, they either accuse people like me of saying "you'll never make money from online content" (an assertion I would suggest has rarely, if ever been made—at least not by anyone with any sense), or

they claim that "nobody ever suggested that ebooks would *replace* print books entirely *or primarily*—only that they'd create a new market." I find the second claim—"Nobody ever suggested print books would die"—particularly bemusing. See, for example, Hugh Look earlier in this piece.

Consider also, if you will, Dick Brass—Microsoft's "chief evangelist for electronic books," according to an article in the September 25, 2000 *Industry Standard*. When he spoke to senior executives at a big wood and pulp company he said, "I see dead people everywhere, and they don't know they're dead." The Microsoft timeline has a "history of printing" that ends with the final paper edition of the *New York Times* being printed in 2018—you may have seen that date in some short-lived MS ads.

"Twenty years from now, 90 percent of everything published will be published electronically." That's Brass' claim. He goes further, however, in a curiously paradoxical statement. "Literacy will spread. Poverty will retreat. There'll be no village in India or Africa too poor to have a library equivalent to the greatest universities in the world." And yet, Microsoft intends to make sure that its ebooks are fully protected, with every use paid for. How will these incredible libraries come about?

Brass goes on to say, "It's like 1908 in the automobile industry. Twenty years later, it was hard to find a horse in a major American city. The same will be true for books." Read that carefully: by 2019, it will be hard to find a [print] book in a major American city. Short of massive thermonuclear war, this vision sounds absurd. But that's what the man said, and he's a Microsoft hotshot.

There are internal contradictions here. The writer asserts that "This vision is definitely not based on free libraries"—but Bill Gates believes in free libraries and has put serious money behind that belief. Brass himself works both sides with equal zeal. He used to work for Oracle, where he became Larry Ellison's chief speechwriter, "routinely denouncing Microsoft as a monopolist." Now, working for Microsoft, he calls the government's case "bizarre and offensive." Why? "I have a good perspective to know this because I was present when the ideas that became the case were being shaped." And he admits that he helped shape them.

I find the government's case against Microsoft a good deal less bizarre than Brass's "no books in major American cities in 20 years" future. But then, I would, wouldn't I?

Adobe, PDF, and Proprietary Formats

I lurk on ebooks-l, apparently one of few on that list who aren't passionate for ebooks as the great salvation. An interchange culminating on October 16, 2000 raised interesting and cogent points, but also involved a misleading statement or two.

The misleading statement was from Millard Johnson, who was pointing out (correctly) that Gemstar *must* use proprietary formats to have any chance at profits. In reference to Glassbook's use of PDF (this was when Glassbook was planning to make a device and before they sold out to Adobe), he said: "Sure, Glassbook will allow you to load any PDF format book. But Acrobat is a proprietary format. Publishers will have to pay Adobe to encode their content into that format."

Technically, that's true—but it's a one-time payment of around \$200, quite different than taking a slice of every ebook transaction. You need the full Acrobat package to produce PDF files (PDF is the proprietary format—Acrobat is the name of the software): that's the \$200. A cheap publisher could presumably buy one copy and funnel all PDF conversions through one PC—but even at \$200 for each "production" PC, this is a trivial cost. *And that's it*: I see nothing anywhere in Acrobat's documentation restricting use, nor would I expect to.

Of course, enough \$200 copies make a tidy revenue stream, but Adobe isn't imposing itself between publishers and readers. I see one secondary benefit to Adobe. PDF is the only widely-available format I know of that allows me to be certain that the publications I prepare and distribute over the Web will appear with both the design *and typography* fully intact. Adobe sells a lot of digital typefaces; PDF makes it feasible to use interesting typefaces along with digital distribution. If you know me, you know I dislike the proprietary nature of PDF—but it works, and there's no per-use licensing involved.

Exit Gutenberg?

That title appeared on Ralph Lombreglia's *Atlantic Unbound* commentary on the eBook World conference. The commentary appeared November 16, 2000; see www.theatlantic.com/unbound/digital-reader/dr2000-11-16.htm

Publishing magnates paid big bucks to attend eBook World: \$1,000 each for two days of speeches and panel discussion. "The consensus at the conference was that digital delivery of most 'content'...is inevitable. The consolation was that 'inevitable' might be a long way off." Richard Sarnoff of Random House New Media talked about 2100. Did

anyone doubt that ink on paper would be obsolete by then? No—but people weren't ready to sign on for Dick Brass' timeline (see above).

Richard Curtis, an e-publisher, commented that "ebooks only have two problems: supply and demand." Later speakers brought out the real "ebook" market, namely print-on-demand (also see above). Publishers and agents were divided as to whether authors less famous than Stephen King could ever profitably market directly to readers; naturally (and, I believe, correctly), intermediaries want their roles to continue. "It was oft-repeated at the conference that a paper book is a nearly perfect machine."

The article includes a good summary of areas where ebooks may already make sense—complex technical material, some travel situations. A cautionary note: "Ebooks offer the possibility of multimedia enhancements to text, although that remains mostly theoretical at this point... Good multimedia is vastly more expensive to produce or license than most publishers seem to think. You could get laughs at eBook World simply by uttering the phrase 'CD-ROM," and yet a number of speakers casually referred to 'adding multimedia content' to ebooks."

This was the first edition of an online "digital reader" column. His December column, "The ghost of ebooks past," was also interesting (and very different). He discusses his own experience buying Jack Kerouac's Orpheus Emerged in Acrobat eBook form and his own previous experience helping to build a very different kind of "ebook." Among other things, that discussion includes one of the few negative comments I've read about Voyager's failed CD-ROM-based ebooks: "To my mind their ebook concept was a design-deficient cookie cutter that embodied everything I disliked about computer multimedia." He and his team reinvented the concept, leading to A Jack Kerouac ROMnibus," published by Penguin Electronic in 1995. He's proud of the result—the text of *The Dharma Bums* with hyperlinks to annotations, photographs, audio readings, videotape, and so on. It got great reviews and an Invision award. Eight months later, Penguin Electronic shut down and the CD-ROM disappeared.

"The most telling detail of all? The sales force of our world-class publisher never managed to convince Cybersmith, an Internet café and multimedia software store in Harvard Square (twenty miles south of Jack Kerouac's hometown), to stock a single copy."

He thinks ebook publishers should remember the CD-ROM era, "because almost all the mistakes of the CD-ROM era will be repeated in the 'ebook era,' only worse." He thinks some companies are trying to do it right, including LiveREADS (epublishers of *Orpheus Emerged*). He recognizes that CD-

ROMs were "too far ahead of their time" (although, as I explain in the May 2001 *American Libraries*, there's more to it than that). And he's hopeful that, if done right and patiently, "electronic-multimedia books could indeed become the future of reading, or part of it. Just like they used to be."

As part of the future of reading, who am I to disagree? Particularly given his caveats: "good production is expensive, it won't be instantly profitable, a slew of boring, overpriced titles will alienate the public." For the whole column—which I recommend—use the URL above and change "dr2000-11-16" to "dr2000-12-14"

An e-Author Speaks

Finally (before moving on to current events), a note from eBOOKNET some time last fall. Keith Shaw, a published "e-Author and educational web-site publisher," had this to say (emphasis added):

I can say with confidence that the problem with epublishing is the sheer volume of content (good and bad) vs. the actual size of the market. My mystery novel recently moved up ten spaces on the B&N Rocket eBook mystery list. Because I felt the eBook hype is just that, I confirmed with my publisher how many sales it took to jump ten spaces on the list. It was no surprise to me that it took *a single sale* to produce the jump in rank. I do not believe people want to read long works on a computer screen.

Current: Projecting the Ebook Market

How many dedicated ebook readers will be sold by 2005—and how much will their owners spend on ebooks for those readers? Enthusiasts seem to think that ebooks will *dominate* publishing by then. Forecasters offer numbers all over the place, and the clever ones have already started redefining "ebook." That's fairly typical for a hyped new field that isn't working out as expected: redefine the field so that it's a success.

Michael Cader's column in the March 6, 2001 [Inside] discusses a few recent forecasts, following the lead "Familiarity may breed contempt, but uncertainty seems to breed nothing so much as consultants." A few highlights:

- Andersen Consulting's study for the American Association of Publishers projects 28 million dedicated ebook readers in the U.S. by 2005 with \$2.3 billion in texts for those readers.
- ➤ Jupiter Research asserts that 1.9 million dedicated readers will have been sold by that time, with the familiar "fewer than 50,000" figure for the total to date. (It's important to note that 50 and 500 are both "fewer than 50,000." Cites

- & *Insights* has a circulation of fewer than 500,000 downloaded copies each month.)
- ➤ Forrester Research isn't quoted as naming a number of units sold but projects \$251 million in sales of ebooks for dedicated readers in 2005 (plus \$423 million in downloads for PDAs and computers and \$3.23 billion in electronic textbook downloads).

As Cader notes, "when it comes to forecasting non-existent markets, any prediction will be wrong—very wrong." He quotes William A. Sherden (a consultant): "The main difference between technology forecasting and science fiction is that the former is sold under the pretense of being factual." But, of course, forecasting is lucrative business.

Not that it has much to do with ebooks, but one note in the article is particularly telling. Stephanie Oda worked for Simba Information, a forecasting firm that I always found particularly ludicrous in its optimistic forecasts. She notes that Simba didn't do any first-hand data collecting—but "literally made millions on conferences, a new newsletter and a plethora of reports."

Pay More, Get Less

PC Magazine 20:8 (April 24, 2001) has a surprisingly positive review of RCA's REB1200, giving it four dots of a possible five. They note that it's "far superior to RCA's first ebook offering" but don't seem to recognize that it's not a replacement for the REB 1100 but a *much* more expensive upscale model.

The good points? Decent text formatting, unlike the REB 1100 "which looked more like that of an email message than a printed page," 8.2" diagonal color screen, and you can mark up the pages.

On the other hand, it weighs more than two pounds, but "is still as comfortable to hold as a hardcover" (let's not talk about the paperbacks that people read on the go!). The battery lasts about 6.5 hours "at almost full brightness." Although not mentioned here, screen resolution is still far below that of the crudest print book.

The heading above is my wording, not *PC*'s. That review is titled "eBook done right." But it won't handle RocketWriter software or interface with a PC at all—the *only* way to get text onto the REB 1200 is directly from Gemstar, according to this review. Forget adding public domain texts, your own documents, or competitively supplied ebooks. Gemstar wants a cut of every ebook you buy and assures that by closing the architecture.

And it's \$699. To my mind—and given the nonexistent discounts for the insubstantial nature of ebooks—that alone disqualifies the REB1200 from being "done right." It's a hefty, overpriced, single-purpose device locked to one manufacturer.

E-Textbooks: A Workable Niche?

The first current item in this roundup notes, indirectly, that Forrester projects an e-textbook market-place in 2005 more than 12 times as large as the dedicated-reader ebook market. That seems plausible. Donald T. Hawkins offers a good discussion of e-textbook happenings on pages 10 and 11 of the May 2001 *EContent*.

As he notes, "carrying a PC that weighs much less, takes up less space but contains the contents of the textbooks plus additional reference materials, easily wins over the alternative of carrying a heavy backpack containing several large textbooks." Note the first three words: "carrying a PC"—which most college students will be doing in any case. Unfortunately, that means considerable loss of readability as compared to print textbooks, but we're more likely to see improved notebook screens simply because that *is* a huge marketplace.

Claire Schooley of Giga Information Group suggests that "a 'blended approach using both print and electronic media will be the best format in which to deliver training." Hard to argue with that. Print textbooks may continue to make sense in areas where it's important to read through lengthy text and material remains stable for several years (leading to resale value for used textbooks)—while electronic textbooks (in one form or another) may be best for fast-changing areas and those books really only used a few paragraphs at a time, particularly if those paragraphs can be improved by interleaving them with exercises and interactivities.

That doesn't mean e-textbooks are a slam-dunk success or that success in that niche means that ebooks in general will conquer traditional media. Neither is true. There have been attempts to build textbook-specific ebook devices; so far, they don't seem to be succeeding. Questia has spent more than \$100 million to push a sort of "rental library" to go beyond textbooks—and, as of late April 2001, appears to have some 900 student subscribers, yielding an annual revenue stream of considerably less than \$0.5 million. Commonly-supported campus libraries may be less convenient, but they typically have *much* larger collections—and money is money.

Paradigms and Containers

The new *EContent* is thick with two-page profiles. Mick O'Leary profiles "ebrary" (e.e. cummings would be delighted!) in the May 2001 issue, a pro-

file that may say as much about O'Leary as about the fledgling company.

As I understand it, ebrary wants to make lots of books and other material available in digital form—and will charge you when you want to *use* some of the text. "Warnock wants to create the experience of a library or bookstore, where you can read to your heart's content, and then take what you want with you." The site's technology supposedly "blocks printing, downloading, or copying to clipboard"—albeit not screen printing, which "is not an issue with publishers." You read all you want—then you pay perhaps \$0.15 to \$0.25 per page to gain full access to the paragraphs or pages you want, downloaded as PDF files.

I can't say whether or not it will work. O'Leary notes that "the ubiquity of copiers makes Warnock's point that people want to buy information, not just containers"—but I'd love to see numbers backing up that odd assertion. How does the number of photocopied pages from library books and magazines compare with circulated items that aren't photocopied—or with sales of books and magazines?

O'Leary immediately goes on to get my back up: "Books and articles are, after all, orderly but arbitrary containers of information." Beep! Wrong answer. O'Leary's profile certainly adds to the "information" provided about ebrary, which could be contained nicely in two paragraphs. Maybe the profile is an "arbitrary" arrangement of the "information" about ebrary, but that's a surprising devaluation of the work of writers and researchers. I'm shocked to see such a narrow-minded assertion from a college library director, but I shock easily.

O'Leary begins the profile by telling us that we should put our money on "the companies that are creating the new paradigm instead of just tinkering with the old." Maybe so, if you believe in "paradigm shifts" as a way of life—but, in practice, companies with lasting success appear to be those that do it better, not just those who do it first. (Note the current situation of Pan Am and Trans World Airlines, two of the true pioneers of commercial aviation.)

I'm also a bit surprised to see the phrase "Its copyright-protection technology prevents actual access to text until you purchase." The rest of the article *seems* to make clear that, while you can't download text until it's purchased, you can read it or do screen dumps; that sure looks like access to me!

Franklin eBookMan Notes

Michael S. Lasky of *PC World* recommended Franklin's \$229 EbookMan EMB-911 in the December 2000 issue, based on viewing a preproduction ver-

sion. "With its ambitious array of features (MP3 player, ebook reader, audio-book player, and PDA), it looked like an absolute winner." A followup in the June 2001 *PC World* (posted on some Web sites May 5, 2001) begins: "First an apology." Now that Lasky has been able to *use* a shipping EbookMan, "I've found it to be an absolute loser."

Installation "is a nightmare." The interface, "although Spartan, is not intuitive." The processor "operates at glacial speed"—it took seven minutes to load and convert a 3.5 minute MP3 file. "Try to load an ebook and while you wait, you might be able to finish its paper counterpart." The device drained its batteries after a couple hours. The screen is difficult to read and the backlighting is too dim.

He doesn't comment on the absurdity of doing serious reading on a 240x240-pixel screen. At least that's more space than a Palm's 160x160 screen. By comparison, if you print this issue out on a 300dpi printer, the text area of the page is roughly 2100x2700 pixels—but more typical contemporary printers yield at least 4200x5400. A typical book page, at medium resolution and with all that "waste space" for margins to improve readability, has the equivalent of at least 3600x5400 pixels.

Gemstar Strikes Again

There was an online "library" called Rocket-Library.com, offering 8,000 free unencrypted documents in Rocket Edition format. When NuvoMedia owned the site and copyright texts showed up, the company would remove the texts and chastise the person who'd uploaded them. But NuvoMedia is no more. In early April, a few copyright texts showed up—and Gemstar closed down the entire site.

Surprised? Don't be. EBookNet had been a vigorous source of ebook news; Gemstar shut it down. There was a Rocket/ebook newsgroup on www.news. nuvomedia.com. It's gone. (All material in this item from Wired News, May 1, 2001, portions of "E-Pledge Drives Don't Work" by M.J. Rose.)

Feedback and Following Up

orrections, amplifications, apologies, sequels and other direct additions to essays and other topics from the last month or two. Also selected comments from *Cites & Insights* readers that go beyond "great job!" or "complete waste of time."

Getting Past the Arc of Enthusiasm

Charles W. Bailey, Jr. was the founder and original editor of *Public-Access Computer Systems Review*—a very early electronic journal that eventually faded away. After reading my article, he offered the following comments:

During my time as editor, I found that, given author characteristics (they were typically librarians or computer specialists, not information studies or other faculty members) and the "double curse" of electronic journals (they are new journals published in a new medium), a significant amount of energy was required to recruit authors to submit papers. If I had waited around for submissions, it would have been a short "arc" indeed. After the journal became refereed, I often found that authors of papers that I thought could easily pass review didn't want to bother with it because of the extra time involved and the perceived lack of personal payoff. That's why I was pleasantly surprised in my final year as editor (1996) when virtually all authors wanted peer review and, given the added editorial labor involved, we couldn't push papers through the review process fast enough to publish all the submissions in that calendar year. So, from my perspective, the seventh year of publication didn't seem like one of declining author interest; quite the opposite. I was perfectly happy to publish five refereed papers and one communication vs. sixteen communications (as in 1990). After 1996, annual Web use statistics suggest significant ongoing reader interest--usage peaked in 1998 (the last year an article was published) with over 250,000 requests; however, by 2000 it had only declined by around 5,000 requests.

Bailey also provided more current information on *EJournal*, which I hadn't managed to track after 1996. "By the way, *EJournal*, while hard to find, is still publishing issues at www.ucalgary.ca/ejournal/. I have a link to an article in it in my bibliography so I had to track it down when its URL changed."

With that additional information, a case can be made that *EJournal* should move from "arc of enthusiasm" to "small successes"—it is indeed still publishing, sort of. Here are the modified figures: 1993: 3/3; 1994: 4/5+; 1995: 2/3; 1996: 3/3+; 1997: 1/3; 1998: 2/2; 1999: 1/0+; 2001: 1/1 (so far). The single issue in 1999 was a "Valedictory" from the retiring original editor. I'm not sure why I was unable to locate the 1997-1999 articles during my two rounds of Web searching in 2000 and 2001, but am pleased to see that *EJournal* is still around. (Note: here as throughout the study, I'm being as liberal as possible in counting articles—some of them may not have been refereed. That liberality also explains differ-

ences in my annual article counts for *PACS Review* from Charles Bailey's counts: as he notes, few early articles were refereed.

Anyone else out there who wishes to update or correct the record? I was pleased and surprised at how well these pioneers have actually done; I'd be even more pleased to find other stories of e-journals that have come back to life. Send me details: wcc@notes.rlg.org.

Harry M. Kriz, director of interlibrary services at Virginia Tech, pointed out another relevant article and offered his own comments on attempts to replace commercial print journals. The article: Anne B. Piternick, "Attempts to find alternatives to the scientific journal: a brief review," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 15:5 (1989), pp. 260-6. I haven't read it yet; Kriz summarizes that "the author traces various alternatives to the scientific journal and explains why the failed to replace print on paper. That was 12 years ago; a followup study that specifically updates Piternick's article might be interesting. (And may already have been published: I don't see most library literature.)

Some of Kriz' comments, not necessarily about my study but about ejournals in general:

There is at least one consideration missing from the debate about e-journals and their future and how universities can become powerful by becoming publishers. There seems to be no real understanding of the purpose of scientific and scholarly journals. If those purposes are not met by e-journals, then e-journals will fail, just as all past alternatives have failed because they did not meet the purposes served by print journals.

The idea that universities will replace publishers seems naïve. Universities gave up publishing scientific and engineering papers long ago... Most universities do not even have a mechanism for tracking either the journal articles or the technical reports written by their faculties...

Just the fact that people talk about journals as vehicles for scholarly communication is puzzling. This is not the principal purpose of journals, and in the humanities this sometimes doesn't seem to be even one of the purposes. In the early 1980s I wrote an essay in our library newsletter reporting on Eugene Garfield's preliminary analysis of the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) database. He reported that 53% of the 107,000 source items he studied were reviews... Scholarly research articles constituted only 26% of the items indexed... Also interesting was the fact that in 1981 only about 5% of the references in the A&HCI journals cited other A&HCI journals... [Within the three ISI citation databases], there were 27 scientific journals each of

which was cited more times in 1981 than the entire set of 1,200 humanities journals.

As an interlibrary loan librarian I haven't followed the e-journal debate closely because e-journals have been irrelevant in my work so far. The demand is booming for photocopies of printed articles held by those libraries that are managing to maintain their collections. And the demand is concentrated on journals published in the past five years. About one-third of all photocopy requests are for articles published during this year and last.

Kriz also forwarded two postings he'd made to the ILL-L list earlier this year. One discusses the surprising breadth of cooperation represented in ILL operations; the other offers a counterpoint to "Everything's on the Web." A few excerpts:

Questions: 1) How many lending libraries does it take to support the interlibrary borrowing operations at your university? 2) How many lending libraries are required to support one of the colleges within your university? 3) How many lending libraries are needed to support the work of a single faculty member?

Answer to all questions: More than I ever imagined...

During calendar year 2000, Virginia Tech (VPI) borrowed more than 28,000 books and journal articles from nearly 1,100 libraries. We delivered these items to nearly 3,100 students, faculty and staff at Virginia Tech.

It startles me to learn that it took more than 1,000 libraries to support Tech's research needs during a single year. It amazes me even more that over the past four years it required the resources of more than 1,900 libraries to support Tech's researchers. These numbers give new meaning to the cliché that "no library can own everything its users need."

Briefly, answers to the second and third questions were that it took 433 libraries to support VPI's College of Engineering in calendar 2000—and that one ILL customer required items from 127 different libraries, and 22 users needed 100 items or more—requiring 318 libraries to fulfill the requests. "Clearly effective interlibrary loan service depends on the good will and cooperation of hundreds of people at hundreds of libraries."

A few weeks after that February posting, Kriz posted this item, worth reprinting in its entirety (with some changes in paragraphing):

75% of freshmen entering Virginia Tech (VPI) this year agreed that "Everything is on the Web." If this were true, then we would expect that the incidence of interlibrary borrowing and lending of journal articles would be declining. In fact, just the opposite is occurring at Virginia Tech.

Borrowing: In the past four years, interlibrary borrowing has increased by 85%... In that same period, article photocopies have increased from 62% of total borrowing to 70%.

Lending: Tech's interlibrary lending has remained almost unchanged... However, article photocopies have risen from 58% of all lending in fiscal 1998 to 65% of lending in fiscal 2001.

Conclusion: The increased availability of electronic journals has not resulted in decreased demand for paper journals held in archival library collections. In fact, despite the extraordinarily rapid growth of information on the Internet, our dependence on other libraries continues to increase. Our greatest growth in demand is precisely in that area, journal articles, where we might have expected resource sharing over the Internet to reduce our dependence on the paper collections of other libraries.

Demon or [Hep]Cat?

Chris Holt wonders about my identification of Napster's logo, which has always looked like a demon to me. "Did you read somewhere that it is a demon, or is that your perception of the icon? Personally, I always thought it was a cat wearing headphones."

I suspect Chris is right. My feelings about Napster may color the way I see the logo—which *still* looks like a demon to me. (As a fan of both *Buffy* and *Angel*, I should point out that demons are not necessarily evil.)

Amazon's Honor System: Does it Work?

I discussed this "tip jar" system in April, noting that I wasn't quite sure what to make of it (or whether to use it). I'm still not sure, but found a May I item in Wired News interesting: "E-pledge drives don't work" by M.J. Rose. She relates two tales:

- ➤ The proprietor of www.ContentExchange.com interrupted the site's online writing list (OWL) for day, asking the 2,000 people to contribute some money (through PayPal or Amazon) to keep it going. Fewer than 10% did so, and he was apparently harassed for making the effort.
- Jade Walker runs *Inscriptions*, a 70-page weekly e-zine "to help writers and editors hone their craft." It's wone dozens of awards and published quite a few significant writers; it has more than 5,000 subscribers. Ad revenue covers less than half her direct costs. She asked for \$5 a year (for a 70-page weekly, remember); fewer than 10% of the readers kicked in.

If "fewer than 10%" means "more than 200, albeit less than 500," she's doing a lot better than some of the other "honor system" stories I've heard.

The Convergence Chronicles

The Industry Standard for April 23, 2001 has a small item on p. 20-21. It notes, "Last Christmas was supposed to belong to Audrey. 3Com's Internet appliance, along with several similar products designed to make going online cheap and easy, were pitched as the must-have holiday gift."

There are six pictures with brief notes:

- Audrey (\$499-\$549): dead following "woeful sales numbers" after six months in production. 3Com's buying them back.
- ➤ i-Opener (\$99-\$399): Although some 70,000 were sold, Netpliance pulled them off the market after a year.
- ➤ iPaq Home Internet Appliance (\$99-\$599): Compaq claims "sales are on target," whatever that might mean.
- ➤ ePodsOne (\$199): Six months, 300 sales; ePods is out of business. "Can you say collector's item?" (This one was a wireless tablet neater than most, but almost certainly cost more to produce than its price.)
- ➤ Dot.Station (na): Intel-produced and one of the least attractive units. Intel says it sold 250,000 to AOL Avant (Spain)—half the original order.
- ➤ Icebox (\$499): A neat little TV/DVD player/Internet appliance from CMi. It was supposed to appear in March 2000. As of April 2001, it hasn't appeared at retail.

According to a March 6, 2001 CNET report, Gateway is selling the Touch Pad, an AOL-related Internet appliance, but "taking a second look" at plans for future Internet appliances. According to a Gateway spokesperson, "We really think that, for the time being at least, the center of the digital universe is going to remain the PC." The Touch Pad's price went down to \$499 temporarily—but I haven't heard of big sales numbers for the unit.

Clearly, Computer Shopper has a longer lead time than The Industry Standard. The May 2001 issue includes a group review, "Nothing but Net," that I originally marked for "Review Watch." Maybe it belongs here instead. The review covers five network appliances costing \$60 to \$500. One of those prices

is misleading: eMachines' MSN Companion may cost \$349 (plus \$22/month for a required MSN subscription)—but that doesn't include a monitor. This ungainly beast doesn't save much space (the non-PC is a small tower but it uses a full-size keyboard and monitor); surprisingly, it gets a 7.6 rating. Emachines isn't doing well, and I wouldn't want to be shackled to MSN, but I'm obviously not a candidate for this "companion." By the way, it won't do broadband: 56K is the best you can get.

That's the only high rating in the roundup. Second place, at a mediocre 6.0, is a tie between Audrey (which may be a "major step in the right direction for Internet appliances," but is also kaput) and Gateway's \$499 Connected Touch Pad, which requires a \$21/month AOL account. It's stylish (with a 10" LCD touch screen and high-style keyboard), but being stuck with AOL seems worse than MSN.

The NadaPC SurfBoard is truly bizarre. It's "cheap" (\$60 shipping plus a 3-year \$22/month contract), it's "lap-friendly" (8.3x9.8x0.8", most of which is an 8.2" passive-matrix LCD display)—but there's no keyboard, it doesn't do Java or Shockwave, and it doesn't include an e-mail client. The summary says, "bare-bones version of Windows CE tanks the whole device." Finally, there's the \$320 New Internet Computer NIC from Oracle spinoff NIC: "dreadfully slow, poor picture quality, no e-mail client...not novice-friendly, case becomes alarmingly hot." And it's as bulky as a regular PC. It's running Linux in the worst possible way: from a CD-ROM that must remain in the machine at all times. It's fair to say that NIC won't be setting sales records.

The Unlimited Growth of Wireless

We all know that everybody's going to carry around multifunction wireless devices to do everything, at least if we believe the hypemeisters. Convergence will bring us streaming movies on cell phones with 160×160 resolution on a two-inch screen—one more way to ignore the real world.

One strong argument for the inevitability of wireless has been the billions of dollars that the global telecommunications firms paid governments for spectrum licenses to handle the vast new wireless traffic. British Telecommunications paid almost \$15 billion to buy British and German licenses: that's proof that a market is there. In all, the U.K. government received \$35 billion in an April 2000 spectrum auction; Germany got \$45 billion last August. If hardheaded traditional firms pay \$100 billion in two countries, can there be any question?

Some of you may note that some big business wants to have it both ways: No limit to profits, but

handouts to cover stupidity. British Telecom has asked the British government to refund some of its money: the company's decided it paid too much. The "3G" services that are supposed to make BT rich are taking a lot of time—and new projections suggest relatively minor revenues. As related in the May 7, 2001 Industry Standard (from which everything in this commentary was drawn), Jupiter Media Metrix now calculates that interactive wireless revenues will grow to \$7.3 billion in 2005—not bad (if awfully optimistic, given the \$104 million rate last year), but just barely enough to pay the interest on \$100 billion worth of licenses. We're all going to shop from our PDA/cell phone combos? Maybe not: the same report projects \$3.5 billion (worldwide) in wireless shopping in 2005, compared with \$58 billion in shopping from PCs. Oh, and if you were wondering how Japan's mighty DoCoMo is doing with its 3G service, announced for May 2001: it's been delayed until October.

Now the telecom companies are looking for money from phone vendors, similar to the financing deals that airlines have used for years. But, as the story concludes, "predicting the cash flow from 3G services is far more precarious than forecasting revenue from a commercial airline. At least with airlines, you know the planes can get off the ground. 3G has yet to prove that."

Disclaimer and Clarification

Since some readers don't interpret tone very well, I should clarify (with regard to the item above) that I do *not* believe wireless is useless or will fade away. I just don't believe that it's a Universal Solution. I do not believe we're all going to carry around PDAs—but I don't believe PDAs are going to disappear either. (On the other hand, Palm's sudden drop in sales projections suggests that the PDA market may be nearing saturation.) I believe in a complex society and complex marketplace, and I believe that working technologies won't disappear all that rapidly.

If you define "convergence" as "companies using transferable expertise in more than one sphere, and aspects of separate technological spaces crossing over," then convergence is a fact of life—and has been as long as there's been technology. If you define "convergence" as "everything blending into one," then convergence goes against the grain of history.

From Web to Book (and Back Again?)

I'm not sure how deep the archive for *Online Journalism Review* (ojr.usc.edu) runs, but you might look for "The Web: coming to a bookstore near you" by Dan Richardson, posted May 10, 2001. It's a fascinating

story with a great lead line: "If the Web can bring fame, perhaps Web-based books can bring fortune."

If you're one of the hundreds of thousands who visit the Darwin Awards site (celebrating the remarkable ways people find to remove themselves from the gene pool), you can probably guess that—like most sites—the site yields just enough revenue to pay the server bills. Wendy Northcutt, a molecular biologist and the creator of the site, assembled the best stories into *Darwin Awards*, published by Dutton. The book's sold a quarter-million copies.

That's hardly unique. The team behind *The Onion* produced *Our Stupid Century*; *Salon* has generated three books so far; and *The Smoking Gun* (from the site of the same name) will come out this fall. *The Suck book* came out in 1997, and other sites have also yielded books.

The article explores some of the connections. Books lend permanence to a site. Joey Anuff of Suck notes, "In 50 years I'm still going to have copies of that Suck book to give my grandchildren. Our [Web] archives might be long gone."

Books also add an odd sort of stature. According to Northcutt, "People totally discount the value of the Web. They're like 'Oh my God, you're a published author? That's so cool!' And yet, every month more people come to my Web site than ever bought the book."

Good article. Read it. If you care to define "convergence" as "one medium feeding on and promoting another medium," that's happening too—as it has ever since there was more than one medium. (I'm sure there are cave drawings showing people playing primitive instruments: one medium promotes another.)

Effectively Unlimited Bandwidth, Effectively Free

That's the promise we've heard for many years now from the gurus of convergence. So much optical fiber is being laid so fast that bandwidth will be "effectively unlimited" and too cheap to worry about. If that doesn't happen, convergence stalls.

We seem to be well on the way. The June 2001 *PC World* includes a three-page article noting pieces of the reality:

- ➤ Smaller DSL resellers are dropping like flies as are some big ones. NorthPoint's abrupt shutdown stranded 100,000 customers; it's far from alone.
- ➤ The big DSL and cable modem firms are *raising* prices, not lowering them. The new going rate appears to be \$50 a month.

➤ Installation and service problems still abound—and the spokespeople say, "It's all just fine now, just fine." As they always have.

Another three-pager, this time in the May 14, 2001 *Industry Standard* (pp. 32-4), adds another piece to the puzzle. Too many companies are laying too much fiber for projected demand, and "essentially free" isn't a business model that financial markets much care for. That means even more bankruptcies are likely. It also means the amount of new fiber (and equipment to make existing fiber) will shrink considerably. For example? According to the story, this year's investment in telecom systems will be less than *one-eighth as much* as last year.

Bibs & Blather

hen I began this zine, I thought it was a newsletter, and I thought the title was Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large. I'm beginning to realize that it's more of a zine than a newsletter (there's precious little news here but a whole bunch of interpretation and attitude)—and the ISSN cataloger at the Library of Congress was remarkably generous in assigning alternate titles. The formal title is still Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large. I find that most people refer and link to it as Cites & Insights, and I've started doing the same.

Most of *Cites & Insights* is either comments about articles I read or essays and quick takes inspired by articles I read. If you're involved with a literature source that you think I should be covering, a complimentary subscription might help. Send me email (wcc@notes.rlg.org); I'll send you a postal address. No guarantees. If I discussed *everything* I read, nobody would want to read this.

A few informal notes on (equally informal) editorial policy. I probably won't be discussing items in publications that I *formerly* appeared in, at least not in Press Watch II; the hint of possible sour grapes isn't worth it.

Product Watch

Moodwatch?

acworld (April 2001) informs us that Eudora, a popular e-mail program, now offers MoodWatch. This feature "gives each message a hot-pepper rating—as many as three peppers, which can indicate a message's potential for causing offense—before you can hit Send." OK; we have spell checking (so you can confidently use the wrong homophone, as long as it's also in the dictionary)

and grammar checking (which actually helps once in a while); why not flame checking? Lisa Schmeiser tried it out, by keying in four deliberate insults from various sources and a seemingly innocent message from a friend.

D.H. Lawrence: "I loathe you. You revolt me stewing in your consumption...you are a loathsome reptile—I hope you die." No peppers: certainly nobody could take offense. John McEnroe: "What other problems do you have besides being unemployed, a moron, and a dork?" No peppers there! Similarly, Max Reger's classic rejoinder to a reviewer (asserting a more suitable use for the paper) and a Golda Meir insult raised no alarms. But this passage was rated three peppers—as offensive as it gets: "I got laid off after three months...you met my boyfriend (almost hubby), who is still slaving on his Ph.D. at UCSF." Is "laid" the trigger word, or maybe "slaving"? In any case, I'll second Schmeiser's final word: "MoodWatch is no match for an older, more reliable tool: common sense."

SnapStream Personal Video Station

First the description, excerpted from *PC Magazine*'s four-dot review. This \$50 item is software to turn your PC into a "virtual VCR." You also need a TV tuner card or video capture card and a certain amount of fiddling to set up the program. Then you can record TV *without a VCR!* All you need is your antenna or cable connected to your PC (on but idle), 300MB disk space per hour of "near-VHS recording" or one gigabyte per hour of "near-DVD recording," and you're in shape. Like a VCR, you can even schedule shows to record in advance.

Next *PC*'s own commentary. "The PVS isn't on a par with VCRs or digital recorders, such as the TiVo... In small windows, streaming media looked fine. But when we ran a recording at 200 percent or full-screen, the lack of detail was unbearable... Streaming media is by no means as clean as recordings made on a VCR or a TiVo." But here's the conclusion: "Still, the PVS performs well and should be considered an inexpensive option for a home entertainment system on a PC."

I wonder about the words "inexpensive" and "entertainment." At this writing, you can buy a *name brand* VCR for \$65 or a generic brand for \$60, either of which will yield full-screen recordings of *full* VHS quality. Or you can buy a Super-VHS VCR, which will *really* yield "near-DVD" quality, for \$150. TV tuner cards aren't standard equipment on most PCs; the premium for such a card (or the cost in lower graphics performance) certainly exceeds \$15. Is watching TV on your PC all that compelling?

Adobe Premiere 6.0

Jan Ozer offers a full-page description and review of this video editor in the April 3, 2001 *PC Magazine*. It's a five-dot review for the "most highly regarded video editor on the Windows desktop," and it's worth reading if you're in that odd situation of being serious about desktop video editing *and* preferring Windows to the Mac. Ozer is one of the few reviewers that I tend to regard as expert in his key areas; the review is positive but not fawning. The choice of pull quote is unusual: "During tests on a notebook and a desktop, Premiere 6.0 was *almost* crash-free." (Emphasis added.)

Jim Heid reviews the Macintosh version of Premiere 6.0 in the May 2001 *Macworld*—and he's similarly impressed. Premiere fell out of favor in the Mac world with version 5, which was "finicky and sluggish" at the time Apple introduced Final Cut Pro. Premiere 6 may "lack the interface elegance and special-effects prowess of Final Cut Pro," but it's easier to learn, cheaper, and offers great Digital Video and Web support. Digital Video is your only option: it doesn't support analog video capture cards.

Cheap Duplex Laser Printing

As a long-time HP LaserJet owner, I'm as loyal to the brand as most other HP printer owners. I still find it hard to think of Brother as building high-quality printers, but the HL-1650 is certainly worth noting, At \$599, it's far from the cheapest laser you can buy—but, as reviewed in the April 3, 2001 *PC Magazine*, it can print as rapidly as 15.6 pages per minute (printing text connected to a parallel port) and as acutely as 1,200 dots per inch. At a real-world compromise—600 dpi, connected via USB, and printing combined text and graphics—the printer still yielded more than 10 pages per minute.

What makes this printer special, in my opinion, is the built-in automatic duplexer. These days, you buy a laser printer for the highest possible text quality or, more probably, for lower printing and paper costs and for high speed. Duplex printing makes the best use of paper, and this unit apparently doesn't slow down all that much in duplex mode (half a minute extra for a ten-page document). Readers may note that *Cites & Insights* is always an even number of pages. I deliberately designed the zine in the hope that you'll use a duplexing printer (although I don't use different margins for even and odd pages), then three-hole punch and edge-staple the results for easy reading and possible retention. Sounds as though you could print off a typical issue on the Brother

HL-1650 for roughly 36 cents and in less than two minutes. That's not bad.

Kyocera Smartphone

I don't get the notion that people will suddenly trade in their tiny two-ounce cell phones for PDA-size, PDA-weight beasts so that they can combine Web browsing with annoying people in restaurants. Still, if such a combination makes sense, the Kyocera QCP6035 may show how it should be done. A two-page writeup in the April 23, 2001 *Industry Standard* shows the phone and considers its capabilities.

It's not cheap—\$499—but it's no more expensive than a midrange Palm and a good cell phone. It's bulky (2.6x5.5x1") but not as bulky as a Visor with VisorPhone added. The screen is the same size as the little Palm100; the phone keyboard folds over the screen. It's a Palm OS device with 8MB memory, so it's a workable PDA—and it offers 14.4Kbps Web access. I don't understand the significance of a "speakerphone" in a cell phone, but then I don't even use a cell phone. If you're hot on the idea of mobile Web access, this combination makes sense.

PC Magazine gives the Smartphone a rave review in a May 8, 2001 review: five dots out of five. That review offers more details. The display area is 1.8 inches square (as compared to 2.3 inches square on the Palm V); the unit weighs 7.4 ounces; and the phone itself is a typical U.S. "trimode" unit—CDMA digital PCS, CDMA digital cellular, and analog cellular. "Imagine the possibilities of cutting back to a truly multipurpose device…"

Cordless Optical Mice

Here's how Michael Miller puts it in his "Forward Thinking" Editor's column (*PC Magazine* 20:9, May 9, 2001): "I like cordless mice. You can install one on a desktop system and eliminate the wires that often get tangled. I also like optical mice. They glide better, and you don't need to use a mouse pad. Until this month, you had to choose—optical or cordless, but not both."

The Logitech Cordless MouseMan Optical costs \$70, offers the typical Windows two-buttons-and-a-wheel, with an extra button under your thumb that clicks on Back. It uses RF technology, so it doesn't matter if the mouse can't "see" the receiver. (A later issue reviews the device, giving it a perfect five dots.)

Thinkmap

Have you used interactive concept and vocabulary maps? You know—the ones where terms float around the screen, possibly with connecting lines, showing "clusters of meaning" and supposedly communicating relationships much faster than mere text. I've seen half a dozen different implementations, and heard thoughtful people swear by them.

Thinkmap Inc. offers a suite of applications to build these visual environments. The Smithsonian's "Revealing Things" site (www.si.edu/revealingthings) uses Thinkmap's Spider and Bubble maps.

A strongly positive full-page review in the May 8, 2001 *PC Magazine* notes, "The Thinkmap interface is well suited for navigation of online catalogs, knowledge management sites, online exhibitions, and so on." The application server costs \$20,000 per CPU; Thinkmap Studio, a visual environment for generating Thinkmap clients, wasn't priced at review time but probably won't be cheap.

I've never been able to make sense of these maps. I gave up on Revealing Things after a few frustrating minutes; I can't *imagine* using a Thinkmap as an online catalog for a sizable collection. But this may well be a conceptual weakness on my part; when it comes to organizing ideas, I'm textually oriented. You might *love* Thinkmaps.

La-Z-Boy Explorer

Here's the product for the intellectually curious couch potato—or, I suppose, lounge lizard. For a mere \$1,299, you get a La-Z-Boy recliner "equipped for Microsoft WebTV Plus service." One arm flips open to reveal a drink holder and remote. The other has a tray table to support the wireless keyboard for Sony's INT-W250 WebTV terminal. That arm also has power, phone, and DSL outlets (in case you'd rather use a notebook). Any comment would be superfluous—and, actually, there's nothing wrong with being comfortable while using a notebook, which the tray table should facilitate.

Press Watch I: Articles Worth Reading

Helft, Miguel, "The trials of Jeff Bezos," *The Industry Standard* 4:16 (April 23, 2001), pp. 28-32.

his cover story offers a great throwaway line on the cover itself: "Jeff Bezos could do no wrong. Now he can do no right." The story tries to make sense of Amazon's situation. One piece of it shows in a sidebar in which a mutual funds analyst claims that "Amazon is one of the few with a potentially gigantic market, a global natural monopoly with a potentially extraordinary economic

model." What gives Amazon a "global natural monopoly"? Got me—but then, I'm not a Wall Street analyst and never will be.

If you've followed Bezos and Amazon over the years, you might think that Amazon can't possibly lose—after all, consider those huge pure-profit deals Amazon was making to promote other dotcoms in exchange for big fees. Fine, except that Amazon's fees were mostly stock in startups such as Drugstore.com and Living.com. You also learn to distinguish between "operating profits" and actual profits. So, for example, Amazon claims to make money selling books—but that "operating profit" doesn't factor in marketing and interest on \$2 billion in debt.

I've always had mixed feelings about Bezos and Amazon. Bezos seems to praise local bookstores at the same time that analysts assume Amazon will put them out of business; the site plays games with postings and prices and seems to have several dozen ways to guide you to the books it wants you to buy.

Carr, Nicholas G., "Get back in that box," *The Industry Standard* 4:16 (April 23, 2001), p. 80.

While you're reading about Bezos, flip back to this "Intellectual Capital" column. Carr points out that, as the tease says, "Technology's changing. Customers aren't. Which is more important?" Maybe I'm attracted to the brief piece because it's a point I've been trying to make for years—people are analog beings and change habits and desires far more slowly than technology can change possibilities. The whole concept of technology-driven revolutionary, disruptive change leaves out the people—and that's a losing proposition. Now, if *Industry Standard* would use nice, readable serif text for its columns, as it does for its feature articles...

McCracken, Harry (ed.), "Net threats 2001," *PC World* 19:5 (May 2001), pp. 93-146.

This special section is surprisingly well done and well worth reading, even if you don't agree with all of *PC World*'s recommendations. It's not 53 pages long, to be sure—but I count more than 30 pages of editorial copy.

The first section, "Privacy matters," may be the most important for most readers. If you haven't thought about the need to balance privacy and convenience, you should. I was astonished to find this comment on the very first page of the article:

Smith [Richard M. Smith, Privacy Foundation] believes life would be better if companies treated personal information the way the American Library Association does. "Librarians have been dealing with issues of privacy for a hundred years. They decided they wouldn't give out lists of the books people took out, and once the book was returned, they'd throw

away the check-out records," he says. If only it were that easy.

I won't damage the good press by mentioning the reality of how some libraries and systems deal with historic borrowing data; what Smith describes is how it's *supposed* to work. A sidebar offers "ten commandments of Internet privacy," overstated but certainly useful if you're using a shared computer.

The second section, "Dot cons," is a good addition to the literature of Webscams. The third, "Fortress PC," offers a set of brief reviews and comparative ratings for antivirus, firewall, encryption, and anonymous-surfing products.

The fourth section, "Hacker nation," offers the views of hackers themselves (and notes that the attempt to separate "hackers" from "crackers" gets fuzzy in the real world). It's a well done, sometimes chilling section.

Finally, Gregg Keizer's "Safe kids" offers a thoughtful and well-balanced set of tips "to defend [children and teenagers] against Internet dangers." Note Keizer's comment on filtering software, near the *end* of his section on keeping younger kids safe:

Though this would be my last resort, filtering programs...can provide nervous parents with some comfort and assistance... Like many parents, I'm not comfortable with such *a priori* censorship—it's no substitute for an honest discussion with your kids—but you may feel differently. Another troublesome aspect of filtering programs: None of them are foolproof, and at times they block worthwhile sites, such as those about breast cancer...

Note that Keizer doesn't even *consider* filtering software for teens; his only suggested use of Cyber Patrol or its ilk is to impose time limits on overenthusiastic Web users. (Keizer has a 15-year-old daughter. He's been writing and thinking about this stuff for years—more clearly than some PC writers!)

Glass, Brett, "Know your enemy," *PC Magazine* 20:9 (May 8, 2001), pp. 90-100.

Think of this as a technical companion to the *PC World* special report. Glass offers unnerving detail on current varieties of "malware," a possibly-worthwhile neologism that covers all varieties of malicious software. Page 100 is an odd final note: it's about Internet chain letters, which waste time and resources in a different way. Both pieces are thoughtful and worth reading.

Trippe, Bill, "A vital piece of the Internet puzzle," *EContent* 24:2 (April 2001), pp. 39-42.

While this article is primarily about content distribution networks (e.g., Akamai), much of the commentary is worth reading and thinking about as you cope with the Web in your library and personal

life. Trippe discusses some of the bottlenecks that make the Web a less robust medium than we might like. Unfortunately, the solutions proposed don't appear workable for database systems or sites on a limited budget. But at least you'll get some insight into why things seem to take so long even when you're on a T1 or cable line.

Vellotti, JP, "The new look of Windows," *PC Magazine* 20:9 (May 8, 2001), pp. 120-39.

Windows XP and the accompanying MS Office XP should be here this fall. *PC Magazine* ran extensive tests on the beta versions. This overview considers the major (and minor) changes, who will benefit the most, and who might be most annoyed. Windows XP is the first consumer Windows built on the NT kernel (actually the Windows 2000 kernel), so it should be as stable as Windows 2000—which, if you're not a crazed experimenter, is very stable indeed. Sidebars discuss Mac OS X and Red Hat Linux with Nautilus.

The second part of the story considers Office XP and, in sidebars, the remaining "competitors." Word appears to be a bit calmer when AutoFormatting imported text, a *lot* less insistent on imposing its ideas of what you intended, and enhanced by new "Smart Tags" to simplify quite a few operations. Applications generally understand XML and the Web even better than in the current Office.

If you're hungering for these upgrades—or worried about them—read the article. It's likely to be as thoughtful and balanced as you'll find.

The Details

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, ISSN 1534-0937, is written and produced monthly by Walt Crawford, an information architect at the Research Libraries Group, Inc. (RLG) Opinions herein do not reflect those of RLG. Comments should be sent to wcc@notes.rlg.org. Visit my primary Web site: http://walt.crawford.home.att.net.

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large is copyright © 2001 by Walt Crawford. It may be copied in its entirety and is currently free (but not public domain). If you like it, let other people know about it (point them to http://cical.home.att.net). If you wish to support this publication, read the FAQ at http://cites.boisestate.edu/cifaq.htm.

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

URL: cites.boisestate.edu/civli6.pdf