

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Perspective

Northwest Passages: From Juneau to Yakima

Juneau, March 6-9, Yakima, April 9-12: Two outstanding reminders of why I love speaking at state library conferences. I won't repeat the whole set of reasons ("Crawford Files," *American Libraries* January 2003), but they include the chance to meet a wide range of librarians, talk about local situations and down-to-earth solutions, and learn about aspects of librarianship I'd never encounter otherwise. "Good state library conferences cover more territory and involve a wider range of librarians than most specialized conferences. They're also frequently bigger, more ambitious, and even raucous at times."

These two conferences weren't that big—but they were both ambitious, and I found both enjoyable and instructive. It's worth noting some similarities and differences—with a few personal comments along the way.

Demographics

Alaska has some 634,000 people spread out over 571,951 square miles: 1.1 person per square mile, as compared to the national average of 79.6. Education is a little better than the country as a whole, and average household income (\$52K) is significantly higher than the national average. The Alaska Library Association has around 250 members, of which 225 were at this conference. On a per capita basis, AkLA is bigger than ALA—and can you imagine if 90% of ALA's 64,000 members showed up for an Annual Conference?

Washington has more than nine times as many people (5.988 million) in less than one-eighth the territory (66,544 square miles), leading to a much higher population density: 88.6 people per square mile. That means a few big cities and some lightly populated areas, but that's also true in California (217 people per square mile but with huge empty spaces) and Florida (296 people per square mile). Education's comparable to Alaska. Average house-

hold income, at around \$45K, is just over the national average. Washington Library Association has roughly 800 members. Although some "westside" conferences get up to 600 attendees, this "eastside" gathering had 350 or so. It's worth noting that Alaska Library Association *does* include school librarians, while Washington does not.

The conferences seemed roughly the same size—both lively, busy, and well managed. Both had similar arrangements: A conference hotel next to the city or county conference center, with most meetings in the conference center and a few in the hotel.

One reason for Alaska's level of involvement may be remoteness, as noted by my hosts. The land is so vast and distant from the "lower 48," and travel costs tend to be so high, that many Alaska librarians find AkLA to be their only chance to get together for learning, problem-solving, and conviviality.

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I was astonished at the depth and breadth of the AkLA schedule—and if there was a problem with WLA, it was that full involvement barely left time to breathe. I'll offer some detail on the schedules to show just how rich these conferences were.

Notes on Alaska Library Association

AkLA began with six preconferences on Thursday, a few afternoon tours, and an opening reception with entertainment by the Juneau Tlingit Dancers. (There were also board and executive council meetings and a late-night "movie night"—and yes, the movie involved a librarian.)

Friday: 7 to 8:50 a.m., continental breakfast and seven roundtables, meetings, and orientations (with exhibits opening at 8 a.m.!). 9-10: Opening session and my keynote; then half an hour in the exhibits. 10:30-11:50: Six program sessions. 12-1:45: "State of the state" luncheon and lobbyist update. Six more programs 2-3:30 and five 4-5:20 (with another ex-

hibits break), followed by a 5:30-7 exhibitors' reception and 7-9 dessert reception and book signing.

Saturday: 7-8:50, continental breakfast and five roundtables. Six programs 9-10:30, six more 11-12:20, then an "Authors to Alaska" luncheon, the general meeting and president's program, four more programs 4-5:20, and the awards banquet 6-9:30 with a local big band, results of a massive silent auction, and a "call-out auction."

Tired yet? Sunday 7-8:20 had continental breakfast and six roundtables and meetings. Six programs 8:30-9:30, seven between 10 and 12:50 (no more than five at once), then an endnote luncheon and two post-conference events.

Add it up: Four plenary sessions, 41 programs, 20-odd roundtables and business meetings, six pre-conferences, three receptions and a banquet. The exhibits were substantial and lively (29 exhibitors), made livelier by putting the extensive silent auction tables in the exhibit hall and providing plenty of free time throughout the day. I skipped the Friday dessert and Saturday luncheon (and headed for the airport before the endnote); the other social events were well attended and worthwhile. Let me tell you about the \$860 bid for a really ugly t-shirt... (No, I'm not kidding. Yes, I contributed a tiny piece of that \$860. If you're interested, it will be up for bid again next year: all for scholarships.)

The program lists 56 presenters in addition to fourteen *feature* presenters, at least eight of us flown in from out of state. AkLA makes good use of visitors—I did two program sessions in addition to the keynote and found them energizing.

I tried to characterize the program, thinking it would help define my keynote—but it was so broad-ranging that it defied categorization. Support staff are well represented and had a marked track. This was a conference that did what state library conferences should do: Addressed local concerns along with general library issues, leavened with lots of hallway conversation and good social events.

I was particularly impressed with the Dragonfly Project, an IMLS-funded project in which the Haines Borough Public Library and Chilkoot Indian Association Tribal Government cooperated to bring youth into the library as technology mentors to other users. That's an oversimplified statement of a remarkable project. You can find more at haineslibrary.org. I'm hoping the project leaders will write an article for *American Libraries*, given the innovation and success of this project. Getting impatient youth to learn the patience to work with 80-year-olds on computing tasks in the library: What an idea!

What about Juneau itself? I've been there twice before—but always during high season, when the

road along the waterfront is vibrant with activity. It's different in March, even with the legislature in session. The waterfront road is basically shut down—the Red Dog Saloon, library, Hangar restaurant and its mall, and a few other places open, but most tourist-oriented shops closed—and Juneau's a small town of 20,000-odd people. With mostly clear skies, the mountains, snow, glaciers, and water are nothing short of breathtaking. If you haven't been...well, I love cruising, and that's just about the only way to see southeast Alaska. I know we'll be back.

Notes on WLA

Five preconferences on Wednesday plus a board meeting and tour, with a new-member reception in the evening followed by several interest group meetings—and, beginning at 9 p.m., the Society Gaius Julius Solinas V. Washingtonius. Think LITA's Fuzzy Match Interest Group or ASIST's SIG CON (if neither rings a bell, ask).

Thursday: Keynote during a 7:30-9:30 a.m. breakfast; six programs 10-noon; business meeting over lunch; five programs 2-3:15; another five 4-6; drinks with exhibitors 6-7—and then the president's banquet (with speech), followed by a dessert reception and silent auction. 7:30 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Friday: Two different 7:30-9:30 breakfasts, one with a speech, one with ALA and Pacific Northwest Library Association updates. Six more programs 10-noon; the WLA awards luncheon; five programs 2:30-4; five more 4:15-5:45. Then an evening at the Yakama Cultural Center, combining dinner, tour, and reception, ending at 9:45.

Saturday? A lengthy, late breakfast and speech; a morning canyon walk; an afternoon winery tour.

More exhibitors (48); a tighter schedule (with earlier and later events) crammed into fewer days (essentially two full days plus precons rather than 2.5 days plus precons). Fewer plenary sessions (two full, one partial). Fewer programs than at AkLA. Explicit tracks in the program, largely based on sponsorship. Fewer speakers from out of state.

I found the schedule a little exhausting. Fortunately, I hadn't signed up for the big breakfasts or some other big events. This conference also had plenty of hallway conversation and explicit breaks for exhibits. For a state that also participates in regional conferences (PNLA), this is an active, busy, interesting conference. My own program (two hours on copyright) was well attended and, I believe, productive for all involved.

I attended more programs here than at AkLA, partly because I wasn't giving as many. One was a bit astonishing, as it began with a quote from Walt

Crawford followed by the claim that Walt Crawford is a Luddite (which the presenters meant as a compliment). They didn't know I was there, and I didn't choose to do an *Annie Hall* moment, jumping up and telling them this was nonsense, given the definition of Luddite they were using.

Reference-related programs were generally strong. One started with the claim that "the desk is dead" and discussed the future of reference when reference desks become irrelevant. Joe Janes, who regularly speaks at WLA, turned a late-conference session into a seminar and kept me and 40 other people active and enthralled throughout. And "Flavors of Washington Territory" included fascinating examples of the work being done to expose early records through digitization, given the sesquicentennial this year. How do you get a sesquicentennial in 2003 after celebrating a centennial in 1989? The difference between territory and state.

What's Next?

Toward the end of almost every speaking trip, I think about the advantages of being home—but trips like these are, on the whole, energizing even when they're exhausting.

I've rarely done two state conferences in one year. This year's extraordinary, with North Carolina's biennial conference coming up in September. (Most of the fall's still open.) I continue to say that state conferences are my favorite speaking events (probably regional as well, but I haven't done those). Almost every state conference is remarkable in its own way; in that sense, these were not exceptions.

Bibs & Blather

I'd like to introduce the new URL for this issue:

Cowlz.BoiseState.Edu/COWLZ/Consortium_of_Web-based_Library_Zines_and_Newsletters/Content/Navigation_frame/Navigation/Members/Founding_Members/CICAL/Cites_&_Insights/Cites_&_Insights:_Crawford_at_Large/Home/Issues/Issues_List/Chronological/Volume_3/Issue_6/Cites_and_insights_Volume_3_Issue_6/civ3i6.pdf

Yeah, I know. (And yes, I'm kidding: It's cites.boisestate.edu/civ3i6.pdf, just as you'd expect.) I swear: I had that idea *before* April 15-16, when T.J. Sondermann and Chris Zammarelli came up with their t-shirt design and L.A.C.K. postings. As I noted to Chris after an exchange of clarifying emails, great minds run in the same gutter.

If none of this makes sense to you, I assume:

- You're not an ALA member, and/or

- You have had no contact with ALA's website since early April and haven't run into any of the commentary on that redesign—which also means you're not on Web4Lib, you don't read *Ex Libris*, and you don't read *Library Juice*.

I've been a reasonably loyal member of ALA for 29 years now (my number's in the low 20Ks). My regular coffee mug at work is ALA's centennial mug, which suggests that I started attending conferences in 1975 (the centennial year), and I've only missed one Midwinter (and no Annuals) since then. Until recently, it's fair to say I was primarily an ISAD/LITA member who belonged to ALA out of necessity, but I don't think that's true any longer. I sent an angry letter to *Library Journal* when John Berry claimed that ALA is too expensive (it's one of the cheapest professional organizations) and that its conferences are too expensive (ditto), noting that organizations with weak central staffs—the only way to cut expenses substantially—aren't good at lobbying or carrying out effective policies.

All of which says that, like Karen Schneider, *I'm on ALA's side*—and I wonder just what went wrong with the website redesign. I don't believe there's much question that something fairly fundamental went astray. Several things, actually: Speed, clarity, navigability, and forward compatibility.

I don't have a lot more to say about this. I hope they'll fix it. I think it's a lot more broken than the old site was—although it is pretty (for what that's worth). The whole situation seems fairly sad, and a distraction at a time that ALA and its members really don't need them.

Here, for those who'd like more informed commentary, are three sources with brief annotations.

Jacsó, Péter, "AW, look what they've done to our links, ma," *Online* 27:4 (July/August 2003), www2.hawaii.edu/~jacso/extra/picks-pans/ALA/aw.htm

"It is quite discouraging that while ALA has published so many good books and journal articles in some of the best and most affordable scholarly journals of our profession about systems analysis, Web site design, information service, and database evaluation, it does not practice what it preaches."

Péter hoped that the new website would finally offer full-text archives of ALA journals for subscribers, with abstracts for everyone—and instead found that, at least at first, much of what *had* been there disappeared.

He notes problems with the new search engine (which appear to be improving), the absurdity of the new URLs—the made-up one for *Cites & Insights* isn't much worse than what's on AW—and the re-

markable new site map, which helps to show just how small the current-section segment of a vertical scroll bar can actually get. (One commentator counted more than 50 page clicks to get from top to bottom, but that depends on screen resolution. Let's just say that it seems to go on forever. At the time the article was written, it was 800K of html!)

The article includes lots of screen shots; as usual, Péter is thorough. Estimates of 20,000 dead links may be too low, particularly since *printed* links to ALA pages in various articles and books are almost certainly now all kaput.

Block, Marylaine, "How not to redesign a web site," *Ex Libris* 174 (April 11, 2003). marylaine.com/exlibris/

This column begins: "I have two words for the American Library Association: beta test." This is a short enough piece that I'd suggest you read it yourself. For once I even agree with the ubiquitous Jakob Nielsen, #9 in his "Top Ten Web-Design Mistakes of 2002": "URL > 75 characters."

Litwin, Rory, "The role of the ALA Web Site Advisory Committee," *Library Juice* 6:9 (April 17, 2003).

Who woulda thunkit? Rory Litwin is chair of the ALA Web Site Advisory Committee. *It's all his fault! Get the tar & feathers!*

Well, not really...as this detailed apologia (www.libr.org/juice/issues/vol6/LJ_6.9.html) makes clear. Litwin claims that the staff group and design firm (Active Matter) failed to fully address committee concerns such as accessibility, treating site users as constituents, and having a clear staged timeline rather than rushing the project—and, later, the need for usability testing. He also claims that Active Matter resisted opening up the design process.

It's a short statement—followed by some fascinating feedback on Litwin's ill-advised suggestion that SLA drop "library" from their name—and well worth reading.

The Glory of Percentages

This item belongs in an ebooks roundup, but that's delayed until next month (at least), partly for space, partly for lack of compelling content. But how could I skip this item at Media Life (www.medialifemagazine.com) on April 21?

Study: E-book sales showing increasing power. Although a recent study by BookBrowse.com found that the vast majority of Americans prefer paper books to electronic ones, the Association of American Publishers (AAP) reported an uptick in e-book sales for January and February. Sales rose 41 percent for the

60 publishers surveyed compared to last year. The bestselling e-categories tend to be science fiction, romance and horror, which appeal to avid readers who don't want to clutter their shelves with more books. Although the AAP predicts that e-book sales will continue to increase this year, the group did not predict by how much.

Wow! *Up 41% from last year!* But—isn't that odd—in an industry-oriented ezine that's always touting actual numbers, *there aren't any actual numbers.* I wonder what it says at AAP (www.publishers.org)?

February was a tough month for book sales, although university press books and religious books were up from 2002, as were el-high sales. I count \$8.1 million in university categories, \$21.1 in professional and scholarly, \$27.8 for religious, \$32.5 for children's/YA, \$148.5 for adult, and \$102.2 million el-high and higher education sales. So that's about \$340 million total, not a great month for U.S. book sales. Audiobooks? \$7.8 million.

Then there's that rapid increase in ebook sales (however "ebook" is defined—does it include PoD?). It's up 41.4 percent from 2002—to a grand \$300,000 in sales. Presumably, that means sales in February 2002 were around \$212,000. It's still less than one-tenth of one percent of total book sales. But at least it's presumably a multimillion dollar business—depending on how it's defined.

TWAIN?

Two months ago, I grumbled about a *Macworld* article that claimed, twice, that TWAIN comes from a Rudyard Kipling poem. While I continue to remember with some clarity, from the time TWAIN was first introduced, that it's a pseudo-acronym ("Technology Without An Interesting Name"), *Consumer Reports* makes the same Rudyard Kipling connection. Do I consider *Consumer Reports* more likely to get arcane PC-related issues right than *Macworld* is? Not at all—but if history's being rewritten this way, who am I to complain? I should note that when a reader made the same complaint to *Macworld*, the editors responded that "research shows" they're right, with (of course) no indication of what or whose research that was. ("What difference does it make anyway," I hear some reader thinking. Not much.)

The Library Stuff

A reminder: I don't comment on material that I don't read, and I don't see that many library periodicals. If you're involved with a periodical that publishes items you believe deserve attention here or

elsewhere in *Cites & Insights*, or as material for my print columns, the obvious solution is to put me on the comp list. That may not do any good, but it means that I'll *at least* scan each issue and read anything that intrigues me.

Abel, Richard, "Making good libraries better," *Against the Grain* 15:1 (February 2003): 34-8.

Here's an intriguing argument, one worth pondering even if you don't agree: That journals represent "raw information" and that academic libraries should be collecting the "synthesized bodies of knowledge concepts and ethical precepts articulated in books." Abel notes that monograph collections have suffered greatly in the past decades and offers reasons why that is so and why it's problematic.

I can't say that I agree with everything here—but I will say that it's well worth reading.

Doty, Paul, "Fish, fire, and fallacies: Approaches to information technology and higher education," *portal: Libraries and the academy* 2:4 (2002): 647-52.

Must libraries and universities rebuild themselves to meet the technological expectations of intractable teenagers? Do we really know what those expectations are? Doty questions some standing assumptions about the expectations of youth and goes on to suggest some alternatives.

He believes (correctly, in my opinion) that the "inevitable" movement of most or all higher education to online forms is neither inevitable nor particularly likely, at least for undergraduate education. Quite the opposite: "Unless students have no option but online delivery, they are going to measure their education in terms of change." In some ways, this is another "human nature" argument, one that makes excellent sense. It has little to do with the many areas in which distance and online education can be important, particularly for lifelong learning and second-career coursework.

Sure, some kids really want to stay at home while they go to college—but many, perhaps most, *really* don't. Thoughtful ones recognize that socialization is an important part of the undergraduate experience, and that part of socialization is distance from the past. I suspect a lot of kids who grow up in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts are *disinclined* to apply to Harvard or MIT.

Doty also suggests that making research so easy as to be trivial may trivialize learning—not that libraries should erect or maintain artificial barriers, but that learning how to learn is important.

Doty understands that academic libraries are part of (and help to define) academic communities

just as public libraries help to define cities and towns. "It strikes me that the circumstances of a university campus are perfect for libraries to argue what a collection is to (and for) students, and thus strike a contrast between university community (something that's new) and the Internet (something that's old and tried to an eighteen-year-old)."

Here's another quote I'd like to believe is true, although there are certainly forces that would falsify it: "Research at universities on opposite sides of a river is going to be taught differently because the communities are different." Not, unfortunately, if the notion that access matters and collections don't is wholly successful. The result is to homogenize library collections so that the libraries become indistinguishable one from another.

A thoughtful, **recommended** paper.

Gibbons, Susan, "Building upon the MyLibrary concept to better meet the information needs of college students," *D-Lib* 9:3 (March 2003). www.dlib.org

Gibbons (University of Rochester) notes the low usage rate of most MyLibrary systems to begin an article that's really about using MyLibrary-like software to do something quite different: Online course packs or course portals. It's an interesting writeup of what appears to be a useful application.

I wonder about Gibbons' repeated use of "push library resources to patrons" to describe MyLibrary systems. Unless used for SDI, MyLibrary seems to be a filtering system (true filtering, not censorship)—but the student still needs to log on and ask for resources. Is it true that "Library resource systems *need* the capacity to push resources to users"?

It is exactly the comprehensiveness of the catalog that *necessitates* a MyLibrary-type system to help the average user find the most pertinent resources from among the several million potentially represented in the catalog.

Is that true? I wonder.

Gibbons makes the excellent point (citing Andrew Pace) that some (not all) MyLibrary systems diminish the value of library print resources by containing only digital resources—although again, that's not inherent in the software.

I have other nits, but they're little ones. Rochester's course pages bring the librarian into the loop by having "an animated image (the only moving on the page) that serves as a link to 'Ask a Librarian'"—but isn't one animated image still an enormous distraction on a research page? I also have mixed feelings about this quote from a librarian: "I am planning to use [the CoURse Resources pages] as a starting point for all of my bibliographic instruction sessions

to draw students' attention to the incredible benefits of such a feature. It's like having dinner ready on the table, waiting to be eaten." But isn't the point of BI to enable students to fix their own dinner, to stick with the analogy?

Those are minor points, a few sentences out of an interesting 10-page article. Rochester's CoURse Resources software is freely available.

Hammill, Sarah J., "Usability testing at Florida International University Libraries: What we learned," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* 4:1 (2003). <http://southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/>

FIU Libraries introduced a new website in Fall 2001. This article offers notes on web usability testing, how they did it at FIU, and what they found. This was true testing—they asked specific questions and measured how many clicks it took people to answer them (or fail).

The results range from fascinating to frustrating, although the small sample size limits projectability. For example, one student library employee had no idea how to find out whether the library owned a particular book, even though the home page has a link entitled "FIU Library Catalogs." "He explained that he was a freshman and had never used the library home page."

Most subjects tested did not look in the library catalog to see whether the library owned a particular journal, instead going to "Articles by subject."

Asked to find "the database Academic Index," a fair number of test subjects did not click on "Alphabetical list of all Electronic Resources." That shouldn't be surprising: I'm in the business, and I wouldn't equate "electronic resource" with "database." On the other hand, most users *could* find journal articles on diabetes—"Articles by subject" did seem clear. As for ordering an intercampus loan—well, the question "Did they understand the difference between Intercampus Loan and Interlibrary Loan?" almost answers itself.

Here's an odd one. There's a link called "Subject Guides" and one question was "Does the Libraries' Web site have a guide to doing research in Nutrition and Culture?" Most people couldn't answer the question—in some cases because "research" didn't appear as part of the link.

The study resulted in some easy changes and a plan to continue usability studies. It's a good article, particularly if you're redesigning your own website.

Hannay, William M., "The market power of publishers," *Against the Grain* 15:1 (February 2003): 24-8.

This presentation was one of the most fascinating at last year's Charleston Conference. Hannay, an attorney, discusses Reed Elsevier's acquisition of Harcourt General Inc. in 2001 and its review by the U.K. Competition Commission, the antitrust arm of the U.K. It's a detailed, interesting, and somewhat disturbing report—particularly because "the rate of change in the provision of electronic access to STM journal content" was cited as one reason to *allow* the acquisition, noting SPARC and other initiatives. On the other hand, Morgan Stanley Equity Research says, "The nature of the [scientific publishing] industry is highly unlikely to change."

Is it possible that the various new initiatives actually *encourage* marketplace consolidation by offering a defense against monopoly arguments? If so, isn't that a problem?

Janes, Joseph, "Why is the Internet Public Library broke?" *American Libraries* 34:3 (March 2003): 86.

Janes harks back to the beginning of the Internet Public Library at the University of Michigan eight years ago and wonders about its survival. He notes, correctly, that there's no real "community" to serve as a natural funding base for IPL, but also draws parallels with the funding difficulties some other libraries are having, and ends with this sentence (and a tag that's irrelevant to this commentary):

Quite possibly, the IPL's peril is a warning for all libraries: If people aren't willing to, or don't see the necessity of paying for digital works, this could bode ill for us all.

In one sense, he's right—any public library that focuses *entirely* on digital resources is quite likely to be in trouble. Every poll I've ever heard of says that people want their public libraries to have books, first and foremost—print books, that is. Ignoring that desire and focusing on digital service as more important than the physical plant and collection could well "bode ill" for libraries.

There's another problem, one I've had with IPL ever since its founding: The name. As I told Janes in email, I have seen more than one non-librarian commentator point to IPL and say, "See? You don't need to pay for a local public library: The Internet can do it all!"

The original design of the site encouraged that sad notion: It was, as Janes says, "Designed as an online analogue to the brick-and-mortar public library." Once you do that, the ignorati who look to cut local taxes by any means possible (and who don't use public libraries—although their spouses and children do) pick it up as a statement *by the li-*

brary profession that local libraries are obsolete. Not a good thing to do.

If I have readers who've been involved with IPL, you're probably preparing your angry feedback, explaining that that wasn't what IPL was about *at all*. I'm sure you're right, and I'll probably use your feedback—but awareness of unintended consequences is important. When librarians call a website a “public library” and design it to show similar functions, they shouldn't be too surprised when people think it could be a substitute for a real public library.

Mann, Thomas, “Why the cybergurus are wrong about libraries: Thinking outside the box of the Internet,” *LOGOS* 13:4 (2002): 190-98.

I suspect I'd love to read *LOGOS*, “the journal of the world book community,” on a regular basis—I see at least one or two other interesting articles from 2002—but I saw this article because Thomas Mann sent me an offprint. I've mentioned Mann's work before. He's an LC reference librarian who does careful research, thinks deeply and writes well. He also believes in the continuing significance of libraries and their collections.

This article notes that there are still quite a few who regard physical collections as outdated and digital access to everything as nirvana. Mann takes issue with that, not just because everything hasn't been (and won't be) digitized, but because—barring a socialist revolution—it's impossible and potentially destructive for everything to be available to everyone at all times on the Internet.

I may rail against excesses of copyright in “Copyright Currents,” but that's quite different from abandoning the concept that writers should have some control over their creations and should be able to gain compensation for their work. If you grant those notions, there is simply no way for universal access to work—again, barring economic norms that have consistently proven unworkable.

Mann details the unarticulated assumptions behind the view that “all information will ultimately become freely available online, accessible from anywhere, at any time, by anyone” and points out that *actual, physical* libraries offer the most plausible method to make “information” (that is, recorded messages) “freely available to citizens.”

It's a careful argument. It's also worth noting that he's not calling for the One Big Library; he believes that the best available solution is “the widespread geographic dispersion of real libraries-with-walls throughout thousands of separate communities.” (He also points out that human nature changes much more slowly than technology, undermining most claims of technological inevitability.)

Highly recommended. If you think Mann's wrong, enlighten me as to how we achieve universal access to all recorded information without establishing a Marxist economy or requiring that all creation be done for free (which would be even less plausible than a workable Marxist economy).

Sapp, Greg, and Ron Gilmour, “A brief history of the future of academic libraries: Predictions and speculations from the literature of the profession, 1975 to 2000,” *portal: Libraries and the academy* 2:4 (2002): 553-576 and 3:1 (2003): 13-34.

Would you be seeing more *portal* citations if I received the print publication? I have no idea—but I can say there were some fascinating articles last year and this. This two-part history is “brief” in that it's not a 600-page book, but I'd guess it's equivalent to 100-125 book pages. Part one (1975 to 1989) includes 19 pages of text and 136 footnotes; part two (1990 to 2000), 17 pages of text and 133 footnotes.

And yet, this is just a slice of that recent history. Each work discussed (except for the first few years) either cites F. W. Lancaster's work or cites a work that does so. While I don't doubt that Lancaster's *Toward paperless information systems* is “the most influential piece of predictive writing among late twentieth century library publications,” many thinkers and writers worked independently of Lancaster's ideas.

I didn't realize just how far back the concept that print books *ought* to go away entered the academic library mainstream. How about 1961 and J.C.R. Licklider's *Libraries of the Future*, based on a CLR commission? Perhaps it's true that “the physicality of printed books makes them intrinsically inefficient means for storing, organizing, and retrieving information,” to which the first response might be that “information” is a misleading and narrow term for the worth of library collections.

As always, of course, one way to become well known is to be an extremist. From Licklider's extreme we get to Ellsworth Mason's “The great gas bubble prick't,” which exposed the whole library automation business for the complete fraud that it is, thus putting an end to all that computer nonsense. Remember these sentences?

Computerizing library operations at present and projected costs, and with foreseeable results, is intellectually and fiscally irresponsible and managerially incompetent. The proper answer to idiots who beamingly dangle their computerized projects for our admiration is, Why don't you do something useful, instead.

I was one of those idiots then, albeit on a smaller scale than Fred Kilgour, Henriette Avram, and the

BALLOTS Team. Some of us were taken aback by Mason's sheer vehemence—but we soldiered on.

Lancaster used the magic word in his landmark 1978 book: *inevitability*. That's what he said about a future all-electronic system of scholarly communication. Resisting could lead to the demise of librarianship. By the year 2000, paperless information systems would prevail in all fields, with print surviving principally for recreational reading. If libraries survived at all, they might be "printout centers" for those without their own computers. A few years later, one writer expected the "disembodiment" of the traditional library to be essentially complete by the year 2000.

What happened with Lancaster's book and related articles? Most reviews were favorable and, I suspect, helped this viewpoint become Accepted Wisdom well into the 1990s. For too many librarians (and apparently some library school faculty), it still is: More's the pity.

That's a small piece of an engrossing, well-documented history. We see Richard de Gennaro's balanced, nuanced perspective—that new technologies are needed but that academic libraries must also strengthen traditional collections and services: "The electronic dimension cannot be developed at the expense of the traditional." We see the debate over the future of technical services (if any). Naturally, we see overly conservative estimates as well as pure technolust; that's to be expected. And, along with many outrageous arguments, we find noted many thoughtful perspectives.

Highly recommended.

Werking, Richard Hume, "Vessels and voyagers: Some thoughts on reading and writing, books and libraries," *portal: Libraries and the academy* 3:1 (2003): 1-12.

Werking offers a few historical notes on reading and writing, books and libraries, with a focus on some controversies of the past decade. He goes back early, noting Plato's worry that writing would not "reveal the writer the way the soul of a speaker was exposed" (quoting William Gass) and that, over time, "the position of Socrates and Plato lost out... Because it did, we know today what Socrates thought 2,500 years ago." Of course, even in the west, the many roles of oral communication continue to thrive—consider that this article began as a keynote, a form of oral communication.

Jumping ahead (and skipping lots of fascinating material), we get to Nicholson Baker and his assertion at one presentation that "Keeping things is really *all* that it's about," which reveals just how badly Baker misunderstands libraries and their func-

tions. "Keeping things" isn't even all that archives are about.

I'd almost forgotten the misbegotten Benton Report, perhaps the peak of the "embrace the dark side—er—digital future" movement, and the 1997 *Library Trends* issue considering that report. (I certainly remember Andrew Odlyzko's contribution to that issue, in which he attacked Michael Gorman and me for failing to *recognize* the "desirability and inevitability of dramatic change" and that "printed matter will eventually be relegated to niche status." Six years later, I continue not to recognize either of those "facts" and to regard Odlyzko as a simplistic if well spoken extremist.)

Giving the devil his due, Werking admits to the possibility that Odlyzko could be right—that, once there are light, flexible high-resolution displays, "print will be truly obsolete." I doubt it. In any case, Werking's right on his next point: "What I think we *do* know is that there will continue to be both change and continuity in librarianship." And I like this: "We like to do some things because we can do them, not necessarily because they will meet some important social or educational purpose." A great reason to climb mountains; perhaps not such a great reason to advocate the inevitable overthrow of existing practices and technologies.

This talk-as-article is *not* a diatribe, and I've only covered a few of Werking's points. **Well worth reading.**

Scholarly Article Access

(Formerly The Access Puzzle)

Here's what I was thinking about as I put together this section. Feel free to disagree with or ignore any of these points.

- If "output charges" for refereed articles (as proposed for FOS) are built into grant funding—the way library overhead should be, but generally hasn't been—then one of my primary worries about FOS [that the money will come straight out of library budgets] *may* go away.
- It's *certainly* true that disciplines that rely heavily on monographs, and the long-term health of library book collections, have been damaged by the absurd increases in journal costs. If those costs go down (and if shelf space is freed up) through FOS and other initiatives *without* destroying library budgets in the process, book collections might regain some health.

- If Richard Abel's right—that journal articles are the raw material of scholarship—this would be a very good thing in most disciplines.
- However, there's little question that some scholars see academic libraries as little more than intermediaries for scholarly articles.
- Thus, if libraries no longer play that role (thanks to overall FOS success), then faculty might be even less inclined than they already are to support library funding.
- If it's also true—as I believe—that *core* journals are unlikely to become electronic-only or be replaced by FOS initiatives, at least for some decades, then one of my other qualms (the difficulty for a new scholar of getting up to speed when browsing the back run of core journals, when there are no bound print volumes) *may* go away.
- And if it's true that most core journals in most (or many) disciplines are, or should be, produced by nonprofits and associations and come with modest subscription prices, then the muddled future of the whole process might make more sense.
- Just as it's clear that some players in the current chaos simply assume that no university or college ever disappears, and that no academic institution would ever pull the plug on ongoing-but-unsupported computer systems (both of which strike me as dicey assumptions), it's pretty clear that nobody wants to look at actual paper consumption, *overall* costs, and ecological issues of print vs. electronic for heavily-read journals.
- Speaking of issues nobody wants to look at, here's a biggie. There's some reason to believe that refereed journals function similarly to highways: As one fills up, creating another one causes an increase in usage that fills that one up as well. Or, to drop the analogy, what portion of the two million (or three million, or whatever) articles that appear each year in refereed journals really don't add to the store of human knowledge? I think of two categories in particular: Articles written entirely for tenure-related reasons, with no expectation that *anyone* will ever read them; and “least publishable unit” articles or deli-slicing publishing, cases where a worthwhile research project is published in several (or many) slender articles instead of one or two major articles.

I'm not a scholar. I can't get this all to make sense. I don't even know how many of those bullets I completely believe, although I believe there's some truth in all of them.

My own primary interests are in fields where monographs and books in general continue to be core to the fields, and where most core serial publications are, indeed, inexpensive (for individuals *and* for institutions) and mostly association-published. As a reader and sometime student of media, I find magazines more interesting than journals—and sometimes the lines are a little fuzzy there as well.

So, for now and the foreseeable future, I'm not even going to try to make sense of this. I'll just highlight some interesting pieces on various aspects of scholarly communication at the article level.

Free Online Scholarship

Peter Suber has put together a concise “Timeline of the free online scholarship movement” (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/timeline.htm). He begins with Medline in 1966, currently omits books, articles, and speeches, and notes directly that the timeline is weak in the middle years. (At some point, Peter Suber and Charles W. Bailey, Jr., could profitably collaborate, given the quality of the work both are doing in related fields.) **Recommended**, both as a timeline and set of links and as an ongoing project that welcomes your input.

Suber, Peter, “Removing the barriers to research: An introduction to open access for librarians,” *College & Research Libraries* 64 (February 2003): 92-94.

C&RL is a print publication—but one with entirely reasonable institutional pricing. It's a core mostly-refereed journal for academic librarians. I suspect it's a lousy candidate for a FOS alternative. I suspect ACRL has no problem with self-archived articles or open access after publication.

It's also the print home of this clearly written argument for FOS. If you're not up to speed on what FOS is all about, you could hardly do better. If you are, it's still one of the clearest pieces of pro-FOS argumentation I've seen. Does that mean I'm totally convinced? No—but the introduction to this section shows just how confused I am at this point. **Recommended** and available at www.earlham.edu/~peters/writing/acrl.htm for those outside the U.S. or the rare U.S. *Cites & Insights* reader without access to *C&RL*.

Prosser, David, “SPARC Europe on open access,” *UKSG Serials-eNews*, March 5, 2003. www.biblio-tech.com/UKSG/ (and a comment by Peter Suber in the FOS News weblog)

Oddly, David Prosser's name doesn't appear as a direct byline, but a heading says “Prosser attacks the kernel problem...” and Suber's response identifies

him by name. Presumably, UK serials folk know who “Prosser” refers to...

Prosser proposes a split option, one apparently in use for some entomology journals. If an author elects to pay a publication charge, the article becomes open to all immediately upon publication. If an author does *not* pay a publication charge, the article’s only available to subscribers.

Such a model would allow for some interesting work on the effects of open access; Prosser mentions that as one of seven advantages of such a model. He also clearly states four disadvantages and offers some potential scenarios.

Suber not only likes the idea (in a March 21, 2003 posting) but offers a additional advantages.

Recommended as an intriguing middle ground. I’m still not sure how print-vs.-electronic plays out in this scenario, but that really is a secondary issue. The split approach appears to reduce or remove many of the risks involved in converting to open access and, as a result, encourages movement in that direction without requiring an act of faith.

Related Articles and Events

Dillon, Irma F., and Karla L. Hahn, “Are researchers ready for the electronic-only journal collection? Results of a survey at the University of Maryland,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 2:3 (2002): 375-390. (Downloaded at a point when access was free.)

portal is one of those odd pieces of the article access puzzle: A reasonably-priced journal created largely because of discomfort with price increases and other changes at the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. I haven’t seen it often, partly because it’s not an open-access journal—but there have been times when it’s been freely available through Project MUSE, and I printed off a few articles during one of those times. (See “Library Stuff.”)

None of which has much to do with the article at hand, which includes ten dense pages of text followed by notes and survey instruments. The survey in question was web-based, done in spring 2001 and aimed at faculty and grad students. It includes enough prefatory material to show its relationship to other similar studies and to note that full-text access imposes its own overhead. Roughly 3,600 surveys were distributed; 1,232 were completed, a very good response rate and a large enough sample to be meaningful by almost any definition.

There’s too much here to summarize thoroughly, and I **recommend** reading the paper if you have access to *portal*. A few notes:

- Just over half of the faculty use electronic versions of print journals at least monthly; 31% never use them. 58% of faculty use library print journals at least monthly; 12% never do. Only 29% use pure e-journals at least monthly—and 42% had never used e-journals.
- Faculty regularly use electronic resources other than library services—particularly association websites, conference proceedings, and author’s websites. 10% of respondents use preprint servers.
- Most faculty—70%—want *core* journals to be available in both print and electronic form. The same percentage would prefer to see *non-core* journals only in electronic form.
- The most popular reasons for moving to electronic access are getting a copy, access to back issues, convenience, reliable access, and access to full content. Problems are image quality, layout, and access to full *journal* content.
- Science and technology faculty use journals (in all forms) more than faculty as a whole—but responses on preferred forms of access to core and non-core journals were comparable to faculty as a whole. 68% of sci-tech faculty want both forms of access to core titles; 75% want electronic-only access to non-core titles.

Good study, clear analysis, no apparent bias. An excellent article.

Palmer, Janet P., and Mark Sandler, “What do faculty want?” *Library Journal*, January 15, 2003.

This article reports on interviews with 61 social science faculty members at the University of Michigan regarding their use of print and electronic journals. I could do without the introductory comments about “creating the digital library of the future while simultaneously continuing to fund, house, and manage the print library of the past and present”—particularly since Michigan maintains a healthy monographic print acquisitions budget.

That grump aside, it’s an interesting report—one that disclaims generalization. This group of faculty members (in economics, sociology, and anthropology) like e-journals but also like to print out the articles, particularly for serious study. One respondent wants *everything* online, and one historical sociologist doesn’t care about journals at all—just articles.

When it comes to books—they want books. Print books. Some of them even know why. Most of them maintain personal (print) journal subscriptions (for core journals?). One or two people might be happy to see journals fade away, but at least one

pointed out the virtue of browsing print runs and getting a feel for context.

A couple understand that digital resources may not always be available—a concern that convinces one to keep a personal hardcopy collection. Interestingly, while most “print partisans” (those who prefer paper journals to full-text access) are old fogies like me, one is a junior faculty member who finds printing individual articles ecologically unsound. She has a point. All in all, an interesting informal report on carefully done research. **Worth reading.**

Willinsky, John, “Scholarly associations and the economic viability of open access publishing,” *Journal of Digital Information* 4:2 (2003). <http://jodi.ecs.soton.ac.uk>.

This long article (23 single-space print pages, the last six of which are notes) is in a free online refereed journal. Willinsky (University of British Columbia) looks at the tax returns for 20 U.S. scholarly associations to analyze current publishing revenues against costs. It is, to be sure, very much an argument *for* open access, one that appears to regard print as hopelessly outmoded.

Willinsky uses “transitional” way too much for my taste, and I have no reason to doubt that he really sees a transition to an all-digital future. He appears to call for dropping print editions of journals, and does not seem to consider that this could ever be harmful to anyone except for-profit publishers. He does a pretty good job of making print sound quaint: “With print there was reason to make readers and libraries pay for elaborately published volumes, prepared in specialized print shops, well-bound on good paper...”

He poses a key question in a way that suggests “When will you stop beating your spouse”:

The scholarly association has, then, to put the question to its membership: Is this organization devoted to maintaining its current revenue levels or is it devoted to serving the professional interests of its members in fostering the greater development and circulation of knowledge?

I would guess that some members in some associations might say it’s not so simple and should not be either-or. Associations mostly want (need!) to keep expenditures within revenues. Most effective associations need central staff and do a great many things besides publish journals. And the case for abandoning print has simply not been made across the board for all disciplines, except by assertion.

I can’t imagine that any association would be disturbed by a decrease in revenues that was matched by a decrease in expenses and that did not

cause a reduction in services and effectiveness. But that’s a more complex issue.

There’s a lot of interesting material here. I may take issue with some of the assumptions and some of the argumentation, but that doesn’t mean Willinsky’s wrong or not worth reading. The article is **certainly worth reading**; draw your own conclusions. (Oh yes: One tidbit is that BioMed Central, claimed as a great success story in open access publishing, “is not yet a profitable venture.”)

Perspective

Grading the Home Pages: PC Magazine’s Best 100 “Undiscovered” Sites for 2002

Here’s how I put it in the May 1999 *Library Hi Tech News*, introducing the first of an occasional series grading home pages of “important” websites. A participant in a Midwinter 1999 LITA Human-Machine Interest Group discussion had noted research suggesting that the “old design rules” don’t apply on the Web:

With only three to five seconds before a user clicks somewhere else, she said, a good site should *not* leave any white space and should cram as much as possible on the page.

I challenged that research result and continue to challenge the notion that design rules don’t apply to the World Wide Web. Useful sites should not be designed primarily for maddened clickers treating the Web as a five million channel cable TV system and their mouses as remote controls. They should be designed to serve people who actually have uses for the Web. That may be an idealistic notion.

During the session, I mentioned that I was intrigued by the *PC Magazine* list [the “top 100 websites”] and had toyed with the idea of judging the sites using a simple set of criteria—not for the content, but for the quality of the home page. Based on the discussion that ensued, I decided to do exactly that...

I am *not* judging the overall quality of these sites. I’m judging speed, simplicity, coherence, and other aspects of the home page—or, in a few cases, a largely empty initial home page and the “real” home page behind it. The “top 100” site that scores lowest in my evaluation is one that I check once or twice a day—but it’s painful to look at, no matter how interesting the content.

If you’re reading *Cites & Insights* because of the “disContent” column in the May 2003 *EContent*, welcome. Here’s the follow-up I promised: You can

skip down to “Overall Winners and Losers.” If you’re not an *EContent* reader, I hope you’ll find this interesting on its own merits. (If you do, go look for the April and May “disContent” columns: They’re related, although each piece stands on its own.) Crossover readers will find some of this repetitious in order to make it self-contained, but I go into more detail here because there’s no 1,350-word limit. You may also want to find “Top 100 undiscovered web sites,” *PC Magazine* 21:4 (February 26, 2002): 86-97, for the full site names and why *PC* thought they were important.

I did a followup study in 2000. The April 2003 “disContent” column covers a very different “top 100”—the *EContent* 100, 100 companies considered most significant within the digital content industry. It was, as I expected, a mixed bag—but, overall, a better set of scores than the 1999 or 2000 *PC Magazine* hundred. As a basis for comparison, I followed that up this month (written earlier, to be sure), judging the “top 100 classic sites” from the same *PC Magazine* section, since those are the sites most comparable to the 1999 and 2000 sets.

Changes in Scoring

In the first two studies, I used six objective and five subjective criteria, subtracting points from a “perfect 100” based on each criterion. Theoretically, a site could wind up with a score as low as 2 (given 50 objective penalty points and 48 subjective points).

Given changes in the web, I dropped the old “ad delta” timing—the *difference* between appearance of the first ad on a page and the time pages finished loading. There aren’t many sites these days with such “look at this ad for a minute or two” practices.

The new sets of tests include more objective criteria. Scores for load time are tougher now (but I’m also testing at 52k rather than 28k) and the maximum penalties for “too many items” and animation are lower.

The new scoring system begins with two hundred-point scores, one for objective measures, one for subjective. The overall grade is the average of the two. In both cases, the *worst* possible grade is in the mid-30s. My grading is far too easy: A+ for 95-100, A for 90-94, B+ for 85-89, B for 80-84, C for 70-79, D for 60-69. (I *know* my subjective grades are too easy, but aren’t we in an era of grade inflation?)

The Basics

What would it take to achieve a perfect score?

- Given a typical rendering of the site’s name or function as a set of words, show the site within the first five results in Google or AllTheWeb

- Load in 12 seconds or less on a very fast PC running IE6 over a 52k connection (with cache and history cleared before each session)
- Have no ads, don’t require Flash or Java for the home page, and don’t have cookies that IE6 considers questionable at its default security setting (typically third-party ad and tracking cookies)
- Have no more than nine major sectors and no more than ten selectable items
- Don’t have changing fields, blinking, music, or sound unless something is clicked
- Don’t require horizontal scrolling at 1024x768 with Favorites open, at around 600x800, or at 1280x1024—and don’t be squashed up against the left edge of the screen at high resolution
- Let me use my preferred typeface, and don’t force an absolute type size: IE’s typesize controls should work
- Have a site map and search function available from the homepage

The subjective measures:

- Don’t use shaded, colored, or patterned background behind text or use light text that reduces readability
- Put the site’s name right up front—top left and the most important element
- Use white space effectively; don’t cram everything together
- Let me know what the site’s about
- Make it clear where I can or should go, what I can do. Don’t use hidden links or “mystery meat” navigation
- Be pleasant to look at—either a minimalist aesthetic or at least one that’s not annoying.

No site scored a perfect hundred overall. Four came close. No site scored a perfect hundred on objective criteria—but eight didn’t have any subjective failings strong enough to lose points.

Caveat, Conditions, Disappearances and Changes

I am *not* judging the usefulness of the sites. I’m just looking at the design and graffiti of the front door, if you will. Every one of these sites has value for some people; *PC Magazine* isn’t entirely quixotic in its choices. Two of the lower-ranked sites for objective problems are sites I use every week.

All testing was done on a Gateway 500X with 2.2GHz Pentium4 CPU, 256MB of RDRAM, MS Windows XP Professional, and an nVidia GeForce4 graphics card (128MB of SDRAM) driving an 18" display. The only software running other than Internet Explorer 6 was Norton AntiVirus. For the pur-

poses of testing, I set the display to 1024x768 (32-bit color), cleared the cache (including saved files) and history for each session, and set my preferred typeface to Bradley Hand ITC so that I could be *certain* whether a site was forcing type. (Bradley Hand is a “handwritten” typeface.) I used an AT&T Worldnet dial-up account that *always* connected at 52kbps—if it didn’t, I logged off and tried again. If I had encountered a string of slow load times, I would have stopped testing and retried later, assuming Net congestion, but that never happened.

When I tested the “classic 100” sites from 1992, eight of them had moved but none had disappeared. I found that remarkable given the general state of the Internet. “Undiscovered” sites should tend to be more fragile—but appearing in *PC Magazine* probably improves the life expectancy of a site.

In fact, only one site of the unknown hundred seems gone entirely: Mind-It.

DSL Reports has a new name at its old URL. Dictionary.com has a new URL but the old one yields a fast redirect; ditto the Linux Documentation Project. Cooking Light *will* be disappearing, essentially, as it disappears behind AOL Time Warner’s latest bad idea (with content available only to AOL subscribers). Spook has the same URL—but the magazine’s name is now *Metropole*. (*Spook was/Metropole* is a full-color ad-supported Web-based magazine, free for the taking if you can handle an 89MB PDF download and color printing.) Completely Free Software has the same URL and name—but it’s a misnomer, since this heavily Christian site now offers almost all of its software by paid subscription.

That’s not bad: One disappearance, six new URLs or other changes that might surprise the unwary—about the same as for big commercial sites.

Finally, two of the 99 sites began with splash pages, graphics from which nothing at all could be done. In both cases (Penzey’s Spices and Red Meat) I moved on to the real home page and included that load time in overall timing.

Overall Winners and Losers

Four sites scored A+, averaging 95 or more. In descending order by points and alphabetically within a single point, they are Google Groups; Nonags and Teoma; and the Easter Egg Archives.

Twenty more earned overall As: Allen’s Winappslst, FILext, and the Internet Traffic Report; Book-a-Minute, RecipeSource, and Red Meat; AirSafe, Annoyances.org, Dictionary.com, Kalustyan’s, and NASA Human Space Flight; Acronym Finder, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, FunBrain, and

Vanguard Group; and Answers That Work, Bibliomania, Consumer Review, PBS Online, and Tom-Paine.com.

Another 41 sites earned B+ grades; 24 more earned Bs—the same number as earned A and A+.

Ten sites dropped to C: the Visual Elements Periodic Table; Kissthisguy.com; Ain’t It Cool, DVD Review, and MedicineNet; DevX and Ifilm; Wargamer; Jumbo!; and InteliHealth.

Nobody scored “D” or “F” overall.

By comparison, the 1999 *PC Magazine* list included eight As and 28 Bs (14 B+, 14B); 29 Cs, 16 Ds, and 18 so low I could only give them Fs—including two that dropped below 50. A fair number of those sites either disappeared or cleaned up their act. The 2002 “classic” sites included five A+, 24 A, 29 B+, 26 B, and 16 C—a few more at the top and bottom than the “undiscovered” sites reviewed here.

Objective Scores and Criteria

No website earned a perfect objective score. None earned A+, for that matter. Seven earned A, with scores between 90 and 94: Nonags; Google Groups; Teoma; and, in a four-way tie with a bare 90 points, Allen’s Winappslst, Bookfinder, Easter Egg Archives, and FILext.

Twenty-one sites earned B+ on an objective basis, another 25 B—all sites that had enough annoyances to be significant but not enough to be troubling. Twenty-seven more scored 75 to 79—mediocre but not too bad. Then there were the trouble spots:

- Nine sites came in between 70 and 74: Atlantic Online, CharityAmerica, and shockwave; The Onion and Poynter.org; Allrecipes.com and the Visual Elements Periodical Table; Evite; and Time Out.
- Four earned a gentleman’s D+: DevX and Ifilm; DVD Review; and National Review Online.
- Five earned low Ds: Ain’t It Cool and Nick Jr.; InteliHealth; MedicineNet; and Jumbo!
- Wargamer was such a mess by my objective standards that it dropped to 58—but that “failing” grade may be just fine for its audience, presumably all possessed of broadband and deep interest in what’s there. I couldn’t get away fast enough.

Let’s look at the individual criteria, highlighting winners and losers depending on general trends.

Google Placement

If you key the word equivalent of a site’s name into Google (or AllTheWeb, check-tested in a few cases), will you get the site within the first five listings (ig-

noring paid listings)? In all but two cases, the answer is Yes—almost always the first listing. The two exceptions: Dictionary.com and MedicineNet. Each of those lost four points.

Load Time

A majority of home web users still use dial-up connections; some of us don't see much reason to change. I think most of us are more patient at home than at work. Any load time of ten seconds or less strikes me as snappy enough (for the home page).

Using a stopwatch, I took the time from clicking on the link in Google (or hitting Enter after keying in the URL for the two "non-Google" sites) until the page stopped loading, including clicking to the real home page for the two sites with splash pages.

The first ten seconds were free. After that, I knocked off one point for each six seconds, to a maximum of 8 points (55 seconds or more).

Eight sites maxed out, taking 55 seconds or more to load: Ain't It Cool, Cartoon Network, Dusty Groove America, Fish Out of Time, Ifilm, Poynter.org, the Visual Elements Periodic Table, and Wargamer. I stopped Dusty Groove America at two minutes, at which point it had loaded less than a third of the absurd *120 album covers* on its home page. (Apparently, vinyl lovers are all broadband users.) The Cartoon Network, Ifilm, and Wargamer also took more than 90 seconds, but at least each of those did finish.

I suspect most first-time users would give up on those eight sites before they ever finished loading—and many would also give up on those taking more than roughly 45 seconds to load. National Review Online and Star Wars each lost seven points (49 seconds or more); DVD Review, GORP, MedicineNet, New Republic, Nick Jr., The Onion, and pets-welcome lost six (43 seconds or more).

I was pleased to see that 23 of the 99 sites didn't lose *any* timing points, loading in 12 seconds or less. Five took less than eight seconds: the Linux Documentation Project, Consumer Review, Acronym Finder, Teoma, and Google Groups.

Advertising

There's nothing wrong with the occasional ad if it brings me free messages and services I'd otherwise have to pay for, but ads can be irritating—and popup/popunder/"pop-exit" ads are much worse than regular ads.

I deducted a single point for each ad, with a maximum of four points—but two for each popup/popunder, for a maximum of six *total*. I did not count "house ads," banners for services or features within the site itself.

Most sites (51 of 99) don't have external ads.

Seven sites maxed out, losing six points for ads and popups/popunders: Allrecipes, Cooking Light, National Review Online, Time Out, UselessKnowledge.com, and Wargamer.

Ain't It Cool, DriverGuide, and Yahoo! Maps lost five points each.

Flash and Java

While I didn't go so far as to disable scripting, I don't have Flash or Java installed—and I don't see why the average *home page* needs either one. Most sites didn't: 96 of the 99 did not run into this irritation. I subtracted three points for either one; no site wanted both.

I can see why Ifilm wants Flash and Sodaconstructor wants Java—in each case, the sites don't make a lot of sense without the tools.

I don't see why CharityAmerica wants Java, however. You'd think a charity site would keep the bars to entry as low as possible. There are certainly other charity sites that appear more eager to see me.

Questionable Cookies

IE6 offers more security (by default) than earlier IE versions; the medium setting blocks most third-party cookies and some other cookies.

I'm all for cookies that make a site easier to use. I'm not thrilled about ad-tracking cookies and I'm not eager to have spyware cookies on my system. Notably, every site seemed to work properly without the blocked cookies—but they're still an annoyance, every time that little red icon pops up at the bottom of the screen. I knocked off three points for each cookie, with a maximum deduction of six points for two cookies.

Eighty-nine sites didn't have blocked cookies.

Six—InteliHealth, Jumbo!, Kissthisguy.com, Obscure Store & Reading Room, Recipe Source, and our old friend Wargamer, maxed out. Jumbo! had a *dozen* blocked cookies, Wargamer ten. Why?

Busyness: Sectors and Items

Too many sections and links make a home page crowded, messy, and hard to navigate. That's my opinion, although lots of web designers disagree. My "sector" score—one point for each three clearly separate sectors beyond nine, with a maximum of four points (at 21 sectors)—didn't affect more than a handful of sites.

For clickable items, *not* including submenus that spring up through mouseovers, I deducted one point for each ten selectable items beyond the first ten (rounding, so the first 14 were "free"), to a maximum of six points for 65 items or more.

Twenty-three sites scored one point or none, having fewer than 25 items in all.

At the other end, *twenty-nine* maxed out with 65 items (or more) on the home page, and another ten had 55 to 64 items. That's more than a third of the sites, and I think they're all too busy for fast recognition and navigation. I won't name heroes and villains, as there are too many of each.

Animations and Blinking

Blinking text is an abomination. Other than one incredibly annoying flashing ad ("You're a winner") on one site, blinking wasn't an issue—but animated/changing sections popped up more often than I'd like. I deducted two points for each animation on the home page (including ever-changing text or animated graphics, but *not* including animations that occur on mouseovers), with a maximum deduction of six points.

Four sites hit that maximum: Completely Free Software, Jumbo!, Netcraft, and Nick Jr.

Eight had two animations each: Ain't It Cool, Atlantic Online, DevX, IntelliHealth, MedicineNet, National Review Online, Poynter.org, and Time Out. I find it odd that online magazines would put animated segments on their home pages—but so does Poynter, dedicated to building better journalists.

Seventy-eight sites had no animation or changing text.

Music and Sound

I deducted two points if the home page made noise without an explicit request. While I've run into a fair number of ghastly sites that start playing as soon as you hit the home page (boo, hiss), the only two deductions here were much less serious.

Looney Tunes and MedicineNet both have noisy mouseovers. For Looney Tunes, while it's startling, it's also entirely sensible given the nature of the page. Why MedicineNet?

Horizontal Scrolling and Fit

Most of us expect to use the vertical scrollbar. Most of us do *not* expect to use the horizontal scrollbar for anything other than big graphics—and I suspect most people don't notice it when it's there.

I believe competent web design should yield home pages (and other pages) that fit horizontally within a 800x600 browser with Favorites open, or *at least* in a 1024x768 browser with Favorites open. I deducted two points if a site showed a horizontal scroll bar in either of these cases, four if both.

Does a page take advantage of the available space, or at least center narrower content on a wider screen? If the content was scrunched over to the left either at 1024x768 *without* Favorites or, if I wasn't

sure, at 1280x1024, with a big white space (or a big solid color-fill) to the right and no space to the left, I also deducted two points.

- Four sites *never* got it right: CharityAmerica, DevX, Kissthisguy.com, and Tom Paine showed a horizontal scroll bar in every situation.
- Seven other sites handled high resolution well but showed a scroll bar both with Favorites and on a smaller display: Ain't It Cool, Freeware Arena, Kalustyan's, MedicineNet, Safari Tech Books, Wargamer, and Yahoo! Maps.
- Most sites want at least all of an 800x600 display, showing a horizontal scroll bar with Favorites open, although they fit on 1024x768 with Favorites. Only 31 displayed without horizontal scroll bar in this case, including 24 that appear to flow neatly into any available screen space.
- A surprising number of sites don't deal well with large display areas: 20 sites in all (in addition to the four overall problems) yielded unbalanced displays at either 1024x768 *without* favorites or 1280x1024. It shouldn't be that hard to center a fixed-width overall display horizontally. Of course, flowing designs are even better.

Typeface

<Rant>When I've asked, it turns out that many (maybe most) web users *do* know how to select a default typeface for their browsers—and quite a few of us have preferences. Most people may not care. For them, Times New Roman works as a very legible and readable typeface. For people who love sans, there are several good ones to choose from, starting with the legible but boring Arial (Helvetica on the Mac).

But once you set a preferred typeface other than Arial in your browser, you notice that you rarely see that typeface when you're browsing. Sites want their own "choice" of typeface—but I don't believe it's really a choice, given that it's almost always the same one.

My June 2003 "disContent" column goes into more detail on typeface and type size issues. No, there is *not* a body of research showing that sans is *more* readable on the screen than serif. There are studies suggesting that serif doesn't have the same readability edge on screen that it does in print—but, except at absurdly small type size, those studies do *not* show a readability preference for sans.

But designers just *love* sans, partly because many designers dislike those ugly words getting in the way of their pretty designs, and sans (particularly Arial/Helvetica) is about as inconspicuous as text

can get. My guess is that a lot of packaged designs come with Arial/Helvetica as a forced type and that most companies don't bother to change them.

</Rant>

Why do I use scare quotes around "choice"? Because using the same typeface that everyone else uses, and refusing to let the user's choice take control, isn't a choice—it's herd behavior.

I would like to deduct more, but I recognize that most people don't care, so I deducted a nominal two points for sites that force a typeface I can't distinguish from Arial. If a site forced some other typeface—*any* other typeface—I deducted a single point.

Eight sites had the grace to let me choose typeface—and every one of them also honored the IE type size setting (that is, click on Largest and the body type gets bigger; click on Smallest, and it gets smaller): Allen's Winappslst, Book-a-Minute, Dusty Groove America, Easter Egg Archives, FIFlex, Netcraft, RecipeSource, and UselessKnowledge.com. (Book-a-Minute is a must-visit, incidentally.)

Eleven others forced typeface but used something other than the ubiquitous Arial: Atlantic Online, BobDylan.com, BookFinder, Cooking Light, FunBrain, Kalustyan's, National Review Online, Obscure Store & Reading Room, Poynter.org, Safari Tech Books, and Spook. Of those, BookFinder, FunBrain, and Kalustyan's honored type size changes.

That leaves a mere 80 sites that insisted that I really should use Arial.

I've fixed this for my own use: In the Accessibility button in IE6, I chose to ignore typestyle changes from the site. Sorry, folks, but I now read your weblogs and other sites in Arrus BT—and if you prefer the web in Comic Sans or Trebuchet or Baskerville or Garamond or Georgia or even, heaven help us, Bauhaus or Playbill, you can do the same.

Type Size

Not letting me choose my own typeface is a minor irritant. Not letting me use larger (usually) or smaller (sometimes) type is a *major* irritant and a significant accessibility issue. Yes, I could ignore type sizes, but that would substantially degrade the appearance and performance of many sites.

I deducted four points if the home page ignored IE type size changes—and using different size bullets didn't count. (You'd be surprised how many sites insist on fixed-pixel or fixed-point type, but let the bullets be as large or small as you want. Strange.)

The sad part: The majority of sites—60 of 99—forced type size, typically a little on the small size for Windows. I'm guessing that a lot of sites are developed on Macs. Who really cares about the other 96% of users, anyway?

Thirty-nine sites (too many to list) did honor type size changes, including the eleven noted above.

Site Map and Search

This one isn't my idea; it was suggested by Mary Ellen Bates in an *EContent* column, as was the Search criterion. She believes every good site should have a site map link and search box on the home page.

I deducted four points if there was no site-map link. Most sites—85 in all—lost points for this; 14 had site map links.

I also deducted four points if there was neither a search box nor a "Search" link. Most sites have one or the other; 27 do not. In some cases, as with site maps, the situation makes sense for the particular site.

Subjective Scores and Criteria

It's clear that I was easy on these subjective scores—rarely giving anything lower than a B, never giving Fs. There are six subjective criteria. On each, a B means a one-point deduction; C two, D three, F four. But the criteria are weighted, so it's possible to have a subjective score as low as 32.

The lowest scores earned C+: Kissthisguy.com and BobDylan.com.

Another eight earned low Bs: DVDReview, F**Company.com, and Jumbo; DSL Reports; Netcraft; and DevX, Ifilm, and InteliHealth.

At the other extreme, I found nothing serious enough to deduct from seven sites: AirSafe, Dictionary.com, Easter Egg Archives, Google Groups, Internet Traffic Report, Teoma, and WebTrain. Another 27 earned slightly lower A+ scores, with 36 more earning A.

Do I really believe 70 out of 99 sites deserved subjective grades this high? No. I was generous.

Background

The most legible and readable type combination is black type on a white background. Colored or shaded type, or type on any background, is less legible. I assigned a weight of two, meaning that a site could lose up to eight points.

Thirty-three of the sites did not use shading or color enough to have points deducted.

At the other extreme. Netcraft earned a "D" for its incredibly hard-to-read text/background combination, and another 15 sites earned "C" (thus losing four points) for difficult-to-read combinations, such as small white type on a black background.

Banner

The most prominent element on a typical website's home page should be the site name, right up in the

top left corner. I deducted points if that wasn't true, again using a weight of two.

BobDylan.com and DSL Reports earned "C" on this criterion. Twenty-one other sites earned "B."

Space

You need *some* white space on a page, including—preferably—at least a little between adjacent columns. While I weighted this deduction a three, in practice I never gave lower than a "B" grade, so no site lost more than three points.

Forty-two sites lacked adequate white space. Fifty-seven used space effectively.

Obviousness

Consider IBM. If you didn't know what IBM was when you got to the home page, you wouldn't know much more after you looked at the home page. What if the name was Smudgecorp or, well, Sodaconstructor?

This problem gets the maximum weight, four, since a home page isn't much good if you don't know what you're looking at. Sodaconstructor earned a "C" (which may be unfair, given that I looked at it without Java); 22 others left me a little vague and earned "B" grades.

Clarity

Are links clearly marked, and is the organization good enough so I have a good idea what I can do from the home page and how to do it? Weight three, maximum deduction 12.

I gave a "C" to one of the most unusual pages, the Visual Elements Periodic Table. Thirty-three other sites earned "B" grades, typically for tricky or hidden links or for vague organization.

Aesthetics

The most subjective of all these ratings, this was based on whether I found the page pleasant, slightly unaesthetic, or bad enough to be positively irritating. I tried to judge aesthetics within the context of the page's audience. As a result, Wargamer (for example) didn't get downgraded badly—I might not like it, but I'm not the audience. Weight three, maximum deduction 12.

I'm delighted to say that 30 sites earned "A," everything from AirSafe to wine.com.

Eighteen earned "C" grades, having enough aesthetic problems that I found them unpleasant to look at. That includes one page I check periodically—and find unpleasant every time I do.

There Is No Moral

What does all this mean? That's hard to say. If a site matters to you, you won't care about most of these

(except possibly load time), and that's as it should be. But most sites want to attract newcomers as well, and there are many marginal sites—sites where you could choose a competitor.

Have you checked your home pages recently? Whether by my criteria or some other set, it wouldn't hurt.

Cheap Shots

Bennett, Hugh, "Multi-family DVD recorders—a cop out," *EMedia* 15:11 (November 2002): 19.

I will be damned if I understand Bennett's viewpoint here, as expressed in the title. Several manufacturers, Sony first among them, have decided to cope with multiple standards for writable DVD by supporting them all—or, rather, by supporting all of them that could ever play on a DVD player. These drives will burn DVD+R, DVD+RW, DVD-R, DVD-RW, and of course CD-R and CD-RW. Not DVD-RAM, but that's a more specialized medium.

"So it's tough luck for the consumer! Hailed by some as a great accomplishment, these new multi-family devices are, to my mind, an industry cop out likely to hurt marketers, manufacturers, and buyers alike."

Why? Because the drives don't "really solve the problem." It's like marketing turntables that could play both 45 and 33rpm records: That ducked the issue of deciding which format would win. What's that you say? Umm...maybe a better analogy would be that it's like marketing radios with both FM and AM bands, ducking the issue of which type of broadcasting made sense. No, that's wrong. Maybe...

Well, you know, for the life of me I can't see how a drive *buyer* can possibly be hurt because the drive can handle all plausible versions of a technology. Sure, buyers have to decide which of "four types of discs" to buy (does Bennett think that one-write and rewrite technologies directly compete?). So?

"Multi-family DVD recorders will curb the healthy and essential forces that work to rationalize products in the marketplace." And, somehow, "*Preventing* consumers from making this a clear-cut format decision will perpetuate the current disuse of all formats and—by inhibiting the possibility for a dominant format family to emerge—will dilute the market and condemn it to persistent mediocrity and confusion." [Emphasis added]

There's questionable history here as well. Bennett speaks of Beta as though it was introduced si-

multaneously with VHS—and assures us “All consumers ultimately benefitted because of the eventual emergence of VHS as the clear victor. Can you imagine what shape the video market would have taken had manufacturers equivocated in the early days and tried to combine a VHS and Betamax recorder?” Well, yes: Those recorders would still be useful, *no matter which format became dominant*. The consumer would win—and some consumers might be smart enough to use Beta for recording (better quality) and VHS for rentals (because marketing muscle assured its dominance).

My Gateway includes six USB2.0 ports (all of which can handle USB1.1 as well) and an IEEE1394/FireWire port—but it also includes parallel, serial, and PS2 keyboard/mouse ports. Why doesn't Gateway have the courage to decide *which single connector* should be used for everything? By Bennett's standards, that's the rational thing to do. So what if my five-year-old HP LaserJet would now be useless? The “healthy and essential forces” of the marketplace would have yielded the single, monolithic, best solution.

Everyone benefits from having only one way to do anything. Shut down Apple and Linux; abandon DTS on DVD soundtracks; if there's more than one standard, we all lose. Right, Hugh?

Fairlie, Rik, “Search engines rank revenue over relevance,” *Computer Shopper* 23:4 (April 2003): 32.

“The first results from *any* search engine will be paid advertisements.” That's the line right below the column title, and it's nonsense. The pull quote says “Make relevance and ad-free results the deciding factors when choosing the search engine.” The article says “Look for—and avoid—terms like “sponsored search listing.”

I'm as indignant as anyone about *hidden* pay-for-placement situations, the way some Overture-related engines used to work (and may still). Google doesn't do that; neither does AllTheWeb. Yes, in some cases the top items on the results page will be sponsored—and they will always, *always* be highlighted, separated from the results list itself, and clearly labeled as sponsored. They look like ads, they are ads, they *help to make search engines free*.

Avoid ads and sponsored search listings? That does raise the question: Who's supposed to pay for all this searching? As far as I know, the government doesn't underwrite any general web search engine. Google makes a lot of money by selling its search technology to corporations—but it earns the rest through the banners above the search list and the sponsored links to the right.

Why exactly should I avoid sponsored search listings? If I'm looking for a particular item, there's a good chance that I'll welcome ready access to firms that specialize in that item—as long as I know I'm looking at sponsored links. I don't avoid ads in the Yellow Pages; quite the contrary.

It's odd for the editor of a pure-commerce magazine to denounce commerce. I do not understand why you should always pass over anything that says “sponsor” any more than I believe I should ignore all of those pages in *Computer Shopper*—the majority of them—that look like, and are, ads. I suppose it all depends whose ads you're supposed to ignore, as Martin Luther did not say.

The Good Stuff

Mattison, David, “Quickikiwiki, swiki, twiki, zwiki and the plone wars: Wiki as a PIM and collaborative content tool,” *Searcher* (April 2003).

I encountered this article through an absurdly roundabout path. To wit, Library Stuff included a listing for a newish library-related weblog. I checked it out. The most recent item (at the time) was a link to this article—one of April's online freebies from *Searcher*—with the following quoted in the weblog entry (possibly without the first sentence):

Wikis are everywhere, but, unfortunately, the online literature has not begun to focus on wikis yet. Why aren't wikis on our radar screen the way blogs are right now? Walt Crawford, a senior analyst at RLG and active writer and speaker in the library field, reported to me by e-mail that he had “tried out a library-related one quite a while ago and, at the time, found the mechanisms and content both either uninteresting or problematic. Since I didn't have any need that cried out for wikis as a solution, I didn't pursue the matter. That also explains the absence of any mention of wikis in my *American Libraries* ‘e-files’ series in late 2001: I was not aware of any real significance in the library field. That doesn't mean there isn't any, of course.”

Perhaps my questions to him weren't fair, but I can see all kinds of potential for wikis in libraries, both behind the scenes where they are being used, and in public customer service areas...

To which I said, “Huh?” I sent a query to the blogger (who responded that she quoted my comment because she felt pretty much the same way) and downloaded the article—and went to look at a couple of wikis once again. After reading the article (quite long, printing out as 21 single-spaced pages

including sidebars) I sent David Mattison a note. Portions of that note follow, and may provide adequate commentary on this article, particularly since I **recommend** it if you're intrigued by the notion of wikis or just want to know more about them.

I have no idea whether your questions to me were fair, but I'll stand by my answers.

My "E-files" trio was based on what I actually saw happening out there. I didn't encounter librarian-ship-related wikis to any extent then. For that matter, I don't see many of them mentioned in your article, and I don't find much (some, but not much) in a Google search. And I've rarely (ever?) been pointed to a dynamic, content-filled library-related wiki in one of the several weblogs I check regularly.

I think the quote from *The Wiki Way* ["Not everyone needs a wiki. Not everyone wants a wiki. Not every situation benefits from becoming an open discussion or collaborative forum."] says it nicely, actually.

If there's anything in the article I might take mild issue with, it's the fourth bullet in the comparison of wiki and weblogs: "wikis promote content over form, blogs promote form...over content."

After looking at a few wikis just now—starting with your searcher's wiki [<http://searchers.swiki.net>], which seems to be almost *entirely* form, I still find that most wikis seem to emphasize form (hierarchy, linking mechanisms, etc.) over content in a way that seems to get in my way as a reader/user, where most weblogs put the content right up front, with the form being reasonably transparent.

Of course, I'm sort of a linear person; when one e-journal (JEP?) ran an article touting hypertext as a hypertext article, I gave up after 10-15 minutes of trying to make sense of it...

Mattison explained what he meant about form vs. content (wikis can have almost any form, where blogs mandate a reverse-chronological linear form). Since then, I've encountered "wikipedia" once or twice—and, frankly, I still don't get it. At least for me.

My problems with wikis, other than being solutions to problems I don't currently have, are twofold:

- The default situation, where anyone can modify anyone else's text, bothers me. As implemented in wikipedia, for example, the founders regard it as a way to assure that errors will be corrected. It can also be used as a way to assure that errors will be promulgated and repeated, over and over again, given that extremists tend to be more tenacious and have more time than other people. (I give you talk radio, most Internet polls, and other instances.) When I

write stuff, I'm delighted to have people comment, respond, argue—and I get along very well with professional editors. I don't much care to have others simply modify what I've written. As a library person, I also wonder what wikis mean in terms of the historical record.

- I get tired of WikiWords real fast. That's a personality issue. I'm getting tired of the growing vocabulary of "blogaria" or the "blogosphere" as well, but it doesn't seem quite as manic as the tendencies of WikiFolk.

Maybe wikis really are the hottest thing since sliced pizza. Go read Mattison's article and see whether wikis work for you. **Recommended**—whether I'm ready to sign up for WikiDom or not.

Nathans, Stephen F., "The real deal," *EMedia* 16:2 (February 2003): 50-61.

How long does it actually take to create a DVD from video shot on a digital videocam? Can you actually do real-time processing with today's PCs? Nathans discusses a set of issues (and, as usual for Nathans, throws in odd but interesting asides) and runs some timed tests: Taking ten minutes of digital videocamera footage, using a midrange Sony VAIO system with a 2x DVD-R/RW drive, and going through the capture-encode-burn process (using the default capture-to-burn settings) with each of four different several different software packages (and with iDVD on the Mac). His limit was 30 minutes for "close to real time"—a reasonable limit for 10 minutes of video. The Mac didn't make it, using just over 40 minutes total, but produced a good one-chapter DVD. MedioStream neoDVD and Sonic MyDVD 4 each managed the whole job in less than 20 minutes (neoDVD a little faster, but MyDVD created a decent menu in the process); WinDVD Creator Plus and Dazzle DVD Complete took 28:33 and 26 minutes respectively. Other tools tested always took more than 40 minutes.

"Top 100 web sites you didn't know you couldn't live without," *PC Magazine* 22:5 (March 25, 2003): 82-94.

Ain't hype wonderful? Do you believe there are a hundred websites you *can't live without*? I can't think of one... But then, the intro also says that if you were stranded on a desert island with electricity and broadband, "there's no question that you'd be on Amazon, eBay, and Google." Really? I've never used eBay (and don't intend to) and use Amazon only as a last resort. (For that matter, AllTheWeb makes a perfectly acceptable alternative to Google at this point.) But here are a hundred lesser known sites that, once you've heard of them, "you won't be

able to imagine life before them.” Even though “not every site is for everyone.” Say what?

Let’s face it: I’m including this because of the separate Perspective in this issue, where I test last year’s version of the “unknown 100.” I believe these are all new sites. I may run a set of tests on them later this year. The reviews do include icons for three semi-objective site aspects: Whether the site loads in less than two seconds (broadband), whether the home page has broken links (as tested with W3C’s Link Checker), and, in rough ranges, how many backward (inbound) links the site has according to Google. That last measure differentiates most of these sites from most of the “classic hundred”: 70% of the “classics” had more than 5,000 backward links, with 37% having 10,000 to 50,000, while more than 75% of the “unknown” sites had fewer than 5,000 backward.

Just to make an already-odd roundup even odder, there are five unexplained “top five” lists in categories that aren’t described, just noted, and aren’t part of the “unknown hundred.” Here’s the “top 5 infojunkies” list: American demographics, *Ex Libris*, UC Riverside’s InfoMine, the Internet Public Library, and the Librarians’ Index to the Internet.

The Little Stuff

Glaser, Mark, “Blogging goes mainstream, take 258,” *Online Journalism Review*, March 17, 2003. (www.ojr.org)

Are weblogs “mainstream” yet? As Glaser notes, “The media have been playing this game for months, and despite so many headlines hinting that indeed, weblogs are now mainstream, the text of such articles seems to beg off from that notion.” Glaser credits SFGate, the online arm of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, with one of the first such articles in July 2002—“Blogging hits the mainstream, for better or worse.” In this case, it’s legitimate to cite SFGate rather than the *Chronicle*: This was an online exclusive, based on a blogging course at UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism.

The direct impetus for this particular item is Walter Mossberg’s explanation of “Web logs” in the *Wall Street Journal*—you don’t get much more establishment than Mossberg. There have been dozens of other articles over the months, many of them begging off on the “mainstream” question. Forbes.com chooses “Best Tech Blogs” and says, “Blogging is the Internet sensation of the moment”—but Forbes’ top pick is slashdot, which Glaser doesn’t consider a blog. (Neither do I.) I love the close of this portion of the column:

Does that [Anna Kournikova having something like a blog] mean we’ll stop seeing reports titled “Blogging Goes Mainstream”? Not until every lost mainstream outlet has its say—and not until every last blogger yells bloody murder about being co-opted.

But wait! There’s more! An extra section quotes Joe Cappelletti of *Advertising Age* thusly: “Our most important media, television, is about to disappear, replaced by the Internet.” Sure it is. (And, as a magazine VP should know, TV is a *medium*, singular.)

Sheehan, Charles, “Spell czech, for better or wurst?” Associated Press, March 14, 2003.

Do grammar and spellchecking software make us stupid—or does it just distract us? The University of Pittsburgh study reported here raises that question.

Thirty-three undergrads were asked to proofread a one-page business letter, half using MS Word with the error alerts turned on, half “using only their heads.” Without the software, students with high SAT verbals made fewer than half the errors of lower-scoring students. With the software alerts, students all made roughly the same number of errors—*three times* as many as high-SAT students without software assistance.

I’m guessing the high-scoring students would do even better if they worked from a printed copy of the letter, but that’s just my guess. Meanwhile, here’s a sentence that managed to trip people up both ways: “Bales has proven himself in similar rolls” (speaking of a candidate Michael Bales). Word thinks “Bales” is a plural and wants to correct the verb—but “rolls,” while clearly wrong, won’t be caught by any existing software. So students tended to miss one error and introduce another one.

The Details

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