

# Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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## ©4: Locking Down Technology Never Enough

That's the rallying cry of copyright maximalists—Big Media and their ilk. No matter how much control they have, it's never enough. And any steps that provide any measure of balance are "loopholes" that must somehow be closed. How else to interpret Jared Bernstein's news piece in the July/August 2007 *EContent*, "A DMCA fix needed to eliminate online copyright loophole"?

What loophole? The safe harbor provision of the DMCA—the provision that ISPs and other websites aren't guilty of copyright infringement simply because infringing material is found on the site, as long as they take down the material as soon as they're notified. Bernstein writes this as a straight "technology development" story (which is also how at least one software company is trying to sell it): "content-filtering technology has evolved...which may in turn affect how the law is interpreted and enforced." Supposedly, one program automates "detection of illegal distribution of copyrighted material on the internet."

Bernstein says "the courts have begun to send a message to service providers: Now you have technology available to help avoid infringement, so you need to take a more proactive role in filtering copyrighted content." What U.S. court cases have negated the DMCA clause to that extent? None is cited. A copyright lawyer "explains" that lawsuits will keep cropping up and thinks "congress needs to reexamine the law," further saying that the issue is "whether the DMCA unduly burdens the content owners."

There it is: DMCA is unbalanced *against* copyright holders. One might ask whether software can truly detect copyright infringement without also identifying fair use materials as infringing—and there, I believe, the answer is most assuredly No. Already there are erroneous takedown requests. If there is

such a thing as fair use (which copyright maximalists would deny), then it is essentially *impossible* for a filter to be completely effective without taking down legitimate material. The tone of the article is clear (primarily quoting a lawyer): Congress should *force* ISPs to use content filtering whether it works or not.

If there are other "loopholes" in DMCA, you can be sure the maximalists are working on them. The analog hole? Under direct attack.

This piece reports on a series of skirmishes over a period of time. It's not exhaustive by any means. Just a few incidents as originally reported and, when feasible, the current status. These are skirmishes. The war—continuing attempts to lock down technology and make it clear that citizens have *no* rights in media use other than those explicitly granted by unsigned contract—continues, but not actively in Congress, at least not this year.

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## Loading DVDs onto iPods

Way back from November 16, 2006 comes this story, as reported at EFF's *Deep links* ([www.eff.org/deeplinks/](http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/)). Here's part of Fred von Lohmann's post:

The MPAA studios are at it again, snatching away our fair use rights, so they can sell them back to us for an "additional fee."

In a lawsuit filed in federal court in New York, Paramount Pictures v. Load 'N Go Video, the MPAA member companies have sued a small business for loading DVDs onto personal media players (e.g., iPod Video) on behalf of customers.

According to the suit, Load 'N Go sells both DVDs and iPods and loads the former onto the latter for customers who purchase both. The company then sends the iPod and the original DVDs to the customer. So the customer

has purchased every DVD, and Load 'N Go just saves them the trouble of ripping the DVD. The movie studios' suit claims that this is illegal, because ripping a DVD (i.e., decrypting it and making a copy) is illegal under the DMCA. The suit also claims that this constitutes copyright infringement.

Although this lawsuit happens to be aimed at Load 'N Go, the DMCA theory in the complaint makes it crystal clear that the MPAA believes it is just as illegal for you to do the same thing for yourself at home. Apparently, Hollywood believes that you should have to re-purchase all your DVD movies a second time if you want to watch them on your iPod...

What happened? The only report I could find says Load 'N Go “went out of business more or less immediately after the suit was filed”—which is what usually happens when DMCA is used as a hammer against a new small business. Score one for the studios.

## Kaleidescape

Kaleidescape produces media servers that store your DVDs and CDs on a hard disk (or array). Kaleidescape tried to do it right; the company became a CSS licensee. But the DVD Copy Control Association (DVD CCA) sued Kaleidescape, claiming that the server breached license conditions—unless the DVD itself was actually in the device whenever you played a movie. Kaleidescape countersued.

This time, the court found that the specifications at issue weren't actually part of the license agreement. Naturally, DVD CCA appealed—and claims that it doesn't want to put Kaleidescape out of business (although that's basically what would happen), it just wants to force compliance with an extremely restrictive requirement. (The same requirement would presumably mean that you could copy a DVD to an iPod if Apple had a CSS license—but you'd somehow have to have the DVD within the iPod when you're playing it, making the copy superfluous.)

The Kaleidescape is a *very* expensive product—and it only reads DVDs, it can't copy them. It's useless for a true pirate, and anyone who can afford a Kaleidescape seems unlikely to be borrowing DVDs and copying them to save a few bucks. (Currently, a Kaleidescape “1U” server sells for something like \$16,000—but that's a big reduction from the original \$32,000 for a Kaleidescape.)

As far as I can tell, DVD CCA's appeal is pending.

## Use Our Products—Or Else!

That's the remarkable tactic of two companies—BlueBeat (and its parent Media Rights Technologies) and SafeMedia corporation. In the first case, Media

Rights Technologies sent cease and desist letters to Apple, Microsoft, RealNetworks and Adobe—claiming that they're violating DMCA *because their products don't use* MRT's X1 SeCure Recording Control technology.

As reported in a May 11, 2007 *ZDNet* story, Jessica Litman called the letters “a play for publicity”:

“I'm no fan of the DMCA, but it doesn't impose liability simply because some product could be redesigned to implement a technological protection scheme but its makers decline to do so.”

An intellectual-property lawyer called the legal theory “out there.” Basically, MRT is claiming that its technology has been “proven effective” as a way to prevent capture of streamed music...and that companies *not* adopting its technology are, as a result, violating DMCA. The company also petitioned the Copyright Office to revoke webcasting licenses for most of the top webcasters (AOL, iTunes, MSN, Pandora, Rhapsody) using the same novel theory—and asked Congress to “hold Apple and Microsoft accountable for piracy.” Checking MRT's website, I see nothing later than July 2007 on any of these moves. I see no indication that the letters and petitions were ever followed up by lawsuits—which, of course, would cost real money.

Then there's SafeMedia and its Clouseau. For some reason, SafeMedia was sending me press releases for a while during 2007, touting the quality of its products for disrupting peer-to-peer distribution of copyright material. I don't believe SafeMedia actually threatened lawsuits, but it certainly made much of a claim that anyone with “contaminated P2P network programs” on their own computer was “committing copyright infringement.”

One problem with Clouseau (a network appliance), according to one review I saw, is that it basically shuts down *all* peer-to-peer traffic, including BitTorrent, thus eliminating most Linux and World of Warcraft-update downloads, for example—although that's not what SafeMedia has claimed at times. According to a June 22, 2007 post by Ed Felten at *Freedom to Tinker*, [www.freedom-to-tinker.com/](http://www.freedom-to-tinker.com/), one document claims Clouseau “detects and prohibits illegal P2P traffic while allowing the passage of legal P2P such as BitTorrent”—but a white paper used by SafeMedia's salespeople says BitTorrent is illegal (not generally true) and was consistently blocked.

The CEO claims Clouseau is “fully effective at forensically discriminating between legal and illegal P2P traffic with no false positives.” Felten doesn't believe that's possible. (I looked at SafeMedia's explanation of how Clouseau works; it relies heavily on “DNA markers” it claims to identify within P2P traffic.)

When Felten first wrote about SafeMedia, he concluded that the company was “a brilliant parody”—since it made claims (about breaking through all encryption, for example) that even intelligence agencies wouldn’t make. The company also called for Congressional funding to install Clouseau “on every Federally-supported computer network in the country”—but, of course, the company is real and still in business. It *appears* to make claims that appear to be impossible—but in a faith-based economy, what’s so special about that?

When I look at recent press releases, I basically see a claim that Clouseau bars all “infringing P2P networks”—and so long as SafeMedia argues that every P2P network has access to at least one infringing file, the appliance *can* carry out that claim, by simply blocking all P2P traffic, legal or not. Once again, it’s a sledgehammer approach—like assuming that all MP3 content that isn’t directly licensed is infringing, because some of it could be.

## Circumventing Effective Protection

Two related skirmishes, both from May 2007. One was a Very Big Deal at the time; the other, a low-key court decision in Finland.

The big deal was “09 f9”—the first two bytes of a sixteen-byte encryption key that unlocked the AACIS copy protection on most existing high-def discs (Blu-ray and HD DVD). Someone figured out the key; it appeared on a handful of websites. The AACIS Licensing Authority (AACIS LA) sent takedown letters to sites with the key, claiming it was a circumvention technology violating DMCA. Once enough people heard about this, *thousands* of people reposted the key. As Ed Felten said on May 1, 2007,

The key will inevitably remain available, and AACIS LA are just making themselves look silly by trying to suppress it. We’ve seen this script before. The key will show up on T-shirts and in song lyrics. It will be chalked on the sidewalk outside the AACIS LA office. And so on.

As Felten noted, AACIS LA’s strategy didn’t even make a lot of sense. The greatest deterrent to redistribution of high-def video is practicality. The files are just too damn big to redistribute. Comments on the first post were interesting—someone had already registered the key as a domain name, it was in fact on a t-shirt on May 1, and at least one site posted the takedown letter it received—which, to be sure, *included the key*.

Then Digg users got into the action, recommending pages containing the key. Digg chose to comply

with the takedown letter—and the users went nuts. As Felten says, they “launched a deluge of submissions to Digg, all mentioning or linking to the key.” For part of May 1, the entire front page of Digg consisted of links to the AACIS key—they were showing up faster than administrators could take them down. It didn’t take long before Digg capitulated. Its founder posted the key and offered an interesting message:

“[A]fter seeing hundreds of stories and reading thousands of comments, you’ve made it clear. You’d rather see Digg go down fighting than bow down to a bigger company. We hear you, and effective immediately we won’t delete stories or comments containing the code and will deal with whatever the consequences might be.

“If we lose, then what the hell, at least we died trying.”

Digg sided with its users—and may not have had much choice. Would AACIS LA actually sue them? Could its claim stand up in court?

Well, AACIS could do one thing, and did later in May 2007. To wit, they could change the key—which would make new discs unplayable on older players (unless the players are upgraded through software updates), but would theoretically limit the damage. So they changed the key—and almost immediately, a company updated its copy-protection-defeating software to include the new key.

Here’s the thing: DMCA says something about circumventing *effective* protection. Would any reasonable court accept that protection is effective if it can be circumvented so easily? (Could Sony have possibly won a lawsuit claiming DMCA violation if someone said “Psst. Turn off AutoRun before you insert a Sony audio CD in your PC”?) Highly unlikely.

Speaking of CSS, the Helsinki district court concluded that CSS protection “can no longer be held ‘effective’ as defined by law,” given that it’s been readily circumvented for so long—and, thus, that circumvention measures aren’t violations of the European version of DMCA. Unfortunately, DMCA itself defines “effective” differently; as a result, it’s possible that a U.S. court would (in the words of Ed Felten) protect “any DRM technology, no matter how lame.”

Since then? It’s hard to say.

## Don’t Rip That CD?

Here’s an odd question: Am I guilty of copyright infringement? I would say no, absolutely not—but if you believe some commentators and some RIAA documents, the RIAA would argue otherwise.

How so? I’ve ripped most of my CDs to my PC (in MP3 form)—twice, actually, at a higher bit rate the second time to get higher quality. I’ve made compila-

tion CD-Rs (expanded back to audio files) from the PC. And, more recently, I've written about 220 of those 320kbps MP3 tracks to a cute little Sandisk Sansa MP3 player.

I own all of the CDs. I haven't "flipped" them—I would regard doing so, while retaining the music, as some form of theft. I haven't even discarded the CDs. Ripping is done purely for my convenience in listening to songs in my preferred sequence or when I'm traveling and don't wish to haul along a CD player.

According to Ryan Singel's January 9, 2008 story at the *Wired* blog network ([blog.wired.com/27bstroke6/2008/01/riaa-believes-m.html](http://blog.wired.com/27bstroke6/2008/01/riaa-believes-m.html)), the RIAA may believe I'm a criminal. "The RIAA has repeatedly taken the position that ripping MP3s from CDs you own is illegal."

Really? Well, it's certainly true that, in an infringement trial in October 2007, Jennifer Pariser of Sony BMG said that making one copy of a track you've legally purchased is "a nice way of saying, 'steals just one copy'." The next day, RIAA's president said Pariser had misspoken.

It's also verifiably true that the RIAA wrote to the Copyright Office (opposing a DMCA exemption) arguing that space-shifting or format-shifting should *not* be considered noninfringing uses—and that creating a backup copy of a music CD was not a noninfringing use. The letter basically says that, if you can readily buy legitimate copies for each device, then you have no right to move music from one device to another.

On its own website, the RIAA concedes that you can copy music onto cassettes (they're analog) and onto Audio CD-Rs (which include royalty fees).

Beyond that, there's no legal "right" to copy the copyrighted music on a CD onto a CD-R. However, burning a copy of CD onto a CD-R, or transferring a copy onto your computer hard drive or your portable music player, won't usually raise concerns so long as:

- \* The copy is made from an authorized original CD that you legitimately own
- \* The copy is just for your personal use. It's not a personal use—in fact, it's illegal—to give away the copy or lend it to others for copying.

This is interesting language. It denies fair-use rights for shifting devices ("there's no legal 'right'") but says the RIAA **probably** won't sue you ("won't usually raise concerns"). The first bullet also seems to say that you're in trouble if you do *two* stages of copying—that is, ripping to MP3 on your computer, then to your portable player. The player copy is not "made from an authorized original CD."

In more than one case, RIAA's lawyers have used "unauthorized copies" to mean the MP3 versions on a

PC of CDs *the defendant owned*. I find it hard to argue with Singel's wording here: "For clear propaganda reasons, the music industry won't publicly say it considers ripping MP3s to be copyright infringement."

Is this interpretation a reach? If so, it's only because RIAA keeps muddying the water. I'll close this skirmish and essay by noting a January 7, 2008 entry on *The Patry copyright blog* by William Patry, currently senior copyright counsel for Google: "What RIAA has said about home taping" ([williampatry.blogspot.com/2008/01/what-riaa-has-said-about-home-taping.html](http://williampatry.blogspot.com/2008/01/what-riaa-has-said-about-home-taping.html)).

Patry goes back to home taping issues—a case where RIAA *clearly* said that RIAA had never sued anybody for home taping, but that they would prevail under existing law if they did so. In other words, RIAA didn't feel that home taping was fair use. The Audio Home Recording Act clarified this—at least in the House report, although not in the statute itself: "In the case of home taping, the exemption protects all noncommercial copying by consumers of digital and analog recordings."

Patry cites the same RIAA language quoted above (and more) and has some similar concerns:

The other part of the passage—"won't usually raise concerns" is puzzling because the passage assumes an individual has made a copy from an authorized CD that the individual owns, and he or she has made the copy for personal use. Why "usually" then? When would that specific use not be fair use? It is not sufficient to say there might be different facts that could lead to different results because the hypo has its own facts.

Patry quotes from another site that's full of obfuscation, offering nothing that can clarify whether it's legit to rip your own CD. He's trying to avoid distorting RIAA's statements—but, he says, of the material he found and cited,

[I]t must also be stated that RIAA has said precious little...to give simple, straightforward answers; the answers are hedged or qualified, and it appears the RIAA doesn't want to ever concede that personal use is lawful—as compared to "usually won't raise concerns." What does that mean? If I ask a cop whether I can drive 35 miles per hour on a particular road with no speed sign, is it sufficient for him to say, "well that usually won't raise concerns"?

In 1987, the answer was clear: There is no personal use exemption or fair use immunity for home taping (at least prior to AHRA). Patry concludes (in part):

It may be that these very clear sentiments do not reflect RIAA's current thinking, but one wouldn't be able to tell from the current material. So here's a proposed solution: let's give honest people what they want, clear guidance; instead of wasting Congress's time on gluttonous issues like getting even greater statutory damage awards, why

not spend that time drafting a personal use exemption—not fair use guidelines, but a real exemption. One that will exempt all home copying and use by individuals off of lawfully purchased copies, including space and format shifting, for noncommercial purposes. Such a law would earn copyright owners (and Congress) tremendous public applause, while those who are honest could forget about copyright law, finally. Those who are engaged in the truly problematic activities, like massive unauthorized distribution of works would be isolated, legally and in the public's eyes. What I think is unacceptable is the status quo, one that deliberately keeps things vague and that lumps honest people who want to engage in home, personal, noncommercial uses in with those who deserve to be called pirates. If copyright owners wanted to change they status quo, they could, so why are they not? Drafting difficulties is not an answer: As copyright counsel to the House, I drafted, along with copyright owners, numerous far more complicated provisions. Nor is there any question that Congress is the only vehicle for achieving the necessary clarity. **Sometimes things unsaid or not done also speak loudly and when that is the case it is hard to complain there is a misunderstanding about what is meant.**

Emphasis added.

## Perspective

# On Numeracy, Naïveté, Google & Pew

Pew Religion in American Life says 21% of atheists believe in God. Or so our metro newspaper reported—and refused to clarify the reporting.

A review of *Dirty Words: A Literary Encyclopedia of Sex* in that same paper notes that the Google searches in the book are “revealing, if not exactly saucy.” It then quotes from the book, comparing the number of “Google pages” for a one-word sexual term I won’t use here with the number for Nabokov—the first being almost three times as high as the second.

It is quite possible that my discussion of Google search results last issue was fundamentally misguided—and there’s no real way to know whether that’s true or not.

Checking the Schwab website just now, I see a truly dramatic rise in stocks—they’re just climbing like wildfire. (It’s not just Schwab: I’d see the same thing on most stock sites.)

## What’s Going On Here?

How do these four items fit together? Numeracy—or some combination of numeracy, naïveté and common sense. When I included a chapter on numeracy in

*Being Analog: Creating Tomorrow’s Libraries*, at least one reviewer sneered at the inclusion, since everybody learns this stuff in grammar school. But it’s fairly clear that people *don’t* (or at least don’t retain it)—and, I’m afraid, “people” sometimes includes the librarians who should be helping other people understand what they’re dealing with.

Consider the four examples:

- This one’s not so much numeracy as sloppy reporting—sloppy reporting that Pew almost certainly knew would happen. The Pew Religion in American Life survey *did not ask* “Do you believe in God?” Instead, it biased its survey toward a positive response: It asked “Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?” That last clause is vague enough that almost anyone who feels there’s something more important than themselves would answer Yes.
- I did a whole piece on Google result counts last time. Bluntly, large result counts from Google simply don’t have any clear meaning—and *can’t* be used to make valid comparisons between different topics. That’s particularly true when one of the terms is sex-oriented: Spam alone can add literally millions of hits that don’t relate back to any actual content. On the other hand, I’d guess there are very few uses of “Nabokov” in spam. The comparison isn’t “revealing”—it’s pointless. Does the web contain more actual content on this particular sexual activity than it does on Nabokov? There’s no real way to know (and I’m not about to do this particular exploration, thank you).
- Seth Finkelstein suggests that part of my discussion of Google search counts was based on false assumptions. To wit, where I found substantially fewer displayable results than the 1,000-result limit for some terms showing very high result counts, Finkelstein believes Google’s just grabbing the first 1,000 results (all it will ever give you in any case) and eliminating duplicates and spam from that result before presenting it. In which case, elements of my discussion might not be right—but *there’s no way of knowing*. Google searching is a black box with no instruction book: You can only judge it based on what emerges. If my analysis was naïve, it was a naïveté that 99% of *those users who investigated* would share. Unfortunately, that’s probably less than one in ten Google users; the rest will simply take the big numbers as being meaningful.
- Schwab’s daily stock chart is classic chartjunk, of a type that’s incredibly prevalent, particularly in financial reporting. The daily chart is a *non-*

*zero chart*: Neither axis begins at zero. It is, in fact, *always* scaled to show the most dramatic possible interpretation. The scale and numbers on the chart are designed so the day's low and day's high define the bottom and top of the chart itself. In this case, what looks like an astounding bull market actually amounts to just over a 1% gain—which is nice given the last couple of weeks, but would be nearly invisible on a proper chart.

## On Misleading Essay Titles

I'm not going to say much more about either Google or Pew. So the title of this essay is misleading—it's really about numeracy and naïveté, using Pew and Google as examples.

Sometimes, numeracy problems are obvious—or they should be, if you understand basic arithmetic and have common sense. They deal with non-reversibility of percentages, being able to do basic multiplication and division, meaningful and non-meaningful digits in reports—and one form of survey bias.

Let's look at a few others.

### *Survey bias and question bias*

A survey can be no better than the quality of its sampling and the wording of its questions. Unfortunately, sampling quality is getting harder and harder to assure. As far as I know, no survey outfit attempts to compensate for the kinds of people who simply won't answer telephone surveys. We don't (and we probably average one survey request a week); do you?

If you don't have a landline telephone, the answer's simple: You don't get called. If you just don't have time for extended surveys, you may get called but you won't be included. As for internet surveys, they have other sets of problems. (I've seen surveys where you can't complete the survey without stating your income range; lots of us simply will not do that.)

Question bias is difficult, especially since most reporting of survey results won't include the questions. I regard the Pew Religion question as deliberately biased toward a positive result—after all, “Do you believe in God” is a straightforward question (and could be varied for adherents to other religions).

### *Subsample adequacy*

You can usually count on surveys from reputable firms having a large enough sample so that first-level breakdowns are statistically meaningful. But that can break down when you get to subsamples.

Let's say a survey asks 2,000 adults about ebook reading but also asks them about their computer platform. Let's say 4% of the respondents use Macs and

2% use Linux. So far, so good. Then the survey reports “20% of Mac users and a remarkable 30% of Linux users are interested in buying ebook readers.”

Remarkable? They found **12 people** who use Linux and are interested in buying ebook readers—and 16 who use Macs and have similar interests. Neither result is particularly meaningful. (I've seen widely-publicized survey results where the magic number was *four people*, extrapolated into a trend likely to include millions.)

### *Chartjunk*

Non-zero axes are one common form of chartjunk, serving to magnify the apparent significance of any change. (Doing the opposite—scaling a chart so that changes are minimized—is fairly obvious, since most of the chart is empty.) There's a much worse form that turns up in PowerPoint presentations and sometimes elsewhere: Unlabeled and partially labeled axes. You can make results show almost any trend you want if you're willing to combine the two. (I can imagine a chart on blogging frequency that has days per post rather than posts per day as a vertical axis...)

## Coping with Nonsense

*Being Analog: Creating Tomorrow's Libraries* was published in 1999. I'm ending this essay with portions of Chapter 4 from that book, “Coping with Nonsense: Numeracy and Common Sense.”

### A Numeracy Quiz

The following questions test some aspects of your real-world numeracy. If you're sure you know all the answers, you may not need to read further—but otherwise you do need to read on, particularly if you say, “Who cares?”

2. Define the user population of an ARL library as being the sum of FTE faculty and FTE students on the campus. Given that definition, the average per capita library funding for 1992/93 at Arizona State University, Princeton University, Stanford University, and the University of Houston was \$1,467. Is that statement: a. True? b. Meaningful?
3. Your city council says there is a budget crisis and your library budget must be cut one-third (33 percent) for the new fiscal year. When that year begins, the city treasurer finds there was a mistake: there is no crisis. The council adds one-third (33 percent) to your library's budget. Does this make you happy?
4. A professor asks how your million-volume library's focus on French literature compares with national averages for academic libraries. Consulting the *National Shelflist Count* tables, you find that the national aver-

age was 0.5025 percent in French literature, where your library's figure was 0.5021 percent. What should you report back to the professor?

5. You read that a new computer "cuts retrieval time by 200 percent." Should you be excited?
  6. Your local newspaper runs the results of a survey on the areas local taxpayers are most willing to pay more for. Longer library hours or better library collections aren't in the top ten. Neither are other library issues. Does this mean your community doesn't care about libraries or feels they're adequately funded?
- There's the quiz. How did you do? If you're not sure, read on.

## Reviewing the Quiz

Here are my answers and why I think the answers and questions are important.

### 2. *Average Per Capita Funding for Four ARL Libraries*

The statement is factual *as an average of averages*, but "true" only in that limited sense. It is not at all meaningful. No meaningful average can be stated for a population of two large and lean public universities combined with two wealthy private universities. The population is too small and too heterogeneous. It's also not true in the proper sense of averages: that is, if you added the funding for all four libraries and divided by the total of the four campus populations, the result would be lower than \$1,467.

For that year, Arizona State's per capita library funding was \$355; Stanford's was \$2,325; Princeton's was \$2,932; and the University of Houston had \$257. The \$1,467 number is wildly misleading for any one of the four institutions, and cannot be used to draw any judgments about them.

*Moral:* An average means nothing without knowing the size and characteristics of the sample population. Since you can't escape averages, you need to be able to demonstrate their fallacies when that's appropriate.

### 3. *Restoring the Budget*

You lost 33 percent, then immediately gained 33 percent. You might be relieved, but you should *not* be happy: you are down more than 11 percent from the original budget!

Percentages are not symmetrical. A reduction of a certain percentage is always more significant than an increase of the same percentage. This is one of the most common real-world mathematical problems and one of the most dangerous.

Look at the numbers in this case. Your library was to have a \$1,000,000 budget. Cutting that by 33 percent makes the budget \$666,667. Adding 33 per-

cent to \$666,667 means adding \$222,222 (666,667 over 3), bringing the budget up to \$888,889. Ouch!

*Moral:* Percentages are not symmetrical and can be the most dangerous numbers when used loosely.

### 4. *French Literature Holdings*

You should tell the professor that you are right at national averages, with about half of one percent of your collection being French literature. The difference between 0.5025 percent and 0.5021 percent is meaningless. "About half of one percent" is as precise as you would want to be—and if the number was 0.5993 percent, you should probably still say "about half of one percent."

If your library has absolutely accurate reporting mechanisms, then 5,021 of your million volumes are in French literature. If every library reporting in the count had accurate reporting mechanisms, then the overall average would be 5,025 out of a million: a difference of four books, not significant under any plausible circumstances...

It's rare for anything past the second non-zero digit of any result to mean much—e.g., so what if your collection is 0.503% rather than 0.504%?

*Moral:* Calculating something to four decimal places does not make those decimals meaningful.

### 5. *Cutting Retrieval Time by 200 Percent*

Yes, you should be excited—in fact, you should be outraged by the sloppiness of the writer. Either that or you should be in awe, as the computer has achieved faster-than-light communication.

To "cut retrieval time by 200 percent," the computer would have to return data as long *before* the data was requested as the earlier model returned it *afterwards*. Similarly, if a computer store advertises that it has "cut prices 200 percent," you may be entitled to go in, pick up a product, and expect to be paid for it: a 200 percent cut from \$1,000 means *giving you* \$1,000.

### 6. *The Taxpayer Survey*

If you're the head of the local public library or the Friends organization, you need to talk to the newspaper—or whoever provided them with the survey—and find out two things:

- What questions were on the survey, and with what wording?
- How was the survey conducted—who was surveyed, and using what methodology?

There's a good chance that the survey listed a group of possible answers and asked respondents to choose those they considered most important—and that there were no library issues on the list. That happened in

Santa Cruz, California (in a survey taken by one city department) and it's probably happened elsewhere. Even with the possibility of adding new issues, most survey respondents will deal only with what they're given. If libraries aren't on the list, they won't be in the responses.

If the survey was conducted entirely among business executives, it's quite possible that most of them simply aren't aware of the public library's importance or problems.

It's possible that your library is adequately funded, but it's also possible that the survey is flawed—or that you haven't done enough to keep the public informed about your strengths and shortfalls.

## Omissions

This test omits some important aspects of real-world numeracy because there is no easy way to state them as questions. For example, real-world numeracy will help you to scan a set of figures and spot possible problems, things that “stand out” and may need double-checking. Numeracy can help you to scan a spreadsheet and spot significant facts that would otherwise stay hidden—and can certainly help you to spot the flaws in conclusions drawn from the spreadsheet. Numeracy is vital in evaluating responses to a Request for Proposal. Any time you see a graph, you must bring numeracy to bear.

## Why Numeracy Matters

Setting aside deliberate lies, problems with real-world numbers come in two major flavors: mistakes and distortions. Mistakes, honest errors, can come about because someone has used inappropriate statistical tools, because of transcription error, or because of spreadsheet disasters or other mechanical problems. The nice thing about mistakes is that they can be corrected without controversy. Sometimes those who make the mistakes will even be grateful for the corrections. The bad thing about mistakes is that they so often avoid detection—after all, if someone you trust and know to be ethical presents you with a set of number-based conclusions, you probably won't investigate the conclusions and the numbers behind them.

Ethical, trustworthy people can also produce distorted figures, usually by accident or misunderstanding. I have produced charts that were distorted, simply because the software I was using had unfortunate defaults and I didn't immediately catch the problem. In most cases, I am willing to assume that distortions are innocent—except when it becomes fairly clear that

they are intentional. Intentional distortions are perhaps the most dangerous, because the underlying numbers may be sufficiently complex or sophisticated that the distortion will be difficult to uncover.

## Conclusions

Pay attention. Think it through. Ask tough questions, and never assume that the computer is always right. Those are all easier said than done, but they are at the heart of effective numeracy.

The engineer asks another question, frequently and urgently: *What factors have been missed?* Nothing is ever as simple as people would have you believe. No new development takes place in a vacuum; no product can be sold without customers; the most “logical” distribution change does not make any sense if people don't like the results.

Tomorrow's librarians will face nonsensical projections and calculations just as much as today's do. Real-world numeracy helps you to deal with such nonsense. It's not uncommon to say, “Ugh. Math,” but it's a mistake.

## Library Access to Scholarship Signs along the Way

Library access to scholarship isn't just about open access, even though OA-related issues make up the bulk of this occasional section. It's about budget equity (is money available for reasonably-priced monographs in the humanities?), *format* equity (which cuts both ways, given the apparent disdain of a few academic librarians for print and the historical record), the long view and more.

What's happening? Briefly, Harvard Law has adopted an OA mandate that may be even stronger than Harvard Arts & Sciences; Stanford has adopted an OA mandate; publishers continue to grouse about the NIH green-OA semi-mandate; the number and significance of full-OA journals continue to grow; and institutional repositories continue to be problematic for any number of reasons.

I started out planning to devote most of this edition to ongoing controversies, many artificial—but a group of “interesting items” at the start turned into the article itself. Maybe next time. Meanwhile, a look at a few interesting items, one of them distinctly newsworthy, from the past ten months.

**A workplace note:** PALINET Leadership Network, [pln.palinet.org](http://pln.palinet.org), now has a cluster of articles on open access, a cluster that should grow and improve



over time. PLN is free and open to anyone who thinks they are or might become leaders.

## Open access library journals

Wayne Bivens-Tatum posted this on October 1, 2007 at *Academic librarian* (blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/). He notes a post on *ACRL*og about the difference between words and deeds among faculty when it comes to access—and among librarians too.

This problem has bothered me for a long time... Years ago I decided that whenever possible I would write only for open access library journals. As an academic librarian who has discussed these issues with professors and tried to promote the idea of open access, I have also wondered why so few library journals are openly accessible.

That includes the offerings from the ALA... It especially bothered me that the ACRL publications weren't openly accessible, though that seems to be changing. *C&RL* is mostly accessible now...

Back to Fister's question, why don't we put our words into action? I suspect it's for the same reason most other fields don't. If one has to publish to keep one's job, and publishing in the most respected journals is the best way to impress people, then that's where people will try to publish if they can. Why take a chance on *Library Philosophy and Practice* or *E-JASL* when you can publish in standard journals like the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* that people have heard of. I suspect that fear keeps people from changing, the fear that publishing in a little known journal won't look as good come review time.

That summarizes one key problem for OA journals quite neatly, and it's a tough problem to overcome. I should include the closing line—which, with two grotesque exceptions, is true: “There is one silver lining to this cloud. At least library journals don't cost \$10K a volume.” (Actually, *Library Management* and *Library Review* both cost more than \$10K a year.)

## Who are These People?

That's the question T. Scott asks in a January 24, 2008 post at *T. Scott* (tscott.typepad.com), discussing email he received inviting him to join the advisory board for a new journal. He'd never heard of the journal or the publisher, Scientific Journals International. When he checked, he found that the editorial advisory board for the journal was indeed impressive and long—but something didn't feel right:

My first clue that something was amiss comes in the 2nd paragraph of the email:

The volunteer Advisory Board provides advice and guidance for the ongoing development of SJI. The members receive periodic emails about the developments of various SJI journals. There are no regular responsibilities for the Advisory Board members. Oc-

asionally, you will receive an email that requests your input on new ideas, decisions or changes in the policies, procedures and guidelines of SJI. If you feel that the issue is not in your area of interest (since SJI publishes journals in all disciplines), or if you do not have the time, you can simply disregard the message.

What a deal! List my membership on the advisory board on my CV, and then ignore all of the messages that I get from them.

Nowhere on the website could I find any indication of who is actually behind these journals. There's a business address in St. Cloud, Minnesota, but no one is named.

I starting looking into the various journals---there are many. Turns out that very few of them have actually published any articles. Click on a journal title and most of them will say: "Coming soon..." As soon as they get some submissions, I suppose.

So what's the scam? Open access, I'm sorry to say. The opening page reeks of a high-minded dedication to assisting "researchers, writers and artists to cope with the publish or perish reality in the academia." They promise rapid turnaround and quick peer review.

Of course, they have to charge a processing fee... They point out that their processing charge is much lower than what various other open access publishers charge—just \$99.95 (add \$99.95 for each additional author). Somehow, I don't think they're viewing this as an incentive to limit the number of authors per paper...

It's got to be the open access movement's worst nightmare, living proof of the most hysterical charges leveled by the most rabid opponents. Do the people who have signed on to these advisory boards think that they're supporting open access by lending credence to this?

Go to the site, you see “more than 100 peer-reviewed open-access journals” and this truly odd statement: “Names of the chief editor or associated editors are not published on SJI Web site. Authors or reviewers cannot contact the editors to influence the review process deliberately or unintentionally.” I must admit that I've *never* heard of a journal hiding its editors' names for any reason, much less this purported reason—particularly while touting its huge advisory and review boards. A fair number of journals do have issues—but there's an odd feel to the whole thing.

It's not the only one. Near the end of March 2008, thousands of us received a list post asking for our involvement in a new open-access “society” aiming to launch 350 OA journals by the end of 2009. This society also plans to have “world summits.” The website is an astonishing piece of work, one that scarcely inspires confidence on the seriousness of the enterprise.

For all I know, SJI and the “society” (which shall go nameless) are both entirely legitimate, just misunderstood. And the library field certainly has its own

subscribe-now/publish-later publishers using the traditional methods. But it's certainly true that efforts such as this give off, at best, mixed messages.

## Open Access Directory

I have no such qualms about this one: a Wiki serving as “a compendium of simple factual lists about open access (OA) to science and scholarship, maintained by the OA community at large.”

By bringing many OA-related lists together in one place, OAD will make it easier for everyone to discover them and use them for reference. The easier they are to maintain and discover, the more effectively they can spread useful, accurate information about OA.

That's from the main page, at [oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/](http://oad.simmons.edu/oadwiki/). Peter Suber and Robin Peek (Peek teaches at Simmons' Graduate School of Library and Information Science) launched the wiki in April 2008 (work clearly began before then—more than 60 pages were created before April 20, 2008, although some of those are stub pages). Early content came from lists that Peter Suber has been maintaining; more are being added over time.

If you're interested in OA, OAD should be in your Firefox favorites or IE bookmarks. It's worth noting that a “list” at OAD isn't typically just a bunch of bullet points—it's a bunch of bullet *links*, e.g. “Institutions that support open access.” In some cases, each link is to a page within OAD—for example, the under-development “University actions” list (which needs some copyediting) already includes more than 20 institutions, each with a detailed description (and links) of what the institution has done to date.

What is *not* in OAD, by design: “The lists will not include articles, narratives, opinions, or graphics.” In other words, this is *facts*—leaving plenty of room for opinion elsewhere. It is also, by design, a “historical record for the OA movement.”

Since OAD is a MediaWiki wiki, you can find out a *lot* about how it's being put together and used. That's a good thing, particularly for a platform within the “open movement.” As you might expect, content in OAD is licensed under the Creative Commons “Attribution” license—you can use any of it in any way you choose, as long as you credit the original.

**Go.** Look at it. Use it. If you're one who can do so, register and add to it. Good stuff.

And yes, it is free of argumentation. Which in this case is as it should be.

(Thanks to Charles W. Bailey, Jr. I saw the announcement first in his *DigitalKoans* post, although that may be an accident of alphabetization in my Bloglines list.)

## Gratis and Libre OA

What constitutes open access? Is *Cites & Insights* an open access journal? (It's not scholarly, so the point may be moot, but...)

That depends. Here's the first paragraph of Peter Suber's April 29, 2008 post at *Open access news* ([www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/](http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/))

The term “open access” is now widely used in at least two senses. For some, “OA” literature is digital, online, and free of charge. It removes price barriers but not permission barriers. For others, “OA” literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of unnecessary copyright and licensing restrictions. It removes both price barriers and permission barriers. It allows reuse rights which exceed fair use.

There's a tricky word in that second definition: “unnecessary.” For some advocates, the *only* plausible restriction is attribution—and when it comes to datamining, that may not even be a reasonable restriction. Still, it's a start—and *C&I* qualifies under the first but not the second. (I think there may be another distinction: Neither definition addresses *datamining* barriers. As PDF documents, *Cites & Insights* issues don't lend themselves to datamining, and I've heard that raised in other cases as an objection.)

In any case, Suber and Harnad (who, for better and worse, are the two big names in OA) have come to a compromise (Harnad favors the first definition, Suber the second):

We have agreed to use the term “weak OA” for the removal of price barriers alone and “strong OA” for the removal of both price and permission barriers. To me, the new terms are a distinct improvement upon the previous state of ambiguity because they label one of those species weak and the other strong. To Stevan, the new terms are an improvement because they make clear that weak OA is still a kind of OA.

A little more:

Stevan and I agree that weak OA is a necessary but not sufficient condition of strong OA. We agree that weak OA is often attainable in circumstances when strong OA is not attainable. We agree that weak OA should not be delayed until we can achieve strong OA. We agree that strong OA is a desirable goal above and beyond weak OA. We agree that the desirability of strong OA is a reason to keep working after attaining weak OA, but not a reason to disparage the difficulties or the significance of weak OA...

We agree that there is more than one kind of permission barrier to remove, and therefore that there is more than one kind or degree of strong OA.

We agree that the green/gold distinction refers to venues (repositories and journals), not rights. Green OA can be strong or weak, but is usually weak. Gold OA can be strong or weak, but is also usually weak.

So where does *C&I* fit? It can't get much more explicit than this:

An article with a CC-NC license is strong OA because it allows some copying and redistribution beyond fair use (even if it doesn't allow all copying and redistribution).

My own preference is still for the CC-BY license, but we shouldn't speak as if CC-NC were not strong OA or as if there were just one kind of strong OA.

Thus, other than the non-scholarly angle, *C&I* is strong OA—but not as strong as it could be, since I still include the “NC” clause.

Later, Suber and Harnad realized that they picked “infelicitous terms” for the distinction. As of this writing, they appear to have settled on “gratis” and “libre”—the first for what they were calling “weak OA” (removing price barriers to access) and the second for what they were calling “strong OA” (removing price and permission barriers). I can't say the terms do much for me, but I'm not the intended audience.

## Open Access: Doing the Numbers

Richard Poynder has been producing an impressive set of interviews and other posts at *Open and shut?* ([poynder.blogspot.com](http://poynder.blogspot.com)), fleshing out the contemporary history of OA and its leaders. This piece appeared June 11, 2008; it's four pages long with another five pages of comments. It is well worth reading in the original, as Poynder attempts to address a hard-to-answer question that's fairly vital to libraries attempting to maintain and improve access to scholarship.

Namely, *what's all this actually cost?* “All this” meaning the *actual* costs of publishing papers—which may not be in the same league as costs claimed by commercial publishers. As Poynder notes, some high-profile gold OA journals have substantially increased their article-processing charges: Biomed Central has gone from \$525 in 2001 to \$1,700-\$1,900; PLoS went from \$1,500 to \$2,100-\$2,750.

Read the article carefully and skeptically. One claim from the UK seems improbable on its face—that somehow moving from subscription-based publishing to OA publishing would *increase* the total cost of the system, which can only be true if existing profits and corporate overhead not only stay in the system but actually increase.

Poynder does provide one apparently-real number, from the American Physical Society. Joe Serene, APS' treasurer/publisher, says it costs \$1,500 to publish the electronic version of a paper, split roughly equally in five parts:

Editorial costs (including peer review)

Electronic composition and production

Journal information systems, "which support everything from manuscript receipt through electronic posting, mirroring, and archiving of the published papers"

Central publication management

Essential overhead expenses

One could poke at those figures, to be sure—but it would be much more worthwhile to have some other sets of numbers from other publishers (including university publishers and smaller societies).

So the question remains: Can OA reduce the costs associated with scholarly communication? If so, how, and when? If not, what are the implications of this for the "scholarly communication crisis?" These are important questions. But without accurate numbers to crunch we really cannot answer them adequately. Wouldn't it be great therefore if other publishers decided to be as "open" as APS in discussing their costs?

One thing is for sure: If OA ends up simply shifting the cost of scholarly communication from journal subscriptions to APCs without any reduction in overall expenditure, and inflation continues unabated, many OA advocates will be sorely disappointed. And if that were to happen, then we can surely expect to see calls for a more radical reengineering of the scholarly communication system.

Poynder gets that last paragraph right. In the comments, Julian Fisher says the *true* costs of e-publishing are “frighteningly low”—he says “two orders of magnitude less than many publishers are charging.” Fisher's article making that case appears in the Spring 2008 *Journal of Electronic Publishing*; you can find it at [hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3336451.0011.204](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3336451.0011.204). The article comes up with estimates of \$64 to \$76 per article—but you need to read the article carefully and consider the assumptions.

## The Invisible Parts of Publishing

T. Scott pushes on difficult issues in this June 12, 2008 post at *T. Scott*.

We often have a tendency to glibly think (in the world of scholarly publishing, at least) that nothing of significance happens between the completion of peer review and the appearance of the published version (whether that be in print or digital form). Some of the ire directed against publishers (in the vein of, "the authors don't get compensated, the editors and peer reviewers work for free, and then you have the audacity to charge me for the final product?") stems from this fundamental misunderstanding. But, as Tom Richardson pointed out in his presentation at CILIPS last week, at the *New England Journal of Medicine* (along with most other publishers), there is an army of copy-editors and illustrators and fact-checkers who come into play after the article has been accepted, all of whose skills are needed to put that article into final form and make sure that the authors'

intent is conveyed in the very best way possible. You can't do that kind of work with volunteers.

And then there's the matter of getting somebody's attention. Take any article from the latest issue of *NEJM*, *Nature*, or *JAMA*. Do you really think that if you posted it on a website and invited comments (even in some mediated way so that it approximated serious peer review), and used those comments to modify and further develop the piece, it would get anywhere near the attention that it would get from having been published in one of the high-profile journals? We have a tendency to ignore the critical importance of brand in helping people make their way through the morass of content that is available.

There's more. I don't agree with everything here—e.g., is it *really* the case that most commercial STM publishers do rigorous fact-checking on scholarly articles?

Still, Scott's saying something here that needs to be considered. (Please note: I'm referring to the June 12, 2008 post with the title above. There's another OA-related June 12, 2008 post, and I'm nowhere nearly as enthusiastic about that one, partly because in my experience the other author referred to very definitely has axes to grind and has been grinding them for years.)

## A Look Back

Full title: *A Look Back at Nineteen Years as an Internet Digital Publisher*. Author: Charles W. Bailey, Jr. ([www.digital-scholarship.org/cwb/nineteenyears.htm](http://www.digital-scholarship.org/cwb/nineteenyears.htm)). It prints out as six pages.

**Get it. Read it.** Here's the introduction:

In 1989, the Internet was much more fragmented than it is today, and the primary information access tools were e-mail, FTP, mailing lists, and Usenet newsgroups. In March 1989, Tim Berners-Lee wrote "Information Management: A Proposal," which tried to persuade CERN officials to support a global hypertext system (it was not called the World Wide Web until October 1990, when he coded the first server and browser). Gopher servers, which represented a significant advance in information access, would not become available until 1991, and NCSA Mosaic, an early Web browser that ignited interest in the Web, until 1993.

In June 1989, I began my scholarly digital publishing efforts, launching one of the first e-journals on the Internet, *The Public-Access Computer Systems Review*: a journal that, if it has been published today, would be called an "open access journal," since it was freely available, allowed authors to retain their copyrights, and had special copyright provisions for noncommercial use.

The paper includes an abbreviated chronology of Bailey's digital publishing efforts—starting with the PACS-L mailing list (the list started six weeks before the journal was announced—the first actual journal

issue arrived in January 1990) and continuing through June 2008.

I don't remember just when I signed on to PACS-L. According to the list archive, I posted my first message on July 28, 1989. I do remember being on the editorial board for *The Public-Access Computer Systems Review* ("PACS Review") throughout its history—and contributing a column, "Public-Access Provocations," in twelve of the issues during the journal's five substantial years. I also prepared the print versions of the first five volumes, issued as paperbacks through LITA. While *PACS Review* wasn't the first OA journal—that was probably *New Horizons in Adult Education*, which began in 1987—it was one of the pioneers. (Noteworthy: Volume 2, Number 1 of *PACS Review*, in 1991, included a cluster of eight articles on early OA journals.) Technically, *PACS Review* wasn't peer-reviewed until late 1991.

For *PACS Review*, publishing an internet journal meant distributing ASCII files using list software: Not the most beautiful results, but it worked and yielded some excellent work at very little cost.

That was only part of Bailey's involvement. He also published an early directory of "Library-Oriented Lists and Electronic Serials," and in 1996 began publishing the *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography*, a free ebook that's in its 73<sup>rd</sup> version as of July 2, 2008.

There's more, to be sure, and I refer you to Bailey's own history for the rest. He's been a pioneer in the field, has provided sustained energy and clarity—and I'm proud to call him a friend.

## Making it Work Possibility and Reality

Don't pay much attention to the pretentious title. If you're not given to thematic organization, think of this as a new version of THE LIBRARY STUFF: a bunch of library-related items I thought worth noting and commenting on. If you *are* given to thematic organization, the common theme is, I suppose, pragmatism. These aren't primarily about philosophy; they're about practice—what actually works (and doesn't) in libraries.

As usual, arrangement is primarily chronological—beginning with a post from July 2007. Or, rather, two posts—one from Jeff Scott noted directly and another one, from Jessamyn West, cited by Scott.

*The future of libraries or getting them what they want*  
Jeff Scott posted this on July 19, 2007 at *Gather no dust* ([gathernodust.blogspot.com/](http://gathernodust.blogspot.com/)).

Of all the technology initiatives that go through, the only ones that are noticed are those that are most dear to the users.

Libraries, overall, are still centers for books, information and internet access points. The top reasons someone doesn't use a library are lack of time, money, or interest.

Scott notes that the first can be “solved” by being open 24 hours a day—but that’s rarely feasible. The second happens when someone’s use is blocked because of unpaid fines. The third? “Those who simply don’t want to use the library,” either because they’re not big readers or they prefer to buy books—“usually the former.”

Those three reasons mean “there will always be a...population that won’t enter the library even with...incentives.” Scott doesn’t see much point in going after non-readers. Otherwise, “just extend hours and get the stuff they want”—simple enough if the money’s there.

Scott looks at some reports on the future of libraries and books. He notes Jessamyn West’s examination of Wisconsin Public Library Consortium’s study *The Wisconsin Library User (and Non-User) II*. The study found people particularly wanting more hours and more “CDs/DVDs/videos that I wanted”—but also found that 49% of those surveyed had either no internet access at home or only dial-up, “a pretty sobering takeaway when you’re trying to provide more and more services online.” West quotes part of the survey’s conclusion:

So, this information presents a juncture: On one hand, if you interpret the results literally you could make a decision to reject technology and focus on building a collection around personal enjoyment for Wisconsin residents. On the other hand, these same results may suggest that initiatives and library services need to be marketed in such a way that resonates with current conceptions of a public library. To this end, I would suggest an exploration of branding Wisconsin library services to more effectively market services. But, regardless of the direction taken from the juncture, a heightened focus on Wisconsin public library customers and customer service is essential in order to expand and maintain your current brand loyalty.

West questions that: “Do they really think that the solution to getting more people to perceive value from the libraries’ technology initiatives is to just find a more effective way to market them?” She suggests other questions—and notes that librarians need “to make sure we’re counting the right thing.” Scott notes that his library is counting “2.0” services and adds:

They are certainly not off the charts for technology usage. I could incorporate these stats into my monthly report, but it would just be another stat that my funders would ignore. Impact is from action, not necessarily from usage of technology...

I would say this report confirms that many of these technology tricks are not going anywhere. Even marketing won't work. I have had a twitter feed from the library for some time, but I only have one user who is actually from the city. There is no way to hit this crowd or go to them since online, they are invisible. Too often, a library puts out a great website that uses social networking sites, only to have other librarians say how great and progressive it is. However, most people who are resistant to 2.0 say, "Does this initiative help check-out a book, or increase a core stat?" Usually, the answer is no. I have had more success in getting non-users by expanding the print sources of the library's news. The best way to get users in the library is word of mouth. They can come once to find bad service and never come back. If you have fantastic service, enough for people to talk about, then you don't need any marketing for that.

It’s certainly not that Scott’s a Luddite. He blogs regularly. His library, City of Casa Grande Public Library, has a Twitter feed, an active library blog incorporating an events calendar sidebar and various new-item sidebars (in addition to Scott’s director’s blog), podcasts, a flickr account, e-newsletters and more.

He quotes the Wisconsin report, noting that most users and non-users weren’t interested in technology initiatives (except for wi-fi)—but that non-users tended to say they’d use libraries more if they were easier to get to. As for Casa Grande:

In my community, a recent study showed that two of the top three things our citizens love are the library's collection and hours of availability. So...I can create a myspace page for the library, but ordering the right books and being open the right hours are the real keys to get users and non-users. That's it, no magic bullet.

### *That Wisconsin survey*

You can reach *The Wisconsin Library User (and Non-User) II* (35 pages) at [www.wplc.info/current/Wisconsin\\_Library\\_User\\_2003-2007.pdf](http://www.wplc.info/current/Wisconsin_Library_User_2003-2007.pdf). It’s an interesting document. I, too, wonder why people who use libraries “rarely” are classified as non-users rather than users, at least without a more specific question. (I’d consider someone who uses a public library at least once a quarter to be a user—but someone who uses it less than once a year essentially a non-user. Is once a quarter “rarely” or “somewhat regularly”?) It makes a big difference: For 2007 responses, you get 50% non-users in the first case—but only 17% don’t use libraries at all.

The table of how often users interact with the library during a four-month period is interesting. Two-thirds never accessed library materials or services by PC from home or office, while half did ask questions of librarians (and 85% located materials for personal enjoyment). The survey finds that even non-users agree that “public libraries are a vital municipal service.”

Looking at interest in technological initiatives, saying users were interested in wifi may overstate the case: On a scale of -2 to +2 (where -2 is very disinterested and +2 is very interested), being able to use wireless internet at the library had the only response above 0—but at 0.05 with a standard deviation of 1.82, it's hardly a clarion call.

Here's the bottom line: 98% of library users were very or somewhat satisfied with their public libraries (77% *very* satisfied)—and so were 79% of *non-users* (40% *very* satisfied).

In interpreting the report, it may be worth noting that conclusions about marketing are one person's take, the consultant who wrote the report.

As a sidenote, the survey included a household income query—and 15% of respondents refused to answer the question. I'm with them, but I'm not sure I buy Morrill's assertion that "there is no reason to believe that households with higher income levels would refuse in greater proportion to households with lower incomes." I think there's good reason to believe that "comfortable" and affluent households make a point of not advertising their income.

Reading the report in its entirety, I'm with West: I don't see how it justifies the suggestion that marketing will bring in more users. Maybe I'm missing something.

### *Enrollment may be down, but*

### *Library numbers are up, up, up*

Michelle Boule posted this on August 22, 2007 at *A wandering eyre* ([wanderingeyre.com](http://wanderingeyre.com)). Given the doom and gloom we've heard elsewhere about falling use of academic libraries (which tend to raise Jessamyn West's question—are you counting the right things?), this one's refreshing. Portions:

I work at the University of Houston and most of the staff this year was disappointed to learn that our enrollment numbers were way down for the current semester. Classes started Monday, along with all the usual hubbub...

Despite enrollment being down, I am pleased to say that out of roughly 32,000 students, over 11,500 of them came into the library on Monday and Tuesday. That is 11,500 on each day! Good for us. I think they are here for multiple reasons. Some of the reasons are good, some are not that great, but they are here in the building. Below are the reasons I think students are coming to our building:

- We have the largest number of computers in any one place on campus.
- We have free printing, for a few more days anyway, and the students know it.
- We let students eat in our library.
- Our staff answers their questions. We often get students who have been sent to a couple different

places to find the answer to a question that a phone call could have solved. We try to solve it or at least send them to the right person.

- Students can manage their accounts with some IT staff who have set up house by our reference desk...
- If people have questions, we answer them. We do not send them elsewhere...
- There are a ton of study spaces, tables, nooks, and crannies where students can meet and relax.
- We have stuff they want: computers and printers. OK, honestly, I did see students checking out a lot of books yesterday...
- We try to help them. Did I mention that yet?

The moral is: I believe our students come to the library because we try our best to be helpful and we have stuff the students need. I think, biased though I may be, that our library gives better customer service than any other department or service office on campus and the students know that. Not that we are perfect, but it is nice to know that they like us enough to be here, in our building.

It may be true that much (most?) use of academic library resources, particularly licensed resources, is or will be virtual—but Boule gives us a number of reasons that the building (and the staff within it) still count. Particularly when the staff answers student questions instead of sending them elsewhere... I think she may have mentioned that. (I'm guessing that UH staff manages to balance the "give 'em a fish" and "teach them how to fish" aspects of academic library reference work—particularly at the start of the year, when students really just need that fish.)

## A Jeff Scott Trio

Scott was on a roll in September 2007, with three posts I thought worth noting and commenting on—all from *Gather no dust* ([gathernodust.blogspot.com](http://gathernodust.blogspot.com)), dated September 10, 18 and 24, 2007, respectively.

### *10 ways to hack your local library*

Scott riffed off *liferhacker's* post on getting the most of your local library online. This post seems aimed directly at Scott's users, and offers an interesting perspective: Basically, how to make your library most effective on your behalf. Think of this as honest marketing, and there are items here that many other libraries might use. Scott's top ten, with some of his notes and my comments (mine are *not* indented):

#### **1. Check out Books**

Right now, you are probably thinking to yourself, "Is that really a tip?" or something to the extent of "duh, I knew that." Many patrons do not fully grasp how important it is to check out books. When you check out a book, it goes right into our stat counter and we realize that you, our

patron, like the book. If that book is checked out several times, we buy similar books to that same book...

I suspect this is something many library patrons just don't think about: Public libraries retain items and purchase new items based, in part, on what's circulating—so making sure to check out the books you like helps assure there will be more like them.

## **2. Don't see it, ask us to buy it**

The library purchases books for you to use. Librarians rely on reviews and circulation statistics to make decisions on purchasing. We don't always catch everything. We rely on patrons to tell us what books they want not only by the number of times a book or books are checked out, but also by what is requested to purchase...

How many patrons ever have the temerity to suggest a purchase? (Note me here not raising my hand.) How many public libraries pay close attention to patron requests, presumably allowing for the edge cases? I'm guessing nearly all.

## **3. The world is at your fingertips with Interlibrary Loan**

Did you know that most libraries can almost any book in the United States through a process called Interlibrary Loan (ILL for short)? Need some obscure title that is out of print? We can get it. Looking for some genealogy information and it's only in that one book in New York? We can get that too. If we don't have it, you can even check what library does on Worldcat.org. The turn-around time is often amazing. My library gets it back to you 10 days from a request *on average!*

Many libraries are in local or regional consortia with even faster procedures, since for many of us 10 days doesn't seem all that fast.

## **4. Don't know what to read, ask us or Ask us anything, really!**

We have many resources and we are trained to pull out your likes and dislikes so that we can recommend books to you. Librarians are here to field just about any questions....

Scott goes on to note that, for complicated questions, you might spend hours with Google when a call to the local library "can get the same information in five minutes." An interesting combination of reader's advisory and reference in one point.

## **5. Be our Friend and you get a longer check-out (teachers and homeschoolers too)**

Almost every library has an organization called the Friends of the Library. They are there to help support the library for special projects, marketing and more. If you don't have time to give, you can just pay for a membership...

An interesting pitch for the Friends group. Since my library's standard checkout is Casa Grande's extended checkout for Friends (and teachers and homeschoo-

lers), I checked and don't see any similar privilege here. (Our Friends group operates a lobby shop 33 hours a week.)

## **6. Ask us for services**

We rely on feedback from customers so if you want the library to have certain resources or services, ask for them. Some libraries can even provide services at a cost. For instance, we sell flash drives for \$5...

As with #2 and #4, this one stresses feedback—and encourages people to make themselves part of the library community.

## **7. Return books**

Again, this may seem silly, but we really need the books back. It takes an awful long time to replace the books and we are often so nice we give you the benefit of the doubt even if you have had it for three months. Don't be mean to us, return the book, even if it is late...

Here's one I might word differently—that is, return books not only because it takes a long time to replace them but also so that *other people* can read them.

## **8. Ask about our services**

Many libraries have expanded services, ways to help you keep track of your books (Library Elf), ways to have books sent to you by mail (books by mail) and many other services. We try to market, but if our library brochure had all of our services on it, it would be lost in a sea of text. So ask us about whatever is on your mind...

Two, four, six, eight, what does this list appreciate? Patrons *asking*—the theme for items 2, 4, 6, and 8. Not a bad pattern.

## **9. Databases are good**

Yes, you may look at a library website and wonder, "What the heck is a database?" As Terry Dawson would put it, a database is something with data in it :) A database is a warehouse of online information that you cannot find by using a search engine.... [Offers some examples of needs and databases]... Did I mention this was free?

## **10. In fact *everything* is free**

Books, movies, music, online information, even items that can be downloaded from the web. The library may not be the fastest to get a book or movie, but it will get it, and it will be free to you.

I'm sure many libraries have put together lists like this—but the informality here and its presence on a director's blog make it interesting and effective.

## ***All the technology you can get your hands on...***

This is a long post (with a long title only partly noted above) about planning and its merits as illustrated by his library's success stories. I won't excerpt the whole thing, but it's interesting to see how one library in a rapidly growing community (with good local support) is coping with change. The post is also, inadvertently, a testament to the unstable nature of the web. The

first two paragraphs include three crucial links—not one of which worked in June 2008, nine months later.

Scott begins by noting an ALA report that library technology infrastructure (space, bandwidth and staffing) is being pushed to capacity and that libraries need more technology planning and dedicated support.

Reports like these two years ago addressed out of date computers. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation remedied that situation. However, with all these new computers, bandwidth is squeezed. Furthermore, libraries must find ways to sustain and support this level of service.

I was in the same boat two years ago. I had 11 old Gates PCs that were installed in 2001. These computers were five years old by the time they were replaced. MySpace crashed the computers every time. We also had to manually sign up users on a clipboard.

In 2006, he put together two grants and a capital improvement project to replace the 11 old PCs with 38 new and better-equipped PCs...and could get more, if space was available. Severe weeding of the paperback collection provided a short-term solution.

Luckily, I have a host of solutions to deal with this issue. My community passed a bond in 2006 for a new library and a renovation/expansion of the existing library. When completed, the library will provide access to an additional 130 computers. A total of 166 computers for a community of 38,000 people. All these projects will be completed between 2009 and 2010. The community is growing, but computer growth should outstrip population growth unless we have over 100,000 people in three years.

What about the short term? My library has the problem of bandwidth. From the time we open to the time we close, we peak out our internet bandwidth. This is with 1.5mbps. High for 1999, but painfully slow today...

As Scott notes, the U.S. lags many nations in typical broadband speed. He's hoping to jump to 6mbps—but will that be enough for 166 computers?

What else are we doing in the short term? We are expanding access with laptops. We don't have a laptop loan program, but we allow our teen group to use our ten laptops during their weekly four-hour program...

We also have a bookmobile. It not only carries books and materials to various locations, it also has a satellite dish to provide wireless internet access wherever it goes...

These are success stories. Scott talks about planning and sustainability; you may find that section worth reading on its own. One point in the library's technology planning, along with assuring staff training and having hot spares for public access computers:

3. Understand what the library can and cannot do. (There must be a point at which the library can refer to the patron's technology equipment manufacturer such as for wireless internet.)

A good library can be many things to many people—but there are always limits, and it's helpful to recognize those limits.

### *The five dollar flash drive*

This is a short one, a specific success story that's being replicated in other libraries. Part of Scott's post:

I had mentioned in my post "10 Ways to Hack your Local Library" that we sell flash drives for \$5.

Patrons create documents and think they'll be there when they return. So the library, like many others, began to sell diskettes and recordable CDs—but that created more problems. Some computers have diskette drives, some don't. (Scott doesn't mention that diskette drives really haven't worked very well for at least five years—you'd be lucky if half the diskettes were readable on another computer.) Few PCs had both diskette drives and CD burners. Staff suggested locking down diskette drives and CD burners and relying on flash drives (that is, USB 2.0 ports).

This seemed a bit severe, but I understood why... Patrons do not know which computers had floppy or cd available, so just enabling a flash drive seemed viable... However, the technology was not readily available or affordable in town.

... In order to solve the problem, I decided the library should sell flash drives to the public. I remember Webjunction gave away flash drives as a promotion. They weren't that big, usually 128MB, but it was a neat marketing trick. They can provide something useful and it also has their logo on it.

Scott went looking for a similar deal—and found it, in his case at [allmemoryupgrades.com](http://allmemoryupgrades.com). He was able to get 250 256MB units, with library logo, for \$5 each—to be sold at cost. (This was in August 2007. Prices may not be lower now, but capacities should be higher.)

Once we had the drives and advertised them, it spread like wildfire. Even the local schools are telling their students to buy the flash drives at the library. Patrons are buying them four at a time. Some people are coming in **just to get the flash drives**.

So I have been able to provide a resource to the community, without cutting off an essential service, plus I have word of mouth marketing that anyone would kill for. Just think of this story:

"I went to plug in my flash drive on my work computer when my co-worker asked what that was. I told her that it was a flash drive that the library is selling. (She holds up the flash drive that has the library logo and url.) Co-worker says "Wow, I didn't know libraries did that."

Next stop for her was the library.

How many libraries do this? How many could? If you have a Friends shop (as we do), it's a natural—and if you were or are selling diskettes, it's certainly a natural



upgrade. As Scott points out in a comment, even a 256MB flash drive is the equivalent of 88 diskettes. And the logo does make it a good promotional item.

Five dollars is an unusually good price—but there are competitors. I've seen quotes of \$8.75 each for 1GB drives (quantity 500) or \$10 for the 1GB pen/USB drive combos (quantity 250); you can certainly get 256MB drives for \$5.75 each (quantity 250).

## Moving On from Arizona

Just to be clear: The commentaries that follow are *not* about Jeff Scott posts!

### *Are the users ahead of us?*

That's Wayne Bivens-Tatum's question in this September 19, 2007 post at *Academic librarian* (blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/). It's an interesting question, one that doesn't have a single answer. B-T notes an *Inside Higher Ed* suggesting that, while today's undergrads use lots of information technology, they don't necessarily expect ubiquity. (The article, "Students' 'evolving' use of technology," appears at [www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/09/17/it](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/09/17/it)). For example, while 74% of students surveyed have laptops, more than half of laptop owners don't bring them to class at all, and only a quarter bring them to lectures at least weekly. And students don't necessarily think that social networking sites have a place in the classroom—they "may want to protect these tools' personal nature."

B-T (who also teaches) doesn't think his students are ahead of him (admittedly, he seems pretty current on tech). Some of what he says:

Yesterday, I asked my students about their IT knowledge. Since we have a class blog that becomes an integral writing assignment for the course, I wanted to know who had blogged before. Only one student, who had signed up for the course partly because he liked the idea of the blog. A few students read blogs, but mostly those of their friends...

To shift the subject slightly, the library just started hosting blogs, and I created one for the philosophy department... I don't think I'm going to use the blog for a while, because I don't think it will be read by my target audience, in this case philosophy professors and graduate students. I've talked to some, and while some are very cutting edge, most are very traditional in their approach to information. They read scholarly journals, not library blogs. They're happy emailing me with problems; they don't need to IM me. The graduate students may be different, but not necessarily...

I often read library blogs that argue we should be adopting new information technologies because that's where our users are at. I'm not so sure. I think that those librarians are ahead of their users in this respect, as I believe

I'm ahead of most of my users. As a reason to change, catching up with the users might not be a very good one, because I suspect most of the users might not be caught up with us.

Does this mean we shouldn't play around with new modes of communication and information technology? Certainly not. It just means that some of the urgency of calls to change ring hollow for me. We must change *quickly* and *now!* But that urgency doesn't seem to fit the facts.

To be honest, most of the techie blogs I read are by public librarians. It's been a long time since I worked in a public library, but I would think the typical undergraduate at a four-year college is technologically ahead of the average public library user...

So is it the case that in either academic or public libraries the users are ahead of the techies? Or are they just ahead of the luddite librarians, if there be such? How wired is the general populace or the average student population? Are they really ahead of us?

As becomes clear in the comments, B-T is *not* against keeping up and trying new things (hey, he also made a wiki for his reference department). "I'm mostly saying I see an evangelical zeal in a lot of the change rhetoric that I think is unnecessary."

### *Three big things*

That's the title of the second of two related posts. Aaron Schmidt asked a bunch of people "What are the most important things on which libraries should be working?" and published the results (he asked them to limit their lists to three things) on November 6, 2007 at *walking paper* ([www.walkingpaper.org](http://www.walkingpaper.org)). The quoted question is also the post's title. Abbreviated versions of the responses—go to the post for more detail:

- Jim Schepcke, Oregon State Librarian: Early literacy services, moving products and services to the web, thinking and planning for the coming ebook revolution.
- Mary Auckland, UK library consultant, focusing on university libraries: Ensuring students get the information sources to complete their courses, delivered wherever they are—and providing varied study spaces.
- Alan Kirk Gray, Darien Public Library: Becoming more efficient (in part by lots of outsourcing), benchmarking and adopting best practices, and banding together in ten-library peer groups to contract for full-blown website redesigns. (I can't summarize that third one: **go read the post.**)
- Sue Polanka, Wright State University: Creating content, reaching users at the point of need, watching to be sure libraries don't pay for content that could be freely available on ad-supported systems.

- Barbara Kesel, Washington County Cooperative Library Services: Community involvement (in both directions), recruiting great people, making the library experience enjoyable and fun.

You can probably guess I don't believe libraries need to be spending loads of time in 2008 planning for "the ebook revolution"—but that's just me. Of the few comments, one argued that the most important thing is marketing and advocacy and took the startling view that "if we don't raise the awareness of the value of libraries nationwide...it does not matter what we do—we will not survive."

Steve Lawson posted his own response on November 7, 2007 at *See also...* ([stevlawson.name/seealso/](http://stevlawson.name/seealso/)), offering his own three choices, with a paragraph expanding on each one. His three:

Exploit diverse networks of libraries and librarians rather than seeking to create monolithic groups. Pursue openness whenever possible. Keep asking yourself and your users "how can we help our users kick ass?"

Pay attention to the last two words of the second sentence: Open is great, but it's not always feasible. (I'm not arguing with Lawson—I'm supporting him.)

Consider these lists. Note that these weren't listed as "what *my* library should be working on" but "what **libraries** should be working on." Of the 18 items, which do *you* think are most important—or is it sensible to posit a single list that applies to all libraries?

### *What your community wants*

That's not a post title. It's a catch-all for portions of three very different posts that struck me as related: "Some thoughts and quotes about authenticity," posted by David Lee King on November 15, 2007 at his eponymous blog ([www.davidleeking.com](http://www.davidleeking.com)); "Social networking," posted by Ben Daeuber (I assume, given the domain name) on December 26, 2007 at *Info breaker* ([bendaueber.com/infobreaker/](http://bendaueber.com/infobreaker/)) and "Technology saturation," posted by Jenica Rogers-Urbaneck on January 3, 2008 at *Attempting elegance* ([rogersurbanek.wordpress.com](http://rogersurbanek.wordpress.com)).

King talks about the difference between the experience an organization *wants* to provide and what it actually provides. Does a library's mission statement match what happens there every day? If the library is a community gathering place, how come people are "told to be quiet, to turn their cell phones off, and to please drink that coffee outside the building"? Then he moves on to the "digital community," which "tries to gather, but quickly finds no place to gather at all, because the website is no more than an electronic brochure with links and a catalog database—so they gather elsewhere." He suggests that libraries should give some hard thought on what they want the end result to be;

"even better, ask your customers what *they* want *their* end result to be"; create a strategic plan, mission statement, etc. that focus on reaching the desired end result; teach the staff how to deliver that end result "physically *and* digitally"; and redesign the website so it focuses on providing the desired end result.

All good advice, even if I still find "customers" to be the worst of several possible words for those who use and pay in advance for a library. (The new suggestion "members" isn't bad; "patrons" and "users" are both fine—but *customers* is too mercantile for my taste.) But King's second point raises an interesting question: what if *your* patrons really don't much want the library to be a "digital community"—if they're not particularly interested in "gathering" there? (Do your MySpace- and Facebook-using patrons want to friend the library? I don't know the answer, but I suspect it's not always Yes.) My guess is that, in some communities, there is considerable desire among library patrons *of that community* to interact with the library—and that in others, they want a useful space to do database research, find and renew books and the like, and aren't much interested in an online community. I stress "of that community" because I don't buy the idea that the world is your online user community. I could be wrong here: Maybe every town and city is chock full of people *in that town and city* just waiting for the chance to annotate library catalog records, comment on blog posts, provide online feedback and otherwise participate in online communities. But maybe not.

The *Info breaker* post noted a post elsewhere about information literacy, in which the blogger wondered "how well the average librarian would do if asked to help someone embed a video and catalog, er, I mean *tag* it, *digg* it, *furl* it, *stumbleupon* it, or otherwise advise on how to make the information discoverable." To which Daeuber, a "real live librarian who works at a real live library answering real live information desk questions," provided some typical questions he'd been asked that day. This wasn't a regrump—these were all reasonable questions. For example:

- How do I sign up for a computer? (several times)
- Do you have any books with pictures of flowers that I can paint still lifes from?
- Where are the resume templates?
- Do you have anything on Howard Hughes?
- Where are the back issues of Newsweek?

Commenting further:

Information Literacy is not about knowing which social networking tool du jour is the new thing. It's not about knowing Web 2.0 tools, search engines or the Reader's Guide....Should I have, or am I even capable of having,

accounts on and knowing the ins and outs of MySpace, Facebook, Digg, StumbleUpon, del.icio.us, Library Thing, etc? Probably not.

Perhaps we just need to wait for this space to shake itself out...

Until then, however, librarianship remains much more boring than that. Teaching people how to sign up for an email account is about as “Web 2.0” as my job gets. I’d rather focus on what continue to be core library skills, knowledge of your physical and digital collections to answer real life reference questions and get people real life resources.

I question whether librarians should be expected to know the ins and outs of every social networking program any more than they should be expected to be able to help patrons do crosstabs in Excel—or build SQL joins. I wouldn’t expect a librarian to help me formulate a book template in Word; why would I expect them to help me embed a video?

On the other hand, there may be libraries where such knowledge is a reasonable part of the job—in film-school libraries, for example, or if you’re a librarian in a media creation center in a well-to-do urban library. In those cases, *your* community may have different expectations that you can reasonably strive to meet—but your community is out of the ordinary.

Urbanek-Rogers comes at it from a different perspective, suggesting that tech-oriented librarians may operate “in something of an echo chamber.” She was visiting friends and family and saw how a bunch of other people operate. Some of her list:

A friend who lives and dies by email and blogging in her professional life working in state politics, but struggled to get the iTunes store set up for her 11-year-old daughter...

A friend who “doesn’t have time for email,” who, when he last went online to find the answer to a question he had about his new stereo, realized he had over 200 email messages and just ignored them.

My mom, who has a desktop computer, a photo printer, a regular printer, a digital camera, a cell phone, and digital cable with a DVR...but no internet connection, and no home phone number to allow dial-up.

My aunt, who is a regular public library user, both for (a huge number of) books and computer use, who refuses to get digital cable or a home computer with internet access. She has an email address (Gmail, set up by me) which she’s never used.

A friend who knows that his girlfriend and his teenage daughter both have MySpace pages, but has never looked at them — “I don’t bother. They’re smart people. They won’t get in trouble, and I just don’t care that much.”

It would be stressful for Urbanek-Rogers to lead her life as these examples do.

But for each of those people, it’s normal. It’s easy. It’s what it is. It’s their life, and they’re happy with that...

Computing and the internet are everywhere, but they’re also not... You can use your cell phone to make calls, send texts, take pictures, and surf the web, like I do, or you can say “I don’t need it to do that” like most of my family does. You can obsess about keeping on top of your email, social networks, and online presence, like I sometimes do, or you can just ignore the web’s communication possibilities when it’s inconvenient, like my two friends do. Everywhere, and not.

And all of those people—and their children and grandchildren—are our users. We, with our particularly echo-y vision of technology, are not our users.

Indeed. And to bring this up to date, I note recent reports showing that broadband penetration in the U.S. is starting to stall out (at less than 60%)—and that many of those who don’t have it, don’t much want it. I see some bloggers responding that there needs to be advocacy, or there need to be national programs, or... And I wonder why. For many people, *quite possibly* 40% of the population, broadband at home would not significantly enrich their lives in ways that matter to them. And, by the way, many (most?) of that 40% are also library patrons...

### *the goblin and gaming*

Sorry, Josh, but I couldn’t resist. Joshua Neff wrote “Et in Arcadia ego” on January 23, 2008 and followed up with “World in motion” on January 25, 2008, both on *the goblin in the library* ([www.goblin-cartoons.com](http://www.goblin-cartoons.com)).

In the first post, Neff cites a post that links (approvingly) to an op-ed article (on an extreme right-wing website) that laments gaming in public libraries and calls it part of the dumbing down of American youth. I was surprised by the attitude of the post and not surprised by the eloquence of Jenny Levine’s response—a response Neff also cites. Some of what he says:

Is the public library “brand” books? Most people I know seem to think it is, and I would agree it’s so. But libraries in general have never been solely about books, and if public libraries were ever about just books, it was certainly long before I was born.

Even if public libraries have been about books more than other forms of media, so what? I know, I know, librarians are supposed to be the champions of the written word, defenders of literacy. Well, I’m not. I mean, I love books, sure, but I love movies and TV shows and theater and music and games at least as much. And I think the idea of libraries being primarily about books—and books being primarily about education and intelligence—is wrong to the point of being dangerous...

Reading text is not inherently better than watching a movie or playing a video game. There’s no conclusive proof that it is. There is evidence that different people learn and are engaged by different methods. Some people are more engaged, more provoked to thought, by

visual and/or active media, like watching movies or playing video games.

People who read books less than they watch movies or TV, play games or sports, hike through woods, play music, garden, knit, or bake are not necessarily stupid or illiterate. People who read lots of books are not necessarily smart or wise. Let's get rid of that notion right now.

Libraries can't be all things to all people. It's probably not feasible for a public library to also be a gym, a dance studio, and a carpentry workshop. But if public libraries broaden what they offer their patrons, turning the library into a video arcade... well, I think that's awfully smart.

The comments were interesting. One commenter accepts that video and games have places in libraries but questions the equation of print literacy and video-games. "I think there is a correlation between time spent reading and an overall ability to think clearly and articulate one's ideas in an effective way." Another commenter felt Neff had pushed the argument too far, saying "literacy is the most important skill for a child to have to succeed in school. Literacy is basically required to succeed in society... Books cannot be left out of the equation. They are not optional, everything else is." At which point, Neff agreed: "Yeah, I may be taking the argument a little too far..."

The second post reflected that. Excerpts:

Thinking about it some more, I believe my last post was a bit over the top. Yes, I think reading and literacy are important. No, I don't think playing video games is a substitute for reading. Something pushed my buttons, which prompted me to write that post. I realize now what those buttons were.

If I see one more blog post or comment, one more newspaper editorial or letter to the editor, one more magazine article or TV commentary about how video games or peer-to-peer filesharing or cell phones in public or text speak is going to cause the downfall of Western civilization, I'm gonna barf... Western civilization has survived phonographs, radio, moving pictures, jazz, rock & roll and hip hop. People have been whining about a decline in literacy since the Great Unwashed Masses got access to literacy, and yet society marches on...

If a library becomes a video arcade *at the expense of quiet reading spaces during normal hours*, I can see cause for concern. If a library discards books that are still being used in order to make space for wide-screen TVs and gaming consoles, I'd wonder. The slogan "If you're not gaming you're losing" doesn't do it for me. *But those are extremes*. It seems clear that many libraries have added gaming to other services and programs without disrupting existing services, and I'm hard-pressed to say that games in general are somehow inferior to DVDs or, well, a great many page-turners. And I'm with Neff on being more than a little

tired of the ongoing bemoaning of how we're all going to hell because we no longer have 100% literacy and 100% appreciation for the classic novels. Not that we ever did, but historical accuracy has never been a big point with the declining-civilization folks.

## 2.0 and don't even know it

This one's a success story, pure and simple, as related by Meredith Farkas in a February 21, 2008 post at *Information wants to be free* ([meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/](http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/)). You should read the post on your own for the whole story—which, briefly, is Farkas' experience with the "crazy idea" that, *for her library community* (specifically distance learning grad students at a relatively small university), it might make sense to order needed books and have Amazon send them directly to the students—who would then return them to the library for proper acquisition and processing.

This is a library that already buys books it doesn't already own when students request them (in many cases) because ILL wouldn't work well for distance-learning students—but getting the book in the library and doing quick processing (which might take a day) can add as much as a week to the time it takes to fulfill a student request.

Farkas offers the reasons for a direct-from-Amazon attempt—and the reasons against as well. She also notes that the change wouldn't affect her own operation but would affect others.

So I tested the waters by talking to our Director and the Coordinator of Technical Services before I actually spoke to the staff I knew it would affect. Our Director was really in favor of our doing anything that will improve the way we provide services. Our Head of Technical Services couldn't think of any good reason not to try doing it other than the fact that we might lose books and there wouldn't be a record in our circ system of the students having the books.

Neither thought the problems were insurmountable, so she called a meeting with the people involved. Here's where it gets interesting:

No one objected to the idea of trying this model out. There were no objections based on the work it would create for them. Instead of talking about why we couldn't do it, everyone talked about how we could do it. The only issues people brought up were practical ones... By the end of that meeting, we had a plan in place for a pilot project that will start in March and a clear workflow that will require a lot of communication, but is doable. As I said at the meeting, at so many other libraries, an idea like this would have met with so many brick walls. Yes, it helps to be a smaller library, but the ease of pushing this through is a credit to the service-orientation and open-mindedness of my colleagues. I've

never had an idea of mine dismissed here, which has not been true of other places at which I've worked.

As Farkas notes, this idea (which wouldn't work everywhere, as she also notes) will make a difference *for her community*—and her colleagues weren't stuck on “this is the way we've always done it.” She bets that a lot of libraries “do a lot of things...without realizing how 2.0 (for lack of a better word) they are. We focus so much on the cool social software-y stuff, when often, what our patrons really want has nothing to do with blogs, wikis or Facebook. What have you or your colleagues done at your library that maybe isn't super-sexy, but really illustrates your/their responsiveness to patron needs?”

As one commenter noted, this wasn't a “let's do this and see what happens” initiative—it was a case where patrons have a clear need that this process could solve. “The 2.0 initiatives I've undertaken at my job that have met with the most support are the ones that I can relate to a current problem, as opposed to the projects that I know will improve a services that no one's currently complaining about.”

*Just a few thoughts on sustainability...*

**In order for libraries to be sustainable, we need to abandon the notion of sustainability.**

That's how Helene Blowers' April 10, 2008 post at *LibraryBytes* ([www.librarybytes.com](http://www.librarybytes.com)) begins—in boldface—and I find myself taking issue with it, but only in part.

In general, I think Blowers makes a good case—that too many librarians get hung up on long-term sustainability, focusing too much on the long term in areas where the long term may not matter.

Stop focusing on the *long-term* issues and solutions. Change your thinking and shift the emphasis to trying things out as *short-term* ideas that have *no longevity*.

The notion that every idea we plan to test out must be designed for long-term commitment, so that we can sustain it for-eeeeeeeeer, easily paralyzes and keeps us from moving forward. How about replacing our thinking with piloting ideas as simply short campaigns?...

There's more to the post—and in general, I agree. Assuming there's a reason to try an initiative that can be helpful this year, it's usually not important that you may not want it five years from now. We need test cases. You do need to try some things that *appear* appropriate and useful for your community, in the knowledge that they may turn out to be flops.

Blowers notes a number of short-term campaigns. They all sound like good things, none of them requiring long-term sustainability. But they all have one thing in common: They all had commitment *for the*

*short term*. They were, I suspect, known to be sustainable for a known, limited time.

That's an important distinction. If a library starts a blog and it turns out not to be serving its purposes a year later, no problem—refocus the blog or shut it down. But if a library starts a blog, publicizes it, and has *no* posts after the first month—well, that just looks bad.

Maybe it's the difference between sustainability and follow-through. Projects may not need sustainability, and for some projects worrying about long-term sustainability can defeat short-term worth. But projects *do* need follow-through: A commitment to provide the resources to give the project a fair shot. That wiki with six pages (and a dozen more filled with spam) and another 20 links to pages that never got built; that blog with four pathetic posts that sits there unread and unupdated—they're like announcing a story hour program and failing to have a third story hour. It's not a matter of sustainability, it's a matter of follow-through. If you can't follow through for the short term, you're not testing something, you're setting yourself up for failure.

## Retrospective

### Pointing with Pride, Part 4

As I look for interesting stupidity on my part (never in short supply) and oddly wrong projections, I sometimes encounter forgotten gems.

#### March 2001: Number 4

LIVING WITH CONTRADICTIONS was the lead essay. By my standards, it's a classic.

The White Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* has useful advice for those trying to find the one true path for the future. When she tells Alice that she's one hundred and one, five months and a day, Alice responds, “I can't believe *that!*”

“Can't you?” the Queen said in a pitying tone. “Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.”

Alice laughed. “There's no use trying,” she said: “one *can't* believe impossible things.”

“I daresay you haven't had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” (p. 200 in the Modern Library edition of *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*.)

Substitute *contradictory* for *impossible*, and I'm on the side of the White Queen. It's too easy to assume that if A is going to happen, that means that B can't possibly hap-

pen—or, vice versa, that B precludes A. But many contradictory situations arise because we substitute “all” for “most,” and the world is much subtler and more complex than most of us wish to consider. When I see “we all” in an article, I’m finding it useful to raise the same immediate yellow flag that I do when I see “inevitable.” “We all want to be connected all the time.” “We all use cell phones.” “We all watch too much television.” “We all” is generally a dangerous oversimplification. Take away the simplification, and contradictory trends can be reconciled, if only because life tends toward complexity.

A recent piece in *The Industry Standard* entitled “Living with contradictions” makes some interesting points. “Sustaining contradictory ideas simultaneously is one of the hardest things for the human mind to do, and that goes a long way toward explaining why this kind of in-between position seems to be rare.” That comes after the author’s suggestion that it’s true *both* that “the Internet is changing everything” *and* that “a few big, traditional companies will continue to be major players in many industries.” He further notes that some Internet stocks were still good investments at their peaks—while most Internet stocks were absurdly overvalued. His most heretical stance: “Amazon, most likely, will neither overtake Wal-Mart nor fade into oblivion, but rather end up somewhere in between.”

I’m not sure that everyday people have that much trouble handling ambiguous or contradictory ideas—but the article is certainly right in noting that “the dynamics of the media and public discourse tend to polarize the discussion.” Ambiguity doesn’t work well in headlines or make a pundit’s reputation, so the tendency is to simplify at the expense of the truth.

“Categorical statements about the future of the Internet Economy...are likely to be proven incorrect. Wisdom lies in the ability to identify and interpret the subtleties, and to accept that the world is a complicated and contradictory place.” You could substitute “media” for “the Internet economy” or almost any hot topic you choose.

### *Can A Copy Improve on the Original?*

A few months ago, I was mentally belittling Michael Fremer (a staff writer for *Stereophile* and *Stereophile’s Guide to Home Theater* who firmly believes that LPs offer better sound than CDs) for one particular article. As part of evaluating some device, he noted that he gets better sound from CD-Rs than from the source CDs. My response was, in essence, “That’s impossible. How can a copy of a compact disc possibly offer *better* sound than the original?”

The *ad hominem* answer would be that the CD-R copy is “better” in a special sense: that it loses just enough of the CD signal to show a bit of euphonic distortion, making it more “musical” than the original. Another *ad hominem* answer is that it’s all in Fremer’s head.

Maybe that’s a lack of flexible thinking on my part. Bob Starrett’s “The CD Writer” in the September 2000 *EMedia* carries the title “High fidelity: archiving audio to

CD-R.” In this one-page treatise, he notes that he has opined that “the discs you make yourself have much lower error rates than the pressed CDs that you buy at the store.” Challenged to demonstrate that assertion, he grabbed a bunch of AOL CD-ROMs, tested them for Block Error Rate (BLER), then copied one to CD-R and tested the resulting BLER.

Part of the essay was his surprise that the AOL spam tested as well as it did: error rates of 5.8 to 7.3, far below the maximum allowable 220. But his CD-R copies had BLERs of 1.1 to 1.4: “Like I said, recorded discs generally have lower error rates than pressed discs.”

Audio CDs tend to have considerably higher BLERs than CD-ROMs. When he tested six brand-new CDs, four had BLERs between 10 and 24, while one had a disturbing 142. His copies tested at 1.7 or so: that seems to be fairly consistent.

So what? From one perspective, none of this should matter. A good CD drive should be able to recover data *perfectly* from a disc with BLER less than 220—after all, if it didn’t recover the bitstream, how could you cut a “better” CD-R? On the other hand, discs with higher BLERs are likely to be more susceptible to failure through fingerprints and scratches.

Applying a little White Queen thinking, Michael Fremer may not be as crazy as I thought. A disc’s BLER *should* be inaudible as long as the bitstream can be recovered fully—but that’s also supposed to be true of a disc drive’s jitter rate (which I’m not about to explain here). Reasonably sound tests suggest that keen listeners can hear the difference in drives with high jitter rates; is it possible that a high BLER also influences the sound in subtle ways?

That leads us into difficult territory, as Dana J. Parker discusses on the last page of that same *EMedia* in “The green flash and other urban legends.” You may know about the green flash that supposedly appears just as the sun sinks below the horizon—but that’s not the green flash she’s interested in. Parker wants to poke fun at the kind of device that *Stereophile’s* writers seem to tout with regularity—one reason I treat parts of *Stereophile* as a humor magazine.

There’s the classic green marker. For a decade now, some people have claimed that you can improve the sound of a CD by marking the inner and outer edges with a green felt marking pen. Today, Audio Prism sells “CD Stoplight,” a device that “reduces jitter” by absorbing “stray light” within a CD player—and, indeed, that’s one of the devices *Stereophile* recommends. Then there’s the more expensive CD Blacklight, a disc that you expose to bright light, then set on top of your CD. It glows—and supposedly increases stability, reduces electrostatic discharge, and reduces jitter. Other devices claim to reduce electrostatic discharge—which, as Parker notes, should be irrelevant for an *optical* medium.

Maybe so—and you won’t find any of these bizarre accessories on my CDs. But it’s possible to make a case of sorts. Yes, the device reading the CD is a laser; yes, the

optical path should be impervious to electrostatic issues. But that CD rides on a physical assembly (and the optical signal is immediately converted to electrical form), and it's not inconceivable that electrostatic interference could play a role at either of those two points. Unlikely, but not *impossible*—any more than it's impossible for a copy of a CD to sound better than the original. Dana Parker, meet Robert Starrett.

Admittedly, some tweaks go beyond the wildly improbable. One \$180 device claims to “polarize the polymer” on a CD “in such a way as to maximize the laser's ability to retrieve stored data.” For a mere \$20 per pack, you can get Rainbow Electret Foil. Attach a little strip of this foil over the CD logo on a CD, or on the speed indication on a record label, or on a tape cassette—or on a bottle of wine or a plant. It claims to “neutralize the adverse energy [created by interaction of all spinning discs with the gravitational forces] by inverting the energy pattern and therefore restoring it to a naturally occurring environmental pattern.” You say your wine and plants don't spin all that much? You gotta believe!

There are three messages here:

- The improbable isn't always impossible. I disagree with Bob Starrett a *lot*, but I see no reason to doubt his BLER tests.
- The conclusion above leads too many people into total credulity, where they'll believe almost anything if the claims are packaged properly.
- When it comes to the musicality of your sound system, the perceived quality of your wine, and many other areas, the credulous people are absolutely right. If they believe a device works, then it does *for them*.

One of the Web's better humor sources (either the Brunching Shuttlecocks or Modern Humorist) had a wonderful piece in early 2000. It looked just like the dreamy ads for prescription drugs you see in all the best magazines these days—but it was for the ultimate drug, Placebo. The testimonials from satisfied users could be just as genuine as for any other drugs—and the motto was dead on the money: “Placebo: It works because you think it does.”

When you're truly bored and find yourself reading the tiny print that accompanies one of those ads, pay attention to the clinical results. In a surprising number of cases, clinical effectiveness is demonstrated by the drug yielding a *slightly better* result than a placebo—e.g., improving the condition in 18% of cases as opposed to the 15% of cases where the equivalent of water did the job.

Since 2001, I've ripped all my CDs to MP3 twice, the second time at 320Kbps, because I think I can hear the difference. I've had occasion to listen to CD-Rs prepared by expanding those 320K MP3s and comparing them to the original CDs. Yes, in some cases I *do* believe the CD-R sounds better—but that could be euphonic distortion from the mild compression.

What else? An article mourning the death of MusicMaker, a website that let you *legally* prepare a CD-R filled with five to 15 tracks you wanted. It was too expensive and ran into two problems, one being the old Napster and the other being that many early DVD players wouldn't play CD-Rs (but would play CDs). Today, you'd just buy the tracks you wanted and burn your own CD-R—but we're just starting to get downloadable tracks at something like CD quality.

Also a piece on “stories between the ads”—the percentage of various magazines that was actually editorial content. In T&QT, I belittled the assurance that we'd all have huge *personal lockers* attached to our houses so the inevitable success of internet retailing would work—so that your drycleaning and groceries and pet food could be delivered securely. I was a little snarky about “It,” otherwise known as “Ginger,” the thing John Doerr said would be more significant than the web and someone else said would make Dean Kamen richer than Bill Gates. Remember Ginger? You may even see some of them, usually doing tours or hauling overweight cops, *always* making their riders look like dorks: The Segway, which somehow wasn't quite as revolutionary as people thought.

## December 2001: Number 14

Twelve articles in 20 pages: A record for succinctness and variety I'm unlikely ever to match. The issue had everything: censorware, PC values, T&QT, ebooks, copyright, products, and both varieties of PRESS WATCH, the good and the silly.

THE FILTERING FOLLIES discussed two reports that offered “strong factual ammunition against mandatory filters”—one from Ben Edelman and one from Marjorie Heins and Christina Cho. Not that it made much difference in the end; Congress was more interested in being For The Children than it was in evidence.

Noting PC Values again, I put together “one good configuration” for November 2001—modifying a top unit to make it more balanced in my perspective. What seemed good at the time? A Gateway 700S: Pentium4 at 1.8GHz, 256MB RAM (remember when 256MB was a lot of RAM?), 64MB display RAM, 80GB hard disk, DVD-ROM and CD-RW drives, Boston Acoustics 2.1 speaker system, Windows XP Pro, OfficeXP Small Business, and an 18” (that is, 19” diagonal—18” viewable) Diamondtron (CRT) display. All for a mere \$1,977.

It's interesting to look back to a flurry of postings on Web4Lib from August 28 through September 2, 2001 on whether ebook readers would be big hits

then, soon, eventually or ever. It makes interesting reading at this remove, since the readers on the market then are mostly gone now and today's readers differ in a number of ways. I won't quote from it here—and in any case nobody (including me) would suffer embarrassment, because I deliberately paraphrased all the excerpts and kept them anonymous.

Most fascinating article cited—well, here I think it is once again worth quoting in full:

Miall, David S., and Teresa Dobson, "Reading hypertext and the experience of literature," *Journal of Digital Information* 2:1 (jodi.es.soton.ac.uk).

I was unaware so many English professors claim hypertext is somehow *better* for literature than linear text. Maybe it's just as well. When I read some of the assertions quoted in this scholarly article, I'm even more convinced that I'll never be a scholar. I never thought of books as "machines for transmitting authority" or that hypertext would somehow empower the reader or improve communication *in general*.

Miall and Dobson put together an interesting experiment. They took two short stories and split each one into chunks of text (one story for each of two experiments). Two groups of readers were asked to read and comment on the stories. For half of the readers, the chunks of text (presented on a computer screen) always ended with a "Next" link at the bottom of the page, offering a straight linear path through the story.

For the other half, each chunk of text (one or more paragraphs) included three hyperlinked words or phrases, designed to suggest a continuation focused on plot, character, or "foregrounding" (which I don't fully understand). Readers could choose links as they wished. In both cases, there was no "back" function.

Here's what makes the experiment interesting. All three links in each chunk of text had the same result: each linked to the next chunk of text. There was no way for readers to know that, of course, since there was no "back" function. Links were chosen so that the linkages made some sort of sense. In other words, all the readers were reading precisely the same text *in precisely the same order*—but half of the readers had reason to believe that they were choosing their own path.

How did it go? In the first sample, 75% of the hypertext readers "reported varying degrees of difficulty following the narrative. Only 10 percent of the linear readers made similar complaints." Hypertext readers took longer to move from screen to screen; they thought the story was jumpy and that they were missing information. The second story—a different kind of story—yielded similar results. Hypertext readers found the story confusing. Additionally, hypertext readers didn't comment on imagery as often as linear readers and tended to find the story less involving.

"Hypertext, as a vehicle for literary reading, seems to distance the text from the reader... The absorbed and

personal mode of reading seems to be discouraged." The authors try to avoid generalization, but their conclusions seem sensible to me.

This is very much a scholarly article from literary scholars; expect some slightly tough reading and more arcane politics than you'll find in librarianship. But it's worth plowing through as one of the few real case studies of the effects of hypertext on reading.

## August 2002: Number 24

Another issue illustrating that some things never change. I grumped about a commentary in *American Libraries* that said *all* librarians wear "last century's clothing—and that "librarian fantasies" (the ones where a cliché librarian suddenly casts off the glasses, lets down the hair and becomes a fantasy woman) would never happen with doctors or lawyers. "If she's really saying men don't fantasize about prim female lawyers or doctors being overcome with desire and turning into fantasy women—it seems to me there are enough TV shows and movies to indicate otherwise." What doesn't change: Aspersion about the cliché librarian and the universal applicability of that cliché. Oh, and the idea that somehow doctors and lawyers have such great images in the media. Really?

Back then, enough seemed to be happening with ebooks that I ran several ebooks/etext roundups a year. I noted the passing of the Frankfurt E-book Awards, "created for a new technological form, yet judged on literary merit." *USA Today* was serializing "ebooks"—but the example noted was 7,000 words, which isn't even a novelette, much less a book. (The most common classification for word length is probably that of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, which uses word count for determining Nebula categories. Short stories run less than 7,500 words; novelettes, 7,500 to 17,499; novellas, 17,500 to 39,999; novels, 40,000 words and up. The Hugo Awards use the same definitions.) This conforms with other ebook sales claims of the past: Many sold "ebooks" were (and are?) actually short stories.

## Spring 2003: Number 34

The longest articles in this extra issue were a COPY-RIGHT SPECIAL on the Broadcast Flag (a bad penny that just keeps turning up) and PERSPECTIVE: THE SHIFTING COMMONS. As to the Broadcast Flag, a thorough unbalancing of copyright in favor of secondary rightsholders (Big Media), the FCC implemented it—and the courts struck it down as being *way* outside FCC's authority, at least for now. Herewith my conclusions, after citing and commenting on a range of material:



Will the FCC take the proper course and laugh the Broadcast Flag proposal out of existence? Only time will tell. For all I know, that could have happened by the time this appears.

Even if it does, the experience is worth remembering. Elements of Big Media appear determined to assert absolute, total control over every use of “their” products, overriding first sale, fair use, and any other doctrines and without regard to secondary damage to consumers, the consumer electronics industry, the computer industry, or others.

It’s becoming increasingly clear that the MPAA and RIAA don’t think current copyright law is unbalanced *enough*. Given the history of prerecorded video and DVD, this attitude doesn’t appear to make commercial or financial sense. The Broadcast Flag debate has no immediate effect on libraries, but the indirect effects could be considerable—particularly if this end-run or congressional action eventually crippled general-purpose computing devices, eliminated the possibility of archival copying, and possibly even eliminated free circulation. Would Big Media ever do something that would make it impossible for libraries to purchase and circulate music, movies, or books as they do now?

Do you need to ask?

I should have known that, faced with a choice of favoring big business or favoring the public—who, after all, *own* the airwaves that broadcast media use—the FCC would always, *always* favor big business, in this case Big Media.

The other essay was an oddity, combining two themes that connect primarily based on this truism: “People tend to generalize from their own situation, and that’s usually a mistake—even in this sentence.” The first portion had to do with Creative Commons and MovableType’s inclusion of a CC license in the default implementations of its software—something that seemed to anger a number of bloggers. The moral, as it pertained to the common theme:

Most of the brouhaha reflected in the two personal weblogs has to do with generalization, as does Arnold Kling’s essay. That is:

- One group is asserting that others believe that *everything* (at least within a category of work) should use CC licenses, and that such generalization is a bad idea.
- Another group is asserting that, because they personally don’t find CC licenses worthwhile, *nobody* should use them.

So far, I haven’t seen explicit evidence that the first assertion is real. Creative Commons most certainly does not suggest that everyone should use a CC license. I suppose there’s an “intellectual property is theft” crowd that might make such an argument, but neither Lessig nor Creative Commons are in that group. I would sharp-

ly disagree with such an assertion: CC licenses don’t make sense for everybody.... Neither general adoption nor general shunning makes much sense.

The second part—well, it’s not worth revisiting. But there was a third part, sort of—about contemplation. The background: I’d objected when David Levy said, in a presentation, that nobody had time to contemplate—and wrote a “Crawford Files” column extolling the off switch as the century’s most vital technological device, as it allows you to switch things off so you can think. One colleague noted that she and other extreme extroverts think things through by talking about them. An entirely separate article (in *Atlantic Monthly* said that introverts are “more intelligent, more reflective, more level-headed, more refined, and more sensitive than extroverts.”

As an introvert, my response to this claim was “*Give me a break*” and other pithy comments about what I considered extreme overgeneralization. I drew another moral out of it all:

When you generalize by saying that nobody has time to contemplate, you’re wrong. (See the original column: Such a generalization was the trigger.)

When I generalize by saying that everybody needs to spend time in *quiet* contemplation, I’m also wrong....

I believe we all need to spend time thinking deeply. I believe we can all make such time.

If your style is such that thinking deeply is a talkative, social activity rather than a quiet, solitary activity, that’s a difference between your mind and mine.

And followed with notes on my own generalizations

I’ve probably erred in making fun of some gadgets, technologies, and services just because *I* don’t find them useful. If so, I apologize—and I have reason to believe that y’all will accept my standing invitation to call me on such erroneous negative generalizations in the future. By now, you should know that I love (and use) thoughtful feedback, *particularly* when it expands my understanding by offering another viewpoint.

I will continue to be critical on at least the following grounds:

- Too many gadgets and technologies are touted as something *everyone* needs or will want. That’s automatically grounds for skepticism on the basis of false positive generalization. Other than food and water, there’s precious little that “we” all want or need.
- If I believe that a gadget is a solution to no need (that I can perceive), or is an absurd way to do something that something else does better, I’ll feel free to call it pointless. If I’m wrong, let me know. (I do not regard “It’s *kewl*” as plausible justification for a gadget, or at least as a good reason for librarians to think about the gadget.)
- It’s reasonable to say why I would find a system, technology, or gadget more problematic than promis-

ing; once in a while, I'll try to note that others might find them wonderful. Maybe you really love the idea of "pervasive computing." My sense that it's a thoroughly dystopian notion is just that: *My* sense.

- And, at least to my mind, there are many devices that make reasonably good sense for thousands, millions, or tens of millions of users but that don't necessarily work well within my conception of a library environment. *My* conception: Maybe not yours.

## January 2004: Number 44

This issue was 26 pages long; it was the *first* issue longer than 20 pages (except for the December 2000 introductory issue). My original aim was 12 issues a year, ranging from 12 to 16 pages. Since there has *never* been a 12-page issue of *Cites & Insights* (so far), and since eight of that first year's 13 issues ran 18 or 20 pages, I modified the aim—to 14 to 20 pages.

In attempting to maintain the 20-page limit and as I started to cover new areas, I found myself cutting out my own commentaries to leave room for everything else. That couldn't continue. Part of what I said in the opening BIBS & BLATHER:

Given time, energy, competing pressures, and the sheer volume of stuff I want to write about, something's gotta give. I'm trying to determine where I can provide added value and am willing to spend the reading, thinking and writing time to do so. In order to allow that process to move forward, a few changes are already in order:

Volume 4 will be "lumpier" than Volume 3. I'm abandoning the 20-page limit (at least for now), and the intervals between issues may be much more variable than they were last year. Yes, this issue is too long—but the more I edited, the less I was willing to cut, and I've already set aside 12,000 words for future issues. As for intervals, I'm aiming for a dozen "regular" issues with monthly designations, and anywhere from one to... (well, however many it takes) thematic issues. It's possible that the first thematic issue will be out before ALA Midwinter, that is, roughly two weeks from this issue. It's also probable that there will be at least one five-week or six-week gap between issues (April may be late this year), and even that various conflicts might lead me to emulate *American Libraries* and *EContent* and do a combined two-month issue.

How did I do with that? There have been a few thematic issues, sometimes around Midwinter, and the one for 2004 was, in my humble opinion, spectacular—but more about that next month. I did do one two-month combined issue, July/August 2005, and that could happen again. There was a long run when a few thousand words rolled over from one issue to the next, but not recently (and I'd rather not have it happen). As for the 20-page limit, there hasn't been

an issue *shorter* than 20 pages since February 2003. It's been some 32 months since the last issue as *short* as 20 pages, and that one—the shortest issue of 2005—was almost entirely one essay.

In another section of that lead essay, I did my first objective "study" of liblogs, based on 234 liblogs listed in Open Directory. (Remember when Open Directory was a key source?) It was a quick check of how recently each blog had been updated, done on December 12, 2003, "before most people would wind down writing for the holidays." Since then, the studies have become more ambitious.

The final SCHOLARLY ARTICLE ACCESS piece discussed the Public Library of Science as a publicity engine and other aspects of open access. While there was an EBOOKS, ETEXT AND POD roundup, it came after almost a half-year interim: "Maybe that's because I'm not paying attention—or maybe it's because very little has been happening." That essay discussed the death of Gemstar's ebook operation and Barnes & Noble's shutdown of ebook sales—but also cheerier items from eBookWeb and overly-optimistic projections for new dedicated ebook readers, e.g., the Sigma Ebook from Matsushita.

COPYRIGHT CURRENTS discussed, among other things, the SunnComm follies—SunnComm being the creator of MediaMax CD3, the silly "copy-prevention technique" that you could evade by turning off Auto-Run. SunnComm also being the company that threatened to sue a researcher for pointing out the absurdly weak "prevention" and later backed off, saying the harm to its corporate reputation had already been done. Oh, and some of the events in the long-running SCO vs. Linux legal battle—the one where SCO's head asserted that it's unconstitutional to waive your rights as a copyright holder! (I'm not kidding: "SCO asserts that the GPL, under which Linux is distributed, violates the United States Constitution...")

I was way too optimistic in the issue's final essay, A SCHOLARLY ACCESS PERSPECTIVE: TIPPING POINT FOR THE BIG DEAL? The lead paragraph, before citing a number of examples and hoping that there was momentum to get away from the hugely expensive ejournal bundles:

While several aspects of scholarly article access remain active, I believe one recent and ongoing story may be most important for librarians and libraries. A growing number of academic libraries are finally saying "Enough!" to Elsevier and ScienceDirect, and the faculty at some universities are lining up behind the libraries—and even, in at least one case, calling for scholarly boycotts.

Or not.

## September 2004: Number 54

The biggest section was LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP—roughly half the issue. That included a chunk of quotations from *Scientific Publications: Free for All?* and some early commentary on this landmark UK government report. There was also news on how universities were *improving* the Big Deal, back-and-forth about society publishers (and cross-subsidization of other society activities by profits from journals), and commentaries on a bunch of articles on OA and related issues.

In THE GOOD STUFF, I found myself scratching my head over an early collection of scholarly articles on blogging, *Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, community, and culture of weblogs*. Some of the papers were worth reading—but the foreword served as a powerful reminder that I was probably destined never to be a successful Ph.D. candidate in Rhetoric. Here are the first two sentences and the final paragraph:

Blogging offers one powerful way to embed a reraced, regendered liberal arts. The familiar system of studying/performing/credentialing is, as folks reading this piece know, premised on the magic number seven.

With the 4 E's (explain, enable, embed, and enthymeme the verb) and the 7 reraced and regendered liberal arts (frequently presented as general education programs), as well as with the many suggestions, theories, insights, and inquiries of volumes such as *Into the Blogosphere*, we might have hope.

## June 2005: Number 64

The Broadcast Flag again? I subtitled the PERSPECTIVE (AN ENDLESS STORY?). Excerpts:

On May 6, 2005, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia circuit ruled unanimously: The FCC exceeded its authority in establishing the broadcast flag. "We grant the petition for review, and reverse and vacate the *Flag Order* insofar as it requires demodulator products manufactured on or after July 1, 2005 to recognize and give effect to the broadcast flag." The American Library Association and co-petitioners won...

Remember the first word in "broadcast flag." This was never about protecting pay-per-view material or premium cable or preventing redistribution of a DVD or a CD. The material in question has been *broadcast*—over the airwaves that the U.S. government provides *for free* to a group of highly profitable businesses.

That material has already been paid for. The presumed intent is for it to reach the widest possible audience. It's called *broadcasting*, not *narrowcasting* or *restricted transmission*.

Ever since the Betamax decision, we've assumed we had the right to watch broadcast TV as we see fit—delaying it, watching it over again, even (gasp!) fast-forwarding

through commercials. MPAA hated Betamax, with Jack Valenti predicting it would strangle Hollywood. Quite the opposite happened—but Big Media has never given up its attempts to assert control over every use of its products, *even after those products have been broadcast over the airwaves*.

You can support copyright protection and still find the broadcast flag extreme, even reprehensible. You can support *strong* copyright protection and understand that the flag goes way too far. I do not believe that you can support the broadcast flag, or any variation of the concept, and claim that you believe in balanced copyright or in citizen rights.

The broadcast flag would injure every library and librarian, directly or indirectly. For now, it's dead. Let's hope it stays that way—and here's to Public Knowledge, ALA, ARL, SLA, AALL, MLA, the Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union, and EFF. They fought against this unreasonable regulation (and FCC power grab), and they won. At least this round...

The broadcast flag story isn't over. I suspect no sane politician will embrace the notion of "breaking all the TVs" and "shutting down the TiVos"—but you can never tell.

In between, notes on the ruling, some of the comments, a little background—and some of the usual crapola from Big Media as they went about trying to get Congress to overturn the court order. Once again, studios threatened to withdraw their HD programs from broadcast TV. Once again, the idea was that "consumers could lose content"—and once again, it was a hollow threat. To the best of my knowledge, there is no currently active legislative attempt to validate the Broadcast Flag—but Microsoft's Windows Media Center will honor the flag, unfortunately.

A rare combined NET MEDIA section discussed "wiki wackiness," weblogs and RSS, and "audio blogging" (OK, podcasting). The wiki section included Meredith Farkas' sensible commentary, an overdone condemnation of wikis from a pseudonymous blogger, and a typically unbalanced *Wired* piece on Wikipedia along with comments on that piece—and I was struck that most problems arise either from the apparent need for a zero-sum game (Wikipedia can only "win" if traditional encyclopedias lose—why is that?) and pure hype. Then there was the Blogging, Journalism and Credibility Conference, which ALA cosponsored, and which seemed mysterious in attendance, reason for being and results.

Glancing at T&QT, I see early commentary on high-def discs—at a time when the format war still seemed avoidable—and a blurb on OLED TVs, likely to happen "but not for a while" (it's happened, sort of, with Sony's \$2,500 11" set). And I quoted this great sentence by John Blossom, explaining why epaper was

the future and the “mass-produced publishing model for paper” is “dead” (some deaths just take longer...):

In general, content is moving towards the proliferation of contextualized content objects that are most easily monetized when they flow into the venue where their value is most easily recognized by very specific audiences.

Blossom’s an industry analyst. I’m not sure who else can come up with comments like that—or understand them, for that matter.

## March 2006: Number 74

Ah, “folksonomy and dichotomy.” I couldn’t help poking fun at Clay Shirky’s “Ontology is overrated” with this short PERSPECTIVE’s first subhead: “Dichotomy is Overrated.” So it is, and most current efforts to add folksonomy (tagging, etc.) to library catalogs and other databases recognize that fact, as few non-extremists actually argue for scrapping professional cataloging and indexing entirely:

There should be no dichotomy. “Popular tagging” has been part of the process of organizing and identifying items throughout history. The web makes it easier and some tagging applications make it fun. I wonder whether most web users are really interested in doing lots of tagging, but that issue will be settled over a few years.

Once you eliminate the dichotomy—once you think “and, not or”—I lose interest in trying to put down folksonomy or determine whether it really is a superior tool for all applications. More interesting questions are how tagging can be used effectively, and how tagging and formal systems can best complement one another. I’d like to think that people smarter than I am are working on those issues. I’m *certain* that people are working on those issues who are better informed on the topics involved and far more likely to produce good results.

## December 2006: Number 84

The longest section: LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP, focusing on the Federal Research Public Access Act, an OA-heavy issue of *Research Information*, and clusters of items from *Open Access News*, Dorothea Salo and *DigitalKoans*—*real* sources for OA coverage.

I enjoyed the lead essay: PERSPECTIVE: THE LAZY MAN’S GUIDE TO PRODUCTIVITY. I described my working habits and ways that I manage to get a fair amount done in relatively little time (deadlines, creative procrastination, a place to write, focus and unitasking, through writing, “one point five” drafts, touch typing, integrated formatting and realistic expectations) and noted some caveats. Here’s the start:

Once in a while someone asks me, “How do you do all that writing on your own time? Do you ever sleep?” Those questions arose more often when I was doing

three columns (two monthly) as well as *C&I*, but they still comes up. Recently, a colleague convinced me that they deserved more than my usual one-sentence answer to the first:

I’m lazy but I’m efficient.

That’s always been my answer. It’s true and relevant. The tough part was what followed. “I do almost all that writing in an hour or so every weekday and three or four hours each weekend.”

Looking back, I’m not sure how I *did* manage to write three columns and a monthly journal, a few speeches each year, even a book and briefer book-type project in that amount of time. Maybe I’ve grown less efficient or a bit slower, but it all sounds improbable.

“Lazy but efficient” may be snappy but it’s less than useful. So, since you (at least one of you) asked for a longer answer, here’s more about how I manage.

## September 2007: Number 94

Previewing *Public Library Blogs: 252 Examples*, a fairly long feedback/following up section (they don’t happen often—and this one was particularly rich in comments on ON THE LITERATURE and ON AUTHORITY, WORTH AND LINKBAITING). T&QT included questions about the safety of some Web2.0 applications, notes on just how compressed HDTV really is (at least 63:1 for Blu-ray, at least 155:1 for broadcast HDTV) and notes on how many people use Second Life.

Looking at products, I was (and am) interested in Zenph Studios’ process for turning a piano recording into data that can be used to create a new, higher-fidelity recording (using a special grand piano)—the first recording recreates Glenn Gould’s 1955 version of Bach’s Goldberg Variations.

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## Masthead

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