

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large

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ALA in San Francisco: A Few Quick Notes

My ALA Annual isn't the same as your ALA Annual. That's a given at any multitrack conference, but in a zoo like ALA Annual, your path and mine might not intersect at all. You may have found the exhibits fascinating, offering a wealth of new ideas. Unfortunately, I found them overwhelming—a sign of age, or a result of commuting via Caltrain to the conference and doing both exhibit floors in one 4-hour swoop?

Because Annual was local this year, I attended fewer sessions than usual. Herewith quick notes on two of three sessions in which I participated.

ITAL Editorial Board

The editorial board meeting for *Information Technology and Libraries* was brief and focused on a continuing problem: an uncomfortably thin stream of manuscript submissions. If you're writing something that could plausibly go in *Information Technology and Libraries*, think about submitting it to them. It need not be a scholarly article (*ITAL* has several other sections in addition to the refereed article section), and "scholarly" does not mean stuffy or necessarily filled with comprehensive literature reviews. If you have questions, LITA's Web site should offer answers to most of them (www.lita.org/ital/); if not, the editor (Dan Marmion) does have email!

Top Technology Trends

LITA's Top Technology Trends group gets together for a freewheeling two-hour discussion at Midwinter and a shorter, more open panel during Annual. This time around, each of the seven panelists—all LITA members with some notoriety for awareness of technology trends—noted areas that they find particularly interesting or distressing at the moment. Think of these brief notes as a tease for much more complete meeting notes that will appear on LITA's Web

site (www.lita.org) in a few weeks, probably including links to more information.

Clifford Lynch is tracking metadata harvesting and the Open Access Initiative; trust and reputation management systems; the semantic Web; new genres of written communication and possible future modes of communication; digital preservation; and wireless technologies and the hype machine.

Eric Lease Morgan noted open source software and libraries; XML; broadening the scope of integrated library systems; and (again) wireless—specifically, connecting library resources to portable computing. He regards CD-ROM searching and dedicated ebook readers as non-issues.

Roy Tennant discussed the "copyright wars," including the effects of DMCA, UCITA, and the extent to which librarians have unthinkingly swapped purchase rights for licenses; the pain and anguish of searching (when people just want to *find*); and the "convenience catastrophe"—user tendencies to take the easy way out.

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I discussed my growing interest in "finding the ways that work"—the smaller developments that fly under the hype radar but actually improve our lives; my growing sense that buzz phrases and real significance may be increasingly opposite; and the circle of gifts and new forms on the Web.

Joan Frye Williams talked about making wireless feasible when designing new buildings—e.g., metal bookstacks disrupt wireless communications; the possibility of reintegrating print, nonprint, and online resources; the need to consider "secondary" aspects of wireless use such as battery farms; the growing shortage of systems librarians for public li-

braries. What's a library's "product"? Joan suggests: "an enhanced patron."


Tom Peters isn't ready to give up on dedicated ebook readers. He also talked about the diffusion of technology; harvesting; how technologies are adopted and integrated; Live Reference packages; OpenURL; electronic theses & dissertations; and open source software.


Tom Wilson noted that the recent Houston floods reminded him that, for all of our virtual and digital ideas, we all live in a physical world. He discussed other aspects of wireless, which is mostly about wire—the cables and other things you need to make wireless work. Wireless issues include determining the appropriate device for various uses, the difficulty of designing device-independent services; and security. He noted that it isn't just metal stacks in libraries that tend to disrupt wireless; the books themselves are effective isolators.


I've omitted some items and most of the discussion that followed—and, unlike the LITA notes that will follow, these initial impressions haven't been reviewed by the TTT participants.


PC Values: July 2001


July's standard configuration includes 128MB SDRAM, 24x or faster CD-ROM, AGP (128-bit) accelerator with 32MB SGRAM, V.90 modem or Ethernet adapter, a 15.9-16" viewable display (usually called 17"), and wavetable sound with stereo speakers. Top values taken from vendor Websites June 18, 2001.

 **Top, Budget:** Gateway Essential 800c: Celeron-800, 20GB HD. *Minuses:* no dedicated graphics RAM. *Pluses:* MS Works Suite 2001, CD-RW drive. \$899, VR 2.99 (+3% since 4/2001, +20% since 1/2001).

 **Top, Midrange:** Gateway Select 1400cl: Athlon-1400, 40GB HD. *Pluses:* 64MB graphics RAM. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, Boston Acoustics speakers, CD-RW drive, Ethernet adapter. \$1,489, VR 2.47 (+8% since 4/2001, +31% since 1/2001).

 **Top, Power:** Gateway Performance 1700CX: Pentium 4-1700, 60GB HD. *Pluses:* 18" display with 64GB graphics RAM. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, CD-RW drive, Boston Acoustics speakers. \$1,999, VR 2.08 (+36% since 4/2001, +27% since 1/2001).

 **Other, Budget:** CyberPower Athlon Lightning DVD 1.4: Athlon-1400, 40GB HD. *Pluses:* 256MB RAM, DVD-ROM, 18" display, 64MB display RAM. *Extras:* Corel WordPerfect Office 2000, Altec Lansing speakers with subwoofer, CD-RW drive. \$1,149, VR 3.93 (9% since 4/2001, 102% since 1/2001).

 **One Good System:** Gateway Select 1400cl: Athlon-1400, 40GB 7200RPM HD. *Pluses:* 256MB RAM, 18" Diamondtron display with 64MB graphics RAM, DVD-ROM drive. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, CD-RW drive, Ethernet adapter, Boston Acoustics speakers with subwoofer. \$1,994, VR 2.23. The biggest upgrade was to a top-of-the-line 18"-viewable display. I also doubled the RAM and added a DVD-ROM drive to the standard CD-RW drive.

Where I Stand

For the Children

Thanks, Will Manley. Had it not been for your "Wooden-headedness" in *American Libraries* 32:5 (May 2001, p. 128), I might have ducked this issue. I've commented on filtering in print, on *LISNews*, and probably elsewhere. But "Wooden-headedness" got under my skin, particularly this rhetorical question regarding CIPA, the Children's Internet Protection Act: Why would ALA "challenge the legality of a law that keeps [pornography] out of the reach of our children?"

You say that the answer is "clearly a distorted commitment to the principles of intellectual freedom." Distortion going on here, but it's not on the part of ALA. There are several good reasons for ALA's challenge to CIPA. I find it hard to believe that you are so out of touch with the professional literature and the ordinary principles of logic that you don't know those reasons. It's much easier to believe that you know very well why ALA's challenging CIPA, but choose to ignore those reasons in order to pursue your diatribe.

Why would ALA challenge a law that might "protect the children"? Because its negative effects on our liberties vastly overbalance any so-called protection. CIPA requires filtering *all* Internet access in libraries, including staff computers. To Protect the Children, everybody's access must be restricted. It's not about "putting *Playboy* on the magazine shelves of a youth services library," it's about forcing restrictions on *all* computers in public libraries.

So what? It's just pornography, isn't it? No. Filtering companies won't tell you what they're filter-

ing (that's proprietary information). Every test to date has shown that every filter either lets through a substantial percentage of "offensive" material or blocks substantial quantities of important material—typically both.

It's not a matter of improving the filters. If you think about the English language and how material can be transmitted on the Web, it's logically inconceivable that a filter could block everything that CIPA considers pornographic (without clear definitions) while allowing all legitimate material to pass.

Any pornographer worth her salt can write the steamiest scenes in the world without using words that will trigger a text-based filter. Any text-based filter that will even *begin* to catch the "naughty parts" must also block access to the Bible, to information on breast cancer or AIDS, and to a grotesquely broad swath of information and literature. As for the difficulties of filtering graphics—I think it boils down to Tom Lehrer's lyric: "When correctly viewed, *everything* is lewd."

I understand why ignorant zealots support such a policy (either filtering or, for that matter, forcing libraries to let them go through the stacks torching books they find offensive). I understand why anti-library forces (and those against public services in general) distort ALA's reasons for opposing CIPA as one more way to bash libraries. I don't understand why anyone within the field would write such a wooden-headed assault. It won't convince librarians who understand the issues to abandon their principles. It will, to be sure, provide more ammunition for the Laura Schlesingers of the world.

The Children's Sharp Things Protective Act

Here's a proposed law. Any institution that receives federal subsidies and allows children into any of its areas may not use sharp things—knives, hypodermic needles, pointed scissors. Sharp things are *known* to cause harm to children. I will assert that knives and pointed scissors have harmed and killed many more children than Internet pornography has.

Well, Will? Do you support that law? It should work the same way as CIPA. So, for example, you can't just switch to rounded scissors in classrooms; they have to come out of the cafeterias as well (just as staff computers in libraries must have filters). Similarly, even if some operating rooms in hospitals are for adults only, I'm afraid hypodermics and scalpels will have to go.

It's for the children. How can you be against a law that protects children from things that absolutely, positively cause them harm? If you regard that ex-

ample as absurd—if you won't support the CSTPA—then you're either a hypocrite or you need to get off the "It's for the children" soapbox. ALA's stance is both reasonable and (I believe) correct. CIPA goes too far by requiring filtering on all devices; CIPA goes too far by requiring use of defective technology that won't solve one problem while it will create other problems.

Never Quite That Simple

I don't believe that libraries *that never provided open Internet access* are under any obligation to do so. I believe that a sound collection-development case can be made *not* to do so. Library computers that only reach those sites considered legitimate, based on coherent policies (positive-access systems) don't constitute censorship: they constitute selection. I'm not a member of the Intellectual Freedom Round Table, and have no idea whether they would agree.

I'll go further down that slippery slope. I don't *personally* object to filtering software on Web computers in children's departments, as long as "children" doesn't include teenagers (who are much more likely to need access to material that filters will block)—although here, I think that positive-access systems make a lot more sense than most filters. I don't even object to policies that won't let kids on Web computers without smart cards that require parental consent—and here I must repeat that this is only personal opinion and doesn't take into account very real operational difficulties.

But *once you've provided open access*, it's a form of censorship to reduce that access across the board within a library. It's like subscribing to *Vogue* but going through each issue to rip out the too-revealing pictures. (Unfortunately, I've recently heard of librarians who do exactly that.) Worse, filtering software isn't a librarian ripping out nasty pictures—it's some unknown agent blocking access for reasons that aren't always clear. One of the speakers at a Florida Library Association program on filtering used a fine analogy. Installing filtering software when you can't see the list of what's being filtered is like hiring someone to go through your stacks removing books—without telling you what books they're removing, or why.

Trends and Quick Takes

Brevity and Godliness

What makes a sermon suitable for young Europeans? According to Martin Bergau, minister at Hanover, Germany's Lutheran church, high technology—and extreme terseness!

According to the May 21, 2001 *Industry Standard*, the church recently held its first “SMS service”—a service conducted as a series of short messages to cell phones. Some 1,500 people signed up for the service—a big deal in an area where congregations are getting smaller and older.

Here’s the kicker. “The service consisted of six messages, a maximum of 160 characters each, sent in 7-minute intervals.” In other words, the entire service consisted of no more than 160 words—roughly the same length as this description and considerably less than two minutes of normal speech. But it did take 42 minutes, time in which the congregation could presumably contemplate the subject, 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Application Service Providers

We’re all going to rent our software over the Internet. Or maybe not. You’ve heard the hype: this is a Sure Thing, as inevitable as all the other sure things. Now comes a European consultancy to offer a different perspective. As reported by Reuters on May 14, Organization and Technology Research did the unthinkable: OTR *asked* companies whether they were interested in ASP services.

Rather than ASP revenues of 8 billion Euros (roughly \$7 billion) in 2004, this report anticipates that 2004 revenues will be less than *one* billion Euros (around \$870 million) by then. The savings are mostly hypothetical; small and medium-sized companies don’t see major problems that ASP would serve. Some of us retrograde types don’t *want* upgrades to appear automatically and without our control—and just maybe aren’t convinced that we want all of our personal or business documents residing on someone else’s platform. But then, ASPs are already disappearing—in some cases taking business documents with them.

Steven Levy, Meet Martin Luther...

“It makes a difference whose ox is gored.” So said Martin Luther to the Diet at Worms. For Steven Levy, the reckoning is recounted in his May 28, 2001 *Newsweek* piece, “The day I got Napsterized.” Or, as the tease goes, “First they came for Metallica. Then they came for Tom Clancy. And then they came for me.”

Levy was conveniently neutral about peer-to-peer distribution a la Napster. “My take was that the Net had simply opened up a powerful mode of distribution... Artists and merchants alike would eventually figure out how to reap bucks from that

bounty, and until then I’d sit back and enjoy the fun as Metallica and Courtney Love duked it out.”

Then he “stumbled upon” an Internet message (Google, anyone?) mentioning his *Hackers* and informing the group that they could get the book free from a Web site. When Levy investigated, he found the site (at Stanford), tracked down the professor who had scanned in the book (thinking that it access was limited to his students), and didn’t worry too much about it—the book was removed and he’d had a good discussion on fair use.

A week later, he was informed that *Crypto*, his current book, was available on a Usenet group. As his informant noted, there’s some irony there: *Crypto* discusses “cyberanonymity” among other things, and the book-posting had been done by a pseudonymous, largely untraceable source. Levy’s publisher noted, “We’re seeing this problem all the time,” including illegal postings of works by Tom Clancy (thus the tease above). The *Newsweek* piece goes on to discuss more of how Levy views all this—and it’s fair to say he’s less willing to stand and watch.

...FamilyPC, Meet Steven Levy...

A half-page feature in the June 2001 *FamilyPC* offers the “down-low on digital download alternatives.” It’s titled “Napster: the day after,” and describes a handful of Napster alternatives. Nowhere is there a word about ethics, intellectual property rights, whether people *should* be seeking out Napster alternatives. Nope: It’s entirely “Here’s how to keep on grabbing stuff without paying for it.” The Gnutella description even says, “Expect the service’s impressive song selection to boom with Napster refugees.”

There’s a copyright statement on *FamilyPC*’s masthead with this explicit statement: “Material in this publication may not be reproduced in any form without permission.” Does the phrase “blatant hypocrisy” ring a bell?

...Charlie Pride, Meet FamilyPC

The Beach Boys sang about “Heroes & Villains” but in today’s copyright brouhaha I don’t see too many heroes. I’ll have a coherent synthesis of where I stand on all this one of these days (in addition to the miscellaneous nonsense from me you may see on LISNews, Web4Lib, referenced in *Library Journal*, and elsewhere)—but meanwhile, here’s two or three more overreactions to the digital piracy “problem.”

One you’ve probably heard about; I’d mentioned the possibility a few months ago. Some cretinous software firm claims it can make audio CDs that aren’t playable on CD-ROM drives and, thus, can’t be “ripped” without two or three minutes of extra

work. Charlie Pride, who has admittedly been treated shabbily by the country music establishment, has “paid it forward” to his fans by using this technology for his new CD—he’s treating them all as potential thieves. Never mind that the technology prevents me from playing CDs where I usually listen to them (at my PC); never mind that some high-end CD players use CD-ROM drives; never mind that this prevents the *perfectly legal* act of creating a compilation CD-R for my own use. I hope this isn’t the beginning of a trend. It certainly rules out any possibility that I’d purchase the new CD.

The June 2001 *Stereophile Guide to Home Theatre* spells out another one I’ve also heard about (and may have mentioned), but in grisly detail (see p. 28). The big motion picture companies want the right to turn off high-definition TV signals at will, so they can be sure you won’t use a digital VCR or DVD-R to record a movie. “The studios actually want the capability to reach into your video recorder and, after a set period of time, erase movies you have recorded. That’s possible with the personal video recorders...that are being built into some new DirecTV receivers.” Presumably, you already know that PVRs can (and in some cases do) report all of your viewing/taping to corporate headquarters.

The oddest aspect to this overprotective stance is that it’s likely to slow the adoption of HDTV even further, possibly stalling it altogether. HDTV was supposed to be a big win for electronic manufacturers as we all run out to buy new TVs and recording systems. Maybe not.

Press Watch I: Articles Worth Reading

Lynch, Clifford, “The battle to define the future of the book in the digital world,” *First Monday* 6:6 (June 2001). http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_6/lynch/

Here’s all you really need to know: If you care about the future of narrative text and the cultural record, you should download this lengthy article, print it out, and read it carefully. If you’re gung-ho about libraries glomming onto today’s ebook appliances and want to get libraries out of the “artifact business,” you *must* download this article and read it carefully. Twice. In print form. It’s much too long to read online—a little over 30,000 words. (It would take 40 pages of *Cites & Insights* and took 62 pages when I printed it

from Internet Explorer.) There are few wasted words in that third-of-a-book length, and Lynch is—as usual—quite readable, but this is a long read and well worth the time.

While “Press Watch I” is normally organized chronologically as I read worthwhile items, some articles deserve special treatment. This is one of them. The most negative thing I can say about it is this: After reading Lynch’s synthesis and examination of issues surrounding books (e- and otherwise), I’m tempted to give up my feeble attempts to write about the field. I won’t, to be sure, but it’s tempting. Clifford Lynch is in a class by himself. (Thank heavens. If there were dozens of library people who write and think this well, I really would have to give it up out of embarrassment.)

Can I find fault with the article? Of course. There are some typographical errors. Lynch uses “digital video disk” as an expansion of DVD, which is wrong on two counts (it would be “disc” and the DVD Consortium has established that neither “digital video” nor “digital versatile” is part of the final name—it’s just DVD).

When discussing the usefulness of ebook readers for newspapers and magazines, he notes the potential reduction in printing and delivery costs but fails to consider a set of economic issues that may more than balance those costs. To wit, most of the revenue for newspapers and (most) magazines comes from advertising—and, so far, no ebook reader offers ways to integrate ads in as effective and non-intrusive ways as print newspapers and magazines. That’s one big problem with electronic magazines such as *Salon* and *Slate*: ads prominent enough to bring in serious revenue are so intrusive as to drive away readers. There’s another issue for electronic newspapers having to do with the breadth of material visible on broadsheet pages, but that’s an intricate discussion.

But my qualms about his comments on newspapers and magazines are probably longer than his discussion, which is very nearly a throwaway within the overall article. It’s just that those comments are almost the only area where I disagree with (or would amplify) what he’s saying. That’s a bit frightening, given that I’ve probably churned out more copy about ebooks than Lynch has (and, as he comments, “I suspect more words are being published about the e-book phenomenon in print than have actually been placed into e-books so far”).

You don’t get to see masters in action every day, particularly not at such extended length and for such a modest price (about a buck and a quarter using a typical laser printer). Don’t skim the article; don’t attempt to read it online. Give it the time it deserves. You won’t be sorry.

Addendum: Gary Frost, proprietor of futureofthebook.com (more commonly known as FotB), is writing his own commentary on the article. I took issue with his initial summary stance; as of now, my comments appear in his BookNews section along with that stance. I may not always agree with Frost, but he is doing some deep and interesting thinking about reading modes and the devices that support them. Good, provocative stuff. Note also that Clifford Lynch has seen the annotation above and offered an informal response. As I presumed, he deliberately chose not to delve too deeply into the economic issues for newspapers and magazines—reasonable, since booklength texts are the primary focus of his article. Finally, by now I’ve seen enough quick comments on Lynch’s article to emphasize that you should really read it for yourself; too many of the comments represent selective reading (my own possibly included!).

Fallows, James, “Class struggle,” *The Industry Standard* 4:17 (April 30, 2001), pp. 22-4.

Fallows recounts his thinking as he went to his seat on a recent flight out of SFO—walking through first class, then through business class, and on to 33E, “my cozy center seat in the rear.” He discusses the reasons that coach has become so bad on most airlines and broadens that lesson to a “Red Carpet Club philosophy of service, in which conditions for the average customer get worse precisely because preferential treatment is available at an extra price.”

As he notes, it’s a dangerous strategy, particularly when it’s applied to customer service in information technology industries. He concludes, “Airlines seem not to care if they annoy the average, non-Red-Carpet customer. People who hope to build businesses in the long run cannot afford to think this way.”

An interesting brief column that’s worth thinking about—although, with any luck, librarians serve all their “customers” with similar courtesy and skill. Still, some in the library field have advocated two-tier service, with basic reference available for free and *real* reference service available at a price. That’s not why I’m mentioning this, though. Fallows’ assertion that Red Carpet thinking is dangerous in the long run goes for more than online services. People don’t always stay in one economic bracket. If I’ve been treated badly by a company when I was a struggling student or just out of school, and if there are reasonable alternatives, I won’t deal with those companies when I’m reasonably affluent. And if I’m dealing with annoying companies out of economic necessity, I’ll flee them as soon as I’m able. So will other sensible people.

It’s fairly clear that Fallows was flying United. That airline went out of its way to slap budget travelers in the face when it reconfigured its coach cabins over the last couple of years. They added a few extra inches of legroom (adding 4.5 inches increases leg room by roughly 50% over the industry average!)—*only* for the first few rows of coach, reserved for full-fare and very frequent flyers. You peons can have eight or nine inches of legroom and be thankful it’s that much!

Meanwhile, American added about the same amount of legroom—but did it *throughout* coach. I noted the difference recently when I ran out of upgrade stickers and had a coach seat for a long flight. While not spacious, the legroom was more than adequate—and when the passenger in front reclined, I wasn’t in pain.

Certainly American treats first class and business class passengers a lot better than coach; my reward for too much flying is that I can move up to first class reasonably often. I’m not claiming that American does it right; other than Midwest Express (which I’ve never flown), I don’t think any U.S. airline can make such a claim. In this case, American did the right thing. They made flying a little less painful, even for those on a budget. That’s likely to maintain customer loyalty—particularly given the alternatives.

“Walking the high-wire,” *The Industry Standard* 4:17 (April 30, 2001), pp. 64-7.

These four pages offer a lighthearted look at the three years since *Industry Standard* started publishing. I won’t attempt to summarize. It’s worth a few minutes of your time—if only to go through the “connections” ring on the last two pages.

Waldrep, Mark, “The making of a DVD-Audio title,” *EMedia* 14:4 (April 2001), pp. 30-6 (and “The sound of DVD: 5.1 mixing opinions part 1” p. 37).

Most of you can skip this—but if you’re interested in DVD-Audio and willing to read analytically, it may be worthwhile. On the surface, it’s a fascinating story of how Mark Waldrep’s AIX Records put together a DVD-Audio (and DVD-Video) recording of Beethoven’s *6th Symphony* and Respighi’s *Pines of Rome*. But there’s more going on when you read carefully, particularly if you’re aware of the high fidelity industry in general. After reading this article I’m more doubtful than ever that DVD-Audio will succeed in any meaningful way. You may see it quite differently: judge for yourself.

Advocates see DVD-Audio as the replacement for CD—and, yes, that means they hope to sell you all your favorite music yet again. How are they going

to do this? By touting surround sound (and higher sound quality, but that's a tougher sell). Of course, you need a surround-sound system *and* a new DVD-Audio player to take advantage of this—yet another boon, this time to the home entertainment industry.

Waldrep is, as he admits, a “strong advocate of the new DVD-Audio format”—and vociferous in trashing both Sony's SACD (a competing high-resolution CD format that's backward-compatible with CD players and has many more CDs actually available) and any high-resolution recordings that come from analog tapes. Waldrep's arrogance isn't the point here. Neither, I suppose, is his assertion that “only audiophile ‘purists’ regard instruments coming from behind the listener as somehow inappropriate”—the rest of us would just *love* to have classical music (which he calls “classical” music) surrounding us. I can see aficionados shaking their heads at his recording techniques (24 microphones so he could place clumps of instruments all around the listener). These are the same listeners who “aren't completely convinced of the necessity of 5.1 channels of amplification and additional speakers.”

The point—the reason I'm mentioning this here—is that Waldrep's vision of DVD-Audio doesn't piggyback on DVD-Video, which (I would argue) is the only plausible way to get multichannel sound into millions of households. Sorry, but DVD-Audio needs not only a different arrangement of the six speakers than DVD-Video—but also *different speakers* for the rear channels! He calls the appropriate speakers “direct reflectors,” which makes no sense to me, but never mind.

Do your own thought experiment. Think about your own family's willingness to put six speakers all around the seating area in your living room or family room so that you can get the full effect of DVD Video. Not the easiest sale in the world, right?

Now think about adding two more speakers—as big as your front speakers—located at different points, or moving speakers every time you switch from DVD-Video to DVD-Audio. Think about this as well: For the higher resolution of DVD-Audio to be audible, you need high-end speakers, not the cheapo “home theater in a box” setups that probably make up the bulk of 5.1 systems today.

I'll guarantee this. Anyone who believes that 128K MP3 offers CD-quality sound will not hear the difference between CD resolution and DVD-Audio resolution. While a few people may be wowed by “instruments all around you” recordings, most people will find that internal perspective tiring after a while—and most listening spaces aren't set up to handle the six or eight speakers required.

Tynan, Daniel, “Nightmare on LAN street,” *FamilyPC* 8:5 (May 2001), pp. 90-2.

Ready to install a network for your home PCs? Read this article. It's mostly amusing, but does suggest some of the realities involved. I'm not suggesting that you shouldn't network home PCs (in the end, Tynan succeeds)—if you have broadband Internet access and more than one PC, I can't imagine *not* creating a network. But the cover line for this article seems to be right: “Home networks—plug and pray.”

Lake, David, “The Web grows up,” *Industry Standard* 4:18 (May 7, 2001), pp. 78-9.

This article combines seven graphics and one table with a few hundred words of text, all relating to Internet usage in the last quarter of 2000 and first quarter of 2001. The headline shows a rational perspective; a more typical “new business” periodical could use a Sky-is-Falling headline. That latter might relate to a *decrease* in average “surfing time” between October 2000 and December 2000—the average user spent 15% less time online during the holiday season than in mid-fall.

Disastrous? Not really—except for those who believe that Net usage is still growing at ridiculous rates. Most media use shows seasonal patterns. People watch more TV in the fall than in the summer; movie viewing and even newsstand magazine sales show seasonal patterns. If people are treating the Web as one in an array of media and tools—rather than as Life Itself—then it's only reasonable that they'd spend less time on the Web and more time with their families in December. (There must be a problem with the labeling on one chart: it seems to show that the average home Internet user spent nine minutes a month on the Internet in December 2000, which is absurdly low even by my conservative standards.)

The other telling charts include Net company failure trends (from *The Industry Standard's* “Flop Tracker” service) and a two-year comparison that shows that 60% of Internet users had been online for two years or more in July 2000, as compared to 44% in July 1999. That suggests that Internet use may be “built out” in the U.S.: that most people who have any reason to be on the Internet already are. (The one-year-or-less figure declined from 28% to 17%).

The Web's not dying; the Internet isn't another CB Radio—but it's not an all-consuming passion either, at least not for most people. It's a tool.

If you're looking at this article, flip to the last page of the issue (p. 88). Robert Levine contributes a charming “Trend Trackers” note, a “special report on the office of the future.” In this trend, cutting-

edge companies are encouraging employees to “treat the office as an office,” cubicles are being converted to walled rooms, and employees are rewarded for being “organization men” rather than “change agents.” Naturally, some of this is reported in *Solid Company*. It’s a hoot—with a fair amount of truth.

Shay, Kevin, “Building the best machine,” *Computer Shopper* 21:5 (May 2001), pp. 128-32.

This article discusses the process of configuring a personal computer on direct-order vendor sites. It’s more interesting than I expected, with some worthwhile advice and some of the quirks of major vendors. I wouldn’t seek out this issue just for this story, but if you’re thinking about a new PC, it’s a good read. Note that Micronpc, if the brand still exists by the time you read this, should be thought of as a new manufacturer with an old brand name.

I might take issue with a sidebar about the advantages and disadvantages of buying all your peripherals as part of your system. One “con” is certainly correct: a vendor’s choice of peripherals might not be the best products in their classes (although Dell and Gateway, at least, generally offer good choices). The other needs a caveat: “Don’t blithely accept the price the vendor lists as the value of a component; look around for the lowest price. Chances are you can find a better deal.” That may be true—but you need to balance that against the two big “pros” of bundling, only one of which is mentioned here.

The one that’s mentioned deserves mentioning again: Good direct vendors will make sure that your complete system is set up properly, sometimes even optimally—and that includes drivers and software for peripherals you order. The second may also be important: You should be able to call one vendor for all maintenance issues.

Fraser, Bruce, “The color challenge,” *Macworld* July 2001, pp. 36-41.

“LCDs may be prettier than CRTs, but are they as precise?” Most articles I see touting the wonders of LCD computer displays don’t raise that question—and for most Windows users, the question may not be critical. Graphics professionals make up a bigger segment of Mac owners, and for many of them predictable color is essential. If you know someone who’s ever stuck a suction cup on his or her CRT or thinks of color calibration as a vital part of system setup, chances are you’re dealing with a graphics professional—and there’s a good chance a Mac is driving the display.

This article compares two 20-21" (viewable) CRTs that come with color calibration hardware and

software with three large-screen LCDs (17-22" viewable), testing for color uniformity using standard targets and measurements. The answers are fairly clear. Even though the LCDs are expensive, none of them tested well: the displays aren’t uniform. One vaunted advantage of the best LCDs over CRTs—brightness and dynamic range—goes away once you calibrate the colors. All in all, “graphics professionals shouldn’t say goodbye to the devil they know.” (In case it’s not obvious, it pains me to keep finding that flat-screen displays don’t make good CRT replacements. I’d *love* to move away from the CRT—but only if the replacement is significantly better and without serious drawbacks.)

Weber, Jonathan, “Story of a startup,” *The Industry Standard* 4:19 (May 14, 2001), p. 5

It’s just a one-page editorial, but Weber says something I firmly believe—something that too many MBAs seem determined to ignore: “It’s not just about getting a paycheck, it’s about realizing a dream—and getting rich is only one part of what such a dream can mean.”

The editorial muses about the film *Startup.com*, a documentary about the rise and fall of Govworks.com. It’s a sad story, particularly because Govworks.com was a good idea—not just a way to get rich quick. The lesson Weber sees in the film is one he finds unfortunate: “In the end, a company is about business, and business is cruel and unforgiving and at some level incompatible with true friendship. For the next generation of entrepreneurs, the challenge will be to prove it doesn’t have to be this way.”

I see this as part of a broader, extremely negative assertion: Business is about profit, *period*. The only goal of a business is to make money. That’s what I keep hearing from business gurus. I think that’s not only sad but, in the long run, self-defeating.

Great businesses large and small arise because people want to *do something worthwhile*—and make money along the way. Hewlett and Packard didn’t set out to find a way to make money; they set out to make great instruments—and HP has always looked for worthwhile new things to do. I’m guessing that HP will be around long after me-too “we can do it cheaper” companies have died; I’m sure people would rather work for HP than for quick-buck artists. Boeing, Honda, Sony, Microsoft, Apple, Time Inc., even Ford—all began by doing worthwhile things in ways that weren’t being done as well before (or made brand new devices that people had use for) and made money along the way. So did Dell, Gateway, and IBM.

For some businessmen, what’s worthwhile is whatever makes the most money, leading to cynical,

hollow corporations that treat employees like scum and customers as disposable sources of ready income. That's sad, and there was far too much of that in the dot-com explosion. Some worthwhile ideas got buried in the gold rush; others will survive.

I've always believed that, in the United States, if your primary and overriding goal in life is to make lots of money, and you're willing to set aside ethics, friendship, and other secondary issues, you can probably succeed—and that such a goal is a terrible waste of a life. I think that's also true for business.

Lessig, Lawrence, "Copyright thugs," *The Industry Standard* 4:19 (May 14, 2001), p. 23.

I want you to retrieve the May 14 *Industry Standard* anyway (you can probably find most of this stuff on their Web site as well). I believe in intellectual property rights; I'm no friend of Napster; and I believe that Lessig's characterization of the Secure Digital Music Initiative and RIAA is on the money.

You may know about the incident. SDMI wants to build methods to prevent copying of digital music (incidentally overriding fair-use rights). It posted four examples of protected music and invited people to crack the codes. Princeton's Edward Felten and team cracked them. When he planned to publish a paper on the team's strategy, the RIAA sent a letter demanding that he destroy the research and threatening that publication "would subject your research team to enforcement actions under the DMCA."

The DMCA was a truly horrendous extension of copyright, making it a crime to build tools that can circumvent copyright protection measures *even to carry out fair use*. In better days, DMCA would be overturned by the Supreme Court as exceeding constitutional authority, but we're not there yet. Meanwhile, RIAA interprets the DMCA to mean that it control who does what research.

As Lessig says, "Someone's on the wrong planet here.... We don't use the law to punish critics, and it can't be a crime to point out flaws." The RIAA claims that it "does not—nor did it ever—intend to bring any legal action against professor Felten." You can try to square that with the earlier passage.

Seymour, Jim, "The dark side of P2P," *PC Magazine* 20:10 (May 22, 2001), p. 85.

Jim Seymour's a big fan of peer-to-peer applications and expects them to have a big future in business. This column offers a little balance—problematic aspects of P2P. First, this model uses a lot more bandwidth than traditional networking; that makes it particularly problematic for home office use, since high-speed Internet pricing is based on asymmetric usage. (You download lots of data,

but you don't send much upstream.) We all know that "bandwidth is essentially free," but if Covad joins NorthPoint *et al* in bankruptcy that "essentially" may become ever more ironic.

The worst problem is security. P2P means wide-open machines—lots of ports accepting any incoming TCP connection. To avoid nastiness, you'll need high-security routers everywhere you have P2P.

Read the column. I tend to believe that Seymour oversells the virtues of P2P, but I don't think he overstates the dangers.

Mechanic, Michael, "Thinking inside the box," *The Industry Standard* 4:20 (May 21, 2001), pp. 64-73.

This is a "Grok special report," the replacement for the short-lived *Grok* supplement. Instead of a 120-page special issue, it's nine pages (but that's all article, no internal ads). It's a discussion of possible new trends in personal computing, and worth reading as long as you don't take it too seriously.

The introduction is a giveaway of sorts. "Users are forced to carry out housekeeping chores like manually allocating memory and saving files." Buzz! Wrong answer! I'll assert that 95% of PC owners (those using Windows) do not, *ever*, manually allocate memory—as far as I know, there's no way (and no need) to do so. That's a Maccentricity, one that I'm fairly sure disappears with OS X. As for saving files—well, lots of programs periodically save temporary versions and almost every modern program prompts you to save when you exit. In many cases (e.g., Access), once you've started a file, you never again issue a save command. Personally, I like to know what my file's called (and to be able to start new files as copies of old ones): that's control, not "housekeeping chores." Also, "because of hardware and software incompatibilities, machines crash more than ever." There's a sign of bad memory: believing that Windows 2000 or ME systems crash *more* often than Windows 3! (I always wonder what it is that journalists do with their systems, which seem to crash every fifteen minutes.)

The best part of the feature may be "All talk, no action"—which discusses voice recognition software, suggests that it may *never* work well enough to replace keyboarding, and noting—correctly, in my view—that such perfection doesn't matter for quite a few markets.

Burns, Grant, "Books and toasters: who ya gonna trust?" (Uncle Frank's Diary #3), NewPages.com. www.newpages.com/weblog/UncleFrank/UncleFranksDiaryNumber03.htm

In last month's "Trends and Quick Takes" I noted ForeWord's scheme to provide "professional book reviews" for \$295 each, paid by the author or publisher. I thought it was absurd but offered only a tiny comment. That's just as well, as I lack Grant Burns' eloquence and would not have devoted the space required for his thorough discussion.

It's witty, cogent, and ruthlessly honest. The price is right (look for "Uncle Frank's Diary Archives" if the URL above doesn't work—and take a look at NewPages in general, while you're at it).

Burns understands the book review market fairly well. His overall evaluation of the scheme can be summed up in the pull quote beneath the title: "What reader, what librarian, would concede a speck of credibility to a review service whose reviews have been paid for by the publishers and authors whose products are being reviewed?"

Dvorak, John, "Channeling television's future," *Computer Shopper* 21:6 (June 2001), p. 39.

Sometimes I think that John "Hyde" Dvorak writes for *PC Magazine* while John "Jekyll" Dvorak writes for *Computer Shopper*. This is another eminently reasonable column suggesting that interactive television, TV on demand and personalized TV are concepts that viewers don't care about. Dvorak notes: "What's overlooked in all this future-of-TV nonsense is that television ain't broke. Why fix it?"

In one sense, TV is "broke"—the audience for network TV continues to decline as choices multiply and people find better things to do with their time. But those better things probably don't include interactive TV or personalized TV. The first has been a Holy Grail of convergence theorists and marketers for more than a decade, despite a continuing string of dismal failures. When I watch TV, I want to relax and enjoy it. If I want to interact, I'm at my computer or in some social setting. His complaint with TV on demand is that it reduces any chance for shows to succeed through word of mouth and consistent placement, a good point if one that I find less convincing. Finally, he lumps personalized TV in with personalized newspapers—"professional editors can do a much better job of organizing news (...or programming...) than you can."

Ogletree, Terry William, "The first line of defense," *PC Magazine* 20:11 (June 12, 2001), pp. 92-4.

This edition of *Cites & Insights* includes several product reviews relating to personal and corporate firewalls. Ogletree's three-page "Solutions" article offers a solid discussion of what firewalls actually do. It's worth reading.

Orenstein, Susan, and Ethan Smith, "Crunch time at Time Inc.," *The Industry Standard* 4:22 (June 4, 2001), pp. 48-54.

What happens when a traditional publishing firm—used to slender profits, "putting the nickel second" (after explaining the world) and slow development—gets swallowed by a firm like AOL? This long, thoughtful article doesn't entirely answer the question, but if you care about magazine journalism, it's worth reading and thinking about. I won't attempt to summarize.

Essick, Kristi, "A call to arms," *The Industry Standard* 4:23 (June 11, 2001), pp. 54-61.

Is this story relevant for *Cites & Insights*? I'll claim that it's exactly as relevant here as it is in *The Industry Standard*: it's a sobering, necessary reminder that personal convenience and high technology can have truly unexpected unintended consequences. The tease provides context: "How the demand for cell phones and computer chips is helping fuel a bloody civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo." It has to do with tantalum. The story is clear, well-researched, and worth reading. It closes: "The links between the cell phones and computers we use every day and the devastation taking place now in the Congo can no longer be ignored."

Feedback and Following Up

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

The Streets of Laredo

Early downloaders—the first 800 (or so) who downloaded *Cites & Insights* 1:6—may note a typo on page 5, in the subheading near the bottom of the left-hand column. Miriam Bobkoff of Santa Fe Public Library certainly did. The subhead should read, "Get yourself *an* Outfit and Be a Cowboy Too!" (Emphasis added.)

For those who downloaded *Cites & Insights* 1:6 after 9:50 a.m. (PDT) May 28, 2001: I never make mistakes.

"In Ten Years..."

Harry Kriz (Virginia Tech) writes that he's amused by predictions about ebooks:

Here's a quote I've been using in talks lately: "...in 10 years textbooks as the principal method of teaching will be as obsolete as the horse and carriage are now."

Then I ask the audience to guess who said this about what. Perhaps it was a local professor talking about the "power of the Web." Perhaps a librarian saying (as a former director told everyone here some 10 or 12 years ago) that soon everything would be on CD-ROM and books and journals would be obsolete. Perhaps it was a prophet of television.

The audience laughs when I say it was Thomas Edison in 1921, as published in *The Diary and Observations of Thomas Alva Edison*. He thought motion pictures would replace textbooks.

In discussing trends and predictions...I have formulated Kriz's Three Laws of the Future:

1. Most things that are predicted never happen.
2. Most things that happen are never predicted.
3. You will experience déjà vu.

Law three is the one prediction you can make about anyone's future and be assured it will come to pass.

In the same letter, Kriz recounted an experience that matched my own—except that mine began with "authoritative" print materials.

I was looking for an authoritative source for the quote "Prediction is difficult, especially when it involves the future." Many Web sites that have collections of quotes attribute this line to Neils Bohr. Pop culture sites and an ABC News site attributed it to Yogi Berra. Some thought it was said by Mark Twain. At least one said it was Neils Bohr paraphrasing Yogi Berra. Some said Einstein said it, one claimed Dan Quayle. One even fell back on claiming it was an ancient Chinese proverb, and perhaps it was. What I found more interesting than all of this variety is the fact that not a single Web site quoted an authoritative source for this quote. Well, it's a sloppy world.

In "Trends and Quick Takes" I felt the need to use a classic quote that I remembered as, "It all depends whose ox is being gored." When I looked it up at home—in a 1943 book of quotations—I found a somewhat different wording and an attribution to Noah Webster. I was going to use that form and that attribution, even though I would have *sworn* that Martin Luther was the source.

Some Web checking (and print checking) convinced me that I was right the first time—not as to the exact form but that Luther said it (although Noah Webster may well have paraphrased it when writing his *American Spelling Book*). You can see the form I finally used elsewhere in this issue. I don't

swear that it's right—but then, Luther didn't say it in English anyway, did he?

Ebook Watch

Catching Up with Ebooks, Part Two

Late December 2000 through February 2001: that's the time frame for this second catch-up installment. This time, notes are split into three categories: noteworthy items from ebooks features on Wired News; other minor news, projection, and commentary items; and more substantive items that deserve note or comment.

I'm interpreting "ebooks" broadly here, to include print-on-demand (PoD) and developments in "e-ink" or "digital paper." While I think it's absurd to call PoD books ebooks, it's an absurdity reflected in industry discussions (and vital to claims that there will be a big ebook market in the near future).

But First...Read This!

Before you read my comments and annotations, go on to "Press Watch I." Read the first item. Or go to http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_6/lynch/ to print the article—it's more than 30,000 words, so be prepared for 60-odd pages. Read it. Carefully, thoughtfully, *twice* if you're one of those who will cope with whatever ebook vendors give you as long as there's the possibility that print books will disappear.

If you don't have time to read "Ebook Watch" and Clifford Lynch's article, just read his article. What I do is amateur night by comparison. (From now on, when I remember, I'll use Lynch's term "appliances" to distinguish dedicated ebook readers—REB and the like—from ebook software and other methodologies.) Now, on with amateur night...

Ebook Notes from Wired News

M.J. Rose and Kendra Mayfield both write ebook coverage for Wired News. While the tone tends to be closer to *Wired's* "if it's feasible, it's inevitable" attitude than the informed skepticism of, say, *The Industry Standard*, it's good coverage and not entirely gee-whizzy. A few items from articles posted between December 19 and February 27, with my own comments as appropriate.

Rosettabooks

In mid-December, the owner of Scott Meredith Literary Agency announced Rosettabooks, a new ebook publisher devoted entirely to high-profile backlist items. At the time, 100 "classics" were in place, with

another 1,500 under consideration. Prices were to be below trade paperbacks, with supposedly platform-agnostic delivery, “so that a reader using Adobe will have the same e-reading experience as a reader using a PDA.” The Website and each ebook would also link to biographies, critical essays, and other related items. Royalty rate: 25 percent of net receipts.

You can draw your own conclusions about the possibility of having “the same e-reading experience” on a 160x160 pixel PDA as with Acrobat on an 18" CRT at 1280x1024 or higher. It's worth noting that the price may be right, but that Rosettabooks does little or nothing to improve book availability: the firm is after high-profile backlist books, ones that rarely go out of print.

Update: Publishers who own print rights to some of these items are suing Rosettabooks, asserting that an ebook is just another edition and covered under the print rights. This should be fun.

Startups and Roadblocks

In that same edition, M.J. Rose noted happenings at Bookface.com, LibraryCard, Questia, MightyWords, and Xlibris:

- Bookface canned 20% of its staff and “told remaining employees this might be a good time to start job hunting.” Ad-supported and offering free online book browsing, the site was moving out of its San Francisco office and “shutting down its New York office” (which, according to some employees, never existed). **See below:** Bookface shut down entirely on January 12, 2001—and 20% of its peak employee roster would have been four people.
- LibraryCard.com expected to become “the largest booklist in the Web world” by early 2001, partly by selling books but also by “finding out if the title is available at a local library.” I don't know what that means; my own late-May test of LibraryCard's “booklist” shows a slender offering compared to the big booksellers—and no clear link to local libraries.
- Questia was announcing a mid-January 2001 launch, claiming that “for the cost of one printed textbook, students will have unlimited access to Questia.” The collection “is expected to grow to more than 250,000 titles by 2003.” It's fair to suggest that this growth rate won't happen, given Questia's current status.
- MightyWords moved even further from its original model. Now, according to this update, the narrowly defined midlength items MightyWords offered would be available through The Mighty Network—affiliate Web-

sites distributing MightyWords titles and passing along a fee to MightyWords. The CEO was now saying that its original vision, which would have broadened the market for shorter-than-book-length materials, was misguided: “It is highly branded, highly credible, high-quality stuff that sells. Writing is hard. We are technologists who approached this and were perhaps a little naïve about it.” Of course, cutting off most topics, reducing royalty rates, and requiring full-scale proposals don't exactly make the writing process easier...

- Xlibris moved to add 200 online retailers and use Lightning Source for PoD service, hoping to improve the firm's laggard delivery record and recognizing that downloaded ebooks wouldn't pay the bills.

Keeping the Faith

Kendra Mayfield's January 11, 2001 column started with a Forrester Research study and added a range of industry comments. As I've noted elsewhere, Forrester Research now projects a grandiose \$7.8 billion in “ebook” revenues by 2005—but most of that figure is either PoD or digital textbooks, with \$674 million estimated for downloaded (non-textbook) ebooks *and* reading-appliance books. The introduction strikes an overstated opposition: “With the advent of the e-book, many predicted the death of print books. Now, after a page-turning year of mounting hype, some are forecasting the death of e-books.”

Now that so many in the ebook field are rewriting history to claim that nobody *ever* suggested that ebooks would replace print books, it's useful to keep track of a few (of the many) instances in which people did precisely that. Some counterpoints to Forrester's study offer examples. (I'm looking for examples of the “many” people who, according to Mayfield, now forecast the “death of e-books”—ruling out even niche markets and digital textbooks. So far, I've come up empty. Help me find those straw men!)

Roland Laplant of Xlibris: “Ultimately e-books *will eclipse paper books*. It's just not convenient now... There needs to be a lot of change in actual consumer behavior for that shift to occur.” (Emphasis added.)

Thomson Multimedia (the RCA dedicated readers) scoffed at Forrester's forecast: “Those numbers are ridiculously low.” But then, Thomson asserts sales of three to seven million REB appliances for 2001 (which I mistakenly read as 2000). Any bets on the likelihood of that happening?

Accenture forecast a \$2.3 billion consumer ebook market by 2005, “with 28 million people likely to adopt dedicated e-book devices.” They get

there partly by an interesting technique: when consumers were asked whether they'd buy an e-book device *if features improve*, two out of three said yes. I suspect no prices were named and Accenture's pollsters studiously avoided issues of book pricing—didn't we all assume that ebook appliances would pay for themselves through book discounts? In any case, the question is essentially meaningless. It's like projecting the growth of high-definition television by asking people "Would you buy cinema-quality wide-screen TV at the right price and with the right features?" Of course I would, particularly if I get to define "right price" and "right features"!

Half of the article discusses e-textbooks, where there should be substantial potential—if the appliances are cheap enough, high enough quality, and pay for themselves. It's a substantial potential market, but getting there may not be trivial.

Fictionwise and Reader-Written Novels

M.J. Rose's January 23, 2001 roundup begins with "one healthy e-publisher," Fictionwise.com. The claim is "over 400 titles and sales topping 10,000 e-books a month," but here we have yet another broadening of "e-books." Most of those "e-books" are short stories, particularly science fiction short stories, offered at nominal prices. So now a 5,000-word story counts as a "book"?

Here's a truly odd one: *The Motive*, a developing e-book "by" Tara Deshpande. It's a whodunit, it's free, and you can check it out at www.themotive.net. Her idea is that readers will submit the even-numbered chapters; she'll choose the best submissions. "While contributors won't receive royalties, prizes will be given for guessing the ending of the book." She calls the idea "an experiment with global culture" and expects contributed chapters to change the novel's setting and plot.

Collaborative novels aren't new, and one or two have been hilarious. Getting your readers to write almost half of "your" book for free is a new twist—but why not, particularly when you're giving the book away?

Low Price, Improved Sales

This February 8, 2001 posting *had* to be by Kendra Mayfield—if only because much of it is about M.J. Rose's new e-titles and quotes her extensively. Simon and Schuster offered a one-month \$4.95 deal on each of Rose's two new e-books, down from the usual \$13.95 (the print price). Here's a shocker: "People are much more willing to read on the desk-top when it doesn't cost them a lot."

Del Rey announced \$1.99 *Star Wars*-related "ebooks," but here again the definition of "book"

takes a beating. The first two-buck book in the series is 14,000 words long—in other words, the length of last month's *Cites & Insights*. (And you got that 14,299-word "ebook" absolutely free!)

In counterpoint, an eBookNet.com columnist argued, "Just because we are able to make e-books more inexpensively and can pay authors a higher royalty as a result does not mean that the books themselves should be cheaper." eBookNet.com has disappeared (killed off by the ever-benign Gemstar)—and the notion that cheaper goods that are harder to read should cost just as much may meet with consumer resistance.

Finally, a February 27, 2001 item. Peanutpress.com, which sells ebooks formatted for PDAs, announced its Peanut Awards for 2000—and claimed that the list of award winners accounted for almost \$1 million in sales. While \$1 million for a list that includes Stephen King (four times), Robert Ludlum, and Robert Silverberg may *be* peanuts, I'm astonished that so many people attempt to read long texts on 160x160-pixel screens. Maybe Gemstar's right: readability doesn't matter. God help us all.

News, Projections, Commentary

A sampling, again in chronological order:

- December 14, TechWeb News: Hank Searls, a "former best-selling author," put some of his OP novels in ebook form, thinking that ebooks would be "the glorious sunshine of easy publication and great royalties for authors." His current comment: "My feeling now is that unless they improve their platforms, nobody's going to be reading these damn books."
- January 12, Inside.com (verified at bookface.com): Bookface ceased operations. It was an odd entry, displaying books "for free" using a Java applet to prevent downloading or printing, and surrounding book text with ads. The other revenue idea was that you'd get sick of reading this way, click on the "buy it" button (connecting to Amazon.com), and Bookface would get a piece of the action. Founders blamed the failure on "the volatility of the Nasdaq" and that "the advertising model had just reached enough customers to make it viable." You know the story: "It's a great concept...but now was the wrong time for it to be born." Quoting from the shutdown page: "Those who have been part of the Bookface team continue to believe that online reading and digital access to information and entertainment is the future." Not "are part of the future"—"*is the future.*"

➤ February 5, *Fortune*: Peter H. Lewis tries out dedicated reading devices, ebooks on PDAs, and ebooks on laptops, then offers his comments. “The most impressive thing about the current generation of new-fangled electronic books is how much they make us appreciate old-fashioned analog books.” A bit later, after some comparisons between print books and ebooks: “In short, digital books represent a solution for a problem that very few consumers have.” Lewis likes the idea of ebooks and considers the pricey REB 1200 to be “the closest thing to a usable e-book of any that I tried,” but even that device is “still way short of the level needed to approximate the sharpness of ink on paper.” He’s tried reading a novel on a Palm, which I probably never will, but I appreciate his finding: it’s “not quite masochistic, but it does require a dedication to reading that many people lack.” Surprisingly, he believes that a 150dpi screen will offer text quality to “rival that of ink on paper.”
(URL: www.fortune.com/fortune/technology/2001/02/05/tec.html)

➤ Some time in early 2001, Harvey Mackay’s “Swimming with the sharks” (clipped from the *San Francisco Chronicle* but not dated)—“Got a book in you? Here’s a chance to get published.” He extols iUniverse for its \$99 self-publishing plan, producing PoD paperbacks with 20% royalties and ebooks with 50% royalties. Mackay sees a great future: “It will leave desktop publishing and vanity presses choking in their dust covers.” A bit later: “There are estimates that about 750,000 book manuscripts are written in the United States each year. Approximately 57,000 of these get published. Those odds are about to change!” Is that a promise or a threat? Clearly, Mackay thinks it’s a great thing. He always closes these business columns with “Mackay’s Moral.” This time: “A lot of people believe that they should open their own restaurant or that they have at least one book in them. Ditch the restaurant, and dig into that memoir.” If 90% of everything is crap (Sturgeon’s Law), and “everything” in book publishing is currently 57,000 titles a year, what does that say about 750,000 new titles a year?

➤ February 13: ITKnowledge announced a complete shutdown effective February 28.

➤ February 16, *Salon*: A report that Xlibris dropped its free publishing program and \$1,200 premium service; the new rates run from \$200 to \$1,600. This report says that

Xlibris had published 2,000 titles in its first four years, “some selling as many as 5,000 copies”—a different number than the 4,000 titles claimed by Xlibris in late 2000.

Substantive Items

This swarm covers a broad range of ebook-related topics. Each item includes the URL (at the time I downloaded it). If I’m misrepresenting the sense of the original, you can judge for yourself. When I believe the article to be particularly worth reading (even if I disagree with the author), I offer a flag: **Recommended** appears before the URL.

E-ink for E-books?

Su Cleyle, a systems librarian at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, believes that ebooks are doing just great: “Portable e-book readers have made terrific inroads in terms of mass acceptance. E-books have a long way to go but they have certainly done well so far.” Then, after noting that people love paper, Cleyle says, “Eventually, we will get beyond this paper clinging mindset to embrace an electronic world where the possibilities for information providers and consumers can be fully realized. Electronic books will help move us through this transition phase to a *paperless society*...”

The article is really about “electronic ink”—you know, the long-promised “here in two years” (any time you ask) technology that gives us paper-thick sheets with “ink” that reconfigures at the touch of a download to create any text you want.

The two competitors in this area have been working on it for a long time—in Xerox PARC’s case, since the 1970s. Xerox claims to have “already mastered 200dpi.” E Ink (from Lucent) isn’t there yet, but has produced commercial-sign applications.

There’s nothing really new in the technology discussion—which, as always, is the “news” for digital paper: it’s still Just Over the Horizon. I find Cleyle’s take on it depressing, but it’s another example of why people like Nicholson Baker believe that librarians hate books: “E-ink could come from the back of the pack in the race to win over readers and paper lovers, and lead us into a truly paperless world.” URL: www.biblio-tech.com/html/e-ink_for_e-books_.html

Note: For a more technical but still enthusiastic overview of e-paper/e-ink, read Henry Jenkins’ “Electronic paper turns the page” in the March 2001 *Technology Review*. It’s as neutral with regard to technological wonders as most material in this MIT-published magazine. Read the print magazine, although you can also find it online.

Why Books Survive

This lengthy article by Larry McMurtry (from *The New Republic Online* for January 2001) is an essay review of Jason Epstein's *Book Business: Publishing Past Present and Future* (Norton). McMurtry isn't just a fine novelist (yes, that Larry McMurtry); he's also a secondhand bookseller and knows the industry.

Epstein's book springs from a 1999 series of lectures at NYPL. It sounds like a good read for anyone interested in trade book publishing. Epstein created Anchor Books in the 1950s and helped found the *New York Review of Books*. He believes that big-name authors (like Stephen King) don't really need publishers—and that publishers might be better off without the big-name authors and the absurd advances they require. Epstein is not an MBA-style publishing person—but then, trade book publishing never has been all that profitable.

This essay (10 printed pages, probably 5,000 words) isn't primarily about ebooks. It is worth reading—as, I suspect, is Epstein's book. McMurtry offers a few pointed comments: "Those who suppose that the potency of the book can be diminished by the Web may find that they have made a very bad bet... It is well to remember that a text is not a book, and readers are mighty picky." There's more. Go read it—preferably in the print *New Republic* (check your library!), but in this download if necessary.

Recommended. URL: www.thenewrepublic.com/010101/mcmurtry010101_print.html

Great Enthusiasm from Great Britain

Sarah Ormes offers, "It's the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine) or How I learned to stop worrying and love the e-book" in *Ariadne*, issue 26. We see her prejudice right up front:

For years we've dreamed of the paperless office and foretold the death of the printed book, but my desk stubbornly remains cluttered with paper, my home full of books and my bags weighed down with reports. But finally these electronic dreams seem to be about to come true—e-books have arrived and are available at a Web site near you.

In a sidebar, Ormes reviews her experience with several different "ebook" forms. She thinks the Rocket eBook's crude sans serif text is peachy-keen: "The quality of text presentation was good and was easy on the eye." There's the "advantage" of ebooks advocates keep trotting out: backlighting "proved to be a great boon if you like reading in bed at night but your partner prefers the lights off." Since this was the old Rocket book, she could convert Word documents—but Gemstar's eliminated that convenience. "I only read one book on the e-book not because of

the technology but because of the high cost of the e-books!" She also tried reading on a Visor—but even with Ormes' "books must die!" mindset she found the tiny screen inadequate. The end of the reading-experience sidebar is telling: "I read *practically the whole text* of *A Widow for a Year* using it and found the experience very easy." She blames John Irving for her failure to finish the book—it couldn't have been the reader!

The main article describes the marketplace. I wonder about the estimate that 50,000 e-book texts are available, but we've already seen that a short story can be called an e-book. So, too (I suspect) are each of Shakespeare's sonnets when stored as separate files. She tells us how ebooks will be integrated into library systems (using models akin to netLibrary), but fails to tell us how publishers will be coerced into accepting this normal-circulation model.

Naturally, library-friendly ebooks will make public libraries much more wonderful. When a reader requests a book not currently held, "the library can purchase it immediately and provide the reader with it within minutes." Thus, libraries can move from just-in-case collection-building (or having librarians *select* materials based on professional expertise) to just-in-time acquisition. She thinks this will all happen in "the next few years" and that "It really could be the end of the library world as we know it."

What Ormes seems to see as a dream strikes me as a nightmare, but as unlikely in any case, at least in "the next few years." Read it for yourself if you don't trust my interpretation.

URL: www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue26/ebook/

Note: much of the text in this article is duplicated in "An e-book primer"—which leaves out readability issues in discussing ebook disadvantages but offers less obvious anti-book bias than the *Ariadne* article. That "issue paper" is at www.earl.org.uk/policy/issuepapers/ebook.htm

Pat Holt on PoD

I've tended to lose track of Pat Holt, former book editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* who now works with the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association and has a fine online column, "Holt Uncensored." Her January 16, 2001 column is "The 'revolution' in print-on-demand."

She recounts her experience taking six PoD titles to Kepler's, a great Menlo Park bookstore that already encourages readers to try out little-known writers through a 20%-discount "Buyer's Choice" selection. She selected six out of a hundred or so PoD titles as "good enough to be sold in independent bookstores." Her suggested sign for a PoD sec-

tion: “None of them ‘great’ and most running the gamut from wonderful to occasionally irksome. But each POD book displayed here offers enough quality and originality, we feel, to warrant your attention. Welcome to the revolution.”

The books are an odd mix: a man (not a doctor) writing on “men surviving menopause”; a novel that’s not very polished but has its good points; a memoir from one of NOW’s founders; an education-reform treatise; a near-future novel; and a “legal thriller” that Holt found “quite engrossing” despite “bogged-down parts, a melodramatic beginning and an unfortunate bias against rent control.”

The results? PoD books are currently problematic for booksellers: They get 25 to 40% discounts but can’t return the books, while traditional print books come with 40% discounts and *are* returnable. They’re not professionally edited “and should be.” The prices aren’t great: \$15 to \$17 paperback, with one very short book at \$11. Putting them in their own section would make them less likely to sell—but there’s no publicity from the publishing house, no book tours, and very few reviews.

“Probably 99.9% or all POD trade books are going to be limited in scope, written for family and friends, and will never see the light of a bookstore day.” It’s mostly cheap vanity publishing—and maybe there’s nothing wrong with that. For the other 0.1%, she suggests that test marketing would show authors how to fix the myriad problems with PoD. Which leads to these two final paragraphs, which may reduce my enthusiasm for PoD:

Hey, wait a minute, one of these POD authors said to me after I broached the test-market idea: You mean I could work my head off and spend the money just to rewrite and recast my book so I could get BACK to traditional publishing and find a literary agent and accept a low advance and wait for a year or two and put up with mainstream arrogance because print-on-demand is NOT the dawn of the new revolution in publishing?

Yes, I say...I’m afraid that’s the way it looks to me.

Recommended. URL: www.holtuncensored.com. Look for issue #208.

Never Mind the Friggin’ E-Book...

It’s All About the Web.” That’s the title of a pointed brief article from Publishers Lunch. It has very little to do with ebooks as such, but a lot to do with effective Web marketing of books (of any sort) and, implicitly, how authors and “e-publishers” might bypass the traditional publishing industry. A couple of interesting tests from the article: Name your favorite book-related sites. How many of them were

publishers? Now, name the publisher of any of the last five books you’ve read.

Key points include the following:

- “Books are not a mass medium, they are a niche medium.” It’s about time someone pointed that out. “Wonderfully successful books can sell anywhere from 25,000 to 150,000 copies”—and professional books can do quite well with 1,500 to 5,000 copies.
- “Your customers aren’t who you think they are.” Publishers pay attention to key buyers at distributors, book chains, book clubs. They don’t know consumers—and most consumers don’t care much about publishers. But with Web-enabled bookselling, the intermediaries may not matter.

There are other points. This is publisher-oriented and ignores the role of the independent bookstore (which I hope and believe will continue), but it’s interesting reading.

URL: homepages.go.com/~caderbooks/friggin.htm, or try www.publisherslunch.com

Terminal Technology

That’s the article title; the author is Richard McKay of the San Jacinto College South Campus Library in Houston, TX, and the venue is *Transforming Traditional Libraries*, an unfortunately named new e-journal. It’s an interesting short piece, and while I might quibble with a few statements, it’s a thoughtful discussion—which, in the end, suggests that printed books will continue to be important, perhaps more for “leisure” (the humanities, narration, storytelling, enrichment—you know, the kind of things books are best for) than for Serious Life.

I don’t mean to belittle McKay’s argument. It’s well crafted and deserves reading. Now, about the name of the e-journal...

Recommended. URL: www.lib.usf.edu/~mdibble/ttl/termtechnology.html

Currents:

Embraced by Cold Dead Hands

I can’t resist citing the PR and call for presentations for Electronic Book 2001: Authors, Applications & Accessibility, the 4th Annual Electronic Book Conference cosponsored by NIST and NISO. Here’s a wonderful quote from this year’s publicity:

Authors: Stephen King, Agatha Christie, Warren Adler, and other leading authors have embraced the e-book.

Agatha Christie died in 1976. Is there a Ouija Board at NISO that allows her to announce her embrace of the ebook? Or has NIST developed extratemporal

endorsement capabilities to make this wonderment possible? We know Willy Shakespeare *loved* ebooks: Consider how often he's represented in them, at Project Gutenberg and elsewhere.

Bibs & Blather

- Last issue, I said something about “editorial policies” but mentioned one such “policy.” Here's another: “Crawford at Large” indicates both that I'm no longer “in the Corners” and that I'm going further afield than in previous venues. There are limits, and those limits may be influenced by reader feedback.
 - While everything in *Cites & Insights* reflects my own perspectives, those perspectives aren't always clear. (If you find my articles in *American Libraries*, *EContent* and *Online* to be clearer, consider the virtues of good editing!) Sometimes that's because I have mixed feelings about issues, devices, technologies, or whatever—which is usually the case. I'm using a new flag for certain essays, beginning with this issue: “Where I Stand.” In the long run, I hope that these essays will be thoughtful summaries of what I believe about a certain issue and why. And if you find that my apparent stance in October seems at odds with “Where I Stand” in April—times change and I never claimed to be consistent.
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Press Watch II: Commentary

Dvorak, John D., “Doing Napster math,” *PC Magazine* 20:9 (May 8, 2001), p. 81.

More than two years ago, Dvorak wrote off the recording industry: in two years, they'd be toast. Since Dvorak never makes mistakes, he's not about to admit he was dead wrong. Now he's convinced that the companies should cozy up to a “legal Napster.” “With good marketing, more services, and legal, free trading of all content 24 hours a day, I think maintaining 50 million users is possible”—at a suggested \$10 a month.

He'd pay it in a minute. Would 50 million other users pay that amount for compromised-quality songs? If so, “the service would gross \$6 billion annually”—which is almost half the current CD business. But that's a big if. For one thing, according to

Web metrics, nowhere near 50 million users actually use Napster once a month: that number was closer to 15 million *before* Napster began its rapid decline. I'd guess that no more than five million would sign up at \$10 a month, yielding around \$600 million a year. That's a fair amount of money, to be sure—but a long way from \$6 billion.

Meanwhile, he assumes that most people will still buy as many CDs—“Anyone who has experimented with Napster knows that tracking down all the good songs from your favorite artists is more trouble than it's worth.” Probably true, and one reason Dvorak's March 1999 prophecy of doom was off the mark. I think this business plan is also haywire.

One outfit claiming expertise on this sort of thing claims that four million students will pay \$20 a month for unlimited Napster use and that another eight million non-students will go for that number. This may be the same kind of projection that has millions of students happily paying for Questia.

Howard, Bill, “Lights! Camera! Learning curve!” *PC Magazine* 20:9 (May 8, 2001), p. 201.

Bill Howard's been working with the Compaq Presario 7000 MyMovieStudio PC, “the first PC that takes you all the way from capturing video...to creating a DVD you can play on virtually any home or PC DVD player.” So far, so good. He mentions the learning curve. He notes the sad truth: “Your PC is likely to crash at some point.” Given Windows' 4GB file-size limit, you have to assemble “raw” digital video in chunks: 4GB is only 18 minutes in uncompressed DV form, although it's close to two hours of DVD-quality MPEG-2.

My problem? Bill Howard notes that printed photos tend to fade over time. “That's one downside to analog imaging: as time goes by, colors shift, images fade, and you have only one original. Digital imaging solves these problems...” He closes:

Once you get a video-editing PC and succeed in making videos, you'll be thrilled because you've stopped the aging process of analog and the finite shelf life (one to two decades) of any tape-based medium. When you render your old analog tapes onto digital format, time stands still. People degrade, but your memories do not.

Any librarian who follows issues of digital preservation will be groaning or maybe getting aspirin. Howard's solution: slap that video on a DVD, and it's yours *forever*. Forty years from now, you can just slap that DVD into your...oops.

Bass, Steve, “Tame your in-box,” *PC World* 19:6 (June 2001), pp. 127-32.

Pitfalls aside, this article offers a good discussion of things you can do to reduce spam and cope with other email issues. He's right on the money about ISPs that filter for spam: although my real name appears on my AT&T WorldNet account, I've *never* received unwanted email there (cross fingers). That's apparently thanks to Brightmail, a set of filters also used by EarthLink and some others.

I got a little confused by Bass' justification of his "more than 150 spam filters in Eudora." In one paragraph, he says: "Wouldn't it be easier to delete unwanted e-mail manually? Not in the long run." Then, in the next, he says, "To cover my tuchis, I funnel filtered spam into a 'Possible Spam' folder and delete the junk manually every few days." I don't quite understand how deleting e-mail manually is faster than deleting e-mail manually. Maybe there's a nuance I'm missing.

The most bothersome suggestion in the article appears right after that second sentence above: "Experiment by creating a quick filter to block the domains of countries that spammers often use to route their junk." I guess if you never want to hear from anyone new in China, South Korea, or Chile that might seem sensible. I know there's at least one reader of *Cites & Insights* in South Korea and another in Hong Kong; I'm not quite willing to cut out whole chunks of the globe.

Pack, Thomas, "Digital rights management," *EContent* 24:3 (May 2001), pp. 22-7 (and later pieces in that issue).

Inclusion of this article in Press Watch II rather than Press Watch I isn't a put-down. I think the article is well done for its audience (the "content industry"). I also think that librarians and people who care about fair use, privacy, and just who controls the PC on your desktop should read it—*carefully*.

While it may be overstatement to assert that DRM in general is antithetical to fair use rights (that's not inherently true), it is true that the groups most interested in DRM don't always seem to care much about fair use or even ownership rights.

The most unnerving paragraph is a quote from Eric Scheirer of Forrester. Here's the first sentence: "One of the things that has been bandied about in the press is the idea that hard disk manufacturers are actually going to come into the loop and start using some kind of system that lets you download content only under appropriate circumstances." In other words, build publisher controls right into your PC. Give Scheirer credit: he wonders whether "we want third parties making rules for us about what we do with our own personal computers."

Read it carefully. Consider what's left out.

While you're at it, skip over to Steve Ginsberg's "Vulture values" (p. 54-55) and Greg Notess' "Joining the in-crowd" (p. 60-1)—and drop in on my own "I will buy no content before it's time" (p. 50-1) along the way. (No, that isn't a typo or a grammatical error. Read the column.) Not that the rest of the issue isn't worth reading, but I want to comment on little things in these particular columns.

Ginsberg discusses mergers and acquisitions in the "dotbomb" era. He closes his discussion of Cnet's acquisition of ZDnet with two sentences that struck me: "In January, it started selling and displaying larger ads placed not at the top of its pages, but in the middle. These ads offer more information than traditional banner ads." I suppose the new monster ads *could* offer "more information," but that's not what I see. I see ads that block all but a tiny remnant of copy; in the case of ZDNet, the effect was to convince me to remove ZDNet from my bookmark list. I used to go there once a day; I haven't been back since. Which may not make the ads a whole lot more effective.

Notess discusses Inktomi's movement toward pay-for-inclusion indexing. This is another article that merits careful reading. The problems with search-engine Web scans are certainly real enough—my own experience is that Google can take four to six weeks to refresh its "awareness" of my admittedly minor sites. But pay-for-inclusion and pay-for-"relevance" both raise serious questions, particularly when they're not obvious. (To Google's credit, its paid listings are clearly marked as such.) Notess hints at this problem toward the end of the article.

The Details

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

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