

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large
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Perspective

The New Site & COWLZ: A Lost Opportunity?

Cites & Insights now resides at <http://citesandinsights.info/> (no hyphen!). Technically, it resides at <http://cical.info/>; the longer, more meaningful name resolves to the same directory. citesandinsights.info is a LISHost site.

All issues of *Cites & Insights* are available at the new URL. Links to old issues and essays (prior to August 2006) at cites.boisestate.edu will work for a while, but should be changed. If there are still links to the original site (cical.home.att.net), they've long since ceased to work.

The Short Story

Those are the facts but not the story. Knowing how much I care about preservation and long-term stability, you must wonder why I moved—particularly since that move orphans a site that had high page rank and visibility.

There are two versions of the story: One short, one long. The short story is simple. Questions were raised at Boise State University Libraries about the *C&I* home page, specifically “sponsored by YBP Library Services.” Why was a vendor name appearing on a Boise State site when Boise State wasn't receiving any revenue?

The questions were preliminary. I didn't get a call saying, “Get rid of the sponsor or move the ejournal now!” But the questions reminded me of something else. Sooner or later, I do plan to produce some print-on-demand books based largely on material in *Cites & Insights*. The obvious place to promote those books is on the *C&I* home page—but that's not appropriate as

long as the home page is at Boise State. A simple sponsorship notice, maybe; direct promotion of products for sale, no.

I'm grateful to Dan Lester for making cites.boisestate.edu possible in the first place and for helping me with it in the years *C&I* has been there. I'm grateful to Boise State University for the free hosting. I didn't want to cause difficulty for anyone.

So I registered two domains (remember when a domain cost more than a glass of wine?), checked with Blake Carver, and he established the new directory on my LISHost account. Fifteen minutes at land1.com to register domains; fifteen minutes to let Blake know what was happening; less than a day for [land1](http://land1.com) to make it happen; less than an hour to upload all the contents to the new site.

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All links within the site are relative (issue links within the overall table of contents are in the form “[civMiN.pdf](#),” not the full URL) so I didn't have to touch them. The links at the start and end of each HTML separate are absolute. Replacing those took another hour or two (thanks, WordPad!).

That's the short version. It includes the when (early July), the “immediate why,” and the how.

But why was *C&I* at Boise State in the first place (I've never been to Boise) and does this move have deeper implications? Answering that requires the *much* longer version.

The COWLZ Story

I could say it began with Marylaine Block's “Who's going to preserve zine content?” (*ExLibris* 135, March

22-29, 2002)—but it goes back to the December 2001 *American Libraries* and the last article in my “The E-Files” trilogy: “E-newsletters and E-zines: From Current Cites to NewBreed Librarian.”

In that article, I discussed library-related e-zines and e-newsletters using five examples: the *Newsletter on Serials Pricing Issues* (established February 1989), *Current Cites* (August 1990), *Library Juice* (1998), *ExLibris* (March 1999), and *NewBreed Librarian* (February 2001). The author bio mentioned *Cites & Insights*, but I didn’t discuss it in the article proper. Here’s how I concluded that article:

People and groups start e-newsletters and e-zines because they have things to say that other people want to read. That may mean collaborative filtering to select the most noteworthy articles in a field and annotate them; it may mean rounding up news in a particular area to provide continuity and focus; it may mean hearing the unheard or providing perspective within a field. Internet distribution, archiving, and other tools can extend a publication.

Current Cites maintains a searchable database to create on-demand custom bibliographies and indexes the full text of all cited articles that are freely available online. *NewBreed Librarian* includes a Weblog along with feature articles. The *Library Juice* archive builds an ongoing presence on the Web—and NSPI’s online archive provides a valuable historical resource.

None of these publications will put *American Libraries* or *Library Journal* or *Information Technology and Libraries* out of business; that’s not their purpose. They use new tools to bring new stories to the community, helping to assure diverse perspective and informed awareness.

ExLibris 135

Marylaine Block raised a good question, noted above. More excerpts from marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib135.html:

Whenever I send out ExLibris to subscribers, I always include the “permanent” URL for that particular issue. But what, exactly, do we who create e-zines mean when we say “permanent”? Just how much of a promise is that?

For me, all it really signifies is that as long as I want to pay the monthly fee to maintain marylaine.com as a showcase for my writing, I’ll maintain the complete archive here. But when I no longer have much to say about libraries and the internet...I’ll probably let the web site lapse, in which case, all the articles I’ve posted here will vanish.

Perhaps that’s no great loss... Maybe all that will be lost is the historical value: what were people saying about the internet and libraries at a particular moment in time.

But my zine is just one of many... [mentioning some of the above and *LLRX*, *D-Lib Magazine* and *First Monday*]. It could easily be argued that in this age of instant elec-

tronic access, these journals are at least as influential as the older established print publications, and yet the survival of their archives is entirely dependent on their creators’ continuing interest and ability to support the server costs and contribute their own time... [S]houldn’t the full-text database providers serving libraries, like Wilson, or OCLC, or Ebsco, negotiate with [the editors] to archive the content of our zines and index it right along with the other librarians’ publications they offer full-text? Wouldn’t this make their databases more complete, reflecting the full range of librarians’ discussions of current issues? Wouldn’t this serve their mission of preserving valuable content and keeping it from disappearing forever?

Block laid down a challenge. What follows came out of that challenge. It doesn’t add up to much.

Cites & Insights: May 2002

I didn’t have a blog back then, but I did have several hundred readers and access to several thousand *possible* readers via mailing lists. I featured this essay as the lead article in *C&I* 2:7, reprinted here almost in full, and stored it as a separate item on my home site for broader circulation:

Long-Term Access to Library Zines

Marylaine Block said it in *Ex Libris* 135 (March 22-29 2002): “Who’s going to preserve zine content?” She focused on library-related zines, defining the field broadly enough to include this experiment as well as *Library Juice*, and raised two issues: Who would assure long-term access and who would provide the indexing that these publications deserve?

Should *Library Literature* index *Cites & Insights*, *NewBreed Librarian*, the *FOS Newsletter* and *Ex Libris* alongside *American Libraries* and *Online*? I’m not sure, and I’m not the person to make that call.

Do these and other library-related online zines and newsletters matter—enough so that they should be preserved for long-term access by scholars and librarians even after their founders lose interest or run out of money? Yes, I believe they do, even if that sounds self-interested.

There’s a ferment in the field, with a variety of thoughtful people providing news and analysis in ways that would not have been possible a decade ago or practical five years ago. My “E-files” trilogy in *American Libraries* toward the end of 2001 covered a piece of this ferment. In the process, I’ve become acquainted with dozens, possibly hundreds of library people who I might never have met otherwise, and who in their turn might have dismissed me as a boring old middle-of-the-road (even “establishment”) jackass unworthy of notice.

But this is about Web-based library-related zines, not me. I can’t get Marylaine’s column out of my mind. I think she’s on to something, and I feel the need to push it a couple of steps further.

Thus, this essay, which will also appear as a link from a mailing to a few lists and a number of zine/newsletter editor/publishers. While I have no particular desire to take on a new leadership role, I do believe that some coordination needs to be done. With luck, some younger, more energetic person will step up to the role. Otherwise, I'll keep on with this for a little while. This being:

COWLZ: A Call for Participation

COWLZ: the [Caucus/Coalition/Consortium/Cluster] of Online and Web-based Library-related Zines/Newsletters. I see the logo already, five letters in a suitable typeface imposed on public-domain clip art of a cowl (which shouldn't be hard to find). Maybe I've been reading too much stuff from UK libraries, with their remarkable penchant for clever acronyms. Sorry.

I've built a COWLZ folder in my Notes Mail space. With a little encouragement, I'd set up a COWLZ Topica list, even with the growing ad overhead of Topica—unless someone offers a no-ad list environment to help semi-organize COWLZ.

This is a call to proprietors of online and Web-based library-related zines and newsletters to do one of two things: Respond with indications of interest and the extent to which you're willing to be involved—or respond with a clear message that this is a stupid idea and you want nothing to do with it. For now, send email to me... Include "COWLZ" beginning the subject line.

I think COWLZ could do three things as a virtual, informal, no-fee non-organization:

- Lobby for and locate an archival location, where current or "dark" archives of Web-based library-related zines and newsletters could reside, establishing long-term access. That location might also be a new home for some zines.
- Encourage firms that index library-related periodicals to include key zines/newsletters.
- Define the field (that is, potential COWLZ members) loosely enough to encourage ferment in the field and tightly enough so that hosting facilities aren't used entirely frivolously.

Pieces of the definitions of this group appear in the name. Let me spell it out a bit more, with the caveat that some *real* leader or council could say that I'm wrong, which would be fine with me:

- **Online and Web-based:** Available on the Web, either directly (HTML/XML) or indirectly (PDF etc.), with no *required* fee. This does not rule out publications with voluntary subscriptions, paid print subscriptions, or PayPal-type arrangements, but does eliminate publications that require paid subscriptions.
- **Library-related:** Loose enough to include *FOS Newsletter*; largely defined by the membership.

- **Zines and newsletters:** Things that appear as periodicals, even if irregular in frequency, with some expectation of continued appearance. This leaves out Weblogs (which need their own archiving strategy) and Usenet/Google Groups, but also omits independent articles and occasional papers. There are probably two levels of COWLZ "members"—true startups and those that have lasted for at least a year and four issues. Dead zines—ones still available but no longer published—are particularly interesting, as they will disappear unless archived.

Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me it's stupid. Or tell me you're interested. I'll be sending a pointer to this piece to as many proprietor/editors as I can locate. I have no interest in controlling this process and would be delighted to turn it over to someone else.

Some of you out there could also tell me something else: That you have a home for COWLZ, that your firm is ready to index COWLZ members based on some criteria, that you're ready to host a face-to-face meeting of some COWLZ participants, or whatever. Ten bucks worth of hard disk space (five gigabytes) and a few hundred megabytes a month of Internet traffic would go a *long* ways toward archiving known library-related zines/newsletters, if connected to the right hosting environment.

Let me know.... Based on responses by May 15, there will be a follow-up in the next *Cites & Insights*—but responses are welcome later as well, with more coverage in later issues.

Free Online Scholarship had joined the discussion. While not technically a library publication, it was (and, under a different name, is) an e-newsletter of considerable importance to libraries and librarians, and its editor was interested in COWLZ.

Enough happened to justify a followup in *C&I* 2:8 (June 2002), excerpted here:

In my foolishness, I half-expected that a few people would say "what a dumb idea this is!" while one or two would express mild interest and everyone else would ignore it altogether. That would yield a compact follow-up: "Very little energy and less than two pages of *Cites & Insights* were wasted on this dumb idea." A somewhat less likely outcome would be an outpouring of focused enthusiasm leading to some real progress by this point. I'd report on responses and where things might go from here.

The truth is stranger and more complex than expectations.... [Long discussion of traditional zines follows]

I see no reason that Web-based publications should be treated *more* seriously than "minor" print publications—but maybe some of them should be treated *as* seriously. *Cites & Insights* reaches more readers than many print library journals; *Library Juice* reaches a *lot* more people than I do. Do they deserve long-term retention? Damned if I know....

What's happened? Most editors I contacted responded positively. A few others also responded positively—offering appropriate disk space (at a university, backed up regularly, with high-speed Internet connections), leadership with experience in the North American Serials Interest Group, leading experience in handling electronic journals, and other ideas. I won't name names for the same reason I won't describe next steps: I'm not in charge (and don't wish to be), and the group seems to believe—appropriately—that it should define a future somewhat before issuing progress reports.

Progress seems likely and it's a little hard to predict the shape of the eventual project. Participants represent deep expertise and awareness, but these are also busy people. Nothing will happen overnight. I'm encouraged; stay tuned.

"A university" was Boise State. I started a Topica list of 14 people who had expressed interest—Dan Lester, editor/publishers, Eric Lease Morgan offering software assistance, and Steve Oberg, a former president of NASIG, the North American Serials Interest Group. During the summer, we discussed possibilities.

Cites & Insights: October 2002

Excerpts from the lead essay in *C&I* 2:13. "Who's Going to Preserve E-Zine Content?":

That's the title on a "Backtalk" piece by Marylaine Block in the August 2002 *Library Journal*. I've seen it cited in the places that cite *Cites & Insights*—and a lengthy citation was the lead item in the August 29, 2002, *ShelfLife* (a weekly "executive news summary for information professionals" sponsored by RLG).

The first line of the *ShelfLife* summary: "Walt Crawford of RLG has been spearheading the Coalition of Web-based Library-Related Zines/Newsletter (COWLZ)..." That's almost a direct quote from the antepenultimate paragraph of Block's piece...: "The archiving situation can be solved by way of the web. Walt Crawford is spearheading the..."

What's that spearhead I feel in my back? Is it being wielded by Marylaine Block, aggressively "following" as a COWLZ participant?... [H]ere's what I think is happening and what I intended my role to be....

[Noting the May essay]: Consider two key sentences in that essay: "I have no interest in controlling this process and would be delighted to turn it over to someone else" and "Some of you out there could also tell me...That you have a home for COWLZ, that your firm is ready to index COWLZ members based on some criteria, that you're ready to host a face-to-face meeting of some COWLZ participants, or whatever." Now let's see what's transpired:

Almost all of the editor/publishers I contacted responded favorably and signed up for the COWLZ list, although some of them quite sensibly wanted their own

publication to be part of a "dark archive" until (unless) they stopped doing it... If they stopped doing it, or failed to respond to an annual tickler, then the dark archive would become publicly accessible, providing long-term access to the ceased publication. A couple simply didn't respond; in one "peer-reviewed" case, that may be just as well.

A few other interested parties joined in—people who don't currently produce Web zines/newsletters but who thought this was a worthwhile effort and wanted to help. They include a former president of NASIG (the North American Serials Interest Group) who may provide the neutral and thoughtful leadership that we need; a librarian willing and able to commit enough well-backed-up, highly-connected Web space to handle anything COWLZ is likely to be in the near future; and a mover-and-shaker who has created his own solutions to various library problems and is showing how some of those solutions could handle COWLZ.

There was a flurry of activity on the list near the end of the academic year. No real action was taken, including failure to act on the offer of Web space; with the summer, postings dwindled—until a signal event at the beginning of August. More on that later.

I tried to nudge things along by asking some questions and tossing out some possibilities, but also tried very hard to avoid "spearheading" or otherwise maintaining a leadership position. There are several reasons for that, but perhaps clear conflict issues will suffice. After all, *Cites & Insights* is a Web-based zine, but one with some tricky issues for indexing and access (given its PDF nature) and one where I'd prefer to move the whole operation to a COWLZ archive operation, since the methods I'm using to run it on my ISP's Web site are a little peculiar. There's also the simple "been there, done that" issue—I've been LITA president and on the LITA board for six years, and don't have an urge to be The Leader—and the likelihood that, as apparent leader, my own ideas would receive less critical assessment and improvement than if I'm just a participant.

Then *NewBreed Librarian* posted its final issue. The Website's still there, but both the Weblog and the bi-monthly issue archive are static, and there's a clear threat that the Website could go away. Suddenly, we had a current case of a no-longer-current publication. The COWLZ list started to pick up, albeit fitfully—and our resident problem-solver put together a trial application to enter COWLZ zine/newsletter information and, later, to harvest sites.

But COWLZ still had (and has, as of this writing) no real structure, no clear definition of who we are, no leadership, no agreed home. After a week or two, one glance at the database convinced me that people were casting a net that I considered far too broad. I raised that issue and suggested that someone should really be working on proposing some structure and definitions. Marylaine

and a couple of others expressed interest in commenting on the bylaws after I propose them...

That, I believe, is where things stand. I've suggested that any COWLZ participant could go through the Topica COWLZ archives...and garner enough suggestions to create a draft set of bylaws—and that I was too old, tired, busy, and conflicted to wish to do that. Perhaps someone else is busily drafting those bylaws and definitions. Perhaps spear-carriers are assuming I'll respond to prodding by doing it myself.

I offered the informal suggestion that, if there wasn't a fairly clear picture by the end of Calendar 2002, it might be reasonable to suppose that COWLZ wasn't going to happen. We all have our own ways of nudging.

What's going to happen? I have no idea. Will I cave in and prepare draft bylaws? See previous answer.

Let's say that a writer publishes a 700-word essay on copyright in *American Libraries* and two 1200-word essays in *EContent*. Those commentaries will be indexed and abstracted in a fairly sizable handful of databases, with subject headings in some cases. Now let's say the same writer publishes 3,000 to 4,000 words every two or three months in a Webzine, with far more detailed discussions and lots of pointers to other materials. Those discussions won't be indexed and abstracted anywhere. Similarly, people looking for Marylaine Block's stuff in most a&I databases will see the *LJ* piece but not the *Ex Libris* piece with the same title that preceded it by several months and laid the groundwork for it.

Does that make sense?

Damned if I know.

Do you? More important..., do you have a way of doing something about it?

I included a first name and last initial in that final paragraph, as I'd already been in touch with a person who could potentially add some of these titles to one of the major library indexes. Otherwise, I'll note that the "willing and able" librarian is Dan Lester and the "mover and shaker" is Eric Lease Morgan. Those two put more real effort into COWLZ than anyone else, I believe (certainly including me) and deserve thanks...and regrets.

What happened next? We established the COWLZ site at boisestate.edu. I moved *Cites & Insights* to that site from its convenience home at my dialup account's free web space, cical.home.att.net. As I noted in the first issue at the new site, January 2003 (3:1), "The move means that *Cites & Insights* is part of a regular backup system and participates in an archiving system with some potential. I hope that it also brings more visibility to COWLZ." At that point, I also put "Founding member of COWLZ" on the *C&I* home page.

From there, it's a long year to...

Cites & Insights, October 2003

That was the 41st issue of *C&I* and, thus, the 100th issue of "this stuff" (including 59 issues of *Trailing Edge Notes* and *Crawford's Corner*). I celebrated with "41 at 58," a set of 41 mini-perspectives, because I turned 58 right around the time the issue was published. Here's #10, in its entirety:

COWLZ and the Dangerfield Effect

Wonder what happened to COWLZ? So do I—and I'm part of it. Well, OK, *Cites & Insights* is now hosted on the COWLZ site at Boise State. Otherwise...it's been a slow road in terms of anything publicly apparent. I don't know that this is likely to change any time soon. I know I don't have a lot of energy to provide to the effort and suspect that's true of others.

In a way, that's a shame. The Dangerfield Effect? Getting no respect. To put it another way, not being on the traditional radar screens. I think that's true of most alternative and informal library publications, no matter what their inherent worth.

I've seen pathetic attempts at e-journals that failed after two issues—and are included in abstracting services, so the handful of articles that are published will show up where searching is done. The key is that they were defined as proper Journals, with referees and all. It's tougher to index and abstract zines and newsletters, although partial indexing (of major articles) might be plausible. Will it happen? Would it make a difference?

Right now, I'm doubtful on either one—and I'm not ready to mount that particular horse and ride off toward that particular windmill once again.

In the next issue, I published feedback from Don Hawkins of *Information Science Abstracts*, who picked up on the next-to-last paragraph here. His letter and some of my response:

"I guess I'm the guilty party on this one, with things like *Transforming Traditional Libraries*. It happens because, of course, when you find out about the e-journal, you don't know it won't survive past two issues. I also think that having the bibliographic record that papers were published is important.

"Regarding newsletters, I do try to include major articles but not pure announcements and the like. Zines and other nontraditional forms are much harder because they're more ephemeral, at least by definition, and as you point out, they're not refereed. I guess it's just the nature of the beast?"

My comment in response: I believe this may be a somewhat insoluble problem. I note that virtually everything I publish in non-refereed magazines is widely indexed... whereas the more substantive (also non-refereed) pieces

in *Cites & Insights* aren't indexed anywhere, as far as I know.

I don't know. What constitutes ephemeral? *ExLibris*? *Cites & Insights*? Does something become less ephemeral when it costs money? (Is *Library Futures Quarterly* indexed? I don't know.)

...Personally, I have no real complaint. *Cites & Insights* almost certainly reaches more actual readers than *Library Hi Tech News*. I believe it will have minor long-term significance as part of the informal history of librarianship, but I certainly don't write *For The Ages*.

2004

I mentioned COWLZ in *A IS FOR AAC: A DISCURSIVE GLOSSARY* (*C&I* 4:2, Midwinter 2004) and there were two tiny mentions elsewhere, one noting the five thematic issues I'd done up through June 2004 and saying four of them "are excellent arguments for the COWLZ assertion that gray literature matters."

Followed by the only appropriate comment, a two-word paragraph:

Remember COWLZ?

2005

One brief mention in the Midwinter issue (5:2), as part of a retrospective on *C&I*. I quoted part of that first essay, noted that COWLZ had resulted in *C&I* being at cites.boisestate.edu and that there was a dark archive of sorts, then concluded:

Other than that...well, I think the publishers involved are still looking for a few other folks to take leadership roles.

If you think the COWLZ cause makes sense, that is.

And that's it. I've had no reason to mention COWLZ in 2006...until now.

What happened?

Along the way, NASIG was approached with the idea of taking on COWLZ as a cause. The organization declined. That may have been the death knell for the group, given that most of its members were too busy turning out their own publications (and in most cases working day jobs) to take on a possibly-thankless leadership role.

We'd already received a basic response regarding indexing; it was not positive. No matter how well established, the publications in COWLZ were "more ephemeral, at least by definition," and thus not worth indexing. I don't believe anyone contacted EBSCO, but the situation with LISTA is pretty clearly the same.

I shut down the Topica list some time back (it never had much traffic), but still had a personal COWLZ list. I sent email to people on that list and to

a couple of e-zine/e-newsletter editors not on that list, asking for any comments about the situation.

Chris Zammarelli may have said it for everyone:

I think the problem with me was just that while I thought COWLZ was an interesting and worthy project, it ended up diverging from the type of work I was doing at the time.

Marylaine Block put it this way:

It might be it failed because most of us didn't care all that much. My own feeling was that preservation of library literature was a responsibility of the profession, and I kind of hoped the material would be preserved by either a library school's library, or by a library literature vendor like Wilson.

Peter Suber, publisher of *Free Online Scholarship Newsletter*, which has turned into the *SPARC Open Access Newsletter* and continues to be the nexus of OA reporting, offered this comment:

I'm not surprised to see COWLZ fold; I hadn't heard anything from it for years. But I am sorry to hear the news. COWLZ was a good idea and I still wish I had some kind of assured longevity for my backfiles.

I'm not without options and one day ("real soon now") will probably deposit the files in one of the LIS-oriented OA repositories. But COWLZ was an early, easy, elegant solution.

Steve Oberg

Steve Oberg, past president of NASIG and proprietor of *Family Man Librarian*, offered an eloquent response, which appears here in its entirety:

I first read about COWLZ in an issue of *Cites & Insights: Crawford-At-Large*. In that issue Walt drew attention to a call to action first issued by Marylaine Block as to library 'zines and the need for access to them to be preserved. I thought, Hey, this is something I can readily identify with (I am a serialist, after all) and it is something about which I share concern. Why not volunteer to get involved? Specifically, I thought I could be of some help to the effort by contacting persons I knew who would bring subject and technical expertise to the table, and asking them to get involved. I also thought that my primary professional organization, NASIG, might be willing to provide assistance to the effort.

I was able to make a small contribution on the former point but not the latter. One of the people I called was Eric Lease Morgan. I told him about the project, and asked if he'd be interested in helping out. He was interested, and he did help out, a lot, even to the extent of developing a prototype system for organizing and maintaining the library 'zines identified as in need of long term access and preservation. One of the students who worked for me at the time also lent his assistance in a small way to the project by tweaking some of what Eric began with and extending it or making it fit into the site

infrastructure at Boise State (Dan Lester had volunteered space on a Boise State server to house the service and attendant files).

Unfortunately, after a rush of activity and discussion, and a lot of basic progress such as the framework Eric supplied, the project gradually petered out. This, in spite of the need that existed then and still exists today. This, also in spite of the fact that the group who gathered 'round the effort was a good group of people. I can't think of a better group, frankly, to have worked on this.

Then why did this project go nowhere? From my perspective the answer lies mostly in the fact that the early volunteers such as myself, simply did not have the necessary energy and time to truly get the project airborne. Another problem was that when I approached NASIG with the idea of somehow promoting and/or financially supporting the COWLZ effort, this idea was met with skepticism and went nowhere. Without external, organizational support like NASIG could have offered, a good will effort such as COWLZ cannot be sustained for long.

I think this is the key point to the whole situation: the lack of organizational or other formal backing. Good intentions and volunteerism could only take it so far. I hope that someday COWLZ will be resurrected and receive the attention it deserves. Technologically, it shouldn't be difficult. As I already stated, the need was and still is there.

I've chalked up my limited involvement in COWLZ to yet another lesson learned regarding my tendency to say Yes too often. I need to be careful about what I can commit to something. I need to be realistic. Even though it felt like I fell flat on my face with my involvement in COWLZ, I thoroughly enjoyed the ideas, the debate, and the brainstorming it engendered. Plus it established a connection with nice, thoughtful people such as Walt that endures to this day. In that sense, for me, COWLZ was a meaningful if short blip on the radar of library activism.

There you have it. Dan Lester and Eric Lease Morgan provided more help than could reasonably have been expected and as much as they could under the circumstances. Steve Oberg gave it his best shot, with no results. The rest of us were busily generating the newsletters and zines; we needed a form of outside leadership or institutional support that never materialized. If I had been willing to push as a leader I probably could have kept the effort going a while longer, but at the time I was producing *three* columns and *C&I*; I was still in some demand as a speaker; and there was simply no energy to spare.

That left Boise State as the home of *C&I*—with no broader context. Without context, the site really didn't make sense. I don't know whether the dark archive is still spinning along automatically, but in every

other respect COWLZ was a "short blip on the radar of library activism," now departed.

Gray Literature: The Problems Remain

What's happened with the e-newsletters and e-zines that were around when COWLZ began?

- *NewBreed Librarian* lasted only 18 months—but the ten issues and two years of news updates have been archived by the University of Oregon, albeit in PDF rather than HTML form. You'll find it at <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/dspace/handle/1794/1071>.
- Rory Litwin shut down *Library Juice* in August 2005; it had declined in frequency during its eighth and final volume. The archives remain at <http://libr.org/juice/>. The name lives on as Rory Litwin's blog, at <http://libraryjuicepress.com/blog/>.
- The *Newsletter on Serials Pricing Issues* shut down in early 2001, after 255 issues. Its archive remains at the University of North Carolina, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/prices/>.
- Peter Suber's *Free Online Scholarship Newsletter* ran from March 28, 2001 through September 15, 2002. It resumed as the *SPARC Open Access Newsletter* on July 4, 2003, continuing the numbering of *FOSN*, and has continued as a regular monthly publication, celebrating its hundredth issue on August 2, 2006. All issues are currently available at <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/archive.htm>.
- *LLRX*, Sabrina I. Pacifici's ejournal (which she founded and edits but which has many contributors), began in 1996 and continues to this day. New groups of articles appear monthly. This impressive publication continues at <http://www.llrx.com>.
- *Current Cites* continues as a regular monthly publication, now in its 17th year. You'll find all issues at <http://lists.webjunction.org/currentcites/>.
- *Ex Libris* doesn't appear every week, but Marylaine Block keeps it going with a wide range of first-rate brief essays. The August 18, 2006 issue is #284; the current issue and all archives are at <http://marylaine.com/exlibris/index.html>.
- I never included Gary Price's ResourceShelf among the list of e-zines and e-newsletters because it's daily, although there's a weekly newsletter emailed as text to a large subscription

list. Price and his team have maintained this admirable resource for many years; the August 10 weekly newsletter was issue 272. You'll find the daily resource (in blog form, using WordPress) and subscription note for the newsletter at <http://www.resourceshelf.com/>.

- *D-Lib Magazine* continues as an almost-monthly (11 issues a year), now in volume 12; its future funding and publication appear to be in question. *D-Lib* has an official home that takes it out of the realm of gray literature—and, sure enough, unlike everything else on this list, *D-Lib* is indexed in at least one major library literature database.
- And here's *Cites & Insights*. Middling in frequency, start date, and regularity within this group, it continues. I removed the "experiment" label in January 2005.

Have there been other similar publications? If so, I'm not aware of them. Maybe that's because of blogs, which are so much easier to start and abandon.

Indexing

Indexing improves visibility, even in this age of Yahoo!Msnask. Taking LISTA as an example (if only because it's freely available), quite a few newsletters, magazines and trade journals are indexed in full—even *Ariadne* and *D-Lib*, two non-refereed e-journals (both from associations). For some reason, *Library Hi Tech News* shows up as a "scholarly journal."

The list above, other than *D-Lib*? Not one. I find this peculiar—but not surprising. Should it be this way? If COWLZ had become a real organization, it might have tested this issue. It seems like an issue NASIG might wish to address.

From me, it looks like special pleading. Maybe so. I don't lack for visibility within the major library databases, or Google Scholar or web search engines. Last time I checked, I had 406 items in Library Literature and 205 in LISTA (and 360+ in Google Scholar). But consider my first seven items in LISTA using the default sort (as of August 19, 2006): three one-page *EContent* columns, three three-page *Online* columns—and a letter in *American Libraries* taking up one-sixth of a page.

Compare that list to these seven items from *Cites & Insights*: "Looking at liblogs: The great middle" (30 pp.); "Finding a balance: Libraries and librarians" (18 pp.); "©3 Perspective: copyright: finding a balance" (2 parts, 16 pp. total); "Library 2.0 and 'Library 2.0'" (32

pp. and over 17,000 readers to date); "OCA and GLP" (2 parts, 16 pp. total); "Library futures, media futures" (15 pp.); and "Catching up with copyright," (20 pp.).

I find it hard to believe that my letter in *American Libraries* is more important to the library field than any of these *C&I* pieces (not to mention the CIPA Special and earlier major articles). For that matter, proud as I am of my columns in *EContent* and *Online*, I'm inclined to believe that some *C&I* pieces have more medium-term and long-term significance than some *EContent* columns.

It's not lack of reach. Typical *C&I* readership is in the mid-thousands, spiking to much higher levels for some articles. Several e-zines and e-newsletters discussed here have more readers than 90% of the publications indexed in LISTA and Library Literature. I don't think it's a question of longevity. It's not even formality: Several of these publications have ISSN's and are as regular as most commercial periodicals.

It's gray literature. It is *inherently* more ephemeral, no matter how long the publication lasts or how significant its contents are. Lacking association backing—and, frankly, *lacking a price*—gray literature doesn't get indexed.

Long term access

Archival access is a different question. It's an issue for all publications and more of an issue for digital publications. LOCKSS helps; so do any number of institutional repositories.

Will gray literature make its way to these repositories? That depends on who's doing it and how a publication ceases. I've seen discussion of the need to archive blogs as part of the library record, and I think that's an interesting discussion. It would be ironic if blogs were archived more readily than, say, *ExLibris*.

A lot's happening in this field. I believe things will work out in a lot of cases. The presumed archival home for *C&I* didn't—because it didn't make sense on a one-off basis. There are other possibilities. When *C&I* has an archival home, you'll read about it on *Walt at Random* and at the *C&I* home page.

Price and worth

The best things in life may be free, but I suspect there's a natural tendency for libraries to worry and care more about things that are expensive. If *Cites & Insights* carried a \$150/year price tag and came in print form (but you could get a digital-only subscription for a mere \$120/year!), I'm guessing it would have at most one-tenth the readership it currently has.

On the other hand, I'm guessing most libraries that paid \$150/year for it would have it in their catalogs and some of them would bind each volume. I'd like to think a significant number of library schools would have it as part of their professional collections.

We're dealing with human nature and organizational nature here. It's natural for librarians to spend more energy taking care of expensive resources than those that cost them nothing—and that don't even "come in the door" because they're electronic.

Does that increase the chances that free but valuable resources will disappear? Probably. Are those resources valuable? I believe so—and I believe that includes the more formal gray literature, not just refereed open access journals.

COWLZ was an interesting attempt to improve the visibility and long-term survival of an unusual group of library-related publications. It failed. That's the *very* long story.

Bibs & Blather

A Few Things I'd Rather Not Write About

These are areas that *could* fall into the scope of *C&I*—but that won't, at least not for now.

I don't like **manifestos**. I believe they oversimplify and polarize. They're great ways to get lots of comments and stir up controversy—but typically at the expense of nuance and balance. I'm going to try to ignore manifestos as much as possible.

I can rarely resist commenting on **hype and generalization**, but I'm working on it. It's more interesting to discuss examples than claims. Some controversies seem deliberate, even manufactured. If I can spot a deliberate attempt to manufacture controversy, I might comment—but probably less on the controversy than the artificial nature of it. That's the desire; watch me fail to live up to it!

Then there are controversies that I feel **less than qualified** to discuss, such as those currently surrounding the Library of Congress. If I'm halfway through raw material and say, "Why am I writing about this?" I'll write off the time spent as professional education and recycle the listings.

Gatekeepers and the A List

Here's one example I *did* write about, where I think I got it wrong and don't believe it makes sense to try to

get it right. That's the "gatekeeper/A-list" controversy, which I could personalize as "Why Seth Finkelstein lacks the audience and influence his research should warrant." *Infothought* is only one example, but it's a real one. I wrote about these issues in May and November 2005, doubting that "gatekeepers" (the A-listers) mattered as much as others claimed—and finally became convinced that they did matter, as noted in December 2005.

I had a stack of stuff in my "Net Media" folder related to A-listers, movement within the Technorati Top 100, continued claims by A-listers that everyone is equal, and demonstrations that this claim is not true. It's interesting stuff—but I wound up recycling it all. Not because I don't believe there's an issue, but for two narrower reasons:

- "Influencers" and "A-listers" matter more in some arenas than in others. While there are certainly a few libloggers with much broader reach than most, I don't believe they control the tenor of most discussions—and liblogging is a small enough arena that people *can* move into the "top 100" (or whatever) without too much difficulty.
- To the extent that there *are* influencers in the library field, I'm one of them, and to some extent unqualified to comment on the phenomenon (including the bullet just above). I'm not an A-list liblogger, not even close—but according to Technorati I'm in the top 0.1% of blogs by links (ranking somewhere between 27,000 and 28,000 out of more than 51 million blogs Technorati claims to track). *Walt at Random* has been averaging more than 1,000 visits per day since March 2006, but it's really *Cites & Insights* and a few books, articles and columns that give me a voice.

I'm not sure just who the A-listers are in the broader community. I looked at the Technorati Top 100 on August 21, 2006 (noting that Technorati now rewards *current* popularity). I don't regularly read any of the blogs on that top 100, and had never seen 97 of them. Going through the list, I found 17 that I would recognize as "real blogs"—after filtering out corporate media, magazines and gossip columns in blog form, blogs so ad-heavy that content seemed almost extraneous, and "blogs" laid out in such a manner that they no longer look and feel like blogs. How many of that 17 would I read on a regular basis? Not one.

For me, Seth Finkelstein and Dorothea Salo each has more influence than Jeff Jarvis, Doc Searles, Robert Scoble, Guy Kawasaki and the rest of the Top 100 put together. As far as I can tell, *no* weblog has inbound links from even one-half of one percent of other weblogs. But the big names *do* get quoted more in the traditional media, *are* more likely to be speaking at the conventions and invited to special get-togethers, *are* probably the only ones making serious money through blogging, and *do* have a lot more readers than most of us.

Within librarianship, I think that's OK. But if you're trying to influence society (or get rich), it's tough. I have no answers.

Quick Followups on Previous Issues

Elena O'Malley responded to a comment in *C&I* 6:9 about author labels on library books: Why is it necessary to add an author-name label to a spine that almost universally has the author's name?

It might not be a necessity, but, as someone who shelved books as a job for four years, it's a nicety I hope we don't abandon unless we really need to save the time/money of processing them.

Label text is at roughly the same height on each book, is the same size font for the most part, and is oriented horizontally. It's faster and easier to read and sort. In bookstores, which don't use such labels, I often end up with a crick in my neck from unconsciously rotating my head to the side as I read the text on the spines.

In addition, a small side benefit is that those labels help out visually impaired folks because they are high-contrast in an easy-to-read font, unlike the graphic design work on some book spines.

An excellent response. I did a lot of reshelving and sorting back in the day—but the Doe Library (UC Berkeley) didn't have separate fiction or genre collections, so call number labels were universal. If I'd been reshelving in a public library, I might have known what O'Malley kindly pointed out!

Many bloggers commented on *C&I* 6:10. I'm grateful for the generally kind comments. One person misinterpreted one of my mid-investigation blog entries: I did not give up summer vacations and other plans in order to do such a broad look at liblogs. The summer vacations and other plans were disrupted by changes in the workplace and family issues; the *result* was that I had time to do the look. I *would not* have abandoned vacation plans in order to do it!

Steve Lawson posted a particularly thoughtful comment, "The view from the Great Middle," on Au-

gust 14, 2006 at *See also...* (library.coloradocollege.edu/steve/). He suggests *new* bloggers should post at least once or twice a week in order to establish that they're serious about the blog. I agree. There are other notes as well. Lawson would like me to return or move to a more qualitative approach. We'll see.

Eric Schnell contemplated my metrics in "Blog quality indicators and impact factors," an August 14, 2006 post at *The medium is the message*. (eric-schnell.blogspot.com). How does one quantify a blog's impact? I decided it wasn't feasible to do so this year—and it appears that Yahoo!'s new "site explorer" may make my possibly promising metric (visible number of link: results) useless in the future. As with Lawson, a thoughtful essay worth reading.

I should also note a fledgling effort at "St. Jerry's Virtual Scriptorium," one of the forum topics at WebJunction, to come up with answers to the ongoing question, what kind of blogging draws lots of conversation? It's a start.

Trends & Quick Takes

The Long Tail's Thick Head

This may be a cautionary tale that needs repeating. Most shopping still takes place in physical stores (Amazon has said it expects online bookselling to peak at 15 to 20% of all bookselling). Most music purchases (95%) still involve shiny discs in jewel boxes. Most business transactions are simple offer:buy with no "conversation" involved. And popularity still counts for a lot.

Consider RankKing RanQueen, an odd sort of "convenience store" in Japan (described in the July 2006 *Business 2.0*). The shops are tiny and hold hundreds of products in more than 250 categories—CDs, magazines, novels, nose hair removers, mineral waters. They "stock only the latest goods and assign each item a ranking based on its current popularity in Japan." The stores are *all best sellers all the time* in every category—and they're doing gangbuster business. People go frequently so they can be *up with the latest hot items*. Thus pushing the curve farther up to the left, not down to the right.

Generation Generalizations

A few little items here, some fairly old:

- The kids are online and the old fogies aren't, right? Not according to a study reported in

the *Wall Street Journal* (posted at *DigitalKoans* by Charles W. Bailey, Jr.): the smallest group of unique web site visitors is those 18-24, traditional college age students. The largest group? Fifty and above: “Geezers rule the web.” I looked at census figures to do a cross-check, comparing unique visitors to the size of the “generation.” By that metric, college-age students are *still* last but, if we assume “17 and under” means “6 to 17,” the young’uns *are* the most connected—but not by a lot. The major change in this metric, other than “17 and under” moving from third to first, is that people aged 35 to 49 move ahead of those aged 50 and over (65% to 61%, still higher than the “digital generation” numbers: 50% for 25-34 and 42% for 18-24). As I put it, “Us geezers are right in the middle. But there are a whole bunch of us geezers around.”

- *Pegasus librarian* posted “Millennials, librarians, and conferences” on June 4, 2006. Pegasus has been to “a *lot* of conferences in the last year” and recognized a “major faux pas when I gave my talk this week. I never once mentioned Millennials... Here’s the thing, though. I’m getting a little tired of the hue and cry. These kids are...well...kids. And just like every other generation of kids, they have needs and they have desires...” Pegasus takes Stephen Abram to task (mildly) for “speaking of kids as if they’re aliens.” Pegasus doesn’t think that’s helpful. Instead, librarians should look at the services kids use and see what’s *also* useful for patrons and librarians in general and remember that “there are lots and lots of kids who are *not* tech savvy,” and that it might make sense to spend more conference time “learning from each other about new processes, best practices, and yes, even some of my beloved theoretical underpinnings.”
- Simon Chamberlain posted three “generations” pieces at *VALIS* in late July 2006. In the first, after reading some of the articles about how we all must use IM to reach the “Millennials,” he notes that Pew’s studies have been misquoted. The research actually showed that 59% of teens preferred the telephone to communicate with peers, as compared to 26% for IM. (He also properly questions 2% for “in person”—“what, teens don’t like hang-

ing out with each other now?”) He also questions the common attitude that what teens do now in social spaces will be exactly what they’ll always do in the workplace. Why might one assume change? “Because teenagers aren’t adults, and work isn’t play.” Didn’t *you* spend a *lot* more time on the phone gossiping when you were a teen than you do now? The second posts skewers the “different brain” concept. The third builds on this and specifically the “higher IQ” claim. Apparently observed IQ scores have gone up somewhat, but that raises the long-standing question of what IQ measures. As Chamberlain notes, if real intelligence was actually increasing at the rate suggested, then the average “Millennial” would have the same intelligence as a genius-level Boomer. “I’m fairly sure that we aren’t seeing anything like this in the real world.” As to generation generalizations, Chamberlain says the kids “aren’t aliens” and makes a compelling point: “The differences *within* human groups are far greater than the differences *between* groups.” Finally, “treating Millennials as if they are a completely unique and novel group, with completely new needs and skills, makes very little sense.”

- Rachel Singer Gordon isn’t willing to give up on gen-gen (August 13, 2006 post at *The liminal librarian*). “A lot of us view generational issues as completely irrelevant—if not downright insulting.” Gordon takes issue with that, saying it makes more sense to work from “two simple premises: 1) Our generation in one way or another affects our outlook and expectations, 2) Our generation in one way or another affects the way others view us.” She comments on both premises, generalizing from the anecdotal. I find the anecdotes a little strange—apparently her son has never dealt with either a VCR or a tape-using digi-cam, so can’t deal with the idea of rewinding, and never watches live TV or has had any toys that don’t have “batteries and buttons.” The second premise seems to resolve to “We and they are going to keep stereotyping based on age; deal with it,” even while admitting that it’s counterproductive to stereotype. After the discussion, Gordon argues for “the necessity to combine our diverse skills, strengths,

and generations to work together productively in a 21st century library.” I still can’t see how the *presumption* of fundamental generational differences helps: It’s the skills, strengths and attitudes that count, and I will *guarantee* there are millions of technophobic “millennials” as well as millions of early-adopter and geeky “boomers.”

Good News on Patent Trolls?

This happened back in May, but it’s worth noting at this late remove. The Supreme Court rejected the notion that patent holders have a *general* right to injunctions against possible infringers. Four of the justices signed an opinion that sympathizes with companies that feel they are being held hostage by patent trolls—companies that have no intention of using patents, but use them to sue others.

That opinion (written by Justice Kennedy) notes the growth of a “patent industry”:

An industry has developed in which firms use patents not as a basis for producing and selling goods but, instead, primarily for obtaining licensing fees... For these firms, an injunction, and the potentially serious sanctions arising from its violation, can be employed as a bargaining tool to charge exorbitant fees to companies that seek to buy licenses to practice the patent.

The opinion also raises questions on business method patents, “which were not of much economic and legal significance in earlier times. The potential vagueness and suspect validity of some of these patents may affect the calculus under the four-factor test.”

To my mind, quite apart from the abuse of business method patents, there are two fundamentally different cases that could be called patent trolling:

- Companies and individuals that have patented processes and inventions, through their own efforts, but choose to license the processes rather than producing goods or services themselves. That’s a complex situation, certainly not inherently an abuse of patent law.
- Companies *that have no business other than* buying, holding, licensing, and suing claimed infringers of patents. In other words, “intellectual property” holding companies. I am naively inclined to believe that patent abuse is far more likely in these cases.

Economics of Conference Speaking

Dorothea Salo posted a cogent essay on this topic on May 29, 2006 at *Caveat lector*. She subdivides confer-

ence “speaking labor” (“and let’s not be coy, here: speaking is *work*”) into gratis and paid, paid into expenses-only and expenses plus honorarium, and expenses plus honorarium into levels for “those who make their living from speaking” and those who treat it as “a nice sideline.” Salo says she knows of one or two people in libraryland who *do* make a living from speaking. I don’t doubt her word. I agree that there can’t be many of them.

Salo subdivides freebie speakers into two stripes: “the altruist and the whuffie-ist.” (I’m not wild about ‘whuffie’: It may mean something other than “reputation,” but I’m not sure what.) And, correctly I think, she adds an extra form: “the clueless altruist,” who has enough reputation to be paid but doesn’t realize it. Some of us fall into a subdivision of paid speakers: Those who don’t getting paid nearly enough because we/they don’t understand the market.

She crosses that taxonomy with the invited speaker vs. “academic speaker” model—that is, cases where a speaker has applied to put on a program. It’s not all academic, to be sure, but that’s the tendency. I’d expect most “academic” speakers to be freebies, but Salo offers counterexamples.

This whole schema presumes face-to-face conferences where “lots of people come to a place to listen to (relatively) few people” and also presumes a “hierarchy of speaking desirability.” She suggests internet-based conferences may destabilize this system and notes the trend of speakers “taking a back seat to social interaction at conferences.” I’m not sure this is a new trend, but I do think it’s one argument *for* face-to-face conferences. In my experience, social interaction has *always* been vital to good conferences and frequently more important than the nominal speakers.

Salo’s long post raises quite a few points I’m not discussing here (**go read it!**). She believes very large conferences may have lower-quality speeches than small ones. She’s interested in the online-conference model and has the good sense to suggest such conferences “will supplement rather than supplant typical conferences.” She notes one significant item for both online conferences and face-to-face conferences: In an era of easy conference archiving, “it’s going to be a lot harder for paid speakers on the library conference circuit to reuse material going forward, I think.”

Quicker Takes

Here’s a trend of sorts: Improving moderately-priced equipment through technology. This time, it’s a new

suite of five audio functions from Audistry (a Dolby subsidiary), designed to be built into MP3 players, TVs, and the like. One expands the stereo space; another modifies headphone sound so it's more like speakers; another tries to boost bass while avoiding overloads; and another is yet another try to simulate "stereo" from mono. The most interesting from my perspective is "Intelligent Volume Control"—a way to reduce the dynamic range of music when circumstances require that. If you're on the road, or listening late at night, or even watching a DVD action movie and not wanting to blast your ears, dynamic range reduction can be beneficial—as long as it's defeatable.

- There's another way to improve MP3 players and similar devices, particularly some iPod models: Add better headphones or plug them in to stereo systems. Leander Kahney had a "cult of Macintosh" item about this at *Wired News* (May 16, 2006), noting a *Stereophile* review of an iPod. The internal electronics are quite good (in some models, not necessarily all). At least one person quoted in the story goes off the deep end: "From a practical standpoint, iPod is revolutionary because the vinyl and CD mediums *are now gone*." [Emphasis added.] That's right: despite having 95% of the market in 2005 (and being the source material for the highest-quality tunes on iPods in most cases), CD is *gone*...
- I've quoted Bowker figures for the number of book titles produced in a given year. You know the ones: 195,000 titles were produced in 2004, up 14% over 2003. Bob Nardini of YBP has a one-pager in the February 2006 *Against the Grain* that convincingly shows "The numbers are not wrong, I am sure. But they are not right either." Bowker counts new ISBNs. That substantially overcounts actual new titles, given the variety of versions a book may emerge in. As one example: Bowker cites 14,484 titles from university presses—but Blackwells and YBP both report "about 10,000" new university press books. Both numbers are right, but they're counting different things.
- An excellent post at *Digitization 101* (July 21, 2006) points out one fundamental limitation of online museum exhibits: "It's not like being there." The combined effect of a really good exhibit beats anything you can do on the web.

Jill Hurst-Wahl draws the moral: "What we digitize and make available should educate people to what is available, what they might travel to see, and teach them something that they can only learn from experiencing those materials (even if it is virtual)." The best online assets should *feed* real attendance at museums, libraries and archives.

The Censorware Chronicles

Another year, another pitiful little CENSORWARE CHRONICLES. I'm not covering DOPA (the idiotic, overbroad Deleting Online Predators Act, which threatens to eliminate a huge swath of contemporary web software in some libraries) because it's been covered well elsewhere. I just want to call two items to your attention. Both are worth reading. One is worth requesting in hardcopy.

Seth Finkelstein posted "10 things you might not know about censorware" on *Google blogoscoped* as part of a blog swap (Philipp Lenssen posted "10 things you might not know about Google" on *Infothought*). You'll find it at blog.outer-court.com/archives/2006-05-15-n66.html. Among other things briefly explained in this six-page essay, Finkelstein notes that "Censorware isn't just for kids," programmers *have* been sued for reverse engineering censorware and publishing the results, censorware tends to block lots of innocent web stuff (language translation sites, Google cache) because these sites can act as "loopholes," and—amusingly—"Censorware sex blacklists are overall very boring." Definitely worth a read.

Then there's *Internet filters: A public policy report*, second edition, by Marjorie Heins, Christina Cho and Ariel Feldman. It's published by the Brennan Center for Justice as part of the Free Expression Policy Project. You can download it from www.fepproject.org or request a printed copy from neema.trivedi@nyu.edu. In printed form, it's an 80-page 7x10" paperback.

When the first edition of this report came out in fall 2001 (from the National Coalition Against Censorship, and Ariel Feldman wasn't one of the authors), I gave it a mixed review (in *Cites & Insights* 1:13, December 2001). Not for the content—that was great, providing "solid evidence for librarians and other mainstream Americans" that censorware massively

overblocked (which continues to be the case). At the time, CIPA was still in the courts; unfortunately, it's now law. My criticism was primarily aesthetic: the report was "entirely in ugly sans serif."

They've fixed that. The printed report is an attractive, readable serif type, although FEPP could still use help from a print-oriented publication designer (paragraphs following headings shouldn't be indented, and it's generally not good practice to have *both* paragraph indentations *and* extra white space between paragraphs).

That's the criticism. It's a well-organized, well-written, factually rich report that demonstrates anew that, as the executive summary concludes,

[T]he widespread use of filters presents a serious threat to our most fundamental free expression values. There are much more effective ways to address concerns about offensive Internet content. Filters provide a false sense of security, while blocking large amounts of important information in an often irrational or biased way. Although some may say that the debate is over and that filters are now a fact of life, it is never too late to rethink bad policy choices.

Those libraries that accept e-rate discounts are stuck with CIPA. Some go well beyond the gutted version of CIPA that survived Supreme Court review, either deliberately or because they don't provide clear, easy, well-publicized ways for adults to gain access to the *whole* web, not just what some program would guide them to (or away from). Is it worth it?

I marked lots of examples in the report—a site on fly fishing that Bess identifies as pornography (also sites on allergies and against the death penalty); issues of "living with CIPA"; filtering studies since the first edition; and more. Pages 45-72 detail research done since the first edition. It's not a pretty picture.

I'm not going to include those examples (other than those already noted). You should read them in context. The report is well written, easy to read (my quibbles regarding design are just that: quibbles), and something every librarian should think about.

The Library Stuff

D-Lib Magazine 12:3 (March 2006): What do you do with a million books?

That's the theme for half a dozen articles and the title of an introduction by Gregory Crane. Rather than commenting on each article, I'll suggest you read the

whole group, thinking about them critically. The distinction between "image books" ("raw digital pictures of books with searchable but uncorrected text from OCR") and true digital texts is interesting. Crane suggests vast collections of "image books" could "arguably retard our long-term progress"—but you need to think through Crane's definition of "progress" to evaluate that assertion. I'm skeptical of the idea that a digital library "automatically learns as it grows larger" or that "documents can learn from their users"; I tend to regard learning as the sole province of humans and other animals. To me, "intelligent digital libraries" is an oxymoron. Crane speaks of "a shift that may eclipse the significance of print." I'm not sure. I could take issue with more of Crane's commentary, but that's beside the point.

I found myself annotating other papers less heavily. There are items I found odd, such as the lead sentence in "Early modern culture in a comprehensive digital library": "One could argue that there are no true libraries with millions of volumes"—apparently because "no single human being can make productive use" of large collections. That's a *very* odd definition of a library.

An interesting theme and a fine example of what makes some magazines and journals more than just sets of independent articles. In some ways, this issue would work better as a print publication.

Farkas, Meredith, "A big fat done stamp (and some advice)," *Information wants to be free*, June 16, 2006.

Meredith Farkas finished writing her book—a big one, around 100,000 words (like most of my early books, but not recent ones). She notes the extent to which she "literally did nothing but work on the book" for the past few weeks—that rush you get when you're *almost* to the end of a marathon project. She offers ten pieces of advice, all **well worth reading**. I'll note a few here (each sentence has a paragraph attached in the post).

- Don't spend more time thinking about how it will get done than doing it.
- Take advantage of high-energy times.
- Read your publisher's submission guidelines. And read them again.
- If you can't multitask well, then [don't].

Go read the original (even if I might question one or two points) and the comments attached. And, of course, *congratulations, Meredith!*

“It is what you make it,” *Redhaired future librarian*, June 15, 2006

“A recurring theme I have been noticing lately is that library school is not intellectually rigorous enough.” Thus begins an extremely cogent one-page post that fleshes out the title.

In a sense, library school is what you make it. It is entirely possible to sail through library school without really engaging your brain, especially if you’re bright (which I think aspiring librarians tend to be). At the same time, though, there are meatier things to think about...

Redhaired mentions some of them—library education itself, libraries through the lenses of philosophers, the intellectual foundations of librarianship, how humans deal with information. If you’re in library school and don’t feel intellectually challenged, “why not seek out the harder instructors” and take other steps to make your own challenges?

I haven’t been to library school, but I did get my BA at UC Berkeley in the 1960s. What Redhaired says of library school today was certainly true of UC Berkeley back then: What you got out of it depended largely on what you put into it. They didn’t give you much of anything (except the knowledge that if you didn’t motivate yourself you’d be one of the 33% who would flunk out or drop out), but you could get a world-class education.

Long overdue: A fresh look at leadership attitudes about libraries in the 21st century, Public Agenda, 2006, 81 pp. ISBN 1-889483-87-7, \$10, available for free downloading at publicagenda.org.

What? Another report on public libraries and where they stand? Yep—this time from the Americans for Libraries Council with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The report’s introduction says it “explores the true position of public libraries today, in the minds not only of library users, but of the people who run libraries and those who provide oversight and funding.” The study is said to be “the first step in the development of a national agenda for libraries and library funding in the 21st century.” Talk of a “national agenda” makes me nervous—as does any sense that library funding should be addressed on a national basis. I really believe that *local* public libraries are a very good thing.

Who is Americans for Libraries Council (an awkward name)? It’s Libraries for the Future, or, rather, the new organization of which the older LFF is the program arm: The website is www.lff.org.

As with other survey-based reports, this one says, “There is a future for public libraries in the Internet age,” with 78% of those asked saying “something essential and important” would be lost if their libraries shut down. Most people think public libraries spend money well and a bare majority says they’d favor tax increases if their libraries needed more money. Public libraries rate an “A” grade more often than *any* other public service the study asked about. Further, “advanced computer users and families with higher incomes are even more likely to use public libraries and the technology services they offer.”

What do people want? More convenient hours; better internet access to catalogs and databases; more computers in the libraries; and more reading hours, homework help, and study space. They expect all the usual things, including a good collection of books.

For some reason, civic leaders view the variety of library governance structures within America’s public libraries “as a major stumbling block,” along with “lack of marketing, impassive advocacy and isolation from the community.”

That’s the short form; the report provides more detail. It’s clear that traditional library services and collections continue to matter. It’s also clear that people want a “quiet oasis” in which to learn.

One depressing section: “Leaders say libraries are indispensable but vulnerable.” One “business leader” says libraries “don’t matter to me” and compares them to Brussels sprouts, while another asserts that people working in libraries “find the profit motive repugnant.” Those may be exceptions. Or maybe not: They may explain why most *people* seem willing to pay more taxes for better libraries while “local leaders” consistently said tax increases are never seen as a favorable option. (The study involved 34 leaders.)

The report asserts four areas where libraries “could play valuable community roles” that would “likely endear them even more to civic leadership and public alike”: providing teen activities (“safe spaces”), improving adult reading skills, assuring access to government information and services, and “always provid[ing]” public access computing.

The report includes “community profiles” of Louisville, Phoenix, Providence, Salinas, and Chattahoochee Valley (Georgia) based on focus groups; number sidebars show sources of revenue and revenue per capita for each library system—but no *output* or effectiveness measures.

The full text and results of the survey appear, so you can evaluate possible bias (other than the natural bias: the study only includes people willing to answer a long telephone survey).

A number of bloggers commented on the study, noting some possible contradictions—and in at least one case, contrasting the “quiet place” finding with all those library people who tell us to “stop shushing people.” Maybe we need a happy medium, tough to do in smaller branches: Quiet spaces for reading and noisier spaces for those who feel the need to be noisy.

I still question the need for a “national agenda” for public libraries. Libraries are local institutions; their agendas, funding, and political organization should be local—as should most library marketing. *Infollectual* put it well in a July 19, 2006 post:

Perhaps libraries should be branding themselves to their local culture. A public library should be branded differently than an academic library. And a library in a metropolitan city will be branded differently from a library...in a rural township...

As one blogger noted, public librarians should not take this additional confirmation of how much they're loved as an excuse to avoid change or rest on their laurels.

Lupien, Pascal, “Virtual reference in the age of pop-up blockers, firewalls, and Service Pack 2,” *Online* 30:4 (July/August 2006): 14-19 (and responses by Luke Rosenberger, Peter Bromberg and others).

Lupien (University of Guelph) discusses technical problems in VR, particularly full-featured VR with co-browsing. The title states some of the problems—that is, interference with security systems. Early on, there seems to be a little confusion between chat reference (which could be carried out nicely by IM) and full VR, but that doesn't keep the article from being an important read. Later, IM is offered as an attractive alternative to software-based VR. Lupien doesn't see ready solutions (other than IM).

Lupien's article did not go unnoticed by libloggers. Luke Rosenberger of *lbr* posted “Objects in mirror are closer than they appear” on June 27, 2006. He notes the article as “a sobering reminder that no matter how much we perfect our interviewing and researching skills, **it does no good for the patron who's unable to connect to our service**, or gives up our service, because of technical problems.” As noted in Lupien's article, Guelph saw a 30% drop in VR use when they changed software. Lupien's article deals

with older VR platforms, but Rosenberger says it would be a huge mistake to dismiss it on that account. He offers a local study: an examination of more than 7,000 L-Net transcripts for mid-March to mid-June 2006. “**A whopping 39%**” of the sessions were unsuccessful (the only message was the initial question) for one reason or another. That's using OCLC Flash; he knows of no similar study for tutor.com's Ask-A-Librarian.

But after I read Lupien's article, it occurred to me that, disappointing as it is, Caleb's 39% figure **only reflects a subset of the patrons we've missed out on**—because it counts only patrons who **attempted** to connect. That means there's another, unknown percentage looming behind that... Is it any wonder...that so many libraries are finding that the balance between feature-rich VR software environments and relatively simple but apparently reliable IM environments is tipping more and more in the direction of IM?

Rosenberg says “it's time for the VR vendors to rethink their approach” and provide a bare-bones “VR lite.” He suggests that VR clients and vendors “**may have one more chance** to create a VR platform that is truly, radically customer-centered and library-friendly. That is, if it's not too late already.” In comments, Bill Drew asked why libraries didn't just use IM—and Rosenberger noted the missing functionality, primarily being able to “queue, route, and distribute incoming calls across a group of librarians available to receive them.”

Peter Bromberg of *Library garden* devoted three posts to Lupien's article (July 12 and 18 and August 16, 2006) under the title “Is virtual reference successful? (Hint: yes it is).” In the first part, Bromberg takes issue with Lupien's assertion that “evidence indicates that libraries are not satisfied with [VR]”:

Say what? Aside from the fact that the statement is so overly broad as to be false on the face of it (which libraries? which services?), it's not about whether the *libraries* are satisfied with the service. **IT'S ABOUT WHETHER THE CUSTOMERS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICE.** [Emphases in the original.]

He notes that the Lupien article never mentions customer satisfaction, that “VR customers love and rave about the convenience” and “love and rave about having a live person available to assist them with their information needs,” that VR “has changed our customers' perceptions of what libraries can offer them” and “has helped to make libraries more relevant to our customers by meeting their needs and exceeding their expectations.” Bromberg has been involved with New Jersey's QandANJ VR system since its inception

and has “looked at thousands of transcripts and thousands of customer feedback forms.” He knows “usage is through the roof” and “our customers tend to be very satisfied.” He quotes feedback, cites “hundreds of pages...with thousands of comments that go on and on...” and notes “many other successful collaborative VR projects like those in Maryland, Colorado, and Cleveland.”

Comments begin with two agreeing with Bromberg—despite the complexity of VR software, patrons love it. Then Morgan Fielman says Bromberg “seems to have missed the point of this article, which is primarily about software,” going on to say that Fielman’s library will soon drop VR software due to problems, asking “how can customers be satisfied when the software we use is so poor?” and arguing for IM reference—which, as already noted, *can’t handle* the collaborative model very well.

Lupien himself provided a long and perhaps unfortunate comment, saying not only that Bromberg (who he addresses as “Peter”) “has indeed missed the point of the article, to the extent that it appears that he has only skimmed the piece and zeroed in on a few phrases, quoted out of context.” He asserts “the entire piece is focused on user satisfaction and on helping libraries to improve the user experience.” That caused me to reread the article (as I was writing these comments)—and, I have to say, that focus is well hidden! I read the article the same way Bromberg seems to read it: As a litany of *librarian* complaints and software problems, with no sign that thousands of patrons apparently use and appreciate VR. Lupien seems to have concluded that no VR software works and basically tells “Peter” to ignore his own successes and “develop a better understanding” of the *literature* on VR. He speaks of “dismissing anyone who dares to criticize VR as a service” (which Bromberg did not do). It’s a rather astonishing, dismissive comment.

Part II consists of two responses, one to Morgan Fielman, one to Pascal Lupien. Bromberg says he understands that the Lupien article was mostly about the software—but it’s not clear what versions of software, and if it’s old versions “then most of the article is, at best, moot.” Bromberg takes issue with Fielman’s question (“how can customers be satisfied?”), saying it’s the wrong question.

The question is “*Are* customers satisfied?” The answer in our customers’ experience is yes, they are satisfied. We didn’t find this out by polling 20 libraries [as Lupien did]. We found this out by asking the customers.

To Fielman’s conclusion, “original VR supporters have realized that this service just isn’t cutting it,” Bromberg responds, “[O]ur service has been cutting it for almost 5 years, and we have the hard data and glowing customer comments to prove it.” He offers other reasons that other VR services might not be cutting it: Training, staff enthusiasm, customer service standards, quality control, 24/7 availability—“and finally...do you consistently and effectively market your service to your customers?” He suggests answering these questions before blaming the software and ends that response: “While the current glitch here and there can be a real and undeniable pain in the ass, it hasn’t prevented us from delivering a high quality and slightly mind-blowing experience to our customers.”

Responding to Lupien (noting “I’ve read his article through thoroughly a few times”), Bromberg says he doesn’t consider himself a proponent of VR. “I consider myself a proponent of libraries” and regards collaborative VR as one high quality service to offer patrons [Bromberg likes “customers”] where and when they want it. Bromberg’s willing to hear problems with current VR software—but in context and tied to customer impact. “I didn’t get this from Lupien’s article.” There’s more, including Bromberg’s note that he *does* keep up with VR literature. Lupien included a comment about “jumping on that user-centric high horse,” to which Bromberg responds:

And if speaking from a place of fact and experience instead of conjecture and generality puts me on a high horse then what can I say? Giddyup.

Lupien responded again (still first-naming Bromberg, which in context appears belittling), saying the article’s assertions “are not based on conjecture. They are based on personal experience, documented cases in the literature and the experience of other libraries.” He goes on to assert that, in a VR project he’s involved in, “*All* of the individuals who have tried VR feel that they are not able to serve their patrons well.” [Emphasis added.] He mentions a literature review again—which seems to suggest that Lupien’s literature trumps Bromberg’s real-world experience. Lupien reiterates, citing many “well written pieces which challenge the usefulness of VR” and expects to see even more such articles “as more and more libraries either shut down their VR service or move to IM reference.”

By this point, it’s clear that Lupien is *not* looking at problems with *some* VR software in an effort to improve services. He’s painting with a broad brush, attacking *all* VR services and seeming to say “one

project” is either mistaken or irrelevant compared with his “far larger number of cases.” He says software versions are irrelevant—that new security features *will* inherently create problems no matter what VR software you choose. That’s quite a claim!

Lupien argues IM is more reliable and stable, doesn’t force patrons to “jump through hoops,” and is more user-friendly. He makes no effort to address IM’s lack of support for queuing, distribution, etc.

Part III addresses the use of IM software instead of VR. Bromberg agrees that IM is a “perfectly good tool for reference work” and for other forms of library communication, suggesting *every* library should offer IM as a point of contact. Then he goes on to reiterate the things VR does that IM doesn’t do: multiple librarians monitoring a single screen name and 24/7 availability via cooperative/collaborative staffing.

Bottom line: Beyond the fact that VR software gives us the power to offer convenient, relevant, 24/7 service, it gives us the power to **change peoples’ perceptions about libraries**. I would argue that we have done just that. In my book that far outweighs any of the downsides that Lupien raised about the buginess and technical limitations of VR software.

Bromberg also apologizes for the “snarky tone” of Part I and honors Lupien’s work. That’s nice. I would suggest Lupien owes Bromberg a similar apology for the dismissive tone of Lupien’s comments.

Maness, Jack M., “Library 2.0 theory: Web 2.0 and its implications for libraries,” *Webology* 3:2 (June 2006). www.webology.ir/2006/v3n2/a25.html

I’m not sure what to make of this article. Maness discusses “Web 2.0” briefly and “Library 2.0,” but cites Paul Miller’s writing as framing Library 2.0, which strikes me as peculiar. He notes that Michael Casey coined the term but *faults* Casey for defining the term “very broadly, arguing it applies beyond technological innovation and service.” As do many of those who use the term. Stranger still, Maness “attempts to resolve some of this controversy by suggesting a definition and theory for Library 2.0,” which may be presumptuous. How does he define it?

The application of interactive, collaborative, and multimedia web-based technologies to web-based library services and collections.

Maness “suggests this definition be adopted by the library science community.” Hmm. He limits “Library 2.0” to web-based services; so much for library gaming nights and outreach to teenagers. He *explicitly* says that Library 2.0 involves “multi-media experience.” So

much for user annotations on catalog entries, blogs, and other text-only services. “Both the collections and services of Library 2.0 contain video and audio components. While this is not often cited as a function of Library 2.0, it is here suggested that it should be.”

That specification would certainly “resolve some of [the] controversy” by vastly reducing the scope of Library 2.0. Maness seems to say that a Library 2.0 service must involve user participation in the creation and content; that’s certainly not clear in most discussions. RSS feeds for new book titles aren’t Library 2.0 by Maness’ standards: They’re neither multimedia nor user-created. Maness requires that services be “socially rich” and “communally innovative,” also vague criteria that many innovative web services won’t meet.

When the definition doesn’t fit, Maness ignores it: IM reference is Library 2.0, even though it’s purely textual. VR is apparently even *more* Library 2.0.

Maness gets into deep water when he suggests Library 2.0 “will know when users are lost, and will offer immediate, real-time assistance”—in other words, Library 2.0 will *monitor user behavior* as a matter of course. What a wonderful idea; maybe NSA can provide grants for such monitoring!

There’s a *lot* of ideology in this paper. Maness states flatly, “Media created by the Web on the Web belongs on the Web”—although, to be sure, “the Web” does not create *anything*. We read that blogs and wikis are “fundamentally 2.0” even though most are text only and many blogs do not allow for user input (in the form of comments). Maness suggests rethinking the “very notions of ‘reliable’ and ‘authoritative,’ so that blogs can be treated as equals to books.” (Turns out we don’t need to worry about blogs and wikis being textual: Maness *knows* that they “will almost certainly evolve into a more multi-media environment as well”—all of them?)

Maness expects users will be able to “see what other users have similar items checked-out”; confidentiality doesn’t seem to play a role in this version of Library 2.0. Library 2.0 is “*completely* user-centered and user-driven” (emphasis added).

“Library 2.0 recognizes that human beings do not seek and utilize information as individuals, but as communities.” I’m not sure what to say about that sweeping generality. I believe most of us did and do frequently seek information as individuals. Maybe I’m insufficiently communitarian for this version of Library 2.0.

Plosker, George R., "The time has come for visual search," *Online* 30:4 (July/August 2006): 45-7.

Has it? Plosker notes some recent developments (adding Grokker to EBSCO, some new facilities in Factiva), but the column really adds up to a question: "Is it possible that visual search is finally becoming a tool that will add value, and therefore attract more usage, now that it is part of key vendor offerings?"

It's a good question. I wonder whether there's a good answer. I'd love to see some research—showing that people use AquaBrowser or Grokker or other visual search systems, that they use it more than once, and (toughest to study) that they gain value from it. I agree with part of Plosker's conclusion: "Integrating knowledge of visual search into your storehouse of online tools is probably a good thing." I wonder. Sure, some users are "more visually inclined"—but do visual reorganizations of textual information add value on a continuing basis? They look pretty. Do they improve user access and satisfaction? That's an honest question; it would be nice to see researched answers.

Porter, Michael, "Netflix takes libraries to school," *Libraryman*, June 6, 28, 29, 2006 (three posts), and David Lee King's "Adapting the Netflix model to libraries," *David Lee King*, June 29, 2006.

Porter says Netflix is a library and library collections "blow Netflix away"—but libraries lack Netflix' infrastructure, "including appropriate pricing."

Libraries just don't have the series of web services and efficient, market expectation meeting delivery that it takes (and will increasingly take) to succeed and thrive in a world of increasingly important information delivery and content provision.

"As non-profits, couldn't we just charge cost for an expanded level of service for patrons that selected to buy in." My hackles go up right there, because *that's not the way it works*—the "expanded level" becomes the base level as the original base level gradually degrades. Porter dismisses that with "it is an increasingly 'content, not containers' world now." I'm not even sure what that means.

"People...don't give a hoot if they get what they want from the local library, from Amazon or from iTunes. A huge percentage of folks don't even give a hoot if they have to PAY upfront for a service that might be free (but more slowly delivered and/or less easy to access) at their local library." Yes, and if people

are happy as clams to pay for their content, they're *always* going to get faster service somewhere other than at the library. We need bookstores as well as libraries, at least in a predominantly capitalist mixed economy—and we need Netflix as well as library DVD collections. Porter thinks there's something wrong in the fact that he uses and loves Netflix even though there's a public library less than a mile from his house. Why is that wrong? Why should he rely on a single service point?

Porter seems to argue that only fear of "rocking the boat" keeps libraries from instituting tiered service, with (naturally) superior service only for those who pay. At least one comment disagreed: "No, charging for **expanded levels** of service is not something public libraries as tax-supported institutions should do." In Part II, Porter says that ideally, he agrees but "shifting attitudes, markets and methods of service provision make me think twice about this conceptually." He makes four points:

- "Core services" would not cost any more than before. "The same free services would still be the same free services."
- Some libraries already charge for some ILL.
- If Friends groups can take in money for things they sell, what's the difference?
- Libraries that are part of Open WorldCat are or will be getting proceeds from the "Buy it now" program.

"So, depending on how the systems we are discussing were set up, it sure seems like it could work.... it certainly seems that both libraries and patrons could benefit greatly from it."

Steve Lawson commented, wondering about fairness rather than legality: "I would be afraid that there would be a temptation to put those paying customers to the top of the hold queue. The public library is one of the few egalitarian institutions in American culture, and I believe that many people love it for that." He also wonders why Netflix-style services would drive new people *into* public libraries: "Isn't the great thing about Netflix that you never have to go *anywhere*, but you can just stay at home and watch DVDs?"

I'm with Lawson on this one—and "the same free services" in a part-pay, part-free situation do have a way of deteriorating. When city councils are strapped for funds, they can look at that nice new income stream and say, "Why not just charge \$2 for each book you circulate?" and libraries competing with Netflix won't have a good answer.

David Lee King seems to back Porter's idea, using Web2.0 companies as examples (where you get basic free service but pay for additional service). King's up front: Those who pay get *weighted* holds and other special services in addition to mail delivery of videos—and suggests adding tiered service to other library services. You want a new book? You'll have to wait: Those who pay already have the first 50 holds.

Porter's Part III asks, "Why compete with Netflix?" He raises some odd side issues, such as the fact that FedEx isn't as "wired" as it was (because overnight delivery is now standard)—but Netflix uses "snail mail" from the U.S. Postal Service for its dazzlingly fast performance. Porter's reason to compete with Netflix? "So that we can continue to offer our services to users in the next 10-30 years." Which to me seems to require argumentation as to why *not* competing with a successful private business (which will raise all sorts of legal issues if it's direct competition) is going to put public libraries out of business.

Porter claims libraries circulating entertainment "have lost circulation and market share." I doubt that, and Porter doesn't cite proof. He claims Netflix is decreasing "business at the libraries circulating this exact same material" with no proof (and damn few libraries offer 60,000 DVDs!). As Lawson says in a new comment, "It is also entirely unclear to me that Netflix is currently eating libraries' lunch." He notes that DVDs at his library are in constant circulation. That's true in my town as well, and I'd guess most people hereabouts can afford (and probably have) Netflix.

Part IV of this series appeared in early July, making much of Netflix' "Top 100" feature and showing that libraries have a lot of copies of Netflix' top 50—but that's silly, because what makes Netflix work is the 60,000 (not 50) titles, and the *millions* of copies that circulate all the time. WorldCat libraries seem to have 50,000 copies in all of those top 50 titles; I'd guess Netflix itself has more than that.

That's not my major objection. My major problem is the idea that libraries must somehow best commercial enterprises—and should be willing to charge to do so. It doesn't work that way. It *should not* work that way. Libraries should no more try to put Netflix out of business than Netflix should or does try to put libraries out of business.

Yes, some people will pay for instant gratification, and keep on paying until they run out of money. If libraries desert their egalitarian natures to try to compete with businesses serving those desires, I believe

they will fail—and that businesses will *properly* demand that libraries shut down such unfair, partly-tax-supported competition.

Rosenberger, Luke, "Anonymity vs trust," *lbr*, June 4, 2006. lbr.library-blogs.net/anonymity-vs-trust.htm

Rosenberger points to other posts relating to perceptions of virtual reference and the idea that "the choices we make when we seek information are driven by trust." Students in focus groups regard trusted people as the preferred path to trusted information—and understand that anonymous strangers online are *not* trustworthy. He considers three points (discussed at greater length):

- "What if our insistence upon anonymity and professional distance from all VR patrons is actually turning some patrons away, and reducing the acceptance of our services?"
- "What if perpetuating..."librarian vs. Google"...is misleading... **No librarian is ever going to out-Google Google; but then again, Google is never going to out-librarian a good librarian either.**"
- "What if hiding behind these policies of anonymity is actually reducing the professional perceptions of our field?"

Rosenberger is *not* suggesting that librarians abandon patron confidentiality and the option of anonymity; he's suggesting that patrons should have the *option* of knowing who they're talking to. "Maybe we will find that we need to rethink our models a little."

My Back Pages

Cables? Cables!

Overture, a high-end Delaware stereo dealer, ran a two-page ad in the April 2006 *Stereophile* promoting their own "recommended components," the "industry's best of the best," touting Overture's criteria: "value, authentic quality, and the integrity of the company behind the product." By very-high-end standards, most of the products mentioned aren't *that* outrageous: CD players for \$9K and \$13K, a \$6.5K DVD player, \$9K preamp, \$10K power amp, and speakers ranging from \$6.5K to \$14K.

Then there's the kicker: MIT's Overture Oracle "Maximum Articulation" Interconnects & Speaker Cables—created to Overture's specifications. The speaker cables start at **\$25K**; the interconnects start at

\$7K (and you'll presumably need at least two to four of them). In other words, Overture's suggesting that your speaker cable should cost more than your speakers—and that it's reasonable to spend \$40,000 or more on cables for a system. I guess integrity comes at a price; certainly, value is in the eye of the beholder.

The Wholesale Elimination of Darkness

Paul Kedrosky's "The Opportunist" column in the July 2006 *Business 2.0* is about LED lighting and its possibilities. Improved LEDs may be hot stuff: Analysts suggest "most lights sold for the home will be LED-based" by 2015, and I'd love for that to be true, given that LEDs are far more efficient and long-lasting than other light sources. So why isn't this in the Products category? A sentence that got *Business 2.0*'s editors so excited they used it as a pull quote: "We can now consider the wholesale elimination of darkness."

Wholesale? Sure, gear to make search-and-rescue workers more visible: Great idea. There are lots of other good uses. But darkness has its pleasures too, including the night sky and restfulness. I'm not thrilled by the idea that people out to make a buck will find ways to make everything bright all the time.

Branding the Feed

Speaking of *Business 2.0* ideas that don't thrill me, here's FeedBurner's CEO (same issue, four pages later) on that company's great business plan: "Stapling ads" to RSS feeds. I sure have been looking for more ways to view ads. Haven't you?

Not hidden off to the side like AdWords; "positioned in the middle of the page, right under the relevant post." FeedBurner will find ways to mine usage data and feed it to developers, "leading to vast new possibilities for advertising and marketing." I can wait. If you're one of those bloggers encouraging me to switch to your FeedBurner feed: Why don't I just unsubscribe instead?

Why Bill Gates Doesn't Matter As Much Any More

The cover story for *Business 2.0* July 2006 is "The 50 who matter now." One of those on the cover: "#21: Bill Gates: Why his power is waning." That's the part that gripes me. Not the description when you get to #21 in the article: That's about Gates' most important role now and in the future, "Benefactor, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation." That's fine. It's the sense that saving a few million lives *doesn't matter* nearly as

much as running Microsoft. Suddenly Gates is less important than Jack Ma and Brian McAndrews. Who? You're obviously not sufficiently up on pure capitalism, where the pursuit of the almighty buck is the only topic of interest. Giving some of those bucks away? Praiseworthy...but it means you're on your way down. (Presumably, Larry Ellison's redeemed himself by renegeing on his biggest donation.)

Relatively Sane Speaker Prices

I don't believe I mentioned it when Robert Harley, in the March 2006 *Absolute Sound*, called \$45,000 for a pair of speakers a "relatively sane price." I eventually tire of pointing out the absurdity of high-end audio prices, particularly when high-end journalists keep asking why they aren't gaining more adherents. What? You wanted a house? But you can get a great tube amplifier, turntable, cartridge, and speakers for the price of a house—and, after all, doesn't the music count?

David R. Rabalais picked up on that "relatively sane"; his letter appeared in the June/July issue. He sees the connection between that statement and high-end growth: "no matter how much money one has, \$45,000 is an insane amount to spend on two speakers... When a publication suggests that \$45,000 is a 'relatively sane' price for speakers, you confirm every negative stereotype about the high end and those who want to grow it." He talks about electronics (generally falling in price and increasing in power) and suggests that high-end video might be the salvation—but not at crazy prices.

Tell someone not in this industry that a 'good' CD player costs \$5000 and watch his face. Tell someone who isn't an 'audiophile' that \$10,000 speaker cables exist and watch the reaction. Tell someone who isn't deeply involved in the business that to bring your system to full fruition you must spend over \$1000 on a power cord. But be prepared for them to look at you as though you had lost your mind.

\$10,000 speaker cables? Pikers! See the first item in this section—\$25,000 *and up*.

As We Are All Aware

Universality is ugly almost anywhere, but perhaps no more so than when it comes from a fringe group. Martin Taylor's got a bad case in the June/July 2006 *Absolute Sound* letters column. "As we are all aware, and indeed have never been unaware, the sound of the black analog record is far superior to any of the currently available digital software." Later: "Why

bother reviewing CD players as front-end sources other than on a perfunctory basis?”

We are all aware that LPs are “far superior” to CDs, SACDs, DVD-Audio, et al. If you’re not part of “we,” you have no business claiming to be an audiophile; you’re a hopeless philistine.

A guest editorial two pages later talks about the “readily apparent” advantages of SACD and DVD-Audio over standard CD—advantages so “readily apparent” that nobody much cares about them. Philistines, one and all. Myself, to be sure, included.

Those Expensive Audio CD-Rs

I’ve seen it twice in the last couple of months: audio journalists referring to the high costs of SCMS-enabled CD-Rs (that is, “audio CD-Rs”). A *Home Theater* blurb for a Sony CD-dubbing unit (one player, one recorder) says “You have to use an expensive SCMS-enabled music-blank CD-R or CD-RW.”

I suppose “expensive” is relative. Most of the time, I see audio CD-Rs selling for two-thirds more than data CD-Rs: You can buy a spindle of 50 data CD-Rs for the same price as a spindle of 30 audio CD-Rs. That’s a big percentage jump—but it means you may pay an extra dime a CD (\$0.30 instead of \$0.20, since the price for a spindle tends to be \$10). I find it hard to think of an extra dime to record 80 minutes of music as “expensive.”

“Our Full Flash MP3 Buying Guide

can be found on page 34.” That’s what Jim Louderback says in his editorial page at *PC Magazine* (June 6, 2006), the new “lifestyle lite” version of the PC bible. What’s a “full buying guide” include? A one paragraph review of the Apple iPod Nano, the current Editors’ Choice—and even as the feature review, there’s no indication of storage capacity or battery life. Otherwise: One “stay away” mini-review, three “other options” (one or two sentences each), six references to recent reviews (one sentence each), a brief overall commentary, and a silly “flash player FAQ” that at least suggests 192K MP3 ripping rate as “the best compromise between sound quality and file size,” although most people will use the pathetic 128K default. Here’s the thing: The discussion talks about storage capacity and its importance. Except for the Pioneer Inno’s 512MB of MP3 capacity, *not one* of the mini-reviews mentions capacity. “This is important, but we can’t waste three precious characters of each writeup to actually *inform* you.” Ptah. Then again, the

editorial says that Apple and Bose integrated iPod speakers “deliver great sound” and considers component stereo a “dinosaur.” Right.

The Tyranny of Retail Prices!

Lacking enough tyrants in your life? The tease for Dan Tynan’s August 2006 “Gadget Freak” column in *PC World* asks the musical question, “Can your cell phone save you from the tyranny of paying retail prices?” That’s strong stuff! What’s next—the fascism of mainstream media?

The answer? Based on this full-page exploration into trying to save a buck on a video iPod, Tynan says “Mobile search sites leave much to be desired, but good deals can be had—if you shop carefully.” Here’s what happened. He was in his *favorite store* (a status that would encourage some of us to pay a few more bucks to keep that store healthy, but never mind). He decided he should shop for better prices *standing in the aisle of the store*—in my mind, adding insult to injury. He had two web-enabled cell phones and a list of mobile shopping engines. And a lot of patience.

After all sorts of nonsense, he found \$249 and \$260 prices at apparently reputable online stores—but for refurbished models in both cases. He doesn’t mention whether that includes shipping, but never mind. Fact is, he *did not* find a way to avoid the “tyranny of retail prices” except by accepting a used or at least non-new device. But he did help pound another nail in the coffin of helpful local retail.

Masthead

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