

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Bibs & Blather

What's Not Here

An odd title, I know—but this is another one of those introductory essays that's *literally* that: An informal introduction to the rest of the issue.

The rest of the issue is three big Perspectives, all of them dealing with continuing themes. That wasn't my original plan, but it's how things worked out:

- With all the hoohah about Amazon's Kindle, I thought it was time to look at ebooks again. (I was working on a summary at PALINET Leadership Network too—and you should consider joining PLN at <http://pln.palinet.org> if you're not already a member. Free, fast, open to anyone who is or thinks they might eventually be a library leader of any sort.) My first draft was way long. When I went to edit it, I didn't find big chunks I was willing to cut.
- The MAKING IT WORK piece grows out of a multiway blog conversation I was involved in, one with no recriminations and a useful exchange of views—and an ongoing frustration I'd felt at some earlier lists of a very different nature. I couldn't see making this one shorter.
- I originally hoped to “catch up” on LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP, since the most recent one was several months back. Harvard University took care of *that* goal, but in a good way—the Harvard faculty's action is one of the most promising signs I've seen toward progress on open access.
- I also planned to begin a ten-part “retrospective” on the first hundred issues of *Cites & Insights* in this issue. The first part is all written and edited.
- I finished the first half of the 50 Movie Hollywood Legends DVD box, and that's an interesting set of mini-reviews.
- I was planning an essay on Citizendium with maybe some notes attached on Wikipedia.

- I *know* I'm overdue with some comments on copyright. Maybe next time. Maybe not.

When I finished editing the five essays on hand (four medium-length and one double-length), I had way too much for a plausible issue—particularly one following an overlength issue (where at least I had a good excuse). So, biting the bullet, I postponed the Retrospective and the movie reviews until next time—and there's half an issue already written and edited.

If you think *Cites & Insights* is worth supporting, one great way continues to be buying one or more *Cites & Insights* Books at <http://lulu.com/waltcrawford>. If you're one of the 33,000+ who've downloaded the special Library 2.0 issue, you could consider buying it in hardcopy along with the rest of Volume 6. If you're in a public or academic library, you might consider one of the library blog books. *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change* is, I believe, worthwhile.

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If you really hate “dead tree books” (books represent around one-half to two-thirds of *one percent* of all paper usage, but never mind), no problem: Buy one of them as a PDF download. You pay \$20, Lulu gets \$4, I get the rest, we're all happy—although you miss out on a really first-rate trade paperback, on real book paper no less.

Library Access to Scholarship

Harvard & Institutional Repositories

The biggest news since the last Library Access to Scholarship *should* have been formal passage of the NIH policy as a *requirement* for NIH-funded research—but that may be overshadowed by the actions

of Harvard University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Harvard's action may indeed be a "game-changer," as the saying goes.

I'm not going to cover the NIH policy, which is now a mandate to deposit articles from NIH-funded research into PubMed. Unfortunately, it's a mandate that allows for up to 12 months' embargo, which weakens it considerably. To date, the voluntary NIH policy has had miserable results, apparently yielding about 4% compliance. You can find more than enough reporting and commentary on NIH elsewhere.

There's always too much stuff to cover even at my lightweight level, so this time I'll focus on two things: the Harvard mandate and institutional repositories.

The Harvard Vote

On February 12, 2008, Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences *unanimously* approved a motion that is, effectively, an open access mandate—the first such mandate in a U.S. university and, according to Peter Suber, “one of the first anywhere to be adopted by faculty themselves rather than by administrators.” It's worth quoting the motion in full (from Suber's *Open access news*, which has a wealth of links on the motion and reactions to it), given its likely significance:

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University is committed to disseminating the fruits of its research and scholarship as widely as possible. In keeping with that commitment, the Faculty adopts the following policy: Each Faculty member grants to the President and Fellows of Harvard College permission to make available his or her scholarly articles and to exercise the copyright in those articles. In legal terms, the permission granted by each Faculty member is a nonexclusive, irrevocable, paid-up, worldwide license to exercise any and all rights under copyright relating to each of his or her scholarly articles, in any medium, and to authorize others to do the same, provided that the articles are not sold for a profit. The policy will apply to all scholarly articles written while the person is a member of the Faculty except for any articles completed before the adoption of this policy and any articles for which the Faculty member entered into an incompatible licensing or assignment agreement before the adoption of this policy. The Dean or the Dean's designate will waive application of the policy for a particular article upon written request by a Faculty member explaining the need.

To assist the University in distributing the articles, each Faculty member will provide an electronic copy of the final version of the article at no charge to the appropriate representative of the Provost's Office in an appropriate format (such as PDF) specified by the Provost's Office. The Provost's Office may make the article available to the public in an open-access repository.

The Office of the Dean will be responsible for interpreting this policy, resolving disputes concerning its interpretation and application, and recommending changes to the Faculty from time to time. The policy will be reviewed after three years and a report presented to the Faculty.

It strikes me as a fairly clear motion. The effect is that nearly all future scholarly articles from Harvard Arts and Sciences should become accessible through OAI repositories, with exceptions requiring explicit waivers. Here's some of what Robert Darnton, Director of Harvard University Library, said about the motion in the *Harvard Crimson* for February 12, 2008:

The motion before the FAS [Faculty of Arts and Sciences] in support of open access to scholarly articles concerns openness in general. It is meant to promote the free communication of knowledge. By retaining rights for the widest possible dissemination of the faculty's work, it would make scholarship by members of the FAS freely accessible everywhere in the world, and it would reinforce a new effort by Harvard to share its intellectual wealth.

The University Library has taken a leading role in that endeavor. Far from reserving its resources for the privileged few, it is digitizing its special collections, opening them to everyone online, and cooperating with Google in the attempt to make books in the public domain actually available to the public, a worldwide public, which extends everywhere that people have access to the Internet. . .

The motion also represents an opportunity to reshape the landscape of learning. A shift in the system for communicating knowledge has created a contradiction at the heart of academic life. We academics provide the content for scholarly journals. We evaluate articles as referees, we serve on editorial boards, we work as editors ourselves, yet the journals force us to buy back our work, in published form, at outrageous prices. Many journals now cost more than \$20,000 for a year's subscription.

The spiraling cost of journals has inflicted severe damage on research libraries, creating a ripple effect: in order to purchase the journals, libraries have had to reduce their acquisitions of monographs; the reduced demand among libraries for monographs has forced university presses to cut back on the publication of them; and the near impossibility of publishing their dissertations has jeopardized the careers of a whole generation of scholars in many fields. It would be naïve to assume that a positive vote by the FAS on February 12 would force publishers to slash their prices. But by passing the motion we can begin to resist the trends that have created so much damage....

The Harvard University Library will set up an Office for Scholarly Communication to make the open-access repository an instrument for access to research across all disciplines in the spirit of the "one-university" environment that the HOLLIS catalog now provides for holdings in all the libraries, more than 80 of them,

throughout the University system... By mandating copyright retention and by placing those rights in the hands of the institution running the repository, the motion will create the conditions for a high deposit rate.

What further sets Harvard's proposal apart from the others is its opt-out provision....Whereas other repositories depend on faculty opting in by volunteering to provide digitized copies of their work, the Harvard system would have all faculty members grant a non-exclusive permission to the President and Fellows of Harvard to distribute their articles. The system would be collective but not coercive. Anyone who wanted to retain exclusive rights to her- or himself could do so by obtaining a waiver...

Darnton notes that the deposit rate at the University of California under a voluntary system is about 14%—and it's much lower elsewhere. UC is considering a similar proposal.

Suber calls this a “permission mandate rather than a deposit mandate”—instead of requiring faculty to deposit articles themselves, it requires that they give the university non-exclusive permission to host articles. Suber says this is the first permission mandate anywhere. He likes the model. As he notes, it's usually the university library that handles the actual deposits—and who better? Suber's February 12, 2008 post offers a number of other good points on the virtues of the Harvard approach.

Peter Suber's final bullet, in the February 12, 2008 post, deserves quotation in full:

Publishers who dislike the idea could respond by refusing to publish work by Harvard faculty. But that will not happen. Harvard is inserting the wedge and making it easier for other universities to follow suit with similar policies.

There's a term that can be applied to any scholarly journal that boycotts work by Harvard faculty: **Suicidal**. Can you image the effect on any journal's reputation once it became known that it would reject Harvard articles because it couldn't live with Harvard's retention of copyright?

For UC to follow suit would be wonderful: The likelihood of serious journals rejecting work from UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC San Diego or any of the other campuses in their specialties is also nearly zero. Add, say, any three or four of Yale, MIT, Cornell, Princeton, Columbia, Stanford, Michigan, Penn, Duke, Chicago, Toronto, Wisconsin and the University of Texas (I could go on...), and you'd have a clear case for journal publishers: “Deal with OA...or die.”

Early reactions

I'm going to ignore the one-note advocate whose reaction was to tell Harvard how it *should* have written the motion. It's too predictable: If it's not 100% my way, it's flawed, perhaps fatally flawed. I'm only offering

tastes of a few of many reactions, mostly positive. As usual, Peter Suber is the go-to source at www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/

Naturally, the AAP's Allan Adler grumped about mandates. Gavin Baker noted the significance of this being a faculty vote. “This is the strongest indication yet: *Yes, Virginia, scientists do want open access.*” David Weinberger likes the mandate but isn't wild about the opt-out provision. Mike Carroll called the Harvard policy “huge” and stressed its bottom-up nature.

T. Scott Plutchak posted “The Harvard vote” at *T. Scott* (tscott.typepad.com) on February 13, 2008:

I'm inclined to think that the Harvard vote may be more significant than the passage of the NIH policy. That it is driven by the faculty rather than being imposed from the outside is a very positive sign. Most important, however, is that a major university is taking a significant step towards managing its own scholarly production.

He contrasts this with the NIH situation, where he's hearing that commercial publishers are trying to buy up even more society-published journals, using as one selling point that they can handle the “headaches” of dealing with NIH's policy. He notes Springer's encouragement of scholars to write the high “Open Choice” fees into their grants as one way of accommodating NIH—and assuring lots of revenue for Springer. (As Suber notes later, Springer already allows archiving without fee or delay, which is all NIH requires.)

I don't fault the commercial publishers at all—they're being creative and taking advantage of the changing terrain as best they can. But I continue to worry about the small publishers and the societies and continue to believe that it was a grave error on the part of the open access movement not to seek alliances there... If the Harvard vote represents a movement on the part of faculty toward taking more control of their own scholarly production, then that's a very good thing.

A number of people and newspapers called on their own universities to follow suit.

Stan Katz wrote a surprising post at *The Chronicle Review's* Brainstorm blog. The key paragraph:

The point I want to make about the Harvard proposal is that it can be seen as a move to undercut nonprofit publishers as well as the commercial behemoths (if it is truly a proposal to post all Harvard faculty articles on the university Web site). Depending on the details, it might also be a proposal to bypass peer review, unless Harvard plans to set up its own peer-review process. What social science and humanities faculty have to debate is the merits of entering the world of preprint article circulation that has served the scientists so well. Our scholarship is, I think, significantly different than that of the scientists. Both copyright and publisher peer-review have a long and useful past in our world, and we would do well to

think through the implications of abandoning them — though it is hard to imagine that this is what Harvard actually has in mind.

Sigh. There's "endangered peer review" again, together with "abandoning" copyright. Comments on the post took issue with his assertions. On the other hand, one university press person claimed that resources to publish humanities journals open access "don't exist, at least not yet"—which makes me wonder about the hundreds of humanities open-access journals already in existence.

Paul Courant at Michigan took issue with complaints that Harvard's policy might endanger society publishers:

It is somewhat troubling that some academic publishers and academic societies have expressed concern that the Harvard mandate will put them at mortal risk, while merely trimming the profits of the big commercial publishers. Plainly, we in the academy have an interest in robust nonprofit scholarly publishing, but we should not fall for the idea that the only way for nonprofit publishing to survive is through policies that assure huge profits to the big players. (There is an analogy to agricultural policy here. In the name of preserving the "family farm," governments around the world provide billions in subsidy to agribusiness.)

It's enormously amusing that Patricia Schroeder, president of AAP, while saying "I don't think anyone is quaking in their boots" because of the Harvard mandate, also said this: "publishers may not be quite as excited to take articles from Harvard." *Bwahahaha... oops, sorry.*

Peter Suber devoted a solid eight pages to Harvard's mandate in the March 2008 *SPARC Open Access Newsletter* (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/03-02-08.htm), including direct commentary and many links to other sources. It's what you'd expect from Suber: comprehensive, fair, insightful and absolutely worth reading. Also essentially impossible to summarize. He points out details of the Harvard situation that I've omitted and offers extended commentary on the long-term meaning of Harvard's action. He believes the policy will spread. Frankly, I can't imagine it *won't*—and I'd love to see the University of California act sooner rather than later.

Would you be surprised that ALPSP, AAP/PSP and STM issued a statement that appears to suggest mandates such as Harvard's are unnecessary and possibly harmful? You shouldn't be. Peter Suber deals with it nicely in a March 11, 2008 post at *Open access news*.

Dorothea Salo wrote two posts at *Caveat lector* relating to the Harvard situation, on February 13 and 14, 2008 (cavlec.yarinareth.net). Excerpts from both:

A friend of mine, wholly unconnected with academia or libraries or scholarly publishing, IMed me last night about Harvard's bold faculty-governance move. "This will make waves, won't it?" he asked.

I hope so. I surely do hope so. This could change the Great Game in repository managers' favor. I am in complete agreement with T. Scott Plutchak that this could turn out bigger than the NIH public-access policy...

I am suddenly bullish on IRs, for the first time in quite some time. Mind you, I will turn bearish again if Harvard turns out to stand alone, as is quite possible—I don't see a mad rush to copy MIT's OpenCourseWare initiative. However, the policy spadework done by SPARC and John Ober's crew and others has specifically been in a research rather than teaching context, so perhaps Harvard's example will prove easier to follow than MIT's.

While the AAP and certain of its members spent gobs of money in Washington futilely trying to stop the NIH policy from sprouting teeth, Harvard quietly flanked them. I didn't know the Harvard permissions policy was even on the table until a few days before it passed. Judging from the lack of concerted response from scholarly publishing, they didn't see it coming either.

I would be afraid, very afraid, right now if I were a journal publisher who believed my profits depended on preventing widespread self-archiving or playing dog-in-the-manger with copyright. The Harvard policy puts publishers in an extraordinarily weak position. They can't denounce it; that's tantamount to denouncing faculty, which would be utterly suicidal. (Publishers can and do slag librarians. They can and do slag government. They can't slag faculty, and they know it.) I don't think they can sue; even if they could win in court (which I rather doubt, though standard not-a-lawyer disclaimers apply), the hideous publicity from suing Harvard would stick like tar. They can't prevent eager librarians at Harvard from setting up and filling a repository. Even their standard lines of FUD won't work—they can't seriously spin this as "a vote against peer review," because really, is Harvard going to do anything that damages peer review? Of course not! All the publishers can realistically do is plead poverty, and a look at their lobbying budgets and profit margins scotches that argument.

At Harvard itself, publishers are impotent. The sly cleverness of Harvard's strategy has me in awe. Since we know that arguments based on increased impact and altruism make no headway with faculty, Harvard went straight for the jugular: faculty's sense of ownership over their work...

Stopping other institutions from following in Harvard's footsteps is a completely different game from stopping legislation in Washington. There are no words for the fiasco that attempting to bribe faculty would create, as faculty are not lobbyists or legislators; the opprobrium the AAP faced over PRISM would be a wet firecracker by comparison...

Exacerbating the problem are consortia such as the CIC, and state university systems with a unified voice on

these matters such as California. Not only need publishers keep their eye on individual institutions, they need to block policy and advocacy efforts coming from collections of institutions. I'm sorry, they just can't, not with the worst will in the world.

No, I have a feeling the deafening silence coming from publishers right now is deliberate. Their only realistic hope is that the Harvard policy sinks like a stone in a vast sea of institutional indifference, and the best way for them to create that outcome is to keep their mouths shut so that the initial flurry of coverage and interest fades quicker.

The ball is in our court now, we open-access advocates. We can't let Harvard's fusillade go quiet. Come on, Cornell. Come on, California. Come on, MIT and Yale and (dare I say it?) Wisconsin. Let's do this thing.

The University of California seems well on its way. For MIT, it would seem a natural progression from existing initiatives. In terms of world-class *campuses*—well, that would be four more right there. What publisher will say, “Sorry, but we're not accepting papers from UC or Harvard”?

Faculty ignorance of open access

Is it possible to overstate the significance of Harvard's vote being *by the faculty*, not an administrative fiat? I wonder. As I was finishing up the notes above and getting ready for the next section, I ran into some old items I'd saved but hadn't used yet.

In an April 13, 2007 post at *Open access news*, Peter Suber points to a UK report “Researchers' use of academic libraries and their services” (www.rin.ac.uk/researchers-use-libraries). Key paragraph:

Despite all the activity and progress on open access over the past couple of years...researchers remain largely unaware of the issues and arguments, and this was reflected in the focus groups and other discussions we carried out for this study. Of the researchers we consulted, only about 1 in 10 were able to show that they fully understood what is meant by open access....

Making this finding unsurprising: “Our survey shows a significant discrepancy between the proportion of librarians who say their institution has an open access institutional repository (52%) and the proportion of researchers who believe that their institution has such a repository (15%).” Peter Suber notes: “On the one hand, it's very discouraging, especially after all this time. On the other hand, it supports our claim that the problem is ignorance, not opposition. My experience is that it only takes a couple of minutes to excite faculty about OA, once you get their attention. The hard part is—still—getting their attention.”

Here in the U.S., at least according to Dorothea Salo, even the librarians aren't up to speed. As she

says in a May 16, 2007 *Caveat lector* post, “Paying for OA” (excerpts):

I've said before that academic librarians are sadly ignorant about open access; our discipline's research literature lags well behind others in progress toward OA...

In my experience, academic librarians have a strong, largely implicit, and (of course) completely erroneous belief that “you get what you pay for.” In the long run, it's possible that making them set aside some of their budget to support OA will turn them into advocates—they're paying for it, so it must be all right. But in the short run, open access smells funny to them, much as it does to many faculty....

But maybe that's changing...at least if the Harvard vote, a similar Oregon vote and activities at UC and elsewhere mean anything.

The Green Road: Institutional Repositories

I keep repeating my general advice for library people who are interested in open access (and more of you should be!): Read Peter Suber's *Open access news* blog and *SPARC Open Access Newsletter*, and maybe some other blogs related to OA—I've listed them before.

Here's more specific advice, if you're interested in institutional repositories from a library perspective: Read *Caveat lector* (cavlec.yarinareth.net). Dorothea Salo does this stuff for a living. She cares deeply about what she does. She's a little discouraged at times. She's forthright and honest *all* the time.

I rarely deal with IR issues; as far as I can tell, the most recent mention was in early 2006—and that discussed several of Salo's posts. Meanwhile, I gathered printouts of a few items where I thought I could add value by noting them. That stack now includes 20 printouts—and, except for a *D-Lib Magazine* article from March/April 2007, *all* of them are *Caveat lector* posts.

Here's this section in a nutshell. “A Cornell study showed that Cornell's DSpace institutional repository wasn't being used or populated very well and attempted to find out why. Dorothea Salo keeps on saying worthwhile and challenging things about IRs, how they do or don't work, and how they can or should work.” Or you could just read “Innkeepers at the Roach Motel” (digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/22088), but Salo says she's going to do a major rewrite.

Tempting as it is to stop right there, I'm inclined to offer a few notes & observations along the way. We start in December 2006 and move forward from there. I won't be adding much commentary. To do so would mostly display my own ignorance.

Google and journal backruns

In late 2006, Google offered to digitize journal backruns for free. Peter Suber wrote about it, finding Google's offer considerably less than ideal, but possibly still a good thing. Dorothea Salo wasn't as sanguine, in a December 17, 2006 post:

I see a ton of downside, so much downside that I don't think any self-respecting journal should take this deal. I do agree with Suber that should Google's offer be accepted by a lot of publishers, open access would benefit hugely, at least in the short term—and to be honest, knowledge of that immediate short-term benefit is making it very hard for me to write this post...

My stubborn objection to the shape of this deal stems from my ebook days, and boils down to this: *never, ever, EVER agree to a digitization deal that doesn't leave you in control of a copy of the bits...*

There's a *lot* more to the post and if you're interested in that issue you should go read it—but it's not directly relevant to IR issues. Her key argument: Google wasn't giving a copy of "the bits"—the digitized journal—back to the publisher, and she thinks the Google project could get in the way of proper preservation plans for journals. Those plans could easily involve institutional repositories, on their own and as part of LOCKSS or similar projects.

A day later (December 18, 2006), after Peter Suber noted that Salo hadn't suggested an alternative route for journals lacking a digitized backrun, she posted "What to do?" Excerpts:

If I were in those shoes, here's what I'd do: sit back and wait, at least for now. I think Suber is right that OCA or someone else will come up with a better deal. If enough publishers express their wariness to Google, Google itself may come up with a better deal! The opportunity cost of waiting is negligible, so why rush in?

Journal publishers will have figured this out already, but for those playing along at home: Google's deal only works for journals who consider open digital access an acceptable publication and dissemination mechanism. Not all journals will agree with that, be it because of book-smeller bias or a perceived need to continue to charge rents on the backrun. Moreover, a Google deal makes only limited sense for a journal with no plans to publish current runs electronically. I don't know how many journals that actually is, but it must be larger than zero.

If none of those concerns applied to my journal, however, I'd be looking for a better OA partner than Google while I waited. Not a few journals in this situation will have formal or informal affiliations with institutions. Those institutions have libraries. Do those libraries have publishing-services or conversion or scanning outfits? Do they have an institutional repository? How about an OJS installation? If they do, that's assuredly where I would go first. (Would I, as a repository manager, wel-

come a newly-OA journal backrun? With open arms! And I can give it OAI-PMH exposure as well as Google juice. Can Google?)

The hard part is going to be funding. Library digitization arms are often cost-recovery outfits, though repository storage, bandwidth, and preservation are generally free to the storer. (We're libraries. Storage and preservation are our job.) Still, for a journal that has no OA backrun, I would think grant funding could be had, or even institutional funding for a particularly interesting journal (or a particularly prominent faculty member, as many journal editors are). If this journal-digitization thing catches on, I wouldn't be surprised to see funds earmarked at some grant agencies precisely to take digitized backruns OA...

I'm leaving out a lot. What's here is what's most directly relevant to the role of IRs in making open access work—and the relationship of most IRs to libraries.

Dancing with them what brung ya

That's the title of a February 1, 2007 post in which Salo comments on one of Peter Suber's predictions for OA in 2007. First, she quotes one of Suber's predictions:

I'm tempted to predict a continuing tension between the narrow conception of institutional repositories (to provide OA for eprints) and the broad conception of IRs (to provide OA for all kinds of digital content, from eprints to courseware, conference webcasts, student work, digitized library collections, administrative records, and so on, with at least as much attention on preservation as access). But I have to predict that the broad conception will prevail. Universities that launch general-purpose archiving software will have active constituents urging them to take full advantage of it. The good news for OA is that many institutional interests, beyond the OA interests, will converge to fund and maintain the IR. The bad news for OA is that the project of filling the IR with the institution's research output could, without vigilant stewardship, drift downward on the IR's priority list.

She agrees with the prediction—but she's annoyed that "he even had to raise the matter" and notes that there's not even a shred of evidence for Suber's "bad news" possibility. Excerpts of what else Salo has to say:

Just for a moment, imagine that academic libraries holding print resources were suddenly told that their sole priority—not top priority, mind you, but sole priority—was the acquisition and dissemination of the peer-reviewed journal literature.

I'll wait for every single academic librarian who reads *Caveat Lector* to stop laughing uproariously. As a bonus, I'll even talk down the government-documents and special-collections librarians who are readying their torches and pitchforks. The simple reality is that academic libraries are multiple-purpose organizations serving many and diverse constituencies with many and diverse materials...

What's more, we wouldn't have it any other way. So if the green road to OA wants to dance with academic li-

libraries—and green-OA does want us on its dance card, because it would not exist and cannot at present survive without us—it will have to accept the other digital baggage we bring with us. Student papers. Digitized collections. Webcasts. Learning objects. Et cetera.

There are certainly discussions worth having about whether standard IR technology is the best tool for some of these things... These are different discussions, however, from “OA concerns the peer-reviewed literature and nothing else!”

I refuse to be defensive about archiving more than peer-reviewed journal literature in the repository I run. I have never considered the peer-reviewed journal literature the end-all of research anyway, and I do not agree that open access to it solves every single pressing problem in scholarly communication...

For my own part, I am quite convinced that IRs and their managers in academic libraries have a larger mission and many more opportunities than the peer-reviewed literature offers. That shouldn't anger those whose sole or primary cause is OA to peer-reviewed literature. It should reassure them, because it is excellent evidence that academic librarians such as I will continue an active commitment to IR technology and to advancing OA, with support from the institutions we work for.

Assailing academic libraries and librarians gains narrowly-focused green-OA advocates nothing whatever. Instead, they should consider dancing with them what brung 'em.

I remember vividly, some years back, a discussion about the future of academic libraries in which one self-assured non-librarian came very close to saying that *the* function of an academic library is to move peer-reviewed articles from their creators to their readers. It's not quite as outlandish as Salo suggests.

Are they being used?

Stepping away from *Caveat lector* for the moment, we have a 22-page *D-Lib* article by Philip M. Davis and Matthew J.L. Connolly: “Evaluating the reasons for non-use of Cornell University's installation of DSpace.” (www.dlib.org/dlib/march07/davis/03davis.html) As described, Cornell's institutional repository (DSpace, also what Salo's running at Wisconsin) is “largely underpopulated and underused by its faculty. Many of its collections are empty, and most collections contain few items.”

The authors did a three-part evaluative study of institutional repositories, comparing seven other DSpace installations to Cornell's and interviewing faculty members. They go through the study and results in considerable and somewhat depressing detail. Here's the conclusion:

While some librarians perceive a crisis in scholarly communication as a crisis in access to the literature,

Cornell faculty perceive this essentially as a non-issue. Each discipline has a normative culture, largely defined by their reward system and traditions. If the goal of institutional repositories is to capture and preserve the scholarship of one's faculty, institutional repositories will need to address this cultural diversity.

Will the Harvard mandate increase understanding elsewhere? Time will tell.

Underuse and underpopulation are running themes with Salo, to be sure.

Disciplinary culture, libraries and IRs

On May 17, Salo considered an interesting disconnect: The area where the serials crisis is most acute, the area where IRs should find a natural constituency—namely, science, technology and medicine—is an area where scholars are not heavily invested in academic libraries. Excerpts:

E-journals and article databases are a transparent service to these researchers; surveys have shown that because the access technology is the same—that is, the web browser—they simply cannot distinguish between a resource on the free web and a resource that their libraries have paid dearly for. (OA, of course, is muddying the waters somewhat, which should not be construed as an argument against OA.) Books? They don't use books...

These researchers do not see the library, do not go to the (physical) library, do not care about the library, do not think about the library. So insofar as institutional repositories are a library service (and as I have repeated ad infinitum, they are that nearly everywhere they exist, at least in the United States), they are just as invisible as every other library service. Small wonder I have an outreach problem! My key constituencies just never think to look in the library for me.

The arts and humanities tell a different tale. The library is a major locus of arts and humanities research, with librarians a major part of the faculty's working lives, both as scholars and as teachers. This means in practice that librarians often play a key role in introducing arts and humanities faculty to technologies that can help them...

In my nearly two years doing this work, I have actually had more contact with humanities scholars than STM researchers, and I am quite willing to believe that's partly or wholly because the library impinges more often and more deeply on their consciousness.

That's a sad analysis. I wonder if it's true everywhere? One of her responses is to “market to STM departments' local IT staff, who are both less contemptuous of the library than those they serve and more likely to see the IR as a solution to genuine problems they have.”

Broken repositories

Dorothea Salo has become the most vocal library voice talking about institutional repositories—and I don't believe she set out to have that level of promi-

nence. Salo runs a DSpace IR at the University of Wisconsin. She believes in IRs as part of open access and she believes in open access. “I’m still convinced, mind you, that open access is not a windmill—it’s viable, it’s necessary, and it will happen under various guises.”

She’s been vocally unhappy with the IR situation, as expressed over a number of posts. While she sums it all up in “Roach Motel,” there’s some virtue to glancing at the developing position. So, for example, portions of a September 5, 2007 post:

Institutional repositories as a class are in serious trouble. They are not producing the outcomes they promised—or, indeed, much of *any* outcome in many cases. They are sucking up library staff time and development muscle, and libraries haven’t enough of either commodity to waste on a non-productive service.

Fundamentally, the value proposition on which IRs were sold to libraries was in error. *Voluntary self-archiving in institutional repositories simply does not happen in the absence of deposit mandates.* From a library perspective, this changes the picture from the original “build it, step back, and they will come” to “make a tremendous ongoing investment in marketing and library-mediated deposit services that may never pay off if other libraries at other institutions don’t do likewise.” It’s only *sensible* that many libraries back away from the latter commitment.

If we in the open-access movement don’t confront our error head-on and make plans for routing around it, I predict with unhappy confidence that many if not most IRs will wither and die, and few more will open. As I said, that’s not necessarily a deathblow for open access, not at all. I do think it would be a sincere pity...

Perhaps if we had built repository systems that weren’t unusable lumbering dinosaurs, that were designed around daily faculty reality rather than the idealized vision of self-archiving, we might have earned some uptake on grounds of immediate practicality rather than hopes of changed attitudes. But we didn’t, so we’re stuck.

An example: mediated deposit. Repository systems blithely assume that the person pushing the buttons to make a deposit is the same person with authority to grant the repository’s license—that is, a person with intellectual-property rights over the content. This is wishful thinking. In most repositories, most deposits are done by a third party, be it a librarian, departmental staff, or a faculty member’s graduate-student assistants...

How much more uptake would we have if we could offer a service enabling departmental IT staff to batch-deposit papers which (once individual faculty have responded to the email requesting licensure) appear magically as prettily-formatted HTML citations on faculty and departmental web pages? It’s technically feasible. We haven’t done it because we’ve fixated far too strongly on the “self” in “self-archiving.”

How much more uptake would we have if we maintained a system that welcomes and cares for unfinished

work as well as curating and displaying the finished products of that work? I can say with some authority that I’d have a great many more preprints and postprints if faculty could find their preprints and postprints in the first place!

Salo saw one hopeful sign in December 2007. She was one of the speakers at a NISO/PALINET workshop, “Getting the most out of your institutional repository”—and, as she says in a December 5, 2007 post, it “was *sold out*, packed to the gills. I was fair shocked, after hearing one librarian say at ASIST that her boss had said “No, I don’t want one of those institutional repositories—they all fail.”

In the same post, she offers some cautionary notes. First, she disagrees slightly with one of Peter Suber’s predictions (“more OA repositories, more deposits in OA repositories”) and adds a somewhat downbeat prediction:

I do not think that there will be significantly more open-access institutional repositories in the United States at the end of 2008 than there are today. This is only a slight disagreement with Peter Suber, because he didn’t specify IRs, just open-access repositories, and there likely will be a few more of those, especially outside the States. I also think that if, as Suber suggests, self-archiving hits the tipping point once we get an NIH mandate and a few mandates like it, *institutional repositories will not be winners.* Nothing will counteract scholars’ natural gravitation toward their disciplines.

I also predict that there will be at least one high-profile IR failure in the United States before the end of 2008... It could be an outright closure, which will touch off a furious debate about repository succession planning that we really should have had years ago. It could be a more graceful handoff, or a consolidation into a consortial repository. It could be a major defunding; the repository’s materials will remain accessible, but staff time and money thrown at the repository will be reduced significantly or eliminated...

Why?

Institutional repositories are money pits, and the returns are negligible. The cost-per-item-archived is *absurd*. Libraries may be idealistic, but they’re not *stupid*, and they *do* move on from failed experiments, especially when those experiments have a heavy technology component.

There’s much more, having to do with commitment and how current IRs actually work.

A December 11, 2007 post notes another part of the problem: “Repository software developers charge gaily into development work without understanding how libraries work, or how repositories work inside libraries.” A few bits from a five-page post:

First, the usual open-source “scratch own itch” development model doesn’t work as well in libraries. The rea-

son for this is that with a few exceptions, *librarians are not programmers and do not think like them...*

Second, the community-based development models that are so fashionable just at present in the repository community are equally if not more precarious. This just isn't how libraries are accustomed to acquiring their software and having their needs met!...

What are libraries accustomed to? RFPs. Vendors. Hosted services. Black boxes. Fee-for-service, not fee-for-input...

Third, this is not a good time to be asking libraries for resources for repositories. Institutional repositories are in enough trouble as it is...

Fifth, most libraries don't have any library technologists.

I'm skipping over some posts, including an interesting January 11, 2008 post ("Jeremiah, not a bullfrog") that says a lot about *why* Salo's been writing this stuff.

A persona approach

Here's a case where there is just no way I can add value—and summarizing the posts could *subtract* value. Salo wrote a series of posts beginning January 24, 2008 ("Meet Dr. Troia") and continuing through January 30, 2008 ("Solving Cassandra's problems"). She describes several personas, then uses them to look at repository design in a different way. If you care about this stuff, **go read the posts.**

In Closing

What? I didn't discuss "Innkeeper at the Roach Motel"? No, I didn't. I read it but I'm not going to comment on it. Here's what you need to know about the article, which is available through Wisconsin's DSpace repository and will appear in *Library Trends* this year:

- It's moderately long—just under 10,000 words, or about 12-14 *Cites & Insights* pages.
- It's important and well written.
- You're better off reading it directly than getting my inadequate summary and comments.

There's much more to talk about on OA, much less the broader issues of library access to scholarship. I think these two themes are related. You can draw the lines.

Old Media/New Media Perspective

Thinking About Kindle and Ebooks

It's been a **long** time since the last C&I essay about ebooks. That long silence was partly because of work-related sensitivities that no longer exist, mostly because I didn't see much evidence of major or interesting developments where I felt I could add value.

Amazon's Kindle is certainly an *interesting* development, one that's generated a lot of discussion in libraries and elsewhere. Is it a major development? That depends on your definition of "major." Now that it's been out for a few months and the initial fervor has subsided, it's a good opportunity to discuss Kindle, ebook readers in general and issues regarding ebooks. It's also, I believe, time to bring back a nine-part model of the ebook field that I introduced in September 2000. I'm guessing almost nobody remembers that *American Libraries* article; I believe it continues to be relevant.

Amazon's Kindle

First, the basics (as I summarized them in a PALINET Leadership Network backgrounder):

- The Kindle ebook reader is exclusively available from Amazon for US\$399.
- Kindle measures 7.5"x5.3"x0.7" and weighs 10.3 ounces.
- The E-Ink screen measures 6" diagonal and offers 600x800 pixel resolution, 167 pixels per inch, with four levels of gray. E-Ink (a trademarked brand of "electronic paper") neither requires nor can use backlighting. (The Sony Reader also uses an E-Ink display.) By most accounts (and photos), it's a medium gray background, not paper-white.
- Kindle has a keyboard (not designed for touch-typing) and large page-forward and page-back strips. It does not use a touch-sensitive screen.
- Kindle supports full-text searching across all texts loaded on the device and comes pre-loaded with a dictionary.
- Books can be purchased and downloaded (the first chapter's free) through Amazon's WhisperNet wireless EVDO data network in most parts of the US (excluding Alaska and Montana). There's no direct charge for wireless access—but it's not clear whether there will be charges for using Kindle as a web browser. There *are* charges (ten cents a document) for converting your own documents to Kindle's format and sending them to your Kindle. It's possible to avoid that charge through email conversion and USB loading.
- Kindle books are heavily laden with Digital Rights (or Restrictions) Management.
- Most new books (more than 100,000 books as of late February 2008) are priced at \$9.95. You can also purchase newspaper and magazine subscriptions and, oddly, purchase certain blogs.
- Amazon estimates Kindle's storage capacity at 200 books. It can be expanded with SD flash memory cards.

- Amazon estimates battery life of two days, a week or more if you disable the always-on wireless connection. (Some reviews disagree.)
- Amazon says the Kindle sold out 5.5 hours after it was introduced and seems to mostly list it as temporarily sold out ever since. Notably, Amazon does not offer any sales figures—it's not possible to determine whether 100, 1,000, 10,000 or 100,000 were sold.

A note about that final bullet. A total lack of actual sales figures is consistent with the Sony Reader and, years ago, with the Rocket Ebook and competitors in all generations. It's *inconsistent* with typical practice for successful new devices in the retail market, where you normally see sales figures touted at all stages of the game. My own instinct is to assume that, if no figures are available, there's a reason—and not a positive one. “Sold out” by itself has no meaning.

The future of reading

One of the most effusive early commentaries came from Steven Levy in the November 26, 2007 *Newsweek*: “The future of reading.” Levy recounts the thinking behind the Kindle and features that print books can't match. He quotes Jeff Bezos at length as to the sheer wonderfulness of it all. Early on, Levy gives us *his* message—one that I *don't* hear from Bezos:

But if all goes well for Amazon, several years from now we'll see revamped Kindles... And physical bookstores, like the shuttered Tower Records of today, will be lonelier places, as digital reading thrusts us into an exciting—and jarring—post-Gutenberg era.

Levy tells us people “have been reading *everything*” on screens, including novels, “but taking on the tome directly is the challenge for handheld, dedicated reading devices, of which the Kindle is only the newest and most credible effort.” Levy's really hot for Kindle's internet connectivity:

Though the Kindle is at heart a reading machine... it is also something more: a perpetually connected Internet device. A few twitches of the fingers and that zoned-in connection between your mind and an author's machinations can be interrupted—or enhanced—by an avalanche of data. Therein lies the disruptive nature of the Amazon Kindle. It's the first “always-on” book.

Levy links connectivity to finding and buying other books—and makes an odd comparison: Kindle gives “some hope to an industry that slogs along with single-digit revenue growth while videogame revenues are skyrocketing.” (We're not talking about an industry *in decline*—just a mature industry past its huge growth stage.)

Levy proceeds to other possibilities: Books that can be corrected (or changed in other ways) instantly.

Maintaining “the tether between the author and the book.” “With an always-on book, it's conceivable that an author could not only rework the narrative for future buyers, but he or she could reach inside people's libraries and make the change.” This brave new scenario is posited as a *good* thing. Levy also seems to think Kindle will make reading and writing both public acts, for reasons that escape me. We get talk of wiki-based collaboration, even for novels, from people who really should know better. Peter Brantley says “The possibility of interaction will redefine authorship.” Kevin Kelly says “reading becomes a community activity” and dreams of “the world's only book” as though that's a good idea.

What I didn't find, on rereading the article several months later: Any indication that Levy had *used* a Kindle for any length of time. As with so many other commentaries on the Kindle—pro and con—this isn't a review: it's a metacommentary. Levy speaks of what could be. I find most of the possibilities either narrow or silly. When I write a book, I don't *want* to maintain a “tether” over the long haul—and, as reader and writer alike, I most certainly don't want a future where the book I read and possibly disagreed with on February 27 is no longer the book on my virtual shelf on February 28. Fixity matters to me. (I'm assuming that the story I read from *Newsweek's* website on February 22, 2008 is identical to the story that was published November 26, 2007. Is that a safe assumption?)

One quick summary I saw of Levy's article says, “He predicts that we'll all be reading books this way one day.” If there was such an absolute prediction, I may have missed it. After all, I was trying to read a lengthy magazine article... from a notebook screen.

Kindling eBooks

Peter Brantley spoke up *before* Kindle appeared, in a November 13, 2007 *O'Reilly radar* post (radar.oreilly.com) based on the likelihood of its announcement—and on a review of the latest-generation Sony Reader. Brantley labels his essay speculation and starts out reasonably distinguishing between audio and books. (It's unfortunate that Brantley dismisses the audio album as “an obviously inefficient, undesirable bundling of content, screaming for disaggregation”—that may be true in some cases, but is nonsense in other cases.)

This comment seems reasonable enough: “In contrast, when one considers long form narratives, whether fiction or non-fiction, there is less of an impetus to migrate from print use except for the possible advantage of portability and more extensive support

for visually handicapped readers; on the flip side, there exist some non-trivial barriers (drm, format wars, etc.) to electronic access.” But that assumes that long-form text narrative will continue—and Brantley’s all for replacing that model:

One might argue that *until* text-based book production, as a creative process, turns more mixed media, and lends sufficient scaffolding for user generated content, re-use, and re-publication, the appeal of any dedicated, standalone device will be weak. Instead, it will be easier to generate marginal cross book-sector penetration with mixed-use devices (iPhone/gPhone) in which reflowable text/html formats (such as epub) are a straightforward application. [Emphasis added.]

Not coincidentally, it is these same devices that will most readily support the envisioning and enactment of new forms of creative expression, ranging from discursive texts which mutually engage authors and readers; location-sensitive rich-media manga with self-selected forking plots; narratives with multiple entry points and randomized outcomes; hybrid reality games where communication, collaboration, and interaction occur in a combination of physical and the digital spaces; and artistry that we cannot yet imagine.

Is it incorrect to sum up Brantley’s argument as “print books make sense if traditional narrative makes sense, but we’re moving past that point”? He says that, if the Kindle and Sony reader *do* succeed, it’s likely to be short-term, “a last gasp of a long-enduring form of socially constructed content packaging rendered anew in digital form.” Down with books, up with “consumer experiences”: “How we read will be transformed as much as what we read.”

Perhaps. I remain unconvinced—not that there will be such new forms (there already are), but that the narrative book with fixed text is, or is likely to become, obsolete.

Other quick reactions

Tom Peters posted an initial essay, “Kindling,” at the *ALA TechSource* blog on November 19, 2007. He offers a good description of the device, wonders whether it will support audiobooks or have text-to-speech support and concludes (in part):

Will the Kindle find a warm place in our hearts, or will this be yet another sad chapter in the tragic smoldering tale of ebooks?...

Will libraries have any truck with Kindle? Will Kindle knockoffs (with names such as Splinter and Tinder) soon hit the market? After the sizzle of the new begins to wane, will Amazon drop Kindle’s price to \$199, similar to what Apple did with the iPhone? Time will tell.

A day later, he notes that Amazon’s website confirms audiobook support but *not* text-to-speech support.

The next day, John DuPuis (*Confessions of a science librarian*, jdupuis.blogspot.com) posted a set of links to “blogospheric reactions, mostly slightly negative but a few wildly positive,” adding more links on the next two days. He asks questions of his own—the kinds of questions that you can legitimately ask without ever seeing the device:

Is the future having a bunch of single purpose devices that are really good at one job or having one multipurpose device that may not be equally good at every task?

What if I’d rather spend my money on content rather than content-reading devices? In other words, is a reader worth the 40 books I could have bought with the same amount of money? The people that make and sell the devices certainly think so, but how about the people that make a living off selling content?

Is the book industry heading the same way as the music industry? Is the value of the content to the consumer tending towards \$0?

I suspect the answer to the first question is “Yes”—some people want multipurpose devices and will trade off performance while others want excellent single-purpose devices. Despite some futurists’ claims, it seems unlikely that “smart phones” will sweep away all other gadget categories for everyone. For the third, I think the answer is No—but I think that even the best ebook reader won’t sweep away print books. For the second—well, that’s a key question, isn’t it?

Quick takes from early commentaries:

- Dorothea Salo: “Looks like the same old, same old to me. I don’t see what’s changed about the gadget or the legal and social environment that’s going to make this thing a success.”
- Tim O’Reilly: “I’m rooting for Jeff and the Kindle. I’m not sure that he’s going to win his bet that people will use a single-purpose device rather than reading on a multi-function device like the iPhone and its successors. But I’m also not sure he needs to. Even if some other device becomes the reader of choice, Amazon will still become one of the leading sources of the books that feed it. All Amazon needs to do here is move the industry forward, and I think that’s already been accomplished.”
- Steve Champion at *LibraryStream* thinks Kindle is “almost like an iPod for books” and hopes his library will buy one to try out—but doesn’t predict its future.
- Science fiction writer and avowed ebook fan Robert J. Sawyer “immediately fell in love” with the beta unit he got to play with—but he’s Canadian, and (at least back then) the Kindle was only available in the U.S. He admits “it ain’t cheap, but man, is it ever *cool*.” Sawyer owns three dedicated

ebook readers and various PDAs—and he'll buy the Kindle as soon as he can.

- Cory Doctorow came down hard at *Boing Boing* with “Amazon Kindle: the Web makes Amazon go bad crazy.” The summary version comes from a “great, incisive post” by Mark Pilgrim. As quoted: “it spies on you, it has DRM (which means that it has to be designed to prevent you from modding it, lest you mod it to remove the DRM), it prevents you from selling or lending your books, and the terms of service are nearly as abusive as the Amazon Unbox terms (and worse than the thoroughly dumb-ass Amazon MP3 terms).” Naturally, there's more.
- Stephen Abram believes “someday there will be an ebook reading device that succeeds”—and has no idea whether Kindle is it. He does, *quite reasonably*, point out that much of the early debate was among people *none of whom* had actually used a Kindle—and that “someone with a library perspective” really needed to play with one and comment (although, as he notes, we don't *all* need to).
- Outside liblogs, Marc Orchant at *blognition* did buy one—and likes it a lot. He thinks the heft is just right, “the screen is brilliant” (no “too-hard black” or “glaring white background”—I never thought about books having “too-hard black” ink!), the cursor strip is “visually arresting” and “intelligent,” the wireless connectivity seems to work, and following hyperlinks is “really quite cool.” He likes the browser too.

Wayne Bivens-Tatum calls himself “an enthusiastic devotee of ebooks” for the last three years, since he loaded Mobipocket onto his Dell Axim, but he's not ready for the Kindle, as he explains in “The Kindle,” posted November 19, 2007 at *Academic librarian* (blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/). Excerpts:

First, I don't want a separate tool... It seems like the things the Kindle can do, I can do now on my phone, and even though the screen might be smaller, the text is very clear.

It also bothers me how rigidly controlled commercial ebooks are. Ebook readers want to try to emulate the book, but only in the reading experience. Ebook readers and publishers are trying to stop many of the other ways people use books. In general, I don't like the way digital rights issues interfere with ebooks in a way they don't with paper books. I might be willing to buy a book, since I buy books now, but after I buy the book I want to do with it what I please. If I want to lend it to a friend, regift it to an acquaintance, donate it to a library, or sell it to a used bookstore, I want the freedom to do that. Publishers naturally want to keep me from doing that, though they never could with paper books, and paper books have long sold even though libraries, used bookstores, and reading friends exist.

The stranglehold on information will be difficult to maintain, but as long as it will be illegal for me to do with digital books what I now do with print books, I'll resist buying them...

If we have ebooks without the freedom to lend, give, resell, or donate them, then in many ways we'll have a bleaker book future than we could have. This isn't a complaint against ebooks, as much as I like traditional print books, but it is a complaint against the commercial restrictions that may dominate the future of copyrighted books.

Simon Chamberlain, one of New Zealand's libloggers, posted “Latest on e-books: Amazon's Kindle” on November 20, 2007 (chamberlain.net.nz/blog/). He notes some early reaction (and that he hasn't actually seen one), likes the wireless downloads, doesn't like being tied to Amazon, and was one of the first to raise a key question—followed by an interesting conclusion:

The next question is whether libraries will be able to lend e-books to Kindle users. I read about 70 books last year, and probably more this year. Of those, I bought about two, and another three or four were gifts. The rest came from my much-loved public library, and the academic library I work in. I'm not likely to shell out \$400 if I have to then buy all the content I use on the device.

But that's OK, maybe I'm not the target audience for this one. I probably prefer reading off paper anyway (it's not the resolution, so much as being able to flick from page to page and to have several books open at once). In an ideal world, I'd have paper and e-books, one for actually reading, the other available so I can do full-text searching when needed...

Most early reactions didn't involve hands-on experience—and in many cases, that didn't matter. It's *entirely* legitimate to criticize a device you haven't used, if your criticism stands assuming that the device does what it does perfectly. While I did comment about Kindle and ebook readers in general during this early period, all I really had to say about Kindle was “The Kindle no more spells the end of print books than any other ebook reader has.” That's a judgment I could *and would* make even if the Kindle was a perfect ebook reader, however you define perfect. I just don't see ebooks sweeping away print books even if they eventually gain the multibillion-dollar annual markets they *should* have (even if only for textbooks).

The early flow of commentary slowed down, as you'd expect. Some later pieces are worth mentioning.

Amazon's Kindle makes buying e-books easy, reading them hard

Walter Mossberg of the *Wall Street Journal* did a hands-on review on November 29, 2007. Excerpts:

I've been testing the Kindle for about a week, and I love the shopping and downloading experience. But the Kindle de-

vice itself is just mediocre. While it has good readability, battery life and storage capacity, both its hardware design and its software user interface are marred by annoying flaws. It is bigger and clunkier to use than the Sony Reader, whose second version has just come out at \$300.

Like the Sony, the Amazon reader uses a high-contrast, but low-power, screen technology. The Kindle's six-inch screen can display only monochrome text and gray images, and there's lag time and a flash of black every time you turn a page. But I did find that the screen was good enough to make me forget I wasn't reading the book on paper...

The device is poorly designed. It has huge buttons on both edges for turning pages forward or backward. They are way too easy to press accidentally, so my reading was constantly being interrupted by unwanted page turns. Plus, the buttons are confusing. One called "Back" doesn't actually move to the previous page, but supposedly to the prior function. I never could predict what it would do.

The "Home" button for returning to the list of content on your Kindle is tiny and located at the very bottom of the keyboard. There is no button to take you to the online store; you have to open a menu and scroll. The book-like cover, intended to protect the device, attaches so weakly that it's always falling off. And because the power buttons are hidden on the back, reaching around to use them practically guarantees you'll knock off the cover.

The software interface also is clumsy. There is no way to organize titles into groups or categories, so you have to keep turning pages in the Home area to find a particular item to read. And doing many tasks requires you to scroll a barely visible silver cursor along a narrow side panel...

Amazon has nailed the electronic-book shopping experience. But it has a lot to learn about designing electronic devices.

Bad math among the eBook enthusiasts

Tim O'Reilly, in this December 5, 2007 post at *O'Reilly radar*, doesn't deal with Kindle so much as with those who claim ebooks must *and should* be cheaper than Amazon's \$9.95. One poll found that most of those surveyed *expected* ebooks to cost \$5 or less, with 20% expecting them to be \$2.50 or less.

As a publisher, O'Reilly isn't buying it. He doesn't think there's a huge unmet demand for books: "Regular readers already often have huge piles of unread books, as we end up buying more than we have time for. Time, not price, is the limiting factor." He notes that alternative income streams aren't as easy as they sound—"free ebooks with advertising" really don't work given that most books have small audiences.

O'Reilly also notes that previous "let's say" experiments (you know, "let's say you cut the price in half and quadruple the sales") haven't worked out very well—and "subscribing to updates" for books *specifically* hasn't worked well.

What he *doesn't* say until the comment stream: There are a lot of costs to books from regular publishers that have nothing to do with the books being printed and bound. My standard figure for a long time has been one-seventh of the *price* (not the cost) at the high end. I've had a number of publishers agree this is in the ballpark. The big savings in Amazon's ebook model comes from eliminating the bookstore and its margins, and I'm not entirely convinced that eliminating local bookstores is inherently a wonderful thing.

O'Reilly's 3.5-page post resulted in 23 pages of comments, most of them long, over the first five days. In that stream, O'Reilly discusses actual costs:

Paper, print and binding are a far smaller part of a book's list price than most people realize. It's usually less than 10%. Meanwhile, distributors and retailers claim well over 50% of the list price. So while paper price fluctuations hurt, they don't explain price changes. The biggest factor that affects price is potential sales volume, so indeed, if there is unmet demand, prices can go down. Volume is also why large retailers like Amazon can offer big discounts—they have lots of margin to begin with, and very large volumes can offset any discounting they do.

He also talks about the whole issue of pricing relative to anticipated sales. Excerpts:

There will be lots of experiments done to find the right price to maximize revenue. And that is dependent on volume—and is independent of length.

A good example of that is our *Web 2.0 Patterns and Best Practices* report or our *Facebook Application Report*, each of which sells for hundreds of dollars. Why? We thought demand would be limited, and that enough people would pay a high price to offset the low volume. We were right.

Meanwhile, many of our short cuts have been an economic failure (with a few exceptions) because the low price (typically \$9.95) isn't generating enough volume to make them worthwhile. I've been pushing our publishers to do more high priced, short form publishing where the demand is high but the market is small. We've learned quite painfully that a low price doesn't necessarily spur demand.

Of course, we have counter examples as well. I turned *Unix in a Nutshell*, one of our first books, into a best-seller back in the early 90s when I dropped the price from \$19.50 to \$9.95. It was a killer price for a really valuable book, and we sold six times as many copies, easily justifying the price drop. But eventually, as we introduced more books at that price point, the surprise factor wore off, and many of the books ended up making less money, so prices went back up.

The set of comments makes fascinating reading, too much to summarize. If it seems as though some of this is about ebooks in general, not specifically the

Kindle, that's quite true. As usual, it's hard to tear the case study apart from the field as a whole.

The silly season

Steve Jobs offered perhaps the silliest (or most offensive) take on the Kindle: "It doesn't matter how good the product is, the fact is that people don't read anymore... Forty percent of the people in the U.S. read one book or less last year. The whole concept is flawed at the top because people don't read anymore." There's been enough discussion of this nonsense that I probably don't need to add more.

E-books and p-books

Paul Courant posted this on December 29, 2007 at *Au Courant* (paulcourant.net/). He's had the "opportunity to skim thousands of comments" on Kindle. "I haven't actually played with a Kindle, yet, but if ever a subject were well covered by the secondary literature, this is it, so I feel fully qualified to comment on the matter. (This in the spirit of Pierre Bayard's recent *How to Talk About Books that You Haven't Read*, which I have played with.)"

The Kindle is plainly many wonderful things, and does many wonderful things, and, for most purposes, is a pretty poor substitute for a book. (At the same time, for some purposes, such as carrying a substantial library on a long trip, or augmenting that library at 4AM from a hotel room in a strange land, or getting the best price on some content from Amazon, it's much better than a book.)

Courant has a Sony Reader with an E-Ink screen:

I like it just fine, although if I have time, space, and carrying capacity, I invariably prefer a book. When I first played with the Sony I thought that pretty soon now, there would be readers that would make e-books very good substitutes for p-books. A year or two and lots of development costs later, I'm not so sure. Put simply, what is most striking about the buzz around the Kindle is that (almost) no one is saying that it is a revolutionary, next generation improvement over its predecessor. It's better at some things, has a much better interface for actually acquiring content, and so on. It's wow, but not "WOW, I'm going to throw away my library and convert the space into a billiard room."

Courant—University Librarian at the University of Michigan—considers JSTOR and the success of eJournals. He discarded part of his own library and skim articles via JSTOR: "Of course, even then if I was really going to read the article, I would print it out"—as he believes that faculty and students tend to do for journal articles they really care about.

I'm betting that something similar will be true of e-books. They will really take off when their publishers admit that on-screen (in either computer or reader) is not the best medium for serious and sustained reading, and develop and use technical and rights environments

that allow cheap and convenient print on demand. It's wonderful to be able to search and to skim on screen, but when you want to read, there is nothing like a book or a printed article. The Kindle and the Reader are great; I wouldn't leave home without one. But, like almost everyone, I do most of my reading at or near home.

I find it hard to argue with anything here.

Tinfoil + raccoon

I'll use the blog name (Rochelle Hartman, rochellejustrochelle.typepad.com) because Hartman posted three discussions of Kindle on January 25, 28 and 29, 2008. She began "(Quasi) liveblogging the Kindle," exploring a Kindle that her library's business manager handed to her for initial evaluation. Hartman avoided reading extensive reviews of Kindle; she wanted to "have a new user experience with it." Of the reviews I've read, this one seems most in line with how most of us would "discover" a new consumer electronics device, so I'm quoting a fair amount of it.

She started out the way most of us would: Trying to figure it out without looking at the manual—and applying the Toaster Test: "Is it as easy to use as my 1959 Sunbeam toaster." She was also multitasking, recognizing the danger in not focusing on Kindle all by itself...and, after not feeling much more enthusiasm than for several other ebook readers she's tried, she set it aside. Some of her comments:

I keep wanting to use it as if it has a touch screen. It doesn't. (*poke* *poke*)

Okay, so I read the manual, since Kindle was not as intuitive as I thought it would be. I think if I were more clear-headed and in play mode, I might have gotten farther without looking at documentation. The documentation is *very* readable, though, and relatively jargon free. It is, in fact, pretty excellent. This brings a tear to my eye.

Now that I know not to poke things to make stuff happen, I find that navigation is not too bad. Only problem so far is the "back" bar. To me, this means "go back one page," but it means go back to last document (I think). So, if you are in a document and click "back," it will take you back to last document you looked at before current one. "Previous page" which is on the left side of the screen, is what you click to go back one page. Since I have the machine in its case, this is cumbersome placement. But, maybe machine was not meant to be kept in case while reading...

[After adding a book she actually wanted to read...] Download was pretty quick. Although the resolution is really good, and there are five text size settings, something isn't quite right. I'm thinking that it would be better with backlighting, but maybe just better contrast. I am reading in bed, with a not-great table lamp. It's readable, but I don't like the darkness of the background. "Muddy" is the word that comes to mind...

I think I am going to have to admit to not hating the Kindle. Managed to read a couple chapters without thinking that I was reading from a machine. Also, when I fell asleep, and book fell on my face, I did not get a black eye as with other, heftier readers I've had... Wait...I just called the Kindle a "book." More tomorrow....

[Next day] Turned on Kindle and it took me back to where I'd left off the night before, so I just started reading. I only got a few pages when the phone rang, so I put machine down to get the call. When I came back, I fully realized one of Kindle's biggest design flaws. It's difficult to pick up the machine (outside of its case) without clicking a next/previous page toggle. The page toggles are right on the edge of the machine, running about 3/4 of the length on both sides, so that if you need to change hands, readjust position, or pick up the machine, it's pretty easy to lose your place. It's easy enough to get back to where you were, but it's a nuisance and hopefully something that will be addressed with next the iteration....

[Saturday, at work] The reading experience has been pretty seamless, aside from occasional toggle bump....

So far, so good. Kindle (and the Sony Reader) aren't ideal "reading in bed with the lights off" ebook readers because they're not backlit—but neither are books. (It's not clear that E-Ink technology is compatible with backlighting. It is, I think, clear that backlighting would undermine the long battery life provided by E-Ink...if you're not running a network connection, that is.) This is the kind of review that almost suggests Amazon might have deliberately done a short production run: They could use feedback from reviews like this to make a second iteration even better (e.g., different labels, making the page toggles shorter).

Then Hartman addressed a different issue: Does the Kindle make sense *as a library device*? After all, very few public libraries circulate MP3 players even though they may circulate downloadable audiobooks; even fewer public libraries circulate notebooks or PDAs, even though they offer lots of databases. I don't know of many public libraries that circulate TV sets or DVD players to make use of their DVDs. So should they be lending Kindles?

In a January 25th post, Hartman looked at Kindle's Terms of Service (TOS) while thinking about Kindle's use in a library. Here's what she saw:

"You may not sell, rent, lease, distribute, broadcast, sublicense or otherwise assign any rights to the Digital Content or any portion of it to any third party."

She notes that a few libraries are already circulating Kindles. When she called Kindle support, a technician verified that circulating a Kindle would appear to violate the TOS. At that point, she concluded: "Bottom line: The Kindle has no application for public libraries."

Comments muddied the water. One commenter got a different response from Amazon—or is it different? "We have reviewed through our Terms and Conditions regarding this matter and the Amazon Kindle. You will be able to purchase Kindles for your library to use for checking out to patrons, as long as you are not reselling the digital content." Another commenter stated that Amazon "cannot tell you who you can lend discrete items to for free"—but that's not clear, since you're not so much buying the ebooks as licensing them.

After a second round of inquiries, the answer *appears* to be that it's OK to circulate an *empty* Kindle (after all, that's a straight purchase)—but that, technically, ebooks are only licensed for reading by the purchaser. (It's still a little unclear.) Meanwhile, Hartman stepped back, resulting in a January 29 post: "Never mind legal issues; Kindle not good choice for most libraries." Portions of that post:

Whoa. Wait a minute. Stepping back from my Kindle crush and putting aside the question of whether or not it's legal for libraries to loan them, I considered the Kindle issue through the eyes of a public library manager who has to make decisions about how to get the most out of a budget. Duh! It's a no brainer. There is no way I could justify deploying Kindles, given the present model. The machine itself is 400 bucks and can hold up to 200 titles. Let's say that the average price of a Kindle title is 10 bucks. That all adds up to almost \$2,500 tied up in a resource that can only be used by one person at a time....

How does it make any sort of sense for a library to loan out a \$2500 resource to be used by one person at a time for 2-4 weeks? That's the equivalent of allowing only one person at a time access to Ancestry online for two weeks. Or to check out the entire *World Book* set. Those ideas sound outrageous. Because they are. It would demonstrate impeachment-level poor stewardship. Even if the price were to come down drastically, it would still be an irresponsible allocation. Now, if Amazon or someone could come up with an affordable e-reader with the same functionality as Kindle, that patrons would want to buy, along with becoming a vendor of affordable, multi-format ebooks that libraries could offer to patrons for *easy* downloading, that'd be something to text home about.

The first post and the other two posts cover different issues, to be sure. The first addresses Kindle as an ebook reader—and here, Hartman's overall tone is quite positive. The others address Kindle as a circulating device—and here, I believe she's right for most libraries. I presume the Apple iPod Touch really is a wonderful music player and, thus, wonderful way to listen to audiobooks. Does that mean libraries should be buying and circulating them?

The comments are interesting. One person, from an early library to circulate Kindles, notes (in a com-

ment on a post that's reference in a comment...never mind) that hard-cover books last for about six circulations until the "text box drops out" (by which I assume she means that the bound pages fall out of the cover). Is that true? Are hardbounds *that* badly made these days?

George Needham and William Lloyd

George Needham offered "Kindle: First e-impressions" in a January 30, 2008 *It's all good* post (scanblog.blogspot.com). It's a favorable review. Needham found himself "thoroughly enmeshed" in a book he wanted to read—"as thoroughly as if I were reading the paper edition." He thinks Kindle might make very long books more approachable, particularly for someone who travels a lot. He loves the variety of type sizes.

His complaints are similar to Hartman's:

I still keep accidentally advancing the page before I'm ready, due to the position of the two "next page" bars on either side of the unit. The screen wipe between pages, required by the e-Ink, is moderately distracting...

The proprietary format and the charges to access blogs and other content that are freely available elsewhere are real problems now, although I would expect to see these addressed in the not too distant future. The cardboard/leatherette cover is good for protecting the reader, but you can't actually hold the book to read when it's in the cover, unless I'm doing something pathetically wrong. Not that it would be the first time.

He finds Kindle "a fascinating step forward for e-content" and would *love* to see textbooks available in this format. "I hate seeing my poor 8-year old grandson schlepping a heavy backpack full of textbooks." He closes with some interesting questions:

So the question seems to be, what now for libraries? Do we have in Kindle an opportunity, a threat, or a parallel course?

Needham can predict my response: Not a threat, possibly an opportunity—if and when Amazon supports a downloadable/circulation mode. Maybe a parallel course for some patrons, just as bookstores are parallel courses for some patrons—and that's OK.

A longer version of this post appeared as the February 2008 "I'm Curious George" column at WebJunction and was also posted to *BlogJunction* on February 1, 2008 (blog.webjunctionworks.org/). The longer version adds useful commentary and suggestions. Needham thinks "we might be at the point where e-books move from techie toy to mainstream product" and that ebooks could have a positive impact in several areas. See the column for more.

Despite this screed, I'm not totally sold on e-books yet. I need to start using my Kindle to know if it's going to be

something I can't live without, like my iPod, or a tchotchke that sits on my desk and doesn't get used, like my digital picture frame!

Here's my prediction: Needham travels a lot, and *for him and people like him* Kindle may indeed be a great and constant companion.

Another favorable review of Kindle appears on the WebJunction site: "Amazon Kindle, breakthrough in ebook readers." (www.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=19372). William Lund of Brigham Young University likes Kindle better than other ebook readers he's tried. He calls it "the first ebook reader that I have truly loved." The review offers a good description of Kindle and its advantages—and finds the same problems.

Summing up

We have no idea whether Amazon has sold hundreds, a few thousand, or *lots* of Kindles. On the whole, most people who have tried Kindle find it better as an ebook reader than most predecessors—but certainly not without flaws, some of which can be corrected easily enough. Its use in libraries is unclear, particularly noting another section of the ToS: payment of fees to download content grants the right "to view, use, and display such Digital Content...solely for your personal, non-commercial use."

That's probably the biggest problem: You're not buying ebooks, you're licensing them. That license is, at least so far, not appropriate for circulating items.

I continue not to have a personal opinion on Kindle. Nor should I have: I'm not the intended market. I don't travel often enough. I borrow most of the books I read. I'm happy with print books. I don't believe Amazon wants to wean me away from print books, for that matter.

Nine Models, One Name: Untangling the Ebook Muddle

This section originally appeared in slightly different form in *American Libraries* 31:8, September 2000. What appears here is the manuscript as submitted.

What's the future of ebooks? What should librarians do about them? The easy answer to the second question may be, "Don't lose too much sleep just yet." There's no good answer to the first question because there's not one medium called "ebooks" the way there's one medium called "DVD" or "Audio CD." Let's look briefly at nine "ebook" varieties.

Proprietary ebook devices

The biggest wave of ebook hype has been for a group of portable devices that claim to be book replace-

ments. Two such devices are on the market: Rocket's eBook and the Softbook reader. Both devices are battery-operated, use backlit LCD screens, hold the equivalent of several print books (downloaded in propriety formats locked to a single reader), and have no functions other than to display and search text and related images. You can't print texts out; they can only be read on the medium-resolution screens. Most book-length texts for both readers cost about as much as hardbound books; most such texts are reformatted versions of print books from commercial publishers. As of May 2000, Rocket claims more than 2,400 books; Softbook, roughly 1,700.

How robust is the locked ebook market? One indicator may be the lack of true competition. Gemstar Development (the company that produces VCR Plus+ listings) purchased both Rocket and Softbook for relative pittance, reporting that sales weren't material to either purchase. Another may be a complete lack of sales figures for either reader.

Locked ebook devices do have niche uses, including a potentially large niche as textbook carriers, but they don't serve libraries particularly well, and so far they don't offer texts that aren't readily available in print form. While locked ebooks seem to interest many librarians, it's not entirely clear why: of all ebook models, they seem to have the least to offer from a library perspective.

Open ebooks

One alternative to locked ebooks is an "open" standard for ebook markup and encryption: a model that allows any text to reside on any reader, but also protects publishers' interests. Such a model has been proposed, an XML-based standard called Open eBook.

Open ebooks have the same niche uses as locked readers but don't require single-use readers. There are several hundred million reading devices for open ebooks: desktop computers, notebook computers, Palm and other handheld devices, and even locked readers.

Open ebooks can make sense for libraries if sensible licensing and circulation arrangements can be worked out—but they must be encrypted for publishers to be comfortable with them, which may restrict printing and make circulation difficult. So far, there aren't enough open ebooks to see where they'll go—and an XML-based model may turn out to be less attractive than Adobe's PDF, even if it is a "standard."

Public domain ebooks

One section of the Internet Public Library offers more than 12,000 ebooks and other electronic texts. These are free for the downloading, printing, circulation, or

what have you: they're either digital copies of books already in the public domain or texts placed into the public domain for various reasons.

Public domain ebooks can enrich library and personal resources. The texts are easy to locate and download, and some of them are already cataloged in the nation's great bibliographic databases. A reader will find a crude plain-text version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be a poor substitute for a Penguin paperback or Modern Library's omnibus Shakespeare, but thousands of public domain ebooks do offer worthwhile resources—and some of these ebooks (or electronic publications shorter than book length) are resources not readily available in print.

Circulating pseudobooks

Digital dreamers have claimed universal availability as one reason that digital distribution must inevitably replace printed books. Once it's digital, everybody can use it simultaneously! That premise terrifies publishers and writers who expect compensation for their work.

NetLibrary dispels the myth of universal accessibility. Libraries or consortia purchase access to titles from netLibrary's collection and users can borrow those titles (downloading them to their own PCs)—but one user can't borrow a title while it's in use by somebody else, unless the library has paid for more than one copy. That's a standard circulation model that makes economic sense for publishers as well as libraries.

Unfortunately, titles borrowed from netLibrary *must* be read on a computer: the software prevents readers from printing out major parts of a work. That does not make the concept worthless. Many readers don't intend to read entire books, particularly in academic libraries or for some kinds of nonfiction books in public libraries. There are tens of thousands of "pseudobooks"—book length items normally used at a paragraph or chapter level within a particular library. While netLibrary doesn't replace a physical collection (and the costs can be tricky), it offers an intriguing model tuned to library realities.

Digital to physical

If you turn a digital text into a physical book, is it an ebook or is it just a book? Lightning Source (from Ingram), Replica Books and competitive services store fully marked up digital texts or scanned page images and use recently-developed laser printers that combine high-speed duplex printing, collating, and binding into a single system designed to produce one book at a time. These instabooks eliminate many of the problems connected with ebooks—but also eliminate some of the advantages.

Currently, Lightning Source offers more than 8,000 titles delivered 48 hours after order, printed on acid-free paper and bound as either paperback or hard-cover books with four-color covers. Replica Books offers similar services through book wholesalers.

This doesn't help library problems with shelf space or potential theft or loss—but it does open a new avenue to acquire three kinds of books previously either impossible or expensive to purchase: out of print books scanned to bring them back into print; slow-selling midlist books ready to fade away; and worthwhile books that don't get published because their audience is too small. In all three cases, instabooks can benefit libraries—and since they're books, they circulate normally.

There are problems. Fair book contracts include reversion clauses. Typically, six months after a book goes out of print, all rights revert to the author—who can then work with other publishers, self-publish, or do with it as he or she pleases. Instabook processing may mean that books will *never* officially go out of print, since it costs the publisher almost nothing to keep the marked-up text available for one-off printing. That strengthens the publisher's already-stronger hand, and may mean that authors need new kinds of reversion clauses.

Not quite a book

The most widely publicized “ebook” wasn't a book at all. Steven King's *Riding the Bullet* is a long novelette or short novella. That's an awkward length for fiction or nonfiction in most print media: too long for an article (or short story), too short for a book. MightyWords offers an intriguing “ebook” model to handle mid-length texts—although they also handle one-page and book-length texts. MightyWords already has thousands of authors, including some established print authors and many who have never been formally published. There are and will be competitive services.

Authors submit files (in Word, PostScript, PDF, or plain text form), short biographies, summaries, and publication agreements. Authors set the price for each publication (with certain very low length-based minima). MightyWords converts other forms to PDF and packages PDF files in secure form, then acts as the e-publisher or e-distributor: providing some publicity, handling charge cards, and sending royalty checks. The author pays \$1 per month for each text while it's mounted; otherwise, MightyWords and the author split proceeds fifty-fifty. As PDF files, MightyWords publications are *designed* for quality printing (and MightyWords may yet offer one-off printing and binding).

MightyWords started out by commissioning essays on the Bill of Rights from various authors, making those essays available as free downloads, and publicizing them widely. As cumulated, the essays make a modest and uneven book, but they offer fascinating insights into the contributors (who include Newt Gingrich, Whoopi Goldberg and the team of Doris Kearns Goodwin and Richard N. Goodwin).

Is MightyWords just another source for vertical-file material that libraries can't handle well? Is it another form of self-publishing designed for shorter works? Could it be a way to enrich publishing through essays, longer articles, and a resurgence of short and medium-length fiction? It could be all of these and more; it could engender competitive services with lower charges; or it could fade away.

EVanity and self-publishing

Who hasn't said, “I could write a book”? Some of us act on that impulse and find the book-writing habit hard to stop. Others may produce just one book-length manuscript in their lives and never get that book published. In most cases, that's because the book isn't “worth” publishing, but in some cases, the book just falls through the cracks: the author fails to contact the right publisher or the book isn't *quite* what the publisher needs this year. If sixty thousand new titles are published in a year, there could be another six hundred thousand (or more) that don't make it into print.

Ebooks blur the line between vanity publishing and self-publishing. At best, digital distribution should eliminate the excesses of vanity presses. When your Internet Service Provider will give you several megabytes of Web space and when Word or its competitors will produce competent HTML for book-length items, why pay someone else large sums to mount your ebook?

There has been an explosion of self-publishing on the Web, but most of it doesn't rise to ebook status. There are personal Web pages with book-length texts, but those represent a tiny fraction of personal Web pages. There is a role for ebook equivalents of contract publishers: someone to check markup, assist with publicity, handle billing and other financial matters, and make arrangements with instabook operations for physical copies. Some people will self-publish full-fledged ebooks, setting up their own merchant accounts and handling other aspects; some will contract out these aspects.

Libraries rarely buy vanity-press publications but most libraries have acquired well-reviewed self-

published books. Just as desktop page layout substantially lowered the entry barrier for self-publishing, electronic distribution lowers it even further. That leaves the two problems that have always made self-publishing and very small presses difficult: awareness (publicity) and reviewing.

Ebooks before the web

Ebooks did not begin with Rocket or the Web. Diskette and CD-ROM ebooks have been around for years from publishers such as Cyberlink Press, Book-on-Disc, Samizdat Express, Ra Kahn, Electra Press, Dead End Street, Eastgate, New York Writers Café, and many others. Some diskette ebook publishers fulfill the filtering functions of traditional publishers; others produce anything they can get their hands on, acting as distributors. At least one diskette ebook publisher has started a CD-ROM vanity imprint: for \$1,300, the writer gets 100 copies of his or her masterwork with a custom jewel-box insert!

These publishers have never had much impact, even ones such as Eastgate that specialize in hypertext. Diskette ebooks have the same readability problems as other ebooks and have rarely been reviewed or distributed comparably to mainstream books. Libraries might consider circulating CD-R ebooks, just as many libraries circulate CD-ROMs and audio CDs (including the new CD-based audiobooks), but diskettes pose bigger problems for libraries. This form of ebook is likely to fade away completely, except in some specialized niches.

Extended books and other models

Years ago, Voyager produced a series of “extended books” (some on diskette, some on CD-ROM), adding features to make the electronic form more than a transcription. Unfortunately, these early ebooks were quirky and aimed primarily at Mac users, and sales never came close to justifying production costs. That’s been the story for most “extended books” published as CD-ROMs. The qualities that make them interesting CD-ROMs drive up production costs, and the mass market for CD-ROMs (other than games and encyclopedias) never really developed.

Extended ebooks, either on CD-ROM or the Web, can go beyond print books in a number of ways besides searchable text. Good CD-ROMs can help users explore some topics in ways not supported by ordinary books, and the same is true for innovative Web-based resources.

Are these ebooks, or are they something else? I would call them new electronic media, able to complement and extend print publishing. They can pose

some of the same problems for libraries as other ebooks, but they offer new kinds of promise that may make up for some of the problems.

Closing the [e]books

Which of these models will make a difference? Which ones do libraries need to consider today, next year, or five years from now? What other models will come along?

I don’t have easy answers for any of those questions. Ebooks of all sorts will *not* replace all print books, but several of these ebook models will provide new resources for libraries and readers. Don’t bet on them converging into a single ebook model: that’s not the way the world usually works.

And when someone asks what you’re doing about ebooks, one good answer is, “What do you mean by ebooks?”

Bringing it forward

That quoted answer-as-question is the end of the September 2000 article (written in May 2000). I believe it’s still as good a model of the so-called ebook market as any, although it’s now clear that self-publishing and print on demand aren’t really part of the ebook market. A few quick and incomplete updates to the situation in 2000:

- Gemstar turned the two ebook readers into REB models, which failed for lack of market interest. It was a vast money-losing operation. Since then, there have been other proprietary ebook devices, including the Sony Reader and Kindle—but both Reader and Kindle bundle in *some* other features and are open to importing texts other than purchased ebooks. Note that I thought the textbook market was a “potentially large niche” even back then—but it continues to be an empty niche, possibly because textbook publishers don’t seem to be interested.
- The Open eBook format *does* exist. What was the Open eBook Forum is now the International Digital Publishing Forum, pushing Open Publication Structure (OPS, the “.epub” extension), a successor to Open eBook. I don’t see a lot of evidence that it’s been that successful.
- There are a *lot* more public domain ebooks than there were in 2000—thanks primarily to Project Gutenberg, Google Book Search, Open Content Alliance and Live Search Books (and, for non-English books, the Universal Library Project). The Online Books Page at the University of Pennsylvania (digital.library.upenn.edu/books/) lists more than 30,000 free books in English and links to some other large-scale repositories. Based on that website’s information,

Google Book Search has more than 100,000 downloadable public domain books; Project Gutenberg more than 21,000; Internet Archive more than 200,000 “items”; Live Book Search “thousands.” The Universal Library Project has supposedly scanned more than 1.5 million books, most of them public domain, but only about 10,000 of these show up at the Internet Archive as searchable, downloadable books.

- I’m not prepared (or knowledgeable enough) to discuss changes in the world of circulating pseudobooks—but some of the models now allow long enough circulation terms that they could correctly be called circulating ebooks and audiobooks.
- Once you convert an ebook into a printed book, it’s no longer an ebook. Period. There are now standalone instabook systems but very few installations. The reversion clause issue has not been worked out, at least not on a standard basis.
- In the past, *numbers* of ebooks sold usually included a lot of “not quite a book” items: Short stories, novelettes. MightyWords disappeared in late 2001 or early 2002. It never realized its possible promise, and in essence faded away.
- The eVanity and self-publishing field has exploded, with several companies operating as publish-on-demand vanity presses and at least one or two operating as straightforward service operations. I’ve written about Lulu.com elsewhere; they’ve made several hundred thousand books available and are ready to offer ebook (PDF), print book or both. For ebook editions, Lulu can even be used for free distribution.
- I believe most CD-based ebooks have faded away, and I’m pretty sure nobody’s trying to make a business out of distributing text on diskettes. (Does your current PC have a diskette drive? Mine doesn’t.) Some prophets of the future of books expect all books to become “extended” in some manner—but so far, the market hasn’t done much with the idea.
- Circulating ebooks (“pseudo” and otherwise) and etexts (e.g. reference works), a category I didn’t include in 2000, have probably had more impact on libraries than any of the other models. They’re clearly not converging into a single model, and relatively few sensible observers even *suggest* that ebooks will replace all (or most) print books. They’re not converging into a single model, and that’s no surprise.

Other Thoughts on Ebooks

Why include a seven-year-old article? Because “ebook” continues to be a muddled name for a com-

plex set of possibilities. I’ll end this PERSPECTIVE with notes on a few other ebook-related items that have appeared since April 2007—leaving out a lot of interesting discussions because this is already too long and the discussions seem dated or simplistic.

The doomed e-book

Mary Beth Sancomb-Moran posted this on April 27, 2007 at *Impromptu librarian* (impromptu.wordpress.com), referring to Mike Elgan’s *Computerworld* article “Why ebooks are bound to fail.” Elgan lists some of the ebook readers available in April 2007, notes that there will be niche markets for ebooks and notes the belief of ebook makers and “millions of gadget fans, technology pundits, bookworms and journalists” that “e-books will soon become a popular alternative to real, paper books for reading novels, nonfiction bestsellers and kiss-and-tell political memoirs”—that “we’ll all start buying these things, and downloading our books.” Elgan’s conclusion:

Not gonna happen.

Reasons? They’re expensive—the readers cost hundreds of dollars and “books tend not to be highly discounted in electronic form.” (Score one for Kindle on the second point.)

Another huge barrier to the growth of the e-book market is that everyone already has alternatives. You can read written content on your PC—in fact, you’re doing it right now—on tablet PCs, laptops, cell phones and PDAs.

Note that this is *not* a barrier to growth of the ebook market—only to the sale of dedicated ebook readers. In any case, Elgan regards those as “minor” issues. More excerpts:

There is one unavoidable and fatal fact that will kill the nascent e-book market in its cradle: People love paper books...

So many predictions about the future have failed because futurists tend to overemphasize the possible over the desirable. They give too much weight to technology and not enough to human nature...

Do people want to ‘curl up’ with a battery-operated plastic screen?

The obvious answer is no.

I’ll take exception here: “People” is almost always too broad a category. Some book readers love paper books; some would be happy enough to have alternatives. Are the “millions” in that category? If so, it’s hard to understand why ebook *devices* never seem to sell enough to state sales figures—but maybe Kindle’s different. Still, wholesale negatives are as unlikely as wholesale positives. I would have to respond, “Yes, some people might be delighted to curl up with a Kindle or Sony Reader...depending on who they are and the circumstances.”

As the basis for arguing that dedicated ebook readers have no real potential to sweep away print books, I think Elgan's right. As the basis for dismissing the category entirely, not so much.

Sancomb-Moran is a book lover. "We have books in almost every room of the house... I buy books like some women buy shoes." She quotes Elgan's comment on technology and human nature, adding the codicil "Just because you *can* doesn't mean you *should*." She agrees with Mike Elgan that "e-books will never even come close to replacing paper books." So do I. But that doesn't inherently mean they'll fail or that "doomed" is the right prediction.

The permanence of paper

T. Scott Plutchak (tscott.typepad.com) posted this on his eponymous blog on August 27, 2007, referring back to a 20,000-word commentary by William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry: Why Paper is Eternal*. Without going back to that long paper (I tried, but...), here's a little of what Plutchak says:

Media are more than just containers—the experience of reading a paper newspaper and a digital newspaper with the same content are qualitatively different.

Much of the discussion about print books vs. e-books ignores that fact. There is an assumption that the advantages of digital are such that, once the technology gets just a little better, people won't want to bother with print books anymore. But Powers reminds us that print has its own advantages and that, in some cases, those advantages are, in fact, superior. He talks about "supersession"—what Paul Duguid refers to as "the idea that each new technological type vanquishes or subsumes its predecessors." But, in fact, this very rarely actually happens. New technologies create new opportunities; but the older technologies don't disappear, they find different niches.

It's never a case of either/or. We're still in the very beginning stages of understanding what can be done with digital media. With e-books, we're still at the stage that Gutenberg was when he tried to make a printed Bible adhere as closely as possible to a manuscript Bible. Eventually, we will learn to discard those features that paper will always do better and focus on the features that are unique to digital...

As we get better at understanding what digital media can do, we'll create amazing things. And for many of the purposes that we now use print, we'll find those media to be superior. But we'll always continue to use paper, because for certain purposes, it will always be the best thing.

"It's never a case of either/or." With a slight change to "rarely," I'll just add that I've been trying to make that point for at least 15 years and probably longer. I think most people get that now—but it's in the DNA of some pundits and journalists to view things as ei-

ther/or, no matter how artificial and improbable that view may be.

Keep books out of nostalgia? Not me.

John Miedema's *Slow reading* post of November 1, 2007 (johnmiedema.ca) begins as a response to a commentary by Jeff Scott (not discussed here) that seems to suggest people prefer print books to ebooks for nostalgic reasons. Miedema doesn't buy that. Some of his points on what he thinks is happening with ebooks and print books:

Is it just a matter of time before better e-Books come along? Probably. Books certainly have superior physical reading qualities. One of the common complaints about e-Books is eyestrain. Personally, I stare at a computer screen all day for work and school, and have no problem with eyestrain. I still prefer books for reading... There is a lot of exciting technology happening with e-Books. One that particularly fascinates me is electronic paper. This technology promises to make computers more like books, instead of the reverse. Brilliant...

Why do books stick around? What is the hard edge? Books are nicer to read, it's true, but nicer quality things often get replaced by cheaper ones. Look at clothes and furniture... So will books stick around? Yes. Books have something that e-Books cannot have—the quality of fixity or unchangingness. Our life is accelerating more all the time. We will increasingly need moments when we can stop and think, turn off all the constantly updated screens, and really think through a challenging work of non-fiction, or relax with a well-written piece of fiction. It's a matter of balance...

Miedema *does* think young people are more likely to prefer ebooks (but that they'll eventually come to like print books for longer forms). I'm still waiting for signs of mass adoption of ebooks by "young people," but he could be right. Otherwise, no argument.

It's worth noting an earlier post, "The persistence of the book" (September 14, 2007). In that post, Miedema notes that it's been more than a generation since it was first predicted that ebooks would replace print books. "The prediction was in error." Noting practical reasons why that was true, he also notes that he was "among those who bemoaned the passing of the books as a regrettable but inevitable event, if not in my generation, then sometime soon. I was wrong." Miedema now asserts (as do I) that "books and libraries will persist" and suggests one existential basis for that persistence: "We are physical beings and require a physical relationship with our information." Not always, to be sure—and some print books have already (for the most part) been replaced with digital resources.

There is no separate digital domain that is taking over; there is instead a continuum of information modes, both

digital and traditional, meeting different needs... The change we are witnessing is books fitting into a much larger spectrum of information resources. Books used to be the only source, now they are just the final and best source. I for one am quite happy with this new arrangement.

To my mind, the primary role of books as “the final and best source” is for narrative resources rather than information resources. Otherwise, no argument.

30 [mostly spurious] benefits of ebooks

Let's close with a January 28, 2008 laundry list from *Epublishers weekly* (epublishersweekly.blogspot.com/) with that title minus the bracketed words, and Mark Lindner's commentary on February 9, 2008 at *Off the Mark* (marklindner.info/blog/), with that full title (minus the brackets themselves).

The list is by Michael Pastore, and it's odd right from the start:

1. Ebooks promote reading. People are spending more time more time in front of screens and less time in front of printed books.

As Lindner says, “Uh, how does this follow?” First, “less time” is simply not proven (Cory Doctorow's aphorism does not constitute empirical evidence); second, as Lindner says, time spent in front of screens may be looking at photos or videos—or whatever. And most on-screen reading isn't book-form reading.

I won't go through the whole list. I see one asserted advantage listed three times with slightly varied descriptions (the claim that ebooks can broaden publishing—which both ignores the profusion of small presses and the fact that print-on-demand does just as much to broaden publishing, maybe more). There's the claim that faster production means ebooks “allow readers to read books about current issues and events”—but it takes *much* longer to *write* a coherent book than it does to print it. “Ebooks can be printable,” at which point they're no longer ebooks.

Then there are some that Lindner does comment on (skipping others):

3. Ebooks preserve books. ... Ebooks are ageless: they do not burn, mildew, crumble, rot, or fall apart. Ebooks ensure that literature will endure.

[Lindner] *Ha ha ha ha ha*. This is one of the funniest, utterly stupid comments I have ever heard. Digital preservation issues anymore? Format migration?

7. Ebooks are portable...

[Lindner] So those books I carry with me pretty much everywhere are not portable? Certainly ebooks are more portable in quantity is the point but make it more clearly then!

14. Ebooks are free. The magnificent work of Project Gutenberg, and other online public libraries, allow readers to read the classics at no cost.

[Lindner] “Right!” said with a proper Bill Cosby accent, ‘cause my public library charges me \$5 just to walk in the door. *Not!*

27. Ebooks defeat attempts at censorship [followed by a list of “banned” books]. Ebooks guarantee that readers maintain their right to read.

[Lindner] I bet I can find every one of those at both my public and academic library. And censorship certainly exists on the internet.

Just for interest, I checked the eleven banned books at Worldcat.org. As far as I can tell, the original list misspelled one title (*Ars Amatoria* by Ovid is held by several hundred libraries; I can find no listings for *Ars Amorata* or evidence that Ovid wrote such a work). Otherwise, with a couple of exceptions held by dozens or hundreds of libraries, the books on the list are held by *thousands* of American libraries.

Is the list all bad? No—but, as Lindner notes, “the ones I did highlight seem egregiously spurious to me.” Lindner isn't against ebooks. He is opposed to spurious marketing.

In Conclusion

Let's assume Amazon decides to scrap DRM, adopt whatever open ebook standard exists, open its platform up for everyone to use, and fix the current problems. Let's say Kindle2 is “the perfect ebook reader.”

Since I haven't used a Kindle, I'm willing to stipulate that it might be “ideal enough” for me. If I had occasion to use it, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if I became immersed in the text of good books as readily as I do with a print book. (Frankly, I'd be surprised if I didn't.) Much as I love elegant typography, I rarely worry about its lack in mass-market paperbacks if the content makes up for it. I suspect I'd get along just fine with whatever Kindle offered.

Let's assume further that almost everyone would feel the same way about Kindle2—and that it would cost, say, \$250 (free with a two-year commitment to buy at least two books a month—let's use the cell-phone pricing model!).

Would that increase the market for ebooks (defined in this case as “booklength etexts sold for individual or library use”)? Yes, I think it would.

If textbook makers played along, Kindle2 or SonyReader2 could be an *enormous* boon to schoolchildren and, with saner pricing, a significant boon to college students—and you'd have a multi-billion dollar market, probably at least 10 and possibly 100 times the size of the current ebook market (depending on your definition of that market). This would, by and large, be A Very Good Thing.

There would be other markets, to be sure, including some of those where ebooks already play a role.

Would Kindle2/SonyReader2 and the increased availability of mechanisms to make ebooks work on existing devices (PDAs, smart phones, etc.) mean the end of print books? No, I don't believe it would. Would it mean the end of physical libraries? That's even less likely.

There's room for both. For most of us—who don't travel a lot, who usually read one book at a time, *especially* who get most of our books from libraries—ebooks continue to be a solution in search of a problem. Technological perfection isn't the issue. Preference is.

It's rarely either/or. It's usually and. Print books aren't going away. The questions, in this case, are whether Kindle will be a major success and whether ebooks in general will become a mass market, let's say reaching a retail presence of 10% of print books. Those questions are tougher to answer.

Making it Work Perspective **TechNos and TechMusts**

What do Rochelle Hartman, Jenna Freedman, Laura Crossett, Emily Clasper, Abigail Goben, Steve Lawson, Dorothea Salo, Meredith Farkas, Constance Wiebrands, Jessamyn West, "sylvie" and Walt Crawford all have in common?

We all write blogs in English. We're all in the "library field," more or less.

I doubt anyone would say we're all Luddites, or technophobes, or anti-2.0, or anything of the sort. I'm sure some might use some of those labels for some (well, one) of us—but they'd be wrong.

I gave it away in the title, of course: We've all done posts admitting to "techNos" or "techNots" or, in Rochelle Hartman's original brilliant formulation, that we are in some ways "Technofaux." During February 2008 we wrote posts 'fessing up to areas of contemporary technology that we either don't get, don't want or just don't care about.

Here's the list of blogs and dates—the blogs are all easy to find. *Tinfoil+raccoon*, 2/10/08 and 2/13/08; *lower east side librarian*, 2/11/08; *lis.dom*, 2/15/08; *Library Revolution*, 2/15/08; *Hedgehog librarian*, 2/16/08; *See also...*, 2/17/08; *Caveat lector*, 2/18/08; *Information wants to be free*, 2/18/08; *Ruminations*, 2/21/08; *librarian.net*, 2/22/08; *rambleonsylvie*, 2/22/08; *Walt at random*, 2/23/08. Instead of taking excerpts from one post at a time, I'm going to mix things up—adding the blog

initials when it's commentary, providing bullet points for specific techNos offered by one or more of the bloggers, sometimes paraphrased. (There were lots more TechNos in comments, but I'll leave those out.)

TechNos

- I'm not a gamer (several).
- I'm not interested in games for my academic library
- I never did learn to program my VCR (2+).
- I refuse to record stuff from TV.
- The clock in my car—can't set the time (2+).
- I can't handle voice mail. And don't even try me with call waiting.
- I've never taken to (others: done any) online voice chat.
- Podcasting. (1) I don't go out of my way to listen... (2) I am categorically uninterested in creating or listening to them. (3) I've had a lot to do with them at work, but am not interested in creating personal ones...and don't seem to listen to many. (4) I have created more podcasts than I have listened to.
- I don't have an iPod or mp3 player (several). (Variant: "I have a four year old MP3 player that I've used probably six times.")
- I do not own a computer (at home).
- I don't use my cell phone as anything but a phone.
- Several: Cell phones for emergency use only, maybe on a prepaid basis.
- Twitter is not something I want to get involved in.
- I've never Skyped (several).
- I don't txt. (Variant: "These days I seem to use my phone for text... I don't use my phone for much else.")
- My stereo speakers are one on top of the other.
- Tried Twitter. Didn't like it.
- No personal interest in ebook readers (2+)
- Programming skills. I have none, beyond BASIC...
- I don't know how to use Photoshop or the GIMP.
- I don't do Second Life (several)
- Video... I now have a working camera...and I still haven't bothered to investigate (me too).
- As a Mac person, I'm ignorant about computer hardware (2).
- Macs. I've never really used a Mac and I don't get the Apple cult at all. (Variant: When I needed to use one, I found the Mac wholly unintuitive.)
- I can read SQL but I'm lousy at writing it raw.
- I can cut and paste...but have yet to sit down and really understand PHP or Javascript.

- I still own and am very happy with a sturdy point-and-click (film?) camera. (Variant: The only camera in the house is an excellent compact 35mm. film camera...for now.)
- The entire mobile revolution has plain old passed me by...no Blackberry, iPhone, cell phone, Palm...

Commentary

If you can present me with a tool that is truly useful to me or to my patrons, I'll have a go at it. I'm not tech-averse, and I can be sporting and adventurous when presented with something beyond my immediate grasp. I've gapped my own spark plugs, and have even looked under the hood of a PC to install memory. So, what tech tools do I use and value? Twitter, Meebo, Gmail suite, Bloglines, Typepad. If someone gave me a Kindle or a Sony Reader, I'd be most grateful. What I love about all these apps is that they are all about readin' and writin'. [T+R]

What about you? Are you perceived as a techie or a "computer person" by your friends, but have areas of tech brown-out or ennui? C'mon! Share your ignorance and techrankiness with the rest of us. Who are we to mock? I just made my first chart, ever, in Excel only yesterday. In fact, it may have been my first ever use of Excel for a real project... I'm not looking to hear from those with active loathing of all things tech, or from any evangelizing whiz kids (unless you are an evangelizing whiz kid with a secret shame you need to get off your chest). Most of us fall somewhere between Lud and Geek. This confessional assignment is for you. [T+R]

So why are we interested in compiling such lists? It's fun to "come clean," to demonstrate to others and ourselves that everyone has blind spots and tin ears for some technology. But what does it matter if we can't program a VCR or play a videogame? I think this memelet says something interesting about library bloggers. We are prone to conflate various interests, tendencies, and proficiencies into one big "techie" category. But we are really talking about at least two different things... [Being able to create and maintain interesting and useful technology; being down with what we think our user population is doing; popularizing and surveying what users are doing.] [SA]

[From a comment on the post above:] I think it also comes from being a public service desk librarian, and being asked by our users about everyday technology that many of us don't use in our every days. I laughed at your comment about being able to "cut and paste" code "like everyone else." I wasn't even thinking about that side of tech when I posted because it is absolutely not part of my job. I think the range of responses we're seeing demonstrates just how broadly we characterize "technology." I think it's valid to admit clumsiness with SD cards and cell phones because many of us regularly get questions at the ref (and circ!) about tools and applications. Libraries are starting gadget garages to get staff up to speed on phones, mp3 players, etc. The bigger

question is: how far do we go to support technology? [Rochelle Hartman]

I'm just pragmatic about the tech I buy. Every time I buy a gadget I don't need, I end up not using it. So I've learned to wait until I really *need* something to get it. Similarly, just because people are into gadgets doesn't mean they're tech-savvy... What does tech-savvy really mean? Is it all about being able to code or is it also about being able to see the value of the tools in different settings and how to implement them successfully? I don't really know much PHP, but I can mess around with the PHP code in a MediaWiki skin until I get it the way I want it. Laura Crosset may not know how to use Photoshop, but she created a damn fine website for her library using blog software... It makes me think there are many different kinds of tech-savvy. There are people who can build a computer or take apart a gadget and put it together again (not me). There are people who can code amazing web applications (not me). There are people who can't do much more than design a web page, but understand how to implement technologies in ways that make it look like they "slaved over a hot stove all day." I may not be all that into gadgets, but if I ever saw the value of using them or supporting them in my library, I'd be leading the charge. I've never actually been that into IM (which is why you won't see me on AIM that often) but I'm the one who pushed for IM reference in my library. I tend to focus on the things that I think will provide the most practical benefit to me or to my patrons, which is why I don't bother doing much with podcasting or making videos (other than screencasts). At other libraries, those may be key technologies for serving patrons... Anything I don't know, I feel like I can learn if I need to. I think that's what being tech-savvy is really about. It's not about owning a certain number of gadgets or having a certain number of programming languages under your belt; it's the facility for learning new technologies. [IWTBF]

I don't feel the need to comment directly on these commentaries. They all make good points—and they're all part of a multiway conversation among friends and acquaintances, with no "you must," no "how could you not," no admonishments. Meredith Farkas said what I believe everyone involved in the discussion feels: "**Anything I don't know, I feel like I can learn if I need to.**" *Need to* is the operative word.

My own post was effectively the starting point for this article. Portions of that post follow—not quoted, because they're my own words.

What makes this [conversation] comment-worthy is not that some bloggers, all of them techies or geeks at least to some extent, own up to being "low-tech" in some areas. As far as I can tell, everyone involved in the discussion **has a life**—and attempts to strike some balance between tech-oriented stuff and other stuff. Different people have different interests and needs.

What I find interesting is the contrast with an earlier set of discussions rolling around a few liblogs: The lists of skills that every library person must have, the universal tech competencies. [See **TechMust** below]... If our strengths and weaknesses in general technology areas can be complementary, why can't—*why shouldn't?*—the strengths, weaknesses, skills of staff members within a library be complementary?

There's something else that's interesting about this discussion, and it's something that I'm finding more of as time goes on (or maybe I'm ignoring the gaps). Civility—and, with very few exceptions, the lack of any need to tell people how to “get over” what they didn't care about or understand. The whole discussion has been charming and positive—and, I think, useful.

It's not always that simple

Mark Lindner offered another perspective in a February 24, 2008 comment on my post. He'd thought about participating in the discussion—and concluded that it maybe wasn't a good idea for people still in library school, hunting for a job, or early in their careers. What if a person lists something that some library regards as critical? Even though they could certainly *learn* the skill, will the library chuck the job application because “I remember in a blog where they admitted to not knowing X”?

I can't argue with the caution and think Lindner's right in saying it means the discussion unintentionally excludes some voices. Maybe it's a discussion that LIS students need to be having face-to-face, where their admissions won't come back to haunt them.

My response (in part): I certainly **would not** encourage a new librarian to confess lacking a set of skills, particularly since you're supposed to be (and most librarians are) experts at finding out things they don't already know. For that matter, I'm not encouraging **anybody** to ‘fess up. Heck, there have been times when I felt I was “faking it” with a programming-related skill...only to discover that I was in better shape than most others.

Rochelle Hartman, who started the whole thing, did me the honor of coming back to my post and commenting, in part:

I like that Walt is putting my not-meme up against the tech competencies that many of us are seeing, and I love his suggestion that maybe we all don't have to do/be it all. I think maybe that's where I was coming from when I posted mine, although I couldn't have articulated it as such then. I haven't seen **any** of those competency lists that I could score 100% on. There should be some basic competencies that we could all agree on—and that no one should be applying for a job without them. But do I

really need to know how to embed a video or set up a simple network?

There's also a pretty big difference between expectations at different types of libraries. My hunch is that academic libraries don't get students coming in with their cell phones asking how to upload a photo to MySpace, but many of us at pub lib reference desks get that sort of question daily. But is that our job? Am I \$30K in debt to be a very clever, over-educated tech support person? Like the Maytag repairman, I get all kinds of excited when a juicy ref question comes across the desk... I think that librarians used to have a very clear idea of what their institutions' missions were, and what was expected of them as professionals. None of that is very clear at all right now, and our current staffing models, skill sets and physical spaces highlight this murkiness.

Dave Tyckoson added a thoughtful comment on making choices, ending with this paragraph:

Choosing to integrate—or not—any technology is neither good nor bad—it's just a choice. Bringing these things into our personal lives is up to each one of us and should not be looked up or down upon by others. Integrating technology into our professional lives depends on the environment and people with which we work. If in a library or other institution that serves a public, it also depends on the level of skills among our community. Rarely is there a one-size-fits-all answer, despite how often we seem to be told about them.

I can't think of a better way to end this discussion than with that last sentence: “Rarely is there a one-size-fits-all answer, despite how often we seem to be told about them.”

TechMusts

With one minor exception, the reaction to the TechNo lists was acceptance of the fact that we don't all need to have the same skills and preferences when it comes to contemporary technology. I'll assert that everyone in the list that began this article, and pretty much everyone who writes or reads liblogs, knows how to find out about technologies when they need to.

Someone who has one speaker sitting on top of the other one probably isn't well equipped to help a library patron understand stereo separation and the basics of speaker placement. And why should they be?

Here's a reason—one I consider absurd on the face of it: Libraries circulate music CDs. To get the most from a music CD, a patron must be able to set up their stereo system properly. Therefore, to make it possible for a patron to use the library's resources effectively, frontline librarians should be experienced in the significance of stereo separation and at least the basics of speaker placement. Heck, maybe a *real* frontline librarian should be able to identify and evaluate

the differences between port-loaded, acoustic reflex, and planar speakers. And since most movie DVDs have 5.1-channel surround sound, a *good* frontline librarian should be able to tell a patron how to set up a surround sound system.

Nonsense, right?

And yet, and yet...haven't we seen lists of the basic "technology skills" that every librarian (or at least every frontline librarian) must have for computing and the internet?

Consider one relatively short list, offered by Emily Clasper as "minimum competencies" for someone to be "truly qualified to **serve as a professional librarian**" (emphasis mine) (*Library revolution*, July 5, 2007, libraryrevolution.com)

- Create a desktop shortcut
- Obtain an IP address
- Create and rename folders
- Save and retrieve saved documents
- Send an email attachment
- Cut, Copy, and Paste text
- Use spell checking
- Create basic documents with a word processor
- Create basic documents with a spreadsheet program
- Working knowledge of Web browser functions
- Connect to a wireless network
- Make an online purchase
- Familiarity with the library's catalog and its features

"Obtain an IP address"? Maybe (although I'm really not sure what that means—do a DNS lookup? Is that necessary for *every* librarian?). "Make an online purchase"? *Why?* What *library-related* function is short-changed if a cataloger or reference librarian hasn't purchased anything online?

One commenter was frustrated that a colleague didn't know how to scan and save a picture, that another didn't know how to post something on a blog. Are these *really* mandatory skills for every librarian? (Scanning a picture is *very* device-dependent. I'm not aware of any universal scanning technologies in Windows, at least. Blog posting depends heavily on the blog software—and we *don't* all have to have blogs.)

Another commenter thought every professional librarian should "be able to use a site like Microsoft TechNet or Apple Support to answer their own questions." (Another commenter questioned the need for library reference staff to take the place of campus technology center help desks for students unable to save documents.)

When the WebJunction list (below) was noted, Clasper called it "really, really great" since "helping patrons with computer issues is an important part of customer service in libraries these days." Then, I would ask, since libraries go to so much expense to provide video and sound resources, how can librarians call themselves professionals if they can't troubleshoot surround-sound systems and DVD players?

Technology competencies for public access computing

This WebJunction document, posted April 12, 2007 (<http://webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=15575>), runs 20 pages. The first part, Patron Assistance, "addresses skills that front-line library staff need in order to provide direct assistance to patrons on the public computers." That's from the introduction—which earlier talks about "a host of new skills and knowledge...required as an integral part of working in a library." This doesn't seem to be a set of skills that *someone* must possess; at the very least, the Patron Assistance set would appear to apply to every library worker who spends any time in public services.

I won't attempt to summarize the full list. The Patron Access section includes nearly 150 specific skills grouped into various competencies. It's an interesting list—Windows-centric, to be sure. Is the list unrealistic? I'm not sure. I know I'd flunk the administrative section. I'm a little suspicious of a requirement to "Understand the difference between operating system software and application software"—Is Internet Explorer an application or part of Windows, for example? Windows Media Player? Windows Media Center (in Vista)? (Hmm. Is the user interface for a Linux distro application software or operating system software? What about Windows 98?) I'm a little surprised to see "Zip disk" as one of the removable storage devices that a librarian should be able to help with in 2007—and I'm not entirely convinced that every frontline librarian needs to "Know how to burn a music CD," particularly since that's *not* part of the OS, at least not pre-Vista. (Quick: Tell me how to burn a music CD on a Windows XP system as shipped. As far as I know, *it's not possible* without adding applications software.)

Oh, and "Know what is meant by 'Web 2.0' and 'Library 2.0'" is *really* tricky as a demonstrable piece of knowledge, since many of us will argue that there is no agreed meaning for the second term.

Skills for the 21st century librarian

Meredith Farkas provided an early "TechMust" list in this July 17, 2006 post at *Information wants to be free* (Meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/). But Farkas' list

does *not* provide specific tech skills; it looks at basic competencies. Briefly:

- Ability to embrace change.
- Comfort in the online medium. (Using search engines well, etc.)
- Ability to troubleshoot new technologies. (Specifically those *in this particular library* for public use.)
- Ability to easily learn new technologies.
- Ability to keep up with new ideas in technology and librarianship (enthusiasm for learning).

Yes, public service librarians should be able to do basic troubleshooting for the public service devices. The last requirement is a little tricky, depending on your definition of “keeping up,” but I can’t argue with the parenthetical closing. Any white-collar job these days almost requires ongoing enthusiasm for learning, and that’s certainly true for anything that calls itself a profession.

There’s a short set of higher-level competencies as well, but I don’t see Farkas saying “you’re not a professional librarian if you don’t have these all down cold.” Even that set of competencies isn’t rife with specific tech skills:

- Project management skills.
- Ability to question and evaluate library services.
- Ability to evaluate the needs of all stakeholders.
- Vision to translate traditional library services into the online medium.
- Critical of technologies and ability to compare technologies.
- Ability to sell ideas/library services.

I think there are two competencies in that set that are relatively rare among even the best librarians, but I don’t think I’ll mention which two, leaving that exercise to the reader.

Basic competencies of a 2.0 librarian

Going back to Emily Clasper’s July 2007 list, David Lee King posted a list of competencies a “2.0 librarian” should have, while agreeing that her list is “all very basic skills.” His July 5, 2007 post (www.davidleeking.com) includes this list:

- Write and post to a blog
- Add photos and videos to a blog post
- Embed a widget into blogs and social networking accounts (like MySpace)
- Social network knowledge - basic understanding of Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc
- Shoot, upload and edit photos
- Shoot, upload and edit short videos
- Record, edit and upload a podcast
- Use IM in different forms

- Use and explain RSS and RSS readers to others
- Send and read SMS text messages
- Edit an avatar’s appearance
- Basic console gaming skills (multiple formats preferred)

And adds these “bonus skills...still essential in this new era”:

- Understand how everything above can cohesively fit together
- Understand how everything above complements a physical, traditional library
- The ability to learn the basics of a new digital service or tool within 15 minutes of fiddling around with it
- And most importantly—the ability to tell the library’s story, through various media - writing, photography, audio, and video.

The list begs a question: What is a “2.0 librarian” and is it mandatory for every librarian (or every public service librarian) to be, or become, a 2.0 librarian? If the answer to the latter question is “Yes,” then the list is *extremely* ambitious. Do we *really* all need to be able to add videos to blogs, to embed widgets, to shoot and edit our own videos, to record and upload podcasts? Do we *really* all need to be able to “edit an avatar’s appearance”? Do we all need to be gamers? Is it *at all* reasonable to assume *every* new digital service or tool can be learned “within 15 minutes of fiddling around with it”?

I would answer “No” to all of those questions for most library staff. I’m not sure there’s any reason every *library* needs to edit avatars or embed widgets or even *have* a blog, much less every librarian. I will pretty much guarantee that many libraries, particularly most smaller libraries, don’t need librarians with “basic console gaming skills

It’s an extreme list unless the purpose is to carve out a special niche of SuperTechLibrarian and call that “2.0 librarian.” And yet, *not one comment* demurred—while several added *new* competencies (e.g., understanding XML and CSS).

So he added more to the list two days later:

- Create, edit, and upload screencasts
- Ability to do basic HTML editing--an understanding of (X)HTML and CSS...
- Know how to pick up a new device (mp3 player, mobile phone, etc) and figure out how to use it

In that second post, King suggests that he doesn’t expect all librarians to be “2.0 librarians,” so maybe he is suggesting a special class—in which case he’s defining a set of skills for a specific kind of job. My prob-

lem there is that it goes against so many other people who speak of the need for all librarians to think in 2.0 terms—by which they do *not* typically mean having all of the skills in King's lists.

A technology pledge

Jeff Scott, who directs a “rural” Arizona library serving 38,000 people, commented on the Clasper and King posts (and posts not noted here)—and the comments on the posts (*Gather no dust*, July 6, 2007, gathernodust.blogspot.com):

What I didn't like about the discussion was the “beat you over the head approach” to anyone who is not technology savvy... We need to be patient with the non-techie people so that they will learn. Furthermore, library staff will not remember any training unless they are using it in their day-to-day jobs. They can be trained and require a competency, but if it is not something that comes up regularly, that information will not be retained. We need to be more patient and clearer in our training and how we provide assistance. Otherwise, many technology experts can look like some IT jerk who thinks everyone is stupid unless they know what they know. What is basic to someone that is familiar with technology is definitely not basic to everyone.

The pledge?

“I pledge that I will help those who do not possess the knowledge of our changing world, and help them navigate it in the way that they are comfortable with. I pledge to remember times, in which, I did not know how to do something, yet someone took the time to teach me. I understand that everyone is different and each person's learning style requires something different of me. It is my responsibility to teach them and if a student does not learn that I take responsibility for that.”

There's more to the post—the results of a staff survey Scott did and the six-month plan for training based on that survey. Scott focuses on getting the staff the knowledge they *needed*—unless they wanted more. “I am introducing new concepts that are more advanced, but only to those who have an interest in the exploration. Staff cannot be forced if it is not necessary.” Is it **necessary** for every library staff member to be able to edit videos and avatars? Clearly not. Is it even something that will come up in day-to-day operations at a library serving 38,000 people? Quite probably not.

More recently, Scott commented on the TechNo conversation—and what he didn't do at his library:

[A]t the brink of implementing a library 2.0 training program, I pulled back. Mostly from an aversion by staff to new technology items. They felt that they were at their limit. We had implemented many technology pieces, from self-check, to computer reservation, and wireless internet. We trained them on how to use all of it. (AND they remembered it because they have to do it as

part of their jobs.) However, too much technology can result in just as much work as having no technology... If staff aren't prepared for the technology that currently exists in libraries, they won't be able to handle new stuff thrown at them. For that matter, neither will our users.

The “Tech-no” conversation was a good conversation because it demonstrated our shortfalls. Many librarians would view themselves in this way, even though their general competencies are still well above the average person. We need to remember that and we also need to capitalize on the feeling we get when we run into our own technology gaps. If we remember all the times where we were stuck on something because we fell into our gaps when helping a patron, we will make that person more comfortable and more able to learn something new.

Maybe Scott sums up the difference between the TechNo posts and the TechMust discussions:

On one hand, we are talking about our gaps in knowledge, and on the other, we are punishing each other for those gaps.

Is it OK for a librarian not to know how to program a VCR, but not OK for a librarian not to know how to edit a video? *How can that be?* Because, in the second case, it's *internet* video? I don't buy that.

The TechNo discussion has been refreshing because it's been honest and without recriminations. I have read nobody saying “How can you call yourself a librarian when you don't know how to use Photoshop?” I wonder why it's reasonable to tell people they're not professional librarians if they haven't made online purchases or don't know how to connect to wireless networks—and I wonder how it's helpful to restrict “2.0 librarians” to those who grok gaming consoles and edit videos.

Masthead

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