

# Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Walt Crawford

## Bibs & Blather

### One Book at a Time

A little more than a year ago, I published *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change*, my first book produced by Lulu. (You'll find it and other Cites & Insights Books at <http://lulu.com/waltcrawford>.) It was announced on *Walt at random* on March 22, 2007. *Cites & Insights* 7:4 (April 2007), published the same day, includes an extended description of the book and PERSPECTIVE: INFORMAL NOTES ON THE LULU EXPERIENCE.

I commented about my experiences with Lulu in several posts on *Walt at random* and on the second experiment of releasing the same book (with ISBN) through CreateSpace/Amazon in August 2007. On August 25, 2007, my second Lulu book appeared: *Public Library Blogs: 252 Examples*. It became available on CreateSpace/Amazon on August 30, 2007. The third original book appeared January 15, 2008: *Academic Library Blogs: 231 Examples*. Later in January 2008, I made the three "original" books available from Lulu as \$20 PDF downloads.)

I'm not going to recount the whole experience, but I thought a few year-later notes might be in order on this ongoing experiment.

#### Hits

- Lulu produces excellent-quality trade paperbacks. The three 6x9" trade paperbacks use heavyweight cream book paper and are classy, and Lulu does an excellent job on the cover. The two big 8.5x11" *C&I* volumes also came out great, on bright-white heavyweight paper with gorgeous covers.
- Lulu does precisely what it says it will, with no hidden charges or funny business. Lulu's instructions are also thorough.
- CreateSpace does a good job but offers somewhat less help and winds up charging some-

what more. On the other hand, CreateSpace automatically gets you an ISBN and listing on Amazon. Lulu offers a wider range of sizes and binding options, but CreateSpace covers most of the basics—and now offers cream paper.

- The process made it possible to get these books out rapidly and with no significant cash outlay. I don't believe I could have gotten either of the two library blog books published traditionally. Maybe there's a reason for that (see "Misses")

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- Four excellent, thoughtful reviews of *Balanced Libraries* have appeared on liblogs. Thanks!
- *Balanced Libraries* hasn't done badly: Just under 200 copies to date. I considered anything less than 100 in the first year to be a sign of failure, anything over 300 copies in the first two years to be success. It's not a failure; in another 11 months, I'll know whether it's a success.
- The paperback versions of *Cites & Insights* are much nicer than the one-off bound volumes I have for volumes 1-5, and actually cheaper (for me, that is).
- *American Libraries Direct* has been kind enough to mention two or three of the books.

#### Misses

- As part of the experiment (and because *First Have Something to Say* never got any print reviews) I didn't send review copies to library magazines. That may have been a mistake, but at around \$20 per review copy, it's a difficult choice to make.
- Perhaps as a result, *Public Library Blogs* hasn't received much (any?) attention—and, in its first eight months, it's only sold 65 copies. That's not disastrous, but it's not great either.

- It's too early to say anything about *Academic Library Blogs* after only three months, but 25 copies isn't quite bestseller status.
- While I tend to prefer Lulu, it's clear that CreateSpace/Amazon has been more effective: During the period that copies have been available from both sources, and excluding the Lulu-only C&I and PDF downloads (of which, by the way, I've sold a grand total of **two**, one for each blogging book), I've sold 90 books on CreateSpace/Amazon (nearly all of them on Amazon) and 48 on Lulu.
- I asked for feedback on the blogging books and promised not to argue with negative comments. I received one thoughtful response—and stumbled on a one-sentence review of one of the books at LibraryThing. Based on that review (assuming the person actually read the book), doing the books was a pointless waste of time. If “just samples pulled off the blogs” is all there is to the books in the eye of the reader, then I failed completely. Such is life.
- I'm not on the speaking circuit and not that great a self-promoter. The books have been promoted here and on my blog—and that's about it, except for some wonderful reviews. No advertising, no press releases and I haven't been going around selling them. Since promotion is key to getting any book sold, I may not be an ideal candidate for self-publishing.

### Oddities

- Publishing through Lulu is more transparent than most publishing methods, at least in terms of creator revenue. If you buy a \$30 library trade paperback or an \$8 mass-market fiction paperback or a \$25 hardbound book, do you know how much money reaches the author? Probably not. But if you buy a 200-page trade paperback from Lulu and pay \$25 plus shipping, it's very easy to figure out exactly how much the writer gets: \$13.17, in this case. (\$4.53 plus \$0.02/page plus 20% of the difference between that production cost and the author-set price.) By the way, if you think Lulu and CreateSpace color art/photo books are expensive, that's because the cost per page for color is twenty cents, not two cents, and that's for *all* the pages in a book.
- I can't be 100% certain how *your* copy of a book will look. Each one is produced when it's ordered: One book at a time. Laser printing can vary slightly, and so can cover color reproduction. In every case, the color rendition on CreateSpace versions is different than on Lulu versions, working from *precisely* the same im-

age—but both are within what I'd consider reasonable boundaries.

### What's Next?

Maybe I should send out review copies. Maybe not.

I'm contemplating two possible books—both blog-related, both looking at changes over time. Does it make sense to do either or both? I'm not sure.

I had ideas for several other possible books, mostly gathering older material and bringing it forward in appropriate ways. Those ideas are on the back burner or have disappeared entirely.

*Cites & Insights Books* continues to be an experiment. The results are mixed.

## Perspective

# Offtopic or Not? Mill Creek & Libraries

Elsewhere in this issue you'll find OFFTOPIC PERSPECTIVE: 50 MOVIE HOLLYWOOD LEGENDS, PART 1—another set of reviews of old movies I watch while I work out on the treadmill each weekday afternoon. In this case, the set includes two dozen movies with big-name stars, nearly all in the public domain.

Maybe these perspectives aren't offtopic. Maybe there is mild relevance for some libraries. I wrote about that in late 2006, in a section of another OFFTOPIC PERSPECTIVE cut for space reasons. That section is the basis for the first portion of this musing. The second portion offers a quick update on recent work from Mill Creek Entertainment, maker of these megapacks.

## Would 50-movie packs make sense for public library collections?

I'll suggest that they **do** make sense for academic libraries in institutions with any sort of film studies, but as “filler”—cheap sources of second-rate transfers of movies, many historic and mostly old, many of which aren't likely to be readily available elsewhere.

If the answer for public libraries is “no,” then these essays appear purely for amusement value. Not that I'm uncomfortable with that!

But my answer is **Maybe—and Yes**.

- **Maybe:** I suspect it would be cumbersome for most libraries to acquire these packs as regular circulating items, cataloging them (typically, only the package—after all, spelling out all of the movies and stars would cost a lot more than the packs themselves) and circulating each 12- or 13-DVD set as one item. (A few li-

braries *have* opted to catalog each disc and circulate it separately; more power to them. See “Quick update” below.)

- **Yes:** I think a fair number of public libraries could use these as supplemental casual-circulation items—but not using traditional acquire / catalog / protect / circulate methods.

Here’s what I mean.

Some public libraries have informal paperback collections, fueled by donations and made available as casual supplements to the real collection. The paperbacks aren’t cataloged, have at most a genre mark or first-letter-of-last-name label on the spines, don’t have security tags and aren’t integrated with the rest of the collection. They’re in a separate area. Patrons know they can just pick one up that looks interesting and bring it back when they’re done. Or drop off the paperback they just finished.

I know I’ve seen such collections in some libraries I used in the past, and on most cruise ship libraries I’ve used. I’ve used and contributed to these informal supplemental collections. I suspect the ship librarian or attendant checks the paperback shelf once a day or so to remove anything inappropriate.

That’s what I’d do with the megapacks. Start an informal video exchange collection, one that could be fueled by patron donations of TV series and movies they know they’re not going to watch again. You’d need a DVD or CD browsing tray or two alongside the paperback shelf. Here’s how I’d do it, if I thought it was worth doing—and in a community with a fair number of retirees who own DVD players, I think it might be worth doing.

- Take \$100 or \$200 (the Friends might fund this) and pick up a few megapacks. Amazon has them at anywhere from \$13 to \$18 per 50-movie collection. There are other sources. Baker & Taylor and Ingram both distribute DVDs from the publisher, so your library seller might have them—but don’t pay more than \$20-\$25 unless there’s an awfully good reason. The company is currently Mill Creek Entertainment (formerly TreeLine). As of late 2006, there were 21 different 50-movie packs, including Drive-In Movie Classics, Nightmare Worlds, and Warriors (mostly “Sons of Hercules” and that ilk). There’s a little duplication among sets, but not a lot—and Mill Creek’s website offers a summary of each flick including which sets it’s included in. Which sets should you get? Explore. Gunslingers? Westerns? Musicals? Hollywood Legends? All good possibilities.
- Don’t catalog them, add security strips or repackage them in locking DVD cases or any

other kind of DVD cases. Do that, and you’ve doubled or tripled the cost of the pack and the fact that these are (mostly) mediocre VHS-quality scans, some with missing frames, may be more of a drawback.

- Remove the contents of the cardboard box: 12 or 13 CD-size cardboard sleeves, each sleeve containing blurbs for the movies on the DVD in the sleeve. Those sleeves are your informally circulating items. I wouldn’t even stamp them with the library name (hard to do without obscuring some of the blurbs, although admittedly some of the blurbs are so wrong that they *should* be obscured). I’d cut out the back panel of the box, which lists all the movies, and have it available in the tray.
- There’s your collection. If you spent \$100 at Amazon, chances are you now have at least 48 and maybe 60 or 72 circulating sleeves, most sleeves containing 4 movies totaling four to six hours. A few sleeves will have five or six short movies. A few will have two: There are at least two 13-disc packs where there weren’t enough very short movies to fit 50 on 12 discs.
- Enhancing this informal collection: If you have a couple of staff members who purchased TV series on DVDs and know they’re done with them, add those series to the informal collection. That’s a little more difficult. You’ll need to purchase slimline or regular CD jewel boxes (*not* press-to-release DVD cases). For single-sided discs, just put each disc in a jewelbox. For double-sided or if you want to get fancy, photocopy the booklet (or the DVD case back on cheaply-packaged sets) and add the appropriate page as an insert in each jewel box.
- **Worst case:** The DVDs disappear and the experiment’s a failure.
- **Second worst case:** Patrons don’t understand the disclaimer—these are not part of the formal library collection and the library won’t be cleaning or replacing them—and it’s more trouble than it’s worth.
- **Best case:** You wind up with a nice little extra service with no ongoing labor costs and fairly minimal supplies cost. Patrons who love old movies or want to sample TV shows are happy.

Crazy? Maybe. But there’s a lot of good stuff in these sets—old detective series, good old B westerns, and lots of old movies (some of them classics) that didn’t have copyright renewed for one reason or another. Some of the sets include newer movies, presumably licensed at next to nothing. One pack is composed entirely of TV movies—and many of those are also good entertainment.

If this seems ludicrous, then assume I'm including the OFFTOPIC PERSPECTIVES for the same reason as MY BACK PAGES: Leavening.

### Quick Update

I should have checked Worldcat.org first! (This note added in late November 2006.) Some libraries *have* acquired some of these sets—at least 24 show as holding Mystery Classics, which strikes me as a fine choice although I haven't picked it up yet—and a few have chosen to catalog each disc as a separate item. Those libraries and library cooperatives know what they're doing. I should also note that some of the sets already had cataloging in Worldcat in late 2006, spelling out the contents in full.

## What's Up at Mill Creek?

Since I wrote the comments above, I've been staying on the treadmill watching old movies (and in some cases TV movies), posting reviews on *Walt at random* each time I get through one disc, adding a new OFFTOPIC PERSPECTIVE each time I finish half a box. For a while, it seemed as though the company—Mill Creek Entertainment—was running on empty, just distributing 20-odd sets assembled from public domain, TV movies and other sources where it didn't need to pay royalties.

In March 2008, Seth Finkelstein of *Infthought* sent me an odd email, assuring me it wasn't spam and he wasn't getting a commission. He reads *C&I* sometimes and knew I watch these old flicks. He saw that Best-Buy.com was having a two-day sale (sorry, it's over): Two 50-movie packs for \$25. I didn't *need* more movies—I'm on disc nine of one set and disc seven of another, with two more packs (100 more movies) waiting after that—but 100 movies for \$25 is a pretty good deal. I checked it out—and found a couple of sets I wasn't aware of, one of them released in March 2008. I ordered two of them (I now have more than 200 movies waiting to be watched—I intend to keep using that treadmill for years to come), and decided it was time to take another look at Mill Creek Entertainment.

Here's what I found: The company's active and it's come up with even *bigger* packs. As I write this, there appear to be thirty different 50-movie packs, up from 21 in late November 2006. 50-packs I don't remember seeing before include Box Office Gold, Combat Classics, Drive-in Movie Classics, Family Fun, Frontier Justice and Nightmare Worlds. Amazon sells them all, at prices ranging from \$13 to \$18 (newer sets sell for a little more); there continue to be other outlets.

There are also nine **hundred**-movie packs—most of them straight combinations of 50-packs with no

duplications (e.g., Action Classics combines the Action and Suspense 50-packs), all of them (I believe) composed of movies that are also in 50-packs. There were already some smaller subsets and that continues—I see 24 20-movie packs and nine 10-movie packs. I could see some people going for the 20-pack of John Wayne flicks, most of them early and short, and some of thematic packs are interesting. Amazon lists the 100-packs at \$27 to \$45 each.

For libraries where the “informal circulating collection” model suggested in the earlier post makes sense, Mill Creek now has something else to offer: **250-Movie Packs.**

That's right. Four packs—Family Collection, Horror Collection, Mystery Collection and (predictably, given the 50-packs) Western Collection. The “foil collectors boxes” still have individual cardboard sleeves for each disc. Buy all four and you'd have 240 informally-circulatable items, each with four or more old movies, for a total outlay of no more than \$400 (list price is \$99.95 for each set) and probably less.

Make that *definitely* less if you can buy from Amazon: I see all four 250-movie packs listed at \$50 each. That's a thousand old movies for \$200—less than a buck per circulating DVD, roughly twenty cents per movie. You couldn't download them and burn them to blank DVDs for that price.

I'm not shilling for Mill Creek. There are a couple of 50-movie packs I'd be reluctant to buy for myself (two recent packs are heavy on R-rated schlock), and lots of these movies are from damaged prints, nearly all VHS-quality or worse. When it says “Digitally remastered,” it means the movies were converted from analog to digital form to go on DVDs. It does *not* mean restored or anything of the sort: Not at these prices!

That said, Mill Creek Entertainment is doing a fine job of using the public domain for all it's worth, and I think that's a good thing. Sure, you can download a lot of these movies—but why bother?

Mill Creek has other stuff—collections of cartoons (300 in one box), TV boxed sets and sets mixing TV and movies, even a few indie movies and fitness sets. But mostly, Mill Creek is boxes of public domain movies at fair prices. The prints may be so-so and lots of the pictures are B or less—but there are some gems. Within the last two weeks, I've watched *McClintock!* and the original, black-and-white, Irene Dunne/Charles Boyer *Love Affair*. Good stuff.

### Checking Worldcat

I'm guessing that libraries choosing to start “paperback DVD” collections might not show up on

Worldcat.org—why catalog something you’re going to circulate informally? Some libraries clearly are buying some of the packs. I didn’t find any 250-movie packs (at least not searching “250 movie”), but did find one library with one of the 100-movie packs—and quite a few 50-movie sets.

Searching “50 movie pack” as a phrase, I see 190 records. That makes sense—because some boxes are held both as released by TreeLine (the original name) and by Mill Creek Entertainment (the current name) and because some libraries catalog each disc individually. The boxes are also vague as to whether it’s “50 movie pack Comedy Classics” or “Comedy Classics 50 movie pack,” and both forms appear. For that matter, some libraries catalog the DVDs based on the titles on a disc rather than the disc itself...

Comedy Classics is held by at least 18 libraries. Mystery Classics by more than 50. Family Classics by 47 or more. Martial Arts (yes, there’s a 50-pack of martial arts flicks) by nine or more. SciFi Classics, 30+ libraries. Western Classics, more than 20. Those are all places that chose to catalog the boxes (or the individual discs).

## Offtopic or Not?

That’s your call. I’d say Mill Creek Entertainment operates at the junction of libraries, media and policy: They’re navigating the public domain to turn out inexpensive legal entertainment. They still use the standard copyright-infringement warning on some discs, unfortunately—and no doubt some of the TV movies and martial arts flicks are under copyright. I’d love to see explicit “Public Domain” stickers on some sets, which would clarify performance rights or your right to use these as source material for other purposes.

Don’t buy these in place of first-rate restored classics. Buy them for what they are. For some of you, that may make them worthwhile purchases.

## Making it Work Perspective Changes in Liblogs: Slouching Toward a Study

How are liblogs doing?

That’s not a simple question and there may not be a plausible answer. That’s never stopped me before. This PERSPECTIVE is a note on what *may* be a work in progress. A few attendees at the Texas Library Association Conference heard snakk portions of it as part of my session on balanced libraries.

## Unpacking the Question

First, let’s define **liblogs**. I don’t care for the term “biblioblogosphere”—it implies too much and too little. That term might apply to a well-defined community of blogs about books themselves, one in which most participants are at least vaguely acquainted. Applied to libraries, it would necessarily include blogs *from* libraries and blogs *about* libraries.

**Liblogs** isn’t an elegant term. When I use it, I mean what Steven Cohen calls “libr\* blogs”—blogs by “library people” (as opposed to official library blogs), not limited to blogs by MLS-holding librarians. It’s the term I used for the biggest study of the field: PERSPECTIVE: LOOKING AT LIBLOGS: THE GREAT MIDDLE (*C&I* 6:10, August 2006). That study considered 213 blogs drawn from “a population of around 550 active liblogs represented in the directories and wikis.” I tried to use objective, quantifiable methods for cutting the population down to size and deliberately left my personal feelings about specific blogs out of it—and avoided making personal comments on the blogs themselves. That’s partly because of certain reactions to the 2005 article PERSPECTIVE: INVESTIGATING THE BIBLIOBLOGOSPHERE (*C&I* 5:10, September 2005), which looked at 60 liblogs drawn from a pool of 238.

Second, what does “how are they doing” mean?

Possible expansions of that question:

- Is the liblog universe growing rapidly, stabilizing or contracting?
- Are libloggers posting more or less frequently?
- Are people commenting on posts more or less often?
- Are people writing longer or shorter posts?
- Are readers more or less interested?
- Are bloggers losing interest or is the field flourishing?
- Are liblogs becoming more or less significant as sources of ideas and discussion on library-related issues?
- Do liblogs have more or less impact than they used to?

These are *longitudinal* questions—they assume a baseline against which change over time can be measured or judged.

I believe the two earlier studies provide a baseline for a sizable portion of the liblog universe. If this project continues, I plan to establish a baseline for a much larger portion of the liblog universe.

### *Recognizing the unknowable*

That last question? Unknowable or at least not provable. Technorati’s “authority” number is a slight indicator of visibility among other blogs, but that’s about it.

As for Google or Live Search or Yahoo! result counts, unless they're small, those numbers are so problematic it's hard to say much about them. Longtime readers know my *opinion* on this issue, but it's a belief, not knowledge. The same is true for the penultimate question: It's a matter of opinion.

For that matter, "are readers more or less interested?" is probably unanswerable on a general basis or, from the outside, for an individual blog. Depending on how your blog is set up, you may or may not have a reasonably good idea of your own readership numbers, but all anyone else can do is look at Bloglines and Google Reader subscription numbers, at best a vague approximation of actual readership (and at worst simply *wrong* because of multiple-feed issues and abandoned aggregator accounts).

As for the other questions: "Losing interest" is tough, but I believe measures can provide clues for all of them. Are they worthwhile questions? It's fair to say *that* question is one reason I'm not sure whether I'll continue slouching toward the big study.

## Naïve Guesses at the Starting Point

Before I started doing real-world measures, I had guesses based mostly on reading way too many liblogs and paying attention to conversational currents. Here's what I guessed in early 2008:

- The shine has worn off blogging. It's moved from being a shiny new thing everybody should be playing with to being an easy publishing medium that's just a tool. That *might* mean the universe is stabilizing or starting to contract, if you define the universe to exclude mandatory (and short-lived) liblogs created for library school courses and other web-tools learning experiences. It might mean that expansion is slower than it used to be. It might also suggest that many blogs would have less frequent posts than they had in former years, as some bloggers become less interested in blogging.
- The shine *may* have worn off *reading* blogs and commenting. There are too many things competing for people's attention and time allocation is the one true zero-sum game. If that's true, I'd expect to see slower rises in readership for blogs. On the other hand, good aggregators make it easier to follow multiple blogs, which might counteract this trend.
- Libloggers use blogs for serious, substantive discussions. It's an easy, effective publishing medium: That hasn't changed.

Put those together, and the answers to the questions in the first list might be:

- The universe is likely to be growing more slowly than before.
- I'd expect libloggers to be posting less frequently. I think some things that used to show up as short posts now wind up on Twitter.
- If libloggers are posting less frequently but with more substantive posts, there might be *more* comments per post, even with stable or slowly growing overall readership. That's my naive guess as to what's happening—across the board, that is.
- It seems to me that libloggers are writing fewer but somewhat longer posts.
- While some bloggers have lost interest and others may be losing interest, the field as a whole is healthy, if perhaps not flourishing.
- As to the last two questions: I gave my opinion in August 2007 (PERSPECTIVE: ON THE LITERATURE), beginning with this forthright statement: "I believe that gray literature—blogs, this ejournal, a few similar publications and some lists—represents the most compelling and worthwhile literature in the library field today." I believe liblogs are becoming *more* significant—and within the library field as a whole, their impact is growing.

## Defining the Universe

The starting point: 60 blogs with metrics for April-June 2005 and 213 blogs (including some of the 60) with metrics for March-May 2006. That doesn't add up to 273 blogs. Quite a few blogs disappeared by early 2008. (The trade paperback version of *Cites & Insights* 6 includes details on disappearances and changes as of December 2007.) My starting point for 2008 was 227 surviving blogs with earlier metrics; even that number is clearly too optimistic.

I wanted to expand that universe to include a reasonably comprehensive set of English-language blogs (keeping the handful of non-English 2006 blogs), with the following criteria:

- Not clearly defined as an official *library* blog.
- Somehow vaguely related to library people.
- Reachable on the open web.
- **Established:** At least one post before January 1, 2008.
- **Not defunct:** At least one post after August 31, 2007 (as of March 1, 2008).
- **Visible:** Sum of Bloglines subscriptions and Technorati "Authority" at least 9 when tested in first two weeks of March 2008. (That's a very low bar—six subscribers and links from three other blogs are enough, for example.)

If I do the actual study, I'll add one more criterion:

- **Semi-active:** At least one post in two of the three months March, April, May 2008. PubSub is defunct and the Open Directory seems stagnant, but there are new ways to identify liblogs in addition to LISWiki, still the primary source for “libr\*” blogs:
- Blogs included in the “Favorite blogs” survey done by Meredith Farkas as reported in *Information wants to be free*.
- Blogs in the LISZen source list.
- Blogs in the source list for Dave Pattern’s “tag cloud” of liblog posts.
- Blogs I discovered on my own.

According to records I kept during the process, I added 48 new blogs from the “Favorite blogs” list, 81 more blogs from LISZen, 37 from LISWiki, nine from the tag cloud and 29 from my own Bloglines list. That’s clearly wrong, since I added 315 liblogs and the sum of those numbers is 204. Where did I find the other 111? That’s a good question.

I can say that, of some 450 new candidates from those sources, roughly one-third were defunct and another 90-odd are “invisible”—they have so few subscribers or links that they appear intended strictly for a small circle of friends. I believe many of the defunct blogs are mandated blogs, where the student has deleted the blog (or stopped posting) at the end of a course or learning session—but hasn’t gone back and removed it from LISWiki.

In 2006, I thought there were about 550 visible liblogs (including a handful of non-English liblogs appearing in LISWiki). That appeared to be more than twice the number in 2005—a remarkable growth rate. In 2008, the universe of visible English-language liblogs (plus the same handful) appears larger, but only slightly: Maybe 650 to 800 with at least a hint of continuing activity. Looking at my current list of 542, I see this distribution, noting that start dates can be thrown off by changes in platform or names:

- Eight started before 2002.
- 24 started in 2002.
- 74 started in 2003.
- 84 started in 2004.
- 154 started in 2005.
- 112 started in 2006.
- 86 started in 2007.

**First conclusion:** The liblog universe isn’t shrinking—but it’s not growing as rapidly as it used to. Based on that distribution, the peak of new-blog creation came in 2005, which sounds about right.

This could be nonsense. Maybe liblogs have continued to double each year, such that there are now at least 2,200 active English-language liblogs, but two-thirds of them aren’t in LISWiki or noticed elsewhere.

That could be true—but I doubt it. I’d believe 1,100: I can believe that half of the liblogs with more than four or five readers still manage to fly under the radar.

### *Sampling the Universe*

If you subscribed to *all* of the liblogs in that “visible universe” (542 of them), could you skim the posts without being completely overwhelmed?

I tried that absurd experiment, adding every blog Bloglines could find a feed for (and keeping a handful of official library blogs already in my Library folder, for a total of 551 feeds).

The answer is **Yes**—although I can’t imagine why you’d want to. Somewhere between 60 and 150 blogs were updated on typical weekdays, with an average of around 250 posts. I needed about 45 minutes to skim them and read the 30 or 40 that interested me. After a week, I deleted three very high frequency blogs. For the second week in mid-March 2008, I counted an average of 221 posts per day.

Just for fun (it’s a meaningless comparison), I compared posts per day *per blog* for this larger universe with the two earlier studies. For 2008, the average was 0.41 posts per day per blog. For 2006, the average was 0.49 posts per day per blog—a difference but not a big one. For the 2005 sample, the average was 0.92 posts per day per blog, but that was a hand-picked set of high-profile blogs.

## Slouching Further Along

First, I defined the preliminary universe for any 2008 study. Then I began assembling 2007 metrics, using March-May, to do two things:

- Establish an overall baseline for one-year change evaluation if I do the big project.
- Look at changes between earlier years and 2007, for the 227 blogs that were in earlier studies and still around.

This time, I looked at number of posts, number of comments, total length of posts—but also number of *images* (videos, photos, drawings, whatever) in the posts. I also made a couple of other changes for clarity and ease:

- If a blogger doesn’t allow comments, I noted that in a validity column and left the comment space blank instead of entering zero.
- If a blog’s archives have fully or partially hidden posts, I noted that in the validity column and just counted posts (and comments, if comment counts were visible), leaving the length and picture columns blank.
- If a blog’s archives weren’t available at all, I noted that in the validity column and left all

columns blank. For the purposes of this preliminary note, I excluded the blog altogether.

Thanks to changes in my work environment and improvements in Word2007, the process of building metrics was much faster than in previous studies, so I could do the first part of the 2007 metrics before deciding whether to do the full study. The rest of this article offers notes from those metrics.

“But wait,” you might say, “you’re mixing 2005-2007 comparisons and 2006-2007 comparisons.” That’s true, but when I looked at the subgroups (43 blogs in the 2005 study that weren’t also in the 2006 study, “all the others”), it appears that changes on a blog-for-blog basis are reasonably comparable.

### *Universe size and post count*

The universe for these comparisons is 201 blogs. The other 26 were either unreachable or had unreachable or uncountable archives.

The total posts in the earlier study period (whichever it was) for these 201 blogs: 11,948, or an average of 130 per day. Total posts in 2007 for the same blogs: 9,618 or 105 per day—20% fewer. That’s a reduction in overall posts, but not a large one.

For what it’s worth, the earlier average posts per blog (for blogs still active) was 59 and the median was 38—but the standard deviation is 76, which makes “average liblog” a meaningless term. Similarly for 2007: average 48 posts, median 28 posts—but a standard deviation of 76.

Want a truly strange pair of figures? I calculated 2007 posts for each blog as a percentage of 2005 or 2006 posts. The average of those percentages is actually 112%—but the median is 76%, close to the overall 80% figure. The standard deviation for the percentages? 159%.

I thought it was worth looking at changes in post counts on a more granular level, taking into account extremes:

➤ One extreme is blogs with very high posting frequency. I used two posts per day in 2005 or 2006 as a cutoff (that is, 184 posts—but no blogs had between 176 and 194 posts). There are eleven such blogs, ranging from *Attempting elegance* (which had a different name in the earlier study) with 195 posts to *beSpacific* with 723, the other nine ranging from 206 to 371 posts. Seven of those eleven are within a change range I’d consider “roughly the same”—from three-quarters as many posts (75%) to four-thirds as many (133%), three having slightly more posts in 2007, four having slightly fewer posts. The outliers: *Collecting my thoughts* had 36% more posts, *Out of the jungle*

had only 39% as many posts (88 instead of 225)—and *Attempting elegance*, a very different blog than its high-frequency predecessor, had 7% as many posts (13 instead of 195).

➤ The other extreme is blogs with too few posts in the earlier studies to make changes meaningful. I used nine posts as a cutoff. Thirty blogs fall into that infrequent-posting category. Every blog with more than 3.5 times as many posts in 2007 as in the previous study fell into this category—nine of them, none of which had more than eight posts the first time around or more than 50 in 2007.

➤ Of the other 160 blogs, 56 are “roughly the same”—the 2007 post count is between 75% and 133% of the 2005 or 2006 count. Sixteen had significantly *more* posts in 2007, including nine with at least twice as many posts. That leaves 88 with significantly *fewer* posts in 2007, including 46 with less than half as many posts.

It’s fair to say a lot more people did significantly less posting to their blogs in 2007 than did significantly more posting. Will that trend continue for a larger universe and from 2007 to 2008?

### *Comments*

Some liblogs don’t allow comments. Others make commenting difficult. Still others, for whatever reason, don’t attract comments. And in some archives with hidden posts, comment counts are also hidden.

For this note and comparison, I’m ignoring any blog that had no comments on posts during March-May *either* in 2005/2006 or in 2007. That omits some blogs with comments in one year but not the other and leaves 141 blogs with comments in both years.

The overall figure is clear enough: There were *significantly* more comments in 2007 than in the earlier years—about 37% more. Liblogs were, across a broad sample, more conversational in 2007 than in earlier samples.

For 2005-2006, the average comment count per blog is 57 and the median a mere 24—with standard deviation around 99. For 2007, the average is 48 and the median is 31, with a standard deviation of 62.

One extreme—blogs with *loads* of comments—could be 800 or 400 in 2007. Two blogs had more than 800 comments: *A fuse #8 production* (1,689) and *Annoyed librarian* (813). In the first case, comments more than doubled from the previous study. In the second, where the blog barely existed in time for the earlier study, there were nearly *twentyfour times* as many comments in 2007 as in 2006. Four more blogs had between 416 and 457 comments: *Text & blog*, *Collecting my thoughts*, *LibrarianinBlack* and *Slaw*.



Many blogs rarely have comments, but 93 more blogs had at least 10 comments in 2007. Roughly half of those had 50 or more comments, including 22 averaging more than a comment a day.

To consider changes, it's necessary to look at the extremes for 2005-2006. Viewed that way, there are three "many comments" blogs: *A fuse #8 production*, *Zenformation professional* and *Slaw*. 104 more blogs had 10 or more comments.

Within that middle group, ten blogs had at least three times as many comments in 2007. Another ten had at least twice as many comments. Another eighteen had substantially more comments—at least one-third more than in the previous study. Twenty-one blogs stayed roughly the same (75% to 133%), while 44 had significantly fewer comments overall. In all, leaving out extremes, 48 blogs had significantly more comments, 44 had significantly fewer.

### Comments per post

If a blogger posts ten items a day and gets one comment per post, they'll wind up with a lot of comments—but a blogger who posts once a week and gets 20 comments per post has more extensive conversations.

Let's look at comments per post. Across all 142 blogs with comments in both quarters, the "average post" had 1.0 comments in the 2005/2006 studies—and 1.6 in 2007, a significant 60% difference. Looking at individual blogs, the *average* of average comments per post was 1.2 in the earlier studies, 1.7 in 2007—still significant.

Three blogs had very high conversational intensity in 2005/2006—more than four comments per post: *Zenformation professional*, *Vampire librarian*, and *InfoTangle*. All three have lots of comments per post in 2007, although *Vampire librarian* declined slightly. At the other end, 46 blogs averaged less than one comment for every two posts in the earlier studies.

Leaving out the extremes, five blogs more than tripled the average number of comments per post—and they're *not* all within the group that tripled overall comments. Another six more than doubled conversational intensity. 29 more increased comments per post by more than a third. 31 blogs show relatively minor changes and 21 had significant drops in average comments per post—in five cases dropping to no more than one-fifth the figure in the previous study. That's 40 with significantly more comments per post, 21 with significantly fewer.

Overall? There was more conversation—but not for every blog or every post. The first is encouraging. The second is certainly not news.

### Length of blog

Here, comparisons include 162 blogs. The nature of archives in other blogs precluded calculating text length without doing an unreasonable amount of work.

The total length was less than in the previous study, but not by much: 89.5% as long.

For overall length, using earlier figures, there are two *extremely* long blogs (more than 140,000 words in 2005 or 2006), *A fuse #8 production* and *Out of the jungle*. The first is still extremely long, down just 3% in 2007. The second dropped to typical length in 2007. Another four blogs were *very* long, between 53,000 and 83,000 words: *Slaw*, *Gypsy librarian*, *Collecting my thoughts*, and the blog now called *Attempting elegance*. One of those grew considerably longer, one stayed about the same and two got considerably shorter.

It's hard to say what constitutes an extremely *short* blog, but I'll suggest two thousand words over three months as a cutoff. Twenty-three blogs had fewer than 2,000 words in the earlier study—including nine with fewer than 1,000 words. Three of those nine wouldn't be included using my current criteria, as they had only one post during the quarter.

In the middle? Eight blogs more than tripled in length, another seven more than doubled, and another 18 grew by more than a third. Forty-three stayed roughly the same (from 75% to 133%). In all, 33 grew significantly longer and 58 got significantly shorter—including 17 that had less than one-fifth as much text in 2007 as in the previous study.

### Length per post

Length per post is a more meaningful number than length per blog. Overall, posts were *slightly* longer. For the 163 blogs where I could verify length in both samples, the "average post" was 232 words in earlier samples, 262 words in 2007. That difference is only 13%, not very significant.

In both samples, one blog stands out for true *essay-length* posts: *InfoTangle*, which averaged 1,463 words per post in the earlier study, 1,713 words per post in 2007. In 2007, one other blog exceeded the thousand-word mark: *Zenformation professional*, where the average post grew from 634 words to 1273 words.

I'm not sure it makes sense to exclude extremes when looking at percentage changes, although it may make sense to exclude blogs with very few posts. Looking at the whole sample, here's what I see:

- Five blogs had at least a tripling of the average length per post: *blogwithoutalibrary.net*, *Reflective librarian*, *Librarian's rant*, *Filipino librarian*, and *Information wants to be free*.

- For fifteen more blogs, average post length more than doubled.
- Forty-one more blogs showed significant increases (34 to 99 percent).
- Fully 61—more than a third of the blogs—stayed about (the average post in 2007 was 75% to 132% as long as the average post in 2005 or 2006).
- Relatively few bloggers became significantly more concise: 37, including 17 where average posts were less than half as long.
- There are six blogs where the average 2007 post was less than one-third as long as the average in an earlier study—but in five of those cases, one of the quarters has so few posts that the results don't mean much.
- Overall, that's 61 blogs with significantly longer posts, 37 with significantly shorter posts.

## Conclusions

For a fairly broad range of liblogs in March-May 2007, as compared to a similar period one or two years earlier:

- Bloggers post somewhat less often.
- People leave more comments in general and substantially more comments per post.
- Blogs are slightly shorter but posts are slightly longer.
- The universe of liblogs is probably not growing as fast as it was in 2005 and 2006, but may still be growing. It's certainly neither collapsing nor shrinking rapidly.

Will I do the full study? I'm still inviting comments; go to *Walt at Random* ([walt.lishost.org](http://walt.lishost.org)) and search for "liblogs waste"—or go directly to [walt.lishost.org/?p=751](http://walt.lishost.org/?p=751). Comments may help me decide whether or not to do the big study, and will certainly help me decide *how* to do it—what to include in the book that might result. Comments will be more useful before June 8, 2008.

## Net Media Perspective

# Citizendium and the Writer's Voice

It's time to look at *Citizendium*—the project begun by Larry Sanger in late 2006 that's a little similar to *Wikipedia* but also a lot different. I wrote about it in November 2006 (*C&I* 6:13) and briefly in March 2007 (*C&I* 7:3). It hasn't gone away. In some respects the project is doing well.

Unfortunately, given the ferocity with which even the mildest questioning of *Wikipedia* seems to be met these days, I need to provide disclaimers:

- If I say good things about *Citizendium*, that is **not** an attack on *Wikipedia*—unless you believe *Wikipedia* should be the only wiki-based knowledge base on the web.
- If I criticize *Citizendium* and *Wikipedia*—and I'm going to, at least in some respects—that does **not** mean I think either one is useless. It most certainly doesn't mean I think wikis are useless! My primary source of income these days comes from editing PALINET Leadership Network, which uses the same MediaWiki software as both *Wikipedia* and *Citizendium*.
- I do not regard "If you're unhappy, go fix it" as a reasonable response to criticisms of *Wikipedia*. I always thought that response was a glib way to dismiss criticism and it's an even more ludicrous response these days. Do I believe the Library 2.0 article is truly "neutral"? I do not. Do I have the energy to attempt to fix it and maintain those fixes in ways that satisfy the Wikicrats? Absolutely not. Nor would I suggest to others that they step into the morass of *Wikipedia* politics without looking first.
- I use *Wikipedia*. There are many areas where it's good enough for my purpose, including areas where I see no reason to doubt what's there. Of course, the more I know about a subject, the less likely I am to take the *Wikipedia* article at face value (e.g., some months back, the Blu-ray article was so far from neutrality it could almost have been written by Toshiba).
- I have no editorial or financial stake in *Citizendium*. I think it's an interesting project, one that librarians should pay attention to. I'm not a *Citizendium* contributor and haven't made much use of it. *I have no horse in this race.*

## Early Notes

Since most of you probably haven't paid attention to *Citizendium* and my early notes were buried near the end of a long PERSPECTIVE on *Wikipedia*, I'll repeat excerpts of those notes (from *C&I* 6:13).

Larry Sanger helped found *Wikipedia*. There's no dispute about that. He's expressed his unhappiness about *Wikipedia*'s lack of regard for expertise.

And he's trying to do something about it. Go to [www.citizendium.org](http://www.citizendium.org); you'll find the papers discussed below (as opposed to the *Many 2 many* posts), an FAQ, and if you're interested that's the place to watch the project unfold—assuming it does unfold.

*Toward a new compendium of knowledge (longer version)* is a 12-page essay with elements of manifesto, but mostly hope and design. Sanger's intrigued by the idea that "Tens of millions of intellectuals can work together, if they so choose" (emphasis in the original). "Whenever I think

about this now, I literally quiver with excitement.” He makes an odd prediction:

In the next year, by the end of 2007, *every* major university, library, museum, archive, professional organization, government, and corporation will be asking themselves with increasing urgency: how, using what systems and methods, can we pool *the entire world’s* intellectual resources to create the ideal information resource? What worldwide projects and organizations should we join or help to create?

I find that prediction so improbable that—much as I’m intrigued by Sanger’s idea—I can’t take him seriously on that point. Many professional organizations and corporations are essentially *incapable* of “asking themselves” questions like that, quite apart from governments and other agencies.

Sanger discusses *Wikipedia* as “an early prototype” of “how [open source hacker] principles should be applied to reference, scholarly, and educational content.” He considers himself a fan of *Wikipedia*—and wants “to *help launch* something better, if that’s possible.” He notes a few historical details—including his claim that Nupedia’s history has been told badly. He cites four “serious and endemic problems” with *Wikipedia*: ineffective and inconsistent rule enforcement, anonymity serving as a troll magnet, insular leadership, and his claim that “this arguably dysfunctional community is extremely off-putting to some of the most potentially valuable contributors, namely, academics.” He finds it likely that *Wikipedia* “will never escape its amateurism”—indeed, that it’s committed to amateurism. “In an *encyclopedia*, there’s something wrong with that.”

His solution? *Citizendium*, a fork of *Wikipedia* with a messy name that means Citizens’ Compendium. The fork would be “progressive.” It would start by importing all of *Wikipedia* (legal given the GNU Free Documentation License and also, he thinks, “morally permitted”). Then people—experts, he hopes—will start changing *Citizendium* articles and adding new ones. When refresh sweeps are done to pick up new and modified *Wikipedia* articles, such articles will *only* be picked up if there haven’t been changes in the *Citizendium* version.

He plans three main changes in the editorial process: Inviting experts to serve as editors, requiring that all contributors use their real names and follow a charter, and reversing some of the “feature creep” in *Wikipedia*. He offers more details for the proposed editorial system and asserts there will not be top-down bureaucratic structures. Insisting on real-name participation and expecting people to follow a brief charter should help avoid trolls, and there will be “constables” to eject “the project’s inevitable, tiresome trolls” based on a clear set of rules...

Two other differences are interesting. He insists on a “zero tolerance policy” toward copyright and libel abuses—and anticipates “much more courteous treatment” for living subjects, including (maybe) the ability to “request removal of biographies about themselves—if they are not politi-

cians or other prominent public persons—or even to have a crucial editorial role in the articles about themselves.” Are we not all experts about ourselves? Finally: *Citizendium* will be called an experimental workspace and compendium. It will require a vote of the project’s governing body/bodies to call it an encyclopedia. “It’s a wiki that *aspires* to be as good as a real encyclopedia.”...

Clay Shirky posted “Larry Sanger, Citizendium, and the problem of expertise” at *Many 2 many* on September 18, 2006. Shirky’s not much for subtlety: He asserts that Sanger’s opinions are based on three beliefs, then states “All three beliefs are false.” Shirky says experts don’t exist independent of institutions—so much for Albert Einstein, independent scholars, and thousands of others who would generally be considered experts. “You cannot have expertise without institutional overhead.” Later, he says “experts are real,” which seems contradictory. There’s more here, but I was most struck by that odd assertion.

Two days later, Sanger responded (in a guest post, posted in full by Shirky). He accuses Shirky of building a “straw Sanger” by psychologizing about him and showing an “annoying tendency to characterize my assumptions uncharitably and without evidence.” He questions Shirky’s certainty that *Citizendium* will fail (repeated several times in different ways), “but clearly he badly wants it to fail.” There’s a *lot* more here (the response is longer than the original post), including a side note that Shirky has his facts about Nupedia wrong. While I find Sanger’s style overwrought at times, in this particular exchange I believe Sanger gets the best of it. Shirky does indeed spout all sorts of certainties and assumptions for which he appears to have no evidence. But I’m hardly an unbiased observer; given Shirky’s overweening insistence that crowds of amateurs are superior to supposed experts (his whole “folksonomy rules!” schtick), I’m surprised to see him claiming to define expertise—except, I suppose, to knock it down.

There’s a second Sanger essay at the *Citizendium* site, about half the length of the first: “How open collaboration works: an introduction for scholars.” It’s interesting and clarifies that Sanger thinks of *scholars*—academics—as his prime source of experts. I disagree with Shirky that expertise requires institution, but that assumption may be closer to Sanger’s beliefs based on this paper. Or maybe not: it’s early in the project to read too much into it. The essay explains open source software and why it matters—and how the vision behind open source software can be extended to other forms of collectively owned work. He sees a breakdown between open source software projects (for which, he says, there’s often a small set of “senior developers”) and *Wikipedia*, which lacks “senior *content* developers.” “Clearly, the job of applying the OSS model to encyclopedias is unfinished.”

I think it’s time that the editors of the world—meaning academics, scientists, and others whose work essentially involves editing—got involved, not necessarily in *Wikipedia*, but in similar, suitably altered projects. I want to encourage you scholars, who

make it your life's work to know and teach stuff, to become students of the wonders and beauties of OSS development, and think about how it can be applied to the development of content.

I wonder how many scientists consider themselves editors—or whether this passage indicates Sanger could use an editor. (Yes, I know, I could also use an editor.) That leads into a brief discussion of *Citizendium* and notes on “promoters of OSS and open content” who say “these projects won't, or even can't work.” I won't quote the stirring paragraph that follows, but here are Sanger's final two paragraphs:

These well-meaning but wrongheaded promoters of OSS and open content seem to think that open collaboration is a method reserved exclusively to amateurs, students, the “general public,” and so forth.

Let's prove them wrong.

What's interesting is how unwilling some folks are to give Sanger that chance...

The only real mention of *Citizendium* in these pages after that came in another mostly-*Wikipedia* roundup in March 2007. It's brief enough to quote in full:

*Citizendium* hasn't disappeared; in fact, it's now opening registration. But there's been a big change in the project. Based on comments from early contributors, Larry Sanger concluded that forking *Wikipedia* in its entirety resulted in too much mediocre material, which contributors found tiresome to edit.

So the fork is being “unforked.” All *Wikipedia* articles in *Citizendium* that haven't yet been edited by *Citizendium* contributors will be (or have been) deleted. That makes the site much smaller but should substantially improve the average quality of entries—if Sanger's basic theses are correct. It's far too early to tell whether that's true.

I believe that decision was crucial. Without it, the relatively few edited articles in *Citizendium* would probably *always* be hard to spot in the mass of *Wikipedia* articles. Sanger's bold prediction for the end of 2007 was, of course, wrong: There really aren't millions of experts out there anxious to contribute serious amounts of time to the collaborative project, and we certainly don't have calls from every major institution to pool all the world's intellectual resources. Nor, in my opinion, should we.

## From March 2007 to March 2008

Let's look at some developments over the past year at *Citizendium*—noting that [www.citizendium.org](http://www.citizendium.org) will still get you there, but in the U.S. you'll be redirected to [en.citizendium.org](http://en.citizendium.org), the home page of the wiki. Most notes come from the *Citizendium* blog ([blog.citizendium.org](http://blog.citizendium.org)) and *Citizendium* itself, some from various reactions. I'm using “CZ” as an abbreviation (as *Citizendium* does), if only to save space and typing.

One oddity strikes me at the home page: Something happened to the “not yet an encyclopedia” disclaimer—unless the governing board took what I'd consider to be a premature vote. The home page doesn't *quite* say “this is an encyclopedia,” but it does say, “A wiki encyclopedia project” and “We are creating the world's most trusted encyclopedia and knowledge base.” Most naïve readers, including me, would say, “Oh, this is an encyclopedia, but it's not finished yet.” (There is, of course, a “beta” tag.)

### *We aren't Wikipedia*

About the time CZ officially launched, this essay appeared in a March 21, 2007 post. Extensive excerpts:

**How is the Citizendium similar to Wikipedia? In quite a few ways. In enough ways that you might make you wonder why we've started another project. Consider:**

1. We aim to create a giant free general encyclopedia.
2. We're managed by a nonprofit.
3. We use MediaWiki software.
4. We use wiki methods of strong collaboration. We don't sign articles or even have lead authors; we strongly encourage everybody to “be bold” and mix it up.
5. No credentials are needed to participate (as an author).
6. We still rely on “soft security” to a great extent. We mostly trust people and solve what few behavioral problems we've seen as they arise.
7. We are committed to a neutral, unbiased presentation of information.
8. We have similar naming conventions, and some other similar conventions.
9. Quite a few of our articles came from Wikipedia.
10. The community and project has been organized by the same person who organized Wikipedia.

Quite similar, it seems. But...

**How do we differ?** Let us count the ways.

1. **We've got editors.** They are experts in their fields...
2. **And we respect them for their expertise.** We do not dismiss their expertise as the mere accumulation of meaningless “credentials.”...
3. **We have a method for approving articles.** While Wikipedia has a “featured article” system, we have expert-approved articles...
4. **Our community and contributors are very different.**
  - \* **We have no vandalism.** Excluding the short period in which we permitted self-registration, we have had zero vandalism—none.
  - \* **We use our own names and identities.** Not only do we require people to sign in, we require them to use names that they attest are their own real names and to fill out a publicly-readable biography...
  - \* **We expect professional behavior and have very low tolerance for disruption.** Our Constabulary has some pretty firm rules which require professionalism...

\* **Our Citizens are bound by a social contract...**

\* **We don't use "userboxes."** User pages are biographies, not vanity pages.

\* **We don't use zillions of acronyms...** Using a lot of acronyms for every small point of policy creates a sort of in-group cant that makes the community only more insular.

5. **Our community managers (called "constables" not "administrators") are different.**

\* **Our constables are not high school students.** They are required to have a bachelor's degree and to be at least 25 years old.

\* **Unlike Wikipedia administrators, constables do not make editorial decisions...** Constables oversee behavior and adherence to basic policies; editors oversee content.

\* **Unlike Wikipedia administrators, constables are held to a conflict of interest policy...**

6. **Policy decisions are increasingly made by representatives, not "consensus..."**

7. **The Citizendium editor-in-chief is a limited-term position; he is not "dictator for life..."**

8. To be confirmed: **Our license disallows unauthorized commercial use.** We are using the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial (CC-by-nc) license for our original articles...

9. **Contributors share their copyright with us.** Contributors give to the Citizendium Foundation a non-exclusive right to relicense their work...

10. **Our article policies differ.**

\* **We are aiming to create introductory narratives, not collections of data.** We are encouraging our contributors to create coherent, readable, extended narratives that actually do the job of introducing a topic to people who need an introduction to the topic...

\* **We use an older version of the neutrality policy...** We use the old-fashioned English words "neutral" and "biased..."

\* **We take defamation seriously...**

\* **Since we've got expert editors on board, we can take a more sensible approach to citing sources.** The editors we have on board create the sort of sources that Wikipedia cites...

\* **We talk about maintainability (or feasibility), not notability...**

\* **We don't overuse templates...**

\* **We will never have nearly as many articles about porn stars and sexual fetishes.** We aim to be family-friendly.

11. **We don't have as many articles.** Yet. Give us a little time.

What to say about all this? Several things:

- The first similarity and last dissimilarity may be unfortunate. Maybe CZ shouldn't *strive* to be giant. Maybe it should strive to be *better* in a much smaller number of articles, knowing that *Wikipedia* isn't going away.

- Requiring real names seems entirely sensible. Yes, anonymity and pseudonymity have places in political and other discussions—but I fail to see any justification within an encyclopedic fact-based project.

- While I applaud the call for coherent, readable, extended narratives, I believe there's a conflict between that call and the later decision that articles need five or more authors before they can be signed. I believe the most coherent and readable narratives will always be the product of a single mind and voice, possibly tweaked by good editing. That's the focus of my grump at the end of this essay.

One link to this post from another blog dealt with the licensing issue—and a comment on *that* post was interesting, if only because it seems to represent a common and, I believe, unfortunate assumption. Asserting that CZ won't knock *Wikipedia* off "its top spot," the comment concludes: "There can only be one. Who will it be?" Why must there only be one? When did monopoly become not only desirable but also essential? Since its inception, I've looked at CZ as a promising project that could *complement* and possibly strengthen *Wikipedia*—not as a "*Wikipedia*-beater."

A few days later (March 28, 2007), the blog had a post "We ain't elitist" responding to charges that CZ is elitist because it has an explicit role for experts. Larry Sanger offers a hierarchy of elitism in content-production organizations (excerpted):

1. **Very exclusive:** the only participants permitted are not just experts, but distinguished experts. Example: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. One of the finest free reference works available online, just by the way. Would it be appropriate to accuse them of being "elitist"?
2. **Exclusive: experts/professionals only.** Examples: most big newspapers and magazines; some academic journals.
3. **Expert-focused, but semi-expert-welcoming:** while experts are most actively recruited, honored, and empowered, the system is also open to people who have a solid but nonexpert understanding of the relevant material...
4. **Open, but making a special role for experts:** no expertise is needed to participate, but experts are invited to fill a special role in the system. Example: *Citizendium*.
5. **Radically epistemically egalitarian:** everyone may participate, and no roles are made for experts; everyone is on an equal footing when it comes to making judgment about what is allegedly good, true, and beautiful... Example... most Web 2.0 projects.

This is a strong and (I believe) true statement: Paying *some* attention to experts is a far cry from elitism—unless you believe there are no experts. He concludes: "To accuse us of elitism is merely to expose the limitations of your world."

### *Why the Citizendium will (probably) succeed*

A March 26, 2007 post links to this ten-page essay. It's an interesting read, perhaps more so a year later. Already, CZ had enough activity to overcome some doubts. On the other hand, Sanger expected "the Google effect" to make a huge difference once the site went live—and, realistically, moving from 1,100 "CZ Live" articles in March 2007 to 5,500 "CZ Live" articles in March 2008 is, while impressive, not the sort of growth I think Sanger had in mind.

Those are quibbles. Sanger discusses what he regards as a sizable and growing latent demand for something like CZ. He also summarizes ten objections to CZ and attempts to answer each of them. Some points:

- Sanger asserts that CZ can become "more useful and more reliable than Wikipedia" while having fewer articles—but still guesses that, in the long run, more people will want to contribute to a CZ-style encyclopedia than to Wikipedia, "just because our system is likely to be more civil and pleasant and actually focused on the work of creating a credible encyclopedia."
- He (reasonably) objects to comparisons between CZ's very first articles and the best of Wikipedia's current articles—"You should have seen Wikipedia after its first few months!"
- To an objection that professionals either need money or credit that counts toward tenure, he responds that there are clearly motivated professionals—and that it's quite possible CZ will eventually have only a fraction of its articles "approved" (which requires signoff by an expert).
- Is anonymity a reason for Wikipedia's rapid growth? Sanger doesn't believe that; neither do I. He says it's "virality" (word of mouth), an ugly neologism but perhaps the right concept.
- There is, of course, the "credentialist" objection, which Sanger calls "uniquely Wikipedian...and little better than wishful thinking."
- Then there are Shirky's objections and related objections regarding relations between experts and authors—and Sanger basically responds that it seems to be working out. That's not surprising: Why would experts sign up for CZ if they didn't want to deal with authors?

### *The rants of April and May*

Larry Sanger seems to get on Nicholas Carr's nerves. Sanger wrote an essay in *Edge*; it's long and in a Sangerian style I can only tolerate for brief periods. Carr wrote a long and surprisingly nasty rant at *Rough type* (the current version—he modified it after first posting it—is entitled "Stabbing Polonius" and dated April 26, 2007), doing a good job of sneering at CZ and Sanger himself, throwing in a bit of scatology for good measure.

I don't think Carr's rant is worth summarizing in total. It includes a statement that entirely confounds me: "What normal people want from an encyclopedia is not truth but accuracy." Nor will I summarize Sanger's April 27 responding rant. I think Sanger's strongest point is that Carr seems not to care much about what CZ's actually doing—he'd rather belittle Sanger's writing.

In May, it was Jimmy Wales' turn. Assignment Zero, a "pro-am collaboration" between *Wired* and *NewAssignment.net*, explored "crowdsourcing" as its first topic, including a discussion of CZ. In that discussion, we get Wales' assertion that Sanger does **not** deserve cofounder credit for *Wikipedia*, credit he had earlier found appropriate. It's an interesting article with odd notes—e.g., claiming that CZ's model challenges "online culture at large" and that *unapproved* CZ articles are "generally inferior to what's available at Wikipedia," which may be true but seems irrelevant to the goal of having experts, um, *approve* the best articles. It is, in essence, a meaningless comparison. That and some other details make the piece come off as, if not a hit piece, certainly slanted. Sanger replied to Wales' new anti-Sanger comments at more length in the CZ blog (May 11, 2007), labeling some of Wales' comments libelous.

### *News from Citizendium*

One interesting piece on CZ appeared within *Wikipedia*—this article by Mike Johnson, posted July 30, 2007 in the *Wikipedia Signpost*. (It was an invited piece. Johnson is a "casual Wikipedian" and member of CZ's executive committee.) Excerpts:

If I had to summarize Citizendium into a sentence, it'd be this: *Wikipedia was concerned with making a working online encyclopedia; Citizendium is concerned with making a community that, if it works, will make a really good online encyclopedia...*

#### **Why should Wikipedians care about Citizendium?**

I'd offer three reasons.

1. The first is the most obvious. We're an alternative to Wikipedia, and we have a lot of good and interesting things going on. You might consider editing here. We welcome Wikipedians, and a lot of you may appreciate how we do things and what problems we don't suffer from (e.g., vandalism).
2. The second follows the saying, 'let a thousand flowers bloom': it becomes easier to understand and improve your wiki once your sample size rises above [one].
3. The third may not be intuitive, but I think it's very real: I suggest that Wikipedians should be deeply invested in Citizendium's success since having a viable competitor is invaluable for the long-term health of any organization. I won't make the full argument here, but it could be that if 10% of Wikipedians left and joined Citi-

zendium, it'd be better for Wikipedia in the long run. It's just a thought—but do think about the value of having a strong competitor.

Notes make it clear that Johnson really does admire Wikipedia, that he believes CZ's process lends itself better to “fleshing out often-disjoint content into a lucid encyclopedia,” and this:

My *personal* theory is there'll be a quality differential between Wikipedia and Citizendium depending on the type of content: articles on inherently ambiguous topics, such as history and society, articles on controversial topics, and articles which are introductions to a topic may benefit the most from Citizendium's collaborative model of explicitly empowering expertise (e.g., those are the sorts of articles I think of as benefiting the most from a “guiding hand” and “lucid expert narration”, or on the flip-side, being hurt the most by edit wars, over-compromising, and cranks).

### *And then there's Knol*

A December 15 CZ blog post notes that Google's announcement of Knol—an ad-supported project with signed articles, potentially many competing signed articles on a given topic—has resulted in a lot of press for CZ. On one hand, I'm sympathetic to the Knol concept, for reasons discussed later in this piece. On the other, it's a little confusing. Knol seems a bit like a searchable collection of signed individual web pages with comments and ratings. Its edge over other web pages would seem to be that Google's search algorithms *could* favor Knol articles and, as a result, yield more ad revenue for Google (and those Knol authors who choose to have ads). The Google announcement includes this paragraph:

Once testing is completed, participation in knols will be completely open, and we cannot expect that all of them will be of high quality. Our job in Search Quality will be to rank the knols appropriately when they appear in Google search results. We are quite experienced with ranking web pages, and we feel confident that we will be up to the challenge. We are very excited by the potential to substantially increase the dissemination of knowledge.

Does that mean being part of Knol will increase a page's ranking? Does it suggest Google's algorithms actually reward objective quality as opposed to link popularity? I can't tell.

When Sanger was interviewed about Knol, he identified three problems:

First, quality. It looks to me as if Knol is a high-level attempt to do what many others have done. Countless websites already exist that invite signed essays and information (remember h2g2.com?) and other content for public rating. Time will tell, but Knol will probably resemble other such websites, and have a huge amount of mediocre content, with a little excellent content mixed

in. The concept does not sound like a model that would attract many genuine experts. I say that because the notion that anyone may write a “knol” and be compared and ranked by “the crowd”—not by expert peers—is apt to attract relatively little notice from experts who are very careful about where they publish...

Second, lack of buy-in from the free culture crowd. Many of the sort of people who contribute knowledge to projects like Wikipedia and the Citizendium are likely to be very skeptical of a giant corporation organizing such a project, particularly with Google Ads appearing on the articles. It does not appear to be in the spirit of the free culture movement. Still, it is good that Google has decided to make ads optional.

Third, lack of collaboration... The quality and depth of encyclopedia articles written collaboratively by a huge global community, especially under expert guidance, will eventually beat out anything produced by individuals, regardless of their ability.

I'm less convinced regarding the third point. There's a huge difference between collaborative creation of a multi-article whole and collaboration on each article. I've seen no convincing evidence that collaborative *articles* are inherently better than those written by single authors, and there's reason to believe that, in certain respects, they're likely to be worse. That's a basic tenet on which I fundamentally disagree with Sanger, Wales and, I guess, the whole “wisdom of crowds” crowd. That doesn't automatically make me wrong; nor does it make me likely to be right.

### *CZ breaks five thousand—notes from this year*

CZ announced a landmark on January 22, 2008: Five thousand “live” articles. That's not much compared to *Wikipedia's* two million plus—and it might make sense for Sanger to say less about the potential for CZ to wind up with more articles than *Wikipedia*, a future that may be both unlikely and (perhaps) unattractive. Another measure is interesting: CZ articles as of early February totaled more than five million words. Sanger feels obliged to say, “More than Wikipedia did in its first year,” but that's irrelevant. Five million words of *good, edited, trustworthy* copy is a *lot*. That's fifty typical 300-page nonfiction books. It's almost three times as much as the entire run of *Cites & Insights*.

More important is that CZ's growth is accelerating. If that is accompanied by high quality, CZ can become a serious force before too long. “Millions of articles” in a few years? Maybe, maybe not. The equivalent of a quality printed encyclopedia? Quite possibly.

### *Why Citizendium?*

A two thousand word essay within CZ, “Why Citizendium?” lays out the case for CZ as it stands. It's an odd combination of attack on *Wikipedia* (and specifically

Jimmy Wales) and manifesto for a brighter day—and as longtime readers know, I’m rarely fond of manifestos.

Excerpts:

“**What is the point of the *Citizendium*,**” you might ask, “when Wikipedia is so huge and of reasonably good quality? Is there really a need for it?”

To put it forcefully: there is a *better way* for humanity to come together to make an encyclopedia. So we make this appeal to you. If we can do better than Wikipedia—or more positively, if we can pioneer a truly effective way to gather knowledge—then shouldn’t we?...

[T]o make our case, we don’t have to say that Wikipedia is broken. While different Citizens have different views about Wikipedia’s merits, we agree on one thing: we, humanity, can do better. But why think that the *Citizendium*, in particular, can do better?

#### **Why think the *Citizendium* can “catch up”?**

[Notes on growth and acceleration].. Even if we merely continue to triple our rate of growth every year, we will have millions of articles ourselves after some more years. In other words, we look to the long term—just as Wikipedia’s founders did in its first years. And the long-term outlook is positive indeed. In five to ten years, we can expect similar growth, similar numbers of active contributors, and a similar traffic ranking. So we need not worry that Wikipedia will “always be larger.”

#### **We can do better**

We do not think that Wikipedia is “good enough.” We think humanity can do better: Wikipedia is full of serious problems. Many of the articles are written amateurishly. Too often they are mere disconnected grab-bags of factoids, not made coherent by any sort of narrative. In some fields and some topics, there are groups who “squat” on articles and insist on making them reflect their own specific biases. There is no credible mechanism to approve versions of articles. Vandalism, once a minor annoyance, has become a major headache—made possible because the community allows anonymous contribution. Many experts have been driven away because know-nothings insist on ruining their articles. Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales acts as a law unto himself, not subject to a written constitution, with no official position, but wielding considerable authority in the community. Wales and other Wikipedia leaders have either been directly involved in, or have not adequately responded to, a whole string of very public scandals... The people with the most influence in the community are the ones who have the most time on their hands—not necessarily the most knowledgeable—and who manipulate Wikipedia’s eminently gameable system.

But even if you disagree with much of this indictment, you might still agree that we can do better.

#### **Real names are better**

By requiring real names, we give both our articles and our community a kind of real-world credibility that Wikipedia’s articles and community lack: if you look at our

recent changes page, you will see nothing but real names.... The *Citizendium* has virtually no vandalism and very little abuse of any kind.

To this, you might say that real names also exclude too many people, so that the *Citizendium* will grow too slowly. But this is puzzling to say, considering that many thousands of people have signed up to the *Citizendium* under their own real names. A community that asks its members to use their real names is more pleasant, polite, and productive than one that allows abusive people to disrupt the community under the cloak of anonymity...

#### **A modest role for experts is better**

We too permit very open contribution; the general public make[s] up the bulk of our contributors, as “authors.” We agree that broad-based contribution is necessary to achieve critical mass as well as the broadest spectrum of interests and knowledge.

But we believe that it is merely good sense to make a special role for experts within the system. A project devoted to knowledge ought to give special inducements to people who make it their life’s work to know things. We believe—and we think our work so far bears this out—that a project gently guided by experts will in time be more credible, and of higher quality, than a project making no special role for experts. So we allow our expert editors to approve articles (creating stable versions, with a “draft” version that can be easily edited). Editors may also take the lead, when necessary, in articulating sensible, well-informed solutions to content disputes—disputes that sometimes go on interminably on Wikipedia...

#### **The potential of the *Citizendium* is stunning**

...the most important reason to get behind the *Citizendium* is not a comparative point at all: it is that a fully-developed *Citizendium* would be stunning. Not only would it have millions of articles, but it would have, at least, hundreds of thousands of *expert-approved* articles, all available for free, all being instantly updatable with the latest research and events, and all wonderfully well written. Imagine enormous quantities of content combined with the highest quality and exhaustiveness of scope, all achievable only by radical collaboration. Imagine, as well, a whole raft of supplementary reference materials.

The world has never seen anything like this. But we can create it. Our best chance to do so is by throwing our support behind the *Citizendium*.

#### **Some personal motivations to support the *Citizendium***

But what about *you*—why should you get involved?

It’s mainly because it is fun and rewarding to share your knowledge with the world. Your contributions to the *Citizendium* are less likely to be degraded by poor edits later on: others will move your contributions forward, not backward. In time (we can’t say when—but eventually), the article you contribute to will be approved by an expert editor, and so represented to the world as containing a credible, reliable introduction to your topic. And all for free. We are accomplishing something truly worthwhile.



Many people, especially academics, are concerned that in a strongly collaborative project like this, they cannot get the individual credit they need. Well, you can already point people to the article history, where your real name will appear, crediting you with the specific edits you make. Also, we will soon probably start a pilot project that will allow people to be credited with their contributions on a “byline,” under certain circumstances...

Furthermore, academics and other experts can submit what we call “Signed Articles,” presenting their own personal, but hopefully objective take on an aspect of an article already in the *Citizendium*. We add “Signed Articles” to a “subpage” of the main article—one of many different types of subpages a main article has...

Fun, rewarding, and worthwhile—what more could you want?

### *Where things stand*

As of this writing, there are more than 6,100 live articles in CZ. “Live” means either that it’s original to CZ or that it’s copied (typically from *Wikipedia*) and there have been “at least three significant changes in three different places.” That 6,100 includes 778 developed articles (articles that are complete or nearly so), 56 approved articles (it’s a relatively slow process), and a bunch in various other categories.

As wikis go, the statistics aren’t impressive—but they may be misleading. The current pageview total is some 1.135 million over some 11,000 content pages. There are slightly more than 7,200 registered users. There’s definitely significant activity: more than fifty new pages were added within the last two days (as I write this), and the most recent 50 changes go back less than an hour (in a midafternoon check).

These are early days. I have no idea whether it’s conceivable or likely that *Citizendium* could overcome *Wikipedia*’s role as the quick-and-dirty place to check things out. I’m not sure that’s even a reasonable goal. Could *Citizendium* become known as a better place to go for well-written articles on a smaller number of topics—a *better* encyclopedia? Possibly, given time and energy.

I am unclear as to why so many seem determined not to let that happen—why so many commentators seem to want CZ destroyed in its early stages. I have heard nobody—*nobody*—suggest people should stop using *Wikipedia* and start using *Citizendium* instead, as things stand now.

I don’t remember. Was there horror when Google appeared by all those who knew that Alta Vista was all we needed—good enough, and we already knew it? Did columnists write attack pieces saying Google would never be of any use? If so, I must have missed them. What’s different now?

## The Writer’s Voice, The Expert’s Mind

*Wikipedia* is admirable in many ways and flawed in some. *Citizendium* seems to be off to a good start and has admirable goals. But it shares one flaw with *Wikipedia* that causes me to hope these projects *don’t* totally undermine traditional encyclopedias—or, worse, lead people to believe these resources are always “good enough” to understand a subject.

That flaw is the belief that the “group mind” is always better than any expert’s mind—that collaborative writing is always better than a single writer’s voice. The extent of that belief at *Citizendium* shows in the proposal to allow signed articles: An article can’t be signed unless at least five people have contributed to it. Once you have five people, there’s a good chance an article will be well on its way to the disembodied group prose that characterizes most *Wikipedia* articles. I think that’s a shame.

Here’s what I said in March 2007:

When Jimmy Wales says college students shouldn’t cite *Wikipedia* in research papers because they shouldn’t cite *any* encyclopedia, I agree. When Jimmy Wales says, “One aspect of Jaron Lanier’s criticism had to do with the passionate, unique, individual voice he prefers, rather than this sort of bland, royal-we voice of Wikipedia. To that I’d say ‘yes, we plead guilty quite happily.’ We’re an encyclopedia,” I disagree. Lanier struck me as calling for *voice*—not necessarily “passionate” but coherent, turning sets of facts into stories. There is *nothing* about an encyclopedia that precludes coherent, well-written entries representing single voices with personality; groupthink and bland speech are not prerequisites for encyclopedia entries. (Remember the “scholars’ edition” of the *Britannica*?)

I looked up an article in a traditional encyclopedia (albeit one in DVD form): *Encarta 2007*. The article, “Pre-Columbian art and architecture,” is long, segmented, and *interesting*; it’s written in a clear voice that tells a story. It’s also *signed*, in this case by Robert J. Loscher of the Art Institute of Chicago, an expert in the field. So are many articles in many encyclopedias. Wales’ defense is simply nonsense.

One frequently cited issue, the uncertainty as to whether stuff in *Wikipedia* has any basis in fact, is to some extent being dealt with as articles show ever more footnotes. Unfortunately, that process seems to have two negative side effects: It makes the articles harder to read (when there are superscript numbers every sentence or two), and it may be making articles even less coherent and “voiced.”

I think those issues deserve more discussion.

I decided to read one of the Approved articles at *Citizendium* and compare it—first with the equivalent

at *Wikipedia* and then with the equivalent at *Encarta 2007*. The example does *not* prove my assertion, because the example turns out to be primarily one scholar's essay at *Citizendium*, and a good one at that.

The example was Andrew Carnegie. CZ's article is roughly 7,000 words long—more than a typical encyclopedia would devote to most biographies, even those of major industrialists and philanthropists. It reads well, with good narrative flow and coherent organization. I felt as though I knew something of the man when I finished. That's not surprising. Fundamentally, this is Richard Jensen's article, with some edits and contributions from others. The article has *voice*—and deserves a byline, in my opinion.

*Wikipedia's* article is longer (about 8,000 words) but it's a mess. Sentences and paragraphs are choppy. The organization isn't coherent. While it's not flooded with footnotes, that turns out to be a problem: The article had its "Good Article" status removed because it doesn't meet *Wikipedia's* cookie-cutter approach to verifiability: There are dozens, maybe hundreds of facts, and there's not a number next to each one. The discussion page includes notes that the article is a mess—and given that Carnegie is a controversial figure, it's almost bound to be a bit difficult.

Neither article paints Carnegie as a hero, but *Wikipedia* barely paints him at all: Lots of incidents, no real sense of who he was.

The *Encarta* article is, well, terse: A biographical sketch that's much less satisfactory than either online choice. It's also an unsigned article, clearly not one of *Encarta's* prizes.

### *The virtue of voice*

The anonymous collaborative approach used by *Wikipedia* has its virtues. Those virtues do not include clear narrative flow or coherent narrative voice. The whole methodology pushes *against* the kind of voice that turns facts into stories, stories that communicate meaning.

I firmly believe that individuals are the best storytellers, certainly aided by good editors. Maybe not always, but as a rule. I also believe that the best way to communicate nonfiction—concepts, not just facts—is through stories.

Could any collaborative effort produce science writing with the clarity and coherence of Isaac Asimov's nonfiction works? I doubt it. Would Churchill's great works have been better vetted by large anonymous teams of interested parties? I'm certain not.

As an editor—now as a livelihood, and for nine years with the *LITA Newsletter*—I've always believed my role was to clarify and revise as needed while re-

taining as much of the writer's voice as possible. I believe I succeeded back then and am succeeding now. Yes, there have been cases where I've thought, "I could write that better"—but that's not my job.

Experts aren't always effective writers. Effective writers frequently aren't experts at anything except writing. Collaboration between expert and writer frequently works brilliantly—but that's not the same as group writing.

I've seen the claim that group efforts always improve writing. I don't buy it. I'd hate to see groupthink viewed as the goal of nonfiction writing in general. I'd hate to see the neutered (not neutral) prose of *Wikipedia* become the norm. If I'm just looking up a quick fact, maybe—but that suggests that *Wikipedia* articles should be a few hundred words long, or maybe just a paragraph. If I want to *understand* something, I'd like to hear a voice.

## Offtopic Perspective

# 50 Movie Hollywood Legends, Part 1

Like the original Family Classics 50 Movie Pack (*C&I* 5:4 and 5:7, March and May 2005) and 50-Movie All Stars Collection (*C&I* 6:4 and 6:14, March and December 2006), this collection isn't limited to one genre. Like the Family Classics set, it's mostly very old movies and includes quite a few that *do* qualify as classics or at least significant films of the times. (The All Stars Collection was TV movies.)

A quick reminder of the ground rules for the Mill Creek packs and how I'm dealing with the reviews:

- Date, director and the first run time are taken from IMDB, as are most names of stars and featured players (listed selectively and arbitrarily).
- When there's a bracketed time, it's because the *actual* runtime (as RealPlayer shows it) is at least a minute different from the IMDB run time.
- Unless otherwise stated, assume VHS-quality video—*not* DVD quality—with few major problems and OK mono sound quality, and assume "full screen" or pan-and-scan, not wide-screen. Most pre-TV movies were filmed full-screen, so that's not an issue for the oldest movies.
- The dollar amount is what I might be willing to pay for this movie in this condition separately, with a \$2.50 maximum for any single movie. If there's no dollar amount, I wouldn't pay anything for the movie.

- Any movie that gets \$2 or more (“or more” is rare) is a winner. Any movie \$1.50 or more is probably worth rewatching. Those at \$1 and \$1.25 are good but with flaws.

### Disc 1

*Dishonored Lady*, 1947, b&w. Robert Stevenson (dir.), Hedy Lamarr, Dennis O’Keefe, John Loder, William Lundigan, Margaret Hamilton. 1:25.

Hedy Lamarr is a successful magazine editor by day, a love-em-and-leave-em type at night, and it’s killing her. She drops out, moves to Greenwich Village to paint, falls in love with a scientist in the same building (O’Keefe)—and can’t escape an old paramour. Murder ensues, with a solid attempt to frame her. The naive scientist is disillusioned, but things work out. Fine drama, well acted. Downgraded for a noisy soundtrack, but still worth \$1.25.

*Good News*, 1947, color. Charles Walters (dir.), June Allyson, Peter Lawford, Patricia Marshall, Joan McCracken, Mel Tormé. 1:35 [1:33].

This one *should* have been in the Musicals pack—it’s a full-fledged big-show-number musical set at Tait College, with Peter Lawford as the quarterback and June Allyson as a shy coed. There’s more to the plot, of course, but this is a big, full-Technicolor, big-production-number musical including numbers such as “The Best Things in Life are Free.” The picture’s in excellent shape, as is the sound. \$2.00.

*Tom Brown’s School Days*, 1940, b&w. Robert Stevenson (dir.), Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Freddy Bartholomew, Jimmy Lydon, Gale Storm. 1:26 [1:20]

The problems of a boy new to Rugby (the school) and the headmaster trying to reform it from a rowdy bunch of hooligans into a first-rate school. Well played. Downgraded for seriously damaged soundtrack. \$1.25.

*Second Chorus*, 1940, b&w. H.C. Potter (dir.), Fred Astaire, Paulette Goddard, Artie Shaw, Charles Butterworth, Burgess Meredith. 1:24.

[Film also appears in Musical Classics; review repeated from *C&I* 7:5] The timeless Fred Astaire and a very young Burgess Meredith as two “friendly”-rival musicians who’ve managed to stay in college, running a collegiate band, for seven years. They hire a gorgeous (and effective) manager, somehow both graduate, and both try to get into Artie Shaw’s band, sabotaging each other along the way. Some slapstick, decent plot, lots of Shaw’s music and some other good numbers, and there’s a little dancing in there too. \$1.50.

### Disc 2

*A Walk in the Sun*, 1945, b&w. Lewis Milestone (dir.), Dana Andrews, Richard Conte, George Tyne, John Ireland, Lloyd Bridges, Huntz Hall. 1:57.

The walk is from the beach at Salerno to a farmhouse six miles inland. The time, the Allied invasion of Italy in World War II. Quite a good movie, with (as the sleeve

says) “long quiet stretches of talk with random bursts of violent action whose relevance to the big picture is often unknown to the soldiers.” There’s some print damage, but it’s a fine war movie with good performances. \$1.50.

*The Most Dangerous Game*, 1932, b&w. Irving Pichel and Ernest B. Schoedsack (dirs.), Joel McCrea, Fay Wray, Leslie Banks, Robert Armstrong. 1:03.

Rich hunter on a boat trip. The buoys don’t look quite right to the captain, but the hunter insists they continue—leading to a shipwreck which he alone survives. He winds up at a castle on a remote island, hosted by Count Zaroff, who recognizes him as a great hunter and boasts of hunting “the most dangerous game.” Other than a bunch of Russian-only servants, the only other ones there are a couple (also survivors of a shipwreck), with the man a somewhat drunken mess. Eventually, it becomes clear just what the most dangerous game is. Scratchy soundtrack but an effective, fast-moving flick. \$1.50.

*The Stars Look Down*, 1940, b&w. Carol Reed (dir.), Michael Redgrave, Margaret Lockwood, Emyln Williams. 1:50 [1:40]

British drama set in a coal mining community and apparently full of social implications. The union has pretty much deserted the working men, the mine owner’s hiding a map that indicates the mine is in danger of being flooded, a strike doesn’t help (and finally fails). Strike leader’s son goes off to university on scholarship but somehow drops out before the last year to marry a gold-digger he’s barely met—who is, of course, desperately unhappy (and indolent) in the mining town. The problem is that the movie doesn’t go anywhere. Sure, there’s the expected flood, sure, the conniving wife runs off with someone else, but there’s no sense of conclusion. Maybe the missing 10 minutes would help? \$1.00.

*The Bigamist*, 1953, b&w. Ida Lupino (dir.), Joan Fontaine, Ida Lupino, Edmund Gwenn, Edmond O’Brien. 1:20.

Harry Graham is a traveling salesman for the company he and his wife run in San Francisco. He seems to spend most of his traveling time around LA. He’s grown a little distant from his wife of eight years, and somehow winds up in bed with Ida Lupino in LA. That one occasion, naturally, leaves her pregnant. Thus the title. The film seems to say “well, he’s a decent man who got mixed up.” I could suggest that decent men don’t cheat on their wives, but I suppose that would be Puritanical. Scratchy but well acted (with Joan Fontaine and Ida Lupino, what would you expect?). \$1.25.

### Disc 3

*Monsoon*, 1943, b&w. Edgar G. Ulmer (dir.), John Carradine, Gale Sondergaard, Sidney Toler, Frank Fenton, Veda Ann Borg, Rita Quickley, Rick Vallin. Original title: *Isle of Forgotten Sins*. 1:22 [1:16]

The sleeve description says, “A young couple travel to India to a remote jungle village, to announce their betro-

thal to the bride's parents..." and so on, and lists George Nader as the star. If the person preparing the sleeve copy checked IMDB or standard reference works, they no doubt based that on the 1952 flick *Monsoon*.

This is an entirely different movie with an entirely different plot, filmed nine years earlier (with an entirely different title) and not even set in the same country. It's about greed, gold, diving and weather. It starts in a South Seas gambling hall/brothel and winds up in a similar establishment. In between? Better than you might expect, partly because there really are no heroes among this strong cast. \$1.25.

*Borderline*, 1950, b&w. William A. Seiter (dir.), Fred MacMurray, Claire Trevor, Raymond Burr, José Torvay, Morris Ankrum. 1:28.

Maybe I saw too much of Raymond Burr on TV, but his bad-guy movie roles always strike me as suiting him better than Perry Mason. This one's no exception. Burr is a drug ringleader (or one rung below leader) in Mexico. MacMurray and Trevor are two different American agents sent—by two different agencies—to infiltrate the gang. Naturally, each of them thinks the other one's part of the gang. Naturally, they fall in love. Naturally, it all works out. It's an odd combination—part comedy, part noir, part "melodrama" as the sleeve says—but, to my mind, it works pretty well. For that matter, MacMurray makes a fine leading man and tough guy. I found it enjoyable and the print's pretty good. \$1.50.

*Indiscretion of an American Wife*, 1953, b&w. Vittorio de Sica (dir.), Jennifer Jones, Montgomery Clift, Richard Beymer, Gino Cervi. Dialogue by Truman Capote. Original title: *Stazione Termini*. 1:12, 1:30, 1:03 in U.S. release [1:03].

This one's *supposed* to be a minor classic, but of course anything by Vittorio de Sica is supposed to be at least a minor classic. The plot's pretty simple. Jennifer Jones (the "American wife") has been somehow involved with the "Italian" Montgomery Clift and is now returning to her husband and child. The two meet in a train station and talk and talk and emote and talk and...

Unfortunately, Capote or no Capote, it's not very *interesting* talk. I'm not anti-romantic: I saw and loved *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset*, and generally like good romances. This one...well, at just over an hour it seemed way too long. I can't imagine sitting through the 90-minute version. For serious fans of de Sica or Jones, I'd reluctantly give it \$1.

*The North Star*, 1943, b&w. Lewis Milestone (dir.), Lillian Hellman (screenplay & story), Anne Baxter, Dana Andrews, Walter Huston, Walter Brennan, Ann Harding, Farley Granger, Erich von Stroheim, Dean Jagger. Music by Aaron Copland. 1:48 [1:45].

What star power! What historical drama! What sweep! What...well, nonsense, at least historically. The first quarter of the movie is bizarre, as it depicts the healthy,

happy, well-fed, joyous occupants of a Ukraine farming village who all have what they need thanks to benevolent Communism. They sing, they dance. Then their idyllic way of life is shattered by the Nazi invasion. The remainder of the movie is all about the occupation of their village, barbaric draining of children's blood by evil doctors, and the brave defense by a group of horse-riding village men hiding in the hills.

If you read the whole set of IMDB reviews, you might think this is some sort of early Hollywood Communist plot (you know that old Commie Walter Brennan, right?)—as opposed to a wartime propaganda film made at the request of the President, to help convince Americans that Russians were our allies and should be thought of more favorably. This is, then, a true period piece: A picture that could not have been made with that much star power two years earlier or five years later. All that said, and all those fine actors admired, it's just not a very good movie—not only does it romanticize the USSR, it's sort of a mess romantically and dramatically. At most \$1.

#### Disc 4

Starting here, I'm doing something I should have started long ago: When feasible, writing the first part of the review immediately after finishing the flick—*before* checking date, run length, director, etc. on IMDB. I need to offer my views before "informing" them through IMDB, particularly some of the axe-grinding reviewers at IMDB. The first movie here is a case in point.

*Diamond Thieves* (aka *The Squeeze*), 1978, color. Antonio Margheriti (dir.), Lee Van Cleef, Karen Black, Edward Albert, Lionel Stander, Robert Alda. 1:39 [1:26].

Good cast, well filmed, fast moving—and for some reason I'm pretty sure it's a TV movie. Or, if it isn't, it has the hallmarks of an "action" TV movie. How so? Strong cast but no real "openers" (stars who can assure a strong opening week). Catchy music that seems entirely derivative. Some odd plot holes at points. And, maybe most of all: I didn't *feel* anything about any of the characters, so I wasn't saddened or shocked when they were killed. Oh, and the fact that it's on a disc like this even though it can't possibly be more than 30 years old, given the cast.

The title gives you much of the plot. Thieves stealing from what I take to be other thieves. Things go badly. An imported safecracker survives (wounded) and interacts with various other actors. Lots of double-crosses. Several shootings. Lionel Stander—sidekick Max in *Hart to Hart*—doesn't overact in his role as a pawnbroker/fence. Karen Black chews the scenery, as does Van Cleef. And it ends. So, now I'll go check IMDB. Hold on... Well, look at that: Not a TV movie. Instead, a cheap Italian/West German production with many different titles in different countries—and the version here is missing several minutes, which may explain some of the plot holes. One IMDB reviewer calls it "European

Trash Cinema” and that may be a good description. Well, it *could* have been a TV movie, even though it got an R rating (presumably for shootings with no gore). I’ll give it \$1.25.

*Treasure of the Jamaica Reef*, 1976, color. Virginia L. Stone (dir.), Stephen Boyd, David Ladd, Chuck Woolery, Rosey Grier, Darby Hinton, Cheryl Stoppelmoor, Art Metrano. Original title *Evil in the Deep*. 1:36 [1:32]

This one’s a little odd, in several ways. The title and some other opening titles are slightly out of focus (maybe a digitization problem). Much of the movie’s filmed underwater—at the site of a real sunken ship off Grenada—and generally very good, although a little murky at times. Lots of voice-overs from Stephen Boyd. It’s about a group of friends who get salvage rights for a sunken 200-year-old Spanish Galleon off Jamaica and set about finding it. They seem undercapitalized, very informal in their methods and way overtrusting. For some reason, they’re not at all concerned when two people on another boat show up more than once—naturally, as it turns out, intending to kill them and take the treasure. The only significant female in the cast spends most of her time in a bikini, but does a credible acting job. At the time she was Cheryl Stoppelmoor; she changed that second name to Ladd (by marrying David Ladd, who she met during the filming) and went on to greater fame. For that matter, the cast could suggest a TV movie (Chuck Woolery?), but it’s not.

The sleeve description seems bizarre in one respect: “There’s a proverbial fly in the ointment: a big grey fly, known as a killer shark. Made before *Jaws*, its producers were accused of trying to rip off the Spielberg film.” Well, there’s a *mention* of sharks, but the cast is never imperiled by killer sharks, at least not in the version I saw. The peril is the people on the other boat. Apparently this is the G-rated version: The uncut version includes shark violence (and apparently a lot more other violence). I must admit, I suspect I prefer this without the shark; I give it \$1.25.

*The Klansman*, 1974, color. Terence Young (dir.), Lee Marvin, Richard Burton, Cameron Mitchell, O.J. Simpson, Lola Falana, David Huddleston, Luciana Paluzzi, Linda Evans, David Ladd. 1:52 [1:41]

Excellent cast. Mostly decent acting, although nobody was likely to get any award nominations. A “narrow” movie—set over a few days and entirely in one small backwoods Alabama town. Good color, good print, good sound. The missing footage mostly isn’t obvious—most likely omitting a rape scene (and other violence you really couldn’t show on TV) and otherwise cleaning it up for TV. A jarring movie, not surprisingly, since it deals with coldblooded Klan racism and violence in a period that’s uncomfortably contemporary—a few years after the Voting Rights Act, while some Southern towns still managed to keep blacks from voting. Without giving away much of anything, it’s a dismal ending: Lots of people wind up dead, with no real resolution in sight.

It’s not a terrible film. As trimmed here, it’s mediocre, most flawed because it’s somewhere between a violent melodrama and a message picture. As cinema, it’s a mess. As a flick, it’s so-so. \$1.25.

*Lola*, 1969, color. Richard Donner (dir.), Charles Bronson, Orson Bean, Honor Blackman, Michael Craig, Paul Ford, Trevor Howard, Robert Morley, Susan George. Original title *Twinky*. 1:36 [1:18].

An odd one, and if you think the name bears some resemblance to *Lolita*, you may not be entirely wrong. Charles Bronson (back in his pre-action days) plays a mid-30s American writer (of novels hot enough to get banned in some places) in London, who gets involved with a 16-year-old schoolgirl (in a short-skirted uniform quite plausible for the time). She convinces her to marry him: In Scotland, at the time, she’s apparently legal without parental consent. Her parents are shocked—but her grandfather (Trevor Howard), somewhat of a dirty old man, seems delighted. They go to America. Things don’t go terribly well. Orson Bean has a good role as Bronson’s lawyer, who thinks the marriage is absurd. The biggest problem, really, other than titles that seem to focus primarily on the exposed thigh and bent leg of a bicycling schoolgirl, is a total lack of resolution. There’s no ending to speak of. Not that this would have been a great picture anyway—it’s remarkably superficial given the story line. (That could be the missing 18 minutes; they’re not obvious as it stands.) Looking at IMDB *after* writing the above: Susan George was *Lola/Twinky*, and 18 at the time. Good print, good sound, surprisingly good cast, generally good acting. Just not much depth or closure. \$1.25.

#### Disc 5

*Boy in the Plastic Bubble*, 1976, Color, made for TV. Randal Kleiser (dir.), John Travolta, Glynnis O’Connor, Robert Reed, Diana Hyland, Ralph Bellamy, Buzz Aldrin, 1:40 [1:35].

*Note:* I reviewed this flick back in 2004 as part of the “DoubleDouble Feature Pack.” Technically, that means I should watch it again, as this is likely to be an entirely different print. But I’m not sure I can bring myself to watch John Travolta’s early “acting” again—so I spot-checked it for print quality and timing.

Here’s the original review. This is an Aaron Spelling production: A TV movie with a *very* young John Travolta. I’m not sure where the five minutes went (or if the IMDB info is correct); it seems to be a decent print. I’d have to say Robert Reed, Glynnis O’Connor, Diana Hyland, and Ralph Bellamy all out-act Travolta, who seems unformed as an actor at this point. As TV movies go, it’s mediocre but watchable. \$1.00.

*Oh, Alfie*, 1975, color. Ken Hughes (dir.), Alan Price, Jill Townsend, Paul Copley, Joan Collins, Rula Lenska. Original title *Alfie Darling*. 1:42 [1:19]

Make a successful picture (*Alfie*) and what do you get? A sequel of sorts. It’s about a good-looking but vapid truck

driver who has his way with several women, married or not, and finds one who doesn't fall for him immediately. Naturally, he pursues her; naturally, she catches him. After a little nonsense (he gets punched out by one of the cuckolds, his codriver falls in love, gets married and needs advice), all ends well. That's pretty much all there is to it.

The sleeve description (apart from spelling "truckor" with an "o") says Alfie "uses his job as a way to commute from tryst to tryst in his travels across the United States," that the woman in question is "as callous and fond of one-night stands as he is" and that their relationship faces "dangers waiting in the shadows." Hmm. The movie I saw was set in England and France both in fact and in dialog, I saw no sign that the woman (a magazine editor) was callous or fond of one-night stands, and if there were any dangers they might have been that she'd come to her senses and see what a himbo she was hitching up with. No such luck. Then again, IMDB mentions "female nudity" which certainly isn't the case—this is probably a TV version with quite a bit lost from the original. Ah well, it's reasonably well filmed with a good print. For that, I'll give it \$1.00.

*Carnival Story*, 1954, color. Kurt Neumann (dir.), Anne Baxter, Steve Cochran, Lyle Bettger, George Nader, Jay C. Flippen. 1:35 [1:33].

A carnival isn't making it in America so they decamp to Germany—where a beautiful woman clumsily pick-pockets one of the carnival folk (who appears to have pocketed a portion of the gate). He catches her, she's down on her luck, he invites her to join the carnival (as a general helper) and, of course, makes his move. He's abusive, but she takes it (or maybe "and she loves it"—that's never entirely clear). Then she meets up with the high-diving artist, who adds her to his act, courts her and marries her. Then the high-diver plunges to his death when a rung of the ladder is loose.

Sure, it's ruled accidental. Sure, nobody even checks the ladder. You can't possibly imagine that the sleazy ex-boyfriend could have anything to do with it... Later, he shows up again. The husband had willed his entire fortune to her (\$5,000, but this was a while back), all in cash, all hidden behind a mirror. The no-good boyfriend who she can't resist disappears with the five large. Oh, there's another man involved: a photographer who's sympathetic to her plight and, naturally, also falls for her. I've probably left out her attempt to spice up the act after her husband's death by doing a 360 in midair, which causes her to land badly and be out of commission for some time. Eventually, it all ends—with a minor character playing a major role. If this all sounds melodramatic, it is. But it's also well filmed and not badly acted by a good cast, with a pretty good print. \$1.50.

*Four Deuces*, 1976, color. William H. Bushnell (dir.), Jack Palance, Carol Lynley, Warren Berlinger, Adam Roarke. 1:27 [1:24].

The sleeve calls it a "tongue-in-cheek crime melodrama" and it has a fine cast, with Jack Palance, Warren Berlin-

ger and Carol Lynley (among others). It's done comic-book style, with big color captions popping up on some scene changes. The print's pretty good, sound is fine, good Roaring 20s music, reasonably well filmed.

Maybe that's enough. It's a lively story with loads of action, double crossing, explosions, gunsels, maidens in distress... No heroes, really, but a variety of villains in what's basically an old-fashioned prohibition-era gang-vs.-gang war, with each gang having a speakeasy as headquarters. Somehow I couldn't get into it. Sure, you could say it's all comic-book violence, but it seemed as though the only ways to move the plot forward were machine guns and arson. I don't know about tongue-in-cheek, but I found it offputting. You might think it's great good fun. I didn't, and wind up with (charitably) \$1.00.

### Disc 6

*Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman*, 1947, b&w. Stuart Heisler (dir.), Susan Hayward, Lee Bowman, Marsha Hunt, Eddie Albert. 1:43 [1:30]

A nightclub singer helps her boyfriend get a job as a radio singer. He succeeds. They marry. He succeeds more. She quits her job—after all, he's making all the money they need or want. She has a baby. He's gone a lot of the time. Meanwhile—well, the opening scene shows her downing a double (straight up) in about five seconds before going on, and as time goes on she has *lots* of doubles, to the point of seeing double, falling down drunk and starting out again the next morning. Also, she smokes and has a bad habit of dropping the lit cigarette when she's pretty well lit. Eventually, her husband files for divorce and custody, she kidnaps the child...and, well, you can pretty much guess what happens next. After that, according to the sleeve, "with hard work and her husband's support, she overcomes her addiction."

Except that, in the version I saw (which appears to be missing a scene or three), the last minute of film has her going from being bandaged in a hospital bed to sitting up and assuring her husband that it's all going to be OK from now on. No hard work, just instant cure. Never mind that. Susan Hayward is quite effective (good enough for an Oscar nomination), Eddie Albert is excellent as her husband's songwriting partner and her friend and accompanist (the only constant through the breakup), and it's well filmed (and a decent print), but certainly not a landmark in cinema, even as a "sudser" and precursor of all those Lifetime TV movies. Supposedly based on the life of Bing Crosby's wife Dixie Lee. \$1.25.

*The Big Wheel*, 1949, b&w. Edward Ludwig (dir.), Mickey Rooney, Thomas Mitchell, Mary Hatcher, Michael O'Shea, Spring Byington, Hattie McDaniel. 1:32 [1:23].

If you go by the sleeve, this is a similar story to *Smash-Up*, but with a racecar driver as protagonist. He gets drunk, ruins his life (by killing another driver because he doesn't recognize that alcohol and gasoline don't mix), and eventually manages to recover. Well, no. Set

aside the fact that alcohol (i.e., ethanol) and gasoline mix very nicely; that's not really the plot.

Mickey Rooney stars as a young would-be racecar driver whose father was also a racecar driver, killed in a crash at the Indy 500. The start of that sentence may tell you a lot about how you'll approach this flick. If you find Rooney immensely irritating as an actor, it helps that he's playing an arrogant, bullheaded young driver—but makes him less sympathetic than I think he's supposed to be. Anyway, yes, he crashes into another driver. Yes, he was drunk at one point, but that was the night before, and he was trying to warn the other driver that his wheel was about to fall off. But, of course, since this punk was fond of saying "I'll drive right over 'em" with regard to other drivers, people aren't likely to believe his story. That's the key plot turn. Naturally, it all sort of works out in the end.

I'm not fond of Rooney and that may color my rating. It's reasonably well filmed and not badly acted. Lots of car racing scenes. All things considered, it's another middling \$1.25.

*Killing Heat* (original title *Gråset sjunger*), 1981, color. Michael Raeburn (dir.), Karen Black, John Thaw, John Kani, John Moulder-Brown. 1:45 [1:30].

Let's see if I can summarize the plot. A man asks a woman to marry him. She says yes. They wind up in South Africa (the old apartheid South Africa), on his badly run farm. She's miserable from the get-go, and doesn't especially hide it, mostly moping around looking like death warmed over. He gets terribly ill from time to time. She winds up dead—but since the film *begins* with her dead, we knew that already.

The sleeve says something about her being a successful woman and having a hard time coping with the new country, and being involved with another man. None of that comes through in the picture. What comes through is...well, nothing much, as far as I could tell. It might make more sense with the other 15 minutes. Maybe. Karen Black gives perhaps the most dispirited, dreary, flat performance of her career (or at least of any of her movies I've seen). I didn't care about any of the characters. If I was watching this from start to end, I would have given up a third of the way in: It's slow, uninteresting, with no particular point that I could find. It's just blah, and unpleasant blah at that. Maybe I'm missing something, but I think I'm being charitable even to give it \$0.25.

*The Fat Spy*, 1966, color. Joseph Cates (dir.), Phyllis Diller, Jack E. Leonard (twice), Brian Donlevy, Johnny Tillotson, Jayne Mansfield, "the Wild Ones." 1:20

I'd call this a triumph of programming. On its own, this teen/bikini/singing flick is a poor example of its kind, with third-rate songs (I'm being kind here), a plot that's thin even by the standards of the genre, and dancers who don't seem to much like dancing. But as the second disc on this side, it's badly-needed comic relief with a little life to it, making it watchable nonsense.

It's nonsense, to be sure, and mediocre nonsense at that. Maybe it's intended as a spoof on the teen-bikini movies, but those always seemed to be spoofing themselves. Phyllis Diller is, well, Phyllis Diller. Jack E. Leonard is so-so in his twin parts. Jayne Mansfield makes the most of an odd part, but the script gives her nothing to work with. The Wild Ones were a very minor and (on evidence) not very talented band—apparently best known for doing the first, non-hit, version of "Wild Thing." The print is very good and the sound is fine. Independently, probably \$0.75. Through the genius move of pairing it with a depressing, badly-done downer, it shoots up to \$1.00.

## Summing Up

*Good News* is a fine film. *Second Chorus*, *A Walk in the Sun*, *The Most Dangerous Game*, *Borderline*, *Carnival Story* are all probably worth second viewings. That's six good movies on the first six discs, which sounds good—or one-quarter of the total, which isn't quite so great. On the other hand, there's only one total loser; the rest are mostly "middling"—not great, not awful. I count a total of \$29.25, or \$22 if you leave out everything below \$1.25.

## Retrospective

### Pointing with Pride, Part I

*Cites & Insights* 8:3 (March 2008), the Centenary Issue, included these sentences in the introduction:

You may be expecting a nostalgiafest. Not this time around. Nor will I give you a list of 100 items or even ten lists of ten items each.

"Not this time around" meant exactly that: The 100<sup>th</sup> issue didn't include a nostalgiafest. But 100 is a milestone and merits looking back at those issues, pointing out some highlights and encouraging you to check issues you haven't already read.

Here's the first installment.

### December 2000: Number 1

This 24-page issue is the only one available online that doesn't have a volume and issue number. The URL for all other issues is a predictable [citesandinsights.info/civMiN.pdf](http://citesandinsights.info/civMiN.pdf), where M is the volume number and N is the issue number. The inaugural issue is [citesandinsights.info/ci2k12.pdf](http://citesandinsights.info/ci2k12.pdf).

That inaugural issue had no freestanding essays as such. All the sections were collections of stuff, including one section name that continues: TRENDS & QUICK TAKES. Back then, I defined *C&I* as "Stuff I think is worth writing about that doesn't appear suitable for a "DisContent" column in *EContent*, a "PC

Monitor” column in *Online*, or a freelance submission to *American Libraries*.” I think it’s an interesting issue, perhaps more as an exercise in nostalgia than for any other reason.

### *Pointing with pride*

THE CONVERGENCE CHRONICLES discussed “some of the nonsense going around about compressed digital media”—nonsense that’s still with us.

The first item in TRENDS & QUICK TAKES was “Free ISPs: Use them while you can.” Hard to argue with that, although the gurus at *Wired* seem once again to be proclaiming (as some did in 2000) that *everything can be free*. Remember free dialup? Freewwwweb? WorldSpy? Juno? How about free *broadband*—was there ever such a beast?

The search wars were going strong even back then. I spent a page discussing a *PC World* article on “how to stop searching and start finding,” involving objective tests of 20 search engines but metrics for those tests that are at best semi-objective: Looking only at the first ten results for each search and determining “relevance” as well as broken or duplicate links. The writers said relevance wasn’t an issue for directories such as Yahoo! (remember when Yahoo! was primarily a directory?), Open Directory and LookSmart (who?). I was impressed that one of the photo insert examples, with quotations from real users, cited a real search using the user’s favorite search engine—a search that *just didn’t work* when I tried it. Ah, the names in that article: Lycos, DirectHit, Northern Light, HotBot—and, of course, Alta Vista.

I took offense at the flat statement by Rick Inatome, CEO of ZapMe!, in a *FamilyPC* article: “The Internet is paid for by banner ads.” Remember ZapMe!? It provided “free” internet access and loaner PCs to schools—in return for “ads, and lots of them.”

### *General bemusement*

I discussed “the etail revolution” in downbeat terms. I wasn’t entirely wrong, but I was *mostly* wrong. Of course, I also thought DigiScents ISmell, a scent peripheral, was a remarkably stupid idea (the coverage begins “Bwahaha. Oh stop it, you can’t be serious! You want me to add a box to my PC so that I can smell stuff on the Web—mostly ads? How much are you planning to pay me to do that?”)—and so did most other people, apparently. Wacom introduced a wonderful 9x12” pressure-sensitive LCD panel and touch screen—for \$4,000 and maybe worth it for the right buyers. Bill Howard was perhaps a bit premature in asking, “Is film dead?” in a *PC Magazine* review of *three-megapixel* digital cameras—costing \$700 to \$1,000.

I was still doing PC Values. The December 2000 “Top, Midrange” PC was the Gateway Select 1100: An Athlon-1100 (presumably 1.1GHz), 60GB hard disk, 128MB SDRAM, graphics card with 16MB display RAM, DVD-ROM, home networking and fax/modem support and a 16”-viewable (that is, 17”) CRT. It came with a 3-piece Boston Acoustics speaker system and MS Works. It cost \$1,999. That was a 32% improvement in bang for the buck as compared to September 2000. Remember when 128MB SDRAM was plenty and 60GB was a pretty large hard disk?

## September 2001: Number 11

One good reason to read *Cites & Insights* 1:10: It’s only 18 pages long. I opened with a sad PERSPECTIVE, “Saying farewell to *The Industry Standard*.” Excerpts:

While *TIS* was one of too many new-economy magazines, it was different in three ways:

- As a weekly, it offered faster commentary without adopting a straight “newsweekly” approach.
- The writing, reporting, and commentary in *TIS* had depth and quality that belied its weekly status and seemed fresher and better than most competitors.
- Uniquely, in my experience, *TIS* covered the dot-com boom without becoming a cheerleader for the “Internet revolution” or buying into the constant stream of hype. Indeed, *TIS* had a strong record for exposing hype and fraud.

At its peak, the magazine had 200,000 circulation—and it was profitable after less than two years. Last year, it set a record for the publishing industry with 7,558 advertising pages... *TIS* ran conferences; it published a monthly supplement *Grok* (but not for long); and one weekly issue reached 300 pages. Expanding rapidly, *TIS* leased enough office space in San Francisco for the 400 to 600 people the company expected to need.

A cynic could suggest that the company heads failed to read their own coverage closely enough. When this year’s slump set in, ad pages—which had grown 133% last year over 1999—dropped 75%; ad revenue dropped to \$40 million (estimated). Meanwhile, \$60 million in signed leases had to be paid. Under those conditions, the company’s efforts to get a short-term loan (while seeking a buyer) yielded unacceptable terms. The August 23 issue I received a few days ago is the last issue—unless a buyer does come along, and it’s tough to find buyers for magazines that aren’t publishing...

In more than one story, editor-in-chief Jonathan Weber said something like this: “I think we had a great magazine and had great people here and I’m very sorry we won’t be able to keep doing it. I’m very proud of what we accomplished here. I have no regrets.”

Weber has much to be proud of. *The Industry Standard* had three great years. I’ll miss it. So, I believe, will oth-



ers trying to cope with relentless “Internet revolution” hype without ignoring what’s actually going on.

Technically, *The Industry Standard* has returned as a website. It’s not the same thing—not even close

There’s snarky commentary on *FamilyPC*’s list of “100 products you’ll love,” including products that didn’t *conceivably* belong in a PC magazine (bread-makers, knife sharpeners, choppers) and a \$1,044 15” LCD TV/display that “won’t bust your budget.” John Dvorak thought every informational web site should have one *and only one* subject so we could browse “the web by subject the same way you can browse a library.” He also wanted separate internets for email and for the web—and wanted Microsoft to “cut back on browser features, please!” I was amused by a helpful *PC Magazine* reference to an earlier article, particularly given the article’s title:

“(Enter URLs with Fewer Keystrokes,” [www.pcmag.com/stories/solutions/0,8224,2690501,00.html](http://www.pcmag.com/stories/solutions/0,8224,2690501,00.html))” Italics in the original.

Let’s stop with the September 2001 Top Midrange PC configuration—and in some ways, I’m surprised at how little it had changed: Gateway Performance 1600: Pentium 4-1600 (1.6GHz), 128MB SDRAM, 40GB 7200rpm hard disk, graphics card with 64MB RAM, CD/RW drive—and otherwise the same configuration as in December 2000, but for \$1,499.

## May 2002: Number 21

Remember COWLZ? The lead essay in this issue was a call for participation in the Coalition/Consortium of Online and Web-based Library-related Zines / Newsletters. At the time, it seemed like a growing field that could benefit from some organization. So much for good intentions. Nothing came of it except a dark archive that may or may not still exist. The field turned out to be shrinking rather than growing.

Looking back at COPYRIGHT CURRENTS, the good news is that CBDTPA never became law (but there are always new threats of extreme copyright protection). “Quiet notes in a quiet time” was the heading for an Ebooks/Etext update—and it continues to be a “quiet time,” even with Kindle.

DataPlay, that quarter-size CD replacement with DRM built in, a sure-fire medium because the major labels wanted DRM so badly—was still “almost here,” a status that continued until it faded away entirely.

## February 2003: Number 31

The lead essay is “Copy protection and next-generation audio.” I start by discussing DVD-Audio

and SACD, both of which provide substantially higher resolution than CD—and come with strong DRM.

For [most] consumers, the sales pitch is mostly surround sound, laced with a promise of even better sound than CD’s “perfect sound forever.” Given SACD-based and DVD-Audio based surround-sound systems that cost \$500 or less including receiver and speakers, it’s fair to say that “better sound” is mostly theoretical in those cases. For the industry there are two other sales pitches, both more important:

- A new audio medium offers the chance to sell people the same music yet again, if you can convince them the new medium is better.
- Unlike CD Audio, an inherently unprotected medium, both SACD and DVD-Audio are inherently copy-proof or at least copy-resistant, and there’s no nasty old standard getting in the way of making them even more so. More to the point, at least with DVD-Audio, watermarking may provide another level of copy protection.

The problems with both media, in brief:

- There are two of them. Yes, Sony’s the primary force behind one (SACD) while a so-called standards body (really an industry cartel) is behind the other (DVD-Audio or DVD-A).
- In times when money doesn’t flow like water, and with advantages that are nowhere near as clear as those of CD over LP or DVD over VHS, people aren’t flocking to the new media—a situation not helped by the presence of two media.
- While record stores are ever so eager to stock copy-protected media, they’re not eager to stock multiple formats.
- There haven’t been many DVD-Audio releases (maybe 300 by the end of 2002, many from minor labels) and not loads of SACD either (but more than 650, many from major labels).
- People who think 128K MP3 is “CD-quality” are never going to hear sonic improvement from either medium, although they might convince themselves that they can.
- Surround sound may be neat, but most surround-sound receivers can produce pleasant effects from ordinary stereo CDs. Unless you really want to be sitting in the middle of an orchestra or band (as one label masters its DVD-Audio releases), discrete surround sound may not be a big selling point for most consumers.
- Savvy consumers (both of you!) don’t appreciate the built-in copy protection.

I discuss dropping CD sales (yes, that started that long ago; yes, CDs are still the bulk of recorded music sales), the views of consulting groups that DRM wouldn’t work in the long run—and the assurance of various voices that DRM was clearly going to *be* the future.

Maybe not. SACD continues to play a role in classical music. DRM never did catch on for consumer sound media—DataPlay was a bust, DVD-A and SACD not big, and Sony’s hamhanded attempts at DRM-laden pseudoCDs were disastrous—and it looks as though downloadable music is (finally) moving away from DRM. Of course, some legal-download sites such as emusic have always offered straight MP3s without DRM.

I thought “gadget fatigue” might be setting in way back in February 2003. Silly me. There are a couple of pieces related to forecasts. Better you should download the issue and read them yourself!

## October 2003: Number 41

This 20-page issue has six or 41 essays, depending on how you look at it. It was the first “hundredth issue”—I’d done 59 editions of “Trailing Edge Notes” and “Crawford’s Corner” in *Library Hi Tech News*, and although *Cites & Insights* was already starting to veer from the original model, it was (and is) a continuation.

Issue 41 was the first logical stopping point for something I still viewed as an experiment. Instead of stopping, I did 41 mini-perspectives. Quite a few of those brief essays still work today. For example:

### 3. Big News: People Still Read Print

Ah, those baby boomers. This fall’s Pew Internet study says that the “older tech elite” (ages 42-62, which covers a lot more than the baby boom) “are fond of technologies yet fall back on more traditional ways and means of doing things.” That’s from an AP story on the report, but the plaintive “yet” fits my image of most Pew Internet reports. While 44% of this group gets online news on a typical day, 60% read a newspaper. “By contrast,” 39% of the “younger tech elite” get online news and 42% read a newspaper. Note that newspaper readership among the *technologically elite of the next generation* is still higher than online news usage.

Sigh. John Horrigan of Pew thinks it’s “social conditioning”—you know, we used to use card catalogs and “relied on stacks of books in the library.” “For young folks, *pretty much everything* is done electronically.” And the study to demonstrate this is?

Some technologically knowledgeable old fogies would say we read print newspapers and use books *because they work*, and that we use online sources *because they work* for different purposes. But “social conditioning” is how you put it when you’re selling the Wonders of Internet Life.

It took a few more years for Pew Internet’s bias to become crystal-clear, but there were hints in 2003.

I think you’ll find the set of 41 interesting from a 2008 perspective—including a report on the death of physical media that had 19% of home video revenue

and 33% of music sales shifting to download sales by 2008. That turns out to be more than two times high for music and maybe ten times high for video. *Wired* called Dell “the Wal-Mart of hardware”—and *probably* meant it as a compliment. We read of the wonders of the anacubis viewer for Google searches, visualizing search results to make relationships immediately apparent. Used anacubis much lately?

## Mid-June 2004: Number 51

All copyright, all the time. I devoted this entire issue to “catching up with copyright,” almost all of it in a COPYRIGHT CURRENTS with sections on Big Media and peer to peer, DMCA fallout, DMCRA, database protection, saving the public domain and miscellany. All still worth reading, if plaintively, given that DMCRA hasn’t gone anywhere—but at least we still don’t have the level of database protection (copyrighting facts) that was being proposed.

The final piece was a COPYRIGHT PERSPECTIVE: “True piracy and other thoughts.” It was one of the pieces that got me labeled **both** a copyright hardliner and anti-copyright. Here ‘tis:

I read the news today, oh boy, about three cases where people were either arrested or chased out of a theater after diligent ushers spotted them using a camcorder to record a current motion picture.

I’ve been critical of Big Media and what I regard as extreme copyright legislation (at their behest) and practice, unbalancing U.S. copyright toward rightsholders at the expense of citizen rights. I’ve also been critical of the term “piracy” as used for most peer-to-peer file sharing and casual CD-R burning. I will continue to be critical in both areas.

So how do I feel about those devil studios urging ushers to spot camcorders in movie theaters and prevent them from being used, even charging people with crimes for using them?

More power to the studios. I hope they succeed.

Just as I cheer when those devils at RIAA manage to locate and shut down factories that demonstrably produce nothing but bootleg CDs and DVDs. Good for them.

There is such a thing as media piracy—the illicit mass redistribution of copyrighted materials for commercial profit, at the expense of creators and rightsholders. It does constitute a worldwide market running to billions of dollars. For software producers, motion picture companies, music publishers and, to some degree, book publishers, it’s a problem.

I can see no legitimate reason to have a camcorder when going to the movies, and *certainly* no legitimate reason to use one. When you buy a movie ticket, you’re buying the right to see one performance of one movie (unless it’s a double feature). You are not buying permanent

rights to that movie. The same goes for live performances, most of which *legitimately* forbid the use of camcorders or other recording equipment. (Yes, there are exceptions, mostly pop and rock bands, and that's great as well. For example, the Grateful Dead had an alternative business model that served them very well.)

### **Balanced, Not Weak**

I believe in balanced copyright as a way to encourage creators and distributors—and, with balance, to encourage *new* partially derivative creations and assure a healthy flow of material to the public domain. Balanced copyright is not really weak copyright, certainly not where it comes to commercial exploitation without permission.

I was an annoying purist in my youth. I had one of the larger record collections in the co-op I lived in and kept the records in pristine condition. I would not, under any circumstances, loan those records to others (both because of probable damage and because I knew they were going to make cassettes from them) or dub cassette copies for others.

I'm also a science fiction reader with some sense of history. When someone says copyright should only last five or ten years, I remember Isaac Asimov's Foundation trilogy. While Asimov was paid by *Astounding* for the serial publication of the stories that made up the books (at the absurdly low rates that the S.F. magazines have always paid), he made *nothing* from the first book publication because Gnome Press had persistent money problems and dealt with them partly by failing to pay royalties.

See Chapter 53 of *I, Asimov* for some details. "He [Martin Greenberg, head of Gnome] had an unalterable aversion to paying royalties and, in point of fact, never did. At least he never paid me." Oddly, the Foundation trilogy was turned down by Doubleday (because it was old material), which published most of Asimov's other book-length fiction and which—11 years later—bought the rights back from Gnome, then published new editions that were enormously profitable for Asimov and Doubleday. With a ten-year copyright, one of the landmark works in science fiction would have earned almost nothing for its creator. With a 28-year or 56-year copyright term, of course, Asimov did pretty well.

### **"Live with It" is Not an Answer**

I am appalled by people who scan contemporary books and release the scanned versions to the internet. That's copyright infringement of a sort that's unfair to the creator and damages everyone involved. I'm no friend of most informal music downloading, either, even as I believe the RIAA has gone overboard in trying to shut it down.

Copyright infringement is not theft, but it is a crime. Blatant copyright infringement of currently available works is unethical as far as I'm concerned. The ethical issues get cloudier for works that are not available for purchase or where "purchase" has morphed into highly restrictive licensing.

I've heard the argument that, since digital transmission makes it easy to pass around perfect copies of anything that

can be digitized, copyright is outmoded and people need to find other ways to earn a living. That's excusing unethical behavior on the basis of technological imperatives. Telling me to "live with it" because that's the way things are is a sneering, me-first response. It makes me want to scream. It does not, however, make me want to "put 'em all in jail" or lock up creations with digital restrictions management so tight that everything becomes pay-per-use.

I believe most people understand that balanced copyright involves ethics as well as enforceability. Most people who find a book they consider worthwhile (and want to read more than once) *will* buy it even if photocopying it or downloading a scanned copy would be cheaper. There's increasingly strong evidence that, at least for most adults, casual downloading to experiment with new music—ethically questionable though it may be—does not actually eliminate CD purchasing. I believe most U.S. adults, given the choice of a \$20 DVD that clearly comes from the motion picture company or a \$10 DVD with photocopied cover art sold by a street peddler will pay for the legitimate copy. In short, I believe that most people will behave ethically if ethical behavior is feasible.

### **Rights for Creators and Citizens**

I also believe in the first sale doctrine and fair use. Once you've purchased a legitimate reproduction of a creation, you should be able to do pretty much anything you want with it—with a few exceptions such as making multiple copies for sale to others and, for some creations, carrying out public performances. (The latter is tricky, to be sure.) You should be able to lend it (as long as you can't use it simultaneously), sell it (as long as you don't also keep it), give it away (as long as you don't also keep it), and copy portions of it for use in an assemblage. You should be able to use limited portions of it as inspiration or as the basis for a new creative work. You should be able to use it in the manner you see fit with those minimal restrictions noted. And, as long as it's a mass-produced copy, you should be able to mock it, alter it, or destroy it as you choose: Moral rights should be limited to originals and limited-run artistic works.

Oh, and if you're a creator, you should be able to give away as many of your rights as you choose. The concept that it's unconstitutional to give away your work—and also require that someone who uses your work in other work must also give away the new work—is simply ludicrous. Right now, I retain some rights in *Cites & Insights*, but I reduce the full range of copyright by permitting both derivation (not stated in the current license) and reproduction as long as it's not for sale. Those are my rights as the creator and copyright holder. If I changed the license to the "No rights reserved" dedication to the public domain (which I don't plan to do), that would be my right as copyright holder.

I believe in balanced copyright. If that sometimes results in coverage that seems to say "a curse on both your houses," that's because sometimes neither extreme makes much sense.

## Spring 2005: Number 61

The first 20 pages included five essays, the longest ©4: LOCKING DOWN TECHNOLOGY. It was mostly about the proposed Broadcast Flag with some coverage of the Grokster story. The Broadcast Flag was and is a terrible idea, and its fate may still not be entirely settled. This piece still offers useful background.

In the products section, I spotted *another* stinky peripheral to provide smell-o-vision with your PC—and the SCOTTeVest Classic, “geek chic” at its best: A \$130 equipment vest with 30 interior pockets.

## January 2006: Number 71

The longest section, oddly enough, was a followup: “OCA and GLP redux.” A lot was (and is) happening with the Open Content Alliance and Google Library Project—so much that after devoting 16 pages of the December 2005 issue to the projects, it made sense to add more than seven pages here.

That issue was the first time I remember noting a one-terabyte personal computer, a \$5,000 Dell gaming PC with two 500GB hard disks. I was more than a little skeptical of Nicholas Negroponte’s “\$100 laptop” then, partly because of Negroponte, partly because the original business plan required third-world governments to *pay* \$500 million to \$1 billion before production would begin. (I’m still skeptical of OLPC’s grand design and its benefits.)

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES had loads of interesting stuff—a power-generating backpack, the Gartner Hype Cycle, *futurists’* picks for technologies better suited to *The Jetsons* than to the real world (smart refrigerators, networked homes...), and an assertion from a hotshot at Amp’d that we’d all be using wireless entertainment devices for *everything*, including as alarm clocks. Remember Amp’d?

## September 2006: Number 81

The publication moved to [citesandinsights.info](http://citesandinsights.info)—and the *long* essay beginning with that change told the COWLZ story, from enthusiastic beginning to dreary end. “COWLZ was an interesting attempt to improve the visibility and long-term survival of an unusual group of library-related publications. It failed.”

Apart from that sad story, this was a “miscellaneous” issue—five other sections, most composed of bits and pieces. I discussed my dislike of manifestos and my problems with the gatekeeper/A-list controversy, the “thick head” of the so-called long tail, a number of generation generalizations—and did one of the last THE LIBRARY STUFF sections before it became MAKING IT WORK.

I found it remarkable that a stereo dealer selling components mostly in the middle-high-end range (\$6,500 to \$14,000) had its own exclusive line of speaker cables and interconnects—with speaker cables starting at \$25,000 and interconnects starting at \$7,000. A magazine editor called \$45,000 a “relatively sane price” for a pair of speakers; some letter writers disagreed. *Business 2.0* didn’t consider Bill Gates very important any more—less important than Jack Ma and Brian McAndrews, for example—because he’s become more interested in saving third-world lives by the millions than in gaining more wealth by the billions. One big difference between Bill Gates and *Business 2.0*: the latter never did turn a profit. It shut down in late 2007.

## Mid-June 2007: Number 91

Surely you have a copy of this one—or did you leave it behind at the 2007 ALA Annual Conference? The longest issue of *Cites & Insights* so far, all on one theme: Conferences and speaking.

That’s right: “Cites on a plane 2: This time it’s for keeps.” Entirely devoted to conferences and speaking. Roughly a third new material, the rest drawn from a variety of old sources (*Cites & Insights* but also *Walt at random*, *EContent* and *American Libraries*).

Some issues are timeless. This is one of them. It would be absurd to try to summarize it—but if you’re a speaker or if you’re just attending conferences, you might enjoy downloading and reading it. With thanks to Ken Nordine, how are things at *your* conference?

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## Masthead

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