

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Walt Crawford

Bibs & Blather

On Being Cited

I saw it as the first item on my chatterwall on the Library 2.0 Ning, from Marcus Elmore on March 21:

Hi Walt—The new issue of C&RL arrived and I opened it only to discover that you're one of the 28 most frequently cited LIS scholars of the past decade—congrats!

“Well, that's interesting,” I thought—particularly given that I'm not a scholar at all. Not having C&RL at hand, I contacted editor Bill Potter, who was kind enough to send the table of “Most Cited Personal Authors, 1994-2004” from “Analysis of a decade in library literature: 1994-2004,” by Kelly Blessinger and Michele Frasier, *College & Research Libraries* March 2007, pp. 155-169.

When I first looked at the table I noted a couple of things (after sending a note about this recognition to select superiors and coworkers):

- I'm one of only two on the list (31 names—28 ranks but with three ties) who aren't academic librarians. The other: Maurice Line, director of the British Library. For that matter, it appears that 25 or 26 of the 31 are library school faculty.
- Michael Gorman was also on the list in 22nd place (I'm 27th), so my first thought was that *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness & Reality* was cited a lot and my inclusion was a fluke.
- As far as I can tell, only eight of the 31 are women, in a woman-dominated profession.

After reading the article, I know a little more. Turns out the second bullet isn't true, or at least isn't *completely* true: the 53 times I was cited cover 29 works.

A couple of caveats: I'm *not* the 27th most widely cited author for that period—I'm the 27th most widely cited in 2,220 journal articles from ten of 28 LIS

journals meeting the study's criteria. It's quite possible that I'd fall out of the top group if all 28 were studied. I certainly can't fault the authors for limiting the study to a reasonable size. (The ten journals, chosen randomly from the 28: *Journal of Documentation*, *College & Research Libraries*, *Library Resources & Technical Services*, *Library and Information Science*, *Library & Information Science Research*, *Library Trends*, *Journal of Librarianship & Information Science*, *Information Technology and Libraries*, *Knowledge Organization*, *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science*. Why this obviously non-alphabetic order? The table lists the 28 journals in descending order by Impact Factor for 2003, from *JDoc's* 1.603 on down.)

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The article covers a fair amount of ground. It looks at topics covered in the journal literature in some detail, noting changes in coverage over the decade. On average, articles included about 21 citations, and the 47,389 citations included 21,994 authors—of whom 69% were cited only once. The “top 28” list includes everyone cited at least 50 times, noting again that these citations are only from 10 of the 28 journals that could be candidates for study.

I won't bore you with more bibliometric comments. I think this is an article I'd read even if I wasn't mentioned in it. On the other hand, it's true that I read less of the formal library literature than I used to and feel even less guilt about not contributing to it very much. (Except indirectly, I guess.) I've said that, when I retire, I'll spend time at San Jose's joint city/San Jose State library (which should include a

strong library science collection) and catch up with professional literature I've missed so I can start doing "proper" writing again. I may be kidding myself.

Making It Work

Why did I discuss this article in BIBS & BLATHER instead of THE LIBRARY STUFF? For the same reason there hasn't been a THE LIBRARY STUFF this year, after six or seven occurrences three of the last four years (four in 2005)—although I didn't recognize that reason until early April. To use webspoken, THE LIBRARY STUFF is now deprecated (like THE GOOD STUFF): It might appear again, but it's unlikely.

That's *not* because Steven M. Cohen told me to stop using his term (he didn't). It's *certainly* not because I plan to write less about direct library issues—quite the opposite, as I believe the first four issues of 2007 show. If anything, a renewed concentration on libraries *as libraries* makes THE LIBRARY STUFF less useful as a section. It has no organizing principle other than alphabetic order by citation. It's useful as a way to comment on articles and longer posts, but not as a way to synthesize citations and insights on *topics*.

Enter MAKING IT WORK, beginning in this issue and continuing as long and frequently as it feels right. My plan is to use the new section for topical discussions—not just "Library 2.0" or social software issues, but any library topics not covered elsewhere where I think interesting things are being said and feel I can add value to the discussion. Sometimes the heading will appear over multiple topics; sometimes it will be used for a single-topic PERSPECTIVE. In that way, it's the same as most section names (except MY BACK PAGES, TRENDS & QUICK TAKES and INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS—all of which continue to be potpourris of briefer items and mini-essays).

Urgh: An Apology to Richard Entlich

Sometimes things get caught in folders and don't make their way out in a timely manner. So it is with a detailed email Richard Entlich (Cornell), author of the wonderful "FAQ"s in *RLG Diginews* sent me last September (*last September!*) adding detail to PIONEER OA JOURNALS: THE ARC OF ENTHUSIASM, FIVE YEARS LATER (*C&I* 6:12, October 2006). It's true that I haven't done any FOLLOWING UP AND FEEDBACK for a long time, but that's no excuse.

Here's an edited version of Entlich's email, providing additional details on some of the ejournals.

Thanks to Richard for the work—and, again, my apologies for not using it in a more timely fashion.

There is no question in my mind that the vast majority of the titles you identified in your first study are now highly endangered, even those for which you were still able to find complete, currently accessible archives. However, after following up on those you couldn't locate, I found the situation dire, but not quite as dire as you indicated...

One pretty strong conclusion from my admittedly tiny sub-study of your listing—the Internet Archive Wayback Machine has little to offer as a sanctuary for these early electronic titles... I'm guessing that the early exemplars of scholarly online publishing will all gradually disappear into the bit bucket of history because no one has identified them as significant enough to merit the effort to collect, catalog, and preserve. There are just too many other more pressing priorities.

On the other hand, things seem to be looking up a bit for more recent publications, with initiatives like the LOCKSS Humanities Project, and various web archiving programs pulling in some of the more obscure web publications.

InterJournal. I did not have any trouble with www.interjournal.org/. The site appears alive, well, and up-to-date, with submission and acceptance of manuscripts continuing in 2006 and a full archive of past submissions. Ulrich's lists this as an active title.

LIBRES. Of the issues that should be on the ftp site, all of those published from 1994 and 1995, and some of them from 1992 and 1993 can be found at infomotions.com/serials/libres/.

RhetNet. The archive at wac.colostate.edu/rhetnet/ seems to be pretty intact, at least compared to the one at www.missouri.edu/~rhetnet/

Asia-Pacific Exchange (Electronic) Journal [APEX-J]. The home page with links to the back issue archive is available on the Wayback Machine, e.g., web.archive.org/web/19990219125302/leahi.kcc.hawaii.edu/pub/apexj/. However, the links are to a gopher site and as far I know, the Wayback Machine did no crawling of gopher sites. I haven't been able to turn up any of the back issues.

Electronic Journal on Virtual Culture (originally *Arachnet Electronic Journal on Virtual Culture*). A full archive is available at infomotions.com/serials/aejvc/. Also, the contents of 1993 issues plus first issue of 1994 are available at www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/communications/papers/ejvc/.

Gassho. The first five issues are available at www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/religious_studies/Buddhism/DEFA/Journals/Gassho/

Research & Reflection: A Journal of Educational Praxis. A partial archive is available at web.archive.org/web/19990203181345/http://www.soe.gonzaga.edu/rr/index.html.

Surfaces. An archive is available at www.pum.umont-real.ca/revues/surfaces/home.html.

De Proverbio. An archive is available, but not free, at www.ebookmall.com/ebooks-authors/teodor-flonta-ebooks.htm

I also have a few tidbits relating to the titles you labeled as "Mysteries" back in 2001:

SPEED: An Electronic Journal of Technology, Media, and Society. An archive is available at proxy.arts.uci.edu/~nideffer/_SPEED/

Sense of Place. I found a single crawl of the site on the Wayback Machine from 2004, but the content doesn't come up. However, it's possible that the Internet Archive does have something that will eventually be accessible. See web.archive.org/web/20041024234207/http://mmm.dartmouth.edu/pages/sense-of-place/sop_home.html.

Advances in Systems Science and Applications. There is some information about it at www.iigss.net/ASSA.htm. I have found a number of references to a current publication with this title and the same ISSN as was given to the original ASSA, but it's published in Chinese. Ulrich's lists its status as "Researched/Unresolved" and its country of publication as "Taiwan, Republic of China." It also says it didn't start publishing until 1997, but the *ARL Directory of Electronic Journals* had a listing for it in 1995.

Online Modern History Review. Based on the information in the *ARL Directory of Electronic Journals*, it appears that this title may have only ever been available via Telnet. See also lists.asu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind9311&L=aera-f&D=1&T=0&P=259.

Old Media/New Media

Back when pundits were assuring us physical books were dead, those who didn't assume we'd all have moved beyond text literacy tended to have a hierarchy of replacement.

As I remember it, magazines would be first to go. Most of them aren't particularly local, they could as easily be delivered on CD-ROMs (back in the day) as in paper form, we all wanted full-text searching—and most of us don't keep most magazines anyway.

Next books: Very little bandwidth (a lot less than magazines, although comparable to journals), no localization, ideal for full-text searching—and just think! If you find a word you aren't sure of, click on it and the onboard dictionary will pronounce and define it. No wonder publishers abandoned hardcopy books years ago: It's an obvious win for the digital revolution. Last, as I remember it, would be newspapers.

Why? Because of local functions, including their use as advertising conduits for local merchants.

The situation's changed. Or maybe it hasn't.

Newspapers and Traditional News

In October 2006, LexisNexis announced the results of a nationwide survey on news sources people trust the most. (The press release says "consumers." I'd say "citizens." Let's split the difference and use "people.") The findings? "When [people] are faced with major events that significantly affect their lives...their trust mostly remains with traditional media." For immediate information, that means television first, radio second, daily newspapers third, internet sites *from traditional media* fourth—and fifth (6% of those surveyed) "emerging media" such as blogs, chat rooms, user groups.

Who do you trust? "On average, consumers are four to six times more likely to feel that traditional media is more trustworthy than emerging news sources..." In the future? "More than half...surveyed anticipate they will continue to mostly trust and rely on traditional news sources," with a third expecting they'll rely on and trust both traditional and emerging media. Just over one in eight (13%) anticipate trusting and relying on mostly emerging media.

As surveys go, this one seems plausible: 1,500 Americans, of which 1,167 were defined as consumers rather than "business professionals." Claimed accuracy is 2.5 to 3.5% at 95% confidence level for the consumer portion.

But newspapers are failing—right?

A quick item in the January 9, 2007 *Media Life* cites a Gallup poll suggesting that the trend of abandoning newspapers is slowing. Twice as many people (44%) use newspapers as a major news source compared to the internet (22%)—and the percentage using newspapers didn't drop from 2004 to 2006, although it dropped from 47% to 44% between 2002 and 2004. Use of the internet for news increased by five percentage points from 2002 to 2004—but only by two points from 2004 to 2006. *Local* TV news topped newspapers; network, cable, and public TV come between newspapers and the internet, while radio trails.

An article by Lisa Snedeker in the same *Media Life* (www.medialifemagazine.com) says newspapers are hurting but "still amazingly healthy." As the title says, "Don't write off the daily paper quite yet." Snedeker offers this answer to thoughts that the American

newspaper is headed into extinction: “It is not, not today, not tomorrow and not for a long time, if ever.” Why not? Well, newspapers continue to show “impressive profitability”—still showing profit margins in excess of 20%. (If you’re Elsevley that may not sound great. If you’re Safeway, any auto company or most other industries except banking, it’s thrilling.) One of the “nastier forecasts” for the future has “profits shrinking to somewhere around 12 percent”—still a “very healthy enterprise.”

Indeed, if newspapers were headed toward extinction, then why would so many millionaires—all shrewd businessmen—be trying so hard to buy them, men like former GE chief Jack Welch, who’s been after the Boston Globe? Not to lose money. Part of it is the prestige that comes with owning a newspaper, but they also see real opportunity. They see a new future for newspapers.

That future has a lot to do with *locality*—the ability to reach local audiences more effectively than any other medium. As the story goes, newspapers *deliver* “for readers and for advertisers trying to reach those readers.” They deliver *more* news (local and otherwise) and engender a sense of ownership. They’re “a mass medium at the local level... Newspapers offer readers a sense of community and also a sense of the public good, as a forum for discussion of issues facing communities, and this is never more so than during periods of crisis or dramatic social change.”

Snedeker argues that the power of local papers will increase as media fragmentation increases: “Even as its readership declines, it will still be the largest voice.” And, to be sure, some loss of print subscriptions will represent moves to the web sites—and on the web, newspapers have strong brand names. “What newspapers have most going for themselves is their ability to reinvent themselves.” Snedeker argues that papers “are perhaps the most aggressive of all media in looking for new means to connect with their audiences.” Around here, I’ve seen that for decades. The San Francisco *Chronicle* reinvented itself as a daily magazine when TV news became the first place to go for the hot national/world stories—earning sneers from journalism schools but establishing itself as part of the ongoing culture. Since then, SFGate showed up as one of the earliest and strongest newspaper websites (originally serving both the *Chron* and the *Examiner* when they had a joint operations agreement), and seems once again to be reinventing itself as a source of strong, long *local* and regional coverage. (Once again, newspaper critics sneered when the *Chron* started a

daily “*Chronicle Watch*” feature to identify failed public infrastructure situations and keep pointing at them until they’re corrected. That’s Not What A Dignified Pseudo-National Newspaper Does—but it’s *definitely* what a local paper does, and the feature has been highly effective.) The paper lost a huge number of subscription readers in the last couple of years, partly because it decided *not* to be the regional paper of choice for all of Northern California and Nevada and stopped subsidizing distant local delivery that Bay Area advertisers didn’t want to pay for. What’s happened: The *Chron* is doing a lousy job of being Northern California’s version of the *New York Times*—and a pretty decent job of being a local metro paper with a *very* strong web presence.

Snedeker followed up on February 1 with a refined look at the so-called circulation crisis: “Fact is, your average paper is just fine.” Just as the earlier drop in circulation mostly affected afternoon papers in two-newspaper towns, the current one mostly affects the big dailies—and may involve public-company profitability as much as real health. Snedeker lays it out clearly:

For years, so many big dailies were competing for national ranking, and for Pulitzer Prizes, opening bureaus in Washington and New York and sometimes overseas. They shunned local news, dismissing much of it as chicken dinner news, the squabbles that came out of, say, a speech at a Rotary lunch.

Not so the small papers. Their philosophy never changed. Rooted in the community, and far more dependent on advertising from community businesses, they kept covering the local Rotary lunches and the school board meetings and the zoning board.

It turned out to be a smart move.

The *Daily Republic* of Mitchell, South Dakota—in an area steadily losing population—may only have 12,443 circulation, but that circulation is growing and advertising is solid. One industry estimate says 75% to 80% of the American newspaper industry is smaller papers that are maintaining or gaining circulation; the “circulation crisis” is among big city dailies and some midsize markets.

Randy Craig of the Inland Press Association gets it: “It’s all about local. In any given situation, if you want to know what is happening, you have to read the local newspaper.” When surveys have asked the question, respondents have said they’re “most interested in things happening in their towns and neighborhoods, what’s called hyper-local news.” And,

as the story continues, it has to be *well-written* news—quality, not just quantity.

Then there's the world

Heidi Dawley reported on “The endangered newspaper that is not” on February 8, 2007 at *Media Life*. She reports that on a global basis, newspapers are *gaining* in circulation—10% between 2001 and 2005. There are also *more* newspapers than ever: More than 10,000 dailies with a total of 479 *million* circulation.

That's partly because of free newspapers (most newspaper revenue comes from advertisers, not subscribers), but paid newspapers are also seeing global growth. European circulation is up. U.S. newspaper circulation is down—but not by much (0.66% between 2001 and 2005). Overall worldwide, paid circulation increased 6.39% from 2001 to 2005.

Not all freebies are little throwaways. *Leggo* in Italy circulates more than a million copies; *Metro* in Britain runs 977,000 copies (a U.S. *Metro* circulates 668,000). The article suggests more papers will switch from paid to free, particularly in the U.S., where subscription prices are low anyway.

Conclusions?

I find it sad when intelligent adults tell me they don't read daily newspapers; they get all the news they need on the internet. What you don't get from the internet, in my opinion, is the overall awareness that a good regional provides—or the intense local awareness a good local paper provides. You also don't get background awareness of what local businesses want to offer, an important part of *maintaining* local business. And you miss the local, regional and national cultural coverage good papers provide.

I'd like to state confidently that good print newspapers will be around as long as I'm alive, but I'm less confident about that prediction than I am about the survival of print books and magazines. Still, I suspect that *local* newspapers will be OK based on what I'm reading. For regionals and nationals, one key may be moving to private ownership. There's an unsustainable conflict between the “*More Profit This Quarter and Screw the Long Term*” attitude of stock market analysts and the need for reinvestment (in the web and elsewhere) and riding out short-term crises that makes newspapers work.

I'll close this section by pointing you to a long article from the February 2007 *Columbia Journalism Review*: “The Race” by Robert Kuttner. It's 19 print pages; you can find it at www.cjr.org/issues/2007/2/Kuttner.asp.

Kuttner discusses the web initiatives of newspapers and a number of other issues. Kuttner agrees that local papers are in good shape, as are the biggest national papers, with “mid-sized regional metropolitan dailies” at greatest risk. (Kuttner also takes a justified swipe at “Web-only journalism,” noting that *Slate* and *Salon* have both become primarily commentary rather than news, “since talk is cheap and reportage isn't.”) Kuttner believes “many big dailies have turned the corner” toward financially and journalistically viable paths of “becoming hybrids.” It's an interesting read—and probably more readable in the print magazine.

Magazines

I've been sitting on this one for most of a year. Some of you already read it in the May 1, 2006 *Library Journal* feature “Best magazines of 2005.” “Techno-seers who predict that the Internet will spell the demise of print media could be accused of being oblivious to the very real pleasures of leisurely leafing through the glossy pages of well-produced magazines... [T]he more than 1,000 new print magazine launches in 2005 suggest that sunny skies are still ahead.”

2005 was “another good year for print magazine publishers,” with a 7.2% growth in advertising revenue. As in every other year, some old (and new) magazines failed and some new magazines took off. Yes, there are gray clouds—one of which is “major publishers' tendency to zero in on large numbers of subscribers as the sole indicator of success.” That's a problem, given that magazine publishing has *always* been a “long-tail” field, with at least 95% of all magazines targeted at niches. Trying to claim huge subscription numbers to get high-end advertisers (by offering deeply discounted subscriptions) may work in the short term, but “discount subscribers are a notoriously unreliable audience.” (It's worth noting that nontraditional “magazines” continue, at least as short-term efforts: One of 2005's “best magazines” is the quarterly DVD-ROM *Journal of Short Film*, which seems to still be in business. Another is a CD-ROM audio literary journal.)

An early 2007 *Media Life* piece is a little less sanguine—although it's not a matter of survival. Diego Vasquez asked Marty Walker of Walker Communications “Why magazines are in such doldrums.” In this case “doldrums” doesn't mean magazines disappearing—just that ad revenues didn't grow much in 2006. It appears that magazine publishers are acting sensibly: Cutting their rate bases (the number of readers

promised to advertisers). What happened with magazines in 2006? Some “big” magazines folded—but do we really miss *FHM*, *Shock*, *Cargo* and *Elle Girl*? Audit Bureau of Circulation rules got tighter. Walker thinks we might see a “shakeout” of sorts in technology or product-related magazines this year—but expects to see strength in niche markets as well as fashion and home furnishing. “I think you’ll see more and more niche-type magazines”—always a strength of print magazines and maybe the future. He’s seeing that car companies now advertise in smaller magazines. Then there are good things: “I don’t think magazines dumbbed themselves down, they still have a high standard. I was kind of happy to see that the shopping magazines didn’t do so well, They’ve kind of plateaued. They’re not magazines, they’re catalogs.”

Like newspapers (only more so), most print magazines are primarily funded by advertising and (in many cases) carry only as much editorial copy as ads support, frequently on a page-for-page basis. Fortunately, magazine advertising has the virtues of impact without interference: The ads can provide both excitement and information without slowing you when you’re trying to read stories. Every time I check *Slate* and wait for that wretched drop-down half-screen ad to go away (or forget it’s there and watch my screen go berserk) or try to watch an Approved TV Clip and sit through the mandatory up-front ad, I’m reminded just how well print advertising balances the needs of commerce and the desires of the citizen-reader.

A Small Digression into CDs

CDs may be the easiest of all physical media to replace with new equivalents—not “digital replacements,” since CDs *are* digital. They don’t carry advertising. The visual splendor of LP sleeves has already been lost, by and large; 5x5" isn’t much of a canvas. To the extent that many (most?) popular contemporary CDs (and LPs) have, for a long time, been ways to sucker us into buying 12 songs of which we really want two or three, they’re ripe for the scrap heap. To the extent that musicians wind up with vastly overpriced production deals and contracts that force those 12 songs when only two or three are really ready, it’s hard to see who loses by a move toward download sales. Bandwidth was a problem back when dragons roamed the earth (say 1998), but now that “everyone has broadband” (that is, a slight majority of U.S. internet users) and most people don’t seem to notice the crappy sound of overly-compressed

MP3/AAC downloads, there’s no problem. For that matter, CDs have been around for almost exactly a quarter-century, and that’s historically the typical life-span of a dominant audio medium.

But it’s not that simple. At least not for everybody. Just as “news” as broadly defined is becoming a complex mix of internet and physical delivery, it’s likely that recorded music will be sold and rented via a complex mix of internet and physical delivery for at least another decade. At the moment, downloads represent perhaps 10% of all music sold. What *may* be happening, though, is a shift in CD production and sales. RIAA members seem wedded to blockbusters: overproduced releases costing close to half a million dollars up front and requiring huge sales to earn back the money. Maybe the future tends more toward realistic recordings that cost relatively little to produce and need only a few thousand sales to become profitable, sold online and in specialty stores. That future might get us back to a variety of music that seemed to be disappearing during the blockbuster days. It might also get us back to a tradition of fair use and first sale rights that DRM-laden downloads seemed to negate.

Just one story to point out this time: Daniel Gross’ “moneybox” column posted March 27, 2007 at *Slate*: “The CD is dead! Long live the CD!” Gross notes the dozens of requiems (“requia” feels right, but Merriam-Webster agrees with Gross’ usage) for CDs, “mostly in the key of boo-hoo major.” He notes the drop of 25% in CD sales from 2000 to 2005, a period (as others have noted) in which the number of new CDs released *also* dropped by about 25% (no comment on the number of *good* new CDs). Sales continue to drop, and of course Tower Records closed last year.

“Conclusion: *The CD is dead!* Except, it’s not.” Local CD chains are doing well. Starbucks established a record label and has done great business with some CDs. Amazon has a new classical music retail outlet.

What we are witnessing is not so much the imminent death of CDs but the death of the old methods of selling CDs. It’s still possible to make money in the CD business—any business with more than \$7 billion in retail sales should allow someone, somewhere, to make a profit. The incumbents are getting killed, but upstarts are thriving, using different methods.

The “legacy” manufacturers built massive infrastructures based on selling “massive and growing quantities of CDs for \$15.99 and up”—hoping they could avoid the deflationary pressures that lowered LP prices and *should* have CD prices down to \$10 or less by now,

given that the incremental cost of each CD is nearly zero (the booklet and jewelcase cost *much* more than the disc itself). The competition—not only from download services but also from online retailers and musicians who bypass Big Media altogether—cuts into the margins.

Today, “people simply aren’t willing to pay \$16 for a collection of songs they may not want.” Tower habitually overcharged; Amazon doesn’t (and neither do Target and good local stores). Most of the top-selling CDs on Amazon go for less than \$10.

This short item leaves out a lot of angles, but the bottom line’s probably true for the next decade or more: “Is the CD dying as a commercial product? Sure. But it’s got a lot of dying left to do.” Meanwhile, while I won’t pay \$16 (or \$18) for two good songs and a bunch of crap, the stock in trade of most current releases, I’ll *happily* pay \$10-\$12 for a Sony Legacy two-disc “Essentials” package containing 30 to 40 songs I really want by an artist I care about, or one of Rhino’s first-rate compilations that comes out to less than \$0.99 per *good* song and offers true “CD quality”—because it’s a CD. So will millions of other people. It’s a different business; it’s still a viable business.

Books

What is there to say? First, there’s the new generation that can’t cope with print books and prefers reading from the screen. *Wrong*. As has now been widely reported, “Kids (age 12-18) are buying books in quantities we’ve never seen before” (Michael Cart of *Booklist*)—and publishers are producing better books for kids and teens. Kids are checking them out from libraries as well, as public libraries with good contemporary teen collections and good policies know. More libraries are forming teen advisory groups; more quality books appear; more teens have more spendable money; and *they read books*. (The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* had a good story on this on March 7, 2007; there have been others.)

Laura Magzis offered “Books, books, books!” in the March 1, 2007 *Library Journal*. A library school student, Magzis notes that “many people value libraries because they are full of books we can read for free.” She objects to the absurd Lawrence *Journal-World* op-ed about “inefficient, obsolete” books and stresses “an important function that public libraries still serve: *books, books, books for free, free, free*.” Sure, libraries serve all sorts of other functions—but circulation statistics continue to improve.

Let me bottom line it for you: libraries must not let the current focus on technology overshadow the activity of people who still read books for pleasure and visit their library in search of free, portable entertainment. Often the patrons boosting our circulation statistics are the very same patrons who queue up to sue the Internet on our computers. They may want more technology, but I’m not convinced that they want it at the expense of books.

Marc Meola posted “Library porn and the inevitable future?” at *ACRLog* on February 16, 2007, discussing a pseudonymous essay (“Thomas H. Benton”) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that asserts, yawn, that “in 20 years, college students will regard books the way they now regard 33 RPM records...” Meole notes: “most of us know that to casually toss off the idea that technology will soon render books obsolete is a simple mistake that is made over and over again by people who focus solely on technology but ignore the economic and social systems in which books are embedded.” He points to an interesting essay by Priscilla Murphy on the century-old “death of books” refrain that speaks to the “intricate involvement” of books within the rest of media and education systems.

That’s all much more high-powered than just noting that print books continue to work, authorship, sales and (public library) circulation all continue to grow, and all that irrelevant reality-based argument. It doesn’t hurt to note (as Meola does indirectly) that the Google Book Search project basically makes books more findable rather than replacing them.

Barbara Fister added a thoughtfully written comment, including these notes:

The idea that Kids Today don’t like books is simply untrue. One of the reasons students flock to libraries to study, even when there are computers available elsewhere on campus, is because they are inspired by being in the presence of books. They may start their search on Google, and may even end there, but that doesn’t mean they hate books and have no use for them.

The great irony is that the libraries Benton finds utilitarian but uninspiring are more important than ever. Those older, dustier books he delights in uncovering in research collections will be much more readily available to the masses through mass digital projects than anything written since the early twentieth century. For newer books, students and scholars will have to turn to libraries.

Masses of books available outside the walls of libraries may be in our future, but not libraries without books.

Digressing slightly, it’s worth noting that *more* ways to produce books, real print books, as they’re needed are coming along. Late 2006 and early 2007 saw a good

deal of publicity for the Espresso, a “\$50,000 vending machine with a conceivably infinite library”—in other words, another print-on-demand package for use in libraries or stores. The prime mover, Jason Epstein, has been pushing this idea for a long time. There’s some nonsense in the publicity (a claim that “within about five years” the system “will be able to reproduce every volume ever printed,” which is not possible given copyright and the orphan works problem) and an overstatement of competitor costs (“\$500,000-\$1 million” in an *ITI Newslink* item), but it’s noteworthy that another serious for-profit competitor thinks it’s plausible to have on-demand in-store/in-library book production. Producing print books.

Finally, for this issue, portions of a January 27, 2007 piece by Richard Akerman at *Science Library Pad*, “reports of the death of the book are premature.” Akerman’s a science librarian and nobody’s Luddite by any means. Here’s part of what he has to say:

In 1993, Canadian futurist Frank Ogden (“Dr. Tomorrow”) wrote a book entitled *The Last Book You’ll Ever Read*.

This was not the first and certainly not the last prediction of the imminent demise of the printed page.

There is only one problem with these predictions, which is that they are consistently wrong.

Long-format is better as a printed book. It’s portable and powered only by your brain. It is readable under a variety of lighting conditions...

The only context in which e-books ever made sense to me was for university textbooks. These have the following characteristics: big; heavy; expensive; always changing; dense information explanations for people new to the field; often never used after the course or the degree is completed.

In that specific context, it makes sense to dematerialize the books so that they can be carried around easily, and also, ideally, so that they can feature enhanced materials (demonstrations, live graphs, animated problem solving etc.)

Somehow digitization of books has gotten all jumbled together with e-books and the demise of books. I think this is incorrect. Digitization is about *search*, not about reading...

There’s more, including Akerman’s justified excitement at the possibilities opened by full-text *search* for better discovery of books, “to be followed by delivery at the local library or bookstore.”

The reality is that new generations continue to read print books in very large quantities and that old generations haven’t given up on them. Books continue to thrive, *augmented* by new media for extension and promotion. So it is with many media.

Offtopic Perspective

50-Movie Classic Musicals, Part 1

Fifty musicals for \$15-\$20. What could that mean? You’re not going to get spectaculars like *West Side Story*, *Oklahoma*, *The Music Man* for that kind of money (I’m seeing some cost-effective collections of deluxe two-disc editions of such musicals, though—like six of them for \$70 or less). As I go through these, it may be interesting to see how “musical” is defined—it can be a picture about music or musicians (real or fictional) so that lots of music gets included, a picture with a regular plot that has lots of music (well-integrated into the plot or otherwise), a musical revue on film—and maybe other things. This set has four or five duplications with other 50-movie packs I’ve reviewed, but three of the four I’m sure of are quite good movies, so that’s OK.

Mill Creek Entertainment continues the erratic spelling of the medium these movies appear on: “Disk” (wrong) on the sleeves, “Disc” (right) on the discs themselves. As with all 50-movie packs, assume VHS-level transfers, frequently from mildly-damaged originals, with no special features and (always) four scene divisions per title (most packs now have intelligent scene breaks, not just an arbitrary quarter of the length). If there are enough missing frames to reduce the run length by more than a minute from what appears in IMDB, I give the actual DVD run time in [square brackets]. The dollar rating at the end of each mini-review is fairly forgiving and ranges from \$0 to \$2.50, although anything over \$2 is rare. A buck or more means I think the movie is worth watching and might conceivably watch it again. \$1.50 or more means I think the movie would be worth buying as a bargain DVD on its own.

Disc 1

The Fabulous Dorseys, 1947, b&w, Alfred E. Green (dir.), Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Janet Blair, Paul Whiteman, Bob Eberly, Helen O’Connell, Art Tatum, William Lundigan. 1:28.

The Dorseys aren’t much as actors, and the plot may be realistic but still comes off a bit hokey—but it doesn’t matter. Great music by great musicians, including a first-rate jam session with Art Tatum. Pretty decent print quality, and the sound track’s more than good enough. Worth watching just for the musical numbers. \$1.50.

Calendar Girl, 1947, b&w, Allan Dwan (dir.), Jane Frazee, William Marshall, Gail Patrick, Kenny Baker, Victor McLaglen, Franklin Pangborn. 1:28 [1:20]

Cute plot, good musical numbers, but the sound's badly damaged in portions and the picture's pretty frayed as well. I'd give this \$1.25 in a decent transfer, but can't go higher than \$0.75 under the circumstances.

Sunny, 1941, b&w, Herbert Wilcox (dir.), Anna Neagle, Ray Bolger, John Carroll, Edward Everett Horton, Grace Hartman, Paul Hartman, Martha Tilton. 1:38 [1:35].

This one also suffers from a badly damaged print, but it's a thoroughly enjoyable flick nonetheless—this time with a plot that actually drives the movie. Sunny Sullivan's a circus performer (singer, horseback rider) who meets up with the wealthy scion of an automaker during Mardi Gras in New Orleans. They get engaged. The circus friends (Ray Bolger and crew) show up at the wedding and she runs away with them—but of course love conquers all: It's a musical! Even with the damage, this one's worth \$1.25.

Swing Hostess, 1944, b&w, Sam Newfield (dir.), Martha Tilton, Iris Adrian, Charles Collins, Betty Brodel, Cliff Nazarro, Harry Holman. 1:16.

Martha Tilton was a vocalist for Benny Goodman and is absolutely first rate as a singer and more than good enough as an actress. As with *Calendar Girl*, this one's partly set in a "struggling artist" apartment house—this time with lots of novelty acts (magician, acrobats). The plot hinges on a situation that could only have happened during a few years: The master disks on which records are directly cut are so expensive that a recording studio head (and masher) insists on using the rest of a disk that Tilton's already cut a demo on—and her half gets released as though by the (awful-sounding) girl the head brings in. Hijinks ensue (this is most definitely a comedy), and of course it all works out. The most interesting part here: "Telephone jukeboxes" in restaurants, where you put in a coin, pick up a phone, and tell the operator what tune you want, at which point she plays the disc on one of several turntables at the central station. I can only assume this actually happened. Not great but quite good. \$1.25.

Disc 2

I hope this is the most problematic disc in the set. Every movie on this disc poses one problem or another, at least as part of a set of musicals. Read on. You'll see what I mean.

Dixiana, 1930, b&w (with color finale that's not on the disc), Luther Reed (dir.), Bebe Daniels, Everett Marshall, Bert Wheeler, Robert Woolsey, Joseph Cawthorn, Bill Robinson. 1:40 [1:25]

Woman who sings and does other acts in a circus performing in New Orleans meets up with a wealthy high-society fellow right around Mardi Gras. They get engaged. Circus friends show up at a high-society gathering and embarrass her, so she runs away. Sound a little bit like *Sunny*? (Check out Disc 1.) It's not.

What it is, is a complete mess—that might have been redeemed by the 15 minutes missing from this transfer, presumably the 2-strip Technicolor finale that includes a three-minute tap dance sequence by Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. That finale might also resolve the plot—but it's just not here. What is here includes a long Wheeler & Woolsey comedy routine that's apparently just about the only film of them (and suggests that tastes in comedy have changed a lot in 75 years!), some other musical numbers of indifferent quality, and a plot that might have been moderately interesting if it hadn't simply disappeared. A shame. Very generously (there's some good comic interplay within the movie itself, and some decent music), \$0.75.

Palooka, 1934, b&w, Benjamin Stoloff (dir.), Jimmy Durante, Lupe Velez, Stuart Erwin, William Cagney, Robert Armstrong, Thelma Todd. 1:26.

It's a decent comedy based on the comic strip, with Joe Palooka as a sort of accidental boxer (son of a boxing champ who abandoned the family for the high life) and Jimmy Durante as his manager. But it's simply not a musical: There are two, count them, two songs total. One is an odd song-and-dance number by Lupe Velez wearing an outfit that's clearly "pre-code Hollywood"; the other Durante's signature tune. A good cast—and I would have sworn that was a young James Cagney as the champ Palooka (Erwin) defeats and is later defeated by, until I read the credits: It's his lookalike brother. \$1.

Glorifying the American Girl, 1929, b&w (and color, but not on the disc), John W. Harkrider & Millard Webb (dir.), Mary Eaton, Dan Healy, Kaye Renard, Edward Crandall, Eddie Cantor, Helen Morgan, Rudy Vallee, Noah Beery, Irving Berlin, Billie Burke, Texas Guinan, Otto Kahn, Ring Lardner, Jimmy Walker, Johnny Weissmuller, Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. 1:27. [1:34!]

With *Dixiana*, I didn't notice the "Technicolor" claims in opening credits, so I was mostly disappointed by the lapsed plot and fact that Bill Robinson didn't show up as a dancer (albeit claimed on the sleeve). This time, I *did* notice the claim, so I was disappointed: If there's any color anywhere in this flick, I couldn't detect it. There's plenty of music and comedy, of course: Much of the picture is a Ziegfeld review, including a Cantor comedy routine and songs by Helen Morgan and Rudy Vallee (sax strapped over his shoulder but never touched during the song). The rest of those stars? Mostly cameos on their way into the theater. The plot, such as it is, lacks resolution, but it's not all that important anyway. Not great, not bad. \$0.75.

Check and Double Check, 1930, b&w, Melville W. Brown (dir.), Freeman F. Gosden, Charles J. Correll, Irene Rich, Duke Ellington and the Cotton Club Orchestra. 1:17.

The most difficult of the four, for reasons that folks knowledgeable with entertainment history may have spotted already. Here's my advice, if you happen to have access to this disc:

Go to the second scene, about minute 27 overall. Most of the next 11 minutes are performances by Duke Ellington and orchestra, including a full-length big-band jazz number nicely filmed and one of Ellington's first (and few) filmed performances. That segment is worth watching. Skip the rest of the movie.

Otherwise, well, there's a huge problem here in the persons of Gosden, Correll, and another actor. It's a problem that makes an otherwise poorly-plotted degrading race comedy into something even less watchable. Ever hear of Amos 'n' Andy? If you ever saw the TV series, they were dumb and played as stereotypes, but they were good hearted and the cast was all black. Here, though, the originators and radio stars played the roles—and Gosden and Correll are both *white*, playing in full minstrel-show blackface. The only semi-redeeming thing I can say about this is that, according to Wikipedia, the two were offered the chance for a sequel and turned it down—and Gosden later called the movie "just about the worst movie ever." Here's an appalling factoid if you believe Wikipedia (I see no reason not to): Although the critics *and* Gosden and Correll hated the movie, it was RKO's biggest-grossing film until *King Kong* in 1933. Oh yes: The soundtrack's noisy, but not too bad during the Duke Ellington sequence. I'd give this a flat zero except for Ellington, who earns it a big \$0.25.

Disc 3

This one's more like it. Four black-and-white movies about and featuring music, all with all-black casts, all marketed primarily to black audiences. Which may be why only one of the four is otherwise available on DVD—and that only because *The Duke is Tops*, Lena Horne's first movie appearance, was reissued years later after she became a star and is available on a two-fer DVD. The prints vary from very good (with missing frames) to poor. But the music? Ah, the music!

Paradise in Harlem, 1939, b&w, Joseph Seiden (dir.), Mamie Smith, Norman Astwood, Edna Mae Harris, Merritt Smith, Francine Everett, Percy Verwayen, Babe and Eddie Matthews. 1:25.

The plot centers on a would-be dramatic actor who's stuck doing blackface (yes, a black actor doing blackface in a Harlem club, playing Uncle Tom), who witnesses a mob hit. The mob tells him to get out of town, which he

does, becoming a traveling drunk. Eventually, he comes back, gets the chance to do *Othello*, and comes to a remarkable scenic climax with the aid of impromptu a cappella gospel (and an absurd ending to the crime plot). Quite a bit of excellent music along the way. Some damage. \$1.25.

The Duke is Tops, 1938, b&w, William L. Nolte (dir.), Ralph Cooper, Lena Horne, Laurence Criner. 1:13 [1:15!]

Lena Horne's first movie, as a singer in shows produced by her boyfriend—until she (and only she) gets a chance at Broadway. He trumps up a scene so she'll leave him and goes to work with a traveling medicine show—eventually coming back to rescue her from a bad show and make everything right. This one's also mostly music and some comedy (Cooper does a fine medicine-show routine). Lena Horne was still young and a bit low on star power, but the music's nonetheless excellent. \$1.50

Reet, Petite and Gone, 1947, b&w, William Forest Crouch (dir.), Louis Jordan (and the Tympany Five), June Richmond, Bea Griffith. 1:07 [1:10].

The plot doesn't amount to much—rich dying father, industrious bandleader son, wicked lawyer, faithful butler, daughter of the father's first love—but it also doesn't take up much time. This movie is really about music—14 complete songs filmed head-on, with good sound and a good picture. If you want to nitpick, the dancers in one or two numbers seem to be doing random steps, but who cares? Jordan's a showman, the music's first-rate, and this one's all about the music. Even with a few missing frames, I give this a solid \$2. I'll watch it again.

Killer Diller, 1948, b&w, Josh Binney (dir.), Dusty Fletcher, Butterfly McQueen, Jackie "Moms" Mabley, Ken Renard, Nat 'King' Cole and the King Cole Trio, and many more. 1:13.

The sleeve talks about a "loose storyline," and that's almost an exaggeration—it involves a show producer, his fiancée, a slapstick magician, four very slapstick cops, and maybe 10-12 minutes total of what's essentially a filmed revue. (Butterfly McQueen's only in the "plot" portion.) Moms Mabley is cleaner than I'd expect (but it is a movie), Nat King Cole is—well, Nat King Cole, even if he's doing lesser-known numbers. Other musicians, dancers, and singers keep it going—including one great performance of "Ain't Nobody's Business But Mine." Unfortunately, there are continuous projector-damage lines throughout the film, and the soundtrack's even distorted at times, which reduces this hour+ of comedy, dancing, and mostly music to \$1.25.

Disc 4

Delightfully Dangerous, 1945, b&w, Arthur Lubin (dir.), Jane Powell, Ralph Bellamy, Constance Moore, Morton Gould and his orchestra, Arthur Treacher. 1:32. [1:30]

15-year-old Cheryl (Jane Powell) is a music student who wants to make it in theater—just like her older sister (Moore). Turns out Moore's really a burlesque performer. Cheryl pays a surprise visit to New York. Hijinks ensue. Good musical numbers, decent plot, fine performances by all concerned—but there's some distortion in the sound track for the first half, unfortunate for a musical. That brings it down to \$1.25.

Private Buckaroo, 1942, b&w, Edward F. Cline (dir.), the Andrews Sisters, Dick Foran, Joe E. Lewis, Shemp Howard, Harry James, Donald O'Connor, Huntz Hall, Mary Wilkes, Ernest Treux. 1:08.

Shemp Howard was much better on his own than as part of the Three Stooges, in my opinion, and he shines in this wartime flick as a sergeant who has trouble with his supposed girlfriend. The real plot: Harry James gets drafted and his group all enlist to stay with their leader. There's another draftee who's not willing to obey orders. The plot makes as much sense as any of these war-promotion flicks, and there's a great running gag: Harry James, an amazing trumpeter, can't get the hang of the Army bugle. The middle Andrews Sister is a bit much for my taste, but overall there's good non-slapstick comedy, great music, and a generally decent print. \$1.50.

Stage Door Canteen, 1943, b&w, Frank Borzage (dir.), Judith Anderson, Tallulah Bankhead, Ralph Bellamy, Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy, Ray Bolger, Katharine Cornell, Gracie Fields, Lynn Fontanne, Helen Hayes, Katharine Hepburn, Jean Hersholt, George Jessel, Gypsy Rose Lee, Alfred Lunt, Harpo Marx, Elsa Maxwell, Yehudi Menuhin, Ethel Merman, Paul Muni, Merle Oberon, George Raft, Cornelia Otis Skinner, Ethel Waters, Johnny Weissmuller, Ed Wynn, William Demarest, Count Basie, Xavier Cugat, Benny Goodman, Kay Kyser, Guy Lombardo and many more stars of stage and screen (I'm not kidding...Peggy Lee doesn't even get a credit). 2:12 [1:52]

First the bad news: The print isn't as good as it might be (some ghost images), although the soundtrack's fine—and apparently a few minutes are missing. Oh, and the plot's not compelling. But the plot's mostly a way to show off an astonishing cavalcade of stars, either performing on stage or acting as waiters and the like—just like the real Stage Door Canteen and Hollywood Canteen (although it's hard to believe they got quite such an impressive concentration every night). If you know stage, screen and music of the 1940s, there's probably another 30 people I should have listed here. Supposedly, this is Katharine Cornell's only screen appearance (a cameo). Katharine Hepburn singing *The Lord's Prayer* (very well). Yehudi Menuhin playing two numbers, one of them *Flight of the Bumble Bee*. Benny Goodman playing clarinet as if he invented it. And so much more. Thoroughly enjoyable, wartime propaganda and all. Even with a second-rate print, this gets \$2.25.

Career Girl, 1944, b&w, Wallace Fox (dir.), Frances Langford, Edward Norris, Iris Adrian, Craig Woods. 1:09. [1:07]

Three out of four ain't bad. This is the fourth. Traditional "girl from the Midwest goes to New York to make it big on Broadway, gets her heart broken, but it works out" story, with a wealthy fiancée back home who wants her to settle down and be Mrs. Mine-manager and a theatrical boarding house full of women who keep her from giving in. There aren't many musical numbers and they aren't all that great; the plot doesn't really reach resolution; worst of all, the soundtrack's distorted enough that the musical numbers are painful. Being generous, \$0.75.

Disc 5

Second Chorus, 1940, b&w, H.C. Potter (dir.), Fred Astaire, Paulette Goddard, Artie Shaw, Charles Butterworth, Burgess Meredith. 1:24.

The timeless Fred Astaire and a very young Burgess Meredith as two "friendly"-rival musicians who've managed to stay in college, running a collegiate band, for seven years. They hire a gorgeous (and very effective) manager, somehow both graduate, and both try to get into Artie Shaw's band, sabotaging each other along the way. Some slapstick, decent plot, lots of Shaw's music and some other good numbers, and there's a little dancing in there too. \$1.50.

Trocadero, 1944, b&w, William Nigh (dir.), Rosemary Lane, Johnny Downs, Ralph Morgan, Sheldon Leonard, Marjorie Manners, Cliff Nazarro. 1:14 [1:08]

This one has an actual plot, albeit told entirely in flashbacks. Tony Rocado leaves his restaurant/night club to his (adopted?) kids, who have trouble making a go of it. But they get some good advice and book some newer jazz/swing performers. Along the way, just as they're about to shut down, one who has his eyes on the woman manager offers to finance a rebuilding and wants a bigger, fancier sign with hotter name—and Tony Rocado's becomes the Trocadero. Interesting variety of music, but this one's as much plot as it is musical. Downgraded for soundtrack problems. \$1.25.

People Are Funny, 1946, b&w, Sam White (dir.), Jack Haley, Helen Walker, Rudy Vallee, Ozzie Nelson, Art Linkletter, Frances Langford. 1:33 [1:27].

Another "friendly" rivals situation, with two radio producers (*that* Ozzie Nelson one of them) trying to sell a show to a grumbly sponsor (Vallee, who sings once), both trying to work from a premise involving ordinary folks in a small town. After various hijinks, "People are Funny" is born. Running gag with one musical group that keeps trying to audition for one producer. Decent plot, decent music, nothing special. \$1.25.

Doll Face, 1945, b&w, Lewis Seiler (dir.), Vivian Blaine, Dennis O'Keefe, Perry Como, Carmen Miranda, Martha Stewart. 1:20 [1:18].

Let's see: A musical based on a play written by Gypsy Rose Lee, telling the story of a burlesque star who writes a book (or, rather, works with a ghostwriter, thus establishing romantic tension with her producer/manager/boyfriend O'Keefe) to show she's classy enough for the legit stage—and winds up doing a Broadway show based on the story she wrote. Self-referential as all get out, and well done to boot. (Carmen Miranda's character makes a deprecating joke when someone compares her to Carmen Miranda...) Good musical numbers including some fully staged showpieces. Obvious missing frames and bad cuts lower this to \$1.25.

Disc 6

The Great Gabbo, 1929, b&w*, James Cruze (dir.), Erich von Stroheim, Betty Compson, Donald Douglas, Marjorie Kane, Marbeth Wright. 1:32 [1:34].

The * after b&w is for one of the disappointments in this curious film: Portions of the movie are supposed to be in color, presumably some of the massively staged musical numbers (near the end, we see the marquee noting a cast of 350—I can believe it!). Unfortunately, there's no color in this print (or, apparently, in any available version). Other disappointments: too many splices and distorted sound in a couple of the big numbers.

Otherwise—well, it's an odd mix of drama and musical, featuring the declining director/actor von Stroheim as an impossibly good ventriloquist (his dummy sings while he's eating, drinking and smoking) who's also a harsh egomaniac and abuses his assistant so much that she finally quits (although she still loves Otto, the dummy). Two years later, the Great Gabbo's a big star in a Broadway show—but the former assistant is also a featured singer/dancer in the show, along with a man who turns out to be her husband. The Great Gabbo wants her back; she tells him the truth; he goes nuts—well, he *finishes* going nuts, including punching out Otto. It's an—um—interesting movie.

I didn't pay attention to the year before viewing it. Knowing that it's one of the earliest all-sound movies (and how difficult early sound techniques were), some of the problems with the film (flubbed lines, relatively little camera movement in most big musical numbers, one angle for audience reaction shots—or is it the same shot repeated?) are forgivable. Watchable enough, and von Stroheim certainly has presence, but I can't give it more than \$1 except maybe as a historic document. \$1.

The Dancing Pirate, 1936, b&w*, Lloyd Corrigan (dir.), Charles Collins, Frank Morgan, Steffi Duna, Louis Alberni, Victor Varconi, Jack La Rue, The Royal Cansino Dancers. 1:23.

There's a lot to say about this little gem of a picture—"little" in that it's not one of the huge music-and-dancing Busby Berkeley or Warner Bros. spectacles. In addition to the movie as it exists in this set, there's the movie as it was filmed and interesting marketing maneuvers.

First, the movie. It really is a gem, but as a modest picture with some great dancing—waltz, tap, and glorious Mexican/Spanish ensemble dances. Oh, and two original songs by Rodgers & Hart. The movie isn't a spectacular, but that doesn't mean it's not the real stuff. The plot's straightforward. A dance instructor from Boston in 1820 gets shanghaied on to a pirate ship. He manages to escape when the ship's loading up fresh water in Alta California and intends to go back to Boston—but a shepherd's spotted the pirate ship, rung the alarm in the little town, and somehow he winds up captured as a pirate (the rest of the pirates sail away, knowing nothing about this). They want to hang him as a pirate, but the alcalde's daughter wants to learn the waltz; then some soldiers show up—supposedly on the governor's business (from Monterey) but actually thrown out of the governor's ranks, and out to seize the alcalde's lands one way or another. Various hijinks ensue, including a wedding intervention by a nearby band of peaceful Native Americans who are handy with ropes, and of course it all turns out well in the end.

Charles Collins is wonderful (if perhaps a trifle too cheerful in the face of frequent impending death) as the dancing pirate, and boy can he dance. Steffi Duna as the alcalde's daughter is very good. But do you recognize that second name in the credits? Frank Morgan—the wizard of Oz. He's remarkable as a frequently bemused alcalde, showing the same mix of bravado and uncertainty as in *The Wizard of Oz*.

I enjoyed it. The print's pretty good (a little streaking near the end), the sound's good, I'd watch it again. The ensemble dances in Spanish/Mexican dance outfits are spectacular, partly because they're not over the top: They're just dancing in the town square.

The movie as it was filmed? That's the * after "b&w," and it's a disappointment: This was the first dancing musical filmed 100% in Technicolor, as the credits note, and it would be great to see those costumes in color—but this print, apparently like most that are available today, is strictly black & white.

Marketing maneuvers? The jacket shown on IMDB makes this out to be a Rita Hayworth movie. And apparently she's in the movie—but not in the credits. For good reason. She was 18 years old at the time, and in this as in fourteen 1935-1937 movies, she's either uncredited or credited as Rita Cansino, sometimes part of the Dancing Cansinos or Royal Cansinos. You'd have to know what she looked like at 18 and look *very* closely to spot her in the big dance scenes; I certainly didn't spot her. (Mill Creek doesn't credit her, appropriately.)

If you read the full set of IMDB and Amazon user reviews, be aware that they're reviewing several different versions (apparently there *is* or was a color VHS release at some point—I'd love to see this in color!) and that, as usual, some of them bring their preconceptions to the table. In my case, I'll just say that I think Collins did a fine job all around, Morgan was amusing, the story was

fun and didn't strike me as outlandish. Even deducting a little for the missing color, this gets \$1.50.

Road Show, 1941, b&w, Hal Roach (dir.), Adolphe Menjou, Carole Landis, John Hubbard, Charles Butterworth, Patsy Kelly, Shemp Howard, The Charitoes. 1:27.

This and the other film on Side B don't really qualify as musicals (each has two or three musical numbers within a dense plot)—but they're both delightful screwball comedies. This one features a rich bachelor who winds up in an insane asylum thanks to his fiancée, meets "certified lunatic" and joyful eccentric Col. Carlton Carroway (Menjou)—who checks himself in and out of the hospital from time to time, escapes and winds up with a traveling carnival. There's more to the plot, of course. It's classic screwball comedy, expertly done and thoroughly enjoyable. Very good print, good sound, just plain enjoyable even if it doesn't really belong in this set. \$2.

Hi Diddle Diddle, 1943, b&w, Andrew L. Stone (dir.), Adolphe Menjou, Martha Scott, Pola Negri, Dennis O'Keefe, Billie Burke, June Havoc. 1:12.

This time, Menjou's a not-very-successful con man married to a Wagnerian opera singer (Negri); his son (O'Keefe) (who she doesn't know about) is a sailor, marrying a woman during his three day shore leave. The bride's ex-boyfriend thinks the sailor's a gold digger and tells him that the mother's lost all her money (due to his deliberate scheming and crooked gambling)—but the sailor doesn't care, and the marriage commences. They want to go on a brief honeymoon, but this is a screwball comedy... Good running gags (one of which, a beautiful woman who keeps showing up in different scenes and apparently different minor roles, blatantly opens the fourth wall as a lead character mentions that she's a relative or friend of the producer); a remarkable sequence in which four people at a nightclub practice doubletakes (causing the bartender watching them to do a classic doubletake). The print's not quite as good as *Road Show*; the musical numbers are fine (one of them really excellent) but two songs do not a musical make; but as a screwball comedy, this is a fine little movie. Lowered for damaged sections to \$1.50.

Summing Up

I tried to be tough in judging these, taking some off for print damage and more for soundtrack damage, and a little for "color" that's not there. As noted previously, I've also cut the original dollar values: \$2.50 is as high as I'd go, simply because DVDs have gotten cheaper in general.

That said, this is a pretty good showing for the first half—noting that I consider \$1 a decent value, \$1.25 a pretty good film, and anything \$1.50 or more solid value. Only five out of 24 movies failed to merit

"passing grades," mostly because of serious visual and soundtrack damage, once because of other, deeper problems (a movie that was pretty much disowned by its stars).

Three real treats here—*Stage Door Canteen*, *Reet, Petite and Gone*, and *Road Show*. Add six more that may be worth watching again: *The Fabulous Dorseys*, *The Duke is Tops*, *Private Buckaroo*, *Second Chorus*, *The Dancing Pirate* and *Hi Diddle Diddle*. For that matter, none of those eight "\$1.25" movies is a slouch. I count a total of \$30.50—not bad for half of a box that cost \$16.

Interesting & Peculiar Products

Cheap Portable DVD Players

I love *PC Magazine's* "real-world testing" articles, where someone goes out looking for inexpensive options for some piece of equipment. This time (December 26, 2006) it was portable DVD players in the \$79 to \$156 range, on the theory that if you're using a player for kids in the back of an SUV, maybe a \$300 device isn't your best bet. You don't get dot ratings in this test, but the clear favorite was also the most expensive: Magnavox MPD850 at \$156, with an 8.5" screen, a full set of accessories and necessities (including two headphone jacks to keep two kids happy) and a vibrant and vivid display that may lack subtlety. Battery charging was initially a hassle, but the charged battery lasted four hours. Neither of the others (\$79 and \$140) sounded even mildly attractive.

The Price of High-End Audio

What does it cost to get serious audio equipment, where "serious" is defined by aficionados and the kind of people willing to pay tens of thousands of dollars for an amplifier or a pair of speakers? Barry Willis, recently moved to *The Absolute Sound* from *Stereophile*, looks at "affordable excellence" from time to time. In the February 2007 issue, he reviews the NAD C325BEE integrated amplifier and C525BEE CD player. The former costs \$400, which is higher than mass-market prices for a 50 watt per channel stereo amp but still quite reasonable. The latter: \$299, ten times what you'd pay for a cheapo CD player, but not an enormous sum—and less than one-twentieth what some audiophile CD players go for. Willis gives both high marks for superb detail, tremendous dynamics,

excellent soundstaging and loads of musicality. I guess I'd wonder what more most people would hear from \$40,000 amplifiers and \$20,000 CD players.

What's Running?

Bill Machrone waxes enthusiastic about this program (www.whatsrunning.net) in his February 6, 2007 *PC Magazine* column. The program shows pretty much *everything* that's happening in your PC—processes, services, modules (DLLs). It offers tools to figure out what this stuff is and maybe what you can do about it—e.g., whether you have processes running that you don't need. I suspect it's a valuable tool and the price is right (free for personal use, \$25 for commercial use). I added it to my system, about a one-minute download with very fast install.

So how'm I doing at the moment? Right now, I see 42 active processes (lots better than Machrone's 88), 96 services (not all of them active and some of them possibly pointless—can I get rid of telephony services?), 12 startup items, 39 IP connections (that's not bad, actually), 209 drivers (some of which I could probably delete)—and, tada, 364 modules (DLL). Here's yet another way to control what runs at startup, and with the “online info” service for processes it may be a wealth of information. It could also be an enormous timewaster, to be sure. (As always, when disabling a Startup item, be damn sure you know what you're doing, or you may wind up in Safe mode looking for a restore point.)

HDTV: Not Entirely Flat Screens

Sure, CRTs are on their way out (except for high-end graphics work and other areas where a CRT's truer spectrum still counts), but there's more to high-def than plasma and LCD flat screens. The *highest*-end (as in true home theaters) is still front-projection TV, where a projector can run anywhere from \$1,000 to \$30,000 or more. But RPTV—rear-projection TV—still plays a big role. *Home Theater* (February 2007) did a faceoff—a carefully controlled comparative review based on the judgments of several expert viewers—of six RPTVs offering the highest definition, 1920x1080 pixels progressive or 1080p. Sizes range from 60" to 65"; prices from \$2,900 to \$4,300; and— one big change in newer RPTVs—cabinets ranged from 18.8 to 23 inches deep, considerably shallower than older RPTVs with screens this large. (According to the article, prices dropped enough during the re-

view period that the range at publication was \$700 top to bottom, not \$1,400.)

Most earlier RPTVs use three small CRTs. These use either DLP (TI's “two million tiny moving mirrors on a chip” technology), LCOS (liquid crystal on silicon) or one of two branded variants on LCOS, D-ILA or SXRD. *All* the sets offered reasonably good pictures; four offered very good or excellent pictures. Oddly enough, the most expensive set (Olevia) came out worst (sixth) in overall scoring; the second and third most expensive (Sony XBR and Mitsubishi) came out fourth and fifth. I usually expect Sony XBR to win competitions like this (I'm biased; we have a ten-year-old Sony XBR that's still so excellent we're delaying a move to HDTV and widescreen)—but while the set has outstanding contrast, its colors are oversaturated (typical of Sony) and its video processing wasn't up to the competition.

The top three as rated are also the three “cheapest.” Nearly tied are Toshiba's 62" \$3,100 62MX196 DLP HDTV and JVC's \$2,900 61" HD-612FN97 D-ILA unit. I'll admit to slight surprise at the clear winner, but maybe I shouldn't be surprised: Samsung's 61" \$3,300 HL-S6188W DLP unit offers accurate color and very good video processing. There's one problem, although it probably makes Samsung look good in showrooms: The set's way too bright for normal nighttime use (they call it “eye-watering” and “headache-inducing”) and there's no user-accessible light output control. Anyone buying this set should pay a couple hundred extra for professional ISF calibration (calibrators have access to a special menu that can lower the light); otherwise, wait for a model with an iris or adjustments—or watch in a well-lit room.

Editors' Choices and Best Buys

This subsection replaces PC PROGRESS. This installment includes material (beginning October 2006) that was waiting for the next PC PROGRESS.

Desktop and notebook computers

How small can a desktop computer be? This mini-roundup [P25:16] reviews six “mini PCs.” Best of the lot is the \$1,200 Winbook Jiv Mini, a snazzy and very unobtrusive little box that's reasonably well equipped: 1GB RAM, Intel Core Duo processor, 100GB disk, dual-layer DVD burner, *and* a TV tuner. It comes with a wireless keyboard but no screen. This being the new and “improved” PC, they don't bother to mention the *dimensions* of the Editors' Choice mini PC; going

online shows it's 9x8x1.7" and includes DVI, component, S-video and composite video output—and integrated wi-fi and Bluetooth.

An extensive *PC World* roundup (January 2007) covers “cheap PCs,” reviewing 14 systems costing \$489 to \$999 (including monitor) and rating the “top 10.” Best Buy, rated considerably higher than the second unit: Micro Express' \$999 MicroFlex 668, with a 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6600 dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, 256MB ATI Radeon X1600 graphics and a 17" Viewsonic LCD. I'd take the advice of the “Smart PC shopping tips” right after the roundup: Upgrade the LCD to a 19" (or larger) screen for \$100 or so, since that's apparently the only cut corner of this otherwise well-equipped unit.

The Best Buy among desktop replacement notebooks in *PC World's* January 2007 “top 10” feature has one unusual feature, shared by the second-place unit: an HD DVD-ROM drive, so you can play (but not record) high-def video. The \$2,530 HP Pavilion dv9000t records all varieties of standard-definition DVD, including dual-layer and DVD-RAM, has a 17" screen and weighs 8 pounds.

Tablet PCs never grabbed a huge share of the market but they're still around, almost always now in convertible form (notebooks with keyboards where you can swivel the screen around and make it a touch-sensitive tablet). A February 6, 2007 *PC Magazine* mini-roundup includes five products across a huge price range; Editors' Choice is the \$2,299 Lenovo ThinkPad X60 Tablet, with an Intel Core Duo CPU, 1GB RAM, builtin EV-DO wireless, and seven-hour battery life (by putting the optical drive in the dock rather than the unit itself). It also includes a fingerprint reader and an accelerometer to determine screen orientation.

Digital cameras and related software

This *PC Magazine* roundup is actually a “real-world testing” feature: Photo-printing options, rating online services, store kiosks and portable photo printers. Editors' Choice goes to the online Sony ImageStation service, which offers very cheap prints (\$0.10 for 4x6 prints), cheap postage (\$1.19) and very good print quality. dotPhoto, Shutterfly and Snapfish all tied for second place. In terms of dot ratings, two portable printers tied with Sony ImageStation, but they're more expensive to use (\$0.27 and \$0.29 per print).

A *PC Magazine* digital camera piece covers 13 point-and-shoot cameras costing \$180 to \$550. The

\$180 Kodak EasyShare C533 is “a decent choice for budget shoppers” but comes in 11th out of 13. The Editors' Choice is also the most expensive camera: the \$550 Canon PowerShot S80, an 8MP camera with 3.6x zoom. It's light (7.9oz.), has a “beautiful” 2.5" LCD screen (and a glass viewfinder) and takes excellent photos.

The February 20, 2007 *PC Magazine* features nine “superzooms,” cameras with at least a 10x zoom range, one of which is only \$330. Editors' Choices are the \$400 Panasonic DMC-FZ7 and \$650 Panasonic DMC-FZ50, both of which have 12x zoom range. The more expensive Lumix DMC-FZ50 has 10MP resolution and “D-SLR-like quality and performance.”

Digital entertainment systems

“Digital entertainment systems” may be a peculiar product category. The six-system mini-roundup in the December 5, 2005 *PC Magazine* doesn't clarify things all that much. The review awards *three* Editors' Choices for three very different not-very-thoroughly-described units. For the Niveus Media Center Rainier Edition 750, a “nearly silent digital entertainment system in an A/V-rack-friendly case” (which looks like a stereo amp or oversize DVD player, with a wireless keyboard and remote), the story is a reasonably powerful dual-core PC with an HD DVD *player* (there are no HD DVD recorders yet) and a 750GB hard disk. The summary says “Nuff said”—but at \$5,499 without a display, I'd like to hear a little more: Why is it so expensive? I might even ask the same question about the HP z565 Digital Entertainment Center at \$2,999 (again looking like a black stereo amp, again without a display), but at least it's got 2GB RAM, two regular and one HDTV tuners, both a 500GB internal and 300GB removable hard drive—but no high-definition drive. The third one's not so expensive at \$2000: Sony VAIO VGX-XL2 Digital Living System, a “two-part cube” with a Media Center PC *and* a 200-disc CD/DVD jukebox. Strangest of the lot (and lowest-rated, with a “stay away” note): the bright yellow \$3,407 Maingear Prysma, a “full-fledged digital entertainment system” shaped like a pyramid. Maybe it keeps your data fresher or sharpens your MP3 tunes?

Portable players

PC World's March 2007 issue includes an extended “Jukebox in your pocket” article, testing 21 portable audio players (some of which also play video). As usual, they only provide full results for the “top X”—in this case, the top five flash players and the top five

players with hard disks. For flash players, the \$140 Creative Zen Plus beats out Apple's iPod Nano and gets the only Very Good score of the bunch; while the \$140 model only has 2GB RAM (for 4GB you pay \$180) and the sound quality isn't quite up to the iPod, it includes FM, voice recording and video; it's well-designed and flexible. Among hard disk players, Apple's \$249 30GB iPod gets the Best Buy but has the same score as the \$250 Creative Zen VisionM.

Printers

PC Magazine for February 20, 2007 gives a full-page review and Editors' Choice rating to Canon's \$400 Pixma MP960 Photo All-in-One, identified as a "photo lab AIO." It's a three-function (no fax) and doesn't have a document feeder—but it does offer 35mm film scanning and can print directly from film as well as the usual PictBridge cameras and memory cards. It duplexes, has text quality very nearly equal to laser printers and produces true photo quality prints. It's not the fastest printer around.

I'm surprised there are so many dedicated photo printers—units that *only* print photos, typically 4x6 (sometimes 5x7 or panoramic). *PC Magazine* reviews six in the March 6, 2007 issue, finding three of the six worthy of Editors' Choices. The \$300 Epson Picture-Mate Flash not only produces high-quality waterproof prints quickly, it incorporates a CD burner, so you can either print photos from CD or DVD or burn a set of photos from a memory card to a CD-R/RW. For \$200, HP's Photosmart A716 includes a 4GB hard disk and can create slide shows to watch on TV—and if money is an issue, the \$100 HP Photosmart A516 is compact, cheap, and includes software to analyze photos and correct the most common problems.

Utility and security software

A *PC World* roundup rates five antispymware programs, starting with one of those "you're all doomed" sentences: "The question is *when*, not *if*, adware and spyware will strike your PC." Depending on how broadly you define "adware," that's probably true for any PC with internet access, but it's not a given (especially with Firefox 2 and IE7). Still, you should be using antispymware. I'm happy enough to see the Best Buy: Webroot Spy Sweeper, which I've been using for some time now.* The same rules apply as for antivirus software: Don't have two of these programs both set for real-time protection: They'll interfere with each other and drive you crazy. But you can certainly use a second program for occasional scans. (*No longer true:

ZoneAlarm is my regular spyware blocker, with a Spy Sweeper sweep once in a while.)

PC Magazine's roundup of antispymware software includes a dozen programs. Spy Sweeper gets one of *two* Editors' Choices; the other goes to PC Tools' Spyware Doctor 4.0. A February 6 roundup covers six "alternative antispymware" products—ones that rely primarily on techniques other than signature detection, and *can* be used alongside mainstream products. Primary Response SafeConnect 2.1 gets the Editors' Choice; it costs \$24.95 a year and looks for "unusual activity."

PC Magazine's December 5, 2006 roundup of PC security suites comes up with two Editors' Choices—a result I find personally interesting since that's just about the point at which I switched from an earlier version of one (Norton) to the other (ZoneAlarm), because Norton had become so intrusive and slow. Apparently, Norton's improved quite a bit for 2007, particularly in the firewall department—but ZoneAlarm still gets a higher firewall rating. Norton's a touch better for anti-spyware and antivirus; the two tie overall. Weakest? McAfee.

Video devices and software

I'm a little surprised to see a roundup of standalone DVD recorders in *PC World* (January 2007). Wouldn't most PC owners use a \$60 builtin burner instead of a less flexible \$340 to \$700 standalone drive? If you're in the market, the good news is that these recorders (all of which include hard disks; they're DVRs with DVD burners) all offer high quality video. All but one of the five in this roundup also handle DVD+R/RW and DVD-R/RW; the Toshiba is both the priciest and least flexible (it doesn't handle the "+" formats). The Best Buy pretty clearly is one—the \$399 Pioneer DVR-640H-S not only handles the four major recordable formats, it also records dual-layer disks and DVD-RAM and the remote control includes a commercial-skip button. The hard disk is 160GB, more than adequate for a non-HDTV unit.

Making it Work

What's "it"? Libraries. Social software in libraries. Balancing existing needs and new possibilities. Expanding patron involvement without biasing the library toward its richest and most connected patrons. Making libraries more valued and essential cores of their communities. All that and more.

Or maybe, sometimes, the quest for “it”—as in Chrystie Hill’s March 18, 2007 *It’s all good* post. Setting aside the start of the post (“where it’s at”), here’s some of what Hill says about the “it factor”:

It’s that thing that’s hard to describe, but that everybody knows about and comes back for. Some people have it. Some people don’t. Some organizations have it. Some organizations don’t. Some libraries have it. Some libraries don’t.

Finding, having or being it is about finding, having and being that thing that keeps you, your organization or your library *alive*. And I don’t mean alive in the *you’re not dead, so you must be alive* sense of the word. I mean it in that *verve, vim and vigor* sort of way. I’m talking about meaning, relevance and maybe even emotional draw. I’m talking about charisma and magnetism, maybe even charm...

I know it can’t be the same thing for everyone. And I know I shouldn’t try and essentially define it. But I do know that we’ve lost it when we stop at content or collections. It is dependent on human connection. It might even be about conversation and collaboration. This makes me wonder: are our personal *it* factors the same as our professional ones?...

So now I have to ask: could your personal *it* factor be the thing that helps your library find, have, and be alive? Or has it already? And does it (also) have to do with connection? How is that different from what we traditionally do or have done in libraries?

Possibilities and Small Successes

Sarah Clark works at a “smallish” university (4,000 FTE) in a medium-small town (17,000) with an “awesome” public library, according to her February 20, 2007 post “Town & gown: Notes on our new resource sharing program” at *The scattered librarian*. Some city residents could make good use of academic library materials once in a while—but not often enough for the \$20 “community borrower” cards. Some commuter students could use public library resources, but if they don’t live in town they’re not eligible for a library card. Enter the university’s serials librarian and the director and head of ILL at the public library. Here’s what they came up with:

1. If a patron at library A is looking for a book that library A doesn’t have, they or the librarian can pull up the OPAC for library B and see if Library B has it.
2. If Library B has the item, Library A calls Library B, and the item is checked out in Library A’s “name”. Library A is responsible for keeping records of which patron has which book in case of problems, and will charge the patron to recoup any overdues/lost book fees that accrue.

3. The patron will be given a receipt at library A with the title of the book, which they present at the main desk of library B to pick up the book. When the patron is done with the book, it can be returned to either library (though we prefer library B, for obvious reasons).

The two libraries are five minutes apart, so transportation’s not a big deal. Both libraries have posters explaining the system (in place for three months so far) and it’s been written up in the local paper. It’s not getting a lot of traffic yet—two or three transactions a week—but that isn’t the point. “Those who have done it like the system, so hopefully word of mouth will grow the system.”

What do we have here? Real, ground-level inter-type cooperation that appears to suit *this particular* pair of libraries. No new technology (assuming both catalogs are web-accessible). Presumably no elaborate set of rules and operating agreements. It might be just the ticket for certain other combinations of libraries. How do you find out? Here’s Clark’s closing comment, directed toward other academic librarians:

[H]ow strong is your library’s relationship with your local public library? Go over and introduce yourself to your counterpart, volunteer, offer to do a bit of training on Library 2.0 “stuff,” or even work together on a joint outreach project like our resource sharing scheme. There is a lot of overlap between the users of the public library and academic library, and by working together we can support each other, strengthen our presence(s) in the community, and create plenty of win-win situations.

When tags work

I don’t use LibraryThing (at least not yet)—but that doesn’t mean I don’t find it interesting. Tim Spalding (founder) posted “When tags work and when they don’t: Amazon and LibraryThing” on February 20, 2007 at *Thing-ology blog*.

It’s a long post—eight print pages—discussing an interesting comparison. “Both LibraryThing and Amazon allow users to tag books. With a tiny fraction of Amazon’s traffic, LibraryThing appears to have accumulated *ten times* as many book tags as Amazon—13 million tags on LibraryThing to about 1.3 million on Amazon.”

Something is going on here—something with broad implications for tagging, classification and “Web 2.0” commerce. There are a couple of lessons, but the most important is this: Tagging works well when people tag “their” stuff, but it fails when they’re asked to do it to “someone else’s” stuff. You can’t get your customers to organize your products, unless you give them a very good incentive. We all make our beds, but nobody volunteers to fluff pillows at the local Sheraton.

Maybe that's all I need to quote—and it's an important comment for libraries adding tagging facilities of various sorts. Spalding says, correctly I believe, "To do anything useful with tags, you need numbers. With only a few tags, you can't conclude much. The tags could just be "noise." He offers as an example the LibraryThing tags for Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*. Tags include "apples," "office" and "quite boring." OK, if those are the only tags, they're a whole lot less useful than, say, "Social evolution," "Civilization—History," "Ethnology," "Human beings—effect of environment on," "Ecology—effect of human beings on," "Culture diffusion" and "Social change." (If you don't recognize those labels, check Worldcat.org!) But those aren't the only tags; there are more than 3,900, and a tag cloud shows "anthropology" and "history" and—well, let's face it, some of the LibraryThing tags in the cloud ("culture diffusion," "social evolution") could have come from LCSH (or CIP?).

The long discussion includes interesting points about folksonomy, large numbers and making sense out of data. Looking for something on evolution? By raw number of uses, Jared Diamond's book is a good candidate—and as Spalding says, "That's crazy." Ernst Mayr's *What Evolution Is* wasn't tagged with that word as frequently, but "evolution" represents a much higher *percentage* of the tags for Mayr's book, making it a better choice.

Spalding admits there's no clear line between uselessly-few and usefully-many numbers. "Ten tags are never enough; a thousand almost always [are]." He offers some reasons Amazon's tagging isn't working; "It's not your stuff and it's not your job" may be primary but it's not the only reason.

If you're considering tagging (for your catalog or elsewhere) as part of patron involvement in your library, you might want to read Spalding's post. He includes a set of suggestions "How to make ecommerce tagging work"; you might consider how and whether those suggestions work when you replace commerce with library and customers with patrons.

Where is the line?

That's the title of Steve Backs' February 21, 2007 post at *Blog about libraries*. Backs starts by quoting from a comment on a previous post, where he suggested that "public service librarians must be technologically literate and that they must be willing to help people use the computers in their public libraries." Here's the quoted portion of the comment:

When libraries were solely about books, did we teach the illiterate how to read? Did we teach librarians how to teach people to read? Rarely that happened, but mostly we didn't do those things.

My offhand answer is the same as Backs': "Well, yes we did. Literacy programs are an established service at public libraries throughout the country" and is one of PLA's proposed service responses.

Backs recognizes librarians *do* have limits:

[W]e cannot teach people to use a computer in a reference interview, we cannot afford to immerse ourselves with an in depth tutoring session on setting up an email account with one patron while five others await our assistance with other matters. Like many reference librarians, I deal with this tension every day and I understand that there are truly times where the best answer to their request for help may very well be to send them elsewhere for assistance or instruction. Some people need to take a class (which we offer), some people need to take a little initiative, and some people need to understand that it really isn't our job to do the work for them.

He sees a whole range of things that fall in the middle—cases where it really is appropriate for a front-line public librarian to provide technological assistance. There isn't a list; "there will never be a list." Backs believes librarians need a reasonable comfort level with computers (and how they're used in the librarians' own library), at which point they should be able to draw "the line" between what's reasonable and what's going overboard.

Banks notes one aspect of being comfortable with technology: "I have a well developed understanding of *what I don't know*." Here's a distinction:

By contrast, a librarian with a low level of computer competency, someone who is very unsure of herself around computers is also someone who *doesn't even know what they don't know*. For me, it is fairly easy to help patrons solve many problems with our computers *and* I have little trouble establishing the boundaries of service. For the librarian who is uncomfortable around computers, those boundaries do not exist because they don't ever really know whether the patron has a reasonable request or not.

There's more here and it's worth considering, including this final challenge:

I said in my previous post that providing assistance to patrons on our computers is not a choice. Perhaps that should be rephrased to say that providing assistance to patrons on our computers is a choice, but we choose not to do so at our peril. We create expectations by providing the computers in the first place. If we don't think we should be helping people use computers, then not only are we not providing a level of service that is a reasonable expectation, but we are also missing opportunity af-

ter opportunity to connect with patrons and demonstrate our worth.

A couple of slow notes

Mark Leggott began the Slow Library “movement” a few months ago; the blog (loomware.typepad.com/slowlibrary/) began in November 2006. Excerpts from what Leggott sees (in a February 27, 2007 post) as the six key concepts of Slow Library—which is *not* another name for Library 2.0.

1. **Education: Everyone and Everywhere**—Any Slow Library approach assumes education (bidirectional) is a primary ingredient and outcome...
2. **Community: Participate and Preserve**—A close-knit community is especially important on the staff side to ensure that the people building the services and resources work closely and collaboratively... Expanding this community (locally and beyond) and preserving the knowledge generated is fundamental to ensuring that the community thrives...
3. **Local: Small-scale and Granular**—Whenever possible grow information services and resources using local talent...
4. **Craftsmanship: Open and Sustainable**—Craftsmen (craftspeople?) care about quality and longevity. In the information universe the best way to ensure the craft and product are strong is to support things open: [source/standards/data/information/knowledge...](#)
5. **People: Capacity and Passion**—I have yet to meet a person in this sector who couldn't learn what they needed to do as long as they have the passion. Take that away and all the skills and knowledge in the world will only take you so far...
6. **Enjoyment: Savour the Unexpected**—What can I say. If it ain't fun it ain't on. Don't stop colleagues from asking completely asinine questions and let the weird ideas flow.

I think Slow Library is an interesting approach. When I consider the obvious parallel (the Slow Food movement), I characterize that concept (perhaps incorrectly) as being about mindfulness, locality and non-homogenization: That is, *paying attention* to your food, using local ingredients and following local traditions and methods where feasible, and celebrating the variety of life rather than providing the same exact french fries and hamburger everywhere on earth. So if the library equivalent is that library services and new developments should be considered mindfully (not blindly adopted *or* rejected), that each library is local and should be part of its own community, and that libraries should be diverse, not homogeneous—well, I'm with you all the way.

John Miedema posted “Library 2.0 and Slow Library” to the blog on March 7, 2007. Some of that post (all of which is worth reading):

As I see it, Slow Library helps clarify where Library 2.0 fits in a broader view of libraries...

Patrons. Library 2.0 reaches out to library users wherever they may be found, local or global, real life or Second Life... Slow Library is more concerned with the patrons in its own neighbourhood.

Different motives for the open catalog. Library 2.0 may be interested in the global networking possible through an open catalog. By contrast, Slow Library sees it as an opportunity for the community to put its local stamp on the library catalog...

An anchor in real life. Every other week you see another article about the end of books. Books will persist, but it is a tempting pitch for those trying to find funds for library technology... Slow Library keeps the mission of the library rooted in the real world.

Food for thought here—your own regional cuisine, ideally prepared with almost all of the ingredients harvested within a hundred miles or less. (Easy for me to say: Other than coffee, chocolate, mangos and pineapples, there's precious little that a Northern Californian would lose!) Slow Food can be fast—but it's never Fast Food. Slow Libraries won't be behind the times—but they won't rubberstamp what the “cool library” is doing just because it's new. That's the way I read it. If I'm wrong, blame me, not the Slow Library folks.

“Get connected”

Brian Mathews has “a campaign idea” in this March 18, 2007 post at *The ubiquitous librarian*. Excerpts from the post, omitting the specific concept (**go read it yourself**):

Don't tell me you have a million books, and offer classes, and have great reference assistance—show me! I kind of think we overemphasize quality, rather than utility. Give me context that applies to my life. Why should I use the library? Why do I care? Build stories that show snapshots of patron use. Give me a potential need and solution. And make it real. It can't be someone reading a script, or looking too posed. It can't be too neat or too obvious. I don't want generic examples of how wonderful the Library is or how to use Boolean or telling me how important peer review journals are and how bad Wikipedia is. Show me what my peers are doing. Make me think “huh.” Redefine the Library through actions...

Sit and watch your patrons sometime and build your advertising around that, not around what you think your library is or wish it was. Help them to see the value of the Library and how they can “get connected” with us and with each other.

A big theme of mine is to attempt to reduce the idea of the Library being a place that students have to go, and turning it into a place that students actually want to be. No one wants to do homework, but if they have to, why not give them a proper environment?...

Does “getting connected” work as well for public libraries as for academic libraries? Does a single national theme for all forms of libraries make sense? I don’t have answers, but I think Mathews raises an interesting alternative view for marketing libraries.

Library blogs aren’t all for patrons

Kathryn Greenhill posted “Internal library staff blogs” on March 22, 2007 at *Librarians matter*. She notes a pilot WordPress internal blog at her library, one that went live as the library was being remodeled and originally tried to cover the whole library “and replace a few email lists.” That was “a bit too confusing for most people, I think”; the blog will be revamped into a reference desk blog. Her post discusses staff buy in and management support, particularly since “the advantages are long term ones—mainly an easily searchable archive.” A bit more:

We are treating the internal blog as an experiment and a training opportunity. We can get used to the interface and iron out any problems before we implement any other blogs aimed at our community.

If an internal blog is replacing some email communication, there comes a point where buy in becomes less voluntary. It’s just annoying to have two places to check for the same information, so someone is going to have to formulate guidelines about what goes on the blog and what is emailed. Clear guidelines, which are sensible and useable. I think it will take more than just that to make people change their habits. Especially when it is actually easier to send an email than post to a blog.

A reference blog seems like a natural—if it’s easy to post to, part of daily life for reference librarians and not Just One More Hassle. Greenhill offers some thoughts about aggregators (web-based ones won’t work for internal blogs) and why it’s necessary to “work out ways to sell” Library 2.0 stuff to staff.

Involving more staff

Which leads naturally into Jenn Riley’s March 27, 2007 post at *TechEssence.Info*, “Involving more librarians and library staff in library projects.” Extensive excerpts from a post that **deserves to be read in full**:

I was at a meeting of librarians and library staff recently in which the topic of how to involve more individuals in technology projects was raised. One individual made a particularly salient point—that librarians and library staff be given opportunities and encouraged to partici-

pate in technology projects, rather than being given a timed ultimatum to do so.

This is a wise approach to a thorny problem. Overall directions of libraries are changing, and it is essential we involve more staff in technical activities and allow our positions to evolve. We must re-imagine our methods while keeping our overall goals in mind. But telling our staff they must change for change’s sake, and to do it right now isn’t the answer...

Instead, be moderate. Your staff have a great many valuable existing skills and initiatives that they shouldn’t be asked to just ignore for the sake of something new. By setting up an environment where experimentation is encouraged (but not mandated on a schedule), you allow individuals to react once they see or think up something that is meaningful to them, in their own area of expertise. Give them the opportunity to take ownership of an initiative, on their own or in partnership with a few of their peers. Rather than seeing a technology project as something thrust upon them, they are likely to see it as their own project, as a new means to do the things they love about their jobs.

Technology projects take time—more time than any of us would like. Use that time to your advantage. Start with a few led by particularly visionary individuals. Their success will likely breed more success in the form of new projects from new individuals that wouldn’t have been the earliest adopters. The cycle can continue...

We need change in libraries. We have always needed change, constantly evolving into institutions meeting the needs of our society and its information. But blind change can be just as damaging as no change at all. Simply telling your staff they must participate, even take leadership roles, in technology initiatives is the easy (and ineffective) way out. Instead, give each individual the opportunity to participate, and the resources to capitalize on these opportunities. The initiatives that emerge may surprise you. Allow early adopters the room to experiment, and give the rest time, resources, and flexibility to find their own way.

One comment offers a touch of pushback—an attitude certainly worth considering:

This is a great idea, but only if you also give staff the opportunity to say *no* to projects. Acknowledge that they are the ones doing the jobs, interacting with patrons, and can recognize if something is going to really bring added value to the services you are offering, or is just so “latest and greatest: piece of flash that just happens to be a bit of buzz that really doesn’t do anything cheaper, better, easier, or faster than the way it is being done now.

Chapter 7 of *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change* is titled “Pushing back: Balance or resistance?” It’s not always easy to tell the difference. Riley’s approach—encouraging experimentation but not mandating it—seems likely to minimize pushback.

She also notes (not quoted) the need to reevaluate now and then: Are some people *always* “saying no,” and if that’s the case what does it mean?

Libraries and community development

Deb, the *Real public librarian*, posted this on April 4, 2007. Apparently many Australian public libraries are within the local community services departments. When she was meeting with other directors in the department, “I expounded that public libraries are increasingly seeing themselves as playing an important role in community development.” She offered an example—briefly, a resident starts a small business selling bonsai plants door to door, stops by the library as one of those “doors.” Staff members buy some bonsai, invite seller to give a talk about bonsai: lots of people might be interested. Very successful session ensues; people decide to meet monthly to discuss and show their bonsai. “Could they continue to meet at the library? No problem!! Grassroots community development in action.”

There’s more here. “Is it a special sort of community development that libraries do? Does it have a particular context?” She offers examples where she does *not* believe the library would be involved and concludes:

It’s pretty obvious when you think about it, what we are doing (intuitively) is facilitating opportunities for information exchange based not on print, or electronic information, but on that other fabulous source of knowledge—community knowledge. Sometimes an outcome of this strategy is the formation of groups or looser connections around a community of interest.

ALA’s currently talking about libraries transforming communities. Chrystie Hill and Steven M. Cohen are writing a book on the subject. Here’s just one example of how this can work—even if it’s not necessarily a “traditional” library function. (Or is it?)

A note about “small successes”

When I use that term, it is not intended to demean the success. It’s an attempt to *honor* it, noting that something doesn’t have to be world changing to matter. The growing set of microloan programs for third-world mini-entrepreneurs is a classic “small success” approach: \$25 here and \$100 there may mean more in some cases than a multimillion-dollar project. An effective reference blog in a library may do more than a universal blogging program, even if it begins and grows slowly. Two local libraries making a handshake agreement and using (gasp!) the telephone as a basis for communication: it won’t revolutionize either li-

brary, but it does provide significant additional resources at the point of need.

Small successes add up over time. For that matter, an individual book is usually a small thing (admittedly not to the author as they were struggling with it)—but put together creatively, they add up.

Problems and Failures

When I started working on this section, I had four clusters of source material: Possibilities, Problems, General Topics, and Longer Items. I’ll save the other two for next time—and I hope that whenever Possibilities and Problems appear together, the first will outweigh the second. So it is this time around.

Rochelle Hartman wrote “Magazines in libraries: Don’t try this at home, kids” on March 17, 2007 at *Tinfoil + raccoon*. It’s a well-written tale that I can’t really do justice to. The short version: Staff thought it would be neat to organize magazines by subject rather than alphabetically. They did so, with good signage and finding aids. “Response was quick and virulent.” *Nobody* liked it. The three-month trial was shortened to a month, and then to even less time.

It’s made me very thoughtful about change in the library. We thought we were being responsive. Did we hear from patrons that they wanted a change in the magazines? No. We were responding to what we’ve been reading in the journals and blogs about how libraries should be less library-like. We were responding to how we, as consumers, look for magazines outside the library. Now I’m wondering—when should a library try something new if patrons have not expressed a desire for change? I don’t regret our experiment at all. I’m so pleased to work with a staff that is willing to float and try new things, and who are secure enough as professionals to step back and say, “maybe we made a mistake.” I think it’s also been terrific to hear **so much** from patrons. Some days you wonder if anyone pays much attention or cares. It’s nice to know that they do. I’m hoping that our responsiveness (to our responsiveness?) is appreciated, even a tiny bit. *We are listening.*

Don’t expect Hartman’s library to wait for patron requests before making any changes. As she knows, that’s no more workable than adopting every new idea regardless of the patrons. This is a fine example of something that *might* have worked, didn’t (in this community), and *benefited the field* because Hartman wrote honestly about it. (This might be a failure in general: Many magazines don’t categorize well.)

More than one liblogger has discussed collegiality as a possible obstacle to change. Joy Weese Moll offers advice on blending collegiality and change in a March

22, 2007 post at *Wanderings of a [student] librarian*. (“student” is in the banner but not the page title that an aggregator uses; Moll recently graduated from library school). Excerpts:

You can be collegial and make changes in your library at the same time. It takes some finesse. Sometimes, it takes some patience, but not as much as you might think.

...some strategies:

- * don't surprise everyone in a meeting with your idea—have an ally or two briefed beforehand to show support
- * solve problems that everyone knows exist rather than tackling the ones that only you see...
- * remember that sometimes it's easier to get forgiveness than permission—for small things that you can do yourself or with a small group of like-minded individuals, present a fait accompli
- * do your research—show examples of other libraries doing what you propose
- * write really professional project proposals—especially, if they aren't part of your organizational culture because they will often get approved just because they look so good
- * use the words “pilot project”—a lot

Steve Lawson noted the problems some of us were having with Bloglines for a while. He also noted that Flickr had problems—sometimes yielding, ahem, dodgy pictures when you expect innocent family photos. He was aware that Five Weeks participants had to be warned that Bloglines was having problems. He continues (in a February 19, 2007 post “When good sites go bad” at *See also...*):

And the fact is, it's Flickr and Bloglines this week, but next week it could be Blogger and Typepad (both of which have had their rough spots over the years) or FeedBurner and PBWiki (neither of which have ever given me trouble, but if they did, I would feel hung out to dry).

I'm not sure what the lesson is here. It would be nice to think that we could do all this ourselves, or minimize dependencies as much as possible, but most of us can't write this software or even host it ourselves, and there may be features that we want to take advantage of (such as the subscriber count in Bloglines or the social features of Flickr) that simply couldn't be duplicated.

I guess the questions to ask are “what could go wrong?” (though I don't think I would have thought of the Flickr-photo-roulette thing until it actually happened yesterday); “how risk-averse am I?” (or “... is my institution?”); and “what is my exit strategy?” (e.g., do you keep your own blog/wiki/photo backups in a format suitable for importing to another application if your current application becomes unusable?).

We already know from our experience with library catalogs that putting too much faith in vendors can be a mistake. Are we making the same mistake with social software?

I'd like to offer answers, but I don't have them. Lawson's hardly an alarmist; these are legitimate concerns.

To close, I'll point out a *non-library* blog post (with an enormously long set of comments) that might be worth reading as a slight cautionary tale, even as you substitute “patron” for “customer”: “Top 5 reasons why ‘The customer is always right’ is wrong,” posted July 12, 2006 by Alexander Kjerulf at *Chief happiness officer* (positivesharing.com). The post itself is at positivesharing.com/2006/07/why-the-customer-is-always-right-results-in-bad-customer-service. Briefly, the five reasons are that it makes employees unhappy; it gives abrasive [patrons] an unfair advantage; some [patrons] are bad for [your library]; it results in *worse* [patron] service; and some [patrons] are just plain wrong. That's just a few words from a six-page post followed by 50 pages of comments (when I previewed it in early February 2007—there may be even more now). Are your patrons always right? Read the post; think about it.

Net Media

The High-Def Disc Saga Continues

Most libraries still have no particular reason to invest in either HD-DVD or Blu-ray—except for film schools and other special cases, where you probably need both. Some of you will wind up with the occasional high-def disc in any case: Some studios are releasing two-sided discs with the movie in HD-DVD or Blu-ray on one side, DVD on the other. (One studio's about to start releasing “universal hi-def” movies with HD-DVD on one side, Blu-ray on the other—but, presumably, will simultaneously release DVD versions as long as that's where 95% of the business is.)

If I had to bet on either format, I'd still bet on Blu-ray for some of the same reasons that VHS beat out Betamax, even though Betamax was earlier (as was HD-DVD in the U.S.) and probably superior (which HD-DVD isn't—it's actually inferior, given lower capacity). To wit:

- One electronics company is carrying the torch for HD-DVD: Toshiba's pretty much the whole picture. Meanwhile, there are already at least

half a dozen companies producing Blu-ray players and drives, with more in the wings.

- Ads for HD-DVD show up once in a while. Ads for Blu-ray are all over the place. That's specifically true at the local level. Most Sunday insert sections (at least around here) now include two or three brands of Blu-ray player and one HD-DVD.
- Blu-ray has already eliminated one disadvantage that Betamax shared, even though this disadvantage doesn't affect most libraries: Sony, which had the first Blu-ray pressing facilities, doesn't do porn. (Of course VHS was helped by early availability of porn, while Betamax suffered from Sony's sensibilities.) By now, other Blu-ray plants are online with no such qualms.
- Not a part of the VHS-vs.-Betamax battle, but still: Blu-ray was a recordable technology from day one. There are still no consumer HD-DVD recorders on the market. PCs with HD-DVD can only *play* such discs, even though they can record regular DVD-R/DVD+R.
- HD-DVD's initial pricing disadvantage is disappearing. The Samsung Blu-Ray player is readily available for \$700, still higher than Toshiba's \$400-\$500 entry-level model but a lot lower than \$1,000—and the Sony PlayStation 3 turns out to be a sensational Blu-ray player for \$500 or \$600.

I could *easily* be wrong on this one. If Sony brings out an HD-DVD player, the game's over: HD-DVD's won. If Toshiba brings out a Blu-ray player, the game's over: Blu-ray's won. It's equally possible that both will become as important as SACD and DVD-Audio, which is to say "not very." I wouldn't expect either format to become a clear winner for at least a year or two. (See the commentary section: Apparently Blu-ray is rapidly outdistancing HD-DVD even with HD-DVD's big headstart, so my bet here may not be adventurous.)

Meanwhile, a recent Best Buy Sunday flyer lists the promised LG Blu-ray *and* HD-DVD player for \$1,200 (OK, "\$1,199.99")—and Best Buy's website shows it as currently available. This *could* be a sign that the feud will be as irrelevant as the DVD+R/DVD-R battle. But maybe not; apparently the device will play neither recordable Blu-ray nor *any* kind of CD.

Mostly, this is just a set of updates on progress in devices and commentary.

Players

The November 2006 *Sound & Vision* reports on Toshiba's second-generation HD DVD player, the HD-XA2, \$1,000. The player finally delivers 1080p output and sends more color information over HDMI outputs. Still no second brand for HD DVD.

The January 2007 *Sound & Vision* has a three-player Blu-ray roundup, comparing the PlayStation 3 (as a Blu-ray player, not as a game system) with the \$1,300 Panasonic DMP-BD10 and \$1,000 Samsung BD-P1000 (updated to turn off the faulty noise reduction). Note that the PlayStation goes for \$599 or less, which makes it the cheapest Blu-ray player on the market even if you never play a game. It's also, apparently, a superior player: Excellent picture and sound, fast disc loading and control response, "future-ready" HDMI 1.3 connection. Three problems: The fan's loud, it won't upscale regular DVDs to high-def resolution—and it was hard to find a PlayStation 3 when the article appeared. It gets the *Sound & Vision* "Certified and Recommended" mark, their version of an Editors' Choice.

The other two don't fare quite so well, although both offer excellent Blu-ray playback. The Panasonic is *very* expensive and doesn't load quickly (true of most high-def players: about three times the lag of the PlayStation). Picture quality is generally fine and it does play back DVD-Audio (a nice but niche feature), but there's a visible defect on some discs ("chroma bug"). The Samsung finally delivers excellent picture quality but also has slow disc-load time. Neither the Panasonic nor the Samsung has an Ethernet port, which could limit future interactivity—if anyone ever adds that kind of interactivity.

The Perfect Vision for February 2007 declares a "World's Best Blu-Ray Player!"—right on the cover. Once again, it's the Sony PlayStation 3. It's the cheapest Blu-ray player you can buy (\$499 to \$599) and much faster to load and play discs than higher-priced competitors. This review doesn't mention noise as a problem but does mention the lack of upconversion (which doesn't matter if your TV does a good job of scaling 480p video, as many do). Of course, you're buying a very powerful game console rather than a dedicated set-top box, but nobody's requiring you to play games.

A month later (March 2007), *The Perfect Vision* did its own three-player Blu-ray roundup, featuring the Panasonic DMP-BD10, the upgraded Samsung

BD-P1000, and the \$1,500 Pioneer Elite BDP-HD—the most expensive Blu-ray player on the market. The overview notes that there are now about as many Blu-ray movies as HD-DVD (125 in 2006 with another 300 expected this year). Scott Wilkinson says the format “is bound to have a bright future.” Wilkinson also compared HD-DVD and Blu-ray versions of the same movie, and unlike last fall’s Blu-ray problems, there’s no discernable difference. How do the players compare? The Panasonic is a near-universal player—it handles all discs except HD-DVD, including all Blu-ray recordables and DVD-Audio (it may not handle SACD: unclear). Excellent picture and sound, superb DVD upconversion, but sluggish and lacks 1080p/24fps output (relevant only for sets that can handle this “pure film” rate). The Pioneer *can’t* play CDs or recordable Blu-ray discs, unfortunately, although it does handle DVD and DVD-R/RW (but not DVD+R/RW). That’s a real drawback for a very expensive player—but it does offer “exquisite” detail, color and sound and has 1080p/24fps support. It also does good upconversion. Finally, the Samsung now behaves properly—but, *unlike* the flawed version, it won’t play Blu-ray recordables (BD-R/RE). It does play CDs (recordable and pressed), DVD and DVD-R/RW (not DVD+R/RW).

PCs and Notebooks

PC Magazine for September 19, 2006 reviews the Acer Aspire 9805WKHI, a \$2,799 notebook with an HD DVD drive (HD DVD-ROM, not a burner). It gets a so-so three-dot rating for high weight (**17.1 pounds!**), continuing problems with the PowerDVD software, and mediocre graphics (nVidia GeForce Go 7600). On the other hand, it’s snazzy: a 20.1" display, 2GB RAM, and a 2.3 megapixel webcam built into the frame just above the display. At notebook viewing distances, 20.1" qualifies as big screen—but the beast weighs *17.1 pounds!*

Much more plausible is the \$2,530 HP Pavilion dv9000t, which gets Best Buy in *PC World’s* January 2007 laptop list: It weighs 8 pounds and the HD DVD-ROM drive will play HD DVD and burn every format of standard DVD.

Drives for Computers

The January 2007 *PC World* gives a Best Buy and very high 88 rating to Plector’s \$999 PX-B900A Blu-ray burner. It’s more expensive than some competitors but also quite versatile and includes an excellent Inter-

Video/Ulead software collection. As a Blu-ray recorder, it’s rated at 2X for single-layer (25GB) and double-layer (50GB) BD-R/RE discs. It writes DVD+R/W and DVD-R at 8X, DVD-RW at 6X, DVD-RAM at 5X (unclear whether it writes dual-layer DVD+R/DVD-R), and 24X CD-R, 16X CD-RW.

Commentary

Scott Wilkinson makes an excellent point in his “color commentary” in the January 2007 *Perfect Vision*: Most early high-def movies are what he calls “high-def dreck.” Given how few movies are available in either format, it’s surprising that so many of them are (to be charitable) B movies. He doesn’t offer reasons, and I can’t imagine why *The Devil’s Rejects* would be one of the first high-def releases.

A March 15, 2007 Reuters story by Lucas van Grinsven reports a remarkable claim: The Blu-ray Disc Association says it aims “to replace the DVD storage format within three years.” Or maybe it was saying something different: the European chair is quoted as saying, “Within three years it will just be Blu-ray,” which could be claiming impending defeat of HD-DVD rather than plain DVD. I’d suggest that Blu-ray *replacing* standard DVD by 2010 is improbable.

More interesting: Apparently undisputed sales figures for both formats. HD DVD people *admit* that Blu-ray drives are outselling HD DVD *at least* five to one (largely because of the PlayStation 3, which had sold 1.84 million units by the end of 2006). The HD DVD people claim *disc* sales are comparable—but 20th Century Fox says Blu-ray sales are three times as high as HD DVD. Apparently more than five million Blu-ray discs have been sold, plus hundreds of thousands given away with PS3s. Five million discs worldwide is a real market (and, at \$100-\$150 million, not a tiny one), but still a niche one—and it seems to be fewer than three discs per player, which may say something about the format.

NetFlix began stocking HD-DVD and Blu-ray discs as soon as they were on the market. There’s no extra charge. According to the head of NetFlix, high-def rentals are less than one percent of all rentals.

My Back Pages

Blogging for Bucks!

Yes, I know, some corporate bloggers and special cases have sponsored blogs or otherwise make “serious

money” from blogging. But then there’s this box at the bottom of an “Internet tips” page in the January 2007 *PC World*: “Blogging for dollars: Cash in with Google’s AdSense.” Here’s the pitch: “If what you say is interesting to even a modest audience, you could receive a check each month by placing ads on your blog.” I suppose it depends on your definition of “modest.” When *Walt at random* had AdSense enabled, it was averaging 1,000 to 1,200 visits a day (plus at least 400 RSS readers)—and that “modest audience” was cautious enough about clicking through that I was “earning” maybe \$5 a month. Google doesn’t send checks that small. Maybe what you say needs to be *commercially* interesting?

Pohlmann Pontificates Again

Time for another cheap shot at an easy target, *Sound & Vision*’s Ken C. Pohlmann, who never met a digital technology he didn’t consider superior—and who believes everything Big Media says about copyright is true. His December 2006 column quotes the music industry’s estimate that it loses \$4 billion annually to piracy (never distinguishing between *commercial* piracy, illegal downloading and possibly-legal informal sharing). He mentions that “honest folks” have *legally* downloaded 2 billion songs at 99 cents each (or less). So far, so good. Then he asserts: “But for every legal song, I bet there are 50 illegal downloads.”

If that’s true, then hasn’t the music industry lost \$99 billion since downloading began, which certainly wasn’t 25 years ago? His backing for the 50:1 estimate? “It’s been estimated that sites like BitTorrent, a popular source of questionable IP, account for a third of all Internet traffic.” One estimate applied against an unstated total, including huge amounts of *legal* BitTorrent traffic, is used to justify another wild-ass guess.

His real point is that “intellectual-property pirates are awash in trouble.” Why? Well, Windows Vista fights against piracy of *Windows Vista*—and since Vista is an OS, it’s in a good position to enforce aspects of that fight. Which, of course, has nothing to do with media downloading. So?

Inevitably, the same screws will be tightened on pirated music and movies. As our computers become ever more integrated, it will be increasingly easy for anyone to check your hard disk’s contents. Surely, companies will devise ways to deep-six ill-gotten data. Or someday, in the same way that the government will turn off all analog TV broadcasting, it may throw some kill switch and send all illegal copies of “Stairway to Heaven” to Davy Jones’s locker. If you’re an honest citizen, the kill switch won’t af-

fect you. You might even welcome it. Remember that ratio of 50 illegal songs (all free) for every legal one (at 99¢)?...

He uses that ratio (no longer stated as Ken Pohlmann’s Guess, but apparently a fact) to suggest that record labels might make downloads cheaper if there was no piracy. Right.

This really belongs in a copyright roundup because it’s the kind of stuff that mixes bad data with a mindset that Big Media should be able to do anything it wants, and “honest citizens” should stand there and take it. Consider Pohlmann’s scenario. He’s saying private companies *should* be able to inspect your hard disk at will, remotely. So much for confidentiality and privacy. Then he says they’ll “devise ways to deep-six ill-gotten data.” How do they determine that an MP3 file on your hard disk is ill-gotten? What’s the difference between an MP3 you ripped from your *legally-purchased* CD (that’s sitting in your garage) and an MP3 you downloaded illegally? Or, for that matter, from a non-DRM MP3 you downloaded and paid for? As far as I know, there is none. If it’s metadata, I guarantee “pirates” can hack the metadata. If it’s certification, then your ripped MP3s are “illegal” because uncertified. If you know much about RIAA’s beliefs regarding fair use, you won’t consider that scenario paranoid. They’d be only too happy to delete all MP3s that aren’t *provably* downloaded from paid sources, including those you ripped at home. After all, if you can rip it at home, they can’t sell you another copy from an internet store, and that means they’re unable to gain their full potential profit from the music. And, as we all know, the Constitution provided copyright to assure the maximum profit for large multinational corporations at the expense of American citizens. Which is why we get Pohlmann’s wonderful idea that the *government* will do the dirty work for Big Media.

A Digital Home for the Rest of Us

The March 2007 *Perfect Vision* covers “low-cost home automation,” systems that can link together your TV, stereo, thermostats, security system, lights and drapes in a big network so you only lift fingers to touch the touchpad. The writers are enthusiastic about the prospect: “If these newcomers have their way, it won’t be long before millions of new homes will have automated environmental controls, and a generation of kids will grow up with no clue of how to load a CD or flip a light switch.”

It wasn’t just that bizarre and unlikely “no clue” remark that earned this piece a My Back Pages special

salute, though. It was the definition of “low cost.” One of these cheapo systems “can be designed and installed for as little as \$10,000.” Remember: That doesn’t buy you TVs or stereos or drapes or lights—just controls. And “as little as” apparently works the same way that cruises “start at” some very low sum. Quoting a company person who uses these new cheapo devices, a typical installation costs \$40,000 and is in a \$750,000 new house.

Universalisms Gone Wild!

Here’s a paragraph from Jim Louderback’s “First Word” column in the February 20, 2007 *PC Magazine*, part of his impressions from the Consumer Electronics Show.

I caught up with my old pal Billy Brackenridge, a brainiac evangelist who’s now working for UWB chip maker Staccato Communications. Over dinner on the eve of the show, he explained why UWB is so cool. “By the end of the next decade, everyone on this Earth will be carrying around a powerful battery-powered processor in the form of a phone,” Billy predicted. That system will wirelessly connect to cheap screens, perhaps embedded in our clothing, and to more expensive HD screens when we get in range; and it will securely connect mice, keyboards, peripherals, screens, and storage.

Louderback’s expressions of doubt over 100%, universal, even in the Third World adoption by 2020 of smartphones of this description? Zippo. Maybe he didn’t have room in the column, but I don’t see even the slightest skepticism.

In another 12-13 years we will have solved all problems of hunger, disease, poverty, infrastructure so well that **everyone** in China, Africa, Asia, South America will be carrying around a smartphone. We’ll have screens embedded in our clothing; so much for any move toward more use of natural materials. And there will be no resistance, nobody who doesn’t want to be connected 100% of the time: Brackenridge says *everyone*. I guess they’ll be issued the smartphone at birth, at the same time they’re chipped with an RFID chip containing their Global Identification Number.

Saving Energy Through Home Automation

PC’s “real-world testing” feature for February 20, 2007 is do-it-yourself home automation kits. It’s an interesting piece but I was struck by one claim: “There are few better ways to save energy and minimize trips around the house than to install a simple lighting-automation kit.” The kit specifically provides remote dimming capabilities. Now, maybe the writers mean

human energy (it sure is tough to switch a light on or off!), but if they mean that other kind...well, as far as I know, it’s nearly impossible to buy compact fluorescents that can work with dimmers. (I’d guess you’re using standby power as well, but the big problem is that you can’t save 75% of your energy costs by scrapping incandescent bulbs.) Yeah, I know, there really are no environmental issues...

Rewards Through Observation

Here’s a great ad from Ascentive, maker of BeAware “workplace activity management software”—in English, corporate spyware. “BeAware tracks all employee PC activity with live, real-time monitoring of E-mails, Web-surfing, Chats and program usage (recording screen shots, time used, and content.” That’s legal and may make sense. Then, we’re told, “Once we identified problem areas, we can immediately resolve them—often with better policies, access control, employee coaching and motivation so the team doesn’t lose focus and waste hours on the Web.” (The ad seems to be written as though it’s from a customer, although there’s no indication of that.)

Here’s the final paragraph in the ad:

BeAware rewards the best employees (we catch them doing what’s right), and deters those that might intentionally steal time and distract the team. When used properly, it is a powerful assessment tool to improve, motivate and grow strong companies.

We’re tracking you so we can reward you. I certainly appreciate knowing that.

Masthead

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