

# Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large

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Walt Crawford

## Bibs & Blather

### Closing the Volume

Does anybody out there actually bind annual runs of *Cites & Insights*? (I do, if you can count Kinko's tape-and-clear-cover perfect binding as "binding.") If so, I'd love to know about it—and you need the same notice I made in the December 2001 issue:

Volume 2 of *Cites & Insights* is *not* complete at this point. Some time between now and January (probably within the next two weeks), I'll issue a volume index and title sheet.

A notice will go out on CICAL Alert.

### Reader Survey

I'd appreciate your feedback on a few simple questions—with the caveat that I won't necessarily abide by the wishes of the majority. Still, there are some choices that I'm fairly neutral about; knowing your preferences may influence those choices.

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Depending on how the setup went, there may be a link from the *CICAL* home page ([cical.home.att.net](http://cical.home.att.net)) to this poll, which allows you to take it with complete anonymity. Otherwise, or if you don't choose to go there, a quick email message will do—maybe just the question numbers and answer letters. It would help if you put "CICAL" or "Cites & Insights" or "Poll" in the subject line. Send

text-only mail either to [br.wcc@rlg.org](mailto:br.wcc@rlg.org) or [wcc@notes.rlg.org](mailto:wcc@notes.rlg.org). Responses before December 20 will be most useful.

Here are the questions:

**1. Assuming that I can't get CICAL down to the ideal of 12 16-page issues (192 pages, as compared to this year's 262 pages), which would you prefer?**

- 1a. Monthly issues as much as possible, even if they're 22-24 pages
- 1b. Shorter issues as much as possible, preferably under 20 pages, even if they appear more often
- 1c. Leave out some of the useless nonsense and 192 pages will be *plenty*.

**2. Which of the following features and sections do you most enjoy or find most valuable? (More than one answer allowed)**

- 2a. Perspectives
- 2b. The Access Puzzle
- 2c. Copyright Currents
- 2d. Ebooks and Etext
- 2e. Filtering Follies
- 2f. disContent Reprints & Updates
- 2g. Bibs & Blather
- 2h. Cheap Shots & Commentary
- 2j. The Good Stuff
- 2k. The Library Stuff
- 2m. PC Group Reviews
- 2n. Product Watch
- 2p. Trends & Quick Takes
- 2r. CD-ROMs Revisited
- 2s. Looking Back
- 2t. Feedback
- 2u. Conference reports
- 2v. Extended coverage of other special situations (i.e. the text-e conference)

**3. Conversely, which of those do you *least* enjoy, find least interesting, and would just as soon see decline or vanish? (More than one answer allowed).**

3a-3v, same meanings as for question 2.

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#### 4. If I add a PayPal link to the *CICAL* home page, how likely would you be to contribute?

- 4a. Unlikely.
- 4b. Only if you reform your publishing/formatting, i.e., do an HTML version.
- 4c. Undecided.
- 4d. Somewhat likely.
- 4e. Very likely.
- 4f. I know an outfit that would love to underwrite *Cites & Insights*, and here are the details...

I assure you that answers to #4 will not be held against you or treated as promises (although any 4f answer may be pursued). And as to #1, it's worth noting that my original target was "a gross publication": 12 pages per month, 144 in all. *Cites & Insights* will probably never follow a precisely predictable schedule, coming out on the same day or even the same week each month; vacations, speaking trips, and other deadlines pretty much rule that out.

Feel free to add comments to your poll response.

### More Sources?

If you spot some new print magazines in "The Good Stuff" and "Cheap Shots & Commentary" (and elsewhere) over the next few months, there's a simple explanation. I have several thousand stranded "frequent" flyer miles on Northwest, probably thanks to cruise-related flights, and they offered to trade some of those miles for one-year magazine subscriptions. Since the stock of PC-related magazines and "new economy" magazines has shrunk, I thought I'd try a few. *Red Herring*—possibly the oldest "new economy" magazine—and *Technology Review* have started arriving; supposedly, the new *Business 2.0* (which has almost nothing in common with the rotten old *Business 2.0*) should arrive soon—as should, gulp, *Wired*. Oh, what the heck. The price was right. (I wrote that a couple of months ago. *Wired* still hasn't arrived. Fine by me.)

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## The Library Stuff

Jones, Steve, et al, "The Internet goes to college," Pew Internet & American Life Project, September 15, 2002 ([www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)), and Surmacz, Jon, "Libraries don't stack up," *Darwin*, September 18, 2002 (64.28.79.73/learn/numbers/index.cfm)

I chose the *Darwin* story almost at random as one of many odd little stories about the recent Pew survey report. The report itself is interesting but also

raises a few unanswered questions. For example, the most talked-about finding, that 73% of college students say they use the Internet more than the library while 9% use the library more than the Internet. My question would be: What proportion of that 73% are, to some extent, using Internet materials that are available because of library subscriptions, specifically online databases and full-text aggregations? Without an answer to that question, the number is fairly meaningless.

Some of the report comments strike me as odd, such as this one: "Surprisingly, only about half (47%) of college students said they are *required* to use email in their classes." (Emphasis added.) Why *should* students be required to use email in their classes? Back when dinosaurs roamed the earth and I was at UC Berkeley, I'd guess most students never communicated directly with their professors during most courses, and none of us was ever required to use postal mail or submit written comments as part of our courses. What makes email so special that it should be required? This only makes sense if the assumption is that all interaction must be forced into technological channels. In practice, three-quarters of students *did* send email to faculty in classes and 82% of the students have been contacted via email by professors, so I don't see the problem.

Maybe Pew does have a technological imperative. On p. 19, the researchers note that students aren't committed to distance learning. "Their current behaviors show them using the Internet as an educational tool supplementing traditional classroom education, and it may be difficult to *convince them to abandon* the traditional setting after they have had the kinds of attention afforded them in the college classroom." (Emphasis added.) Again, what makes it necessary to "convince" students to abandon models that work well? There's another point here: How is it that the Pew researchers can casually assume that student habits and practices will simply carry forward into the workplace? The shock of the real world, both staggering and refreshing, seems likely to be as relevant to today's college students as to any other.

Finally, although the methodology for the statistical surveys are stated well and appear to involve a large enough sample for reasonable confidence, there are no numbers attached to the observational notes, although these play a significant role in the text. Were there three observations? Three hundred? Are Chicago colleges typical of the nation as a whole?

The study's worth reading if you haven't already encountered it—but I would probably have ignored it except for the ancillary reports. Surmacz' story is typical, with a wildly misleading headline followed

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by an odd story. In the very first paragraph, Steve Jones says that “the findings shouldn’t alarm librarians,” yet the headline says “libraries don’t stack up.” Later, Jones says that students used to go to the library to study and socialize—but now they’re “much more purposeful...Many go there to study or get materials.” Surmacz turns that into “students go to the library with one purpose—to do research.” In practice, neither is quite what the study say, and that part of the study is weakened by its pure observational nature. Here’s a direct quote: “Rather, email use, instant messaging and Web-surfing dominated students computer activity in the library.” That’s research? I see nothing in the report saying that students *don’t* socialize in libraries, and I’ve been in enough academic libraries in the last few years to consider such a finding highly improbable.

Mann, Thomas, “The importance of books, free access, and libraries as places...and the dangerous inadequacy of the information science paradigm,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 27:4 (July 2001), pp. 268-81.

Yes, I know July 2001 is a long time ago—but I don’t normally see *JAL* and missed this article until the author sent me a copy. It’s in Elsevier ScienceDirect and probably other aggregators. I heard a different version of this article in a wonderful speech by Mann, part of a program at which I also spoke. As with the speech, the article impresses me with what a *real* writer can do, particularly one who thinks deeply and long.

There’s a lot here, some of which you may disagree with—and so might I. But everything in this article deserves reading and consideration. That starts, emphatically, with a topic that might seem obscure to librarianship: the decline of the railroads. You know—Herb White says that libraries must not repeat the mistake of American railroads, who forgot they were not in the railroad business. “Neither are we in the book business.” Stuart and Moran in *Library and Information Center Management* use the railroad analogy as well, saying, “Most libraries and information centers now realize that they are in the information business.” And so on. As Mann demonstrates convincingly, one problem with the analogy is that the thesis is false: Railroads did *not* fail because they thought they were in the railroad business but because they were over-regulated and competitive forms were massively subsidized. Turns out that one *Harvard Business Review* article, offering no substantiation whatsoever for the claim, is the source of the conventional wisdom here.

So what? Well...read the article. **Highly recommended.**

Greenstein, Daniel, and Suzanne E. Thorin, *The digital library: A biography*, Digital Library Federation, September 2002 ([www.clir.org](http://www.clir.org)).

Seventy pages plus front matter. A 29-page “biography” followed by six case studies. Well-formatted, well written, and probably as good a summary of the current state of “digital libraries” as you’ll find. And I’m not sure what else to say here. The authors sometimes seem to show mild disdain for traditional libraries, but I may be reading that into the report’s text. I’m still bothered by the term “digital library,” and it’s fairly clear that all the so-called “digital libraries” discussed here must become part of complex physical-and-digital library systems to be useful in the future.

I suffer a number of biases and conflicts here. RLG is heavily involved with DLF. Most of the case studies here (five out of six) involve RLG members, and all involve institutions and people I respect and admire. In early years, it seemed that “digital library” projects involved a lot more understanding of the first word than the second, but that may also be my naïve understanding.

As I read the discussion, I came to believe that the bloom is off the digital library rose in a healthy way. Projects that had been kept outside library decision-making processes and mostly grant-funded are being melded into the overall operation and mission of parent institutions, typically within a library environment.

I recommend a close and slightly skeptical reading should you choose to download this—and if digital libraries interest you, I do strongly **recommend** that you read it.

Burns, Grant, “Who needs librarians? Let’s get some trained monkeys!” *NewPages*, downloaded October 22, 2002 ([www.newpages.com/unclefrank/Number10.htm](http://www.newpages.com/unclefrank/Number10.htm))

“Uncle Frank’s Diary,” of which this is number ten, has generally been lively and interesting. This edition makes it clear that Grant “Uncle Frank” Burns is a librarian and not too happy about one public library replacing badly-paid reference librarians (\$31,000 a year for a Master’s?) with even worse-paid clerks (\$22,000). It’s a short, pointed, **recommended** column, lovingly illustrated with pictures of three fine professional librarians at the reference desk, Stooges one and all. [Burns inadvertently reminds me to remind you that, while I consider myself a library professional, I am not a capital-L MLS-holding Librarian. Maybe some day, perhaps in a future life...]

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Block, Marylaine, "Guru interview: Walt Crawford," *Ex Libris* 160 (November 22, 2002), [marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib160.html](http://marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib160.html)

Surprisingly, nearly half of this interview deals with RLG—I say "surprisingly" because Marylaine's initial email questions took me by surprise. There's also a certain amount of blather about technophilia and writing as a hobby. I can attest that Ms. Block did a fine job boiling down some absurdly long answers into the final interview. Naturally, I **recommend** that you read this—perhaps before you answer the questions raised in "Bibs & Blather." And, thinking about it, I believe I should change the piece in my speech where I demur at being called a guru or an expert. Here's a better formulation: Treat me the same way you should treat most any "guru"—as a source of amusement not to be taken too seriously.

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## Feedback: Your Insights

First, a correction. Roy Tennant pointed out that I referred to Pamela Samuelson as "Paula Samuelson" in the November issue. My apologies.

Gary Price sent a comment about Google vs. "Yahoo Google," the results you get when searching the Web on Yahoo (as opposed to using it as a directory). "Remember, Yahoo Google doesn't offer the many advanced searching options and syntax and the very useful cache feature. Bottom line: Know which version of Google you're using. Previously, it was also evident that Google and Yahoo Google were using different databases, with Yahoo Google accessing a smaller version. However, during some very recent testing I've seen a change. I'll continue to experiment."

I had also noted an oddity when doing a vanity search on some other search engines, including AllTheWeb—a descriptive paragraph was showing up that I *knew* wasn't from the Website being indexed. Gary offered to inquire. Meanwhile, I figured out the situation: AllTheWeb and several other sites use *directory* descriptions for pages represented in OpenDirectory; that's what appears. (I would never call myself a librarian, but an OpenDirectory listing for my home page does use that word.)

Steve McCann (U. Washington, MLIS student) posted some notes about search engine optimization on Web4Lib, coming to the following key conclusion: "It's true that Google makes money off of their

search results, but I think it's important to point out that they do so in an ethical way."

Now for two delightful short commentaries from regular readers:

- George S. Porter (Cal Tech) responds to my CD-R perspective in the November issue:

I bought my children (11 and 12, now 12 and 13) each an iMac this time last year. Promptly made a trip to Fry's and picked up a spindle of CD-Rs and a block of slimline cases.

Where have the CD-Rs gone? Primarily to school. They've both created websites for book reports or major class projects, then burnt the resulting report to CD. A portion of the bibliography entries, but not all, included links, in case the teacher was reading the report from a connected computer.

How many CDs of MP3s have they burnt in a year? Zero.

Do they occasionally listen to MP3s over the net? Sure. Then they add the artist to a wishlist for birthdays, holidays, etc.

My son got industrious one day and recompiled some Weird Al CDs, but primary to get more minutes of music onto a single platter.

RIAA will probably be breaking down the door when I get home tonight.

Nah. They have to haul me in first—I've gone through a 30-CD-R spindle already, between artist compilations, the 12 wonderful "mix discs" we listened to driving to and from San Diego, my computer backups, and the CD-Rs I used to submit my latest book proposal and, separately, my new photo for *American Libraries*. All music CD-Rs were entirely from owned audio CDs, of course. I may be a pirate in Big Media's eyes, but that's their problem.

- Jerry Kuntz (Ramapo Catskill Library System) offers "just a little rant as an aside" to my notes about big expensive TV sets:

My wife and I are shopping for a new TV, and went into our local Best Buy and Circuit City, and were shocked to find no screens smaller than 28"! Most were 32" or larger, and half the TV section was used for displays of HDTV monitors that started at around \$1,200 and went up to \$6,000. Looking at those larger displays, we found:

- 1) We quickly got headaches after 40+ years of watching smaller displays
- 2) These monsters would dominate and clash against almost any decor that wasn't tech/modern, and would look ridiculous in our small living room.

Boy, do we feel old. We enjoy TV once in a while, but not *that* much.

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I suggested Target, Sears or, in desperation, Radio Shack (or, perhaps, Sony's Website). One side-effect of the favoritism for big-screen TVs is that first-rate smaller-screen TVs are much cheaper, and improvements in electronics mean that today's cheapo TVs have pictures almost as good as the first-rate TVs of five years ago. (We recently purchased a \$90 small color TV for an aged relative who just wanted companionship; connected to cable, the picture was *astoundingly* good.) My wife and I are spoiled by a 32" Sony XBR, and given a weekly DVD and six hours of favorite shows, we're considering a bigger and wider-screen TV, although our tiny house wouldn't really suit it well. ("Considering" means "some time between next month and the next century.") If we wanted a TV smaller than 27", it would be an impulse purchase, given today's quality and prices. I also suggested looking around near the boomboxes at Circuit City: they may have half a dozen smaller TVs hidden there.

- Finally, a longer letter from Edward Chiu that expands in particularly valuable ways on my November 2002 CD-R commentary:

You've spoken well for the silent majority on the CD-R tax. As food for thought, here's an alternative view in favour of the tax: In a letter to my local paper, the writer stated how happy he was with the tax. Now that we're paying the surcharge, he said, we're making good on the royalties that the record companies say they're losing. Hence we're at total liberty to rip and duplicate CDs.

I guess from a common-law point of view, he's correct. What else, after all, does that tax represent? What's the added consideration for buyers? It's not the manufacturer charging for costs. Buyers are specifically paying royalties for each CD-R they buy. So shouldn't they get in return some use of the copyrights paid for by those royalties? And hence his support for the tax...

Okay, so much for that. Now, about the MP3 format. It's proprietary, and the patent holder can pull a fast one any time. The world has already been shocked once when the Fraunhofer Institute tried to enforce its patent.

That's not the worst thing about MP3. Even worse is its philosophy towards sound quality. MP3 technology, which is actually more than 10 years old, has led to the false equation of higher bit rates with better sound. That's not the whole equation. Even MP3 supports variable bit rate, recognizing that all sound is not created equal.

The format of the near future is no doubt Ogg Vorbis. It's open source, so it's forever free, and it measures sound by a more realistic quality scale of one to ten. *And* its file sizes are much smaller than MP3.

And now Xiph, the organization behind Vorbis, have just released code for building hardware Ogg players. From company reactions posted on Xiph's site, such players should soon be on the market. For more details, see <http://www.xiph.org>.

I would recommend Ogg strongly over MP3, and hope that you will be sufficiently curious to try it out.

First, regarding the CD-R tax. The letter writer should be right, but RIAA seems determined to ignore any consumer rights that relate to the law that caused audio CD-Rs to carry a royalty. There was, of course, a fatal flaw in that law (from RIAA's warped perspective): the royalty is a *percentage* of purchase price (or manufacturer's wholesale, I'm not sure which), and is now essentially meaningless. When audio CD-Rs cost \$10 (if they ever did), 3% was significant. When they cost \$0.35, it's not. But there's a legal challenge just waiting for someone with deep pockets. Meanwhile, my offer stands: Demonstrate that the artists I listen to will get even half of the money, and I'll gladly write a check for 3% of the cost of all the CD-Rs I've used for music mixes—or even for a nickel per CD-R, which would be six times as much money.

Yes, aspects of MP3 are proprietary, but I'd be astonished to see Fraunhofer attempt a widespread royalty grab. The best MP3 codecs on the market today *are* licensed from Fraunhofer, including those used in MusicMatch—and they're a lot better than they were five years ago or ten years ago. But it's also true that MP3 is relatively old technology.

I don't know anything about Ogg Vorbis and, obviously, neither do the people at the magazines that have done blind comparison tests of codecs. I guess I'd say that I'll try out Ogg Vorbis about the time that MusicMatch includes it along with the many other codecs it offers. Chiu is certainly right that bit rate is only part of the story and that all music is not the same. My current 196K MP3 ripping rate includes a considerable safety margin for most music, but I'm not convinced that it's high enough across the board. Fortunately (?) my ears aren't that great. A key step will be Ogg Vorbis support not only in hardware players and notebooks but in car stereos: then things get interesting.

Note related stories elsewhere in this issue.

## A Request on Feedback

If you're sending me feedback that you're willing to have appear, signed, in *Cites & Insights*, please say so in the letter. I no longer make assumptions about people's willingness to have email appear in print.

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I suspect there are other pieces of feedback where I did get permission and I've mislaid the documents in the meantime. If so, my apologies to the correspondents.

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## Ebooks and Etext

Has there been any drama in the ebook field since October? That depends on your definition of ebooks, your definition of drama, and most of all how optimistic or gullible you are about Microsoft's latest "killer app."

If you're a believer, you'll be encouraged that Gemstar's now running *useful* ads for what's now the Gemstar ebook appliance in *TV Guide*—that is, you can actually do something with the information in the ad. Has there been a surge of interest in ebook appliances? Well...not so's you'd notice.

This may be the final edition with notes from the University of Rochester/River Campus *Librarian's eBook Newsletter*; apparently the August issue (which appeared in September) was the final one. Unfortunately, M.J. Rose's e-publishing column at *Wired News* also seems to have disappeared with the site's redesign. If it's not gone, it's hidden so well that I can't find it. The two ebook Websites I've checked on seem almost comatose. It's likely to be longer between intervals for this section, given the lack of energy within the many fields called "ebooks."

### News and Small Articles

The *Globe and Mail*, which I assume is a Toronto daily, has two articles posted September 18 and 19 respectively ([www.globeandmail.com](http://www.globeandmail.com)). The first, by Andre Mayer, takes a somewhat different look at the eBookWeb/KnowBetter survey noted in *Cites & Insights* 2:13. Mayer sees the *real* finding, which is that ebooks have failed to penetrate the mass market. The director of the Association of Canadian Publishers finds those low-profit publishers wary of ebooks. "For those people who are worried that the train has left the station, I don't think the train has even moved." Even this skeptical commentary falls into the percentage trap, noting that HarperCollins sold more ebooks in the first half of 2002 than in all of 2001, showing that ebooks "enjoy a slightly higher popularity in the United States." But selling 50 ebooks in the first half of 2002 doesn't mean success; it's just better than 50 in all of 2001. (I have no idea of the actual numbers, because HarperCollins won't mention them—which, by itself, is fairly damning.)

On the flip side, Frank Romano of the Rochester Institute of Technology informs us that "There's absolutely a future for e-books; it's just a question of how quickly that future comes." He notes the problems—"Most people want a device that feels and looks like paper, and screens weren't the quality level, the batteries didn't last long enough, there was no real model for how to get the content to the machine and the cost of these devices was too high." What solutions are in store for those problems? Romano sayeth not. A good story, **recommended**.

The next day's story, "Not coming to a bookstore near you" by Simon Haupt, is a bit different. Dave Eggers has a new novel—and he plans to sell it only through his Website and at a select group of independent bookstores. "Eggers says he wants to reward those who have supported his quirky literary magazine *McSweeney's*..." (No, this has almost nothing to do with ebooks. I just couldn't resist the story. Sorry. Go read it.)

The October 7 *Publishers Weekly* includes "E-book vendors look to libraries for growth" by Calvin Reid. ([publishersweekly.reviewsnews.com](http://publishersweekly.reviewsnews.com)) The opening line—"While consumer e-book sales continue their incremental growth"—is, I suppose, better than saying "While consumers continue to ignore ebooks almost entirely." Well, if you can't get to the consumers, go to the libraries—after all, who knows what percentage of sales of the Rocket eBook and REB readers was to libraries doing grant-funded trials? There's netLibrary, of course, but now Fictionwise.com also looks to library subscriptions with its Libwise program. It's like netLibrary in some ways but uses MobiPocket software to run on most PDAs (and notebooks?). The article also includes the addition of 200 Gale reference works to netLibrary and new developments for Adobe Content Service.

Jimmy Guterman writes "Making e-books safe for the toilet" in the November 14 *Business 2.0*. The story is about Microsoft's hot new initiative, the tablet PC, and the note that some magazines will offer digital replicas for the device. He notes three crucial issues that must be addressed before tablet PCs can make sense to readers as ebook devices: Publishers need to add value beyond print, agree on one publishing platform and understand that people read from devices differently than from the printed page. This piece is actually about e-magazines (not books) and closes, "Early indications are that Microsoft's latest attempt to create a new magazine-distribution medium will fall short."

J. Alan Hartman has the third installment in his first-rate "8 stupid things publishers do" at KnowBetter.com—and there's been precious little else there (other than book reviews and ads) since the

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September 26 posting of “Diversity.” His complaint: Almost all ebooks from independent publishers are mystery, “sci-fi,” romance and fantasy, and very few of them star anyone who’s not Caucasian. (I use quotes around sci-fi because, to a science fiction reader, there’s a big difference between science fiction and sci-fi. Asimov, Heinlein, Rudy Rucker, Spider Robinson, Gene Wolfe and many others write or wrote science fiction. Star Wars, entertaining as it may be, is “sci-fi.”) It’s a good piece although it seems to be riddled with missing letters in the print-out. **Recommended** despite its faults.

### Where’s Rose?

I always looked forward to Tuesday morning, when M.J. Rose’s ebook/epublishing column appeared at wired.com. On September 17, she discussed William Rivers Pitt’s instant book, *War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn’t Want You to Know*. Written in three days, edited in eight hours, one month from concept to publication, with a companion Website. There’s also a “collection of 2002 World Almanac databases” for Palm OS PDAs, most costing \$9.95 or more.

The following week, she repeated the grotesquely unlikely 1992 adult literacy statistics to introduce the Horror Writers Association auction to benefit ProLiteracy Worldwide, which used to be the Literacy Volunteers of America. And Kensington Publishing (Zebra Books, a major romance imprint) has an agreement with iUniverse to refer PoD titles that sell more than 500 copies in six months. “iUniverse will receive an undisclosed percentage of proceeds if Zebra picks up rights.”

October 1, Rose noted the United Airlines in-flight ad for Palm ebooks, specifically Stephen King; discussed Libwise’s new service; and introduced paid courses from Barnes & Noble University.

Since then, I haven’t seen the column. Too bad.

### Librarian’s eBook Newsletter

Also too bad, as already noted: The apparent demise of *Librarian’s eBook Newsletter*. You’ll find the August 2002 issue (2:6) and back issues at [www.library.rochester.edu/main/ebooks/](http://www.library.rochester.edu/main/ebooks/), along with a number of other ebook resources. Susan Gibbons did a solid job on this newsletter for the two years of its life.

In “Updates, etc.,” I see more comments about Gemstar’s difficulties. One aspect of those difficulties is the issue of how Gemstar accounted for REB1100 and REB1200 ads carried in Gemstar’s *TV Guide*. As Gibbons notes, “The majority of the limited advertising...was within issues of *TV Guide*.” You probably already know my opinion: Gemstar helped convince its hardware partners to manufac-

ture the overpriced, underperforming readers by promising vast amounts of advertising—nearly all of which was actually in-house advertising, most of it useless. I’m not one of those who believe that Henry Yuan single-handedly killed off ebook appliances as plausible consumer devoces; I just think he speeded up the process.

One “main article” describes a new prototype color e-ink display that “may place devices...in the hands of consumers by 2004.” Philips is one of the partners, with E Ink providing the e-ink technology: electrically charged colored capsules embedded in a film, that require electricity to *change* displays but not to *sustain* them. The prototype is called “high-resolution” but runs 80 pixels per inch, significantly cruder than even ordinary notebook screens. Low power, yes—but a much finer resolution would be needed for serious ebook use.

Finally, the issue includes a solid eight-page annotated bibliography of ebook functionality studies and research, with links and prices as appropriate. Each section is arranged in reverse chronological order. I’ve seen perhaps a third of these papers, including several from the defunct *Future of Print Media*. I have not seen Gibbons’ own article in *portal*, which supposedly finds that the general assumptions about user reactions to ebooks aren’t supported by the results. If those findings are generalizable, they’re so much at odds with most of what I’m seen that I’m surprised they haven’t been trumpeted more widely.

### Longer Articles

Crowell, Ben, “Free books: a sneaky success,” [www.lightandmatter.com](http://www.lightandmatter.com).

I’m not sure what to make of this informal piece, but it’s interesting and a fast read. Crowell is probably the first “free information” person I’ve read calling Adobe Acrobat (that is, PDF) “nonproprietary,” and his assertion that PoD didn’t happen misreads the pace of such technology and the reality of today’s short-run PoD publishers. It didn’t *take over* (and, unlike some in the publishing field, I question whether it ever will), but it’s growing and already significant. Crowell also gets it wrong when he assumes that publishers normally get copyright for books. Look in a selection of books; I think you’ll find that most fiction books and many nonfiction books have copyright notices in the name of the author or authors. Crowell is running an “online catalog” of free books, *The Assayer*, and asking people to review them. **Worth a quick read.**

Hyatt, Shirley, and Lynn Silipigni Connaway, “Utilizing e-books to enhance digital library

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offerings,” *Ariadne* 33, October 10, 2002 ([www.ariadne.ac.uk](http://www.ariadne.ac.uk)).

You will see no qualms, doubts, or drawbacks to ebooks—particularly netLibrary’s form of ebooks—in this article. The writers both work for OCLC. The theme here is why OCLC acquired netLibrary, with no mention of netLibrary’s business problems. It’s all very rosy. The *only* usage study mentioned is one in which netLibrary usage beat print usage all hollow. Read this for what it is. (And yes, I believe OCLC is the best thing that could have happened to netLibrary under the circumstances.)

Sawyer, Susan K., “Electronic books: their definition, usage and role in libraries,” *LibRes* 12:2 ([libres.curtin.edu.au/libres12n2/ebooks.htm](http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libres12n2/ebooks.htm)).

This review of the literature of ebooks comes from the University of Queensland Library Service. It’s a good overall review with an extensive bibliography and a few paragraphs of commentary. It’s more even-handed than most literature reviews I’ve seen. Included are several useful tables organizing some key issues.

Bellaver, Richard F., and Dr. Jay Gillette, “The usability of ebook technology: Practical issues of an application of electronic textbooks in a learning environment,” downloaded October 28, 2002 from [publish.bsu.edu/cics/ebook\\_final\\_result.asp](http://publish.bsu.edu/cics/ebook_final_result.asp)

This seven-page paper evaluates the Ball State University tests of ebooks for college courses in Spring 2002. Briefly, learning appears not to be affected by substituting ebooks for print books, but students weren’t impressed with the ebooks—although the authors offer reasons for that. Students did find ebooks harder to use than textbooks and didn’t much care for the special features such as bookmarking and search.

Worth reading, but pay attention to the cases where the writers feel the need to add parenthetical excuses—make that “explanations”—for students’ negative reactions to ebooks. Note also that this is about appliances, not the whole field of ebooks.

## disContent

# User-Generated “Content”: This is the Promised Land?

I read Cliff Figallo and Nancy Rhine’s May 2001 article, “Tapping the grapevine,” with a mix of

agreement and bemusement—and some historical argument. Professionally developed “content” has been around on the Internet since before the Web became prominent—but it’s also true that “online conversation” has been with us since the early days of the Net. I find it refreshing that the dominant use of the Internet is *still* email: one-to-one and many-to-many communication continues to matter.

I don’t believe in “the commercial Web” as a standalone entity. Commercial portions of the Web mix seamlessly with noncommercial portions; [loc.gov](http://loc.gov) may not get as many hits as [yahoo.com](http://yahoo.com), but it’s a higher-quality source for those who use it. That’s beside the point—which is that substituting user-generated “content” for what Figallo and Rhine call “manufactured content” may be a tricky road to continuity, profitability, and respectability.

Let’s call “manufactured content” what it is: Professional writing that has (with luck) been professionally edited. If writing experience and editorial oversight don’t give “manufactured content” an edge over user commentary, something is terribly wrong. Either freelance writers have gone bad, editors have given up, or readers have lost all sense of discrimination. I don’t believe any of those to be entirely true.

## Gaming the Ratings

There’s nothing new about using aggregated user feedback as a ratings mechanism, and it’s hardly unique to the Web. *Condé Nast Traveler* turns its reader surveys into several major articles each year. *PC Magazine* and *Consumer Reports* both base reliability rankings on reader surveys. On the other hand, these reader-based reports are based on *large* aggregations: results won’t be listed if there aren’t enough reports to be statistically valid. Neither *Consumer Reports* nor *PC Magazine* bases actual evaluation on user feedback; both rely on expert testing.

Similar techniques can work on the Web as part of an overall ratings scheme. NetFlix offers an average “star” rating for each DVD based on user ratings—and makes those averages meaningful by noting the number of ratings for each DVD. NetFlix encourages viewers to rate DVDs by making it easy to do so, by offering a one-click-response “rate it now” email each time you return a DVD, and by offering custom recommendations that theoretically get better as you rate more DVDs.

NetFlix also shows one problem with user-generated content, as do many of the user reviews in Amazon. Textual reviews submitted by users can be useful—but they can also be peculiar, as when one viewer gave *West Side Story* one star because he or she was expecting an action picture, not all that



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singing and dancing. When one misguided jerk is mixed in with 5,000 others, it's irrelevant—but when it's the only user review in Amazon and the user is coherent enough to hid his or her ignorance or prejudice, the joke is on the reader.

So three reviews of an electronic toothbrush give the highest possible rating and say wonderful things. How many of those reviews came from employees of the toothbrush company? In Amazon, presumably, they can't all be from the same person using different registrations (or can they?), but many sites relying on user content have no such safeguards. Were there unfavorable knowledgeable reviews of the toothbrush that disappeared from Amazon? I've seen book reviews appear, disappear, and reappear with no particular pattern. I know from personal experience that Amazon sometimes suppresses authorial information; why should I assume that all user-generated content is treated fairly or equally?

More than one Web site offers reviews of cruise ships and aggregates numeric user ratings into overall scores. I've read enough of these reviews to be deeply skeptical of such scores. One review of one of my favorite ships (one that consistently rates among the top 10 ships in the industry) makes it sound like an aging rustbucket with mediocre food and lousy entertainment—while another review, from another passenger *on the same cruise*, makes the ship sound like heaven on earth. I've seen 150-square-foot cabins described as larger than average and spacious while 220-square-foot cabins are described as cramped.

Aggregate ratings can serve as useful information, but aggregate ratings should not substitute for professional writing. Amateur reviews can be lots of fun and might even be useful, but even if treated fairly by the sites, they too often tend toward rants and hobbyhorses. That doesn't make them worthless—but don't expect me to pay for that “content” or regard it as a reason to stick with your site.

## Online Discussions & the Heat Death of Discourse

I was amused by Figallo and Rhine's characterization of *Salon's* Table Talk as “a salon for budding writers and populist commentators.” There must be some of that, but I've encountered much more of the Freeper Phenomenon: Countless flames from extreme right-wingers with lots of time to troll the topics and good typing skills, aided by near-total disregard for logic, grammar, and spelling.

Perhaps there are specialized Table Talk topics that bore the crazies enough so they leave; I just haven't seen many of them. But then, I've stopped

looking; who has the time? Anything remotely connected to politics or social issues seems to bring the usual suspects out of the woodwork. Blessed with multiple identities, an array of cute pseudonyms, and the charming (but infrequent) quirk of tracking down people who disagree with them and don't use pseudonyms and harassing them in real life, this coterie is another great weakness in “user-generated content.”

At one point, I was moderately active in The Gate's conferences—but I fled from the barrage of vicious attacks and “you're another” responses. I've seen the same happen in most broad-based online fora. If *Salon* is becoming dependent on user-generated content, then *Salon* is failing. As it is, *Salon's* professional contributors include skilled ranters along with a few good writers—but David Horowitz and Joe Conason are nuanced and well-reasoned compared to the amateur posters.

Can conferences avoid the heat death of inflamed discussion? Maybe. Define the topic narrowly enough (and apolitically enough) and the extremists will go elsewhere—but, as ZDNet's old feedback mechanisms showed, there are extremists of all stripes. If other posters don't respond to the nutcases, they'll go away, *eventually*, but others take their places. Make the discussions technical enough (as on slashdot), and the readership may eliminate most political extremists—but not all (as on slashdot!).

Then there's moderating. It works, but there goes the free lunch. Active moderating—reviewing messages before they appear and rejecting those that are worthless or off topic—slows the flow of discussion and can cause its own problems. Passive moderating—allowing automatic posting but kicking people off the system if they're out of line—works well enough in email lists but poses another set of dangers.

## Not Hopeless, But No Magic Bullet

I believe in lists, discussions, and other forms of user-generated content. I don't believe that such content can plausibly replace professional writing, at least not without substantial editorial oversight. As a consumer, I don't see freely generated content as part of “the business environment”—I see it as part of the Web that I pay for with my \$19.95/month ISP payment.

You can enrich a professional site with amateur feedback in a number of ways. That's great. But if that's most of what's there, I'm gone. So, I think, is your business model—unless you're Topica or something similar.

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This “disContent” column originally appeared in *EContent* 24:8 (October 2001), pp. 50-1.

## Postscript

The first sentence may not make sense unless you read the *EContent* article referred to—but I believe the rest of the column works independently. I don’t find anything here that needs updating. My February 2003 “disContent” column looks at another approach to reader-generated content that can appreciably enhance online sites: look for it in a couple of months.

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## The Good Stuff

Ozer, Jan, “Building the perfect digital video studio,” *EMedia* 15:8 (August 2002), pp. 22-32.

You may not find me editing video, but that’s because I lack the artistry (or interest) to take good video in the first place. One thing’s clear, though: If you’re going to deal with video, digital editing makes life a lot easier, retains image quality, and generally makes your talents more critical than your tools. Today’s PCs (Mac or Windows, take your pick) have the speed and disk space to handle serious video editing, and burning DVDs is becoming more practical every month. Ozer, who’s been working with these technologies for years, offers a detailed discussion that will help your library (or you, for that matter) define your goals and assemble an appropriate set of hardware and software.

One of the most important statements comes in the second paragraph: “Spend more than you need to for the best camera, DVD card, or video editor, and you’ll likely find yourself with a product that’s either too confusing to learn or poorly-suited for its intended use, or both.” That’s not really new—saddling a casual photographer with a professional-grade 35mm SLR removable-lens camera system not only costs far too much, it makes picture taking too complicated *for the intended purpose*. Most library uses are likely to be at the “department user” level (according to Ozer’s divisions)—frequent but not continuous and with a real need for user-friendly setups. Read the article if you or your library are considering video work, a consideration that’s more likely as time goes on.

Bohannon, WK, “LCD vs. CRT for the DV studio,” *EMedia* 15:8 (August 2002), pp. 34-9.

If your PC use is primarily business applications, the choice of LCD vs. CRT probably boils down to

cost, space, and operating system. If you can afford the higher cost of an LCD (or if you don’t have space enough for a CRT, or if a bunch of CRTs in a room generate too much heat), and if you’re running Windows XP or a contemporary Mac OS (with type-smoothing technology so the LCD will display text pleasantly), an LCD may be a better choice.

The choice is more difficult in specialized applications. As other articles have noted, the wider and truer color palette of CRTs make them better choices for high-end graphics. Bohannon raises some issues for digital video and includes some actual test results in his commentary. There’s an extreme Mac bias in this article (the two LCD displays he tests *only* work with contemporary Apple computers), but it’s still good background if you’re making such a purchase.

Bass, Steve, “How to fix the biggest PC annoyances,” *PC World* 20:10 (October 2002), pp. 72-8.

I’m not sure this belongs in “The Good Stuff,” but I don’t have a “Bemusing Stuff” category yet. This story shows you how to fix “the most aggravating PC behavior once and for all.” Bass appears to be easily aggravated and some of the fixes may be more trouble—or more dangerous—than they’re worth, but you might find some nuggets in this mixed bag.

I’m bemused by his suggestion to “save system resources” by preventing Acrobat Reader from starting automatically when you click on a PDF file in your browser. He thinks it’s cooler to download the file to disk, then open Acrobat Reader separately. That seems like a lot of extra trouble unless you’re having problems with system resources—and if you are, an upgrade to Windows XP should solve them.

The tip I find most difficult is one I might otherwise enjoy: “Fix your font size.” I think it’s great to be able to set your own default typeface (and I wish Web “designers” weren’t so insistent on forcing their own, particularly since it’s usually the unlovely Arial) and your own base size—but Bass goes further. He wants you to check “Ignore font sizes specified on Web pages” in IE or uncheck “Allow documents to use other fonts” in Navigator. That’s a recipe for some strange looking pages. Even pages that generally stay out of your way on typeface options (Eureka is a fine example) use relative sizes for good reasons; overriding those sizes may yield unworkable or unreadable pages. Web pages with forced fixed type sizes are another matter: they probably won’t work right, but they shouldn’t be designed that way in the first place.

There are some good hints here. I was also bemused, however, by the claim that there’s no cure for Office’s desire to default to the My Documents

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folder. I don't care for My Documents any more than Bass does, but for some reason I had no trouble at all telling Office applications to start out in other folders. His solution is to add a \$20 FileBox Extender utility. Maybe the "Modify" button on the File Locations tab of the Tools/Options menu item is too subtle for Bass? (There's my big tip. Do I get paid *PC World* article rates?)

Ranada, David, "Codec commandments," *Sound & Vision* 67:8 (October 2002), p. 34.

If you're doing any work with audio and PCs or MP3 players, or for that matter DVD, you're probably dealing with codecs whether you know it or not. "Codec" stands for compression-decompression; MPEG2 (DVD), MP3, WMA (Windows Media Audio), and ATRAC3 (Sony MiniDisc) are popular codecs. So, for that matter, is JPEG.

Ranada's meaty one-page "tech talk" column offers ten key elements to understand and deal with codecs, fundamental to any work with lossy compression. I've referred to some of these indirectly when making fun of authors who seem to think that you can switch back and forth between MP3 and full audio CD quality at will. A couple of the commandments may strike you as odd but are pretty fundamental, e.g. "III. Don't rely on signal measurements to determine codec quality—listen instead." Traditional audio signal tests are much simpler than music and allow codecs to perform extremely well. Particularly important: "IV. Always use the *highest* encoding bit rate allowed by the combination of playback time and storage capacity you're seeking" and, even more, "V. Don't re-encode material that has already gone through a codec." The latter can lead to disaster. Ranada seems to feel that you get close enough to "CD equivalence" at around 192Kbps for most codecs, maybe 160K for the best-designed (Fraunhofer-based) MP3 or more modern codecs. I'm using MusicMatch's 192K Fraunhofer-based MP3 at home; I think that's about right...most of the time.

Anyway, read the article. It's only about three times as long as this summary and worth every word.

Minow, Mary, "I know it when I see it': Constitutional, federal and state legal definitions of child pornography, obscenity, and 'harmful to minors' of interest to California libraries," *LLRX*, October 1, 2002 ([www.llrx.com](http://www.llrx.com)).

I believe in a modified form of *ad hominem* as a useful filter—which, in the case of Mary Minow, means that I come to one of her articles assuming that it will be interesting, well-written, informative

and grounded in solid legal background. (It works both ways, and I try to be sensible enough not to praise mediocre articles by good writers or to ignore gems from people I dislike.)

This one's no exception, and while California law is featured the rest of you will also find this worthwhile. Don't worry: the lengthy title does not imply a long or convoluted article. My printout runs to six pages, primarily very readable definitions of key terms and laws and their current statuses. Highly recommended.

I was particularly charmed by a quote from Kathleen Sullivan, now at Stanford Law School, regarding the first two "prongs" of the "Miller test" for obscenity: that the average person would find that the work appeals to the prurient interest and that the work depicts sexual conduct in a patently offensive way. Her comment: "The first two parts...are incoherent: to put it crudely, they require the audience to be turned on and grossed out at the same time." Incidentally, the same incoherent pair appears in CIPA and COPA: the material must be patently offensive *and* appeal to prurient interest.

"Make Windows work better," *PC Magazine* 21:19 (November 5, 2002), pp. 92-124.

An unusually strong "tips" article with fairly lengthy discussions of the 104 suggestions—many of them specific to Windows XP, already the strongest Windows ever. I've flagged a few pages for later use. As always, it's pointless to summarize a tips article.

I was bemused by one internal contradiction in this issue. The first "tip" is a discussion of whether you should buy Windows XP Professional or Home version. The advice: "For the majority of consumers, the less expensive Home Edition is fine." Okay by me (although my new Gateway came with XP Pro because, when I added Office XP Pro, the OS upgrade was free)—but not by Bill Machrone. His "Extreme tech" column, "A bad choice gets worse," grumbles extensively about XP Home Edition. Who's right? Your guess is as good as mine.

Block, Marylaine, "Web contributions and tenure decisions," *Ex Libris* 159 (November 15, 2002). ([marylaine.com/exlibris/](http://marylaine.com/exlibris/))

Think of this as a broader discussion of the points raised by Steven D. Krause in "Where do I list this on my CV?" (noted in *Cites & Insights* 2:13, p. 16). Block argues that not only scholarly Websites but also certain newsletters, zines and Weblogs should reasonably count toward tenure in the category of "service to the profession." A provocative essay, whether you agree or not; **recommended**.

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Taylor, Charles, "Will the DVD save movies?" *Salon*, November 14, 2002. ([www.salon.com/ent/movies/feature/2002/11/14/dvd\\_era](http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/feature/2002/11/14/dvd_era))

An interesting essay, once you get past the snobbery and apparently willful terminological/technological ignorance. The former? He dismisses "Star Wars" as "one lousy movie." The latter? He consistently uses "video" to mean "VHS" and contrasts "video" with DVD—but when you're watching a DVD movie, you're watching *video*. Duh.

Otherwise, his points are good ones, perhaps more important for those who argue that if it ain't on the big screen (with screaming kids and gum under the chairs) it ain't a movie. Perhaps, in which case it's unfortunately true that I haven't seen a movie in more than a decade. But DVD gives you the movie the way it was shot, in much better quality than the prints you'd get in theaters for minor pictures or in smaller cities, with the ability to study the picture as closely as you wish, and with extras that help explain what the creators had in mind. Selection may be the biggest deal. If you live outside a handful of big cities, you're not going to see most indie and foreign movies in the theater no matter how much you love the big screen—but Netflix and its peers will make you happy. All in all, a good essay that may be correct in suggesting that DVD can save the heart of movie-making.

## A Search Engine Cluster

Bazac, Daniel, "The meta search engines: A Web searcher's best friends," *LLRX*, September 16, 2002 ([www.llrx.com](http://www.llrx.com)).

Maybe you're like me (Gaia forbid!) and gave up on metasearch engines when they seemed to return nothing but paid-placement results, and those slowly—or when you found that Google gave you what you needed faster and with a lot less garbage.

If Bazac's right, it's time to look around—and you presumably know that Google is absolutely not all there is to say about Web searching. This article offers extremely brief pros and cons on metasearching, then describes an astonishing twenty-one different "real MSEs" (ones that aggregate results from multiple engines into a single list) that he considers worth trying. He says ez2www is "THE best!" but there are many others, each described in a brief paragraph. Since I'd only heard of one of these engines, I have no intelligent comment just yet—but the article is a fast download and meaty enough to overcome LLRX's ugly forced-sans printing

I tried half of these engines, but not with searches that might yield the most useful reports. A few of them do seem to add real value, certainly in-

cluding ez2www; several others either didn't work at all or struck me as more trouble than they were worth. Still, almost everyone should find at least one "Aha!" within this list.

Morville, Peter, "Google needs people," *O'Reilly Network*, October 11, 2002 ([www.oreillynet.com](http://www.oreillynet.com)).

A wonderful brief grump about the silly disclaimer that used to be at the bottom of Google News: "This page was generated entirely by computer algorithms without human editors. No humans were harmed or even used in the creation of this page." As always, Google adds a little cuteness to some strong technology—but in this case, they're harmfully wrong (although my first impulse was to tell Morville to lighten up). Of course Google News relies on humans—to write the computer algorithms and to make the decisions at 4,000 news sources that yield Google News. It doesn't help that Chris Sherman of *Search Engine Watch* got overexcited, saying Google News "will change everything."

Just for fun, I've had Google News as my home page at work for a week or so, after giving up on my former home page thanks to increasingly aggressive advertising. It's amusing, but it's also sort of a mess. I'll take the local metropolitan daily over Google News any old day.

Zittrain, Jonathan, and Benjamin Edelman, "Localized Google search result exclusions," downloaded October 24, 2002 from [cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/google/](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/google/)

This brief paper states an issue—Google's French and German sites appear to screen search results—and adds a call for people to assist in an "open research" project on such national filtering. Of course, there's nothing illegal about Google customizing results to suit national needs—and there may very well be legal issues that force Google to do so—but it's still an interesting project. (At the same time, it's worth noting that Google has finessed the use of cease-and-desist orders to remove other Web pages. It removes the pages; it also sends the cease-and-desist letters to a public site so that you can see what's being removed.)

Olsen, Stefanie, "The Google gods," *News.com*, October 31, 2002 ([news.com.com](http://news.com.com)).

Remember Daniel Brandt, Mr. Anti-Google? (*Cites & Insights* 2:13, p. 16) He's back in this "News.com special report" along with others who seem to think that Google is a public utility that should be regulated appropriately. Oddly, when Ink-tomi powered many of the directory/engine Websites, you didn't hear this sort of nonsense—but,

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possibly because Google works well and the private company makes money, it seems to be an easy target. This odd article includes suspicions from some firms that paid advertisers are somehow coached to get better placement.

The article is long on innuendo, short on facts. Data Recovery Group “would typically come up around the fourth listing on Google” until “Google removed the company from its listings without explanation.” But “fourth listing” under what conditions? The words “data recovery”? All searches—no, that’s absurd. Without qualification, the heated lead paragraphs of this article have zero factual content.

It doesn’t much help that people quoted include the president of WebGuerilla, “which helps companies improve their visibility in search engines.” Hmm. So a company whose business is to pervert legitimate relevance rankings doesn’t appreciate Google: That sounds like an endorsement to me. (If you have a more innocent version of “improve their visibility in search engines,” let me know.) Data Recovery is a WebGuerilla client—do you sense a pattern here?

Brandt now says, “We don’t know which comes first—whether Google is reflecting popularity or if it’s creating popularity.” Brandt operates link farms, one rank-perversion method that Google has dealt with. Again, Brandt’s attack strikes me as a pretty good endorsement.

If this is the best that Cnet’s News.com can do as a “special report,” I don’t think print journalism is in any danger. It’s as though a professor was taken to task by two or three Internet term paper mills because she recognized and downgraded papers that came from those mills: It’s the sort of attack that Google can cherish.

Which is not to say that you should always or exclusively use Google. Any library professional who does so is lazy or ignorant. Right now, Google may be the best single tool on the open Web for some purposes—and other engines, including metasearch engines, may be better for other purposes. But regulating Google makes about as much sense in 2002 as regulating Dialog would have in 1985. (There were probably calls to do that back then, but I don’t remember them.)

“The search engine ‘perfect page’ test” and “Perfect page test: criteria and detailed results,” *Search Engine Watch*, November 4, 2002 ([www.searchenginewatch.com](http://www.searchenginewatch.com)).

Here’s an interesting article and set of results. SearchDay readers suggested their “ideal” search results—but not the searches that should yield them. The editors chose ten pages to use as test cases and

thought up searches they believe are typical and should show those pages first. Then they ran the tests against eight major search engines—Google, Yahoo!, MSN, AllTheWeb, Inktomi, Lycos, Ask Jeeves, and AltaVista—the old AltaVista, to be sure. HotBot wasn’t tested because Terra Lycos said it’s about to change; AOL Search and Netscape Search are Google; LookSmart asked to have Wisenut omitted because it’s “not quite ready for prime time.”

They didn’t ask for “I’m feeling lucky” quality, although Google and Yahoo yielded the “ideal” page five times out of ten. Instead, they assigned one point for placement in the top ten, a half-point for a related page from the same site in the top ten or for certain unique results.

Their letter grades give flat-out A’s to Google, Yahoo, and MSN, noting that Yahoo’s results are essentially Google. MSN uses Inktomi, but it also uses LookSmart and some of its own work. AllTheWeb did almost as well as the three top engines, earning an A-; Inktomi and Lycos earned “B” grades while Ask Jeeves has improved a *lot* to earn a B-. The old AltaVista scored a “D.” Note that Lycos uses FAST (AllTheWeb), but when the tests were run Lycos failed to return one result that AllTheWeb returned directly.

An interesting and unusual approach to search-engine evaluation that might be worth expanding.

Sherman, Chris, “Can AltaVista’s Phoenix help it rise again?” *Search Engine Watch*, November 12, 2002.

Remember AltaVista? Despite its great beginnings, AV declined into near irrelevance—but the new version may improve the situation. Default operations show local sensitivities (that is, radio buttons for language and country appear based on your browser’s information or your IP address), AV now indexes PDF files and does news searching, and relevance ranking may be working better. An interesting short article, including notes on a couple of questionable AV claims.

## Short Takes, Worth Reading

Lasica, J.D., “When bloggers commit journalism,” *Online Journalism Review*, September 24, 2002 ([www.ojr.org](http://www.ojr.org)).

It must have been a fascinating session at UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism: Dan Gillmor, Scott Rosenberg, J.D. Lasica, and two “veteran bloggers.” This seven-page report consists of excerpts from the conversation. If you read Weblogs, and particularly Weblogs that include reporting as well as citations, you’ll find this worth reading.

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Overing, Michael S., and Wilde, Edward C., "Database resellers beware...", *Online Journalism Review*, October 3, 2002 (www.ojr.org).

Can database providers resell personal information with impunity? The gist of this brief piece is that people *do* have some privacy rights, ones that can be legally enforced. The case law discussed is from California, where privacy is in fact a constitutional right (the state constitution), but that constitutional clause does not enter into this discussion. Well worth reading, although perhaps tangential to library concerns.

Mayfield, Kendra, "Word up: Keeping languages alive," *Wired News*, November 4, 2002 (www.wired.com/news).

I don't believe this piece is tangential. It's a brief report on The Rosetta Project, which aims to create a "near permanent archive" of more than 1,400 of the world's languages. The project's first product will be a nickel disc etched with *text*—not digital representations, but actual printed text. Given that the disc itself should last 2,000 years or so, and the ease of rebuilding high-magnification microscopes, this may result in a truly archival product—assuming that the three-inch size doesn't lead post-collapse peoples to treat the disc as big jewelry or other ornamentation.

There will also be a printed volume and free online archive—and the next phase aims to include many more languages, ideally all 4,000 of the world's "documented" languages.

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## Following Up

What happened to Declan McCullagh? That, it turns out, was the wrong question. The right question was, "Why hadn't I followed enough of McCullagh's work to recognize his leanings and biases?" A long set of emails with people whose opinion I tend to trust, backed up by links to some of McCullagh's past writing, clarifies the issue considerably.

McCullagh is a small-l libertarian (that is, a believer in libertarian principles but not a member of the Libertarian Party). If I'd read Lawrence Lessig's *Code* (one of these days...) I might know that. If I'd seen some of his earlier work, including his own site, I might understand that snideness is a fairly common McCullagh response to differing opinions, and that he's dogmatic about some creeds.

## Eldred v. Ashcroft

November's item on the transcript of the Supreme Court hearing in this case was brief and vague. My apologies. Since then, the transcript has been posted at a government site with no question of legality (Google should get you there, and of course there will be links at the various Websites; it's case 01-618 if that helps). As always, I'm no lawyer, and with that in mind here are my quick impressions on reading the transcript.

First, I'm impressed by the extent to which these hearings are discussions. The justices can and do interrupt a *lot* to question, clarify, and so on. Lawrence Lessig rarely said more than a hundred words continuously, and Theodore B. Olson (DOJ) didn't do much better. On the other hand, Lessig also interrupted judges more than once, as did Olson. The transcript makes surprisingly interesting reading.

Justice Kennedy poked hard at Lessig's argument that continued extension of copyright—particularly retroactive extension—impedes progress in science and the useful arts, saying that he saw no empirical evidence that the 1976 extension had caused such damage. Lessig notes that empirical evidence isn't required, but also that circumstances (technological and otherwise) have increased the likelihood of future damage.

Justice O'Connor asks one of those difficult questions: "I could agree with you...that [CTEA] flies directly in the face of what the Framers had in mind, absolutely. But does it violate the Constitution?" Lessig's answer, briefly, is "Yes, if you buy our reading of the Constitution."

The question of "harmonization" comes up—that is, the claim that CTEA was needed for consistency with the European Union—but, as Lessig notes, there are several areas in which U.S. law *prevents* full harmonization. "If France adopted a rule that said you couldn't grant copyrights to hate speech, we could not harmonize with that rule consistent with our First Amendment." The U.S. Constitution is unique in expressly limiting terms of copyright—which is one reason that I snickered at claims by Australian authors that Lessig should not be arguing the case based on the Constitution.

Here's a great comment from Lessig: "Just as a limited edition print is not limited if each time a customer comes in a new print is printed, so, too, a limited term is not limited if each time copyright holders come to Congress they can extend the term."

Olson begins with a peroration on the long string of unchallenged Congressional extensions of copyright (very few of which had the same problems as CTEA, but never mind), and from the oratorical

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tone seemed ready to proceed forever. Or until a Supreme interrupted, which happened fairly rapidly. When asked whether the Copyright clause does in fact contain limits on Congress's authority, Olson does a little tap dance: "I think that to the extent that there may be limitations...they are...require considerable deference by this Court to the judgment of Congress."

Right about there, it becomes clear that the Justices will be at least as tough on Olson as they were on Lessig—which is, of course, exactly as it should be. One justice finds it hard to accept that retroactively extending the term of an already-issued patent (as an example) could "encourage invention" given that the inventor knew the original term of the patent. Olson talks about "many ways in which the holder of an existing right may benefit the public," but the Justice isn't buying that.

Justice Breyer pushes Olson as to whether it would be legitimate for Congress to give a copyright to a publisher solely for the purpose of reproducing and disseminating the works of Ben Johnson or Shakespeare. Olson never did answer the question. Breyer doesn't understand how writers have more incentive because their works are protected 70 rather than 50 years after they die; Olson suggests that 80-year-old writers might not be as productive if they knew their works would be protected for a mere 50 years after death. When pushed, Olson goes back to "the authority is vested in Congress."

Justices O'Connor and Rehnquist push the point that affirming CTEA seems to mean that there are no real limits to the length of copyright. Justice Kennedy asserts that the most plausible explanation for CTEA is to reward existing vested interests, not to stimulate new works. When Olson does admit that "an unlimited time would violate the Copyright Clause. Something that was the functional equivalent of an unlimited time would violate the Copyright Clause," Justice Scalia notes "that's precisely the argument that's being made by petitioners here." After that, the discussion gets *really* interesting, particularly as it pertains to retroactive extension.

A fascinating transcript that, to my naïve eye, says the Justices are taking *Eldred v. Ashcroft* quite seriously. **Recommended.**

## PC Group Reviews

# Desktop Computers

DeFeo, Jennifer M., "Innovative by design," *PC Magazine* 21:18 (October 15, 2002), pp. 94-114.

Somehow the 26 PCs (desk and notebook) in this roundup are "unique, progressive, and oh, so cool." Wowie zowie. There are some neat designs here, but the Editors' Choices seem almost random: Apple's \$1,799 iMac, NEC's \$1,600 PowerMate eco, Toshiba's \$2,499 Satellite 1955, and Toshiba's Portege 2000 and Portege 4010, \$2,017 and \$2,049 respectively. A fair number of interesting designs appear in these good individual reviews, but some of these are about as pedestrian as my new Gateway—oh, I forgot, the new Gateway black-and-silver mid-tower and tower cases qualify as cool, don't they?

Karagiannis, Konstantinos, "2.8 GHz brings us oh-so-close," *PC Magazine* 21:17 (October 1, 2002), pp. 28-30.

Close to what? To 3GHz—but why would that matter? In any case, this review covers five early 2.8GHz Pentium-4 systems costing \$2,887 to \$3,816—but the \$3,816 Falcon system doesn't include a monitor or speakers. As a comparison, performance tests were also run on a prototype AMD Athlon XP 2600+ system; it lagged behind the others. All these systems are well equipped. Dell's \$3,058 Dimension 8200 gets the Editors' Choice.

O'Brien, Bill, "State of the parts," *Computer Shopper* 22:10 (October 2002), pp. 112-17.

Another odd "group" review covering three desktops and two notebooks that "incorporate some of today's hottest technologies." What technologies? High-speed RAM, big high-speed hard disks, the Intel Pentium 4-M for notebooks, and USB 2.0. Reading the individual reviews might lead a skeptic to suggest that the article theme is just an excuse to turn several independent reviews into a cheap article—particularly since some of the units don't seem all that special. The only units to get decently high ratings are the two notebooks, Acer's TravelMate 632XCi and Toshiba's Tecra 9100. The first stands out as a cheap (\$1,499) decently equipped Pentium 4-M system; the second is a fast \$3,409 notebook that seems overpriced for the configuration.

Ozer, Jan, "Towers of power," *PC Magazine* 21:16 (September 17, 2002), pp. 106-21.

Think your 2.5GHz Pentium-4 with 512MB DDRAM and a huge 7,200RPM disk is a real barn-burner? You're right, of course—but *real men* use workstations. Cheap shot, and women are also into digital content creation, mechanical CAD, digital animation, and the other tasks for which these monsters make sense. This roundup includes six "mid-range" workstations costing \$1,899 to \$3,757 (but with four of the six over \$3,000) and six "high-end" units at \$4,899 to \$6,595. That always includes

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1GB DDRAM or RDRAM and either a 2.4GHz or faster Pentium4 or Intel Xeon processor or AMD's claimed equivalent CPUs, along with high-end graphics, big hard disks, and big displays. The high-end units all have SCSI hard disks running 10,000 or 15,000 RPM—but all the midrange units come with 7200RPM IDE disks, making it difficult to distinguish them from well-equipped “regular” PCs. In practice, it may boil down to certification for certain pieces of software. Dell Precision Workstations take both Editors' Choice awards.

## Digital Cameras

Kaplan, Jeremy A., “Snap judgments,” *PC Magazine* 21:17 (October 1, 2002), pp. 86-114.

This roundup includes ten cameras in the \$300 range and eight costing roughly \$500, with sidebars on “(almost) affordable digital SLRs” (specifically, a \$2,000 Nikon) and two \$800 cameras. Digital cameras vary so much in form factor, strengths and weaknesses that you need to read the story—and, unfortunately, photo samples are not included. Editors' Choice for a \$300 camera is Nikon's Coolpix 2500, an interesting little camera with the zoom lens hidden inside; for \$500, they recommend FujiFilm's 3.1 megapixel FinePix F601 Zoom.

Long, Ben, “Compact DV camcorders,” *Macworld* 19:11 (November 2002), pp. 38-9.

All of these cameras work with Macs, but they should also all work with Windows PCs equipped with IEEE1394/Firewire ports (standard on many modern PCs and cheap to add on others). The group consists of single-CCD camcorders (that is, ones using a single image sensor rather than three); prices range from \$1,200 to \$2,000. All four offer good image quality (considerably better than Hi8 or VHS-C camcorders), but the Canon Optura 200MC and Sony DCR-TRV50 yielded the best images in the group. All four do good jobs of stabilizing images and all four will take still pictures—but the stills aren't as good as \$200 digital cameras. Unfortunately, all four “oversharpen” images. Three of the four have vertical forms somewhat like thick portable cassette recorders—for example, the Canon is 2.5 inches wide, 5.1 inches high, and 5.1 inches deep. The Sony DCR-TRV50 is a more traditional camcorder shape (2.9x3.6x6.6). Three of the four cameras get very good ratings (four mice or better), excluding only the lowest-cost unit; the \$1,899 Canon gets an extra half mouse and *Macworld's* recommendation. Incidentally, these are all fairly lightweight units: the Canon weighs 1.3 pounds, the Sony 1.5 pounds.

Spoonauer, Mark, “Shooting stars,” *PC Magazine* 21:19 (November 5, 2002), pp. 172-3.

This brief roundup covers seven consumer-priced digital camcorders, roughly the same category as Ben Long's *Macworld* roundup above. These units range from \$500 to \$1,100, but the single camera cheaper than \$850 is heavy and mediocre; thus, there's actually no direct overlap between the two reviews. Editors' Choice goes to the most expensive camera in the group, Sony's \$1,100 DCR-P101, notable for its quality optics (yielding sharp videos) and innovative LCD touch screen controls.

## Digital Convergence Systems

Howard, Bill, “Digital jukeboxes,” *PC Magazine* 21:17 (October 1, 2002), pp. 166-7.

I don't understand the “wow factor” that Howard assigns to these six devices, properly known as digital audio servers. Four of the six combine hard disks, CD drives (CD-RW in three cases), and software so that you can play MP3s on your stereo system—and, in two of the four cases, Internet radio as well. The other two do even less, essentially connecting PC-based sound files (and Internet radio) to your stereo without even having local storage. At least those two are cheap, \$300 for the Editors' Choice Voyetra Turtle Beach AudioTron and \$379 for the low-rated Motorola simplfi. Three of the four others strike me as absurdly overpriced: \$2,000 for the Editors' Choice Escient FireBall and as much as \$3,500 for the AudioReQuest ARQ2 Pro! (Yamaha's CDR-HD1000 is cheaper, \$500, but it's almost useless; it doesn't even handle MP3s, basically just acting as a hard disk buffer for copying CDs.)

What do you get for \$2,000? A CD-RW drive, 40GB hard disk with a substantial portion of the GraceNote CD track information database already installed, and a wireless keyboard and remote. You can add a touchpad VGA panel—for another \$2,000! Figure \$200 total for the hard disk and CD-RW drive (being generous), and given that MusicMatch Pro costs \$20, you're paying almost \$1,800 for a cabinet, keyboard, remote control, and a database that's available free on the Internet. Maybe “wow!” is the right word.

## Displays

Blachere, Kristina, “LCDs that suit you,” *Computer Shopper* 22:10 (October 2002), pp. 140-6.

As with Bill O'Brien's graphics board article below, this is an odd article that attempts to match particular displays to types of users rather than doing a straight comparative review. The five units in-



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clude two Editors' Choices, HP's \$799 Compaq TFT7020, inexpensive for a 17" LCD, and KDS' \$425 Radius Rad-5, a relatively cheap 15" screen. A third unit ties for highest rating with those two, Samsung's \$899 17" SyncMaster 171P.

Jantz, Richard, "Larger screens, smaller investments," *PC World* 20:10 (October 2002), pp. 58-9.

Big-screen LCD displays still cost two or three times as much as CRTs, but at least the prices are now out of the stratosphere. This mini-roundup covers three 18.1" (viewable) LCDs and one 19" unit, all with 1280x1024 native resolution. The review calls the 19" ViewSonic VX900 "the best choice in this group" for its size, features, and price (\$1,099)—but for pure image quality, the \$1,089 Eizo Nanao Flex-Scan L665 has it beat.

Poor, Alfred, "CRT monitors fight back," *PC Magazine* 21:18 (October 15, 2002), p. 41.

This may be the year in which dollars spent on LCD displays exceed dollars spent on CRTs, but CRTs keep improving. This review covers two 16"-viewable CRTs with flat picture tubes and extra-bright modes. The \$210 NEC MultiSync FE771SB is inexpensive but the SuperBright feature degrades image quality. Samsung's \$220 SyncMaster 756mb gets an Editors' Choice for its better image quality and some clever extras, such as a definable "highlight zone" to brighten just part of the screen. At home, I run my aging Trinitron display at less than halfway on its brightness scale—but then, I'm not usually watching DVD movies.

## Graphics Hardware and Software

Holsinger, Erik, "21<sup>st</sup>-century home movies," *Computer Shopper* 22:10 (October 2002), pp. 148-52.

This article covers four DVD authoring programs costing \$30 to \$100, with a sidebar mentioning five higher-end programs costing \$80 to \$999. The single Editors' Choice among the four inexpensive programs is also the most expensive: Dazzle's DVD Complete Deluxe. It won't handle QuickTime but it does many other things well.

Krasne, Alexandra, "High-flying graphics cards," *PC World* 20:10 (October 2002), pp. 99-112.

This may be a "10 best" review (five "power" and five "value"—at *PC World*, computing always breaks down into neat predefined numbered

groups), but it offers more detail than most. Nine of the ten boards included in the rankings use nVidia GeForce4 chips, so the writeup is more interesting than the tabular results—but one test report includes a broader range of cards and chips and is fairly interesting. Best Buys are two MSI cards, the \$259 G4Ti4400-VTD and \$119 G4MX460-VTP; unlike many other nVidia-based cards, these two include dual-display support.

O'Brien, Bill, "Getting graphic," *Computer Shopper* 22:10 (October 2002), pp. 128-38.

Another one of the recent group reviews that makes me wonder what's happening to *Computer Shopper*. This one claims to "track down the right graphics card for five types of user." It's essentially a set of recommendations rather than comparative reviews with no comparative performance tests. Do the recommendations make sense? Possibly, particularly the \$249 ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon 8500DV for digital-video buffs and the \$350 Leadtek Winfast A250 Ultra TD for high-end gaming. For most of us, in most applications, almost any contemporary graphics card will provide more power than we can use—and that may even be true of the best integrated graphics support.

Ozer, Jan, "Video editing meets DVD authoring," *PC Magazine* 21:19 (November 5, 2002), pp. 32-4.

Where Ozer's September review (see below) covers semi-pro packages that typically separate editing (trimming videos, adding effects and audio) from authoring (creating navigation menus and burning to DVD), the popular-priced programs here perform both tasks. Pinnacle Studio 8 (\$99) gets the Editors' Choice; this is the first version of Studio to combine editing and authoring. Second place goes to MyDVD Video Suite 4.0 (\$100), the easiest way to move from tape to DVD. It's not as capable as the competitors for video editing but it can automate the whole process. The third option, Roxio's \$80 VideoWave MovieCreator, is weak on editing and lacks MyDVD's automation—but if you want a "themed" DVD and have no idea how to create one, the packaged themes here (e.g., a kid's birthday party) may make it the best choice.

Ozer, Jan, "Video editors battle for the high ground," *PC Magazine* 21:16 (September 17, 2002), pp. 34-6.

These three video editors are for serious work and carry variously serious prices: \$550 to \$2,995, with the Editor's Choice at \$699. That's Pinnacle Edition DV, based on FASTStudio.DV. The package includes Pinnacle Impression DVD Pro for DVD

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authoring. Second place goes to Video Toaster [2], an expensive combination of software and special hardware offering exceptional performance (including real-time rendering of special effects). Old standby Adobe Premiere comes in last.

## Internet Browsers

Carroll, Sean, “The bionic browser,” *PC Magazine* 21:18 (October 15, 2002), pp. 116-28.

Give *PC Magazine* credit: what other magazine could spend twelve solid pages (there’s only one ad in the 13 pages) on browsers? The field as a whole keeps improving, but Internet Explorer 6 still stands out for its “ability to render every page smoothly.” The review includes a slew of add-ons, many of them striking me as more intrusive than helpful, but browser add-ons are classic cases of personal taste and preference. Read the article; you may find more than the Google Toolbar (one of the seven Editors’ Choice add-ons) to be worth the space.

## Optical Character Recognition

Mendelson, Edward, and M. David Stone, “OCR: the best yet,” *PC Magazine* 21:18 (October 15, 2002), p. 44.

This one-page “roundup” says that the newcomer Abby FineReader 6.0 Professional (\$299) does a pretty good job—but ScanSoft’s OmniPage Pro 12 Office does even better (and the \$150 Pro 12 should do just as well, but without automation and a few other high-end features). In fact, both programs show impressive percentage results in newspaper and magazine tests as well as laser-printed pages—for example, both yielded 99.4% accuracy on a 756-word magazine article. But that’s a little misleading: the two programs missed 26 and 29 characters out of 4651 characters total. In terms of *words* that require manual correction, that means the accuracy rates are 96.6% and 96.2% respectively—still good, but not quite as spectacular. (The worst case, FineReader on a 1,667-word newspaper article, showed 95.8% word accuracy—still pretty good.)

## Printers

“Fresh prints,” *PC Magazine* 21:19 (November 5, 2002), pp. 129-50.

Bad puns, good printers: Roundups with individual reviews of ten personal inkjets, six multifunction printers, nine photo printers (that is, inkjets that offer six-color photo printing), and four personal lasers—and a test of third-party inkjet refills.

The best news for personal inkjets is that “there isn’t a truly awful one among them,” from the \$70 Lexmark Z35 to the \$500 HP Color Inkjet Printer cp1700. In this category, the Editors’ Choice was a “contest of HP models,” with the \$150 Deskjet 5550 getting the award for its balance of speed, quality (including optional six-color photo printing) and cost, but “if money were no object” the \$500 cp1700 is the clear choice: best print quality, cost per page down in the laser-printer range, and fast.

HP also wins among multifunction printers, specifically the \$500 OfficeJet d135, although its OCR support isn’t as good as some others. If money *is* an object, they recommend Canon’s \$300 MultiPass F60, but it lacks fax capabilities. Canon gets the Editors’ Choice among photo printers with the \$350 S900 Color Bubble Jet Printer—and Samsung’s \$200 ML-1430 is the least expensive laser tested and Editors’ Choice in the personal laser category.

## Projectors

Pittelkau, Jeff, “Compact projectors,” *Macworld* 19:10 (October 2002), pp. 32-3.

If you want the best color and contrast in a projector that you could use as a slightly less expensive home theatre unit, consider the \$4,600 Boxlight Cinema 17SE. If brightness and price matter more, consider the Epson PowerLite 720c: 50% more bright, two-thirds the weight, and \$3,500. Those are the key findings from this brief roundup of five 1024x768 digital projectors. It’s worth noting that the ANSI lumen ratings given here are manufacturer claims—unlike *PC*, *Macworld* can’t be bothered to run objective measurements.

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## The Details

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