

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Bibs & Blather

Open Access: What You Need to Know Now

I am delighted to announce that *Open Access: What You Need to Know Now* is now available for preorder from the ALA Editions website at www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=3281

It's an 80-page 8.5x11" Special Report and costs \$45; it should also be available through library book jobbers. Here's what the order page says:

Academic libraries routinely struggle to afford access to expensive journals, and patrons may not be able to obtain every scholarly paper they need. Is Open Access (OA) the answer? In this ALA Editions Special Report, Crawford helps readers understand what OA is (and isn't), as he concisely

- Analyzes the factors that have brought us to the current state of breakdown, including the skyrocketing costs of science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM) journals; consolidation of publishers and diminishing price competition; and shrinking library budgets
- Summarizes the benefits and drawbacks of different OA models, such as "Green," "Gold," "Gratis," "Libre," and various hybrid forms
- Discusses ways to retain peer-review, and methods for managing OA in the library, including making OA scholarly publishing available to the general public

Addressing the subject from the library perspective while taking a realistic view of corporate interests, Crawford presents a coherent review of what Open Access is today and what it may become.

I believe this book fills a need—not only in the library community but beyond. I believe it's useful for public and special libraries as well as for academic libraries and researchers. It's a reasonably fast read but also provides a set of resources for further exploration.

Dorothea Salo, Peter Suber and Charles W. Bailey, Jr., all deserve credit for reading the draft version, offering honest suggestions and criticism and leading to a much better final version. Dorothea in particular was usefully frank, as I'd expect.

This is my first "traditional publisher" book in eight years. I don't believe it will be my last.

Making it Work Perspective

Five Years Later: Library 2.0 and Balance (cont.)

This is the second part of FIVE YEARS LATER: LIBRARY 2.0 AND BALANCE, which began in *Cites & Insights* 11:2 (February 2011). If you haven't read that yet, *read it first*. If you're mostly interested in Library 2.0 and social networks, *read it first*—most of that discussion is in the first part.

Inside This Issue

T&QT Perspective: Forecasts and Futurism23

Before delving into the remainder, I'd like to highlight one response to the first part of this essay. Michael Golrick posted the following at *Thoughts from a Library Administrator* after reading the essay:

On page 15, as part of a discussion about "Libraries: Not About Books," he expresses a very important concept which I am going to slightly paraphrase:

Libraries need to build their brand from books not by running away from them.

That is a very, very powerful statement.

I love this. When I heard that a public library had "Books are only the beginning" as a motto, I cheered. When I hear things like "Books and beyond," I'm happy. It's when I see libraries—or, realistically, librarians—treating books as though they're some old embarrassment that libraries would be better off without that I get cranky and feel that some librarians are professionally suicidal.

al. Building on strength and your brand—building *from books*—is a way to assure success. Running away from that brand: Not so much, unless the brand truly is despised, which books pretty clearly are not. Thanks, Michael, for paraphrasing my thoughts more succinctly than I manage.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

A few items on the past and future that seem to belong in a discussion of libraries, social networking and balance.

Thinking about the future

That's Kathryn Greenhill on September 2, 2009 at *Librarians Matter*, considering her own future and that of her new library. Given a new building that needs to serve for 20 or 30 years, how do the librarians make it serve the community optimally for that period?

Some items don't directly relate—e.g., the non-users who pay for the library through property taxes and “are going to be checking out the new library when it opens”: How can you make them into “passionate users”? Then there's this, which shows the friction between “reaching out to the community” and doing what the community says they want:

During community consultation about the new library in the last few years, **the requests have been for books, books and more books**. Some of the new libraries I most admire have created more room for users and less room for books. There are so many new formats, accessed so many different ways. To me much of print publishing has morphed into a “push that product, move those units” cynical marketing exercise, that often does not give or expect sustained intellectual effort by either writer or reader. How can I support what the community obviously wants while bringing to them also the online, alternative and exciting content that exists in other formats and via other channels? [Emphasis added.]

I admire much of Greenhill's thinking and writing—but a community member hearing this might reasonably wonder what's going on, as they might when reading much of what some other librarians say. Is it *really* the role of public librarians to tell their patrons “No, you just *think* you want more books. They're mostly rubbish anyway and you're better off with hot new formats”?

The next paragraph is on public libraries as third places and being the “community's living room,” and there are good questions here:

What should the library's role be in showing our users how to use these and setting up and hosting them?... Is it a logical extension of moves to create community information services, physical meeting spaces for our communities and running computing skills classes—or just not what we should be spending our time/money doing?

Greenhill has big plans for online presence—and it would be worth seeing how much of this works out beneficially in the long run:

I would love to work up a consolidated online presence for the library. It would be a great way to keep the community informed about progress with the building and, if energy to keep the conversation going was available, a great way to find out what the community wants from the library. **To create any new library channel using social media requires interesting content, engagement, interaction and a strong voice—which takes a lot of staff time**. Is this the best use of resources right now? I would love to create weekly three minute movies about the progress of the building and post them to YouTube—including interviews with the users about what they would like to see. Or a Twitter account with three tweets daily, shared among staff. Or a meebo chat box. Or a Flickr account with photos that change on our home page—showing our programmes and the new building. I'm still not convinced about a Facebook page... [Emphasis added.]

A discussion of open source software is interesting and best read in the original, although I will quote one apt sentence: “I know that Open Source software costs as much as proprietary software—you hire good people instead of pay license fees.” The discussion “Creators as well as readers” has a comment that bothers me a bit:

People are still buying items cheaply via ads in the newspaper, attending physical meetings for medical support groups and going into shops to purchase items. These things can also be achieved online also—if people know how to. Should the library be looking at its role to promote literacy and broadening it to include showing people how to better use online spaces?

Is there something wrong with people using newspapers, attending face-to-face meetings and buying from local businesses—you know, the ones that pay sales taxes and that provide local jobs, both of which keep the library running? Is it *preferable* or necessary to make sure every citizen does as much online as they possibly can? (I may be misreading Greenhill here.)

There's more and then, "Most importantly":

Balance

I will be initially working just two days a week, with probably one day pre-committed to desk shifts, shelving, book selection, meetings. How can I identify the strategic few things from the list above where it is best to put my energy?

She can't do all of this, and balance is tough.

The second comment, from Steven Chabot, addresses her comment about books and the libraries she admires:

I will never understand the mindset of my colleagues in this respect. If these people are advocating for something that is opposed to what people have been telling you over and over—books, books and more books—why do these librarians have your admiration?

Joann Ransom had a similar finding: "We surveyed and held focus groups with the community when reviewing our library services and got exactly the same message. Our community wants the flashy IT stuff but not at the expense of books; happy to have a computer suite but line the walls with books!"

Greenhill responds to Chabot:

The librarians have my admiration because when I have visited their libraries, they were lively places with many users who are obviously getting what they want :) I agree that we won't be out of the book business soon—but can see that like travel agents, Virgin megastores and video shops, we do have to adjust what we do in response to our users changing what they do.

Ah, but the users say they're reading books (and all indications are that this is true). Is this a case of pre-adjusting to what librarians believe users *should* do or will do? (By the way, travel agents who add value—cruise agents and those setting up complex itineraries for a fee—seem to be doing OK. If Blockbuster hadn't busted the locally-oriented, customer oriented videostores off the blocks, maybe video stores would be in better shape. And there are a fair number of local and specialty record stores that are surviving as well.)

Future Librarians and Immediate Challenges

PF Anderson wrote this on October 2, 2009 at *Emerging Technologies Librarian*. Anderson attended a session on social media and the future of academic librarians:

People talked about whether social media is appropriate to use in education, and whether librarians:

- (a) should teach social media skills,
- (b) should teach digital literacy skills as they apply to social media,
- (c) should teach digital literacy skills more generally,
- (d) should use social media to teach digital literacy,
- (e) should use social media only as it comes up in order to support education in whatever form it takes,
- (f)...

Anderson has "more practical experience than well-thought out opinions" in this area, having started teaching Delicious almost four years prior:

I didn't think so much about whether or not I should do it, I just did it. There was a tool I was using and finding useful, I could imagine many other ways it might be used, and wanted to share the tool and ideas with others. People liked it, and I was asked to teach the class several years running.

Anderson's response to the issue of librarians' role in this environment is "We do the same things librarians have always done"—and you can certainly make the case that some of these roles (discover, select, collect, organize, husband, access, preserve, assist, share, teach, outreach, research, advocate, create) lead directly to social network activity. There's much more to the post, and I haven't done it justice.

Ten Years In

Wayne Bivens-Tatum thought about his first decade as a professional librarian in this January 3, 2010 post at *Academic Librarian*. Some of you may find this paragraph a trifle startling:

I've been trying to think about what's changed in the profession in the ten years I've been a librarian, and I'm having trouble coming up with many things. This might sound silly, but for me librarianship hasn't changed as dramatically as it has for some more senior librarians. I am unable to recall with relieved nostalgia the days of card catalogs, or DIALOG, or CD-ROMs as dominant forms of information retrieval. By the time I was a librarian the Web was booming, Google already existed, and Wikipedia wasn't far behind. The days of librarians as authoritative controllers of access to information were already gone, and I never went through the Kubler-Ross relationship with Google and Wikipedia so many librarians did. I also came along when constant change in information technology was the norm rather than the exception, so I've never had to adapt to that fact. If I weren't comfortable with

constant learning and frequent change, I wouldn't have become a librarian ten years ago.

The big change, he says, is communication, "and that one will be obvious to anyone reading a blog."

It's a lot easier to communicate with other professionals than it was ten years ago. Blogs were just taking off, but by the time I began this blog two and a half years ago, the system was entrenched and easy to use. Add in all the other social media that librarians use, and it's clear anyone can communicate with anyone else in the style they prefer. Blogs especially have given librarians the opportunity to discuss serious issues in a thorough but informal manner, and they've allowed humanistic librarians like me an outlet for professional writing that was mostly missing from the previous library literature.

They've also given us unprecedented public insight into the profession. Ten or twelve years ago I would have loved a blog or three that gave me a feel for what actual academic librarians were thinking about, reading, and doing, the issues they thought important, something that was deeper and more personal than either the scholarly literature or the approved commentary in the major library publications. I've tried to do that with this blog... Combined with a few other blogs from other academic librarians doing various library jobs, the curious can get a much better idea of what we do than was possible when I started library school.

There's more, but what's here may be most relevant to this discussion. Go read the post.

Big things I've learned 2000-2009

Same day (January 3, 2010), same field (academic librarian), same topic (ten years)...but this time it's Meredith Farkas at *Information Wants to be Free*, and she was in grad school for a *different* career at the time. This one's about life lessons, not libraries as such...except that you can't separate life and career that easily. Here are Farkas' six big lessons, but you're missing a lot if you don't read the fascinating expansions in the original post:

1. Leaps of faith often pay off (or better to fail or succeed at the right thing than be successful at the wrong one)
2. The biggest growth experiences come from doing things that scare you
3. Don't sell yourself short
4. You'll be much happier and more successful when you stop trying to be like other people and start just being yourself
5. Don't get too stuck on a specific vision of your future

6. You don't need to keep going to school to keep learning

Meredith Farkas uses social networks more extensively than I'm ever likely to and she is—in her own way—a rockstar regarding Library 2.0 tools. By some standards, Meredith and I should be at each other's throats—but she is also consistently thoughtful and willing to discuss, not just advocate or argue. I don't always agree with what she says (and, I'm sure, vice-versa), but I'm pretty consistently convinced that I've learned from what she has to say.

My Job in 10 Years: Optimism

One in a series of posts by John Dupuis in the category "My Job in 10 Years," leading up to a promised book. January 4, 2010 at *Confessions of a Science Librarian*. I regard Dupuis much as I regard Farkas: A fine thinker and writer, one whom I frequently disagree with but never find disagreeable.

Dupuis begins with a bizarre but apparently accurate quote from Adrian Sannier, CTO at ASU:

Burn down the library. C'mon, all the books in the world are already digitized. Burn the thing down. Change it into a gathering place, a digital commons. Stop air conditioning the books. Enough already.

As Dupuis says, "There's no shortage of people who seem to think that we'll be completely replaced by Google, that everything is available online for free, that students don't read." So why is he optimistic about the future of academic libraries? After recounting an interesting and relevant anecdote (including the gift of a fine *paper* notebook from Indigo that Dupuis uses during his non-driving commute), he says:

The reason I have optimism for our profession is that we all have a foot in the past—the values that our profession has come to embody and represent. We also firmly have a foot in the future and are able to translate those values into a way that will make sense for our profession going forward.

Old versus new, print versus electronic, as the old ways evolve into the new, as we transform the print culture of the past into some unknown online culture of the future. Devices will change as today's iPhone becomes tomorrow's paper notebook. The lesson of the notebook that Indigo sent me is not that paper notebooks will forever represent the pinnacle of a portable memory aid, it's also not that iPhones will make paper notebooks obsolete either. It's that change is inevitable and constant and that optimism in the face of those changes will prepare us to evolve along with them.

After all, I'm not prepared to give up either my notebook or my iPhone.

This may not require much commentary—with one oddity in the comments. “Roland” says “digital is the way to go” *because* most books from the first half of the 20th century are printed on acidic paper. Roland apparently isn't aware that nearly all books from recent decades (except mass-market paperbacks) are printed on acid-free paper that should last for centuries. Saying “most of the books in most of the libraries” are starting to crumble into dust is probably *wrong*. And relevant only if you're asserting that print books are and should be dead within academic libraries.

Balance in Libraries

That simple heading can cover a lot of ground. Items here are ones that seem to me to fit into the overall structure of this two-part essay.

Five years, five lessons, five memories

This one appeared on May 15, 2008 at *BlogJunction*, written by Joe. He summarizes “the biggies” he learned in his first five years at WebJunction—with at least four of them relevant to libraries in general. Excerpting:

1. **It's not about technology....**
2. **Hang in there.** There are few virtues as valuable as persistence...
3. **Take the middle path.** It's not content or community, it's not big libraries or small libraries, it's not folksonomy or taxonomy, it's not top-down or bottom-up.
4. **If it's going to be difficult, it might as well be fun...**
5. **We've only just begun...**

That last may be specific to WebJunction. I might add “only” after “not” in the first point. Otherwise, these are certainly worthwhile lessons—especially the third one.

Academic Libraries: Searching for Balance in Frenzied Times

That's Steven Chabot's title for a short presentation he gave in 2008, edited down to this 900-word essay on December 8, 2008 at *Subject/Object*. He starts by questioning (implicitly) the concept that libraries are all about “information”:

I think that the profession's adoption of the word *information* hearkens back to a time when academic libraries were managed gateways, and technology was a way to deliver this “stuff” called

“information” as efficiently as possible. And, unfortunately, the notion that the library is in the information business is the source of the problems facing academic libraries today. Or at least the source under our direct control...

Chabot sees the need for balance in three areas:

Balancing our virtual and physical spaces. ...Too often the library focuses on technology as a catchall solution to our problems. But what you get from talking to our newest students is that they don't make the same distinctions we do. The Internet for them is not something world changing—it is their world. Apart from the ease of getting items while in their fuzzy pajamas, they don't see the same revolutionary gulf between the physical and digital as we do. For them it is just space... Studies like the wonderfully innovative ethnographic study of the University of Rochester library and our own experience will show the continued importance of library as place. In fact, students are packing every corner of our physical space, even as we cede the space once taken up by bulky encyclopedias... Despite the hysteria, students are coming here. It is our job to make sure that all the spaces we create—both the physical and the virtual—are welcoming ones: enriching environments inspiring creativity and collaboration.

Balancing our teaching: [See the post for more on this]

Balancing the place of the library in the university: We cannot out-innovate Google. We don't have the money, and we don't have the experts. And all of the superior resources in the world will not stand up to the growing control the corporate world is going to have over this stuff called information. So we cannot [just] be about information. ..The solution to this final challenge is really the solution to all three. It should be our job to use outreach, marketing, and advocacy to remind everyone in our community what I think they already know. Cicero called the library the soul of a house. When I call the library the heart of the university, it is not only because of its central location. The library supplies the lifeblood which sustains the university: ideas. As we make our all of our spaces ones which are student-centered, we should at the same time breaking down our walls to spread this message... We have to reach out to our community to impress upon that our business of ideas and knowledge and teaching and learning. Because the library has something that Google will never have: **heart**.

I've combined headings and multiple paragraphs into single paragraphs. These are interesting thoughts worth discussing. As for discussion on the blog itself? No comments in two years.

Interior space as a social cause

Rory Litwin wrote this on May 21, 2009 at *Library Juice*. He looks at “trends” and “problems” (a distinction he finds artificial or prematurely judgmental) and offers some trends—at least one of which I regard as phony:

- The increasingly rapid pace of life
- The shift away from print media towards more interactive, sensory-stimulating aural and visual media
- The tendency to share our lives online, by choice
- The loss of personal privacy, not by choice
- The decline in educational standards, at least in terms of traditionally-valued skills having to do with written texts
- The shift from individualized to collective thinking
- The new ubiquity of communication technology and the 24/7 connectedness that it brings
- The decline in literary reading as a pastime (as noted by the NEA a few years ago)

He sees a broader emergent trend tying all of these together: The interior space of a person. He sees that space as “progressively being diminished,” and I might question that, but that disagreement may be unimportant.

Interior space is something that people can cultivate. It is cultivated through time spent in sustained, imaginative reading; time spent meditating for greater mindfulness or higher consciousness; time spent reflecting on a problem, on an idea, or on past events; or time spent in another way, as long as it involves a degree of solitude and freedom from external demands. What interior space requires for its maintenance is time, solitude, autonomy, quiet, and a freedom from external sources of stimulation.

Here I agree almost entirely—and yes, I’m aware that lots of people seem not to regard the maintenance of interior space as necessary or worthwhile. Litwin notes the difficulty of explaining the value of interior space and hopes that people will try to recreate it “when it is gone.” Then:

We know with certainty, however, that libraries, in being quiet spaces with books, are natural allies of interior space. Few other places are socially sanctioned as allies of interior space. Religious buildings (temples, churches, synagogues, mosques) and nature preserves are two that come to mind.

Museums are arguably another, depending on how one thinks about art.

My point, obviously, is that we, as librarians, should not overlook the value of libraries in their traditional sense, and should not be so quick to treat every social trend as inevitable, unquestionably good, or something that we Resist at the peril of a final loss of relevance.

Here I’m entirely in agreement. There’s more to the post, it’s worth reading—and it’s worth thinking about your own interior space and the extent to which traditional libraries serve that space (which some would call sense of self).

End of the hybrid library

If it seems as though the last few excerpts and commentaries have been love-fests, with me largely agreeing with what I read, it’s time to change that a bit. The *title* of this post (by Michelle McLean, on September 3, 2009 at *Connecting Librarian*) involves, in my opinion, a logical fallacy: Synecdoche, the confusion of the part with the whole—or the supposition that the part is typical of the whole. (I always think of a small city in eastern New York when I encounter that particular logical fallacy.)

McLean did a big weeding project of the reference collection at her library’s largest branch—a collection filling 85 bookshelves. That’s not a huge collection, but it’s not tiny either. She anticipated weeding 40% of the books, but it’s running closer to 60%, and it would be even higher if it weren’t for “our motor manual collection.” Much of what’s been weeded has gone to the lending collection: it’s good information but no longer useful in a reference collection.

Which brings me back to the hybrid idea. Print reference is not dead in my library, not yet, but it is no longer the force that it was. Now it seems that print reference is a backstop to our online resources and the internet, whereas it was always the other way around. Now it’s where you go, when it’s too hard or really to obscure to find something online. And even that’s changing.

For a long time, when talking collection development, we talked about the hybrid library—finding the balance between print and electronic resources. When it comes to reference type material, the scales are now definitely tipped in favour of the electronic.

I don’t dispute that. Quite a few (most?) reference books are what I’d call “hammer books” (from

“When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail”)—things that appeared as books only because there was no other way to organize and provide the contents. Collections of facts, where the specific order of the facts makes little or no difference, and where each fact is a reasonably short statement: Those make more sense as digital resources than they do as books.

So far so good—and if McLean changed “library” to “reference collection,” I would have no objections. But I see a broader implication and I doubt the implication. Most books in most libraries are *not* “hammer books”—they are linear narratives, fiction or nonfiction, bound because they are of one piece and normally read from start to finish.

I suspect McLean overstates the end of the “hybrid library” for reference collections. There continues to be a significant subset of reference works for which books are sensible presentations. But even if that is not true, its expansion to the library as a whole doesn’t follow. (I’d be delighted to see the end of “hybrid library” as a term, but that’s a different issue.)

McLean’s meaning really is the narrower one, despite the misleading title and one or two other phrases. When I raised the issue in a comment, McLean responded:

Although I see print reference dying, I see no corresponding actions with our lending collections. The book is here to stay for quite some time as far as I’m concerned.

Is it useful to note that McLean is in Australia? Probably not: This is one of many cases where I don’t see fundamental differences between Australian librarianship and the field in the U.S. and Canada.

File Under Miscellaneous, Part 1

Here’s one where I’m mostly saying, “If you haven’t already read this, you should”: Andy Woodworth’s September 10, 2009 post at *Agnostic, Maybe*. He works in a public library and notes some things that just aren’t addressed in MLS programs, such as signing work orders for plumbers. He offers good discussions of three such needs, all involving balance:

Diplomacy: You will need it. You need to be able to effectively communicate to noisy kids, disruptive teens, oblivious parents, passive aggressive seniors, coworkers of various temperaments & theory of librarianship approaches, political officials of all stripes, and the myriad of pleasant to impatient patrons you will meet....

Basic mechanical skills: While I’m in a county library and there are people who handle maintenance exclusively, I am still a “first responder” to most building situations. Burned out or flashing lights, wobbly tables, broken chairs, loose shelving, cracked windows, busted doors, stained carpets, broken toilets, various alarm malfunctions (security, generator, sump pump, and/or fire)...

Patience: The most obvious application of this virtue is in service of patrons in general, for the life of a public librarian has a lot of explaining in it. Whether it is policy, procedure, materials, or how to retrieve an email or get a library card, you will have to be able to tell someone how to do it or find it...

There’s more in the post, all worth reading. Oddly, this is another one of those first-rate posts with no comments at all after more than a year.

In Which HuffPo Says It For Me

Leigh Anne Vrabel on October 5, 2009 at *Library Alchemy*. She quotes *Huffington Post*:

People who think books are dying don’t understand the power of ideas to inspire. And people who think books will die at the hands of the Internet don’t understand the power of what happens when an engaged reader—of both web and print content—discovers new ideas, new thoughts, new thinkers, or remembers the impact of a classic. Word spreads faster than ever, and the ensuing debate helps refine ideas for the future.

Her real point:

If we’re going to have a discourse about “the user experience,” then that should mean ALL users’ experiences, including those of us who are fond of reading in a traditional fashion.

She includes “all 1,140 people who are currently waiting to read” one of her library’s print copies of a particular book. Oh, there are 248 waiting for the unabridged audiobook, 56 waiting for the abridged audiobook and 40 waiting for the Overdrive ebook...but “there are more people in my library’s service population who love print. And that should be okay.”

Only one comment, about teen rooms, but that encourages a followup from Vrabel:

A lot of this “books will vanish” nonsense is predicated on the unspoken, implied assumption that teens don’t read, which is utterly bogus. Not only do we have hordes of evidence that teens love to read, but YA fiction just keeps getting better and better!!

To which I can only say: From your mouth to the ears of those who say these silly things—but

they're not listening. They *know* nobody under 25 reads print books, as an article of faith; don't try to confuse them with facts.

Balancing technology in library service

Karen Klapperstuck ponders this balancing act in a November 2, 2009 post at *Library Garden* (or *librarygarden*, if you follow the banner instead of the page title). She links together Internet Librarian, NJLA's first Adult Services Forum and the introduction of "Library 101" as relating to a common theme: "how, why and in what format we provide services (to all our patrons)." And notes: "Those thoughts cannot be separated from my concern over the division that is created by the acceptance of technology in library service."

Klapperstuck admits to technolust—but also feels some restraint. She also knows this:

Most people are not yet comfortable with a wide range of technologies. As a librarian, I feel that it is important for the library to be a safe and comfortable place to expose people to web 2.0 (and beyond) and new ways of doing things.

Then she looks at not only "Library 101" but also the many blog posts and tweets that "generally disregard traditional service"—and, to be sure, other librarians *complaining* about "the move towards Web 2.0 in libraries."

Yes, it is important for libraries and librarians to be on social networks, Twitter, producing webcasts, providing text and im reference, etc. But I think it is equally important to remember why we are doing all of these things. We are providing a new medium for things we have always done. We can connect people to these new technologies, give them new skill sets, and ultimately, strengthen the connection to our libraries.

And we can hope that, in so doing, we change the public's perception of libraries and librarians. But we all need to be working together and not undermining the traditional work we still do, that is still overwhelmingly appreciated by the people we serve. There can be a balance to using new technology to promote, support and enhance traditional, as well as new, programming and resources.

Again, maybe there's not much more to say. Go read it.

In Which I Ramble About Content, Shiny Packages, and My Love of Books

And the award for longest post title in this essay goes to...Abigail Goben, the *Hedgehog Librarian*, writing on April 5, 2010. Goben's social networks

were seething with conversation about newly-delivered iPads—and she's less charmed than she first was. That's partly "a little whiplash against consumerism" (ten years ago, she had a desktop computer; now, she has a digicam, cellphone, two laptops, a desktop and an MP3 player), but it's partly something else—and that something else may be an odd sort of balance issue, since I know some folks will read it and scratch their heads.

I think one of the things that bothers me is that we're increasingly buying packages without content. And that is what troubles me most about the Ipad. I'm not entirely clear on what it comes pre-loaded with but from the sounds of it, it doesn't appear to be much. One can purchase any number of things to play and run on it, assuming of course that said things are sanctioned by Apple...but it still strikes me as a watered down laptop that doesn't have a full keyboard, on which I can't multitask or do anything requiring Flash and for which I would end up paying yet more monthly subscription fees to **somebody**...

I like purchasing content in final form. Owning a copy of that content. I have a suspicion that's part of the reason I own so many books. When I buy them, I've bought them, I've paid for the final format, it's mine and there I have it. I don't need a secondary device to access the content, certainly not a proprietary one. My DVDs will play on any of my computers as well as my DVD player. I can also lend them to a friend without losing my proprietary gadget.

Yes, for some folks the Celestial Jukebox may be an ideal solution: Rent everything, own nothing. For others—including, I suspect, Goben, it's a dystopian future (and one that some of us believe will inherently be more expensive, less private and more censorious). This isn't entirely an age thing—at least I hope not.

Goben also bring up other balance issues, as one who works mostly in front of a computer and finds herself in front of *some* screen as much as 12 hours a day. She spent one day nearly entirely *away* from screens—and, well, see the third sentence below.

And in a way all too familiar to those who do it too, I'm exhausted. I'm always multi-screen-tasking, even now I have six tabs open in Firefox. Being able to step away, to not feel plugged in to one of my own gadgets, was a pleasant change. I think that's one of the reasons I've felt so anti-reader. I can certainly see a purpose and no doubt the next time I move someone will lecture me about how much lighter and easier it would be

to move me were I to shed the 7 packed bookshelves. But I like the option to disconnect. I like having something that doesn't require charging...

That's partly the balance between digital and physical, another form of balance between owning and renting. She concludes:

I don't think I'm alone in wanting to own the content I've purchased, wanting to focus my purchases on tools that are useful and not just objects that require more purchases and cash outlay, and a move from proprietary to cross platform. And if record circulation numbers at my library are any indication, I'm not the only one who still likes reading in book format.

She's not alone.

Full disclosure: That *isn't* the longest post title in this roundup, just the longest one I've quoted in full so far.

History and change

Getting back to balance within libraries, Meredith Farkas directly addresses the issue in this June 23, 2010 post at *Information Wants To Be Free*. She quotes another post in which a librarian suggests that remembering the past may be an excuse for avoiding changes that will provide value now. That's a tricky issue—but sometimes she's probably right. Farkas notes, with an emoticon, "I think that lack of institutional memory sometimes helps us a great deal in our ability to push changes forward. Maybe we all need a bit of institutional amnesia at times." I'm a great believer in forgetting—and if it's no longer possible to make a valid argument for an existing service or policy, that's a good reason to abandon that service or policy. (This doesn't conflict with my push for balance and tradition: There are *excellent* current arguments for maintaining strong bookstocks and, I believe, for building collections for the long term.)

Tradition can get in the way:

Our library is very change-oriented, but there is definitely a hesitance to change anything that feels like it might not be in keeping with the Norwich [where Farkas works] tradition or that involves getting rid of something that's been around a long time.

She's considering the reference desk which, as with many academic library reference desks, is traditional in the wrong way. The librarian sits but the peasant—sorry, student—must stand; there's a big fat desk in the way barring much collaboration. But, you know, "The desk has been in the library

since it was built. It even has a plaque with the name of an alum on it." So the library may spend more in order to make modifications that don't really get where they want to be.

I completely understand that we need to be cognizant and respectful of things that represent Norwich's history and things that the alums might be attached to. They are stakeholders too. But are they really attached to a reference desk? And wouldn't most alums be happy to see a change that would improve services to current students? I honestly don't have the answer to that. Nor do my colleagues.

Here comes the more general thought:

I'm sure other libraries also struggle with making decisions that might anger older and loyal members of their population or that represent a major break with tradition. I think the key is to keep asking questions and take nothing for granted. What was the reason for doing it this way in the first place? Is there really a good reason to keep this the way it is? Do the people we think care about this really care? We always think we know our populations, and more often than not, we're dead wrong. And that not only applies to the reasons to avoid change; it also applies to the reasons (and the way we want) to change...

Sometimes it's not about change vs. history. Sometimes it's all in our heads. Sometimes it's just about figuring out what your stakeholders really want and care about. And, yes, sometimes the wants of stakeholders will conflict, but I think we spend a lot of time debating things that might just be non-issues if we actually *asked* our users.

Which, as Farkas agrees, cuts both ways (note the last sentence in the first paragraph just quoted): If you ask patrons and they prefer tradition (in some cases), maybe there's a reason, and saying, "Oh, they just don't understand" is not a great answer.

Crankypants

Short title, short post—on November 17, 2010 at *Impromptu Librarian* by Mary Beth Sancomb-Moran. It's so short that I'm going to quote the whole thing (noting that she's an academic librarian—this isn't just a public library problem):

I'm turning into a cranky librarian.

I know there is a lot of information out there about how libraries are changing, how we're not shushing patrons anymore, how the libraries are filled with joyous teens playing Guitar Hero and having a wonderful time.

Bleah.

There is a value in having a Quiet Space. There is value in having a contemplative space. There is value in having a space where you can sit in a comfortable chair and just think.

We have some students that seem to understand this. And then there are the students who don't seem to have an "inside voice." They are loud. Just in general conversation, they're loud.

I find myself getting increasingly irritated with these types, and would dearly love to stride up to them and shush them. I don't, unless there's a student taking an exam.

But boy, I really, really want to.

How do I create a contemplative study space without being the Crankypants Librarian?

Is there room for quiet places in libraries? Shouldn't there be? Isn't that *part* of balance? There's only one comment, from "DBF" to "Dear Librarians Everywhere:"

What is with this no shushing thing? Are you afraid that people might want to think in a library? Are you afraid that silence might mean that something thoughtful is going on? Is that the problem? Or do you think that if you let people talk and treat a library like the food court at the mall that you'll get more visitors?

DBF goes on to say that libraries are not the mall—and that libraries are "sacred spaces," places for quiet contemplation, study, peaceful work. "Rules like quiet are signals of respect for other people, and an external signal that this is a place for thinking, not visiting."

Getting Rid of Books: A Heresy

Y'all know I believe every academic library should retain every book it ever purchases, every public library should do the same, and the real purpose of libraries is to preserve all the written records of civilization, in every library, forever. Right?

Wrong. I *do* believe that part of the broad mission of libraries as a whole is to preserve the records of civilization, including outdated books...and that ARL-class academic libraries and very large public libraries should consider that mission when deciding which books to get rid of. But if I held the extreme stance suggested in the previous paragraph, I would be citing Barbara Fister's December 2, 2010 *Library Babel Fish* post (part of *Inside Higher Ed*) to attack it. Instead, I'm noting it as a thoughtful, *balanced* commentary on the ongoing role of print books within most real-world libraries.

Fister's writing is so consistently good that, apart from sheer envy, I could just point you to the article and say, "**Go read it.**" She notes that some people think librarians "are so enamored of shiny new electronic toys that we have turned our backs on the traditional purpose of libraries, or that we want to devote space to trendy espresso bars and gaming rooms for adolescents who should be writing papers instead of goofing off"—and there are plenty of blog posts, articles and conference talks to give people that idea.

Fister loves books. "And I love getting rid of them." The article is about weeding and the reasons libraries weed—reasons that have different nuances depending on the size and community of a library. For her library, the first reason to weed is lack of space: If you want to add new books, you have to get rid of some old ones.

But there's a more positive reason to weed the collection. Not all books age gracefully. Some weren't much good to begin with, and they haven't improved with age. Lots of them confidently state truths that are no longer true, if they ever were. Most of the books we remove are benignly bad—like advice books for executives on how to use computers to improve payroll management circa 1975; they aren't dangerous unless large numbers of them fall on your head. But others are recklessly bad, such as state-of-the-art reviews of how to treat mental illness or how to deal with juvenile delinquency published in 1970. I'm not talking about classics, about books that shaped our thinking and continue to be cited. I'm talking about books that weren't all that great when they were published. And libraries are full of them.

Yes, I'd like to see *some* copies of those books retained *somewhere*, for a variety of reasons. But "somewhere" in that case is likely to boil down to a handful of ARL-class libraries and the largest public libraries, and even then maybe not the latter.

What's even better is that removing books can lead to adding them. When an entire subject area turns out to have no books with a publication date newer than 1975, and we are offering courses in that subject area—or it concerns a region of the world or a topic that is not in the curriculum, but is in the news—it's time to track down book reviews and acquire some more current material.

Fister understands my desire, and I understand what she's saying:

I realize there is a need to preserve our past, to offer opportunities for the serendipitous discovery,

to honor the odd and the offbeat. I realize that someone, somewhere, may be deeply interested in how payroll management was computerized or in how mental illness or juvenile delinquency was treated decades ago.

But not every library has to preserve all books, just in case. It's not feasible; we can't all build additions to store everything. And for libraries like mine, serving undergraduates, the likelihood that someone will conduct that historical study someday is outweighed by the fact that too often novice researchers use out-of-date sources in their research. If the library's shelves have 100 bad choices for every good one, they may never find the good ones. They may, indeed, conclude that libraries are where ideas go to die, that they are museums of moth-balled information, jars of formaldehyde preserving curiosities. [Emphasis added.]

I've quoted a fair amount of this post—but *go read the whole thing*. Here, I'll make it easy: www.insidehighered.com/blogs/library_babel_fish/getting_rid_of_books_a_heresy. There are ten comments, one of which reasonably worries that all the libraries might make the same weeding decisions. I think that's avoidable, but it does place a special burden on research libraries. The comments are also well worth reading.

Balance in Librarians and Service

Another group of items that come together in my mind—and might or might not in yours. Also another section going back nearly three years.

Finding Balance

Jennifer L. Cyr posted this on March 17, 2008 at *Canuck Librarian*, now *A Canuck Librarian* (jenniferlcyr.wordpress.com/). After a year at a college library, where undergrads were clearly her primary patrons, she moved to a larger university library.

One of my first days of work at my new library, a staff member commented how she believed that faculty and graduate students are the users that we should be most focused on—that our services should be directed to them. This was an opinion I had not actually heard from anyone before, though I think I've encountered it in readings somewhere. We were discussing changes in the library and I brought up how it is difficult to find a balance between providing services and information for students and serving their homework up on a silver platter.

Despite her comments, I still see undergraduates as my target users. Faculty and most grad students have already unraveled the mysteries behind re-

search. They are expert researchers... If they cannot find something, they know where to get assistance. (Yes, I'm making broad generalizations without evidence.) Undergraduates not only have more difficulty formulating research questions and digging for information, but also are known to be hesitant about asking for help whether because they are afraid to approach the reference desk, or they just don't know where to get it.

This is a balancing issue—in this case, between giving answers and providing on-the-spot instruction. (This has been discussed elsewhere over the years, albeit rarely here. I've seen the portrayal of academic librarians as insistent on making every reference interview into a learning session—and the counter that “sometimes you should just give them the damn fish” rather than trying to teach them how to fish.)

The question on how to best help users has focused on a few areas, one of them being the reference desk itself. Discussions of different models—where should it go, how should it be staffed, should there be one at all—have taken place both recently and in the past. Personally, I think there will always be some form of a desk as long as there is a physical library (and probably in virtual ones too). I know I've heard some people compare roving reference to staffing at retail stores but I love to shop and let me tell you—it's not easy to find someone when you want to...

Ok, so I like reference desks. I've worked at a few and used a few so I know some set ups are better than others and some are just different. Back to the balancing act: should the reference librarian focus more on giving answers or instructing the user on how to do it?...At the college library there was a definite sense that instruction was the main duty. We had two computer terminals by the reference desk that we would help set students on to do their research, and we would regularly leave the desk to go to a student's workstation to help them—sometimes for extended periods of time (those nursing students really had some hard stuff to do!). Instructing at the reference desk was not consistent among all reference staff, but I do believe that in general we did that more than just give out answers; I certainly did.

At my new work, the setup of the desk isn't as conducive for helping individuals learn to use the library and its resources. I know the librarians are not against individual instruction at all and they do do it, it's just that it is not as practical...

That's just part of a thoughtful discussion from someone who's dealing with a sharp shift in cir-

cumstances. There's no single right answer (as Cyr says) and there's little doubt that the reference setup influences the answer. How do you maintain a balance—and does roving reference (or the bigger academic library “reference by appointment”) really do the job?

17 Unbeatable Ways to Create a Peaceful, Relaxed Workday

And now for something completely different—picked up from Jessica K. Baumgart on April 15, 2008 at *j's scratchpad*—but most of it's quoted from a post with the same name on *Zenhabits*. It's quite a list and is not directed to librarians as such. Here are some of the 17 points, each of which has a paragraph to explain it:

Do less. Create a morning routine. Get in some morning exercise. Work when it's quiet. Turn off the distractions. Cut back on your commitments. Cut out meetings. Single-task. Take breaks and stretch. Go for a walk. Do mini-meditations. Learn to focus on the present.

Chances are, you either never read the post (at either location) or have long since forgotten it. Chances are, you'll disagree with some of the advice and may be right to do so. But chances are also good that paying attention to one or two of the points, ones you hadn't thought about for a while, could be worthwhile. (“17 Unbeatable Ways” should be enough of a search to yield the original post and, down the page, Baumgart's expanded post.)

Meditations Upon My Lack of Fame

That's Wayne Bivens-Tatum, the *Academic Librarian*, on November 24, 2009—although I suspect B-T is more “famous” than he thinks. He doesn't speak often but believes he does a good job on those occasions—and that he's got as much substance as others. Then it gets interesting...and may help explain why I've dropped entirely off the speaking circuit:

Besides my general lack of ambition to be famous, I think the problem might be one of the hedgehog and the fox. Isaiah Berlin notes in his essay of that title that, “There is a line among the fragments of the Greek poet Archilochus which says: ‘The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing’” (*The Proper Study of Mankind*, 436). In his essay Turgenev is the fox, Tolstoy the hedgehog. It seems to me that the most famous librarians, especially the most sought after speakers, are hedgehogs, whereas for better or worse, I'm more like a fox.

This may sound critical or even dismissive, but that's far from my intention. The famous librarians often have a shtick or a brand they push: that's the One Big Thing they know. It's not that they don't know other things, it's just that for the sake of public consumption everyone associates them with the one big thing. When people want them to speak, it's because they know the person can speak well about that One Big Thing, whatever it is. “You're planning a panel on X? I heard so-and-so speak on X and she was fabulous!” I don't think I even have to name names. Everyone can probably associate a few One Big Things with particular people. I'm almost positive some readers of this blog are themselves associated in the librarian hive-mind with one big thing.

I wouldn't necessarily mind being associated with One Big Thing, but I have no idea what that thing would be. This presents a problem if I wanted to be famous. I know about a lot of topics, but I'm not sure there's any library topic I know more about than any number of other librarians. Plus, I'm not very focused; just consider this blog...

I couldn't have written that post because I've never read Archilochus and don't think or write the way B-T does—but boy, can I identify with the message. I'm not a librarian, but I *am* a generalist of sorts, and while I did do a fair number of speeches, they were all over the map in terms of topic. (There may be other reasons I'm not getting invitations: The speeches may not have been very good, for example, and I don't do freebies, make proposals or solicit invitations. But lack of a Single Topic on which I'm the Expert/Guru may be part of it.) Yes, I said so in a comment, adding the word “guruhood” as something I'll never earn. B-T liked the word. Oddly, Steven Bell came back saying that I have “real staying power” because I can write or speak on a range of topics—but the fact is nobody's asking.

Which would you rather be? Balanced and complex or famous? If I was 40 years younger and had to make that choice...I *think* I'd choose the first, but it's hard to be sure.

Too many tools, too little time

This April 15, 2009 post is *Re:Generations*, a group blog from CLA (Canada, not California) you may not have heard of. The post is by Megan, one of quite a few bloggers there. She'd been to the 2009 ACRL conference...

[A]nd I emerged from the experience with seemingly endless lists of tools, information re-

sources, and nifty utilities to try out. And to exacerbate matters, my newly-stocked blogroll and folks to follow on Twitter have kept me inundated with resources to read and play with in the last month. Sometimes I feel that I'm struggling to keep up with all my current awareness tools to the detriment of actually getting anything done.

Megan isn't one of those who can immediately figure out how a "gizmo" works, "nor do I have an interest in doing so." She understands that staying informed on tools and trends that affect her daily work is essential.

However, cognitive overload is also a very real danger for students, researchers, and librarians. Librarians need to monitor how much we push at clients without providing guidance as to why a particular tool or resource is better for certain purposes. I've been advised to avoid the "cereal box" approach of showing students a list of databases and telling them just to search, rather than explaining how to select and use one or two tools. It's important to remember my own frustrations with information overload when I work with students and carefully pay heed to their existing knowledge of research and comfort with technology.

She's seeing the need for balance, and resolved to be "currently aware in moderation"—choosing a few resources instead of trying to try everything she comes across. The reason I'm quoting it is this young (I believe), fairly new librarian's recognition that she needs to balance the need for the new with the need to get things done.

How to Reclaim Your Attention

Breathe out... breathe in... A little earlier, I cited a *Zenhabits* post indirectly. This time, I'll cite one directly—by Leo Babauta on March 5, 2010. This is another one from outside libraryland that I believe is relevant to almost all librarians. Babauta thinks people are feeling overwhelmed: "Our attention is being pulled in too many directions, leaving us feeling overloaded, distracted, chaotic, spread thinly, without focus." Lots of blogs, people, services, media *want* your attention—and, he says, "what you pay attention to becomes your reality."

If you watch and read the news all the time, you will become obsessed with the latest crises. If you watch and read about celebrities, your life will revolve around them. If you socialize on social networks all day long, this will become your world.

Babauta offers eight suggestions; I provide only the topic sentences, not the longer discussions, but add one critical [parenthetic] addition.

Limit your [virtual] friends. Limit your feeds. Limit your communication time. Give up on news. Be brief. Give your attention to the important. Become conscious of your distractions. Surround yourself with the positive.

I don't claim to do all of these, but reading a post like this now and then can be useful.

Damming the Information Streams

And breathing in again, back to a direct librarian focus. Here's Maura Smale in an August 28, 2009 post at *ACRLLog*. She notes just how *busy* you get in academic libraries when the semester starts—and that strategies for keeping up may wear thin as the workday fills.

It's so much easier during the summer. Not only is there more time to breathe at work – fewer meetings and classes, quieter reference desk—but there's also less to read. The publication pace of everything seems to slow down, especially online information sources. My summertime RSS feeds are well-mannered and easy to control, my email inbox usually hovers near zero.

But here she is, not all that far into the semester, and "I'm suddenly swamped by my information streams." Something's gotta give...

I headed to my RSS reader and weeded feeds mercilessly. I also reorganized them by priority into several folders—critical, desirable, and optional—which I hope will make it easier for me to ignore less important items until there's time to read them.

I also plan to cull many of my table of contents alerts, as I've found them to be something of a double-edged sword. It's important to me to keep up with what's new in the library literature, but ultimately I've printed more articles than I've had time to read (which accounts for the pile on my desk). So I'm going to cancel several of my alerts and let myself off the hook with the journals that remain...

Finally, I'm going to try and build intentional time for reading into my schedule... Once I've made all of these changes I'm not sure if I'll end up reading more than I do now, or less. But if these strategies help me read more thoughtfully and feel less buried, then that's a worthwhile trade.

Have you reviewed your overall strategy for keeping up lately? Is it working? (Did you read that post title with an "mn" instead of "mm"?)

How Do You Say No?

That's the question Emily Ford asks in a December 16, 2009 *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* article. (Yes, article, not post. While this one's on the short side for ITLWTLP, at only 2,900 words, what would

you call something that's longer than most *American Libraries* or *Library Journal* articles and includes a bibliography?) A few excerpts:

Have you ever found yourself thinking: "I know I said yes to this, but now I wish I'd said no. That's what I wanted to say in the first place"? Chances are you said yes because you were afraid to say no or you didn't know how, or you don't like saying no. If you were afraid to say no maybe you felt that you would be looked on as being difficult to work with, or that you would receive a poor job performance review. Maybe you feel that if you say no now, you won't be asked again. Maybe you even feel guilty because if you can't do a project then your co-worker will have to do it; or the project doesn't get done at all. How do you say no? How can we frame "no" in a way that avoids negative consequences and enables us to be effective and healthy librarians?

Maintaining the right work/life balance can be tricky. For example, if your partner or child has an important event that conflicts with a meeting, what will you choose to attend? Some people might go to their meeting or show up late to her child's piano recital or her partner's awards ceremony. I have heard the phrase "rotating neglect" to describe these kinds of conflicts within work and personal lives. Essentially, we make choices to either neglect work or neglect ourselves and family. One of the ways we can counteract this is to begin by saying no to opportunities for service or projects that will upset the work/life balance we have.

The ability to say no to taking on a new project at work or another committee appointment is directly related to mental wellness and a healthy work/life balance. Many of us have a hard time saying no and can accumulate too much work and responsibility...

...Sometimes we just say yes because we fear the consequences, but if we can frame our "nos" positively... we will find many of these fears ill-founded, and we will say no without feelings of guilt. Saying no in this positive way will feel good.

I recently remembered an act of self-advocacy displayed at a former job. When I was working as an elementary school library assistant, the principal asked if I would be interested in planning and hosting an after school book discussion group with students. My response is paraphrased as follows. "What a great idea. I think the kids could really benefit from something like this. I would not be able to do this on my free time. Can we work it out so that I may work more hours and be paid to do this?" You can see that my response follows the positive no construction. First, I say

"yes!" affirming that I think the kids at the school could benefit from the program and I would enjoy doing it. Then I say "no" to doing the work as a volunteer. Finally, I say "yes?" to working on the project provided I get financially compensated. The principal and I were able to come to agreement and I started an after school book club for 4th and 5th graders.

That's only one-sixth of the article. I love this: Ford surveyed her colleagues and peers via email on issues surrounding saying No. One response she received, in its entirety:

I apologize for not replying sooner. These past few weeks have been very busy for me both at work and at home. I've given your request some thought and I am sorry to say that I cannot participate in your informal information gathering. I know that lots of other librarians will be happy to share their experiences with you, and I hope you will think of me the next time something like this comes up.

What a great response! Other responses suggest that inability to say "no" is a real and sometimes serious problem. Unless you can do so, you'll never achieve a reasonable balance. Great stuff, as echoed in the comments.

My Year of No

For once, there's a clear transition—from the article above to Leigh Anne Vrabel's series of posts beginning March 31, 2010 (some at Facebook, some at *Library Alchemy*), which was inspired by Ford's essay. (The two posts I'm considering here are on Facebook March 31, 2010 and at *Library Alchemy* on April 30, 2010.)

Some people have difficulty expanding their horizons and trying new things. I am not one of those people. The same insatiable curiosity that makes me a good reference librarian leads me to all sorts of exciting, fun adventures in life. I enjoy having new experiences, learning new concepts, making new friends, and trying things that scare me just a little bit.

While all of that is lovely and admirable, there's just one small problem: timing. You can definitely have it all. You just can't have it all RIGHT NOW.

Sadly, that's what I've been trying to do.

She's over-scheduled, at her 50-book limit for borrowed books (and the same for holds), has way too many new ideas, places to go, posts to write...

Did I mention I've been tired lately? Too tired to clean house, too tired to figure out what the hell

to do with my hair, too tired to try that interesting new restaurant... [etc.]

Clearly some kind of action is called for here. So I thought about it, and came to the conclusion that what was called for was a little old-fashioned boundary setting. But I know myself very well, and I know that unless there's a public accountability component to the changes I'd like to make, I probably won't make them.

Thus the Year of No, "in which I do my best to drop things that aren't working for me out of my life, and only let those things in which are getting me closer to my goals." She's focusing on improving her writing, health, personal relationships and creative pursuits, and says:

Every new opportunity that crosses my path will be subjected to a 24-hour discernment period, then rejected unless it falls into one of those four areas and/or otherwise enriches my life. While I certainly don't plan on being a slacker in other areas, I do plan on making them temporarily less important...

She planned (plans) to recount progress on a regular basis, presumably at Facebook. The *Library Alchemy* post is her "library edition"—the same project from a professional perspective. And, as she notes in a few paragraphs, it's *hard* for librarians to say no, particularly in times of smaller budgets and larger demands.

In such a tense professional climate, it becomes difficult for those of us fortunate enough to have jobs to say no to anything, ever. The fear becomes, if we start saying no, that's a demonstration that we're not team players, not willing to "man up" in hard times and help us all get through this. No matter how nicely it's said, even the most polite, professional "no" can sound like an unwillingness to go the extra mile in tough times.

But it's also *necessary* for balance and long-term effectiveness. Vraibel thinks public accountability will help, so she stated four vows for her professional life from 4/1/10 to 4/1/11. Stripped to the bone, she's saying that she will not check work email when she's not working, work from home, volunteer for additional unpaid professional service—or "say 'yes' to any new work opportunity without subjecting it to a 24-hour discernment period."

The punch line to my latest humanifesta is, of course, that I am writing this particular Alchemy essay from home.

Ah, but a journey of a thousand miles sometimes begins with a single pratfall. I suspect Vraibel

won't succeed *fully*; I also suspect the effort will have beneficial results. Hmm. I think I'm adding LAV to my growing list of "library folks whose writing and thinking I treasure and who I don't find disagreeable even when I'm disagreeing with them." Some lists I'm delighted to see grow.

A Breather

Sarah Faye Cohen of *The Sheck Spot* took eight days in mid-May 2010 to celebrate her best friend's wedding. And, as she documents in this May 21, 2010 post, she made it clear she was getting away—and set her Out-of-Office message to say she lacked access to email.

And I held to it. I could have logged on to a number of computers while I was away, but I didn't. For eight days, I was away from the office, from Facebook, from Hotmail, from the NYTimes. In truth, it felt like I was away from it all. When we got home, Jon said that he can't remember the last time that I was so relaxed. When I moved at such a steady pace. And I know that being away from my computer was a big, big part of that.

Under normal circumstances, Cohen isn't as connected as some. She doesn't have a smartphone (for now)—and is beginning to wonder whether having one would be such a great idea. She was able to "close my eyes and listen to the sound of the ocean rather than looking at a screen or moving around the beach for a signal." She also found that making it clear that she wasn't going to respond "changed my own expectations of my time, my energy, my anxiety."

And that was the real eye opener. That the expectations we set of our use of information is incredibly important when we are seeking information. But also when we are trying to evade it. And that it takes evading. I had to talk myself out of following the crowd and checking in. I had to remind myself that all I really needed was this time away. I think I had devalued that more lately. And I think that is dangerous. I love my job. I love my friends. I love technology. I love connecting. But it felt incredibly rejuvenating to take a breather from it all and connect back with myself.

I haven't done a "time to vacate!" post for some years—and we haven't been on vacation in two years, but then (as my wife says) our new home in Livermore and lack of explicit jobs makes it feel, to some extent, as though we're always on vacation. We not only don't have a smartphone, we don't keep our feature phone in standby—it's *off* most of

the time. On days when I'm paying attention, I won't be in contact electronically from 7:30 p.m. one day until 8 a.m. the next—and if I'm *really* being good, “7:30 p.m.” becomes 6 p.m. In other words, more than half of the time I'm entirely out of touch—and I don't keep an email or Friendfeed tab open when I'm working on projects.

But then, I'm a mostly-retired semi-hermit. You connected folks *have* to be in touch all the time, every day, all year long. Right?

Right?

What Running Can Teach You About Librarianship

That's Buffy Hamilton, *The Unquiet Librarian*, a school librarian (or “media specialist” if you prefer), writing on July 6, 2010. It's a fairly long post (more than 2,100 words, or a bit less than one-eighth as long as this essay) on how she started running (*real* running—half-marathons and 50 miles a week) and lessons learned. As usual, I'm just offering the topic sentences and you'll get more from the full discussion:

The First Steps Are Sometimes the Hardest. Embrace Discomfort. Tuning Out is Dangerous. Learn to Love the Hills. You Are Going to Fall Down Sometimes. Learn to Love the Sweat. Set a Goal and Go After It. Cross Training. Everything in Moderation. Half of Running is Mental. Just a Few More Steps Makes the Difference. Leave It All on the Road.

A couple of those may not make sense out of context...but I urge you to go read the context. (“Cross Train” comes down to the need to have interests outside of librarianship, for starters.)

Why Not Digital?

Abigail Goben, *Hedgehog Librarian*, has a question “that everyone has been polite enough not to ask, as yet”: Why hasn't she purchased an e-reader, especially as she finds herself needing a seventh bookcase? This October 5, 2010 post offers some reasons—and I think those reasons do speak to balance, given that Goben is far from being a late adopter like me. Excerpting:

- 1) To date, the cost has been prohibitive... [but] this is fading.
- 2) I'm still concerned about format type...[and DRM]
- 3) I get a large portion of my books from work...
- 4) Used books stores, I love them... And those used books, wherever I've acquired them from, then [go

on to others]. A cycle of sharing, with each of gaining a smidge of something from the book.

5) Screen time and the non-commute. I'm in front of a computer all day. Often, that continues at home. In between I have a ten minute driving commute, which isn't enough to get through an audiobook chapter. So I don't really want another screen device...

6) I'm a little terrified of just how much I could impulse buy that way...

For now, I have plenty to read.

In other words: *On balance, at that point*, an ereader didn't make sense *for her*. Any more than it does for me right now.

Even More Miscellaneous

What? How is that even possible? Trust me, it is...even though I could probably fit these items in elsewhere.

Satisfaction for the Profession

That's Steven Bell's October 13, 2009 *ACRLog* follow-up to a 2003 *portal* article, “Passion for the Profession.” The earlier article was all about why it was great to be passionate about academic libraries.

But perhaps I was guilty of overselling the concept of professional passion. According to some real passion experts maybe I should have written an article titled “Satisfaction for the Profession” or “Finding Meaning in the Profession” because for most of us that is about all we can hope to achieve.

Real passion, it turns out, is rather elusive. According to experts true job passion is a state of total involvement and complete immersion. A truly passionate academic librarian is fully absorbed in the experience. How absorbed? Picture a teenager playing his or her favorite video game. Hours can pass totally unnoticed...

I'm leaving out a section of this paragraph that got Bell in trouble: where he seems to call tweets and Facebook updates during the day “questionable diversions” that truly passionate librarians wouldn't do.

According to the experts, feeling a sense of control over one's work situation and having work that one is able to master while taking on challenges that afford the opportunity to grow are the foundation of feeling satisfied with one's job. Being completely immersed (obsessed?), if that's a sign of passion, is not necessarily required for workplace happiness or professional success.

So if you do find yourself in a position of speaking with a potential, future academic librarian what

should you tell him or her? Should you pull all the stops and go with the “P” word? Or is knowing just how elusive real passion is a reason to put the kibosh on introducing it into the conversation?

Bell plans to stick with passion. Setting aside the comments about Bell’s social-networking comments (although I think Jason Griffey’s being hyperbolic when he says “Social networks are *how work gets done* these days,” emphasis in the original, at least as a general statement), there are some interesting thoughts on the possible danger of too much passion for the job. Lack of balance is certainly one danger.

Shades of gray

Here’s Meredith Farkas again, this time on November 2, 2009 at *Information Wants to be Free*, considering the role of vendors and those who might be vendors. The post may have been triggered by Stephen Abram’s “position paper” on open-source systems (while he was still at SirsiDynix).

I’ve found it interesting how some vendors are vilified (sometimes fairly, sometimes not) while others get a free pass—to the point where we no longer even think of them as vendors. Open source vendor? You’re cool. Vendor who blogs and gives talks about 2.0 stuff (à la Paul Miller, Stephen Abram and Tim Spalding)? You’re cool too. Product manager, marketing dude or executive at a company like Ex Libris or EBSCO or Elsevier? Not so much. And why is that? They’re all trying to sell something to libraries, right? They all want to make money from us. But some of these people are seen as being good and having our best interests at heart while others of them are seen as being out to screw us.

It’s an interesting and complex point, one that gets even more complex when vendors who don’t happen to be ALA members may get their way paid to do a conference presentation that’s at least partly free publicity for their goods, while the ALA members on the same presentation will pay their own way (ALA rules with which I generally agree).

It becomes obvious when a vendor *turns vendor* during a presentation: When they move from topic to sales pitch. I’ve seen that happen. But most people who represent vendors are more subtle about it. Abram wasn’t quite subtle enough, and did a sloppy job in his attack on open-source ILS. But I think Farkas has a point: If someone from the open-source community—say Nicole Engard, for example—did an equally sloppy job of

attacking proprietary systems, would they get the same negative reaction Abram did? “I hate to say it, but I think the answer is *no*.”

Full disclosure: I was a “vendor” from June 1979 through March 2010—that is, I earned my full-time or part-time living from an organization selling services to libraries. During most of that time, organizations that invited me to speak typically paid my expenses and an honorarium. During one year, my employer paid expenses if I was speaking to any library organization and didn’t allow honoraria. In almost all cases (and *certainly* all cases where I received expenses or payment from an association), I was speaking on my own behalf, not on behalf of my employer. I’m pretty sure I was consistently treated as a library person, not as a vendor. Was that right? I hope so. Did I ever shade my remarks in a way that favored my employer? *Probably*, whether consciously or not. Did I ever give a sales pitch? No.

These *are* shades of gray. At the time, Abram may have been vilified more than he deserved—but that might also be overreaction because Abram has been such a consistently present (and, generally, consistently admired) Big Speaker at Library Conferences, before and since.

In my own comment, I tried to draw a distinction that may or may not work:

I think the difference is between people who are on point all the time—who are always selling—and those who are either more subtle about it or who legitimately aren’t acting as vendors. The “more subtle about it” is the tricky part, and I think that’s where Abram stumbled... (I’ve heard speeches from “library family” members who’ve changed jobs, where the speech sounded astonishingly as though it was coming from some other “on point” person from the new employer.)

Steve Lawson said this better:

I think I’m agreeing with Walt when I say I’m happy to listen to or talk with people who work for vendors, but I’m not happy to engage with flacks (or people in flack mode). People like Roy Tennant, Andrew Pace, Tim Spaulding, and Ross Singer have important things to say about libraries, and we shouldn’t write them off because of their employers. We should always have our BS detectors on, regardless of who is speaking.

Stepping away from the shiny

Dorothea Salo, November 4, 2009, *The Book of Trogoon*. What’s it about?

Projects that, no matter their scholarly or design merit, are completely unpreservable because they were built from unsustainable tools, techniques, and materials. What's worse, even a cursory examination with an eye to sustainability would have at least signaled a problem.

Salo says this is more common in the humanities than in the sciences:

Humanists, on the other hand, will pick up whatever tool seems good to them without even asking themselves whether the result will last past the lifespan of the tool. Then they bring the resulting binary CD-ROM or Flash-based website or whatever to the library with beaming smiles, and are shocked to find out that the library can't help them.

To me, it's a balance issue because of Salo's title and its implications. As she says, "Proprietary tools and formats are often quite shiny." Remember HyperCard? Not only wasn't it shiny, it seemed at one point to be the inevitable future of all digital scholarship. (Yes, I'm exaggerating. Maybe.) Then it pretty much disappeared.

There are better ways to proceed. They may well be less shiny at first, but the secret is that shiny can almost always be added to solid sustainable data later on, through mashups or interface redesign or whatever takes your fancy. Once its platform is thoroughly obsolete, though, a project may well not be rescuable in any form. Worse yet, piling otherwise-sustainable raw materials into an unsustainable platform destroys the sustainability of those raw materials, too. I've seen it happen!

A fine post, worth thinking about if you're doing anything that should be preserved digitally.

Digression: My memory of HyperCard is indistinct, so I went to the font of all truth and wisdom to learn more. Wikipedia's article uses present tense for HyperCard—first released in 1987 and "withdrawn from sale" in 2004, although it had largely faded by the mid-1990s. (The article is interesting on several points, among them the claim that "Before the advent of PowerPoint, HyperCard was often used as a general-purpose presentation program." Given that PowerPoint was given that name in 1987, and actually appeared on the Mac as Presenter *before* 1987, the first clause is bad history.)

Clueless faculty and uppity librarians

Steve Lawson doesn't believe in confrontation and tries to avoid argument, thus this mild-mannered title for a November 24, 2009 post at *See Also...* (No, I still don't use emoticons.) He notes two articles in *Inside Higher Ed*—one on Syracuse University faculty protesting a plan for the library to move parts of

the collection to distant (250 miles) offsite storage, another on "reviving the academic library" that appears to argue that *the* purpose of an academic library is "enabling students and faculty to access archives." Rather than dealing with the articles directly, Lawson chooses to offer some advice.

Semi-digression: You might want to look at the relatively brief Neem article, which appeared on November 19, 2009 in *Inside Higher Ed*. Neem does indeed appear to believe that librarians somehow snatched control of libraries away from faculty at some recent point—but hey, he's a history professor. The 34 comments, almost all of them from librarians, run many times longer than the article itself, and while I was dismayed by one librarian's apparent dismissal of books as being old-fashioned and best avoided (not in those words), Neem certainly did stir up some literate hornets. Now, back to Lawson...

Lawson suggests that, rather than "get[ting] riled up and self-righteous on behalf of the preservation of Western Civilization," it's more productive to get to know the librarians and make your case for what you see as important.

I understand faculty and students who value browsing the library stacks (see my advice for librarians, below), but I think it's time to recognize browsing the local stacks as a pleasurable, useful activity, rather than a core research strategy. Even if you are at an enormous, inclusive library like Harvard's you are still missing a great deal that is electronic-only. And you should certainly re-think passing on that strategy to your students who are likely to end up at institutions where the library has far narrower collections, or where the library has already moved to a collection that is more online than printed.

Putting aside that libraries have long been more than an archive for books, if you wonder why the library is taking on amenities that you associate with a student center, I'd like you to do two things. First, talk to students about this. Talk to a lot of students, not just the ones who know what you think and will tell you what you want to hear.... Second, please visit your library after 10PM during a busy time of the term. Too many faculty never see the library when it is fully in use by the student body. Perhaps you will be surprised by the variety of activity going on in the library, and how students move from quiet solo study, to group study, to social conversations and back again.

Lawson also has some advice for librarians, and it's advice that I wish some of the commenters on Neem's article had taken:

I have misgivings about the truism “the user is not broken,” but let’s think about that for a minute, since it’s a commonplace in library blogland. I think one of the most useful readings of that phrase is that when readers tell us something, we should assume that they are speaking in good faith and that they know what they want.

So when student and faculty readers tell us that they want books they can open and handle and that stacks that are browsable are one of our core services as far as they are concerned, shouldn’t we respect that? Yes, budget and space problems are causing friction at many libraries, but I think too many of us think that people don’t browse any more, and some users are telling us that we are wrong.

We keep telling students that we have a hybrid library of printed and online sources, and that they shouldn’t privilege the online sources just because they are easier to use. Shouldn’t we take our own advice there?

Lawson also says we need to think about browsing and serendipity in contemporary libraries, where digital resources *must* represent a very large percentage of what the library makes available.

Odd. When I started excerpting from Lawson’s quote (or, given that I’ve used most of it, “massively borrowing text”), I left out the first part of the first paragraph just above, starting at “when readers tell us...”—but the first comment on Lawson’s post is from Walt Crawford, quoting the entire paragraph and saying “That is, to date, the most useful reading I’ve seen of that particular commonplace.” I think that’s still true: The patron is *frequently* “broken,” but it’s always sensible to *start* by taking what they say in good faith. A librarian at a fashion and design school library comments that browsing *is* a core research strategy at art schools and art libraries—“There are different kinds of users and one answer is never going to fit all.”

The Side Effect of Management No One Wants to Talk About

Mary Carmen Chimato posted this on January 12, 2010 at the now-closed *Circ and Serve*. In some ways, it belongs in a roundup on social networking—but since she addresses balance up front, it appears here. Excerpts:

Ideally we strive for a healthy work/life balance. We all want to come home at the end of the day, unwind, do our thing and not have to think about work until the next day. Depending upon your job, achieving a happy balance is either easy or difficult...

Social networking has thrown a bit of a wrinkle into this equation. All of us seem to be online 24/7, whether updating our Facebook status, tweeting where we are eating dinner, posting pics of our pets to FriendFeed—whatever your social network of choice—our lives, both professional and personal are available for all to see. This is both good and bad.

Good: We can connect with others professionally and personally. We find people with similar interests. We feel connected to a larger community. We can learn from one another.

Bad: As managers our staff can read these updates and posts and while our intent may be one thing, their reading and interpretation of it may be entirely different. Not. Good.

So what to do? Do we censor our online selves? Do we only post off the clock? Do we nuke our social networking profiles? My answer to all of these is an emphatic no with a word to the wise: be mindful. We don’t need to censor ourselves, but we may need to choose our words more carefully. We may need to consider the time we are posting...

Our online personas tell a lot about the people we are and what we are doing and thinking. As a manager, you need to keep that in the back of your mind at all times. Perception is important and when it goes bad, it is hard to repair. There is a time and a place to share thoughts and feelings about work, be mindful of what you are sharing and when.

Certainly good advice, even though “all of us” certainly are not online 24/7. Chimato is one of the most open and present people I know on Friendfeed, far more open than I would ever be...which adds to the value of her advice. I would wonder whether it doesn’t also make sense to think about how what you post *about yourself* may influence those you work with, not merely what you post about work?

The Next Library 2.0?

Hot term that seems to have fuzzy definitions, many definitions or no definition: **Check**. Blogs, wikis, lots of posts: **Check**. The likelihood of lots of conferences and speeches on the topic: **Double-check**. A bunch of old fogeys (some in their 20s, some older) who don’t see that this new term actually describes anything new: **Check**.

Likelihood that I’ll follow this one and comment on it at any length: Mark that with a big red diagonal slash. Oh, and there’s one other thing

that differentiates the Hot New Term from “Library 2.0”: It doesn’t only come from librarians.

By now, most readers will already have figured out the term I have in mind: Transliteracy. The word (or “transliterations”) dates back at least six years, as do conferences devoted to it. Within the library field, Bobbi L. Newman may be the most active booster of the name and its importance to libraries, while David Rothman (the medical librarian, not the ebook fanatic) has probably taken the most outspoken and carefully critical approach. And Meredith Farkas...well, like me, Meredith still remembers being “bruised and battered for criticizing Library 2.0” and thinks there might be something she’s missing.

Here are a few library-related sources you might want to read if you haven’t already. In every case that has comments, *you must read the comments* to get the full flavor of the conversation. You can certainly find dozens (hundreds?) of other posts and articles touting transliteracy, and a fair number questioning it. (If you hear that transliteracy is being discussed without the personal attacks that damaged “Library 2.0”—well, follow those links, including one linkback in which a proponent chooses to call a critic “outright petty, mean-spirited and unprofessional.”)

Proponents

- The *Libraries and Transliteracy* blog as a whole, certainly including “On Defining Transliteracy and Why Transliteracy Matters” on November 18, 2010; “Why transliteracy?” on December 20, 2010; and “Why Transliteracy? Bobbi’s Two Cents (or less)” on December 22, 2010.
- Bobbi L. Newman also gives transliteracy a lot of play in *Librarian by Day*—for example, “Defining Transliteracy for Librarians” (March 8, 2010).
- “Introducing transliteracy” by Tom Ipri in the November 2010 *College & Research Libraries News* (crln.acrl.org/content/71/10/532.full).
- Lane Wilkinson blogs at *Libraries and Transliteracy* but also at *Sense and Reference*, “a philosophical library blog,” including “On defining transliteracy” on November 17, 2010 and eight other posts as of January 6, 2011.
- “Transliteracy for librarians” on *HLWIKI Canada* (hlwiki.slais.ubc.ca).

- “Redefining Transliteracy” by Brad Czerniak on November 12, 2010 at *Hawidu*.
- John M. Jackson at *Ink and vellum*, specifically “More Transliteracy Talk: Metaphors and Metonyms” on December 20, 2010 and “Discovering Transliteracy” on March 11, 2010.

Critics

- “Commensurable Nonsense (Transliteracy)” by David Rothman on December 19, 2010 at *davidrothman.net* may be the touchstone document—it’s detailed, issue-oriented and drew a lot of comments. It also links to quite a few other documents not noted here. Rothman wrote a follow-up on December 28, 2010 which you should also read: “Follow-up: Transliteracy, Theory, and Scholarly Language.”
- “Transliteracy from the perspective of an information literacy advocate” by Meredith Farkas on December 21, 2010 at *Information Wants To Be Free*. Farkas also draws a fair number of comments.

Somewhere in the middle?

- “Transliteracy, Information Literacy, et. al” by Marcus Banks on December 21, 2010 at *Marcus’ World*.
- “Where do you stand on ‘transliteracy’? My recommendations” by Dean Giustini on December 19, 2010 at *The Search Principle blog*.

In Closing

My remaining print magazine column is “Crawford at Large” in *ONLINE Magazine*, a column frequently consisting of shorter, updated versions of earlier *Cites & Insights* essays. For March/April 2011, I began excerpting the first portion of this essay—and then found myself adding some overall thoughts, quoted here:

On reflection, I wonder whether the dichotomy I suggested in 2006 (between Library 2.0, the set of tools, and “Library 2.0,” the movement/bandwagon) is inadequate. Maybe that should be a three-part model: The movement, the toolkit—and the philosophies (including the *idea* of direct multiway contact with the user community, small “failable” projects, library transparency and more).

One truly beneficial result of the whole “Library 2.0” phenomenon is that some (by no means all) library groups and libraries recognize the virtue of

small, rapidly-deployed, “failable” projects: ones done without a lot of planning and deployment, ones that can grow if they succeed, die if they fail and in many cases serve as learning experiences.

Not that such small projects are new to Library 2.0, but I believe the rhetoric and experiences of Library 2.0 made the virtues of small projects more evident to some library folk who had forgotten them.

It’s also *certainly* the case that, used thoughtfully, the tools and techniques of the web and the internet expand the universe of feasible small projects. A library can start a blog or a Facebook group a lot more easily and affordably than it can start a mailed newsletter—and, done right, the blog or group may be recognizable as a failable experiment: one that might reasonably disappear after a few months.

The Library 2.0 “movement” had more than its share of Big Deal Projects and Manifestos, a whole bunch of universalisms (“every library should...” and “every librarian must...”) and a fair amount of better-than-thou moments. It involved more inter-generational misunderstanding and quarrels than should have been the case. But it also resulted in some worthwhile new philosophies and tools.

Thinking about it even more, I think there may be *four* parts—because there are two philosophies of Library 2.0. The one I applaud is the one discussed in this quotation. But there’s also another philosophy, one that was clear from some (but by no means all) early proponents of Library 2.0 as a movement: The assertion that *all* existing libraries were (are?) deficient, endangered and in need of transformation. You could call this the library equivalent of Calvinism, if you wanted to use a religious analogy. To me, it was always a somewhat foreign and forbidding philosophy, one I thought of as “the glass is one-quarter empty—and we need an entirely new glass.” I believe that philosophy has largely faded.

Or has it?

I’ve seen another post (*not* Michael Golrick’s) quoting from the first half of this essay—and, the more that I think about it, the less I wish to publicize the post or the blog, as it strikes me that the blogger rejoices in the “death” of Library 2.0 because *it wasn’t radical enough*. What I regard as a healthy outcome—librarians using the tools as appropriate without worrying about an overall structure—is, from this perspective, a failure to abandon the past entirely. As one who finds “digital fugitive” even more absurd and offensive than

most gengen, I’m not buying it—and I won’t give it more space here.

Who’s Out There Now?

Here’s an honest question that may reflect my lack of intimate current knowledge of the formal library literature:

Has anyone studied the actual use of social networks by public libraries other than those with high-profile spokespeople/advocates? Better yet, has anyone done so on a scale broad enough to be anything more than anecdotal?

I’m asking not because I assume the results would be “not much of any use” but, actually, the opposite: I’m beginning to suspect there’s a lot of real-world low-key adoption that we don’t hear about.

Why? Anecdotal, of course. As I was preparing that March/April *ONLINE* column I found myself adding new material—and wondering what I’d find locally.

Just for fun, I thought I’d see what elements of 2.0 technologies I could locate at three well-used local public libraries—the one I use now and the two I used previously. None of these have high profiles nationally; all are reasonably but not lavishly funded; all are in a region where use of social networking and other “2.0” tools should be predictably high. All three communities are roughly the same size (70,000-80,000 population).

The library I use now, Livermore Public Library, has had the same director for more than two decades. She has a blog—but doesn’t use it all that often, with nine posts in the three years since it began. (One post speaks to the nonsense you hear sometimes from doomcryers about most people not wanting or using public library services: In a local survey, 81% of respondents reported using LPL—and they rated service quality at 79 on a 100-point scale, a very high result.) There’s also a teen blog—but it’s only had three posts in its one-year life. LPL also has a Facebook page with a fairly steady stream of updates on LPL programs (seven updates in the last two weeks) “liked” by 550 people and a Twitter feed with 172 followers, with 905 tweets to date. How many of those 172 followers are actual Livermore residents interested in library issues? That’s a tougher question. There’s also a mobile catalog, a version of LPL’s catalog stripped down to a bare all-text minimum. All in all, a reasonable showing for a library with high

usage and budgetary problems that stem entirely from city budgetary problems.

Mountain View Public Library devotes most of a straightforward home page to a catalog search box and set of current events—but there’s also a “Social Networking” icon that leads to a surprising wealth of items, some oddly identified (e.g., the library’s blog is identified as Blogspot rather than by its name). The library blog appears to serve as the source of the home page’s center strip; it’s entirely official announcements and book reviews and has ten posts in the past 3.5 months. A Teen Blog began in April 2010 and had 45 posts during 2010. There’s also a Delicious page with the library’s bookmarks (189 in all), a Facebook page with 285 people Liking it and 15 items in the past month—and another TeenZone Facebook page with 37 people liking it, clear evidence of teen patron involvement but relatively few recent updates; a Flickr photostream with 93 photos; two Twitter streams, a general one having 311 followers (and itself following 169 other streams!) and a fairly steady stream of tweets and a much smaller teen stream (33 followers, 88 tweets); and—unusually—a Yelp link, where you’ll find 89 reviews for the library. (Based on those reviews, MVPL is doing quite a few things right!) All in all, an impressive showing.

A slightly different version of this section appeared as a blog post at *Walt at Random*. Laura Shea-Clark of Mountain View Public Library added this comment: “What you can’t tell from looking at our social media presence is that we reach out to people who mention Mountain View Library or just the word library within a 15 mile radius (via Twitter search). We have answered reference questions, service concerns, reader’s advisory questions, and also had the opportunity to brag about our jazz CD collection. This proactive customer service has real value in that people really appreciate it and we generate a positive connection with our community.”

Like Livermore, Redwood City Public Library has a slideshow current-events element on its home page that can be either great or annoying. The front page doesn’t link directly to any blogs—but does have Facebook and Twitter icons. The Facebook page has 295 people Liking it and four updates in the last two weeks; the Twitter stream has 124 followers and 123 tweets—four of them

within the last two weeks. In fact, RCPL had one of the earliest public library blogs, *Liblog*, beginning in 2002—but its URL now links directly to the library’s home page.

Conclusion? All of these libraries are using social networks with varying effectiveness. None of them makes a big deal of their usage. That may be as it should be.

As to my general question: No positive responses to the question in the last few weeks. I’m guessing that there haven’t been such studies. Would one make sense and be of service to the field?

Conclusions?

Huge, sprawling *C&I PERSPECTIVES* generally don’t have neat conclusions, for reasons that may be obvious. That’s true this time as well. Given the anniversary title of this essay, however, the final paragraph of Meredith Farkas’ December 21, 2010 post on transliteracy may serve as a fine conclusion for this essay and the whole “Library 2.0” thing—and may sum up why I’m staying away from transliteracy. As you probably already know, I don’t believe Meredith Farkas is a cynical jerk at all; I do believe she’s a thoughtful person with broad background who combines strong interest in the new with a healthy dose of critical perspective:

In the end, I felt like the whole Library 2.0 thing was a distraction. So many libraries jumped on the bandwagon, creating “2.0 services” that were not carefully planned for, staffed or assessed. Now we see a vast 2.0 graveyard of abandoned blogs, wikis, Facebook pages and more. And, in the end, there was never really any agreement on what it all meant. I can’t really see anything good that came from that term or discussions about it. Now, instead of tons of articles, presentations and books about Library 2.0, we will see tons of articles, presentations and books about transliteracy. What real impact will it have on our patrons? How will it change the way we serve them? I feel like a cynical jerk sometimes, but I want to see results. I have no problems with theories as long as they can be applied to our work in some way. My own teaching has been influenced heavily by constructivist learning theory, but I’m not sure what transliterate library services or transliterate instruction looks like. And until someone can show me, I guess I’m going to be as cynical about that as I was about Library 2.0.

As far as I can tell, I’m *not* fully transliterate, which seems to mean I’m not able to fully participate in society. I can live with that.

Forecasts and Futurism

It's time again to look at a few of last year's short-term forecasts and how they've panned out and offer some of this year's forecasts, with a side helping of related commentary. Unlike last year's review of 2009 forecasts, I'm going to keep the 2010 commentary short—focusing only on a few special cases. You can go back to T&QT PERSPECTIVE: TRENDS AND FORECASTS in the February 2010 *Cites & Insights* [10:2] and draw your own judgments. I was going to include deathwatches—but there are too many to include in a medium-length roundup. I am including a handful of library forecasts.

2010 Forecasts

I'm omitting some discussions entirely. In the ones I provide, I'm omitting forecasts where I either didn't understand what was being predicted or haven't the vaguest idea whether it's happened. In general, my comments are *in italic*.

Top digital trends for 2010

That's the title for Nuri Djavit and Paul Newnes' December 3, 2009 post at *digital media buzz* (www.digitalmediabuzz.com). A few of the forecasts:

- **Facebook replaces personal email.** *Entirely? Wrong. Partially? Maybe.*
- **Mobile commerce—The promise that has never delivered, yet.** *Yes, there was more of this in 2010. No, it's not conquering everything.*
- **Fewer registrations—one sign-in fits all.** *I think this is also “this year's sure thing.” Fewer? Maybe. “One fits all”? Not so much.*
- **Info-art.** *I don't believe the state of **helpful** information visualization has improved, but ways to bias and distort raw data continue to be refined.*
- **More Flash, not less.** *Unclear. I'm inclined to say this was just wrong.*

Technology trends of 2009: What does 2010 bring?

That's the title for a December 15, 2009 post at *Krafty Librarian*. Krafty references *another* post, Max Anderson's “Top digital trends for 2010 (and other tech news)” (posted December 10, 2009 at *The Cornflower*, nlnm.gov/gmr/blog).

Krafty breaks things down into “Hot in 2009,” “Not in 2009,” “Hot in 2010?” and “Not in 2010?”

Some of the trends are medicine-specific and I'm omitting those, but the others are in some cases provocative. My 2011 comments in *italic*:

- **Hot in 2009:** App phones (and two medicine-specific trends). “Say goodbye to ‘smart phones’ and hello app phones.” *Damned if I know the difference between smart phones and “app phones,” but most people still call them smart phones—and, by the way, most people still buy feature phones or plain old cell phones.*
- **Not in 2009:** Blogs (“everybody is tweeting now”) and medicine-specific items. *Here in 2011: Millions of people still blog. “Everybody” only tweets for a very special definition of “everybody.”*
- **Hot in 2010?:** Flash, Twitter and Mobile optimization with a followup universal statement, quoted verbatim: “**Everybody** is using app phones.” *To which—that is, the universalism—I can only say, balderdash. Nor do I think Flash has gotten hotter.*
- **Not in 2010?:** Google Wave, E-readers in medical libraries. *Right about Wave.*

10 ways social media will change in 2010

ReadWriteWeb, December 11, 2009, Ravit Lichtenberg.

- **Social media will become a single, cohesive experience embedded in our activities and technologies.** *Didn't happen, won't happen.*
- **Mobile will take center stage.** *Certainly not for all of us.*
- **Expect an intense battle as people and companies look to own their own content.** *“Intense battle” overstates the case for 2010.*
- **Enterprises will shape the next generation of what we've called “social media.”** *Translated: Companies will **define** social media. My take: I no longer think “social media” means anything except to marketers.*
- **Finally: Real, cool and very bizarre on-line-offline integration.** *Among other things, “you'll never need to ask for a business card again”... Bull, except for a narrow, privileged definition of “you.”*

10 tech concepts you need to know for 2010

Apparently *Popular Mechanics* feels people “need to know” concepts years before they're actually

significant in the marketplace—if they ever are. Consider last year’s list: **Anthropomimetic machines**--Robots that mimic human form. **Direct carbon fuel cells**. **Metabolomics**. **DNA Origami**—A suggestion that Caltech and IBM can “strategically position” folded DNA strands as anchor points for tiny computer-chip components. **Piezoelectric display**—“screens that can change shape or texture”—mobile devices that “can harden protectively when turned off, and soften into a depressible touchscreen when turned on.” **Oseointegration**--Prosthetics that fuse with living bone. **Horizontal drilling**—Tapping “trillions of cubic feet of natural gas” in the U.S. by drilling to shale beds and turning the drills 90 degrees. **Kinetic hydropower**—Underwater turbines gaining power from natural flow. **Nanoyarn**—Carbon nanotubes woven into yarn for commercial applications. **Ultracapacitors**—Possible alternatives to batteries for electric cars.

Are there any of those you felt you needed to know about last year? Seen any self-hardening mobile devices lately?

Ten predictions for the e-reader/e-book market in 2010

paidContent (paidcontent.org) on December 1, 2009, courtesy of Sarah Rotman Epps and James McQuivey, both of Forrester Research. Last year, I said most of these were likely to be right—and that’s not too surprising, since Forrester is one of the more cautious “market research” firms.

- **E Ink will lose its claim to near-100% market share for e-reader displays.** *True, particularly given the increasingly fuzzy definition of e-reader.*
- **Dual-screen mobile phones and netbooks will eat into e-reader demand.** *Defining “eat into” is difficult, as e-reader sales appear to be rising.*
- **Apps will make non-reading devices more e-book friendly.** *True.*
- **eReaders will get apps, too.** *I guess this one’s true?*
- **Amazon will launch a suite of new touchscreen e-readers.** *The writers expected color and flexible displays as well as touchscreens. They got this one wrong.*
- **B&N will steal market share from Amazon and Sony.** *Unclear.*

- **E-book content sales will top \$500 million in the U.S.** *True.*
- **E-textbooks will become more accessible, but sales will be modest.** *Unfortunately true.*
- **Magazine and newspaper publishers will launch their own apps and devices.** *True.*
- **China, India, Brazil, and the EU will propel global growth, but the U.S. will still be the biggest market.** *I don’t know enough to comment.*

Why 2010 will be the year of the tablet

Wired on August 3, 2009 by Brian X. Chen—and interesting because, even though tablets did well in 2010, Chen was *almost entirely wrong*. He thought Dell would be a big player, claimed it would be *free* with a suitable contract, have a 5” screen and run Android or Windows 7. He also lectured anybody who criticized his forecast, essentially telling people that it was inappropriate to be skeptical. Which may be *Wired* in a nutshell. (I do credit the magazine for consistency of a sort. The November 2010 issue’s writeup of the iPad 3G as “mobile product of the year” says “The laptop is at its end. You may have already purchased your last one” and ends “If you don’t have [an iPad] yet, you will soon enough.”)

Most of the deathwatch items I culled last year are so silly there’s no reason to review them again. Go back to the February 2010 issue for your entertainment. The silliest may have been Mike Elgan’s list of “obsolete technologies” that *should* be “killed” in 2010 because they’re “dumb”—including home entertainment remotes, landline phones and music CDs. Oh, and business cards.

Freedom to Tinker’s annual scorecard

Freedom to Tinker does something almost nobody else in the forecasting game does: It publishes an annual post reviewing the previous year’s forecast and how things worked out. This year’s scorecard (for 2010) appeared on January 25, 2011. As always, the first *and most certain* prediction is “DRM technology will still fail to prevent widespread infringement. In a related development, pigs will still fail to fly.”

I didn’t include this blog’s predictions in last year’s roundup, and some of them are a little too specialized for me to comment on (e.g. “Federated DRM systems, such as DECE and KeyChest, will

not catch on”—where they say they were mostly wrong). Some of those that I should have included, and how they worked out:

(4) Major newspaper content will continue to be available online for free (with ads) despite cheerleading for paywalls by Rupert Murdoch and others. *They say “mostly right” and I’d agree. The San Francisco Chronicle (and its very old and enormously popular SFGate website) is doing an interesting thing: Some stories, including some of the best writing and analysis, are embargoed from SFGate for two or three days (and marked as such in the print paper), only available via paid digital subscriptions.*

(5) The Supreme Court will strike down pure business model patents in its Bilski opinion. The Court will establish a new test for patentability, rather than accepting the Federal Circuit’s test. *Unfortunately, although the specific patent was struck down, there’s no new test or general striking down of business-model patents.*

(6) Patent reform legislation won’t pass in 2010. “Another prediction that works every year. Verdict: Right.”

(8) Fresh evidence will come to light of the extent of law enforcement access to mobile phone location-data, intensifying the debate about the status of mobile location data under the Fourth Amendment and electronic surveillance statutes. Civil libertarians will call for stronger oversight, but nothing will come of it by year’s end. “The issue gained significant public attention through a trio of pro-privacy victories in the federal courts and Congress held a hearing on ECPA reform that focused specifically on location-based services. Despite the efforts of the Digital Due Process Coalition, no bills were introduced in Congress to reform and clarify electronic surveillance statutes. Verdict: Mostly right.”

(9) The FTC will continue to threaten to do much more to punish online privacy violations, but it won’t do much to make good on the threats. “As a student of the FTC’s Chief Technologist, I’m not touching this one with a ten-foot pole.” *That Chief Technologist, Ed Felten, used to be Freedom to Tinker.*

(10) The new Apple tablet will be gorgeous but expensive. It will be a huge hit only if it offers some kind of advance in the basic human interface, such as a really effective full-

sized on-screen keyboard. “Gorgeous? Check. Expensive? Check. Huge hit? Check. Advance in the basic human interface? The Reality Distortion Field forces me to say “yes.” Verdict: Mostly right.” *Hard to disagree.*

(11) The disadvantages of iTunes-style walled garden app stores will become increasingly evident. Apple will consider relaxing its restrictions on iPhone apps, but in the end will offer only rhetoric, not real change. *Verdict: Wrong...and, if anything, Apple’s tightening the restrictions.*

(12) Internet Explorer’s usage share will fall below 50 percent for the first time in a decade, spurred by continued growth of Firefox, Chrome, and Safari. “There’s no generally-accepted yardstick for browser usage share, because there are so many different ways to measure it. But Wikipedia has helpfully aggregated browser usage share statistics. All five metrics listed there show the usage share falling by between 5 and 10 percent over the last years, with current values being between 41 to 61 percent. The mean of these statistics is 49.5 percent, and the median is 46.94 percent. Verdict: Right.” *Well...maybe.*

(13) Amazon and other online retailers will be forced to collect state sales tax in all 50 states. Wrong.

(14) Mobile carriers will continue locking consumers in to long-term service contracts despite the best efforts of Google and the handset manufacturers to sell unlocked phones. *Right—although Virgin Mobile and other non-contract operations are increasingly looking attractive, especially for heavy data/texting users.*

(15) Palm will die, or be absorbed by Research In Motion or Microsoft. “This prediction was almost right. Palm’s Web OS didn’t catch on, and in April the company was acquired by a large IT firm. However, that technology firm was HP, not RIM or Microsoft. Verdict: Half right.” *Or, rather, wrong but with an asterisk.*

(16) In July, when all the iPhone 3G early adopters are coming off their two-year lock-in with AT&T, there will be a frenzy of Android and other smartphone devices competing for AT&T’s customers. Apple, no doubt offering yet another version of the iPhone at the time, will be forced to cut its prices, but will hang onto its centralized app store. Android will be

the big winner in this battle, in terms of gained market share, but there will be all kinds of fragmentation, with different carriers offering slightly different and incompatible variants on Android. “Almost everything we predicted here happened. The one questionable prediction is the price cut, but we’re going to say that this counts. Verdict: Right.”

(18) Twitter will peak and begin its decline as a human-to-human communication medium. “We’re not sure how to measure this prediction, but Twitter recently raised another \$200 million in venture capital and its users exchanged 250 billion tweets in 2010. That doesn’t look like decline to us. Verdict: Wrong.”

(20) Facebook customers will become increasingly disenchanted with the company, but won’t leave in large numbers because they’ll have too much information locked up in the site. *Right.*

(21) The fashionable anti-Internet argument of 2010 will be that the Net has passed its prime, supplanting the (equally bogus) 2009 fad argument that the Internet is bad for literacy. “Wired declared the web dead back in August. Is that the same thing as saying the Net has passed its prime? Bogus arguments all sound the same to us. Verdict: Mostly right.”

There are some others not mentioned here. The overall score according to them: seven right, eight mostly wrong, one half-right, two mostly wrong, four wrong. At worst, I might call the “half-right” one mostly wrong—but that’s still a *remarkable* track record, although it’s less than 50%. It’s also a remarkable display of honesty.

Forecasts for 2011 and Beyond

The first set of predictions appears first even though it was the most recent one I encountered, simply because it’s *Freedom to Tinker*.

Predictions for 2011

Posted on *Freedom to Tinker* on January 26, 2011 by Timothy B. Lee. The predictions come from discussions among six folks, “but note that we don’t individually agree with every prediction.” It’s a neat set of 25. Where I have a comment, it’s in italic.

1. DRM technology will still fail to prevent widespread infringement. In a related development, pigs will still fail to fly. *Always right.*

2. Copyright and patent issues will continue to be stalemated in Congress, with no major legislation on either subject. *Probably right—and the good news is it’s not getting worse.*

3. Momentum will grow for HTTPS by default, with several major websites adding HTTPS support. Work will begin on adding HTTPS-by-default support to Apache.

4. Despite substantial attention by Congress to online privacy, the FTC won’t be granted authority to mandate Do Not Track compliance.

5. Some advertising networks and third-party Web services will begin to voluntarily respect the Do Not Track header, which will be supported by all the major browsers...

6. Congress will pass an electronic privacy bill along the lines of the principles set out by the Digital Due Process Coalition. *I’d be pleasantly surprised.*

7. The seemingly N² patent lawsuits among all the major smartphone players will be resolved through a grand cross-licensing bargain, cut in a dark, smoky room, whose terms will only be revealed through some congratulatory emails that leak to the press. None of these lawsuits will get anywhere near a courtroom.

8. Android smartphones will continue gaining market share, mostly at the expense of BlackBerry and Windows Mobile phones. However, Android’s gains will mostly be at the low end of the market; the iPhone will continue to outsell any single Android smartphone model by a wide margin.

9. 2011 will see the outbreak of the first massive botnet/malware that attacks smartphones, most likely iPhone or Android models running older software than the latest and greatest. If Android is the target, it will lead to aggressive fingerprinting, particularly given how many users are presently running Android software that’s a year or more behind Google’s latest—a trend that will continue in 2011.

10. Mainstream media outlets will continue building custom “apps” to present their content on mobile devices. They’ll fall short of expectations and fail to reverse the decline of any magazines or newspapers.

11. At year’s end, the district court will still not have issued a final judgment on the Google Book Search settlement. *Sigh. Unfortunately, I suspect this is right.*

12. The market for Internet set-top boxes like Google TV and Apple TV will continue to be chaotic throughout 2011, with no single device taking a decisive market share lead. The big winners will

be online services like Netflix, Hulu, and Pandora that work with a wide variety of hardware devices. *Given built-in services in new TVs and Blu-ray players, I wonder whether “chaotic” is another word for “in decline”?*

13. Online sellers with device-specific consumer stores (Amazon for Kindle books, Apple for iPhone/iPad apps, Microsoft for Xbox Live, etc.) will come under antitrust scrutiny, and perhaps even be dragged into court. Nothing will be resolved before the end of 2011.

[14-17 on electronic voting machines omitted as outside C&I's scope.]

18. Multiple Wikileaks alternatives will pop up, and pundits will start to realize that mass leaks are enabled by technology trends, not just by one freaky Australian dude.

19. The RIAA and/or MPAA will be sued over their role in the government's actions to reassign DNS names owned by allegedly unlawful web sites. Even if the lawsuit manages to get all the way to trial, there won't be a significant ruling against them.

20. Copyright claims will be asserted against players even further removed from underlying infringement than Internet/online Service Providers: domain name system participants, ad and payment networks, and upstream hosts. Some of these claims will win at the district court level, mostly on default judgments, but appeals will still be pending at year's end.

[21-25 on DNS, TLDs, network neutrality and cable stuff omitted as somewhat outside of scope.]

FTT seems to run about half right, and I'd be surprised to see that change. There's not one of the predictions that I find outrageous. The comments are interesting, including ones about the conflict between universal HTTPS and latency (that is, several more network roundtrips are required for an HTTPS transaction, and that can add up—does Gmail seem more sluggish these days, for example?) I find one comment amusing, as it suggests that DRM really *does* work but just not perfectly—and unless “work” is defined as “annoy the hell out of honest citizens and not even slow down true criminals,” I'm hard-put to agree.

What if the future of media is no “dominant players” at all?

This is a refreshing counter-forecast by Scott Rosenberg on October 28, 2010 at *Wordyard*. He's noting a piece on a *New Yorker* blog that seems to conclude that the “established players” in media

will come out “on top” in newer news media, rather than Gawker Media and its ilk becoming “dominant players.”

“The future” has been lying “therein” over and over for the last 15 years, yet it never seems to turn out that way. This kind of thinking drives me nuts—it's always a zero-sum battle for dominance. (Can the scrappy little new guys grow so powerful that they'll replace the big old guys? Or will the lumbering big old guys survive and “ultimately come out on top”?) And it always misses the point.

The point? The new folks (Gawker, Huffington Post before it became part of AOLd Media, etc) won't “become dominant players” but may be *active, important players*—while the smarter “established players” will also be *active, important players*.

In other words, this is a future with no small group of “dominant players,” but maybe a much broader spectrum of modestly successful players. This is because, in a world awash in content, the media business is never going to be as profitable as it was in a world of scarce content. It will be sustainable, but it won't support the sort of monopoly profits that made it so attractive for seekers after dominance.

I think Rosenberg's only too right in saying “this outcome is almost entirely inconceivable to New York media insiders...” and that the rest of us should *hope* for a future of many smaller forces and fewer media megacorps. It's been clear for a while that the “death of book publishers” translates to “death of a dozen New York publishers as the dominant forces,” and it's not just books.

Predictions for 2011

Jason Griffey on December 29, 2010 at *ALA Tech-Source* blog—but these aren't library predictions. Griffey believes we'll see “traditional eInk eReader[s]” like the Kindle drop to the \$50 range—but that Kindle may not be the one. He thinks Amazon will release a non-LCD color Kindle for around \$239, that Barnes & Noble is losing money on NookColor and will shift to a “more tablet-like interface” this year, and that Apple will release a thinner, faster iPad with a front-facing camera. He also predicts that Apple will get major textbook publishers to turn out iBook versions.

Much as I love to tweak Griffey for his Appleogics and “digital conquers everything” overstatements, I have no reason to doubt any of these predictions—although I'd be surprised (if pleasantly) to see major textbook publishers turn out

reasonably-priced e-textbooks in significant numbers in 2011. I *want* that to happen, and have been calling for textbooks as the best multibillion-dollar market for ebooks for years; that doesn't mean it's likely. (Griffey's right to grump about Tex Avery's claim in a comment that this post was a "page long ad for Apple": Apple plays a *very* small role in this set of predictions.)

2011 Staff Predictions

ReadWriteWeb just loves predictions, and maybe making fun of them is also shooting fish in a barrel. But, hey... This December 31, 2010 post offers 37 predictions from several different staff members. Among the more interesting or amusing, setting aside the many inside-biz things that—well, do you care whether Groupon buys Foursquare or Kevin Rose leaves Digg?:

- Seamus Condrón says QR codes will "finally score big with a mainstream industry: wine"; that by December 2011, "we won't be talking about the glorious resurrection of Delicious"; that many Facebook users will complain about privacy but never actually visit their privacy settings; and that "Flickr: In Memoriam" will be the title of a late 2011 *RWW* post.
- Abraham Hyatt says a major digital news organization will acquire a "once-major legacy news organization" and much handwringing will occur—but didn't that happen years ago, when AOL "acquired" Time-Warner? Guess who won in that battle of new vs. old? He also says there will be fewer bloggers but as many blog-readers (probably right) and that an increasing number of people, albeit a small minority, will "go online every day but visit fewer than 10 different sites a week." He calls it "the Facebook bubble." I wish I thought he was wrong, but I don't.
- Jared Smith expects Verizon's network to see "strain it hasn't yet seen before" thanks to the Verizon iPhone, sees NewsCorp either spinning off or shutting down MySpace and sees IE9 as bringing "a renaissance for Web designers." *IE9? Seriously?*

2011 Predictions: Mike Melanson

This *ReadWriteWeb* post is dated December 28, 2010. Melanson offers five predictions: The idea of

the 'real-time Web' will become "the standard as dynamic, real-time content permeates every corner of the web"; complex Internet TV systems (like Google TV) may not conquer everything; mobile payment systems will make inroads but *won't* be as important in the US as in developing nations; "we're going to see Facebook really do something with its virtual currency"; and Twitter will become a "consumer friendly, consumption-based tool."

I don't see the real-time web as ubiquitous, but that's me. I suspect separate internet TV devices—especially expensive ones like Logitech's Google TV box—are on the wrong side of a technology tendency toward building *limited* internet TV functions into TVs and Blu-ray players, so I think I'm with Melanson there. I'm almost certain he's right about mobile payments. I can't bring myself to give a damn about the last two predictions, one way or the other.

2011 Predictions: Sarah Perez

Another *RWW* set, this time from December 29, 2010. (I've skipped two sets where I couldn't find anything worth commenting on.) Perez has 13 predictions, among them:

- 2: Google Music Launches! It's awesome! ...But it's not as good as iTunes because it offers music only—not videos. I'm going with a Q1 2011 launch date on this one. And maybe an Amazon partnership, too.
- 3: In-app purchases take hold as new way to monetize apps, but the trend almost drives you nuts as even the silliest, most useless free apps try to make an extra buck through in-app purchases and virtual goods. (Want even more fart sounds? Check out the premium sounds here, only 99 cents each!)
- 6: iPad continues to rule the tablet PC world, beating its Android competitors with ease. However, tablet computing as a trend continues, eating away at desktop/notebook/netbook sales.
- 10: Foursquare, not as fun as you first thought.
- 11: Facebook Places. More fun than you first thought.
- 12: Facebook Messages. Nope, still doesn't kill email. Nice try, though!
- 13: Chrome OS launches on netbooks to middling sales. People prefer tablets now.

The second half of #6 is one of those odd situations, as netbook sales *continue to rise*, albeit at a slower rate than previously. Notably, the big drop in that growth percentage came *before* the iPad

was introduced and was an absolute, 100% predictable occurrence: When year-to-year growth is at 600%, that growth rate is *going to fall off a cliff* in the very near future. (In its inimitable style, a *Techcrunch* post seems to equate year-to-year unit growth with actual sales, turning a slight decrease in *growth rate* into “no one is buying netbooks right now.” But then, *Wired* does exactly the same thing, equating a reduction in *growth rate* with “shriveling” sales.)

Alt Text: A Look Back at Predictions for 2010

If you don't already know what “Alt Text” by Lore Sjöberg is—well, think of it as the *sensible* part of *Wired.com*. That is to say, *deliberate* humor. This piece appeared December 30, 2010, and it's a rather lovely take on how futurists deal with the past when, well, the world goes its own way. If you're really good at it, *you're always right*—for some definition of “right.” There's no way to excerpt this brief lunacy in a sensible manner; **go read it.**

IBM: Five innovations that will change lives by 2015

I picked this up in a December 29, 2010 item by Darryl K. Taft at *LinuxDevices*; it's the fifth iteration of IBM's “Next Five in Five” list. The five? “You'll beam up your friends in 3-D”; “Batteries will breathe air to power our devices”; “You won't need to be a scientist to save the planet”; “Your commute will be personalized”; “Computers will help energize your city.”

Expansions? The first has to do with real-time use of 3D holograms; I dunno, but would bet against really widespread live 3-D hologram interaction by 2015. The second, expanded to a prediction that battery advances “will enable devices to run about 10 times longer than they do today,” strikes me as implausible: Battery advances, which are mostly chemistry, just haven't been that fast. Of course, the expansion also suggests that future cellphones and ereaders would be so energy-efficient that they won't *need* batteries, “scavenging” energy either from your movements or from thin air. The third has to do with widespread ambient data contributions and seems reasonably likely. The fourth is, as expanded, already happening; so is the last, at least on a small scale.

“Dear Monday...”

One of the *other* retired librarians in Livermore seems to have built an enormously successful blog on the basis of daily (numbered!) posts and a large

cadre of active commenters, only a few of which seem to foam at the mouth. On January 3, 2011, *Will Unwound* #321 is “Dear Monday—Joe the Soothsayer asks for your Predictions.” It's a guest post by Joe Schallan—and maybe the most appropriate response is to say “Go read it. Take it exactly as seriously as it asks to be taken.” The same goes for the comments.

My 2011 Forecast

Elizabeth Brown on January 13, 2011 at *Social Disruption*. Brown is a librarian, but these really aren't library predictions. They're things Brown thinks *might* happen this year or next (*might?* with an attitude like that, Brown is likely to be valuable rather than a true Guru). Excerpts:

1. The backlash against Facebook, and possibly twitter will increase... I think [a lot of people] will just get bored and try something else... What will replace it? I'm not sure, but I do think this tool will be more fully integrated with other services, like an aggregator, and work equally well with apps and web sites...
2. The hype for e-books will die down, especially once a widespread DRM/privacy issue occurs and lots of people lose content they paid for... [And print will continue viable for some time.]
3. The hype about smart phones, ipads, and handheld/lapheld app devices will continue...
4. Semantic web applications will come closer to successfully developing and marketing a killer app...

My extracts don't do justice to Brown's expansions. I'm less sanguine about #4; otherwise, I'm not inclined to second-guess her.

The Perils of Futurism

Just for fun...

Timeline of Failed Predictions

Posted on December 2, 2010 at *What's Next: Top Trends*, this is an interesting commentary on why people love predictions—and why some of us have fun with failed predictions.

What I especially love about bad predictions and prophets of doom is that they both highlight the danger of extrapolating from a single trend or from seeing the world with a single lens. In other words they use critically false assumptions. They assume that things will always go on as they are or fail to foresee the impact of new events or innovations. There is also the problem of groupthink. As the writer JG Ballard once said: “If enough people predict something it won't happen.”

If “seeing the world with a single lens” is another way of describing “OR thinking,” the tendency to require winners and losers, I agree—but, frankly, these days more bad predictions arise from the assumption that *everything will change, rapidly*. This post organizes a highly selective list of bad predictions chronologically—starting with the committee that advised King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1486 that “So many centuries after the Creation, it is unlikely that anyone could find hitherto unknown lands of any value” and Trithemius’ dismissal of printed books.

It’s an interesting list, and a fairly long one for a blog post. I suggest reading it in the original. I do like a British parliamentary committee’s dismissal of the electric lightbulb (after Edison developed on) as “unworthy of the attention of practical or scientific men.” On the other hand, the timeline includes Clifford Stoll’s 1995 assertion: “The truth is no online database will replace your daily newspaper, no CD-ROM can take the place of a competent teacher and no computer network will change the way government works”—and I’m not sure Stoll was wrong on any count, certainly not the second or third.

Ray Kurzweil’s Slippery Futurism

That’s by John Rennie, in the December 2010 *IEEE Spectrum*, with this tagline: “His stunning prophecies have earned him a reputation as a tech visionary, but many of them don’t look so good on close inspection.” Indeed. Here’s a quote from Kurzweil at the February 2005 TED conference:

By 2010 computers will disappear. They’ll be so small, they’ll be embedded in our clothing, in our environment. Images will be written directly to our retina, providing full-immersion virtual reality, augmented real reality. We’ll be interacting with virtual personalities.

And here’s the kicker—the reason gurus like Kurzweil continue to be taken seriously: “If you have a different impression of the world today, Kurzweil would want you to know that he is technically correct. If the rest of the world fails to think that’s enough, the rest of the world is wrong.” Yes, there are chips embedded in the environment (not so much in clothing). Yes, some folks interact with “virtual personalities” in some cases.

Of course, Kurzweil did not mean to say that all computers would actually disappear. Rather, embedded microprocessors would allow many of the

functions once uniquely served by computers to disseminate to phones, tablet computers, and even cars, clothes, and key chains. And in that sense, 2010 might indeed be seen as a ringing vindication of Kurzweil’s prophecy, because smartphones and iPads are everywhere.

Here we have it: the ultimate out of any overeager guru. “When I said X, I meant Y.” “By 2010 computers will disappear” *really* means “by 2010 embedded microprocessors will take on some computing functions.” Gotcha. Did I say “black”? I meant “Not entirely white.”

Rennie isn’t buying it: “But a moment’s reflection reveals that expansive interpretation of Kurzweil’s remarks to be, at bottom, insipid.” If you use the “expansive interpretation” it had already *happened* in 2005.

Therein lie the frustrations of Kurzweil’s brand of tech punditry. On close examination, his clearest and most successful predictions often lack originality or profundity. And most of his predictions come with so many loopholes that they border on the unfalsifiable. Yet he continues to be taken seriously enough as an oracle of technology to command very impressive speaker fees at pricey conferences, to author best-selling books, and to have cofounded Singularity University, where executives and others are paying quite handsomely to learn how to plan for the not-too-distant day when those disappearing computers will make humans both obsolete and immortal.

Here, though, Kurzweil is no more than one case of many: *Once you’re a guru, you’re always a guru*, no matter how vapid or *wrong* you are. When 2029 arrives and researchers have *not* “reverse engineered the human brain” or built an AI that can truly pass as human, Kurzweil will have an explanation for why he’s nonetheless right. Or, in the manner of many other proper gurus of the future, he’ll simply ignore criticism.

That’s just a taste of a 3,000-word article. It’s well worth reading—both for the perils of prediction and for the ways gurus evade admitting error. The sidebar includes a link to Ray Kurzweil’s response. You may also find the comments interesting. You might want to read “Kurzweil, the Singularity and His Futurism,” posted by the same John Rennie at *The Gleaming Retort* on December 23, 2010.

A Few Library Futures

Mita Williams wrote “The future of libraries is what we create in the present” on November 17,

2010 at *New Jack Librarian*. I tend to agree with the title—but I’m not so strong on what she’s saying—or at least not all of it. She begins by quoting a metaspeech: A talk by Dorothea Salo prepared for but, thanks to weather, not given during the 2011 OLA Superconference. Here’s the key paragraph:

Buying books and journals distinguishes libraries less and less, as published information becomes a commodity and open access makes inroads into scholarly communication. Perhaps this will turn collection development inside out! Instead of collecting from the vast information world for our patron base, we will collect unique materials from our patron base to preserve and present to the world.

The second sentence is interesting and quite likely a big part of the future of distinctive academic libraries. But I think Salo (for whom I have the greatest respect) overstates the “commoditization” of publications and the extent to which everything is or will be online tomorrow. And I don’t hold Salo responsible for what Williams says next:

We will come to see one large collection of items as the result of a quaint but ultimately unkind hoarding instinct. The mission is now to associate every item in a library building into a smaller and more meaningful collection of items. Each item in the library will have an explanation of why it was selected for the collection, just like a museum.

For ARL-class libraries and *most* public libraries, for at least the next few decades, I believe that’s improbable and not a desirable future. “Library as boutique/library as archival collection” may be *part* of a library’s mission, but we are a very long ways from it being reasonable to abandon the broadly-selected collection.

Williams says “we no longer live in a world of scarcity.” That’s both true and false: True for a small elite and for some categories of materials, false for most people in many situations. It’s a privileged statement, not only a first-world but an elite-of-the-first-world assertion. *Most people* in the U.S. and, I would venture, Williams’ Australia make real, difficult choices among acquisitions. Buying all the ereaders and either ebooks or physical books that might serve their needs and desires *will* interfere with other uses for that income. For librarians to say “everything’s free on the internet” and abandon large collections to take on *entirely* an archival role is, I believe, to create a dystopian future.

I have the same feelings about John Dupuis’ “Reimagining the University Press and the Post-

Collection Library,” posted November 24, 2010 at *Confessions of a Science Librarian*—and, again, Dupuis is somebody I respect but don’t always agree with. For example, “post-collection library” involves a *bunch* of assumptions I’m unwilling to make except, *possibly*, for science and some other specialized libraries.

Dupuis seems to believe monographs are doomed:

Even long-form text-based communication will probably evolve, even within the humanities, into more compact, concise forms. A series of shorter, blog-post-like, essays seems like an interesting model for even fairly complex communication online rather than huge “books.”

Even for scholarly monographs (and Dupuis goes on to say “Trade book publishing...is a whole other kettle of fish”), that seems improbable *as a universal future*. That there will be more lengths and forms seems nearly certain. That physical collections will vanish in any medium-term future seems highly improbable. But then, Dupuis also refers to “the media singularity,” and I don’t buy it—the idea that essentially all current media forms will die. Change, yes (as they’ve been changing for years); die, probably not. And, to some extent, Dupuis is relying on the same “end of scarcity” overstatement as Williams:

Our collecting has always been scarcity driven. We collect media for our patrons because they’re scarce and expensive and our patrons need us to pay for them. But if those media either no longer exist or are no longer scarce, then what’s left?

Again, that depends on the definition of “scarce.” I’m not sure what else to say here; this is a future that strikes me as improbable *on a general basis*. Dupuis ends the post “Any ideas?” and, as of early February 2011, there are no comments.

Looking toward 2011

Dorothea Salo offers specific possibilities for 2011 in this December 30, 2011 post at *Book of Trogoon*—and starts out with the kind of paragraph that keeps me pointing to Salo’s work and saying “**There**: You need to pay attention to her” when I have the opportunity:

Before I get to crystal-ball-gazing, I have to point out my track record, because it’s *really quite bad*. Not only am I on record with a major prediction that didn’t come true (“IRs in the US will fold”), I quite failed to predict a number of things that did,

from Harvard's OA policy to California telling Nature Publishing Group to go suck eggs.

Salo is not a Guru, even as she's (appropriately) becoming recognized as a national expert on institutional repositories, expanding academic library missions to meet new institutional needs and related issues. She's offering some things "that wouldn't surprise me a bit in 2011." The first three bullets require Salo's commentary and links to make any sense at all; I am not qualified to comment on them. Here are the others, with Salo's commentary excerpted or eliminated and my comments in italic:

FRPAA won't make it this time either. Sorry. Maybe next time. *Probably right, unfortunately.*

Some chemistry department somewhere will drop ACS accreditation because the institution can't afford ACS journals. *If not in 2011, then sometime soon, I'd bet.*

A bare handful of Big Deal renewals will blow up, à la California and NPG. *Likely and perhaps salutary, but, as Salo says:*

Faculty will start a lot of "why don't those damn librarians..." grumbling. *Nearly certain, based on what we've already seen elsewhere.*

An IR's gonna fold. Yes, all right, I was wrong when I said this the first time, and I wouldn't be surprised to be wrong again. But I'll say it nonetheless. I see too many libraries who opened IRs on a wing and a prayer without adequate planning or even a sensible collection-development policy. Let's face it, folks: in the absence of mandates, the OA-via-IRs experiment failed...

We'll see a bare handful more campus or patchwork mandates. I don't think we've quite seen the end of the post-Harvard wave. I do think we're close to that end—and there won't be a second wave, not without a lot more work and evangelism than the open-access movement is currently mustering. *I'd like to believe Salo's wrong, but I don't.*

Another major university press will merge with its library or fold. *Likely and maybe a good thing.*

Crowdsourced data-analysis projects will increase, and pick up more good press. *Another case where I don't know enough to even understand this.*

I'd bet Salo will beat *Freedom to Tinker's* batting average—that she'll be right on most of these.

7 Library Predictions for 2011

Andy Woodworth posted this on January 4, 2011 at *Agnostic, Maybe*. There's a paragraph of discussion for each one, which I'm omitting here:

More public and school libraries will close. Academic libraries will be scaled back.

There will be more paywalls to content.

There will be an ereader company that will work with libraries.

There will be a copyright reckoning.

There will be a philosophical shakeup in the profession.

The libraries that start new construction this year will be based more around spaces and services rather than the collection itself.

Despite everything, it will still be a good year to be a librarian.

I think the fourth (copyright) is highly improbable, at least for 2011, and I'm at odds with the fifth because I don't think "one big team" thinking serves librarianship very well (but hey, I'm not a librarian). Otherwise? We shall see.

Can we please stop the "library is dying" hysteria already?

I'm closing with this, posted January 6, 2011 at *The Gypsy Librarian* by Angel Rivera. He read Brian T. Sullivan's "Academic Autopsy Report 2050" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, about how academic libraries would be dead by 2050—and feels the piece begs for rebuttal:

I've heard the piece is supposed to be satire, and that would not worry me were it not for the fact that our campus president would likely view it seriously and use it as evidence to close the library down...

Then Rivera takes on the major points in the essay. He calls the post long, but in fact his point-by-point commentary is only about 1,300 words and **well worth reading** in the original.

Masthead

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