

# Cites & Insights

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## The Front

# The Open Access Landscape

If you don't read [Walt at Random](#) or follow me on a social network, you may not be aware that I've begun a series of weekly blog posts with the overall title [The Open Access Landscape](#).

This series complements *Open Access Journals: Idealism and Opportunism*, the *Library Technology Reports* issue based on my direct study of 7,301 open access journals listed in the *Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)* as of May 7, 2014. That study is, as far as I know, the first and only reasonably comprehensive look at what's actually happening with gold OA, in this case covering 2011 through June 30, 2014. ("Reasonably comprehensive": it's missing some 2,408 journals with no English option in their interface, which made it impossible for me to analyze them.)

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*Open Access Journals: Idealism and Opportunism* will appear this summer. I heartily recommend it if you're at all interested in what's actually happening with OA—it provides a solid foundation of facts to inform the arguments. It's reasonably short (of necessity: *Library Technology Reports* has length limits) and should be informative. When it's out, I will link to it in my blog. I believe the print version will be available for something like \$45 for those who don't subscribe to *Library Technology Reports*.

## Complementary

The new series of blog posts does not replace *Open Access Journals: Idealism and Opportunism*. Instead, it complements it—but also adds new information.

The complementary part: while the monograph devotes one chapter to journals divided into more than two dozen topics, the series consists of one post for each of those topics. There's more detail on journals within that topic and notes on how they differ from the norm for OA journals.

The added information: I'm looking at the journals to pick up article counts for *all* of 2014, at least as long as energy holds out. (I believe I'll wind up getting them all, although it's possible that one topic may be delayed from its usual alphabetic spot, since that topic accounts for about a quarter of all gold OA journals. If you know anything at all about OA or have read my earlier reports, you already know what broad topic that is.)

It's important to note that the *only* data updates or revisions are the addition of full 2014 article counts as feasible. I am *not* making other revisions, such as filling in late 2013 posts or changing grades based on what I see: In every respect other than 2014 counts, what I'm using for the posts is exactly what I used for the *Library Technology Reports* issue (the dataset is available in anonymized form at [figshare](#)).

## Schedule

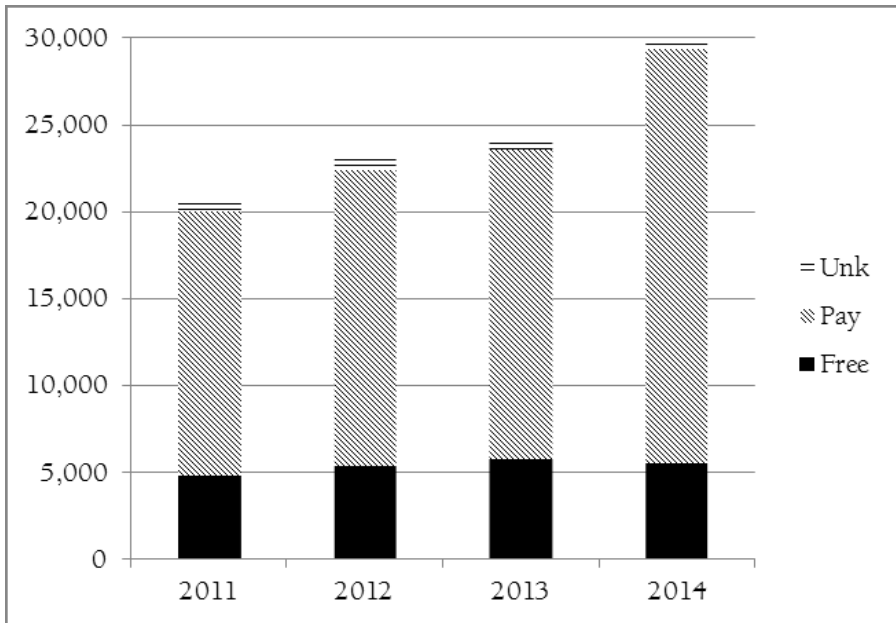
The first topical post appeared on March 6, 2015. My plan is to post one topic each Friday (again, if energy holds out and there seems to be enough interest). That should mean that the final post will appear on September 11, 2015 or September 18, 2015—or possibly eight weeks later, if I do a supplemental series of posts covering groups of topics.

## The Book?

The posts are actually draft chapters of a potential self-published book—let's call it *The Open Access Landscape 2011-2014: A Topical Survey*. I'm writing each chapter in Word, using my standard 6" x 9" book template, then copying the chapter to Word's blog option, posting it as a draft and doing a tiny amount of cleanup in WordPress. Word—Word 2010 for now, but that may change before the series is done—does a commendable job of creating posts, even handling graphics within a chapter automatically.

While the posts are informative, they're probably not beautiful—I don't attempt to optimize the tables for online viewing, for example. The chapters should be much more readable. It should also be much easier to compare different topics, as you can flip through a book so easily.

The chapters will also be edited and revised, probably adding a "Distinctive Aspects" paragraph describing the most distinctive aspects of the journals in that chapter as compared to all gold OA journals.



I'm also adding one graph to each chapter, a stacked bar graph showing the free, pay, and unknown-APC articles for each year for the journals in a given chapter. Here's an example.

This particular graph strikes me as telling a very clear story. What's the topic? You can probably guess if you're following the series of posts. Otherwise, well, buy the book.

I believe the book will be a worthwhile addition to the OA literature—but I won't publish it unless I have reason to believe it will sell at least a handful of copies (probably at \$45 paperback, \$40 no-DRM PDF ebook). Unless, of course, somebody or some group comes up with enough funding to make it sensible to put this out for free (or for the actual production cost in print form). Best guess is that the book would be ready before September 11, 2015; I won't make it available until after the *Library Technology Reports* issue appears.

If you're interested (or if you have sources of funding to make this free), let me know—[waltcrawford@gmail.com](mailto:waltcrawford@gmail.com).

(Why am I looking for advance signs of interest—signs that are *not* commitments to buy? Because of the dismal performance of last year's *Beyond the Damage: Circulation, Coverage and Staffing*, a book expanding on and complementing last year's LTR issue *Big-Deal Serial Purchasing: Tracking the Damage*. Although I trust that the purchaser of that book found it useful.)

## On to 2016?

Would it be worthwhile to do a five-year longitudinal study of gold OA (as defined by the contents of *DOAJ*)? I believe it would.

Would it be practical? That's another question. Even for a mostly-retired semi-obsessive type like me, it would be a *lot* of work. I'll be honest: The reasonably complete picture of 2011-2014 only emerged because I bit off a chunk at a time, then found myself adding chunks until the whole thing was consumed.

If anybody thinks this is a great idea *and* knows of a funding mechanism (that doesn't involve me making a pitch video and trying to come up with hundreds of premiums) that would work for an independent researcher like me, I'm certainly open to the possibility.

Here's what I think would be entailed, noting that I believe inspecting each website is the only way to get a reasonably accurate overall picture:

- In early January 2016, download the *DOAJ* spreadsheet—basically, as soon as there's one with a 2016 datestamp. Right now, there are just over 10,000 journals in *DOAJ*; I have no way of knowing whether there will be more or less in January 2016, given that new journals spring up but also that *DOAJ*'s implementing tougher listing criteria.
  - \*Prepare a new master spreadsheet, importing certain data from the existing 2011-2014 spreadsheet where there's a clear match. (Prepare a new “unmatched” 2011-2014 spreadsheet for certain purposes.)
  - Go through *all* of the new spreadsheet, using essentially the same criteria and measures as in 2011-2014, but assigning grades freshly and combining topics freshly. Use existing 2011-2014 data, but check blank and unusually low cells to see whether they've been filled in. Add new 2015 data. (This bullet is the killer. It's hundreds of hours of work.) There might be some refinement of grades and more use of subgrades to flag certain conditions in journals.
  - Prepare various analyses. Depending on the level of funding and where it comes from, publish results in various ways.
  - Anonymize the spreadsheet and load it on figshare.
  - If somebody with a lot of money and perhaps less sense wanted it, do a “sideshow analysis” of the most recent Beall lists, but only after everything else is done, and I'd just as soon ignore this entirely.
- There's the concept. Suggestions, advice, funding sources welcome—same email address as above.

Oh, by the way, while I don't actively seek speaking invitations, I'd be happy to consider them on the gold OA landscape or other topics on

which I have something to offer—and I’d count honoraria against my funding goals. (Not expenses, of course.)

## Libraries

# FriendFeed, Going. LSW, Not

Right around the time this issue of *Cites & Insights* comes out, FriendFeed will shut down—specifically, April 9, 2015, according to the message in the header (since changed to “soon”).

What’s FriendFeed, you ask? That question may explain why FriendFeed is going away. By the standards of Social Media Gurus, it’s been dead for years: it doesn’t have tens of millions or hundreds of millions of users. (I’ve seen it written off as already dead by more than one Guru—years ago, in some cases.) Apparently, what users there were have to some extent migrated elsewhere—although since I don’t know how many there ever were or how many there are now, I can’t say that with any certainty. In any case, Facebook purchased FriendFeed *years* ago for its people and its technology and has now decided its time has come.

I wouldn’t normally write a *Cites & Insights* essay about a failed relatively obscure social network, and I certainly wouldn’t put such an essay under a “libraries” header. But this isn’t just about FriendFeed; it’s about the Library Society of the World (LSW). FriendFeed has been the home of LSW for quite a few years now, and we’ve found it a good place to be. Good enough that its passing seemed to deserve an essay. (Never heard of LSW either? You’re not a long-time *Cites & Insights* reader, are you? Read on.)

## FriendFeed’s Strength and Weaknesses

FriendFeed itself began in late 2007. It was (and is) unusual in a way that’s right in the name: it’s about feeds from friends. Specifically, once you had a FriendFeed account, you could set up feeds from your other places—your blog, your Twitter account, anything else that offered an appropriate feed (dozens of them). People following your FriendFeed account would see all the items you posted, if the feeds were working correctly—but they could also comment on the items within FriendFeed, and post items directly within FriendFeed.

FriendFeed was also unusual for its time in being real-time: unless you set it to Pause, new items would pop up in your stream as they happened. I found that disconcerting, and always left Pause on, refreshing as needed. Because FriendFeed also popped an item back up to “newest” whenever there was a comment on the item, it could get quite lively.

Facebook purchased FriendFeed in August 2009. It left it running as a separate network until early April 2015 (assuming FB doesn’t change

its plans); there weren't new developments, but bugs did get fixed and the servers got rebooted as needed. Facebook never attempted to "monetize" FriendFeed, as far as I can tell—there have never been ads, either on a sidebar or in the stream. When you think about it, that's remarkable: For six of its eight years, FriendFeed has been operating as an orphan of sorts, and generally operating well.

[According to Wikipedia](#), FriendFeed has (or had?) an average of one million monthly visitors. In the world of megasites, that ain't much. You can see the attitude in this *Wikipedia* sentence: "After the acquisition by Facebook the service has been kept active, with a small loyal community using it on a daily basis, even as the main point of presence online, despite the rise of more recent and successful competing platforms." According to [my own post](#) on the day I joined it (December 26, 2008), FriendFeed at one point had seven million users.

More recent and successful competing platforms? Yes, more successful in terms of attracting huge numbers of users. Certainly, more recent. But if you define success in terms of the user, then it's a question of minority tastes. For those of us who found FriendFeed a welcome home, nothing else has been nearly as good—and we're actively looking.

Strengths? The feed aggregation model is nice (although it effectively means that I see the same content from people two or three times, since it's not feasible to use FriendFeed as my *only* network). The threaded conversations are especially nice, and now show up to some extent in Facebook and elsewhere. There are cute things—e.g., you can change your screen name any time (although mousing over the screen name will yield your "real" username, which can itself be a pseudonym), leading to curiosities such as the day everybody in the LSW group carried a certain library writer's name. (I'd link to that thread—FriendFeed establishes a unique URL for each thread—but it wouldn't show what I wanted: the display's generated dynamically, so that thread would now show whatever the *current* screen names are.)

Following is asymmetric, to some extent: Unless somebody's account is private, you can follow them without asking or having them follow you. That's becoming more common, of course. You could and can also either hide a specific comment from somebody or block them entirely, in which case all of their comments disappear from your feed (which can lead to some oddly disjointed threads). You can send a direct message to somebody and, of course, group your "friends" into appropriate clusters. You can restrict your thread to "My discussions," those items where you initiated the item, added a comment, or Liked the item. You can edit a comment after you've posted it—or delete it for that matter.

Groups could be open or secret, small or large, and a sidebar showed the time the most recent post to a group appeared. I have four groups in my sidebar (I signed up for five, but one has disappeared), and as usual the

LSW group has a post within the last few minutes, while the others are much less active.

Mostly, *it just worked*. Images showed up in the stream as needed. URLs automatically functioned as links and you could explicitly add links. The message length was somewhat limited, but it was a reasonable limit, and of course you could always comment on your own message to extend it. FriendFeed didn't suggest who I should follow (as far as I know) or otherwise intrude on my attention. And FriendFeed didn't keep switching my stream to show me the most "important" items—it was always newest first (there is a Best of Day item, which I tried for the first time in writing this essay—it shows the most popular items among my friends, which is a sensible approach).

For me, and I think for LSW, the greatest strength may have been the key weakness: It wasn't so popular that we had to deal with trolls very often. Other weaknesses? Well, it isn't going to survive. The lack of ads is a strength from my perspective, but not from Facebook's. Sometimes feeds didn't work right; sometimes the search function didn't work right. Once in a while, it disappeared for a little while—and some of us wondered whether it would return.

Assuming Facebook doesn't grant it a reprieve, I'll miss FriendFeed. I'm not saying Facebook's done anything wrong; in fact, it's allowed FriendFeed to survive for an amazingly long time. It's been my primary online home for quite a while; it's my home page in Firefox. But that's not just because of FriendFeed—it's also because of LSW. We'll get back to that in a little while, but first...

### *Other Folks on FriendFeed*

Barbara Fister posted "Goodbye, FriendFeed" [on March 13, 2015](#) at *Barbara Fister's Place*, and it's so good I almost decided not to write this essay. Here's Fister's one-paragraph demonstration of why she's a better (and more concise) writer than I'll ever be:

Chances are you've never heard of FriendFeed. It was a bit under the radar, but those who used it were avid. It had a simple, uncluttered, and intuitive interface where you could form groups, have RSS feeds stream to the group, and have discussions – with any active discussion popped to the top of the page. It allowed anonymity (which can be extraordinarily useful) and private messages, which is where surprise parties were planned. Facebook acquired FriendFeed in 2009, but somehow it kept going. Every time it went down for a few hours there were panicked backup plans made, but it always bobbed back up – until the final official announcement was made.

About those private parties...I dunno about parties, but portions of LSW did some extraordinary things in those private spaces. Again, more about that later.

Fister—who’s a mystery writer and a librarian—came to FriendFeed through the Crime and Mystery Fiction group, but found her way to LSW as well. What she has to say about LSW on FriendFeed is excellent, and perhaps best read in the context of her post. Of FriendFeed as a welcoming home for the two groups she’s primarily involved with, she says:

Every now and then there would be drama in either of these groups, but even at its most heated it never seemed to fundamentally alter the nature of the community. Perhaps the relative obscurity of FriendFeed made it unattractive to trolls and spammers. In any case, these were remarkably civil, balanced, and inviting spaces.

The more I think about it, the more important I think that middle sentence is. I was, twice, involved in a much larger library group on Facebook, and finally left for good because of the ongoing actions of a few of the people.

In a comment on Fister’s post, Stephen Francoeur highlights a basic and unusual feature of FriendFeed that I didn’t make as much use of:

I’m really saddened by the plans to close FriendFeed, too. I think we can recreate the conversational community elsewhere, but the loss of the ability to connect up to FriendFeed various services you use elsewhere and have them automatically update your FriendFeed is something that really hits home for me. I can’t tell you how many great conversations got started because an item someone’s shared delicious bookmark feed, or their Flickr feed, or their feed of videos favorited on YouTube, led to marvelous and unexpected discussion threads. I hope that wherever the LSW winds up, we can recreate that kind of functionality of serendipitous social discovery.

Iris Jastram wrote up one of the more bizarre occurrences in FriendFeed’s life on [November 24, 2013](#) at *Pegasus Librarian*: “The day Anonymous took down...Friendfeed?” Some hacker initiated a Distributed Denial of Service attack on FriendFeed based on two mistakes: that FriendFeed was “one of the biggest social networks” and that its frequently malfunctioning search function wasn’t yielding results for a certain hashtag because of censorship. [In discussing it](#), *TechCrunch* (or at least Drew Olanoff) showed its usual keen sensitivity to anybody behaving differently than *TechCrunch*’s anointed winners, first by adding “Ugh” as the only comment about FriendFeed’s ability to bring in feeds from other places and later this update when the attack ended:

After this long downtime episode, some folks are reporting that they’re able to access their precious FriendFeed again. The unofficial downtime was 19 hours. This now leads me to the question...why does it still exist? To keep the fanboys and girls happy, or is it a test-bed for innovation at Facebook?

Certainly not because “fanboys” like me found it worthwhile and wanted to keep using my “precious FriendFeed.”



Back to Jastram's post and a key paragraph:

Now, for those of us active on FriendFeed, it's a huge part of our lives and relationships. But none of us kid ourselves that we're operating on "one of the biggest social networks." In fact, most of us are simultaneously pleased and baffled that Facebook has let us limp along for 4 years on our preferred platform even after the whole FriendFeed team went to work for Facebook instead. [TechCrunch can't figure out why FriendFeed even still exists to be attacked](#). I'm mostly worried that this whole attack will remind Facebook that they forgot to pull the plug on us years ago.

Cameron Neylon commented [on March 10, 2015](#) at *Science in the Open* in "End of Feed," and he'd posted about FriendFeed seven years previously. Apparently the Open Science people formed a sizable FriendFeed group—but many or most of them left when Facebook took over. Neylon didn't; he's been involved in some LSW and other library discussions (yes, open access has been discussed a *lot* on FriendFeed).

Yesterday Facebook announced they were going to shutter the service that they have to be fair kept going for many years now with no revenue source and no doubt declining user numbers. Of course those communities that remained are precisely the ones that most loved what the service offered. The truly shocking thing is that although nothing has been done to the interface or services that Friendfeed offers for five years it still remains a best in class experience. [Louis Gray had some thoughts](#) on what was different about Friendfeed. It remains, in my view, the best technical solution and user experience for enabling the kind of sharing that researchers actually want to do. I remember reading about Robert Scoble disliked the way that Friendfeed worked, and thinking "all those things are a plus for researchers...". Twitter is ok, Facebook really not up to the job, Figshare doesn't have the social features and all the other "facebook for science" simply don't have critical mass. Of course, neither did Friendfeed once everyone left either...but while there was a big community there we had a glimpse of what might be possible.

You can read Louis Gray's post yourself, and maybe the 98 comments (or maybe not).

Jon Udell wrote "Save FriendFeed! Why we need niche social networks" [on March 23, 2015](#) at *InfoWorld*. The tease:

The Internet economy dictates that social networks win big or go away. But there should be a place for useful services like FriendFeed, which Facebook says it will kill soon

And a key paragraph:

FriendFeed combined two major functions: group messaging and feed aggregation. Were it only a platform for group discussion it would still have been useful. Even today, that basic need isn't easy to satisfy

in a lightweight and open way. But it was feed aggregation that made FriendFeed into something more: a user innovation toolkit, albeit one that was never well understood or fully exploited.

Udell's is a good writeup, focused on a project he was involved in that had an 85-member FriendFeed group. If I had to guess, I'd say the *active* part of LSW on FriendFeed is or was around 85-100 people, although the numbered membership is well over 1,000. Udell's close:

Nowadays, services like FriendFeed are born in the cloud. They start small and aim for world domination. A few make it. When most don't we call them failures and consign them to the dot-com deadpool. Maybe there's another way. Maybe services like FriendFeed can go back to being small, become distributed, and continue to deliver their unique value to those who appreciate it.

I suspect there will be more requia for FriendFeed. I'll close with an anonymized version of one thread—anonymized because the thread was in a group that may not be public, and because the names of the people involved aren't terribly important. The content and attitude are what make this, and it's indicative of the kind of thing I found and find more often and done better on FriendFeed—inside LSW and elsewhere—than anywhere else on the web.

FF Insiders, I want to remind you that, as thought leaders in our community, it's up to you to make sure that our goals and values are well-represented at other communities on a go-forward basis, by leveraging our cross-functional strengths and capabilities.

I am too very much cross-functionally thought leadering. – [A]

Excellent job, [A]. You've been elected as vice chief thought leaderer. – [B]

I think, as thought leaders, we should interactively generate future-proof solutions – [C]

[C], would you thought-lead a skunkworks sub-committee to investigate if a future-proofing project would have a net positive ROI if it were proactively architected? – [B]

That's a good thought. It would probably allow us to dramatically utilize interoperable imperatives. I'd be happy to. The sub-committee should select only those who have shown the ability to appropriately repurpose multi-functional thought-ing. – [C]

[B], I don't think I'm comfortable with thought leaders that aren't organic, free-range, hormone-free, cruelty-free, etc, etc. Can you look into that? – [D]

But are you local? – [E]

You are all so dynamic! I'm glad that you're all self-motivated AND driven team players! We need to elect one go-to person to transcribe the minutes

for our think tank. We need to think outside the box and be proactive about creating the right synergy with others! Be innovative! – [F]

I'll, uh, be an observer. – [D]

I would like to be nominated as office ho. Or ho bag if you please. – [G]

Well, [D]'s not local, obviously. She's in one of those foreign countries. - H

[G], you're CEHBO now. (Chief Executive Ho Bag Officer.) – [B]

\*slips [G] his mobile number and an old skool Polaroid\* - [J]

If we pivot and disrupt like we do at morning cross-fit, the renown of our deliverables will go A-list viral. – [K]

PIVOT! – [F]

We should definitely double-click on this idea. Stephen: can you email more about this offline so we can synergize on this? – [L]

Email offline. You people are killing me. – [H]

We need to break the paradigm with a visioning exercise. Will FF V2.0 be leadering in 2025? Are we enveloping fast enough? – [M]

(I thought 'double-click that' was just a weird Microsoft-ism...my friends and I were just talking about that last night). Also, I think someone needs to F/U because I'm really concerned that we're neglecting the cloud and the services and the cloud as a service. – [N]

We rockstars better proactivate our synergy to seamlessly move forward to futureproof and net-net the 'net. #quickanddirty – [M]

But will it scale? – [P]

Is this organic process future-proofed against negative social media flow? – [Q]

I love you all. I love you so very very much. I'll be dj. always open to requests. reserves the right to refuse any and all requests. – [R]

So, is this where the rock star futurists meet? – [S]

(I waited and waited and waited, but no one was saying "futurist." I'm so disappointed.) – [S]

(Also nobody's attempted to monetize this yet.) – [T]

[T], I was just operating under the impression that we'd just wait for FB to buy us and let them worry about revenue ;) – [U]

If your Buzzword Bingo Card hasn't caught fire yet, read through that again. As I remember, it took place over about half an hour. There were also serious conversations, many of them, with lots of involvement.

I'll miss FriendFeed. That's obvious. But let's get back to LSW or TheLSW or...

# The Library Society of the World

I came to FriendFeed nervously, joining right around [December 26, 2008](#), for reasons explained in the second of *many* Walt at Random posts mentioning FriendFeed (I think the search results in about eight pages of posts). At the time, I was deeply reluctant to join social networks—but I was already involved with LSW, which at that point was primarily ensconced in Meebo (remember Meebo?). A bunch of the LSW folks, librarians I trusted and liked, said I should give FriendFeed a try. I did. My motives at the time:

There are only three plausible reasons for me to open a FriendFeed account:

1. To reach the universe of people who would love to read Walt at Random but (a) have never heard of it, (b) are among the seven million FriendFeed users. Estimated increase in readership: Zero, give or take five.
2. To post direct questions/comments in FriendFeed, when they're too short or strange to post here.
3. Mostly, to see what else is happening—it's clear that some worthwhile conversations among colleagues are happening there.

I mentioned LSW (using the initialism) for the first time on June 18, 2007, in a post that had little to do with LSW but mentioned the Meebo room.

I won't talk about the founding of LSW because I wasn't there (I think), because key founders are no longer active with LSW, and because I just don't know enough. I got involved, clearly, by late 2007, and found it a congenial group. Or not-group: LSW has a Cod of Ethics (which lives on in the banner for Barbara Fister's *Inside Higher Education* column) but not a code, no bylaws or dues or membership restrictions, as many officers as people choose to call themselves officers (something that hasn't happened much lately), an unusually fluid "membership" and an ongoing combination of humor, seriousness, professional discourse, personal issues and stuff.

I'm there for the stuff.

I'll quote [one April 7, 2008 post](#) from *Walt at Random* in full, "Har-rumph: When TLIs intermingle," then give up on trying to pin down my own role in LSW—noting that this was before LSW migrated en masse from Meebo to FriendFeed:

I hear from semi-reliable sources a grotesque rumor that I was "on" LSW Meebo (is that like being on drugs?) during a presentation on LSW at CiL.

LSW? CiL? What are all these initialisms?

I can only say this to that: I'm as likely to be found on LSW Meebo as I am to post [mini-reviews](#) of [old movies](#).

I would note that any LSW participant (I hear from those deranged types who actually frequent whatever-the-heck it is) can set their screen name to be anything. Michael Gorman, Edgar A. Poe, walcrawford, you name it...

TLI? Well, LSW isn't an acronym (at least I can't think of any reasonable way to pronounce it as a word), so TLA doesn't work. Besides, I'll be at TLA (or TxLA, if you prefer) next week...in the flesh, not in some crazy person's impersonation of me in a room talking about...well, no I'm not going to repeat that. And since LSW Meebo is passworded, you can't get it from the buffer anyway

23. And still it didn't crash. Not that I was there to see it, of course..

If that's not confusing enough, I was *not* at CiL in 2008; I was at TxLA.

Does this seem random? Well, we are talking about LSW...

LSW has a website. It's not very active. (Not [lsw.org](#): that's the Little Spokane Watershed, clearly a fine group. Also not [lsw.com](#): that's Learning Solutions Winstanley, and reading the front page of their site reminds me a lot of the FriendFeed thread quoted a bit earlier in this piece—especially “make base knowledge actionable, grow audience awareness and increase outcomes.”)

LSW has a small presence on Facebook. LSW has an even smaller presence on Google+. There may be other outposts. But mostly, at least until April 9 and since Meebo's decline, LSW is on FriendFeed.

There, it has prospered. As I write this, there are 1,385 subscribers—but there are nowhere near that many active participants. (Looking at the first page of 80 subscribers sorted by most recent, there's only one out of 80 I recognize; sorted alphabetically, I get four out of 80, with five of 80 on the second page.) My best guess is that a few dozen people are active, with the rest lurking, but “a few dozen” could be anywhere from 50 to 250 or more, depending on your definition of “active.”

It's a wildly eclectic group, and that's part of what makes it special. More than that, though, I'd say that LSW has only two real (if unenforceable) rules: Be honest—at least within the context of LSW—and expect symmetry. By the latter, I mean that if you're snarky, you should expect snark (and most of us do).

LSW was irresponsible for two zines: *Codslap!: The Library Society of the World Zine*\* \*Now incorporating “*The Australasian Journal of Library Science*” and “*Librarian Fancy*” and *Librarian Bomb*. Appropriately, the latter is dated Fall/Winter 2009; the former does not carry any proper date but has “7 July 2009” at the bottom of the editorial introduction.

LSW was largely responsible for a Los Angeleno, Derrick, deciding to go to library school (and paying for a trip to Italy when he graduated). I'm

fairly certain that Derrick's career all by itself says a lot about the worth of LSW. As I write, he's an ALA Emerging Leader. (LSW, using the same private messages used to set up that trip, also paid most of the expenses at ALA Annual for a tired old hack who'd recently been summarily dismissed by the group he was working for part-time, where he had naively kept working without a signed renewed contract and could thus be let go without fulfilling the assumed contract terms: I do remember, and I do appreciate it.)

LSW folks have answered hundreds (thousands?) of serious questions related to libraries, librarianship and other things. LSW folks have engaged in thousands of frivolous discussions, sometimes lightening the mood when people needed some cheering up. LSW folks have encouraged the discouraged. LSW folk have seen one another through several pregnancies and one remarkable memoir of an unplanned pregnancy. One terrible old sod from Great Britain has posted far too many satirical song lyrics to be taken seriously (he's also fast to create puns bad enough to elicit groans, a talent I greatly ~~also~~ admire). There are also LSW folk in Australia, most certainly in Canada and probably in some other places. Some are active in ALA, SLA, ASIST or other initialfests; some aren't really librarians at all (cough cough). A fair number are *LJ* Movers and Shakers—but even more are LSW Shovers and Makers.

I'm not going to quote from either zine issue (yes, I have both), but it's tempting, especially the syllabus for LIS 957—Special Topics in Reference and User Services: Stapler Management and Curation. (Or, for that matter, I could quote Laura Crossett's remarkable job of excerpting the writing of a tired old library-related hack and turning it into credible poetry. But I won't.)

FriendFeed may have been the ideal home for LSW. FriendFeed's going away. I don't believe LSW will fade away (at least I hope not—frankly, LSW has much to do with my continued involvement with libraries and writing). There may even be an equally congenial and obscure home, but it's so early that I'd rather not mention it. Instead, I'll add a couple of comments from others—one a blog post, the other a thread where I *did* warn people I'd be quoting them.

### *Basking in the Reflected Glow*

This post by Iris Jastram appeared [March 16, 2009](#) on *Pegasus Librarian*, and it says a lot about the Library Society of the World. I'm quoting the entire thing (but for the links, you'll need to go to the original); I hope Iris doesn't mind:

I was busy recruiting ACRL attendees for the Library Society of the World this past week, which involved several conversations about how it got started (a funny story that can be told with more or less snark depending on the situation... I love snark-flexible stories). My favorite

part to tell, though, is the “you are here” part. If you decide to take up with this crew, you’ll find yourself surrounded by smart, thoughtful, innovative, energetic, inspiring, and just plain wonderful library people.

There have always been anecdotes of useful conversations and interesting ideas to share when trying to explain why I think the group does good work, but as the group and individuals within it continue to work hard to improve the profession, it’s getting easier and easier to point to things that non-LSW members will have heard of and say “Look at this, and this, and this. See? These people really are cool!” Take, for example, yesterday’s announcement of the Library Journal’s list of Movers and Shakers. That list includes so many people that I know from LSW: Dorothea Salo, Jenica Rogers-Urbanek, Jason Griffey, Karen Coombs, Michael Porter, Rachel Walden, Dave Pattern, Lauren Pressley. Then there are a few other people listed that I know but am not quite sure if they’ve declared themselves LSW members (one of the fun things about the LSW is that there is no comprehensive roster of members): Chad Boeninger, Melissa Rethlefsen, Sarah Houghton-Jan, and the “Dutch Boys” (Erik Boekesteijn, Jaap van de Geer, and Geert van den Boogaard). That’s a quarter of the LJ list, folks. That’s nothing to sneeze at!

On top of that, there are all the other cool things that LSW members play huge roles in, like LCOW, Library Camp Kansas, the ALA unconference, the Lib2.0 Unconference (in Australia, since this is “of the world,” remember), BIGWIG programming, setting up all kinds of conversation spaces online (the LSW Meebo room, the LSW forum, the LSW LinkedIn group, the LSW FriendFeed room)... the list goes on and on and on. And now, the LSW is coming up with a way to recognize all the amazing things that its members do day in and day out. If you haven’t seen it yet, check out the Shover & Maker award site which appears to be gearing up for something big.

What started as a joke has become an actual force in the library world, and I, for one, am honored to bask in the glow of these truly inspiring people.

The names have changed (for example, it’s now Jenica Rogers and Sarah Houghton) and some of these folks have dropped out of LSW, but some are going strong. I can’t think of anything Iris Jastram says here with which I’d disagree, which is amazing, given how disagreeable I am.

### *What did I learn from the LSW group and from the Wider FF community?*

Joe Krause offered that leading question on March 9, 2015, in response to the planned shutdown. I’m quoting the whole thread, including screen names as they appeared at the time, modifying it to strip out FF overhead

and notes on where a comment came from, and one segment of a comment that involves another library group on a social network, not because I disagree with what's said but because...well, this is an appreciation of LSW and FriendFeed.

I learned that there are others who feel the same way I do about life, things and stuff. And I love you all for it. Heck, I even love [most] of the FF people who don't feel the same way. - Joe

God. So much. - laura x

most of what I know - Iris

That not everybody hates me? - RepoRat

So so much. - Christina Pikas

that my colleagues are funny, smart, in touch, and willing to lend a hand instantly - and that the world is not so grim a place after all. - barbara fister

All of the above. LSW restored my faith in librarianship. :- ) - Megan loves summer

...pretty much everything I know about libraries...and technology...and what happens when social hits technological... - Cameron Neylon

So much, and so much that's kept me going. (OK if I mine this thread for my C&I reminiscence?) - walt crawford

That there are people who think like me, and people who don't, and there's a place for us all. That organisation need not mean organised. That people will, and do, lend a hand. - Pete's Got To Go

Walt: mine it as much as you want. - Joe

I've learned so much from the LSW! I feel pretty new around here, but have found the attitudes and passion here really inspiring. It's honestly helped me stand up more for the stuff I believe in at my own place of work. Plus the LSW has given me models for passionate-but-collegial disagreements. And models for robust theorizing about the library, or robust research into library stuff. - Regular Amanda

what it means to have a professional network I can immediately rely on at all hours. - Hedgehog

That ragequit doesn't mean forever. - Rochelle \*boom\* Hartman

I agree with pretty much everything [Cameron says here](#)... - John Dupuis

i joined FF almost the day i started my first librarian gig. to me being part of libraryland means seeing all of you on FF daily. - jambina



How awesome non-medical librarians are, and some of the amazing things they're accomplishing every day. - Rachel Walden

To me, and this is mine-able, the great thing about FF was that it was the first place that I saw that really facilitated people interacting that might not have met before. In my case, it was scientists and librarians. We librarians had a chance to see what scientists were really thinking about and really doing at the edges of the open science world and to reflect back and give meaningful input. I'm thinking of all the amazing science and library people I've met here virtually and later IRL: Cameron, JCB, Michael Nielsen, Bill Hooker, Bjoern Brembs, Kay Thaney and so many others. On the library side, just a couple of months ago I met Stephen Francoeur in real life. But also over the years Christina, jambina, RR, Walt, Stephanie, Secret Agent Fister briefly at OLA before rushing off for my son's appendectomy, and so many others. This was always a place where I could be myself and feel that people had my back. Even though I wasn't the most prolific commenter, I always really valued this place. - John Dupuis

So much - including through all these discussions about migrating content and community to a new site. I love how thoughtful you all are! - Grumpator

What a lot of you have said, but just that you all are my people. I love having a wide network of smart people who will give me advice, agree or disagree with me in meaningful ways, and give me a broader perspective on things. Also, I just like you all. - kajisa

FF and the LSW is my go to professional network. - 🎵Maurice the Dolphin🎵

^^^ This. Twitter is useful for knowing what's going on and for links to interesting stuff, but the depth of the conversation here and the capacity to get good help or discussion about an issue - and sense of close community - there's nothing like it. - barbara fister

The ability to say something in more than 140 characters helps me gather my thoughts. Even though other services have threaded discussions like this, the LSW has the right diversity and mix of people for me... [*Segment deleted*]. - Joe

I learned that goodbye does not mean never again hello. Also, I learned that a career is more than just the daily job, as it can have so many facets and directions. - Julian

Who are the cool librarians who know the real deal.. who "get it"... - LibrarianOnTheLoose

^^^ This! Being part of LSW has changed my life. I've found support for incubating ideas, been challenged to grow and expand in a professional humorous way by fun super smart colleagues, and especially

during the move and transition to my current place of, LSW kept me from feeling isolated and alone in my work. - Galadriel C.

How awesome it is to have a tribe that has my back. That not all libraries are dysfunctional. That there are amazing people doing interesting work. That it's ok to have professional heroes/crushes/whatever-you-wanna-call it and sometimes you get to meet them and they have foibles and interior lives and that's cool. - Jaclyn aka spamgirl

Like others have said, LSW has restored my faith in the future of librarianship. It's meant more than I can express to have a place to converse with such thoughtful, open people. - Jen

Besides learning the more practical aspects of things, a lot of my thinking on librarianship has been shaped by discussions here on IL, open access just to name two. - aaron

LSW reminded that becoming a librarian was the right choice for me and that the job I had when I find this place was not the right choice for me. - John: Thread Killer

Thank you! - Galadriel C. from Android

Before I became a librarian or ever thought of it, I was an activist. I organized and demonstrated and got arrested and generally worked my tail off to try to change the world and make people's lives better—sometimes those of my colleagues; sometimes those of people I'd never met. When I started working in libraries, I felt I lost a lot of that. I still believed in the work, but, like most of us, I was caught up by and stymied in the bureaucracy and politics that are the reality of most institutions, especially large, slow moving ships of state like libraries. The LSW gave me back what I'd been missing—purpose, immediacy, common cause with people who were smart and scrappy and passionate—people who did stuff. Friend-Feed, as a social network, was just like the LSW—small, often overlooked, sometimes prone to crashing, and yet fast and collaborative. Suddenly we had the people and the place, and we were on fire—raising money for the Louisville Free Public Library after it flooded, taking down Clinical Reader, planning unconferences with people we'd never met, fighting for the good and making lifelong friends. That's what this place and you people have given me—or given back to me. I'm eternally grateful. - laura x from iPhone

FF and the LSW is my go-to professional network: That about sums it up. Or there's this, from a 70-comment discussion in early 2013 after I noted that someone had mentioned LSW as “one of those mean-spirited groups where only the brave go and where character assassination is par for the course”—a version of LSW that I didn't recognize then and don't now. I won't quote the whole discussion, because 2013. But I will quote two of my own comments in the thread:

I have referred to LSW as my key professional network, and will probably do so in the future. And as a place where I can ask possibly-stupid questions and get worthwhile (or at least interesting) answers. Those places are rare. (Also, I don't feel as antique here as I might at some other places...)

Actually, I'll put it another way: Without LSW, I would probably have shut down *Cites & Insights* and stopped writing and speaking by now. But don't get any ideas...

That was February 2013. I've done a fair amount of library-related research and writing since then, always inspired and frequently supported by LSW.

I hope and trust that LSW will continue. We'll miss FriendFeed. (Barbara Fister said it better in a few hundred words than I did in roughly 6,500, although around 2,500 of those are quoted. This should surprise nobody.)

## Social Networks

# Slightly More Than 140 Characters ~~Words~~ Sentences Paragraphs About Twitter

Warning: Do not expect a wholly serious or fundamentally profound treatment of Twitter here, or even of my own experience with Twitter—since I'm not a heavy or sophisticated user at all, although I check and use it more often than I used to.

That sentence is about 50% longer than Twitter would allow in a single tweet. I could certainly reduce it to tweetable length: "This article is just a bunch of random notes about Twitter with no particularly deep meaning." Wow. 48 characters left over.

In any case, I'd been tagging Twitter-related items I thought I might want to discuss, and see that I have almost four dozen of them, the earliest dated December 22, 2010, the most recent dated February 17, 2014. With three exceptions, all of the items here are at least 28 months old, so you're definitely not going to get a cutting-edge discussion—and won't face four dozen items either. This issue of *Cites & Insights* is a little odd anyway, especially given the main essay; this article just continues that oddness. These are items along Twitter's history that seemed interesting or amusing at the time.

## The Early Years

What's left of the 33 items I'd tagged prior to December 22, 2010—ignoring a lot that no longer seem interesting, amusing or relevant and the handful that have disappeared entirely, sometimes along with the domain on which they appeared.

### *3 out of 4 Tweets Ignored*

So says Bob Brown at *PCWorld* [on October 17, 2010](#). The lede:

If a Tweet is posted on the Web and nobody sees it, is it worth the bother?

That's an interesting question...until you get to the definition of "nobody sees it" and "ignored" used here. To wit, a "social media analytics" company looked at 1.2 billion posts made over two months in 2010 and found that 71% were neither retweeted nor replied to.

That's a strange definition of "not seen" or "ignored." If applied to my blog, for example, it would mean nobody but a handful of autospammers has paid any attention to, or even *seen*, any of the posts in the last six months or so, since there haven't been any comments (replies, that is) or reposts.

The rest of the "survey" results are, shall we say, not too surprising: most tweets that *do* get replies only get one, at least back in 2010, and more than 90% of retweets happened within an hour of the original tweet.

Good to see that this professionally-written online article is carefully proofread, as in this paragraph, copied-and-pasted without modification:

The basic Twitter page got a revamp in September featuring embedded videos and pictures as well as threaded replies (though there are a lot of really short threats based on the Sysomos study). Twitter also recently revamped its search engine, boosting its speed and capacity to index posts.

Watch out for those really short threats!

One commenter from "1610 days ago"—gotta love that accuracy!—gets it right, saying (in part):

So... I guess reading something but not commenting or passing it along counts as "ignoring?" In that case, I've ignored every newspaper and book I've ever read, and 99.99% of the *PCWorld* articles I've seen. Since I didn't comment, or copy/paste them to a friend.

### *Experiencing ALA Annual Through Twitter*

Laura Rancani's [July 11, 2010 post](#) on *The PLA Blog* discusses a fairly early example of a Twitter phenomenon I personally find incredibly frustrat-

ing, but can recognize others may find worthwhile: “liveblogging” in the form of conference tweeting with a common hashtag.

I admit I was skeptical when signing up for a Twitter account last spring. Another site to check when I pop online? Did I really want to commit to that? I quickly fell down the rabbit hole that is Twitter when I discovered how easy it was to stay up-to-date with concurrent conference events during last year’s Annual meeting in Chicago, which I attended in person. I was unable to make it to Washington D.C. this year, but the tidbits posted by participants who used the #ala10 hashtag helped to satisfy my curiosity. The fun continued with #virtual10, the hashtag used by attendees of the Virtual Conference sessions on Wednesday, July 7th, and Thursday, July 8th. I added both hashtags to my list of saved Twitter searches so that real-time updates were never more than a click away. (Unfortunately, Twitter limits the search availability of “older” tweets. Act now if you want to catch what was tagged!)

During this spring’s PLA conference in Portland, Oregon, Gretchen Kolderup observed that the stream of tweets tagged with #pla10 could be likened to “a roomful of people talking at and not with each other.” The stream for this year’s Annual followed a similar trend. Whenever I scanned the most recent tweets, I didn’t catch many back-and-forth exchanges using either hashtag. Messages tended to be brief bursts of ideas and resources gained from sessions rather than ongoing discussions. A year’s worth of following various conference activities through Twitter has given me the sense that this is often the case with on-the-go conference updates, but I don’t mind the fragmentation. Even if conference tweets don’t spark an in-the-moment conversation through @-replies or the site’s direct message feature, they can foster connection among Twitter users at a later time. Aside from harvesting links to conference notes or video footage, one of my favorite ways to make use of the stream is simply to see who is using it. Conference hashtags are a great resource for finding fellow librarians, technology buffs, and booklovers to chat with long after conference events have wrapped up.

Rancani doesn’t think following a hashtag is a full substitute for going to a conference, but finds it valuable when you can’t make it. I believe that continues to be true.

### *Digital Ephemera and the Calculus of Importance*

Dan Cohen posted this [on May 17, 2010](#) at his eponymous blog. You may remember that, when the Library of Congress said it would archive all public tweets (here’s an [April 14, 2010 post](#) about that), there was some debate about the usefulness of such a venture. For example, here’s one of the comments on the LC post:

Archiving the ephemeral, the meaningless and the lulzy. Strange project – doesn't this seem to be an overly commercial endeavor? If tweets™ are in, how about craigslist.org postings? Spam bot postings? are you all keeping up with the google buzz™ feeds or my facebook updates? (you see my point, I hope) because all of that information is just as culturally vacant to be archiving in the LOC.

This is making a meaningless library indexing ephemeral nothings. Thanks for contributing to our literary and cultural heritage with this.

There were also, of course, lots of comments about the importance of knowing “what flavor burrito I had for lunch.” I'm guessing few of these comments come from people aware of the extent to which history (e.g., of the Civil War) has been enriched by access to “ephemeral” source material such as letters from soldiers. I don't remember what I felt about the LC acquisition at the time; I'd like to believe I didn't snark about it, but I was even less of a Twitter fan at the time, so...

In any case, Cohen recognizes the “significant debate” about the usefulness of the acquisition—and comes down on the side of it being worthwhile: “How could we not want to preserve a vast record of everyday life and thoughts from tens of millions of people, however mundane?”

As any practicing historian knows, some of the most critical collections of primary sources are ephemera that someone luckily saved for the future. For example, historians of the English Civil War are deeply thankful that Humphrey Bartholomew had the presence of mind to save 50,000 pamphlets (once considered throwaway pieces of hack writing) from the seventeenth century and give them to a library at Oxford. Similarly, I recently discovered during a behind-the-scenes tour of the Cambridge University Library that the library's off-limits tower, long rumored by undergraduates to be filled with pornography, is actually stocked with old genre fiction such as Edwardian spy novels... Undoubtedly the librarians of 1900 were embarrassed by the stuff; today, social historians and literary scholars can rejoice that they didn't throw these cheap volumes out. As I have argued in this space, *scholars have uses for archives that archivists cannot anticipate.*

That's early in a fairly long post that raises some other interesting issues; I suggest reading it in the original, even 4.5 years later.

The *Krafty Librarian* also posted about this, [on April 21, 2010](#), and her thoughts were what I'd expect from a good librarian: she thought it made sense as part of LC's mission and based on a Congressional mandate for LC to identify and acquire materials that are “born digital”—but also this:

To me there is little doubt that there are definite nuggets of sociological gold, but researchers will have to do a lot to separate the wheat from

the chaff because there is also a lot of unimportant chatter out there, like my AHIP tweet or the tweets about somebody's breakfast. I wonder how people will access this stuff and how they will do it in a way that makes sense. To view President Barak Obama's tweet after he won the Presidency is relatively easy to do, you just look at his account. Following the thread of chatter about an event such as Hudson River plane might be a little more difficult but doable if there are certain common words or they used a hashtag. Just think, we will be able to look through the archive of tweets happening at the MLA meetings. However, there are a lot of other tweets that are still floating around in those 5 terabytes of data, and I have no idea how somebody can find logic within that mess.

Jason Scott also had a reaction, on [April 19, 2010](#) at *ASCI* by Jason Scott, entitled "Library of Tweets." It's Scott, so there's a certain amount of four-letter-wordedness to his comments, but also—it's Scott—a huge amount of good sense. He was mostly interested in watching "the totally predictable, entirely mundane slots people fill, one by one, upon the reaction of this news"—specifically, the predictable voices against the step. He comments at some length on the "but now my public views are *public!*" objection, the "what a waste of money for LC" objection and the third one, which he nicely titles "REACTION THREE: OH GOD TWITTER IS SO VAPID WHO WANTS TO SAVE THE WORLD'S BLATHER WE ARE DOOMED." And then he basically gives up, closing:

Oh never mind. Look, just study this for a while until the hurty feelings go away, and after you're dead someone will find the tweets where you railed against this whole thing and go "what's up with that guy?":

Followed by an illustration that...well, you'll have to go look for yourself.

### *Twitter—on the Road to Nowhere?*

It may be important to emphasize the question mark on this February 28, 2010 post by Richard Watson at *What's Next: Top Trends*, since Watson regards himself as a futurist. There's a big graph running from January 2007 to December 2009 and a line starting at around 75% in January 2007, dropping rapidly to 40% (by February), then dropping more slowly so that it's between 20% and 32% since then, further dropping to around 17% toward the end of 2009. The graph: "Percent of Users Tweeting by Month."

I look at that graph, think about when Twitter started as a public service—March 2006—and think "As many more people sign on to a service, the percent that use it actively drops." That's such an obvious expectation that I can't imagine commenting on it at all. But here's what Watson posts (in its entirety):

This is interesting. The average Twitter user has 27 followers. 80% of Twitter users have tweeted less than 10 times Only 17% of Twitter users are active These figures are from RJ Metrics (i.e. not Twitter) who looked at 2 million tweets from 50,000 users. Hence they should be taken with a large pinch of salt. Nevertheless things aren't looking good.

Um. “Nevertheless things aren't looking good”? With a sample of 50,000 early adopters?

One of two comments:

I'm not sure they're that bad. The nature of a service like twitter is that a lot of people will try it, but only a few will stick with it long-term (the heaviest users). The proportion of users tweeting now is only a percentage point or two lower than in late 2007. Of course, if they don't arrest the decline now, they are in trouble.

That “road to nowhere” graph is based on 50,000 users and two million tweets over a *three-year* period. In 2012, Twitter says it was handling 340 million tweets *per day*. Even in 2008, it was at 100 million tweets per quarter. You might even say the study was meaningless.

*Ten reasons why Twitter will eventually wither and die...*

If you liked Watson's uncertainty, you'll *love* James Clay's certainty in [this April 26, 2009 post](#) at *e-Learning Stuff*. April 6, 2009, not even 2010. Three years into the life of a service that's now nine years old. With this lede:

It is a fact known to all that use Web 2.0 tools and services that one day they will no longer be flavour of the month, or will be swamped by spam, cons and hustlers. We have just seen the death of Geocities and services such as Friendster and Friends Reunited are not once what they were.

And, of Twitter's fate:

One day we will no longer be using Twitter and when that is, no one really knows, but if it continues along it's [sic] current roadmap it will be sooner than we think.

The ten points, each explained at some length? Spam; terrible jokes; fake retweets (OK, that's just spam, so...); “the hustle” (shortened URLs that give you no sense of where you're actually going); identity theft; cons and scams; Trojans and worms; fashion (going out of...); feature creep; “spam followers” (that is, “people” that follow you because some people automatically follow back when somebody follows them).

So will Twitter fail and disappear completely?



Eventually, yes Twitter will go the same way as other services have in the past, some diehard users will continue to use the service, but doesn't mean it will always be there. Where is Geocities now?

None of the above are the result or fault of Twitter itself, just the result of a great and popular service. The time it will take will depend on how Twitter can slow down or stop any of the above happening, but it is not a question of if the above will happen, it is a question of when.

The first comment notes that most of this is *also* true for email, and yet... But that commenter also didn't think Twitter would last much more than a year or so except possibly as some faded service on life support.

### *Twitter's Golden Ratio (That No One Likes To Talk About)*

Still back in 2009, this time [August 26, 2009](#), when MG Siegler wrote this at *techcrunch*. The first couple of paragraphs give away this Deep Dark Secret; the rest is typical *techcrunch* blather.

If you're new to Twitter, life is easy. A notification comes in that someone is following you, and you probably follow them back. After all, you're going to want some tweets in your stream. After a couple dozen of those, you may start using more discretion, looking over the person's profile and their most recent tweets. But that gets old quickly as well, and inevitably you turn to using the secret ratio that nearly everyone knows (whether they realize it or not) to determine who is worth following back: "Followers" versus "following".

If a person has more followers than they are following, they're probably a good person to at least consider following. If they are following more than they have more followers, the opposite may be true. The greater the discrepancy between the two numbers, the more likely each of those is true — to a certain point, since celebrities like Oprah throw this system out of whack. But for regular, non-Hollywood celebrities, the system works remarkably well as a filter.

Do people still use this "golden ratio" as the basis for following people they don't actually know? (Do people still follow people they've never heard of?) I should point out that Siegler thinks this "ratio" is a *great* method for deciding who to follow. With that in mind, I'll look at my own numbers as of March 23, 2015: I follow 67 people and have 185 followers. And, honestly, I'm a pretty dumb person to follow because I so rarely tweet (when I do it's usually something I've also posted on Friendfeed, Facebook and Google+): I've only tweeted 478 times in the four years I've been on Twitter. Admittedly, I've been tweeting more lately and a fair number of those followers appear to have come about because of retweets about my OA landscape studies.

## *Twitters is Not a Conversational Platform*

So says Mark Drapeau in this [June 9, 2009 article](#) at *O'Reilly Radar*—and what I find astonishing is what Drapeau thinks Twitter actually is:

I argue that the underlying mechanics of Twitter more closely resemble the knowledge co-creation seen in wikis than the dynamics seen with conversational tools like instant messaging and interactions within online social networks.

So Twitter is like a wiki, with “knowledge co-creation” involving a handful of experts writing 90% of the content and most people just reading what they write. (The same paragraph that suggests this also has Brian Solis positing “the dichotomy of whether Twitter is a conversational or broadcast platform”—in a post that’s now gone 404—and I’ll admit that this is one of those many “dichotomies” that I find absurd. Why can’t Twitter be both? Facebook and FriendFeed certainly are.)

Think I’m making it up? Nope.

According to a [Harvard Business School study](#), about 10% of Twitter users contribute roughly 90% of its content. Anecdotally, these 10% are subject-matter experts, passionates, mavens, and thought leaders who break news, write strong opinions, and tell jokes. Like on Wikipedia, most users merely read this information, and a modest number of people in the long tail use the information in the form of re-tweets, comments, corrections, and alternative opinions or links.

So while an individual user may use Twitter primarily as a conversational tool or a broadcast medium, in its totality, Twitter operates a lot like a wiki: as a knowledge-sharing, co-creation platform that produces content and allows its consumption. Conversation is perhaps the most simple and obvious form of collaboration, but would anyone claim that Wikipedia is a conversational platform? Despite the presence of information sharing, co-creation of an end product, and even discussion pages, Wikipedians on the whole aren’t having conversations.

Drapeau also argues that Twitter isn’t a social network either—based on reading that same HBS study and taking the “fact” that men had 15% more followers than women and are more likely to follow men than women as being *not like other social networks*, where “most of the activity is focused around women.” So if it isn’t woman-centered, *it’s not a social network*. Can’t argue with logic like that.

In the comments, Drapeau is combative about Twitter not being “a conversation.” Which, of course, it isn’t. It includes many, many conversations, also a fair amount of broadcasting, also loads of ads, also...but it’s assuredly not *a* conversation. Although I’ll argue it’s a damn sight closer to that than it is to being a wiki.

## *Orphaned Tweets*

That HBS study (involving 300,000 accounts over one month) got a lot of mileage, including this *Slate* item by John Swanburg and Jeremy Singer-Vine [on June 8, 2009](#). These two focus on the “median of one post” factoid that the HBS researchers found, coupled with a Nielsen analysis claiming that 60% of Twitter users “do not return from one month to the next.” (This strikes me as entirely plausible, particularly in the first few years of a growing service—you try it, you don’t find it interesting because your friends aren’t there, you leave. Maybe you come back. I’m pretty sure I’ve left; I know I’ve come back.)

The authors note the blog [One Post Wonder](#), “a collection of amazing blogs that have one post” (yes, it’s still around, but the most recent post is from June 17, 2011, and all but four of the posts are from 2008 and 2009) and looked for “orphan tweets,” accounts with only one tweet that had been dormant for at least six months when they went looking. They offer examples and suggest people retweet examples *they* find with the hashtag #orphantweet. I do *not* suggest searching that hashtag; there are some fairly nasty things there, and most of them are not retweets.

### *two-way touché.*

Back to libraryland for char booth’s March 27, 2009 piece at *informational*. During an ACRL presentation related to a 2008 Ohio University environmental scan of the use of emerging technologies by students, booth made a joke along the lines of “librarians are the only Twitter users.”

Ah, the things I do for humor’s sake. The usage data on Twitter seemed so absurdly negligible compared to more established social tools that I was compelled to poke public fun. While I remain committed to finding whatever levity I can in the bleak sea of technostatistical exposition, I fully admit that I’ve been appropriately schooled for my statement, and by more than one source.

booth notes some of the points raised and that Twitter was gaining more ground in early 2009, although she says “Twitter may still be inordinately well known within the librarian community of practice.” After more discussion, booth closes:

I’d also like to note that my precipitous past dismissal of Twitter highlights another important reality of library technology development (not to mention an interesting side effect I’ve long observed among “early adopters,” for lack of a better descriptor – preemptive writeoff syndrome). Rejecting a tool based on low apparent use – without fully investigating its other implications, behind the scenes applications, or future potential – can be just as unfortunate as developing a new public service technology without adequate needs assessment and project planning. It pays to keep our collective and respective eyes on a con-

stantly shifting landscape, and to actively resist assuming that we can predict the direction a tool or trend might take.

I'm *certain* that I've personally been guilty of both preemptive writeoff syndrome and rejecting a tool without considering all of the implications. I'm equally certain that booth's willingness to publicly admit and rethink her judgments is one reason I admire her.

### *How the Other Half Writes: In Defense of Twitter*

Here's an odd one—on [April 22, 2009](#) at *BldgBlog* by Geoff Manaugh. Who responds to a Maureen Dowd editorial about Twitter that, it being by Maureen Dowd, I don't see any point in even reading—and to “the obvious glee with which so many people have denigrated the note-taking value of Twitter.”

See, Manaugh *knows* what Twitter is all about: it's “a simple note-taking technology.”

The fact that so many people now use Twitter as a public email system, or as a way to instant-message their friends in front of other people, is immaterial; Twitter is a note-taking technology, end of story. You take short-form notes with it, limited to 140 characters.

End of story. (That's the second time the writer says Twitter is a “simple note-taking technology.” A *crappy* note-taking technology, if you ask me, unless you have a private account with no followers. But nobody's asking me.)

Bizarrely, Manaugh makes an analogy between Twitter and ballpoint pens:

Imagine a world where everyone uses typewriters: they write novels, manifestos, historical surveys, and so on, but they do it all using typewriters.

Now the ball-point pen comes along. People use it to write down grocery lists and street addresses and recipes and love notes. *What is this awful new technology?* the literary users of typewriters say. *Ball-point pens are the death of humanism.*

Guess what Manaugh says just a bit later about ballpoint pens: “*It's a note-taking technology.*”

Manaugh equates tweeting with writing in a personal journal, and seems to suggest that grumping about one is like objecting to the other. I find the analogy apt only for private accounts or for people whose diaries are automatically copied to anybody who's interested in reading them—in other words, blogs.

OK, Manaugh does make some good points: Much of the objections to Twitter is a form of highbrow complaining about Those People having the audacity to write. (Remember Truman Capote on Jack Kerouac: “That's not writing, it's typing”? Remember Truman Capote?)

On one hand, I'm on Manauagh's side: people tweeting about what they had for breakfast is no more the "death of humanism" than is Maureen Dowd being taken seriously. It's a good thing that more people are writing; I'm inclined to believe more of them will actually *think* once in a while, and they're usually reading as well as writing.

But...well, here's the end of the post, and that final paragraph is one of my great trigger lines:

Twitter is just another option for people to use when they want to take notes – and it's no more exciting than that, either, to be frank. It's a ball-point pen.

Get over it.

Calling Twitter just a simple note-taking technology...sorry, but I just can't. And I won't get over it, thank you very much. (I'm tempted to write that glass-to-glass joins in buildings are just a leak-assurance technology, but fans of starchitecture might find that irritating.)

That's apparently it for the early years, or at least all I could still get to. Am I going to go back to my blog and this ejournal to show how badly I misjudged Twitter? Probably not. Fortunately, I'm happy to admit that, if I dismissed it as irrelevant or worse, I was wrong.

## 2011 and Beyond

This group doesn't have a common thread either, except that the items all date from 2011 or more recently. What it does have in common with the first part: a *lot* of the items disappeared either because sites disappeared or because I just couldn't.

### *Don't delete that tweet*

This is two posts, both by Scott Rosenberg at *The Wordyard Project*: "Correct, don't delete, that erroneous tweet" [on January 10, 2011](#), and "Don't delete that tweet? The debate rages" [on January 11, 2011](#).

The first begins with an error: news organizations reporting, erroneously, that Rep. Gabrielle Giffords had died.

These reports don't seem to have originated on Twitter. But many spread there — and now they're occasioning a round of head-scratching over how to handle retractions and corrections in this new communications format.

This happens with every new phase of communications-technology evolution. Twitter, with its speed and popularity and intermingling of professional and personal channels, presents some modest new challenges to accuracy practices. But for journalists there should be little confusion about the answers.

You can gather Rosenberg's opinion from the post's title:

It's almost always better to correct than to unpublish. Removing information you've already disseminated—sometimes called “scrubbing”—always leaves open the possibility that you're trying to hide the error or pretend it never happened.

When tweets are journalistic, I'm inclined to agree, even though there's an interesting argument that people may retweet the misinformation without adding the correction. But that's on them, and there will always be people looking to misread or misinterpret. As long as you can comment on your own tweet, correction makes more sense than deletion. That's for journalistic tweets; where personal opinion or issues are involved, the balance may be different.

The comment stream on the January 10 post convinced Rosenberg to write the follow-up. Danny Sullivan argues for deletion; others suggest taking a screenshot of the erroneous tweet and attaching it to a correction (after deleting the error); a number of suggestions require changes in Twitter. One commenter notes the difficulties with deletions (they're not instantaneous, especially to Twitter clients).

The second post acknowledges the strength of both sides of the discussion and notes a problem with one approach (“it's just a tweet”):

Every new style of online participation is born dangling from a “just.” It's “just” a tweet, so why bother worrying about deleting it? But every wave of Internet-based communication that preceded Twitter arrived on the scene with a similar sense that it was more ephemeral than what preceded it. Save your e-mail? Why bother? Hey, edit your Web page at will — it's just data on a server!

Each time, we gradually discover that what we thought was casual has become an essential part of the record of our time. And each time we scramble, belatedly, to retrofit some responsibility onto our practices. Maybe this time we can at least shorten that cycle.

Public tweets play an increasingly important role in our news ecosystem. They tell stories and are part of the story, too. We should minimize tampering with them. We need better tools that might let us correct them responsibly, whether this takes the form of fixes auto-propagating to retweeters or correction notices or revision tracking or all of the above.

Do I ever delete tweets? Yes, but I do so little tweeting that it's rare. On my blog and on FriendFeed (or whatever replaces it), where I'm more likely to say something significant, I'd only delete if I realized something might be actionable; otherwise, I'd edit to correct. (The exception on my blog: temporary posts such as Lulu sale announcements that have no long-term significance or amusement value.)

## *Twitter is clean, expressive and human*

My own feelings about Twitter are complicated. I probably started out dismissive, and I still find it a difficult medium to deal with. As I'm writing this, I just skipped over an encomium to Twitter from a marketing person who thinks it's the bee's knees and uses a blog post that would have required about 40 tweets in order to tell us why a tweet is the perfect length to say something.

That said, I respect John Dupuis and his opinions, and the heading above gives his short take on Twitter as expressed [on May 31, 2011](#) at *Confessions of a Science Librarian*. As with the essay I skipped over, it's partly a response to a boneheaded *New York Times Magazine* [May 18, 2011](#) column by Bill Keller, "The Twitter Trap." Whenever I read an attack on some online thingie that says it ruins your attention span because *the writer* keeps it running all the time and feels the urge to respond whenever there's a new whatever, I want to yell "DON'T BLAME THE TOOL FOR YOUR OWN FAILINGS." I'm not interrupted by email every ten minutes because I don't keep Gmail active all the time; I'm not interrupted by tweets all the time because I don't have Tweetdeck (or whatever) running all the time. (If I still worked, yes, I'd have the corporate mail client running somewhere—but that's different.)

Anyway, that's the Keller column. Here's Dupuis' own take before quoting a couple of key excerpts from Keller:

Twitterers of the world.

We've all heard the questions. The murmurs. The doubts and whispers.

"Twitter is a waste of time," they say.

"People are just talking about what they ate for breakfast, or what their dog is doing."

"No good can come of it, no way to spend work time, turning us all into ADHD cases."

Part of what Dupuis says after quoting Keller:

...I think the thing that bothers me the most is the unspoken disdain for different ways of being social and engaged in the world.

I don't think Twitter people are less engaged with in-person socializing — in fact, my overall social media presence has made me a ton of new in-person friends both in my home city and institution as well as around the world. And Twitter has been a bit part of that in the last couple of years. In particular, I have to say that Twitter has been an amazing tool for building contacts and relationships within my institution. And even real friendships. And I have a hard time believing I'm alone in this.

Twitter has also become an incredible source of ideas and provocation and engagement. Interestingly that engagement and learning usually happens one of two ways.

Either in a short, bursty exchange with one or more people. Or via a link to a more indepth blog post or article. So in a sense, Twitter is quick and superficial but it often leads to something deeper and more meaningful — but not on Twitter itself.

Sure, Twitter is the source of an awful lot of shinyshinyshiny distraction for me. Is it something I have to work at keeping in check? Of course. But that's not Twitter's fault, it's my fault.

Exactly. (That last.) For me, Twitter hasn't been as positive—but that's largely because I haven't really engaged it.

### *Twitter, tragic events and the price of social media stupidity*

Given what I've heard about *GigaOm*'s current situation (as of March 9, 2015, it's essentially shut down and unable to pay its creditors, including contributors), I'm a little nervous about citing [this July 20, 2012 piece](#) by Jeff John Roberts; if it's gone when you read this, such is life.

The story here is one you may remember (or not): the Aurora, Colorado theatre massacre. You may *not* remember this:

A dress shop committed an act of unfathomable stupidity today when it tweeted that references to “Aurora,” site of the horrific theatre massacre in Colorado, were “clearly about our Kim K inspired #Aurora dress.”

The insensitive tweet, which wasn't the only one of the day, has trigged a rightful cascade of contempt that could stain the company. At the same time, the fallout from the tweet shows how social media is changing the nature of crisis communications.

The dress shop is a UK-based online “boutique,” and the quote is a trifle misleading—as a more complete version shows, there was a smiley ;) after the “dress,” not a period. Which, frankly, makes it a *lot* worse: whoever wrote the tweet knew damn good and well that #Aurora trending had nothing to do with a dress.

Then came the non-apology: the company said “Our PR is NOT US based and had not checked the reason for the trend” and retweeted somebody else saying “Its [sic] a fabulous Friday, what are your weekend plans??”

Then came a bit more apology...and the account went silent. (They have since “rebranded” and started a new account.)

Roberts notes some slightly similar cases (one from an NRA account) and seems mostly sympathetic to the company for receiving a lot of fairly rapid abuse from other tweeters, after likening it to President Bush's “apparent” callousness at the time of Katrina:



The situation was much the same with today's tweeters who were almost certainly ignorant or unlucky rather than callous and bad. The insults raining down on them represent an urge to vent over the senselessness of the Colorado shootings as much as they do anger at the NRA or Celeb Boutique.

While public anger at a time of tragedy is not new, the speed at which it is expressed is new. Social media means not just that a company like Celeb Boutique can damage its brand more quickly and broadly than ever before, but that it has far less time to undo that damage. In the past, a company could detect a bad news story early on and work with professionals to spin the story. In the case of Celeb Boutique, its chance to fix the damage has already come and gone.

There may be two lessons here. First: Stupidity is its own reward. Second: *Especially* on a commercial or "celebrity" account, *think before you tweet*—and use those Web sources (I bet even a UK PR firm could have found out what #Aurora was all about in five minutes or less).

### *Dave Eggers made me quit Twitter*

This piece by Michele Filgate [on October 7, 2013](#) isn't really about Dave Eggers, and Filgate didn't really quit Twitter in the long run. It's one of several pieces, before and since, by people who "can't live without" social media and who find it useful to step away from it—and, of course, get paid to tell other people about their epiphanies.

I promise, I'll only quote this one this time around. There's a kind of sameness to all of these. Filgate begins:

I get a sort of high when people retweet me. Let's be honest: We all do. It's pretty human to want to be liked, and more important, to be paid attention to.

You know what? I'm not going to object to my *bête noir*, "we all do." In this case—where someone's actively tweeting—she may be right. (One commenter raises my typical objection, but that's because the commenter doesn't tweet. So I took "we all" as meaning "we who tweet all." Maybe I'm getting charitable in my old age.)

But last month, two things happened that made me realize just how addicted to social media I'd become.

First: Louis C.K. made some comments about smartphones on Conan O'Brien's show. He talked about not giving them to kids, and he talked about the overall effect of smartphones on society. By having the Internet in our pockets, we're never truly alone.

"You need to build the ability to be yourself and not be doing something," he said. "That's what the phones have taken away."

Second: I read “The Circle” by Dave Eggers...and it scared the crap out of me. So much so that I decided to take a break from social media. I asked one of my best friends to change my passwords, because I didn’t trust myself to resist the siren call of endless chatter and information and likes and retweets and comments.

There follows a summary of *The Circle*’s plot, about a company working to undermine privacy on behalf of ever-present social networking (that’s too simple, but I’ve linked to her piece and Eggers’ novel has been out for a while now).

Filgate is, I think, a typical Twitter junkie (I don’t believe most Twitter users are anything like this bad):

I’ve spent plenty of nights endlessly refreshing my Twitter and Facebook feed while I’m reading or writing, in the hopes of not feeling so alone. I follow 1,615 people at the moment. Some of those people are prolific tweeters. That means that while the TweetDeck application is open on my desktop, I’m constantly seeing notifications in the background. I’m always tempted by how easy it is to click a link to an interesting article and fall down a rabbit hole of endless distraction. It’s time to admit to myself that part of the reason I do this is because it’s easier than being stuck in my own head.

Normally I roll my eyes at people who are anti-social media. I’ve made numerous close friends and professional connections through Twitter. I’ve reconnected with old friends on Facebook. Those are good things. But as I kept reading “The Circle” and thinking about Louis C.K.’s comments, I found myself more and more uncomfortable with just how dependent I was. Earlier this month, I actually tweeted: “Now that I’m used to it, I can’t imagine life without social media.” I check Twitter and Facebook on the subway at the stops where my phone gets reception. I check it while waiting for a film to start at the movie theater. And recently I’ve found I can’t walk the four long blocks from the subway to work without constantly refreshing my Twitter and Facebook apps.

“Now that I’m used to it, I can’t imagine life without drinking a fifth of vodka each day.” If you say that, *you’re in trouble*: you need to get help. Is social media different? Maybe. Maybe not. It won’t kill you (unless you’re tweeting when you should be paying attention to traffic, whether you’re in a car or walking), but it may suck your soul dry.

Anyway, Filgate “quit” social media—for a week.

For the first couple of days, I felt disconnected from the rest of the world — and I didn’t like that. Twitter is the primary way I get news about the literary world.

Then I actually started to like being disconnected. I wasn’t as overwhelmed by my inbox. I responded to emails much quicker than I

normally do. I didn't feel any kind of pressure to post something that might entertain those who follow me. I read for longer stretches of time than I normally do. I came up with ideas for various essays I want to write, and most important, I wrote.

Now that I'm back on social media, I'm realizing that the answer isn't necessarily to deprive yourself. It's better to find a balance and not think of your life as existing in 140 characters or status updates.

I believe the experiment would be purer if she'd also stayed off email for a week—after all, email is a form of social medium. But that's hard to do if you're employed, especially as a freelancer.

The lesson she learned is the one I'd suggest in general: you need balance. I suspect that you need to disconnect once in a while for at least a day, or maybe more frequently for shorter periods. (I'm lucky: I don't own a smartphone and regularly have my computer off for at least eleven hours a day, from 8 p.m. or a bit later until 7:30 a.m. or a bit later.)

She's decided not to tweet while she's walking or check her phone on the subway, and she dumped TweetDeck. She's figured out that *if you're writing* you shouldn't have social media active. There's a little more here, and while I'm using this as an exemplar of this sort of "how I dropped off social media and rediscovered myself" essay, it's a pretty good one.

A number of commenters take issue with calling what she did "quitting." One draws the same connection to alcoholism that struck me. Not drinking for a week does not constitute a cure.

There's one more story in my Diigo list, about a study purporting to show that there's no correlation between *reading* stories and tweeting about them (or otherwise linking to them). And, as I read it more than superficially, it didn't seem linkworthy.

That's it. No conclusions. No deeper meaning. Maybe some of these old insights are still useful. And yep, it's more than 140 paragraphs, much less characters. I don't plan to tweet it.

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## The Back

Time for another miscellaneous heap of snark, some related to audiophilia, some not. No particular order, no particular significance.

### That's So Last Week!

The December 2014 *Sound & Vision* has a review of the LG BP540 Blu-ray 3D Player, a \$130 device that features lots of apps for streaming video. (The review's title: "There's a (Cool) App for That.")

So far so good. It's relatively cheap (and lightweight), the inclusion of 3D—while perhaps passé in 2015—does no real harm, and the “online price” appears to be about \$90.

Why mention the review here? Because of this paragraph:

The BP540 sailed through all of our benchmark tests—even the challenging 2:2 cadence tests—but its prowess as a DVD scaler was somewhat middling. *Then again, when was the last time you actually watched a DVD?* Regardless, the LG played everything I threw it without any hiccups. [Emphasis added.]

It's that penultimate sentence, which seems to assume that *nobody* still uses DVDs—presumably, it's either Blu-rays or streaming all the way down. You say you spent several hundred dollars on DVDs and you plan to watch them again? What kind of Luddite are you?

My answer to David Vaughn's question is “last night,” for what that's worth: we're watching some TV shows via Netflix and they mostly don't come on Blu-ray. (Our “broadband” isn't good enough for streaming, even if the shows are on that other Netflix.) For that matter, we've had enough trouble with some recent Blu-ray discs via Netflix that we're toying with downgrading anyway...and we're sure not going to replace the dozens of DVDs we have with Blu-rays, especially when they're TV shows. (There was one movie we owned on DVD that we replaced with Blu-ray: *The Princess Bride*.)

You know, I'd think that people who'd like to get a decent Blu-ray player for \$90 rather than \$900 might also be people who might want to make good use of their DVDs. Apparently not.

## Perception and Measurement

Another review in the December 2014 *Sound & Vision*, this one by Mark Fleischmann, reviewing the \$600 Klipsch R-10B Soundbar System. I'm fascinated by the fact that Klipsch *makes* a soundbar, and this one seems plausible.

But I was also taken by a juxtaposition of text on page 63 and a graph on page 64. The text:

The R-10B was an intrinsically excellent-sounding bar with a generously warm midrange. The top end was slightly rolled off but not in a way that would starve frequencies that reproduce the human voice.

The graph—well, I can't reproduce it, but it shows a *huge* rise in the 5K-20KHz region, up at least 5 dB throughout the top octave. In other words, it measures as having a *hot* top-end. (There's a slight dip around 2kHz, which I'd think of as upper midrange, but it's nothing compared to that rising top end.)

Just sayin'. (I suspect *Sound & Vision* is like *Stereophile* in that measurements are done only *after* the review proper is written.)

## Take Two

Speaking of *Stereophile*, the December 2014 issue of *that* magazine has an Art Dudley review of the \$11,900 Allnic D-5000 DHT tube-based digital-to-analog processor. That's right: for a bit less than 12 big ones, you can buy the equivalent of the low-end stuff built into every MP3 player and computer and the \$120-\$200 high-end USB converters. (Hey, it's South Korean and it uses tubes: you expect to pay a premium, right?)

Anyway: Dudley *loved* the device—although, frankly, you wonder why he'd bother, given his (typical for *Stereophile*) attitude toward Appropriate Sources for Real Music:

As has been noted by many, and expressed in a recent Facebook posting by my friend and colleague Steve Guttenberg, people play LPs for serious listening, but they play CDs when the goal is merely to “put on some music.”

I'm not people, I guess, since I don't play LPs at all, but that particular snottiness is standard Dudley fare. Anyway, even though Dudley apparently only uses digital sources when he isn't really listening, he gets paid to *review* five-digit devices, and says of this one: “The Allnic D-5000 DHT is easily among the three or four finest digital processors I've tried...” (although he admits he thinks it's a trifle expensive).

So it's a great processor, right? Then we get to the extended sidebar in which John Atkinson runs fairly detailed measurements on the device (13 graphs and a lot of text). His conclusion:

The Allnic D-5000 DHT has the dubious honor of being the worst-measuring digital component I have encountered, exceeding even the Lector Strumenti Digitube S-192 D/A processor that Art Dudley reviewed last June... I must admit that, unless something broke and affected the left channel's behavior while the review sample was in transit from AD's place to my lab in Brooklyn, I am baffled by this product's measured performance.

*Stereophile* makes almost all of their old reviews available online (for free!), so I was able to go back and look at that earlier review. The Lector costs a mere \$3,595, and Art Dudley loved it as well—he “heartily recommends” it. Here's the last paragraph in Atkinson's measurement sidebar:

In the past year or so *Stereophile* has reviewed several superbly engineered D/A processors in the Lector's price class—from Arcam, Auralic, Ayre, Electrocompaniet, Marantz, and Musical Fidelity—as well as less expensive products that measure as well, from Benchmark and NAD. I know that Art Dudley wrote that he can “heartily recommend Lector Strumenti Audio's Digitube S-192 for the musicality it displayed in my system,” and I have the utmost respect for AD's listening abilities. However, the Digitube's truly dreadful measured performance in the digital

domain, along with its disappointing showing in the analog domain, rule it out of contention, in my opinion.

The Lector is an interesting case: Manufacturers see the reviews and are invited to comment—but they're not allowed to *change* the reviews, and the comments run near the end of the issue. Kal Rubenstein quotes from Lector's response:

FWIW, in the “Manufacturers’ Comments” section, Lector Strument-i’s US representative states that the designer “deliberately sacrifices measured performance to achieve his design objectives, the most obvious one being superior musicality” and seems not to think that the measurements are unexpected.

We have here to some extent one of my old bugaboos (and one reason I regard Dudley as an odd form of entertainment rather than serious reviewing): I believe the role of high fidelity equipment should be *fidelity*, to reproduce what was recorded, while there are some—Dudley apparently among them—who want their equipment to *make music*, to make everything “musical.” It appears that the Lector is in the latter camp.

Incidentally, Allnic later said that it must have been tube damage. Why do you need fragile, electricity-wasting tubes to convert digital to analog? You got me...

## Getting It Wrong: Maybe

The article's actual title is “Actually, that ‘off target’ 1995 anti-Internet column was amazingly on-target,” by Michael Hiltzik on...well, I tagged it [on March 5, 2015](#), but I can't find a dateline...at the Los Angeles *Times*. The column in question was an article Clifford Stoll wrote for *Newsweek*, “The Internet? Bah!” (The current title on that piece, [which is still available](#), is “Why the Web Won't Be Nirvana.” Oh, and not only is *Newsweek* still around, it's gone back to being a print magazine.)

Hiltzik notes:

Stoll ridiculed the claims of “Internet hucksters” that we might someday buy books, music and airline tickets over the Internet, or make restaurant reservations, or that we'd live in a world of telecommuting workers and interactive libraries.

And, of course, that various folk like *BoingBoing* and Farhad Manjoo love to “guffaw at its naïveté.” Most recently, a professor called it “so breathtakingly off target that it has become something of an online cult classic.” But, Hiltzik continues:

Here's the thing that BoingBoing, Manjoo and Campbell missed, however. A few of Stoll's points may be off-target, but for the most part, *he was dead right*.

Stoll predicted that the Web would be a fount of misleading information and outright lies, that it would be oversold as a tool for education and governing, and that it would isolate people more than bring them together. “A network chat line is a limp substitute for meeting friends over coffee,” he wrote. “No interactive multimedia display comes close to the excitement of a live concert. And who’d prefer cybersex to the real thing?”

There’s more about Stoll (who, sigh, is a mere child of 64); among other things, he makes and sells Klein bottles but also designs cellphone networking software.

Stoll told me by phone that he hasn’t read the Newsweek column since it was published, but he’s a bit abashed that he wrote it in language that he uses “when I scribble notes to myself”—terms like “Baloney” and “Bah.” He said he doesn’t engage much with the issues he raised then—the Internet has left me behind; it’s as if I belong to a different universe—but with minimal prompting he’ll talk about how Web surfing and smartphone chatting are poor substitutes for experiencing the real world.

Hiltzik then says, “Stoll’s biggest misses involved e-commerce and e-books.” Yes and no. Stoll blew it on e-commerce—but to the extent that he was responding to Nicholas Negroponte’s absolutist “it’ll all be ebooks real soon now,” Stoll was right to be skeptical.

Then Hiltzik recounts the things Stoll got right: the overselling of Internet-based and multimedia education, the mixed effects on government, the problems with everybody being heard.

People who trot out Stoll’s 1995 piece as though it’s a flawed prediction of the future haven’t read it carefully. More to the point, they seem to be unaware of the real drawbacks of today’s networked world. Stoll, who has experience teaching grade schoolers and grad students, reminds us that facility with computers isn’t really what makes youngsters successful.

“What I want to see in students,” he told me, “is not competence with a computer, but curiosity, enthusiasm, a yearning to fool around with the very mundane world around them, not disappear into movies. I’ve yet to find any group of YouTube videos that could set me on a path the way my 11th grade science teacher did.”

Looking back at Stoll’s 1995 piece, he got it right *and* wrong, sometimes in the same sentence, and that’s not terrible for 20 years ago.

## What the Traffic Will Bear

The article is “Start Up. Drop Out. Welcome to the Garage.” It’s by Miguel Helft and appeared in the November 17, 2014 *Fortune*. It’s an inter-

esting story about startups. It has one sentence (about one of the startups) that I found a little horrifying:

One of them is Fluxy—Sood and Saxena’s own idea for a dynamic-pricing service allowing restaurants to charge more during rush times and less when it’s not so busy.

*Dynamic meal pricing*—not just the posted Happy Hours specials and senior early-dining discounts, but *dynamic meal pricing*. Is there a point of fixation (I assume the menus will be on iPads to show those dynamic prices), so that you don’t order a \$20 meal and get a \$40 check?

Uber uses dynamic pricing. Which doesn’t necessarily make it an ideal to be emulated everywhere.

### *Patenting Price Gouging*

In his March 2015 “Legal Issues” column in *Information Today*, George H. Pike discusses Uber’s attempt to patent “surge pricing,” and I appreciate Pike’s use of the forthright term for “dynamic pricing”: price gouging. (I’m not being snarky about Pike—it’s a good column, and happens to complement the Fluxy thing nicely.)

## The Boundaries of Fashion

This time it’s the December 2014/January 15 *Fast Company*. It’s a “Wanted” one-pager, this one for Molecule shoes from Francis Bitonti. They’re “high-fashion shoes” that “look like they were dipped in data,” created using various algorithms and built using a 3D printer with photosensitive plastic.

And the example, which takes up half the page, is...I’m not sure ghastly is even in the right ballpark. Well, hell, you can [see it for yourself](#).

It looks incredibly uncomfortable, but that’s how I feel about almost all high-heeled shoes. It also looks like an explosion at the garbage dump. I’m sure the shoes aren’t cheap.

## Automagic Lifestyle

That’s the title on John Sciacca’s “Perfect Focus” column in the January 2015 *Sound & Vision*, and it’s good enough to leave as is. Sciacca’s a home theater installation guy, so he’s presumably used to people with essentially unlimited income (based on what I’ve seen), and a *true love* of gadgets.

This column is about “home automation,” and he thinks it’s *cool*—especially all those things that happen “seemingly on their own, ‘automagically’ as you live your life.”

He *loves* motion sensors (as does every librarian who’s ever had office lights equipped with them and settled down for some stationary desk work,



right?). He can walk into his bathroom “and the lights pop on. Once you’ve lived with this convenience, it very quickly becomes *an indispensable lifestyle feature*.” [Emphasis added.] And, of course, he praises the “other half of a motion sensor’s job”: turning devices off again “when no one is in the room to conserve energy.” Not that all those sensors use any energy on their own, of course... and there *certainly* wouldn’t be times when the lights go off because the sensor *doesn’t sense motion* during its programmed time. Of course not.

A bit later, we learn that his rear door is set up so that, “when I unlock it with the knob, it knows I’m going out, and I have it programmed to automatically relock the door after two minutes.” That’s OK: he has a “keypad code” to unlock the door. Just hope he never leaves the house while guests are over, without at least warning them “whatever you do, *don’t go out the back door!*”

I guess I am a Luddite in some ways. And reasonably happy to be so.

## 11 Most Useless and Misleading Infographics On The Internet

This one, I definitely *can*—even if it is a listicle, an approach to things that I dislike almost as much as I dislike some infographics. The piece is by Abhimanyu Das and Diana Biller and appeared [on February 26, 2015](#) at *io9*.

Everybody loves infographics. Facts (and assertions) just spring to life when you make them into cool pictures. But this powerful tool is all too often misused. Here are 11 infographics that are either completely misleading or totally useless.

Yeah, well, not *everybody* loves infographics; quite apart from the seeming trend for most so-called infographics just to be poster-sized bunches of text and pictures with bad sourcing, I find that infographics too often tend to obscure more than they inform. Somehow, it seems to ennoble “information” to require the reader to scroll down a whole bunch in order to see a handful of “facts” and a little bit of text.

You’re going to have to go to this article to get the full effect, beginning with one of the best pie charts I’ve ever seen (it’s not one of the 11 examples), with segments labeled Bulgaria, Apples, Oranges, No, and 58% respectively.

It’s easy to create a chart that presents wrong data, cherry-picks correct data, or just compares apples to oranges. For a collection of hilarious charts that contain false correlations (the number of people who drown in swimming pools has a surprising correlation with the number of Nic Cage movies per year), check out [Tyler Vigen’s Spurious Correlations](#) (via FastCo Design). But not all terrible charts are created that way on purpose. See for yourself...

Incidentally, the Vigen page is *great*—showing cases of wholly unrelated statistics that happen to show a strong correlation. (Calling the Cage/drowning correlation “false” isn’t exactly right: the two sets of figures *do* have strong statistical correlation, it just doesn’t happen to relate to any plausible causation.)

Anyway, back to the eleven. The first, and one where I’m pretty certain it wasn’t an accidental screwup, is the graph showing the number of murders committed using firearms in Florida each year, with a dramatic downturn after 2005, when Florida enacted its “stand your ground” law (you know, the one that makes it OK to shoot innocent people if you can claim they somehow threatened you by, say, Looking Too Brown).

The graph has two things right: it has labels on both axes. But one little thing is oh, just a little odd: the labels for number of deaths start with 0 *at the top* rather than at the Y-axis. In other words, the dramatic downturn means that *lots more murders occurred* after the law was passed. Maybe you can believe there was an idiot analyst who didn’t understand what he (I’m assuming “he” here) was doing; I can’t.

The second one’s from *Business Insider*...and maybe that’s all I need to say. But no—and, in fact, the complaint is not quite as justified. The graph shows that the cost of a four-year degree (as though any such overall figure was meaningful) has risen much faster than the earnings of someone just graduating college. The piece says the key fact is that you’re much *worse* off without a degree—the graph leaves out the non-graduate earnings numbers.

Another example is classic and could be repeated over and over and over and... a combined line graph and stacked-icon bar graph showing the need for more nurses—one that basically sets the Y axis at roughly the current level. (Specifically, four stick people stand in for 43,147 nurses in 2008/2009—but the 47,500 needed for 2013 show up as 40 stick people.)

That’s just the first five. The rest are equally interesting—e.g., sources that don’t say what the graphic says they say, just bizarre metaphors in infographics (look at #8 and see if *you* can make sense of it), cherrypicked data (hello, NEH!), and graphs that simply make no sense (#11, which suggests that California is entirely white and living in 1960).

## Generation Wha?

The actual title is “Every Every Every Generation Has Been the Me Me Me Generation,” and it’s Elspeth Reeve’s [May 9, 2013](#) musings (at *The Wire*, News from *The Atlantic*) on Joel Stein’s “The Me Me Me Generation” cover story in *Time Magazine*.

Stein’s story (behind a paywall) is about how Millennials are even more narcissistic than the “Me Generation” (the so-called Baby Boomers) and the famously narcissistic Generation X.

Sometimes you get the sense that these magazines' cultural writers have very little experience with the entire American culture, and prefer to make their grand analyses based on what people they know in the gentrified parts of cities like New York and Los Angeles were talking about at brunch last weekend. The type of young person that magazine writers come across most frequently are magazine interns. Because the media industry is high-status, but, at least early on, very low pay in a very expensive city, it attracts a lot of rich kids. Entitled, arrogant, spoiled, preening — those are the alleged signature traits of Millennials, as diagnosed by countless magazine writers. Those traits curiously align perfectly with the signature traits of a rich kid. Have you seen your intern [on Rich Kids of Instagram](#)? If so, he or she is probably not the best guide to crafting the composite personality of a generation that fought three wars for you.

I bring a bias to the whole “Generation whatever” discussion. I was born in September 1945, which according to Generational Labels makes me part of the Silent Generation. You know, the generation that spearheaded the civil rights movement, the Free Speech Movement, etc., etc.—but had the bad luck to be sandwiched in between The Greatest Generation (which apparently included a lot of high-profile culture writers intent on giving themselves a positive image) and Baby Boomers, who just took over everything.

Fact is, every generation is different and every generation is the same, and generation generalizations are even less likely to be right than most other generalization. (That is, of course, a generalization and not exempt from itself.)

In this case, Reeve notes some research appearing to make the case for Millennials being somehow lacking—more of them live with their parents, they get married later, they're not quite as eager to get a more responsible job.

And, of course, *it's all their fault*—because it was Millennials who increased unemployment by cutting budget spending, because it was Millennials who saw to it that people leave college with huge debt, because Millennials demanded of their bosses that they give them the same pay for harder and longer work. Right?

Reeve quotes this as “the most important bit of data” in the Stein piece:

The incidence of narcissistic personality disorder is nearly three times as high for people in their 20s as for the generation that's now 65 or older, according to the National Institutes of Health; 58 percent more college students scored higher on a narcissism scale in 2009 than in 1982.

I will not comment on my uneasy feeling that “narcissistic personality disorder” being labeled as a psychiatric disorder is another big step in the path to making sure *everybody's* labeled as suffering from at least one psy-

chiatric disorder and therefore needing regular sessions and probably help from Big Pharma. I anticipate “Excessive Happiness Disorder” and “Deluded Normalcy Syndrome” any day now.

Anyway...Reeve finds another paper that finds a more plausible explanation for this finding:

First, we show that when new data on narcissism are folded into preexisting meta-analytic data, there is no increase in narcissism in college students over the last few decades. Second, we show, in contrast, that age changes in narcissism are both replicable and comparatively large in comparison to generational changes in narcissism.

In other words: young people tend to be narcissists and tend to get less narcissistic with age (with luck!). I love Reeve’s analogy:

It’s like doing a study of toddlers and declaring those born since 2010 are *Generation Sociopath: Kids These Days Will Pull Your Hair, Pee On Walls, Throw Full Bowls of Cereal Without Even Thinking of the Consequences*.

## Another Library Scandal

The full title: “Another Library Scandal: They’ve Thrown Out All the Precious.” By Emily Weak [on June 20, 2013](#) at *MLISSing in Action*.

I’m going to quote the first five paragraphs but redact a name or three, because there may be complexities to the actual situation and I haven’t read *every* link related to it:

Here’s some recent library scandal: [X], the director of the [Y] public library, created a list of all the adult non-fiction books, sorted it by publication date, and asked 12 new part time employees to pull and discard all of the titles that were ten years or older. This happened while the person in charge of the collection was out of the country.

Then someone who writes for a local online magazine noticed what was happening and was outraged. She stated that 50 or possibly even 75% of the collection was being removed. Thousands of books were being discarded! As fervor grew, various steps were taken to stop this from happening and punish the director. A petition was even started on [change.org](#) to “Hold a public forum and make [X] explain her decisions.”

There is a lot of very detailed information about this available online, most at the original article [here](#). People are outraged. People are \*appalled.\*

I am not.

Here’s why: ten years is old. Think about what the world was like ten years ago. We had never had an African American President. We had only just begun our war with Iraq. Know any 8 year olds? They

weren't born yet. Pluto was still a planet. Facebook wasn't yet a twinkle in Zuckerberg's eye, and you could not have Tweeted about this. You most likely would not have had a smart phone anyway. What were you wearing ten years ago? Would you care to see it featured in a style book? Here's a scary one: would you like to take ten year old advice on how to manage your HIV? How about ten year old recommendations on how to get a new job?

There's more to the blog post—saying *some* older nonfiction books might be relevant (poetry, Shakespeare) and *some* ancient books might be important to a community—but also books wear out, so these *might* be worn out, so it's apparently OK to discard them *en masse*, and hey, they'd hired a bunch of people to do RFID tagging but they couldn't do that yet, so with spare people, why not dump all the old books?

Maybe I'm being unfair to the blogger (who is a public librarian), but I'm coming at this from the perspective of a public library *patron*. One who reads one nonfiction book for every two fiction books. One who *rarely* reads a nonfiction book published in the last ten years. And who finds that last paragraph above, well, *appalling*.

Yes, *of course* most public libraries need to weed—on an ongoing basis with a clear set of criteria (which [Y] library apparently has, but they weren't followed in this case). I'll even admit that my fondness for reading slightly older treatments of contemporary technology, with all their “here's how *it's going to be*” assertions that haven't necessarily worked out, is peculiar—but a good nonfiction collection in a fair-size public library ([Y] library had about a quarter million volumes in 2011, so it counts) will have tens of thousands of nonfiction books to cater to obscure tastes—and most of those books will probably be more than a decade old.

In the closing paragraphs, Weak admits that [X]'s decision was a bad one—but argues against vilifying [X] for making a bad decision, which ignored [Y]'s own rules and potentially resulted in the loss of thousands or tens of thousands of books and a gutted collection, because “it probably sounded like a good idea at the time.” (“It seemed like a good idea at the time” is a line that should be reserved for tombstones, but that's another can of worms.)

In responding to some comments, Weak suggests that a lot of the criticism comes from “academic librarians and library students, who may not understand the continuous short-staffedness and other dynamics particular to public libraries.”

Turns out I was involved in this discussion at the time. I grumped about it on Friendfeed in a thread that eventually involved Weak as well. Here's Weak's [followup post](#), partly resulting from the discussion. In that post, she says her original post was “maligned, misunderstood, and groused about” in the FF discussion—and I'll flatly say that, based on

rereading both posts and the discussion, she's wrong about the middle word. Pretty much everybody in the discussion understood what Weak was saying, and didn't agree with her.

Another thing I was criticized for, was for saying 10 years is old for a book. I've been thinking about it, and I stand by what I said. 10 years is old. Again, I don't mean that all books older than ten are useless and outdated. And I don't mean that getting rid of all the books older than ten is a good way to start weeding. It's not. However, I do think you could look at a collection where 50-75% of the books are ten years old and say "this collection is old." I gave some reasons why in that post about the [Y] debacle.

I criticized her for saying that; so did others. I still do. If the average age of the science-and-medicine sections of a *small* public library is ten years or more, that might be a reason to ramp up some (thoughtful) weeding, but as a generalization, I'm not buying it. In the FF discussion, Weak pushed me (or the other participants in general) to say what *was* an appropriate generalization age—that is, would we go along with "this collection is *old*" if 50% of the books were 15 years old? 25 years old? "What should the average age of your public library collection be?" Those of us who were still involved in the discussion thought that the question didn't make sense, so didn't answer it.

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# Masthead

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