

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large

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Bibs & Blather

First Semiannual

Cites & Insights Gathering

Formal name, informal non-event. If you're at ALA Midwinter, free Monday between 4:30 and 5:45 p.m., drop by the sports bar at the Hilton. No reserved tables, no-host everything, but I plan to be there for informal conversation.

Plans for Volume 2

The first full year of *Cites & Insights* suffered from deadline creep and size creep—issues kept getting earlier and, eventually longer.

I stopped writing for a couple of weeks following the December 2001 issue, to leave time to prepare the index and because I suspected a break would do me good. Before the break, I asked my core readers—the 300-odd who subscribe to the “CICAL Alert” list—for their advice on a few aspects of *Cites & Insights*. Here are the questions and my interpretation of the answers received.

Would you rather see more “topical clumps” of annotated citations with commentary thrown in (e.g., Ebook, Copyright, Tasini, Filtering), with a consequent delay in some citations—or would you rather see most stuff [appear in] the four catchall sections (Press Watch I & II, Trends & Quick Takes, Product Watch) with more current citations?

More than half said “more clumps,” with the rest split between “both” and “more currency.”

What feature or specific article have you found most useful/most enjoyable, intriguing, readable

Useful: Press Watch I & II, ebooks, intellectual property, Tasini, Trends & Quick Takes, and Review Watch. Enjoyable/readable: Trends & Quick Takes, ebooks, copyright, Tasini.

What feature or specific article do you just skip over or find annoying? (And, as a separate question, what makes your eyes glaze over?)

Nobody seemed annoyed by anything but PC Values received several votes for “skip over,” along

with mentions of Product Watch and Review Watch. PC Values gets the MEGO (My Eyes Glaze Over) nod from a couple of readers, with one mention for Review Watch.

Here, then, are my hopes for Volume 2—based partly on reader feedback, partly on my own preferences (which turn out to be similar):

- I'm aiming for 16-page issues, but that may mean more than 12 issues.
- Expect as many topical clumps as in the last half of the year, but I'll cite important articles as soon as possible.
- Review Watch, Product Watch and PC Values appear less frequently, but I'll try to include at least one “PC-related” feature each issue.

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You're welcome to submit your own answers to the questions above. I do read all feedback (there's not a lot, but *much* more than I get from any other writing) and usually respond. If you don't want your comments to appear in *Cites & Insights*, make that clear in your letter. I honor such requests but otherwise assume that feedback is “letters to the editor.”

Self-Promoting Library Internet Thought Leader?

Think for yourself. Make up your own mind. Surely I don't need to say that to readers of *Cites & Insights*—or, for that matter, those who read *EContent* or *American Libraries*? Two disconcerting email conversations make me wonder.

One correspondent—almost certainly not a regular reader, but alerted to a recent discussion—referred to me as someone who has “spent so much effort promoting himself as a library internet thought leader.” My immediate reaction was, “Say what?” Then, in a dark hour, I pondered, “What if this person's right?”

My name appears in print fairly often, which I suppose could be called self-promotion: it's never occurred to me to write anonymously or under a pseudonym. I don't set out to arrange speeches and I've spent no money advertising *Cites & Insights*—but maybe even *doing* this zine constitutes self-promotion. Damned if I know. (“Probably,” one other correspondent might say, since I'm headed for the eternal flames by that person's lights.) I notify three library lists when new issues come out. I do *not* send out list notices whenever one of my print articles or columns appears; that, to me, would indeed be self-promotion. Not that there's anything wrong with self-promotion; too many librarians keep their talents hidden.

“Library Internet thought leader.” If that means I expect librarians to follow (i.e., understand) my thoughts about the Internet, I plead guilty. I try to write in plain English and not make my commentaries too obscure. If it means that I expect librarians to follow (i.e., *accept without independent thought and verification*) my opinions on the Internet, I plead innocent. I'm neither willing nor competent to make other people's decisions or determine their beliefs.

I don't believe any of you accept my opinions as the way things are. If you do, *stop it*. I'm not a guru nor a “thought leader.” I'm an opinionated observer with strong experience-based feelings in some areas, complex attitudes in others. I try to separate fact-based explanation from commentary—but I don't even expect you to accept my factual statements without verification. You're all adults, almost all better educated than I am and quite a few more intelligent. Act that way. If you don't like thinking for yourself, what are you doing in the library field?

Journal of Electronic Publishing 7:2: A “Press Watch I” Cluster

The *Journal of Electronic Publishing* is editorially slanted in favor of electronic publishing, but it's included first-rate articles—not all of them from true believers. The first issue of volume 7 (August 2001) struck me as generally first-rate. The same is true of 7:2 (December 2001).

All the articles discussed below deserve at least a glance, although I'm not equally enthusiastic about them all. Citations and brief comments appear in the apparent order of the issue itself. I don't include the full citation in each case, but I do include the

page count as printed in Internet Explorer 5.5. The second half of each citation is “*Journal of Electronic Publishing 7:2* (December 2001), www.press.umich.edu/jep/07-02/” In all but one case, you can get directly to the article by adding the first author's last name and “.html” to that string. The final piece uses a different model: add “benson0702.html”

Bailey, Charles W., Jr., “Evolution of an electronic book: the *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography*.” 20 pp.

Charles Bailey is one of the heroes of library-related electronic publishing: founder of the seminal Public-Access Computer Systems List and founder (and editor for seven years) of *Public-Access Computer Systems Review*. In 1992, Bailey also produced the first version of what is now the *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography* as an article in *PACS Review*.

After 25 revisions of this selective bibliography, Bailey transformed it into an electronic book (of sorts) in 1996. It continues as a searchable Web site and HTML document, but it's also available as a Word document or PDF file. Currently, Bailey updates that master file every other month. In addition, he's started the “Scholarly Electronic Publishing Weblog,” updated almost daily. It's on my short list of Weblogs for daily checking.

The article provides a history of the bibliography and some fascinating statistics. Bailey's work doesn't exist in a vacuum: in calendar 2000, there were more than 217,000 file requests and 215,000 page requests, and over the past few years more than 30 countries (outside the U.S.) have accounted for more than 1,000 file requests each.

Well worth reading—and the bibliography continues to be a worthwhile tool.

Willinsky, John and Larry Wolfson, “The indexing of scholarly journals: a tipping point for publishing reform?” 21 pp.

Apparently, this is the only refereed paper in this issue—and it's the one I find most troublesome. Willinsky and Wolfson argue for a universal open-source journal index, with the indexing done by authors themselves (including subject indexing) and the index assembled by automatic harvesting across the Web. We are told of the “inevitability” of digital journal publishing. We are told that metadata “greatly increases the accuracy and precision of online searches” in a context that seems to deny the existence of metadata prior to Dublin Core. Some of us in the library field believe that metadata's been around as long as cataloging, certainly as long as USMARC, and we're aware that almost all journal indexes use metadata schemes—else how could they

support author, title, and subject searches? The worth of professional indexing and controlled subject vocabularies seems to be covered in the following sentence:

We appreciate that [authors] will not be as skilled as professional trained librarians, but the benefit of self-indexing is how it will encourage authors to think more about how they position their work, in terms of audience, and how they integrate their into their field [*sic*], since that field will be far more present for their work: only a click or two away.

Maybe I shouldn't try to judge this paper. I work for the Research Libraries Group as lead analyst for Eureka. Roughly half the use of Eureka is for journal indexes. I'm acutely aware of the expense of providing adequate computer support for indexes, the evidence that there is no one best methodology for retrieving and displaying all forms of bibliographic data, the benefits of coherent professional assignment of subjects, and the problems that arise when journal indexes become large and heterogeneous. I'm also nervous about Grand Solutions—and a single universal journal index, paid for by diverting budgets currently used for indexing services, is as Grand a Solution as I've seen lately.

Worth reading and thinking about, even if I suspect that this magic bullet won't fire.

Sosteric, Mike, Yuwei Shi and Olivier Wenker, "Electronic first: the upcoming revolution in the scholarly communication system." (21 pp.)

You have to love an article with "revolution" in the title and a head quote from 1965. This particular paper is part somewhat-misleading economic model and part sensible discussion of realistic ways to streamline scholarly publishing. The core theme—that scholarly articles should *first* be designed for proper electronic communication, after which it's trivially easy to produce print forms if desired—is worth stating.

The biggest flaw, to my mind, is one that's common to calls for electronic journal publishing: the claim that printing and paper costs are *eliminated* in the process. They aren't, not unless some transformation causes us to read from the screen. They're distributed, not eliminated: each reader incurs her own printing costs.

I also miss any sense of the cost of computers and networks or the problems of assuring long-term retrievability of purely electronic journals.

That said, most of the authors' points are well-taken, certainly including their suspicions about the claimed *higher* costs of e-journal publishing and their suggestion that smaller niche journals *need* "electronic first" methodologies to survive. Worth reading

and thinking about. I don't see an argument for a Grand Solution in this article; I see suggestions of better ways to achieve a complex set of goals.

Poe, Marshall, "Note to self: print monograph dead; invent new publishing model." (7 pp.)

A charmer that I almost hesitate to summarize; I can't do justice to Poe's prose and offhand expression of tough realities. Note that "print monograph" and "book" are not at all the same thing, and Poe isn't suggesting the Death of Print. He is suggesting that short-run scholarly monographs are in trouble and that scholars who are primarily interested in reaching their natural audience can do it themselves, cheaply and professionally.

We're talking Print on Demand, PDF, the ridiculous ease of formatting a book-length document in Word—and, to my delight, Harvard's Widener Library's refreshing attitude for dealing with this kind of publication. "No problem."

Well-written, a fast read, and Poe makes more useful points in seven pages than most authors do in 20. Highly recommended.

Benson, Philippa Jane, "The more things change...: paper is still with us." (8 pp.)

This is, in essence, a truncated version of a presentation intended for the Fourth International Peer Review Congress. (Who knew there were congresses on peer review?)

I'm not sure about her assertion that "With improved technology, legibility of computer-displayed text is no longer a critical factor for the usability of electronic information." The citations are from 1991, 1994, and 1997—and, while *legibility* may not be a factor, *readability* most certainly is.

Never mind. She's saying that print isn't going away (just as print can't be the only medium) and gives strong reasons why—having to do with reading modes and the extent to which reading and writing are overlapping or simultaneous activities. She includes recommendations for improving the usability of electronic forms of scientific information.

Ebook Watch

What a time for several varieties of "ebooks"! There's too much ground to cover in one issue.

Epublisher Shutdowns

Was iPublish ever a plausible business for Time Warner (now AOL Time Warner)? The goal was ambitious when Warner announced the "imprint"

two years ago: “not only [to] sell original ebooks but to discover talent and introduce new authors via ebooks to the reading community” (M.J. Rose, *Wired News*, December 4, 2001).

Two of the three major science fiction magazines have iPublish ads on the back covers of October through December issues, with the tagline “Hope for today’s writers.” They’re clever ads, each featuring a typed manuscript with either a Post-it note or red notation from the publisher. For example, *Moby Dick* has this note: “Dear Mr. Melville, Whale books don’t sell. How about an alien? Or a dinosaur? Or an alien dinosaur?” *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain: “Mr. Clemens: We don’t care how many different names you send this under—If you don’t have an agent, we won’t read it!!” And, on the fifth and last page of O. Henry’s *Gift of the Magi*: “That’s it? I’ve read longer grocery lists! Write another 250 pgs. and resubmit.”

The ad copy assures you that, variously, “At iPublish.com your work won’t [get returned just because a publisher thinks it’s too long or too short] [be turned down just because it doesn’t follow a trend] [get overlooked just because you don’t have an agent]. If you submit your work, it will be read. The best works will be published as eBooks. And if your eBook is successful, we’ll publish it in print.”

Or not. The division burned through \$13 million (peanuts in dot.com terms) over two years, had 29 employees—and, during the six months (since May 2001) of its open-door policy, managed to pick up *nine authors* deemed worth publishing in ebook and print-on-demand form. (Others were published through the traditional route, being submitted and represented by an agent.) The Authors Guild condemned iPublish because the contract for newly-published authors included an option on the author’s next book, with a limit of a \$5,000 advance. That’s an odd objection, as J. Knight points out in “iPublish iPerishes” (posted at eBookWeb on December 5, 2001): “In other words, the worst thing that could happen to an author with iPublish would be, God forbid, that his work got published and he became wildly successful!”

Knight saw a confusion within Warner as to goals and means, with the result that iPublish looked like self-publishing to many observers. The publisher apparently fell down on promotion for early titles. Mostly, however, iPublish had high overhead and low sales.

Laurence Kirshbaum, chairman of AOL Time Warner’s books division, said it was costing them \$50,000 for each new book they acquired through the complex iPublish process—while they buy books from agents for \$10,000 to \$20,000. The business

was doomed. (Additional information for this section came from a December 4 story in PW Newline, a service of *Publishers Weekly*.)

Then there’s MightyWords. Started by FatBrain and mostly owned by Barnes & Noble, it began with a wonderful idea (and a high-profile set of big-name essays on the Bill of Rights). Provide electronic distribution for “midrange” documents—nonfiction that’s longer than an article and shorter than a book, fiction that’s shorter than a book and doesn’t fit into one of the few remaining fiction magazines. Charge authors a buck a month for storage and half of author-set prices for downloads.

Later, they abandoned that wide-open approach to focus on business-to-business documents acquired through other publishers or formal submissions. I thought the operation might still have a chance in this narrower niche. By December 2001, MightyWords.com had 30,000 documents but only a thousand exclusive documents.

At its peak, MightyWords sales reached \$50,000 a month (according to a December 13 *Publishers Weekly* story; an AP story says 50,000 *units* a month). The company had a staff of 23. Even without the costs of operating a large online distribution system, those numbers don’t work. MightyWords had plenty of capital (18 months of remaining working capital, according to the CEO) but didn’t see business growing. Go to the MightyWords.com site and there’s an FAQ stating that the site will cease operations as of January 12, 2002, that no part of it is for sale (including customer lists), that royalties for the final quarter of 2001 will be delayed to include the last 12 days of business, and offering routes for authors to ask Barnes & Noble Digital to consider distribution of their documents.

This is a shutdown, not a bankruptcy. Employees receive severance packages. Authors receive royalties. Readers? As long as you keep using the computer you opened a MightyWords document on, you’ll have access to the document. Change computers and you’re out of luck.

Random House also shut its AtRandom ebook imprint in November but will continue to publish ebooks.

E-Library Developments

“Ebook Watch” for November 2001 (edited in mid-October) had a last-minute note on netLibrary’s problems. There’s been an unsteady stream of reports since then; sources for this section include *The Daily Camera*, Boulder’s newspaper (netLibrary is in Boulder, CO), LJ Academic Newswire, PW Newline, the *Rocky Mountain News*, the *Librarian’s*

eBook Newsletter from the University of Rochester, *American Libraries*, netLibrary and OCLC. Here's what I read and what I make of it:

- On October 13, 2001, netLibrary announced that it was for sale, that "Sept. 11 events" caused funding attempts to fall through, and that employees who stayed on would all earn a flat \$360 per week. (netLibrary's Marge Gammon had a great way to put this: "We're all making executive pay now.") The company had raised almost \$110 million in venture capital and once employed some 475 people. It laid off employees in January, March, and April—larger numbers each time, leading to a staff of 230 on October 13.
- An October 15 message said that "the majority of employees" returned to work and that netLibrary access continued. Four days later, Jay Jordan clarified the OCLC/netLibrary escrow agreement, an essential aspect of netLibrary's "permanent access" sales.
- The *Librarian's eBook Newsletter* for October 2001 noted that netLibrary's woes "were not without some foreshadowing." In addition to substantial layoffs in April there's the matter of collection growth: "Between January and April of this year, netLibrary added on average 1,480 new titles each month. Since May, that average has dropped to only 480 new titles per month."
- In early November, netLibrary royalty checks to university presses were bouncing. Purdue University Press received a check for less than \$100—but the check was no good. The press' director was also concerned about the escrow agreement (without which no competent library would have purchased permanent licenses): "My content agreement with netLibrary allows for their distribution of our books via the Internet. It doesn't allow for the burning of CD-ROMs." Here's a twist to give pause to anyone who holds permanent licenses: PUP's agreement allows the press to withdraw the content from netLibrary after three years. Another story noted some of the creditors listed in netLibrary's bankruptcy filing: \$91,000 to Wiley, \$52,000 to Houghton, \$43,000 to ABC-CLIO—and \$3 million to Innovative Interfaces, "roughly the alleged amount of revenue netLibrary took in...between March 1999 and March 2000." Total debts amount to somewhere between \$9 and \$9.5 million.
- On November 15, OCLC offered to purchase "substantially all the assets of netLibrary and assume certain netLibrary liabilities" for what

turned out to be \$10 million (including a loan of up to \$2.4 million so that netLibrary could keep operating). At that point, netLibrary was down to 127 employees at \$9 an hour. A *Rocky Mountain News* report noted that netLibrary was once valued at \$450 million and might sell for "about 2 percent of that." That same report says that netLibrary has 7,000 library customers "but has never had a profitable quarter."

- As of this writing, the most recent item is from the December 4 *Daily Camera*: the bankruptcy court approved the OCLC loan and a procedure to sell the company—a procedure that doesn't assure a sale to OCLC. Oliver Kimberly, netLibrary's finance manager, blamed a fall in sales on the bankruptcy situation.
- David Dorman (in the December 2001 *American Libraries*) commented, "It is also clear the company's business model of selling perpetual access, which involves perpetual cost, for a one-time fee is not sustainable in the long run and will have to be abandoned by the eventual buyer."
- My own comments? OCLC does seem like the best possible buyer from the viewpoint of netLibrary customers. On the other hand—and this is where it gets difficult—I think there's another reason (besides the bankruptcy) that netLibrary sales have been falling. While some libraries and consortia reported reasonable use of the netLibrary titles they purchased, others reported absurdly low usage levels. If the cost per circulation for netLibrary titles turns out to be several times as high as for a physical collection, one has to wonder whether the model makes sense for libraries. That's a big "if" and I don't know of any large-scale survey of netLibrary use levels and relative costs.

Elsewhere, a November 19 *Houston Chronicle* article notes that Questia cut its workforce in half—for the second time this year. From 280 employees in May 2001, the firm is down to 68 "because relatively few high school and college students have been willing to make monthly payments for the service." The company raised \$21 million over the summer and fall. A librarian posting on Web4Lib raised the question that many of us have had about Questia: why on earth would students lay out \$20 a month to get what they can get for free from libraries?

What about ebrary? I see two items, one from M.J. Rose's November 20 column at *Wired News*, another from the October 19 *Denver Business Journal* (originally from the *Milwaukee Business Journal*). The Rose item notes new publishers partnering with ebrary, joining a list of "more than 80 publishers,"

but notably fails to offer any total number of items available through ebrary. The other article is a bit chilling from an author's perspective. It begins by noting the university presses that are working with ebrary and the way the service works—you browse free, but pay \$0.15 to \$0.25 a page for printing or \$0.25 to \$0.50 a page to cut-and-paste text for use elsewhere. Here's the chilling part:

Long term, ebrary sets the stage for print-on-demand applications, said Warnock. "The real potential for this is that...the copyright would never go away," Warnock said. "From a publisher's standpoint, it could represent a means to keep a book in print indefinitely."

It isn't that copyright would never go away—contemporary works already have copyright protection for the life of the author plus 70 years. It's that authors would never *regain* copyright (or the assignment of certain rights) from publishers because reversion clauses would never kick in. That may be great for publishers but it's appalling for authors.

Ebook Appliances

First the Franklin eBookman. I've noticed occasional ads for this \$99-\$150 device, in one of Amazon's print flyers and in two inserts for Longs drugstores. When I've visited local Longs outlets, I don't *see* the eBookman anywhere—but at least they're advertised. With one odd and consistent quirk in every ad from every source: You *never* see the eBookman displaying etext. It's always showing a PDA-like menu—and, of course, the eBookman is as much a cheap PDA with a bigger-than-Palm screen as it is an ebook appliance.

How well is the eBookman doing? According to *Publishers Weekly* (as recounted in a wonderfully mean-spirited story by J. Knight on eBookWeb, "Whither Franklin?"), not very. "In the second quarter of 2001, ending September 30, Franklin paid out more for returned eBookmans (eBookmen?) than it took in. More than a million dollars' worth." Knight goes on to discuss the Franklin investment in MobiPocket, "maker of cross-platform eBook software that runs on any PDA." That alliance adds some 4,000 books to the eBookman stock, but Knight makes it sound like fairly thin gruel. He also notes that MobiPocket Reader is an unlikely candidate—most publishers are releasing downloadable books in Microsoft Reader and Adobe Reader formats. Knight doesn't give Franklin's appliances much of a chance. New \$50 versions with smaller screens? "The price is good. The size isn't." On the other hand, he disagrees with a quote from the president of MobiPocket, "People will not read on dedicated reading

devices." Here's Knight's take: "Oh? The users of the original Rocket reader would disagree with Brethes, I'm sure." He goes on—but I have to wonder: If that's true, then how come almost nobody but libraries *purchased* the Rocket reader, particularly for their own use?

Which brings us to "the Amazing eBook" (as RCA labels the REB1100 and 1200). I've been going through all 20 (or so) ad inserts in each Sunday's paper looking for the flood of advertising that must accompany expectations that REB 1100s and REB 1200s could garner significant sales this year. From mid-September through December 8, I saw absolutely no ads for either reader from any of the electronics, book, music, computer, or office supply stores. Zip. Finally, on December 9, OfficeMax advertised the RCA REB1100 for \$150, with "\$300 worth of books and periodicals" thrown in free. (Thomson/RCA dropped suggested retail prices on October 30: \$149 for the REB1100, \$399 for the REB1200.) On December 16, there are no ads for *any* ebook appliance.

RCA's Web site offers details on that \$300 offer. You get to choose two of six "premier selections" such as Margaret Truman's *Murder in Havana*, three of seven titles such as Ram Charan's *What the CEO Wants You to Know*, and two of five titles such as Maeve Binchy's *Evening Class*. You choose 20 "classic selections" from a list of roughly three dozen—all of these public-domain titles such as *Little Women*. Finally, you get sample runs of ten periodicals. About the time that Thomson lowered reader prices, Barnesandnoble.com stopped selling Gemstar eBook titles—now, you buy them directly from Gemstar or, oddly, through Powells.com. Finally, recent postings on PUBLIB raise questions about REB reliability—and Gemstar has no responsibility for the hardware.

Most of you know that I think dedicated ebook appliances make no sense for the general market. Gemstar continues to use a quarter page in each issue of *TV Guide* for an eBook ad that doesn't include a Web address, a phone number, or any information except the tagline for the eBook. Further comment may be superfluous.

Brief Items

- A November 7 item at DMNews.com discusses Scholastic Inc's novel approach to ebooks. Three titles have appeared so far, each with images and sound, each as an earlier version of a print book. Pricing and distribution are aimed to promote the print version, not to make profits from the ebook. So, for example, *A Time for Courage: The Suffragette Diary of Kathleen Bowen*

sold for \$1.95 through Thanksgiving and \$9.95 thereafter; the print book will appear in March 2002. The item includes the usual comments about lack of sales and, of course, it being “only a matter of time” before Kids These Days make ebooks big business.

- We all know that CD-ROM and Web-based encyclopedias represent one kind of ebook that took over already, knocking print encyclopedias out of the market. Or do we? A December 13 press release says that *Encyclopædia Britannica* will appear in a brand-new, heavily revised 2002 edition, the first print revision in four years. \$1,295 for the 32-volume set. Says Dale Hoiberg, senior VP and editor: “Despite the benefits of electronic publishing, books remain a remarkably efficient platform for the storage and retrieval of information.”
- In November, I mentioned Scott Adams’ decision to publish an ebook even though he’d never used one. He wrote a charming column on November 23 about his experience; I downloaded it from the *International Herald Tribune* Web site. *God’s Debris* is, according to Adams, the best-selling ebook in the world for 2001. “That’s the good news. The bad news is that it sold only 4,500 copies.” By comparison, his first print book (*The Dilbert Principle*) sold some two million copies. Adams promoted his ebook through his Dilbert Newsletter (360,000 subscribers) and *Dilbert.com* (one million unique visitors a month), and he did some media interviews. He learned a lot. He doesn’t think ebooks will ever be more than 5% of the market for pleasure reading—but, as he notes, that’s still a sizable market. He made a few bucks—and convinced his publisher that it’s worth publishing this first non-Dilbert book in hardcopy form.
- Tom Williams posted a piece on eBookWeb November 12, 2001: “Your good name is up for grabs.” It speaks to a topic that’s bothered me as well—the extent to which print on demand services become vanity publishers. Williams runs Venture Press. He, along with other publishers and agents, got a “pitch” from Xlibris offering to pay him for referring rejected authors to them—after all, one man’s trash is another’s treasure. That bothered him, but not as much as iUniverse, which “publishes” any document that comes in digitally with a \$99 fee—and then sells PoD books back to the authors for 50% to 80% of the full price. He believes that this operation—almost the classic definition of vanity publishing—is a major source of revenue

for iUniverse, and he feels that it’s ruining the reputation of PoD. Interesting.

M.J. Rose

M. J. Rose’s ebook column on *Wired News* continues to offer a variety of news, perspectives, and tips you might otherwise miss. I’ve referred to some recent coverage in other discussions; here are more items.

- October 16: Do “sponsored” novels make sense? If it’s Fay Weldon and *The Bulgari Connection*—where Bulgari paid Weldon for product placement but the book appeared as a standard novel—it may be an ethical issue (although product placement on TV and in movies is standard practice). If you’re sending out a free novel serialized as email, as a way of promoting some other service, it’s less problematic. Jesse Kornbuth is doing that with *The Dark Nile*, told over 40 days of email (and in the narrative form of email). In another case of ebooks as promotion, Stealth Press is offering a free PDF “e-anthology” of Halloween-related stories and has offered other free ebooks to promote its print books: Stealth doesn’t sell ebooks.
- October 23: Rose offers some other perspectives on the Xlibris offer that Tom Williams referred to. Xlibris scrapped the program after a week; literary agents were particularly outraged. In other news, two media firms put \$10 million into InsideSessions.com, which offers a \$70 course for unpublished authors including tips from best-selling authors.
- November 6: Simon & Schuster opens its own ebook store after grumbling about Barnes & Noble Digital’s decision to publish original ebooks. How many of your favorite books can you identify as Simon & Schuster imprints without looking at them? The surprising story this week is an instabook, *Because We Are Americans: What We Discovered on September 11, 2001* (Warner). Portions of the book are “excerpts of what was posted on message boards and in chat rooms by millions of AOL subscribers”—used without notification or request. That’s absolutely legal based on AOL’s terms of service: they own the content. (I’ve used excerpts from list postings in *Cites & Insights* without always requesting permission, so I’m not pointing fingers.)
- November 27: there may be a sixth *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* book, based on the contents of Douglas Adams’ hard drive found after his death. The Open eBook Forum plans a campaign promoting the wonders of ebooks: “Open

an eBook: Discover New Worlds of Reading.” The campaign pushes the virtues of etext (all else being equal) such as interactivity and enlarged fonts, but also claims that ebooks advance literacy, one of those iffy claims.

Trends and Quick Takes

So this is It?

Thanks to Huey Lewis for the title and Dean Kamen for unveiling the great mystery. No thanks to Steve Jobs and John Doerr for hype well beyond the call of duty or to *Time* for devoting lavish “deep investigative” coverage to this story. By now, you’ve probably heard: It, or Ginger, is the Segway Human Transporter—a fancy scooter.

No Stirling engine using hydrogen as a fuel: it runs on batteries. It’s a heavy one-person scooter with no provisions for, say, carrying more than one bag of groceries. Since it’s powered, you won’t get the exercise you would using a bike, an unpowered scooter, or (gasp) your shoes on the sidewalk.

If anything is revolutionary about the Segway, it’s the sheer amount of technology supposedly packed into the device. According to a *Wired News* story, it has 10 microprocessors and a bevy of gyroscopes so that you won’t fall off and it will go “exactly where the rider wants it to go via sensors that monitor the rider’s subtle body movements and center of gravity.” The Segway goes 12 miles an hour (or 15, depending on which source you read).

You can readily go 12 miles an hour on a \$300 bicycle, burning calories in the process and using bike lanes in many areas. You’ll *never* have to stop to charge batteries and won’t be limited to 11 miles total travel. I suppose you could spend \$3,000 on a bicycle (that’s what a future model of the Segway’s supposed to cost)—but not for typical city use.

One of the best writeups I’ve seen came from Rob Walker in *Slate* (posted 12/4/2001). He notes *The Daily Show*’s suggestion that the Segway could be improved by adding two more wheels, a large compartment for several people to sit in, and an engine capable of highway-compatible speeds.

Far be it from me to say the Segway is pointless. The hype was over the top, however. Steve Jobs’ idea that cities would be designed around an electric scooter? Where are they designing new cities these days (where people can afford \$3,000 scooters), and in particular where are they designing cities such that people all live within two or three miles of where they work and shop, but too far away for walking? One report says that Kamen thinks his big market is overseas, maybe in China and similar ar-

reas. \$3,000 “fast walkers” in China, where people already use bicycles? Really?

A few days after I wrote the above, a Weblog pointed me to a *Salon* article by Christopher Orlet (posted 12/7), “Segway’s assault on walking.” While Walker is bemused by the Segway, Orlet sees it as a “slothful step in the wrong direction.” He believes that, if successful, the Segway won’t reduce transportation problems, car use or air pollution—but it will reduce ordinary walking, and that’s almost certainly a bad thing.

He points out the irony here. Most of Dean Kamen’s patents are for medical devices (including the heart stent that keeps Dick Cheney going)—and, all things considered, the Segway could increase occurrence of heart disease.

This is a downbeat article. “Americans, in general, are loath to walk, which may help to explain why 27 percent of us are obese.” A nationwide survey shows a 42% drop in walking trips over the last 20 years—partly because so many suburbs don’t have anything worth walking to, partly because (he claims) most city downtowns are full of skyscrapers. That last bit suggests a Right Coast perspective; a stroll around downtown Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, New Orleans, Philadelphia—or Mountain View, for that matter—certainly doesn’t show a sterile set of skyscrapers with no ground-floor retail.

Orlet overstates his case—but it’s pretty clear that Kamen wants to replace walking. “When you stand on this machine it kind of walks for you.” Or how about this: “[A walk that] used to take you half an hour will take you 7, 8, 9 minutes.”

Orlet closes with a plea for more sidewalks and walking trails, “the reappearance of street-side shops and sidewalk cafés that once made urban walking enjoyable,” and a note of sadness that Kamen is working to make walking obsolete rather than trying to create something to improve the quality of life. I wonder just which urbanities Orlet walks in that have no shops or cafés (LA, maybe?)—but his story is an interesting counterpoint to *Time*’s hype.

Does VideoCD Stand a Chance?

If you’re watching a prerecorded movie at home in the Far East, there’s a good chance the image is sub-VHS quality. That silver disc isn’t a DVD; it’s a VideoCD, video recorded on a CD using inferior MPEG-1 encoding and extremely high compression. Despite some projections, VideoCD never caught on in the United States as a prerecorded medium.

Many (most?) DVD players sold in the U.S. will also play VideoCD, as will all DVD-ROM drives (and most modern CD-ROM drives).

So what? So this: If you have home movies on videocassette, chances are VideoCD would provide acceptable quality—with the convenience and durability of CD. Bob Starrett offers an interesting look at the possibilities in “American recordings: can CD-R bring VideoCD back home?” in the October 2001 *EMedia*. He suggests that VideoCD could be useful for training and educational applications as well as home movies. The discs are cheap (they’re just CD-Rs), the recorders are cheap, reasonable video software is becoming available, and for some purposes the quality is good enough.

There’s also Super VideoCD—near-DVD quality, but (as a direct result) only 15 minutes or so on a CD-R. Maybe that’s all you need.

One warning: while your DVD player may have the software to play VideoCD, it might not have the hardware (the second laser) for CD-R. That’s changing, to be sure.

A Gaggle of Google Items

ZDNet reports that Google is testing a “voting” feature that “could eventually let Web surfers help determine the popularity of sites ranked by the company’s search engine.” Part of the story is about that system, but the more interesting part quotes marketers and “search result optimizers” on their ongoing efforts to, um, “enhance” Google’s rankings. These companies use “legitimate methods to get top billing for a site.” I’m not sure what such methods could be. “Marketers say that cloaking and other tactics can be useful and legitimate tools in certain cases.” Again, I’m not sure what “legitimate” means, although the discussion goes on to say that “cloaked pages” can “get a highly relevant site a top slot in search results and...keep outsiders...from understanding how it landed there.”

Now I’m puzzled. If a page is *legitimately* at the top of a search result, shouldn’t it be obvious how it got there? I understand why some metasearch engines turn up no results at all for “cites & insights” or don’t show this site: I have no interest in paying for placement or playing tricks with HTML.

The Cnet report was puzzling in another way. Google keeps expanding its index and the availability of Web resources by indexing non-HTML pages. First it was PDF; now it’s a group of popular document and spreadsheet formats. Such sites, open to any Web browser and without a “robots.txt” file asking not to be crawled, can now be seen—either launched in the appropriate programs or viewed as (sometimes-sloppy) HTML.

What’s the problem? I would say there isn’t one. You shouldn’t mount unencrypted documents on

the open Internet if you don’t want other people to look at them. No competent firm should store passwords or credit card numbers in unencrypted, unprotected spreadsheets on the open Internet.

Some of those quoted in this November 28 item say they do, and that Google is somehow to blame for exposing them. One CTO faults Google for offering the feature to users “without thinking about security.” Others point out that crackers can certainly crawl the Web and read spreadsheet files—and they don’t stop at robots.txt files!

Here’s another story, posted at *Media Life* on November 30: “Like Google? Try AllThe Web.” The story suggests that AllTheWeb beats out Google—it’s “faster...and the information it pulls up is more up-to-date.” The story seems to be suggesting that it’s reasonable to use search engines for *news* searches, which boggles my mind. I’m also boggled by the quotes in this story. Two people are quoted. Both of them work for “positioning” companies—what I call “search result optimizers” above.

I try to avoid cynicism, but it’s tempting to say that “optimizers” dislike Google because it’s so difficult to trick. Otherwise, why would these people have any opinion at all? But both people quoted say that AllTheWeb is “fresher” and therefore better, putting Google “at risk.”

The example used in the story may be telling. Search for “Prince Charles” on Google and the first site will be the official Web site. Isn’t that what a Web search engine *should* provide? But AllTheWeb brings up “a story, filed [yesterday], of a Latvian teenager saying she was still unrepentant for an incident a month ago in which she hit the prince across the face with a carnation...”

The name “AllTheWeb” suggests, well, all the Web. The story makes a big deal of the claimed 600 million Web pages indexed by the service—without ever mentioning the size of Google’s index (more than twice as large).

I did a few offhand comparisons on December 4. For the exact phrase “Cites & Insights,” Google yields 1,870 hits (the first of which is the *current* cical.home.att.net home page, and that’s the cached copy as well). AllTheWeb brings up the same page as the first of 118 hits.

Other comparisons weren’t quite so one-sided. “Walt Crawford” brings up 1,670 on Google, 1,006 on AllTheWeb—but, for some reason, the first hit on ATW is the *Cites & Insights* home page (Google provides my home page first). iPublish is in the news, since AOL Time Warner just announced a shutdown. Google yields 7,730 hits—and a news link above the hits. ATW yields 5,561 hits—and a news link (to the same story) above the hits.

“Prince charles” brings up 117,000 hits on Google, the first of which is the official site. On ATW, you get 59,756 and a news story—but the first hit is a site that has nothing to do with the prince. “Ariel rlg” (as words, not a phrase) yields 2,300 hits on Google, 1,744 on ATW—but while Google points directly to the Ariel home page, ATW points to the RLG home page, one level higher.

Finally, I tried “ssca.” Yes, ATW brings up a news item that Google doesn’t (although it’s not really news), followed by 4,980 hits. Google? 15,100 hits—and the top ones seemed better tuned.

Google is not the be-all and end-all of search engines. But when people whose business it is to “influence” result rankings make a point of attacking Google, I’m inclined to believe that Google has a lot going for it.

Here’s another, earlier, perspective on Google vs. AllTheWeb at *Linux Journal*’s Web site. Doc Searls posted a Web Watch piece on November 20 “taking a look behind the recent hype over AllTheWeb.” Google is a Linux hero since it runs on more than 10,000 PCs running Linux. I loved a quote from Jason Kottke: “Google is the default command-line interface to the Web.” Now *there’s* a Linux quote.

Searls notes all the recent press that AllTheWeb’s been getting, particularly for its “news” retrieval. And he does more comparative tests. Google had 30% more hits on “Linux Journal” with the site itself as the first hit; given the news features of the site, that may negate ATW’s fairly recent news items. One apparently-important personal name yielded almost twice as many Google hits as ATW hits. Then he did a toughie: “Geeks on the half shell,” a piece that appeared on the *Linux Journal* site on November 7. Google had it (and no other hits); ATW didn’t. His commentary (after getting PR contacts from ATW):

If you’re going to send out press releases to editors bragging about how fast you crawl news sites, at least crawl the ones you’re pitching.

Gizmo Fatigue Redux

A November 20 Reuters piece may not add much to my December 2001 item on “gizmo fatigue,” but it offers some evidence of reportorial bias. The basic story is similar: consumers have had enough, and that’s part of the reason spending is down. In this case, product complexity is seen as the villain.

Here’s the kicker in mid-article:

There also are the technophobes looking for a face-saving way to thwart the electronics revolution taking place around them.

Bwahaha. If I don’t buy a PDA because I don’t have much use for one, I’m a *technophobe* trying to “thwart the electronics revolution.” If you keep your cell phone for two or three years, you’re a *technophobe*, causing Gartner Group to reduce its projection of phone and PDA sales in 2005 from 700 million units to a mere 450-550 million. Join the crowd.

Paul Saffo, who even this report can’t accuse of being a technophobe, admits, “there is no such thing as casual use of a personal digital assistant.” If you’re not deadly serious about a PDA, why bother?

Come the revolution, you *will* buy a new cell phone every 18 months, and you will like it. Come the revolution, you *will* sign up for ubiquitous computing—in your clothes, on your belt, in the air, everywhere. That’s how revolutions work. Object, and you’re a technophobe. After all, it’s from Reuters: it’s news, not propaganda.

“LCD impacting CRT monitor sales”

That’s the heading on a one-paragraph news item in the November 2001 *EMedia*. It may be true—CRT sales were down somewhat in early 2001 and LCD display sales continue to increase—but the second half of the paragraph provides critical perspective.

Possibly because of sharply reduced prices, LCD displays did sell at a record rate in the second quarter of 2001: 650,000 units were shipped in the U.S. Meanwhile, CRT sales for that quarter in the U.S. were a mere eight million.

The headline may be correct (although, in a slumping economy, that’s not absolutely clear), but there’s a big difference between “impacting” and “devastating.” For each LCD shipped, more than a dozen CRTs were sold.

I believe traditional CRTs will eventually fade to niche status in the display market (although it’s not clear that LCDs will be the eventual winner)—but that’s still going to take a while. Larger monitors are gaining favor (20% of CRT sales were 18"-viewable), and larger LCDs are still brutally expensive.

Faster Wireless Networks

Last April, I cited a group review that showed that 802.11b wireless networking was beginning to catch on. Then, as now, Bluetooth was just around the corner—but now, there’s a substantial challenger. To wit, 802.11a: a wireless standard potentially offering 54Mbps speeds rather than the 10Mbps of 802.11b.

PC Magazine for December 11, 2001 includes a review of one of the first 802.11a setups, from Proxim Harmony. The tests showed real-world transmission rates just about five times those of 802.11b (and about half the theoretical maximum).

Perhaps more to the point, 802.11a operates in a frequency range and with a methodology that makes it less prone to disruption than 802.11b, which can suffer from interference from microwave ovens, cordless phones, and Bluetooth devices.

Copyproof CDs: the Sad Story that Won't Go Away

You have to give RIAA, MPAA, and AAP credit: they seem impervious to facts, learning curves, and hits they take to their reputation by treating customers as thieves. Here's an AP story posted November 30, shocking for what the reporter accepts as fact but more shocking for statements from participants.

The theme is that more record publishers are producing "copyproof" CDs. One from Universal Music Group will carry a sticker stating that it's copy-protected and, supposedly, stores will allow returns of opened CDs that don't work right. When a Natalie Imbruglia release in the UK came out copy-protected, consumers rose up in arms: it not only wouldn't play on some CD-ROM drives, it wouldn't play on some DVD players either. If, like me, you got rid of your CD player when you added DVD, that means you're out of luck. Or, rather, the publisher is out of luck.

Here's a quote from Noam Zur of Midbar Tech, an Israeli firm that produces a copy-protection technology. Zur "called copy-protection critics a fringe group that probably are pirates themselves. 'Mainly those people have a large number of compilations on their PCs.'... Zur dismissed customer complaints and said the CD works on most players."

"Most players." Good stuff. Like the Yugo: it ran *most* of the time. Heck, most people who contracted smallpox during worldwide epidemics lived: it only killed one out of three.

Fred von Lohmann of EFF notes, "This is not about piracy; this is about controlling consumer behavior." He added, "I own upwards of 800 CDs, but it seems like they're on a crusade against me. It's a strange development when you seem to be hellbent on alienating your best customers."

Keeping Up with Filters

I belatedly encountered a fine article by Geoffrey Nunberg in *The American Prospect* 12:1 (January 1-15, 2001), "The Internet filter farce" (www.prospect.org). Nunberg usually impresses me with his eloquence and careful thought; this is no exception. In discussing the extent to which filters fail on both counts (both underblocking and overblocking), he states something I've always believed

but rarely seen in published discussions: "The technology doesn't—and *can't*—work as promised." (Emphasis added.) It's not just inadequate computing power; it's the nature of language (particularly the English language) and graphics.

He also points out the nonsensical nature of pro-filter claims that overblocking in one test "constituted only 0.0006 percent of all Web access attempts." It's absurdly misleading because the bulk of Web attempts will be to a small number of sites in any case. I like his analogy: "Imagine a police force that arrests every Arab American in town on an antiterrorism sweep, then claims that its false arrest rate is under 1 percent, since 99 percent of the total population was not detained." The question is not what percentage of all Web sites are inappropriately blocked; it's what percentage of blocked Web sites are valuable and should not be blocked.

How bad is that problem? Worse than you might expect. Read the article. It's still available (as far as I know), it's elegantly written, and it makes what I believe to be the most fundamental case against the *possibility* that filtering software can work properly. Semantic analysis can only go so far.

Quickies

- **CD-R sales:** The October 2001 *EMedia* cites information from Santa Clara Consulting Group that just over 1.1 *billion* CD-R discs were sold worldwide in the second quarter of 2001—down a little from just under 1.2 billion in the first quarter. How many CD-R/RW drives were sold in those quarters? Just under 9.8 million in the second quarter, 11.4 million in the first. That's 21 million writers and almost 2.3 billion discs in half a year!
- **Bluetooth's lowered expectations:** A December 11, 2001 *Wired News* report from the Bluetooth Developers Conference suggests that, if Bluetooth goes anywhere in the U.S., it will be much less important than earlier projections. As one developer puts it, "It's not going to cure cancer but it will help you send e-mail"—if you're a gadgeteer, at least. Bluetooth makes a good medium-speed cable replacement—a file transfer medium offering (ideally) about 1mb interaction in a 30-foot radius. That's megabit, not megabyte.
- **Patenting the wheel:** It's true—although it's an Australian "Innovation Patent," apparently a fast-and-loose version of a normal patent. John Michael Keogh was granted a patent on application AU 2001 100012 for a "circular transportation facilitation device." You can find

it on the Internet. As far as I can tell, it's not a hoax—although it may be a fairly pointed dig at speedy patent systems.

- **Curl:** Tim Berners-Lee is involved and DARPA supposedly provided some funding. It's supposed to make Web sites faster "by a factor of 10 or more" (according to a 12/5 *Wired News* report) by using a single language (instead of C++, HTML, JavaScript, Shockwave, Java, etc.) and moving more processing to the client. It's only available for Windows. It—Curl 1.0, from Curl Corporation—may be worth tracking, although it's far from a sure winner.

Press Watch I: Articles Worth Reading

Sears, JoAnn, "Chat reference service: an analysis of one semester's data," *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* Fall 2001 (www.library.ucsb.edu/istl).

Given the stream of publicity and hype about virtual reference services, it's good to have some papers tracking experience and attempting to draw conclusions. The paper isn't that long and Sears (a librarian at Auburn) writes clearly; she seems to have done a thorough analysis and drawn appropriate conclusions, without going inference-crazy or deluging the reader in correlation factors.

Auburn's system isn't (or at least wasn't) the kind of multilevel 24x7 virtual reference service pushed as this year's magic bullet; it's a more modest effort offered during the 77 hours per week that Auburn has at least two people staffing its centralized Reference Desk. (When live chat wasn't available, people can use the Web site to request help by e-mail.) But then, more than half the chat questions asked during the study "were related to the local library's policies, procedures, collections, or resources; this data has significant implications for those exploring collaborative projects."

Over 112 days of an academic semester (Spring 2001), with an open policy for chat reference (librarians did not qualify questioners as part of the Auburn community), the service logged 153 chat questions during 118 chat sessions. To quote Sears, "The use of this service is not overwhelming our ability to answer chat questions at this time."

Widzinski, Lori, "The evolution of media librarianship: a tangled history of change and

constancy," *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education* 1:3 (August 2001) (at University of Toronto Press journals online, www.utpjournals.com).

Widzinski offers an interesting brief history of media librarianship—certainly not a comprehensive account, but a good starting point for further reading. I may be one of those with "persistent biases against 'non-print media' in libraries," as she puts it, although I would maintain that arguing the primacy of print for sustained argument and narrative is quite different than dismissing non-print as useless. (That convoluted sentence may itself be evidence of my "printist" nature. So be it.)

Worth reading, although UTP forces you to put up with 12 pages of sans serif. The print may be (needlessly) ugly but the text is worthwhile.

Snell, Jason, "OS X comes of age," *Macworld* December 2001, pp. 56-64.

Press coverage of the first Unix-based Mac OS was lukewarm at best. Apparently, Version 10.1 solves most of the OS X problems. This detailed discussion shows the changes and concludes that this is "now truly the operating system of tomorrow." Of course, it won't succeed without native software—and guess who's making the most important native software? The devil incarnate, Microsoft. See the next item. Oh, and if you're a Windows-hating Mac user, do be aware that OS X 10.1 *does* use file-name extensions and has the same idiot default as Windows—that is, it hides the extensions unless you change settings.

A writeup in *PC Magazine* for November 27, 2001 supports the view that OS X 10.1 is a major upgrade from OS X and, to quote the headline, OS X "the way it should have been." That writeup notes that OS X just doesn't do SCSI at all—a complete turnaround from the only company that used to care about SCSI on the desktop!

Negrino, Tom, "Office remodeling," *Macworld* December 2001, pp. 66-76.

Mac users may love to hate Microsoft, but almost all of them *use* Microsoft software. Not just for Web browsing, but also for word processing, spreadsheets, and presentations. Until recently, Microsoft dominated the Mac productivity market much more thoroughly than the Windows market, and you still find more competitive word processors and spreadsheets for Windows than for the Mac.

How important is Microsoft Office to the Mac? Negrino puts it this way: "In a very real sense, the arrival of Office v.X [which runs native under Mac OS X] legitimizes OS X." This article offers a de-

tailed and favorable review of a late-beta Office v.X. It's worth noting that Microsoft's Macintosh Business Unit does *not* share code with the Windows team; Mac code is original from the ground up.

If you use a Mac that's potent enough for OS X and you use Office, read this article—but then, you probably already have the upgrade on order.

“Home entertainment face-off,” *PC World* 19:12 (December 2001), pp. 135-40.

“Can your PC replace the latest consumer electronics gadgets?” This article takes an interesting approach: compare a suitably equipped PC with standalone digital entertainment products and see which works better. Once again, “convergence” will be redefined to suit the case at hand. This time, it doesn't mean One Big Wire or a single all-encompassing device: it means that “PCs integrate capabilities developed in consumer electronics devices and vice versa.” Once you define it that roughly, *of course* convergence is inevitable.

Given that this article appears in a PC magazine, the results are obvious, right? Not so fast. Comparing the PC versus digital video recorders, the editors give the overall advantage to Ultimate TV, a DVR/PVR that can record two programs at once. Comparing PC-based audio to “living room digital audio,” Philips' \$500 FW-i1000 (a compact stereo system that can play Internet radio and PC-based MP3s) gets the nod over the PC-based system. The third comparison isn't home entertainment but does give the PC a chance to shine: to wit, an \$1,800 DVD-equipped notebook computer outshines a \$1,200 portable DVD player. It's hard to argue with that conclusion. The article as a whole is amusing and worth reading.

The December 2001 *Sound & Vision* includes a one-page “quick take” on the Philips FW-i1000 noted above. It plays MP3 streams from Internet or other networked sources—but won't play MP3-encoded CD-Rs. It calls itself an “Internet radio” system, but won't play RealAudio or other streaming stations: *only* MP3 streaming is supported. And you can't plug it directly into a cable modem; you must use a router. It does, of course, offer typical minisystem features including a three-CD changer, AM/FM tuner, and dual cassette deck.

Glass, Brett, “OS alternatives,” *PC Magazine* 20:20 (November 27, 2001), pp. 89-91.

If it's not enough that *PC* runs comparative Linux reviews (see “Review Watch”), this article goes farther—discussing variants of BSD, the Berkeley Software Distribution “Unix-like operating system” that's *truly* freeware, without the restrictions of

Linux' General Public License. BSD may be the most reliable and secure operating system and it's the foundation for Mac OS X. Worth reading if you're considering alternative operating systems.

Block, Marylaine, “Down from the count,” *My Word's Worth* 6:17 (November 25, 2001) (www.qconline.com/myword/numbers.html).

Heard any good numbers lately? Did you understand them and the basis for them? For example, what's the ratio of people killed by automobiles each day to the number killed by anthrax last year? What do you do with the “fact” that four hundred million Americans fly on business every year—which is a creative way of saying that, in a typical year, there are 400 million passenger boardings for business.

The second (dull) statement can be verified and makes sense. If the first didn't make you sit up and offer an opinion equivalent to “bovine excrement,” then you should read the charming column cited first above. What the heck, read it anyway: it's well written, short, and free.

I got stomped (figuratively) by a couple of book reviewers for a chapter in *Being Analog* that dealt with numeracy—we all learned that stuff in the fourth grade, the critics said, and certainly don't have problems with real-world numbers. Marylaine Block thinks differently, and every week I see examples that say she's right.

Review Watch

Desktop Computers

Broida, Rick, “The after-hours PC,” *Computer Shopper* 21:12 (December 2001), pp. 102-12.

How do you differentiate today's fast-but-boring PCs? Make up categories like “desktop entertainment systems,” the theme for this roundup. Criteria include 128MB RAM, 40GB hard disk, 18"-viewable display, both CD-RW and DVD drive, “nonintegrated” sound and graphics (that is, separate cards), a three-piece speaker system, and Windows ME—the report was too early for XP. The five systems cost \$1,300 to \$1,600, surprisingly low for the specs—and, not surprisingly, none of them use today's fastest CPUs.

Editors' Choice goes to one of the two most expensive systems, from one of three lesser-known makers: the \$1,599 ABS Performance 5. It offers the best overall performance, includes a high-speed 60GB IBM hard disk, uses today's fastest graphics

CPU (nVidia GeForce 3, with 64MB DDRAM), and uses a quality Plextor CD-RW drive. The CPU is a 1.4GHz AMD Athlon. The speaker system is a full surround-sound Cambridge system. Tech support hours are short and there are only two USB ports.

Jones, Leigh Anne, "Home PCs: all this & XP too," *PC World* 19:12 (December 2001), pp. 106-16.

Gateway (and some other makers) began installing XP in home PCs a month before Microsoft offered the OS at retail; this roundup, presumably done in late September or early October, includes 18 PCs but only discusses ten of them in any detail. It's an interesting group of machines with considerable power for reasonable prices. Best buy among the "power systems" is the \$2,299 Dell Dimension 8200, although it's not the fastest unit. *PC World* loves obscure brands; the Best Buy for value systems is NuTrend's \$1,339 Athlon Mega 3. In terms of star ratings, the Falcon Northwest Mach V (\$3,995!) and Polywell Poly K7-1400DDR (\$2,199) matched Dell's four-star mark, while the Compaq Presario 5000Z (\$1,459) and Gateway 500X (\$1,608) matched NuTrend's 3.5 stars.

Metz, Cade, "Back to business," *PC Magazine* 20:21 (December 11, 2001), pp. 131-8.

The layout people must have been rushed with this story: the review-finder box says that every review is on page 000. The roundup covers five "perfect corporate workers," managed PCs from five of the best-known names (IBM's missing). Compaq's \$1,204 Evo D500 earns the Editors' Choice for its small case, upgradeability, and management software. All the others also appear to be "first-rate corporate managed PCs," with Dell's \$1,295 OptiPlex GX240 coming in second.

Metz, Cade, "Whiz bang boxes," *PC Magazine* 20:21 (December 11, 2001), pp. 110-29.

This time, the editors asked for primo systems—the best that manufacturers chose to send. That results in a price range from \$1,997 to almost \$6,000, high-end displays (including Apple's \$2,500 22" LCD), today's fastest CPUs, and generally robust configurations. A graphic shows the magazine's idea of the "perfect high-end PC," and none of these systems quite makes the grade—but they're all strong performers.

Editors' Choice goes to a Compaq—the \$2,770 Presario 8000Z, equipped with the Athlon-1800XP+, 256MB DDRAM, 80GB 7200rpm hard disk, nVidia GeForce 3 graphics (with 64MB RAM), and Pioneer's DVD-R/CD-RW drive (with an extra CD-ROM drive thrown in). You also get an 18" CRT,

five Klipsch speakers fed by a Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live! 5.1 card, and built-in IEEE1394 (FireWire) support.

Digital Cameras

Aquino, Grace, "Compact 3-megapixel sharpshooters," *PC World* 19:12 (December 2001), p. 68.

Primarily a data point, this comparison covers two cameras (in the same issue as a 15-camera roundup!). Pentax' \$699 Optio 330 gets a four-star review for its stylish design and good-quality photos; Nikon's \$600 Coolpix 885 is recommended for experienced users. The three-megapixel slot is an odd one—substantially more expensive than lower-resolution digital cameras intended primarily for Web and casual use, but lacking the near-film resolution of four and five megapixel units.

Baldrige, Aimee, and others, "Take your best shot," *Computer Shopper* 21:12 (December 2001), pp. 114-21.

The cameras reviewed here are two-megapixel units, far behind today's best units but costing \$255 to \$406. Most big names show up: Canon, Kodak, Nikon, Olympus, and Sony. The review includes detailed individual writeups and a comparative features table, but no sample shots. The Editors' Choice is Canon's \$362 PowerShot A20 for speed, quality, and ease of operation. A sidebar offers brief reviews of six high-resolution digital cameras.

DeFeo, Jenn, "Photo finish," *PC Magazine* 20:20 (November 27, 2001), pp. 104-17.

This roundup includes all the high-resolution cameras available at the time of writing—ten cameras offering four or more megapixels—and five three-meg cameras for comparison. Related reviews (noted elsewhere) cover photo software and printers.

The article includes useful background, good individual writeups, objective and subjective test results, but no examples of photo quality. Editors' Choice among the high-resolution units is Fujifilm's \$750 FinePix 6900 Zoom—and that's a little strange, because the camera is really a three-meg device with hardware interpolation to reach a claimed six megapixels. Nikon's \$500 Coolpix 885 gets the award for standard three-meg cameras; while it doesn't do the best in every criterion, it's "pretty good in every category."

McClelland, Deke, "Macworld's ultimate buyer's guide: digital cameras," *Macworld* November 2001, pp. 54-73.

A funny thing happened this summer. *Macworld* moved to a more readable typeface and more sensible spacing—and the magazine also began to run more substantial articles. This is one of those substantial articles, 18 pages (excluding ads) covering most aspects of contemporary digital photography and featuring reviews of 26 under-\$1,000 cameras.

The feature includes several sections and, unfortunately, doesn't include individual writeups of each camera or print samples for each camera. Nonetheless, there's a lot of good information here, whether you're a Mac user or part of the rest of us (since almost all digital cameras are platform-neutral).

Editors' Choice at the low end is Canon's \$349 PowerShot A10, a one-megapixel camera with a good balance of features and performance. Canon also captures the midrange honor with the \$499 PowerShot S110 Digital Elph, a two-megapixel camera that offers sharp images, good contrast and strong color fidelity.

If you're making big prints but not ready to wait (or pay) for five-megapixel wonders, Fuji's \$899 FinePix 6800 Zoom may be your choice. It gets the Editors' Choice among three-megapixel cameras.

Pittelkau, Jeff, "DV camcorders," *Macworld* December 2001, pp. 36-7.

Short but to the point, this mini-roundup reviews three under-\$1,200 digital camcorders that will work well with contemporary Macs. If your Mac has a FireWire port and iMovie software (and plenty of disk space), it's set up for video editing—and if you have the snazzy SuperDrive recorder you can make your own DVDs.

Highest rating (four mice) goes to Sony's \$1,100 DCR-TRV17; it has the best preview screen and a "Night Shot" mode to take pictures in the dark; it can also be used as an analog-to-digital video converter without requiring a recording step.

Thornton, Carla, "The big pixel," *PC World* 19:12 (December 2001), pp. 90-104.

My frequent gripe applies: although this roundup covers 15 under-\$1000 cameras, you have to go to *PC World's* Web site to read about five of them. The review only discusses the five highest-rated in each of two price ranges, under and over \$500. Print samples show the best and worst for each of four kinds of picture but don't allow you to compare quality across the board. It's still an interesting review with long individual writeups for each of the top ten units. Best Buy for bargain hunters is Toshiba's \$299 PDR-M61, a 2.3 megapixel camera that's a little bulky but takes good pictures and offers long battery life. Among more expensive units,

Canon's \$899 PowerShot G2 gets the nod; this four-megapixel camera took the best pictures in the roundup and also offers good batter life. It's the heaviest unit at 18.9 ounces.

Handheld Computers/PDAs

Brown, Bruce, and Marge Brown, "Microsoft takes on Palm—again," *PC Magazine* 20:19 (November 13, 2001), pp. 41-2.

Handheld PCs running Microsoft's PocketPC OS are more expensive and bulkier than most Palm OS handhelds—but they're also considerably more capable, with larger screens and the ability to work with Office files. PocketPC 2002 provides better access and a range of other improvements. This mini-roundup covers three name-brand PocketPC PDAs, all of which garner strong four-dot ratings. Figure \$570 (Toshiba PocketPC e570) to \$650 (Compaq iPAQ Pocket PC 8370), 16-bit color on a good-size reflective or backlit display, 32 or 64MB RAM, and decent expansion capabilities. The Toshiba's a bit short on software; the Compaq includes Bluetooth.

Kaplan, Jeremy A., and Bruce and Marge Brown, "Pocket to palm," *PC Magazine* 20:21 (December 11, 2001), pp. 142-55.

If the story above is an appetizer, here's a more substantial meal: eleven recent models from eight makers. The editors choose Editors' Choices in three categories. For consumers, Sony's \$200 Clié PEG-S320 offers the best combination of price, display, and ease: it's a Palm OS unit. For "mobile professionals," HP's \$650 Jornada 565 may be pricey but it's sleek and powerful. It runs Microsoft Pocket PC, as does the \$570 Toshiba Pocket PC e570, Editors' Choice for large businesses planning to deploy these devices by the hundreds.

McCracken, Harry, "Get organized: PDAs for any budget," *PC World* 19:12, pp. 66-7.

These four recent handhelds aren't entirely comparable. Two new Handspring Visor models use the Palm OS; the Toshiba PocketPC e570 runs Microsoft's Pocket PC; and Casio's Cassiopeia Pocket Manager BE-300 is one of the rare holdouts for Windows CE, Pocket PC's "creaky" predecessor. Maybe the ratings make sense for PDA-class machines: the least powerful system (Handspring's \$199 Visor Neo) gets the top rating, although it's basically just a slightly faster Visor Deluxe without the leather slipcase but with "trippy, translucent new colors." Far out.

Optical Drives and Software

Heid, Jim, "DVD burners," *Macworld* December 2001, pp. 38-9.

Sigh. "Forget about CD burners." Heid knows better. The availability of \$700 to \$1,000 DVD burners hardly spells doom for \$125 CD-RW drives unless you don't care about money.

This is an odd roundup, as all six units—from such household names as APS Tech, CD CyClone, and EZQuest—are based on the same Pioneer SuperDrive. You get different cases, power supplies, fans, and software—but it's all the same drive. That makes the benchmark chart particularly amusing—lots of bars and numbers showing essentially meaningless performance differences.

Two units receive four-mouse ratings: QPS' \$749 Que Fire DVDBurner Pro and EZQuest's \$799 Boa FireWire DVD-R/RW. For reasons that aren't quite clear, the QPS gets the sole Editors' Choice.

Perenson, Melissa J., "24x CD-RWs: software matters," *PC World* 19:11 (November 2001), p. 70.

There is no drive on the market that can create a CD-RW disc at 24x speed (that is, in less than four minutes). These drives claim "24x10x40," and "10" is the claimed multiple for CD-RW. That's still fast, and two of these three drives wrote 100MB to a CD-RW in roughly eighty seconds, which works out to be nearly 9x writing. The same two drives can burn a 650MB CD-R in 241 seconds—not really 24x speed but more than fast enough for most purposes.

CenDyne's \$180 Lightning 24x10x40 drive was fastest on all writing tests, but QPS' \$190 Que 24x10x40x was almost as fast—and considerably quicker in ripping audio CDs. While Plextor's \$230 PlexWriter 24/10/40A ran slower and costs more, it includes a better software package for audio work.

Perenson, Meliisa J., "User-friendly CD burning software," *PC World* 19:12 (December 2001), p. 71.

It's odd to see this miniature "roundup" in the absence of the two programs that dominate CD burning, Roxio's Easy CD Creator (and Toast on the Mac) and Ahead Nero Burning ROM—but these two apparently showed up after the October 2001 roundup. SmartDisk MVP costs \$70 and gets a strong review (but it's resource-intensive); Iomega's HotBurn is cheap (\$30) and stripped-down, which may suit beginners.

Printers

Kaplan, Jeremy A. "Get the picture," *PC Magazine* 20:20 (November 27, 2001), pp. 129-30.

This roundup includes half a dozen printers particularly suited to photo printing. All of the units produced crisp, sharp images and accurate color. Two earned Editors' Choices. Canon's \$300 S800 is fast and produces the least expensive prints; HP's \$400 Photosmart 1315 is also fast and can print photos directly from a camera's memory device.

Stone, M. David, "New do-it-all printers," *PC Magazine* 20:18 (October 30, 2001), pp. 36-45.

Some page ranges are more misleading than others. This is a two-page "first look" covering two multifunction printers, with a sidebar reviewing a new low-priced HP LaserJet.

The two multifunction devices both score four dots and aren't entirely comparable. Brother's \$500 MFC-6800 uses a monochrome laser printer, offers both flatbed and sheet-fed scanning, copying, and faxing, and can print a full ten pages per minute at 600dpi. Oddly for a laser, printed output curled, causing stacking problems.

HP's \$400 PSC 950 uses a color inkjet printer and offers a full range of options together with 3.6 page per minute (monochrome) printing—but it lacks a sheet feeder.

Finally, HP's new LaserJet 1000 costs \$250 (street), prints at 10 pages per minute, runs at a true 600dpi but, with HP's resolution enhancement, yields output similar to 1200dpi—and has a small footprint for a laser printer (16x19"). It's the first "host-based" LaserJet—that is, your computer does most of the printing, as with almost all inkjets.

The Details

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