

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Trends & Quick Takes

The Hazy Crystal Ball

It's that time of year—time for pundits and gurus to tell us what's to come and for a few of them to spin last year's projections.

I was going to include snarky comments (or credits, when applicable) about *last* year's forecasts—but I see that last year got so confusing that I never ran a set of forecasts. Neither did I make one: That should be no surprise.

WebJunction's Emerging technologies for small libraries

You could think of this as a counterpart to the LITA Top Technology Trends group, but with fewer participants (eight in the October 4 posting) and a small-library bent. The committee develops a quarterly “list of five technologies they think are worth considering for your library.” I like the guidelines: “The committee avoids recommending technologies that are faddish, over-hyped, or just too darn cool. If it's on the list, it's there for one (or more) of these reasons:

- “Your patrons will be asking for your library to support this technology soon (if they aren't already).
- “The technology will improve your ability to deliver services your patrons need.
- “The technology is a wise investment that will save you time and money”

Here's a brief version of the October 2004 list:

- **Flash and USB Drives:** “Patrons can carry around 32MB of storage on a \$10 device the size of a pen cap. But they can't use them at your library if you aren't set up for them.” These days, 32MB is minimal; 128MB for

\$20-\$25 of 256MB for \$40-\$50 may be more typical. With XP computers typically having front-mounted USB slots, the primary setup requirement is security.

- **Wireless Access:** “Providing wireless access frees up your public access computing terminals for those who truly need them, and makes your library the neighborhood ‘hot-spot’ for information access.”
- **Thin Clients:** “Thin-client technology enables you to extend the life of your existing computers, lower costs on expanding the number of patron terminals, and simplify maintenance procedures.”
- **Upgrading Your Operating Systems:** “TechSoup Stock offers upgrades to Windows XP for \$8 (libraries are eligible)...” The text calls Windows 2000 and 95 “antiquated.”

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- **Technology Planning:** “Thinking ahead about what your library needs, and how to fund and support those needs.”

I don't know enough to say much about “thin clients” (except to note that, these days, that really means low-end or older PCs, not the traditional smart terminals). Otherwise, this all sounds about right, although Windows 2000 isn't quite as “antiquated” as Windows 95.

The December version eliminates USB drives and adds “Blogging & RSS” both as ways to keep up and as library tools. Can't disagree. Then there's the odd “#6 with a bullet: E-books and audio e-books.” Given the range of definitions for both terms, that might be reasonable—or might not.

PC World: "What's new and what's next"

This December 2004 feature story (by Michael Desmond) says "what the next two years *will* bring us" (emphasis added):

- The "next PC" will have dual-core processors; two-thirds of all PCs in 2006 will feature 64-bit processors; high-end PCs are likely to have 4GB or more of RAM; and "you could be upgrading your next PC with Lego-like blocks—the ultimate no-hassle upgrade."
- We won't get volume production of SED displays until 2007 (which may be worth waiting for), and the "promise of big and flexible organic light-emitting-diode and other foldable displays remains the stuff of lab demonstrations," but we may get rear-projection TVs that add three more "primary" colors for an expanded colorspace.
- MIT Research Labs still claims we all really want "computation everywhere" (the Oxygen Project), with video walls that do whatever we need them to—but it's now targeted for "five to ten years."
- Photo software will get smarter, in conjunction with digital cameras that provide automatic metadata as pictures are taken.
- High-definition DVD recorders shipping: That's a safe bet, since Sony and Panasonic already sell them in Japan. Several makers *plan* to ship HD-DVD devices in 2005 or 2006, and a bunch of Blu-ray supporters will have recorders and players—including a Blu-ray player in Sony's PlayStation 3. Will the 25-50GB Blu-ray (Sony, Matsushita, and others) merge with the 15-30 GB HD-DVD (NEC, Toshiba, and others) to make a single HD format? Probably not—but universal player/recorders will eventually emerge.
- Worms will get nastier and will spread to anything with an IP address, including cell phones, Pocket PCs and PDAs.
- We might get "batteries made of paper and other fibers." SRI suggests manufacturing may be "a couple of years out," but "couple" is a dodge.
- Cell phones will get hard disks and be able to switch between digital cellular and Wi-Fi networks—and, sigh, they'll probably be usable during flights.

- What would a set of tech predictions be without assuring us that the Smart Home is really, truly, going to happen now, and that we really, truly want it? Sure enough: Kitchen tables that become virtual workspaces, food containers that track freshness, and all the other wonders of home automation. Any day now.
- "Smart cars" are nothing new, and it's interesting that the article uses a photo of BMW's IDrive system to show how neat they are—given how critics and drivers have reacted to the IDrive technology.

Harry McCracken's "up front" column in the same issue discusses "yesterday's future tech." He notes that removable high-capacity microdisks (Iomega DCT, DataPlay) haven't worked in the market; that "ultraportable" PCs are still mostly vapor (although the OQO finally made it to market two years after announcement); that voice recognition is still at that awkward stage where it's great for people who can't or shouldn't use a keyboard, uninteresting for everyone else; that Bluetooth *still* doesn't matter (except maybe for cell phones); and that OLED is taking forever to come to the U.S. market.

Educause Review: "Surveying the digital landscape: evolving technologies 2004"

EDUCAUSE has its own evolving technologies committee. Oddly enough, this report says it's about "Internet life in 2004"—but it's in the November/December 2004 issue, so you'd expect it to concern 2005. The main concerns for this group: Spam management, legal P2P, learning objects, "convergence of libraries, digital repositories, and web content management," nomadcity, and regional networks.

It's an interesting report, one that I can't summarize neatly. You'll find it at www.educause.edu/apps/erm/erm04/erm0464.asp

Walking paper: Top ten things to stay tech current

This November 25 posting definitely relates to libraries. Here's the quick list, grouped sometimes paraphrased (on the posting, www.walkingpaper.org/index.php?id=128, each item gets a thoughtful paragraph including costs):

- Have a search box into your OPAC on the front page of your website. Related: If your electronic resources offer remote usage, make these easily available on your website.
- Support CD burning on your public workstations so people can download large files. "No

dumb computers” (which, as I read it, conflicts with other recommendations for thin clients). Configure your PCs for hassle-free browsing (with no unexpected popups or antivirus renewal notices).

- Answer patron email rapidly—48 or 24 hours doesn’t cut it. Use IM. Offer wireless.
- Use blogs and RSS to your advantage. “Don’t do it because it is trendy, but do it because it can help you.”

These all seem remarkably sensible, but not entirely uncontroversial (e.g., CD burning). Bonus: “You’ll need training on anything you implement.” Read the whole post for more details.

While you’re there, look at another excellent posting at *Walking paper*: “tech needs pyramid,” posted January 3, 2005 (“id=140” in the URL above). It’s an adaptation of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and offers a model for the “tech needs pyramid for a public library.” For example, you should have email reference, OPACs, computers and instructional classes before you offer remote database use and CD burning—but you need those before you add wireless and IM reference. That’s a sample assessment. The idea that you meet your base needs effectively before harping off after the next level is an excellent one, worth remembering when you’re seeking out the hot new thing. Several other bloggers commented on the post; Michael Stephens (*Tame the Web*) and Laura Blalock (*Creative Librarian*) both noted that the pyramid will be different for every library; Stephens also notes that the pyramid needs input from the user population. I suspect discussion of this pyramid will continue. *Walking paper* is becoming must reading.

Red Herring top ten technology trends for 2005

I don’t read *Red Herring*, but a press release included six of the trends “that will dominate the world of technology in 2005”:

- The end of Moore’s Law, as semiconductor density reaches physical limits.
- Medical devices inside your body “to prevent depression, relieve back pain, and even paint your esophagus to reduce acid reflux.”
- Videos, photos and music on your cell phone—and fast deployment of 3G networks.
- Mini fuel cells making their first commercial appearance: “Your laptop will run for days instead of hours and your cell phone will take calls for weeks without a recharge.”

- Internet telephony, with VoIP becoming a household word.
- The digital living room, with consumer electronics vendors battling it out against PC/software companies. (Is Sony a PC or consumer electronics company?)

I believe the first is premature for 2005, the second unlikely this year on a wide scale (but what do I know?), the fourth *highly* improbable on a large commercial scale in 2005. As for the last the question is, will anyone but a few million early adopters care?

Business 2.0: Whither Apple, Google, blogs and DVRs

Erick Schonfeld’s “future boy” for December 27, 2004 includes eight predictions for technology in 2005—“best enjoyed with a salt shaker handy.”

- The year of the DVR, with the number of installed recorders pushing well above the 10 million mark—mostly set-top boxes.
- Apple introduces the iPhone, possibly made by Motorola.
- Google searches everything, including video.
- Blogs go mainstream and podcasting catches on. “Some bloggers and podcasters may even figure out how to make money.” (Do you know what podcasting is? Do you care?)
- Tech consolidation continues, “to no avail” (as startups come up with better ways to provide software).
- Nanotech makes fuel cells feasible.
- Chinese IPOs party like it’s 1999.
- The word ‘passion’ is barred from all business meetings (please).

Again, I wonder about such rapid improvements in fuel cells—but I wouldn’t argue with the rest. I’m a little tired of “passion” being overused in library environments as well.

PC Magazine: Crazy technology predictions for 2005

Lance Ulanoff offers 19 predictions, calling them “statements of possibilities, those that range from the somewhat plausible to the decidedly fantastic.” Again, the writer explicitly calls for a grain of salt. I won’t list them all (including eMachines dropping the “Gateway” brand name from the merged company!), but here are a few interesting ones:

- Bill Gates retires from Microsoft and devotes himself to his worldwide philanthropy efforts.

- Apple launches a PDA smartphone in conjunction with Cingular. (There's the iPhone again!)
- Windows XP SP3 comes out by late August 2005, with a dramatically leaner IE.
- "Spam wins"—but it's a Pyrrhic victory, as we all just pay someone to handle it, response rates drop to almost nothing, and spammers switch to phishing.
- A supervirus sweeps through most home PCs without up-to-date virus signatures, resulting in loads of zombies bringing down sites like Amazon, eBay, Google and Microsoft.
- All production of VCRs stops, as does production of full-size VHS tapes.
- Internet2 moves to the commercial world.

Some of the 19 seem plausible, some interesting, some mostly silly (e.g., Steve Jobs quits Apple and buys the Boston Red Sox, Michael Dell quits Dell and buys the New York Yankees).

SPARC Open Access Newsletter

Peter Suber offered 14 predictions for 2004 in the February 2, 2004 issue. You might want to look back at those predictions (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/02-02-04.htm). I'd say he got 12 of 14 right and the other three at least partly right. (I haven't seen that much OA activity in the humanities and I don't believe Amazon's "Search inside the book" has either proved or disproved the concept that free online full-text triggers more sales of print books, although I believe that to be probable.) That's a remarkable track record, particularly given that some of the projections were neither obvious nor (I would have said at the time) likely.

Suber offers 13 predictions for 2005—use the same URL but with "01-02-05" for the full January 2, 2005 issue. He thinks the NIH policy will inspire other similar policies, that we'll see at least one journal claim that the NIH policy is causing it to lose subscribers, and that we'll start to see competition among OA journals within specific niches. Subscription-based journals will continue to experiment with OA in various ways (lots of hybrids); that means fewer journal publishers raising the "peer review" objection. While OA will expand in well-funded fields, there will also be efforts in less-funded fields.

OA literature will induce coders to create worthwhile tools that work with the literature (and vice-versa). OA journals will become prestigious enough to

attract the top scholars. "OA to new journal articles will vastly outpace OA to new books. But OA to sufficiently old books (books in the public domain) will start to surpass OA in sufficiently old journals... [still] we'll see new progress toward OA to new books..." Journals will find that restrictive archiving policies (e.g., Elsevier's "only your own institution") are unworkable. Very few (if any) journals will rescind "green OA" policies. Large publishers will diversify to ensure survival.

"OA proponents will have to cope with success. Or to be more precise, we'll have to cope with partial success. That means preventing universities from using OA as an excuse to cut library budgets..."

I'd bet Suber's right on 12 of the 13, and I hope he's right that we'll see more humanities OA. I suspect one prediction from 2004 is equally valid for 2005: "There will be less unity in the OA movement, or at least less concern to preserve solidarity in every public discussion." That's a good thing for the long-term health of OA.

Ed Felten: Freedom to tinker

Felten restated his seven 2004 projections before making his new list. For 2004, he predicted that some public figure would be severely embarrassed by an image taken on a picture-phone or audio captured on a pocket recorder; that e-voting technologies would lose credibility; that P2P tools resisting countermeasures would become more popular; that the studios would want *more* than the broadcast flag; that DRM would still be mostly useless; that WiFi would become more and more a free amenity; that VoIP companies would be "darlings of the business press" but the biggest stories would be security and reliability questions. He rates himself two right, three mostly right, two mostly wrong (VoIP and the timing of further MPAA moves). That's a good track record. Felten says, "I'm surprised to have done so well. Obviously this year's predictions need to be more outrageous."

Here are this year's predictions (www.freedom-to-tinker.com/archives/000744.html):

- DRM technology on PCs will be seen as a security and privacy risk.
- Vonage and other established VoIP vendors "will start to act like incumbents, welcoming regulation."
- IE will face increasing pressure from Firefox.
- Major bloggers will either team up or affiliate with news outlets or major web sites.

- A pure-internet TV show or movie will be a cult hit.
- The Supreme Court won't provide a definitive Grokker decision.
- Copyright legislation will be stalemated, as will spam, spyware, and security issues.
- Congress will pass a "harmless but ineffectual" anti-spyware act.
- "DRM technology will still fail to prevent widespread infringement. In a related development, pigs will still fail to fly."
- New P2P systems will combine swarming (BitTorrent) distribution and distributed (Kazaa etc.) indexes; big media will try to corrupt system indexes.
- "X-ray vision technology will become more widely available (though not to the general public), spurring a privacy hooahah."

An interesting list, with #3 a done deal. Far be it from me to question the first eleven!

Wired News: "Vaporware phantom haunts us all"

This January 7, 2005 story by Leander Kahney isn't a forecast, it's a sad reality—the 8th annual Vaporware Awards. Ignoring games (and *particularly* ignoring *Duke Nukem Forever*), the vaporware awards include:

- Alienware's Video Array, which would allow video cards to run in parallel
- A 4GHz Pentium 4 from Intel and a 3GHz G5 from Apple
- ATI Radeon X800 video cards—supposedly shipping, but you can't find them
- Microsoft Longhorn, the successor to Windows XP, originally scheduled for 2004. (I can wait.)
- "CherryOS," a \$50 Mac emulator for Windows PCs
- The Phantom Game Console from Infinium Labs

That's it for the forecasts (for this issue at least). Do these influence your "top technology trends" picks for 2005? Should they? In some cases, yes; in some cases, libraries *should* be behind the curve. In some cases, I just don't know.

Quicker Takes

Bill Howard thinks everyone else should have the same preferences he does, which isn't unusual for tech journalists. His latest piece of bad advice, "Rent, don't rip," comes in the October 19, 2004 *PC Magazine*. He

doesn't want to own CDs or DVDs; he wants to pay rental for all his media needs—and, presumably, rests comfortably in the assurance that this total dependence on the goodwill of Big Media will serve him well in the long run. What's interesting to me is that Howard simply sweeps away the extreme compromises involved. Hey, for \$10 a month, Napster or Rhapsody will give you "all the music you want at moderate fidelity (few of us stop to listen to music critically)." So much for quality audio: You're not really paying attention, so who cares? It gets worse: He thinks it's time to stop buying DVDs because his DVD collection "is about to become obsolete in the face of high-definition DVD." That's simply false (obsolescent is not obsolete, and—unlike LPs—those DVDs will play just fine on HD DVD players, when those eventually make sense), and "movie downloads"—with their extreme compression to save download time—really do fall into the "well, I'm not really watching critically anyway" category. It's the old Heavenly Jukebox, a prime example of the need to be careful what you wish for. (Will those KTDs who really don't ever buy or listen to CDs ever understand that they're not hearing all the music? Will they care?)

- "The Internet will prove to be the undoing of society and civilization as we know it." Why? Because of "the Web's natural ability to remove normal interpersonal structures that prevent society from falling into chaos." Hmm? "Almost everyone on the Net is anonymous." "Haughty bloggers" who "hide behind a good online template" are taken seriously and "may even become famous" if he/she stays hidden long enough." The entire political scene has become totally dichotomous, and that's "thanks to the net." "If it were up to me, I'd shut down the Net tomorrow and make people get out of the house and mingle." Who's writing this over-the-top screed? John C. Dvorak, or some whack job posing as Dvorak successfully enough to take over Dvorak's *PC Magazine* column (23:19, p. 61). And, of course, Dvorak has a special weekly column that only appears on...the Web. For which I suspect he makes very good money. Little wonder that the best letter four pages earlier in the issue offers "proof positive that John Dvorak is the complete idiot that I've believed him to be all these years" for

claiming that the “D” in Class D audio amplification stands for “digital.” (It doesn’t, and Class D amplifiers have been around for a long time.) The last line of the letter was good enough to be the callout for the letters page: “John Dvorak’s column is a vastly entertaining piece of highly opinionated fiction.” Except it’s rarely entertaining these days.

- While I didn’t include *PC Magazine*’s big roundup of HDTVs (it’s a little out of scope), I was delighted to see the article acknowledge and quantify one issue with plasma TVs: They’re power hogs. The three plasma sets required 708 (55”), 545 (50”) and 363 (49”) watts, where rear-projection (DLP/D-ILA or LCD) screens needed 195 (61”), 200 (50”) and 250 (60”) watts to yield *brighter* pictures than the plasma screens. (Direct-view LCDs are generally smaller, so it’s hard to make comparisons, but the three tested sets drew 350 (46”), 216 (37”), and 145 (30”) watts.)

Bibs & Blather

Why the Midwinter Issue?

Well, see, it’s like this...

Originally, I’d planned to do the whole PERSPECTIVE: LOOKING BACK in a single issue. As I juggled deadlines and energy in late December, I realized that it would be *way* too long, so I split it into two natural sections. The remaining “half” is still more than half of a regular issue and I’d just as soon get it out of the way. If all goes well, and as Midwinter reports arrive, I’ll have plenty of new and more varied material for the February issue.

I could make the case that including the forecast cluster in TRENDS & QUICK TAKES before Midwinter constitutes my small contribution to the LITA Top Technology Trends discussion.

Between those two, a group of INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS, and this nonsense, I had enough for an issue (setting aside the LIBRARY STUFF, GOOD STUFF, and PC PROGRESS sections that are growing but not quite ripe yet).

Then there’s the format change, which may be small or substantial (depending on a truly last-minute decision and whether you consider my “substantial” change to deserve that name).

Do I promise that the February issue will restore a blend of standing sections and interesting new PERSPECTIVES? I’ve learned not to promise what will be in a given issue until the day it’s published.

Small Changes?

The banner changes with this issue, adding the tagline “Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media” below the subtitle “Crawford at Large.” The new line is a tagline or motto, saying something about the claimed purpose of *Cites & Insights*. It’s like “The most comprehensive guide to today’s technology” for *Computer Shopper* or “The independent guide to technology” for *PC Magazine* or, a *very* similar case, “Home Theater • Audio • Video • Multimedia • Movies • Music” for *Sound & Vision* (with the dropped red “&” replacing the middle-dot between “Video” and “Multimedia.”)

It’s *not* a subtitle. For the sake of serials librarians or ISSN watchdogs in the audience, let me repeat that: The title and subtitle *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* have not changed. I don’t want a new ISSN, and under no circumstances would I change titles mid-volume: I’ve been in the library field *way* too long to do that!

Rethinking the body type

In the interests of space, I’ll skip most of a long, boring story about end-user license agreements (EULAs), ethics, the law as regards typefaces, and all that. Let’s just say that:

- Typeface designs can’t be protected by copyright (which makes sense, if you think how much new designs *must* be based on old ones), but the software that produces a digital typeface can be protected.
- ITC’s EULA was a little confusing, but offered up front. I couldn’t determine whether the standard license would cover this sponsored-but-free publication (is it commercial or not?) and whether embedding within PDF counts as embedding a typeface.
- Here’s the kicker: Unlike far too many companies with websites, ITC (International Typeface Corporation) is responsive. Sarah Maguire responded to my muddled email and clarified the situation.

Cites & Insights has always used Arrus BT, a Bitstream original TrueType design, for body type and third-level headings. (Bitstream’s version of Friz Quadrata is used for the banner and all larger headings; that isn’t

changing.) I like Arrus BT a lot; I think it's one of the most readable text faces around. Body type has been 10 points on 12 point leading, 9 on 11 for indented quotations, 12 on 14 for citations.

Much as I love Arrus (I used it to prepare the pages for *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness & Reality* and *Being Analog*), there are always other good choices. I was struck by the quality of the body type used for *First Have Something to Say* (which I did not desktop publish): Berkeley Book, really Berkeley Oldstyle Book. It struck me as elegant, extremely readable, and possibly a nice change for *Cites & Insights*. (Goudy designed Berkeley Oldstyle for my alma mater, the University of California, Berkeley. That's not why I like it.)

Berkeley Book isn't among the hundreds of professional TrueType typefaces that came with Corel Draw and Corel Ventura. After clarifying the license situation, I purchased the ITC typefaces.

That's what you see here—but with other changes as well. Body text is now 11 on 13.5 points: Arrus typically looks a whole point larger than it's set, where Berkeley sets at a typical size and needs a little extra breathing space. Block quotes are set 10 on 12. Citations are still 12 on 14—but in Berkeley Oldstyle, which is heavier than Berkeley Oldstyle Book.

This type is a little fancier than Arrus and a little more open for its size. It's also kerned quite well, although not as tightly as Arrus.

What's kerning? It's the process of fitting letters together when one overhangs another—an area that contemporary typesetting can do much better than metal type. Type the following phrase into your word processor: “Tanya the WAVE said Yes to TrueType.” Print that out (or look at it on screen) in various typefaces. Note the spacing of the “Ta,” “WA,” “AV,” “Ye,” “Tr,” and “Ty.” In this text (and in Arrus), they're all kerned so they look right. Too many typefaces lack adequate kerning information.

I'm acutely aware that at least 90% of you don't much care. If I switched to Times New Roman (not going to happen!) or Arial (so not going to happen!), you might not even notice. Such is life.

Interesting & Peculiar Products

DualDisc

You may not care about high-resolution multichannel sound recordings (other than multichannel sound-

tracks on DVD movies). Most consumers apparently don't, and the record publishers aren't nearly as committed to either or both formats (DVD-Audio and SACD) as they claim to be. Record stores don't want the headaches of multiple formats.

One answer for SACD has been stealth discs—Bob Dylan, Rolling Stones, and other restored reissues of important recordings that come out in a single form with two layers. One layer's just a CD and that's what most people (and libraries) think they're buying. The other layer is SACD, with or without multichannel. These discs typically sell for CD prices and underplay the SACD connection. They solve the record store stocking problem (only one format) and finesse the copy-protection problem: SACD is copy-protected, CD isn't. (I can live with that level of DRM.)

So what about DVD-Audio? It *really* hasn't done well, even though it can offer video clips along with multichannel high-resolution sound. The four big record companies are trying to move things along with DualDisc, a “flipper disc.” A DualDisc is a slightly thin CD on one side and a DVD on the other; the DVD side could be DVD-Audio, surround sound in DVD-Video format, or regular video.

Oddly enough, even Sony Music is involved, although Sony developed SACD and is a strong proponent of that format. Indeed, Sony's DualDiscs won't have DVD-Audio on the DVD side, just DVD-Video surround sound. For high-res, you buy an SACD.

DualDiscs (which should be on the market as you read this) will be packaged in CD-size jewel boxes, not DVD-size longboxes, and priced similarly to CDs. You may have noticed that many music DVDs are *cheaper* than CDs by the same groups, even though they may have twice as much music in concert or music video form. Of course, you can't rip that music to MP3 form without special and legally questionable software; that may make DualDiscs more desirable.

The thinner CD layer can't handle 72 or 80 minutes of music: It's limited to a total time of 60 to 65 minutes. The CD side of a DualDisc isn't really a CD *because* it's thinner. The CD *Red Book* requires a minimum of 1.1mm for a CD; the CD side of a DualDisc is 0.9mm thick. The DVD side is even thinner, 0.6mm. Philips says casual dirt causes a lot of failures when playing the CD side. The CD logo will *not* appear on DualDiscs; Philips insists on that. (Philips and Sony own the CD and SACD patents.) Some players may not handle the CD side very well.

And, of course, there's the same problem as with all double-sided optical discs: No real label area and some confusion as to which side is which. For libraries, there's the added complication that there's *really* nowhere to put a security device—but you already know that from the many two-sided DVD movies.

Will DualDisc revive DVD-Audio? Wait and see. [Information on DualDisc gleaned from *Sound & Vision* 69:9 (November 2004).]

OQO model 01

One of the longer-running stories in the world of unusual PC variants. I wrote about it in July 2002, again (briefly) in August 2004, and noted that it was apparently, finally, shipping (in the December 2004 *Interesting & PECULIAR PRODUCTS*). *PC Magazine* 23:20 (November 16, 2004) reviews the shipping OQO. It's now up to \$1,999, still only available direct from OQO. As I suspected, the OQO's screen isn't "five inches wide" (impossible in a device that's 4.9x3.4x0.9"): it's actually a 5.1" *diagonal measurement* widescreen LCD with 800x480 resolution. The pocket PC—and the whole reason this is an interesting device is that it's a full Windows XP PC, not a PDA—did wind up at just under a pound in weight and supports its 1GHz Crusoe CPU with 256MB RAM and a 20GB hard disk. In use, the unit's bigger than those measurements: you slide the screen up to reveal a thumb keyboard. While you can use a stylus to navigate, there's no handwriting recognition.

PC Magazine didn't run full performance tests. "Running Microsoft Office apps and surfing the Internet seemed fine, but we don't recommend having several applications running at the same time." You get reasonable connectivity: 802.11b Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, a FireWire port, and one USB1.1 (not USB2!) port.

Here's what *PC Magazine* concludes: "Clearly, the OQO model 01 isn't right for everyone, but it could prove very useful for the salesperson who needs a scaled-down PC on the road." It's an odd market position, somewhere between a Windows CE-based PDA (less than one-third the price and a little smaller, but with nowhere near the screen resolution) and an ultralight notebook (about the same price but considerably larger). OQO continues to treat it as a revolutionary product that can't be compared to anything else and will change *everything*. I see a niche player at best, but what do I know? One thing's clear, between this device and a couple of PDAs with full

VGA resolution: It is now possible to get greater than 175dpi resolution in an LCD screen, as long as the screen is small enough.

PC World reviewed the Model 01 in its December 2004 issue—but didn't rate it because it still wasn't a production model. The headline says "OQO Handheld Disappoints." The story calls the device "painfully slow" and notes odd keyboard design, poorly located headphone jack, noticeable heat, and erratic touch-screen performance. In sum, "you have a PDA that's awkward to use at best." You also have a \$1,999 PDA, three times as expensive as high-end PDAs.

Surround Sound from One Speaker?

Nothing to do with computing technology or libraries, necessarily, but the M&K MP-4512 is—at the least—an interesting product. It's a \$650 speaker system, roughly 18x5x6", with six speakers on the front and one on each end. Ideally, you'd use it with a subwoofer like M&K's \$599 K-10, since the larger speakers on the MP-4512 are "mid-woofers" and make no pretense of going much below 100Hz.

Several companies have produced single-box surround-sound systems in the past two or three years, including the \$300 Mainstage from Sound Matters. This is a little different partly because M&K is a high-end manufacturer, partly because this one runs from your regular 5.1-channel receiver or power amplifier. The review in *Ultimate AV* 1:6 (December 2004) is fairly positive. Set up properly in the right room, the MP-4512 apparently does provide a convincing surround-sound image most of the time, and good-quality sound at that. The whole thing should fit nicely on top of a 20" or larger TV. For small "home theaters," it may be just the ticket.

iPod's Big Brother?

That's *PC Magazine's* take on Apple's iMac G5—and it's a compliment. The G5 drops the snazzy swing-arm and the clunky dome base, putting the works in a two-inch-thick chassis behind the display itself. That design seems reminiscent of the older Gateway Profile and makes inserting removable media a bit clunky, but of course it's white, has rounded corners, and has Apple's cachet, so it's automatically hot stuff.

Grumbling aside, the G5 appears to be a first-rate system at a fair price: \$1,299 and up with a wide-screen 17" LCD or \$1,899 and up with a 20" display. Given the price of separate 20" LCDs, that seems

more than reasonable. The system tested cost \$2,103, but that includes 512MB DDRAM, high-end nVidia graphics, a 160GB hard disk, a DVD-RW burner, 802.11g, and Bluetooth—and the 1.8GHz PowerPC G5 processor. It's not that portable at 25 pounds, but you could cart it around. The rating is a full five dots, earning an Editors' Choice designation.

Matrix 3-D Memory

A two-page news feature in *EContent* 27:11 (November 2004) discusses this “low-cost, write-once flash memory chip.” Matrix calls it a new category of memory, with three-dimensional chipmaking techniques that stack bits on top of each other as well as on a given plane, supposedly greatly reducing the cost of flash memory. I wonder a bit about the technological explanation—“chip costs are based on the area consumed rather than volume”—and even more about the complete lack of actual cost figures. There's no direct competition with flash RAM, e.g. USB drives, solid-state MP3 players, and the many digital camera storage devices; this stuff can only be written once, so it's more of a publishing medium.

For that matter, I wonder about the likely uses claimed by an industry analyst. He suggests that people would use blank *write-once* devices to buy video and music and would also buy them to use as digital film. The memory would have to be awfully cheap for the latter use to make sense, and it seems to eliminate the potential ecological advantage of digital cameras. But who knows? This one may be worth watching.

Cool or Geeky?

PC World's Steve Fox thinks Oakley's The Thump is “a marvel of geek-meets-chic design.” This \$395 (128MB) or \$495 (\$256) oddity is a pair of sunglasses with an MP3/WMA/WAV player built in. Controls are on the frame; speakers are on “adjustable booms” next to your ears. The glasses don't weigh much (1.9oz) and are rated for 6 hours battery life. Fox's last line: “Besides, looking cool just costs more.” Except that, to my eyes, these glasses are the antithesis of cool: They look nerdy as all get out. To each their own.

Should You Pay for Ad-Aware?

LavaSoft's Ad-Aware and Spybot's Search and Destroy are typically among the highest-rated tools for cleaning and preventing spyware and adware—and both are free. But there's also a \$27 version of Ad-Aware, SE

Plus. According to *PC World's* 12/04 review, it may be worth it: It adds real-time protection.

A Good Old Idea Returns

The \$2,099 Toshiba TDP-T91U is a little heavy as portable data projectors go (8.2 pounds), but it's an impressive performer: 2018 lumens on *PC Magazine's* tests, measured 336:1 contrast, “one of the highest we've encountered in years of testing,” and generally excellent image quality—and even a decent built-in speaker. That's not what makes it special, though. This is: A document camera attached to one side that can be used to display documents and three-dimensional objects—offering a combo that used to be available in a very few high-priced overhead transparency projectors. You can detach the camera—and if you know you won't need it on a trip, leave it behind to bring the projector down to 6.2 pounds.

Perspective

Looking Back 2: Trends and Perspectives, 2001-2004

This PERSPECTIVE goes through the 57 editions of *Cites & Insights* through the end of volume 4, repeating excerpts from one item with notes added as appropriate. The overall meaning should be just as clear as it was for LOOKING BACK 1.

2001 and Preview

[Commenting on “Virtual spying” by Roberta Furger in *FamilyPC*]: With one exception, this is a thoughtful discussion of how parents should approach their children's use of the Web... The paragraph on software filtering quality dismisses problems a little too abruptly. Here's the entirety of any doubts as to filter effectiveness: “Although the products have long been criticized by civil liberties groups for their tendency to block legitimate educational sites along with the porn and hate sites, many media advocates and child-development experts acknowledge the usefulness of these software tools.” That's it. [December 2000]

Roberta Furger continued to ignore the real problems with filters, even though she could have acknowledged them and said (perhaps properly) that, *despite* those problems, they were worth considering. But, as

usual, those who advocate filtering do their damndest to ignore the known problems.

BEYOND THE PC: WEB APPLIANCES AD NAUSEUM... Most silly ideas disappear—but few well-funded bad ideas disappear rapidly. Virgin's WebPlayer falls into that rare category.... The company that was providing the [10,000] appliances and Internet service is dropping out of that business. WebPlayers can't be reconfigured to work with any other ISP... Add it up. Somebody—Virgin Entertainment or Internet Appliance Network (IAN)—laid out somewhere between \$3,000,000 and \$5,000,000 for the devices and an additional sum for Internet access for the subscribers.... A few thousand Virgin shoppers either keep high-tech doorstops, send them back to IAN to use for parts, or find hackers who can convert the WebPlayers to PC peripherals. Some New Economy players lose a few million dollars. Single-function Internet appliances take another hit in the credibility department. Life goes on. [1:1, January 2001]

At the beginning of the essay, I offered this moral for libraries: "If you think that 'thin clients' and 'Web appliances' offer great value to replace your Internet and catalog PCs—those values will only remain if the industry succeeds on a broader scale. So far, the odds don't look all that good."

TREND WATCH 2001: THE NEW YEAR FOLLIES... Guttman, Monika, "The 10 hot tech trends of 2001," *FamilyPC* 8:1 (January 2001), pp. 96-7. This remarkable article brings us ten projections from "10 experts"... Philippe Kahn...has us all carrying candy-bar size wireless devices that combine digital cameras and cell phones so we can share life's moments anywhere, anytime. Jack Myers says that we *need* personal video recorders to handle our 62 TV channels, and they'll become so popular so quickly that they'll be embedded into TV sets. Hence the age of personal TV, *this year*. Michael Wolff (*Burn Rate*) oversells Net backlash by claiming, "By the end of the year, the whole notion of a dot-com will seem like a foolish or quaint idea. There will be no businesses that are just Internet businesses." He includes Amazon.com (and presumably Yahoo, Dell and Google?) in that overstatement: they'll all "go out of business or be merged into other conventional business." This year. Ben Mandell has the wired home happening this year—yep, even the sure-fire refrigerator that keeps track of your groceries and maybe sends lists to the stores. Joyce Schwarz heralds the death of "high phone bills" because we'll all be using Internet telephony. This year... [1:2, February 2001]

Kahn and Myers were three years early—and "us all" became early adopters even then (tens of millions for

camera phones, millions for DVRs). Wolff and Mandell were just plain wrong, for opposite reasons. Schwarz? At least four years early—and "the death of high phone bills" may come through service bundling more than VOIP.

LIVING WITH CONTRADICTIONS... Can A Copy Improve on the Original? A few months ago, I was mentally belittling Michael Fremer...[who] 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."... When he tested six brand-new [audio] 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? ... Applying a little White Queen thinking, Michael Frammer 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? [1:3, March 2001]

Most of the music we listen to now is on CD-Rs, reconverted to audio CD form from high-resolution MP3 (usually 320Kbps). I actually do think that some of the resulting songs sound better than the originals (not because of euphonic distortion); so does my wife. And that bothers me a lot.

PRODUCT WATCH... Revolve RoadWriter. Here's another one that could be a blessing or a curse. It costs \$205 to \$265 and requires a Palm PDA (or one of a few competitors). What it is, is a fixed keyboard, nickel hydride batteries with charger, 12-volt "cigarette" adapter, two serial ports—all on a platform

atop a 14" flexible gooseneck arm. Mounted in your car. "You need to be sure that mounted PDAs and any other devices do not encroach on the airbag zone." That's the frightening part. "If your car is your office, the rugged Revolve RoadWriter holds your PDA in a visible location and aids input and communication." While you're weaving in and out of traffic in a Jeep Grand Cherokee (their test vehicle) at 80 miles an hour? [1:4, April 2001]

Unfortunately, it wasn't even a joke when I wrote it.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Sense and Scents... we read about Trisenx and its new plans. "Trisenx has already brought the world the MultiSenx scent device, a PC peripheral that mixes and dispenses aromas." Next comes a new peripheral loaded up with 200 "flavor cartridges." "It will work like an inkjet printer and dispense the requested flavor onto an edible potato-based wafer." It won't be here until early 2002; I, for one, can wait. Has anyone seen a MultiSenx stink factory in action? Is anyone *really* willing to visit Web sites and literally swallow what the ads are saying? Ready to equip library Internet computers with both scent and taste systems? Another timing wonderment. I wasn't aware that there were *two* companies trying to convince us to add scent to our computing; I was only aware of DigiScents, the higher-profile company. DigiScents went under on April 16; their business plan apparently stunk up the place. [1:5, May 2001]

Bad ideas rarely go completely away. I recently read about another sure-fire scent peripheral.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... What may be the final issue of *[Inside]* (April 3, 2001) includes a disturbing article by Charles C. Mann, "Here come the Napster-proof CDs." The idea? Audio compact discs that contain deliberate errors within the data tracks. The theory is that CD players will ignore the errors—but CD-ROM players will stop playing at that point. If the CD won't play in your CD-ROM drive, you can't rip it to MP3. It's not really copy protection (presumably, a CD recorder could copy the data tracks, although that's not clear). It wouldn't keep anyone who can find a Radio Shack from ripping tracks, either—all you need to do is plug any old CD player into the audio input that's on every audio card and rip that way. You lose some quality, given two analog-digital conversions, but if you're converting to MP3, who cares? ... This is idiocy. I've probably discussed it before, but the four pages of coverage here say the threat hasn't gone away. [1:6, June 2001]

It wasn't until that October that I recognized the need for ongoing copyright coverage—and I'm not sure I recognized that this fit into such coverage. Induced

errors do represent one of several stupid CD tricks used in copy-"protected" pseudo-CDs, and it's still a really bad idea.

BIBS & BLATHER... While everything in *Cites & Insights* reflects my own perspectives, those perspectives aren't always clear. (If you find my articles in *American Libraries*, *EContent* and *Online* to be clearer, consider the virtues of good editing!) Sometimes that's because I have mixed feelings about issues, devices, technologies, or whatever—which is usually the case. I'm using a new flag for certain essays, beginning with this issue: "Where I Stand." In the long run, I hope that these essays will be thoughtful summaries of what I believe about a certain issue and why. And if you find that my apparent stance in October seems at odds with "Where I Stand" in April—times change and I never claimed to be consistent. [1:7, July 2001]

The first WHERE I STAND carried the title "For the Children" and commented on CIPA (and Will Manley's "Wooden-headedness" column supporting CIPA), introducing the Children's Sharp Things Protective Act to illustrate the problem. ("Any institution that receives federal subsidies and allows children into any of its areas may not use sharp things—knives, hypodermic needles, pointed scissors.")

PRODUCT WATCH... Remember the competing "super diskette" drives, the Sony HiFD and LS120A SuperDisk? Maybe not. Both offered upward compatibility with 3.5" microdiskettes while providing much higher capacity on special same-size media (120MB and, later, 240MB for the LS120A, 200MB for the HiFD)... [H]ope springs eternal. Matsushita (Panasonic) is introducing the FD32MB SuperDisk, which supposedly stores 32MB on a *standard* microdiskette. The claim is that the new drive will also handle LS120A SuperDisks. Drives will cost around \$200. The Panasonic spokesperson is high on the idea, saying that the low cost of diskettes and ease of use should be big selling points (according to a report in the June 2001 *Computer Shopper*). One little drawback: files written in high-capacity mode are read-only. Just as they are on CD-Rs, which are as cheap as microdiskettes, use drives that cost less than \$200, and hold 700MB rather than 32MB—and are faster than diskettes... Maybe I'm missing the point. [1:8, Midsummer 2001]

I wasn't missing the point. I was missing the final nail in the diskette's coffin (and certainly in the coffin of "high-capacity" diskettes): USB drives, which hadn't appeared yet. The FD32MB did even less well than the HiFD and LS120A: No surprise.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... The Swinging Pendulum. A year or two ago, everything was going to be free and the Internet would conquer all. As with most extremes, corrections also tend to go too far. That was clear in a sequence of messages on PUBLIB in early June. In the first one, a public library director noted that a free antivirus service was disappearing, replaced by a priced product. The conclusion? "The free parts of the Web are drawing to a close... The end of the 'free Web' is going to have a financial impact on libraries." Another public library director responded, "The end of the free Web will be a double edged sword."... Blake Carver of LISNews fame offered his take on this situation in a June 7 essay, "The reports of my death have been exaggerated." ... The "free Web" isn't going away—but absurd freebies probably are. It never took deep thought to recognize the silly situations—cases where there was no plausible way for ad or subsidiary revenue to make up for actual costs, and where there's not a secondary business reason to support a losing proposition. Why would anyone be surprised that such services disappear—and why would this be a sign of the apocalypse? [1:9, August 2001]

LISNews is still here and still free. *Cites & Insights* is still here, still free. Ditto Google. And now, the "long tail" that makes *Cites & Insights* plausible with only a few thousand readers (and has always been known to magazine and book publishers, since 99% of successful magazines and books are niche publications), has caught *Wired's* attention and is the Hot New Thing.

BIBS & BLATHER: Stephen Davis of Columbia University Libraries, a respected colleague, wrote to comment on his difficulties in citing an article from the last issue. One problem is that there's no way to deep link to a portion of an issue: that's not going to change. The other problem is that I don't assign a stable filename to an issue until the *next* issue is published... I think Davis makes a good point. Henceforth—beginning with this issue—*Cites & Insights* issues will be stored with stable URLs... [1:10, September 2001]

OK, I was wrong to use temporary filenames for current issues—but it's true that, *at the time*, I had only one counter to indicate readership. As to the second sentence of the comments above: "That's not going to change" *for now*, but who knows?

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Wearable Computers. A tiny piece in the August 2001 *PC Magazine* notes "it's not just for LARA Croft anymore." For a mere \$3,995, you can strap the one-pound Xybernaut Mobile Assistant V to your belt buckle. It features a Celeron-500 and TI digital signal processor. The picture

shows a worker with this device on his belt and one of those Borg-like side-of-the-eye displays. Important niche markets clearly exist for devices like this—airplane mechanics, for example. A Gartner analyst thinks that niches are where these belong. But Dewayne Adams of Xybernaut "believes wearable computers will eventually be everywhere because of the convenience factor." Great. Now, along with the black plastic handheld earflaps that allow urban idiots to ignore us halfway, they'll have headmounted monitors and beltmounted CPUs so they can ignore the real world completely. I can just see Castro Street at lunch hour. [1:11, October 2001]

Fortunately, Dewayne Adams' dreams of ubiquity aren't going anywhere, at least so far. "Black plastic handheld earflaps" probably meant cell phones...

PRESS WATCH II: COMMENTARY... Henshaw, Robin, "What next for Internet journals? Implications of the trend toward paid placement in search engines," *First Monday* 6:9 (September 2001), www.firstmonday.org. This article might have appeared in Press Watch I, but not with the following first two sentences: "In September 1991 a new journal was announced. The *Online Journal of Current Clinical Trials* was to be the world's first online peer-reviewed journal." **Wrong.** Not even close. Among others, *The Public-Access Computer Systems Review* published one complete volume (three issues, sixteen refereed articles and a number of columns, 229 pages in the delayed print edition) in 1990 and a substantial issue in early 1991. That issue was, in fact, a special issue on electronic journals—and the first article noted at least half a dozen *other* existing online peer-reviewed journals. ...*New Horizons in Adult Education* began in 1987, to give another, even earlier example. I can't take seriously an article that begins with such an outrageous—and easily demonstrated—falsehood. That's too bad, as a better-edited (or better-refereed!) version might be worth reading. [1:12, November 2001]

Articles and commentaries on ejournals *still* consistently get the dates seriously wrong, usually even more so than this egregious example. I don't know whether any online peer-reviewed journal predates 1987, but any timeline starting later than that is wrong, wrong, wrong.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Burning DVDs. "Trust us: You will eventually own a rewritable-DVD device." That comes in the third paragraph of a four-page story, "The DVD dilemma," in the November 2001 *PC World* (pp. 26-9). You can probably guess that I feel the same way about "Trust us" as I do about "inevitable"—my BS detector goes off the scale. Similarly, the first paragraph: "It's been a while coming,

but the day that you'll trade both your trusty CD-RW drive and your familiar VCR for a new rewritable-DVD device is fast approaching." If by "fast approaching" Jon L. Jacobi means "in the next couple of years," I suspect he's wrong for most of us—at least partly for reasons discussed in the rest of the article.....[1:13, December 2001]

I was wrong and Jacobi was right. Well, partly right: People aren't abandoning CD-RW, but if you're buying a new PC I can't imagine *not* getting a DVD burner, and standalone DVD burners (preferably coupled to DVRs) are certainly on the road to replacing VCRs. The drives and blanks have come down in price even faster than I'd expected. You can buy an internal multiformat burner that even does dual-layer DVD+R for about \$60, and recordable (but not rewritable) blanks are cheaper than \$.50 in bulk quantities.

2002

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Does VideoCD Stand a Chance? If you're watching a prerecorded movie at home in the Far East, there's a good chance the image is sub-VHS quality. That silver disc isn't a DVD; it's a VideoCD, video recorded on a CD using inferior MPEG-1 encoding and extremely high compression. Despite some projections, VideoCD never caught on in the United States as a prerecorded medium... [Bob Starrett] suggests that VideoCD could be useful for training and educational applications as well as home movies. The discs are cheap (they're just CD-Rs), the recorders are cheap, reasonable video software is becoming available, and for some purposes the quality is good enough. There's also Super VideoCD—near-DVD quality, but (as a direct result) only 15 minutes or so on a CD-R. Maybe that's all you need. One warning: while your DVD player may have the software to play VideoCD, it might not have the hardware (the second laser) for CD-R. That's changing, to be sure. [2:1, January 2002]

Almost every DVD player also supports VideoCD, and most newer ones play CD-Rs (older ones may not)—but VideoCD *still* never caught on, even as a storage medium for analog home video. It continues to be a medium for commercially pirated movies in Asia.

BIBS & BLATHER/NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION: NO MORE GUILTY PLEASURES! Here's a New Year's resolution you should be able to keep: No more guilty pleasures. "Hah," you say, "so you've stopped watching *Buffy* and *Angel* and *Futurama* and *Enterprise*, and now you expect us to stick to high culture as well." Hold on. No, I haven't; no, I don't. I'm not suggesting that you change your viewing, reading or listening habits

unless that suits your own needs. What I'm suggesting is that you shouldn't feel guilty about your pleasures. (Unless it gives you pleasure to feel guilty about them.) ... If you enjoy a book, a movie, a TV show, a CD, a restaurant—then it has positive features that you respond to. [2:2, Midwinter 2002]

There's more to the essay, and I'll stand by every word. If you care, my wife and I *still* watch an episode of *Buffy*, *The Vampire Slayer* every week—we're going through the DVD sets, currently near the end of season six. (I went on to suggest that folks going to ALA Midwinter 2002 in N'awlins should leave time for dirty rice and po'boys in corner dives.)

THE YEAR AHEAD (AND BEHIND), II... 2001: A Failure Odyssey. That's the head on Joanna Glasner's brief roundup at *Wired News*, posted January 2, 2002. She looks back exactly a year. Joe Geek is finishing another day coding at home, connected by Excite@Home; the doorbell rings, with the Webvan man delivering groceries; Geek clicks over to Napster to grab some tunes, then checks the stock market. Well, Enron's down to only \$80 and both Lucent and JDS Uniphase went down a bit—but we all know that Republican presidents are good for the economy, so it should be fine soon. Geek goes back online, checking CyberRebate.com. Then he leafs through *The Industry Standard* and, finding the TV schedule boring, calls Kozmo to deliver a video. Need I say more? [2:3, February 2002]

This three-page piece gathered a bunch of predictions (most of which were either too early or just plain wrong); I thought the final bursting of the first dot-com bubble was worth repeating.

BIBS & BLATHER: WHERE DO YOU GET THIS STUFF? I rely on the kindness of semi-strangers. Don't we all? Yes, I check quite a few sources regularly—some print magazines, some electronic journals and online magazines. My quick scan of article titles and introductory paragraphs probably misses great items, but I read a lot more articles fully than I cite here. But the publications I regularly read probably account for no more than half the material noted here. I don't exactly *find* the other items—they find me, one way or another... Sometimes, a writer sends me a copy of something particularly interesting. Publishers that want to see their magazines covered might yet decide to send me complimentary subscriptions. Someone may send a note pointing to an interesting item. More frequently, I pick up such notes from one of the lists I subscribe to. There's a third category: Resources that do the same thing I'm doing, albeit in different ways. I check a dozen or so Weblogs every day (that takes one coffee break), including the obvious choices

(mostly mentioned in my October 2001 *American Libraries* article) and a few more obscure ones... [2:4, March 2002]

I went on to specifically cite *Current Cites* and Peter Suber's *Free Online Scholarship Newsletter*. The latter has changed names and continues to be invaluable. So far, no publisher has decided to comp a subscription to their magazine(s). As for weblogs...well, what with Bloglines, I follow close to a hundred weblogs, and it takes less than one coffee break. That list (which doesn't quite cover everything) is available if you know where to look for it.

THE LITERACY "CRISIS": GOOD NEWS—OR IS IT? Surely you remember the shocking "facts" about the adult literacy crisis in America? Forty-seven percent of adult Americans are functionally illiterate—or at least they were in 1992, according to *Adult Literacy in America*, published by the National Center for Education Statistics. That was devastating news back then and has continued to be heard almost as a drumbeat in some discussions: nearly half of Americans can't read. I don't recall seeing similar coverage for a recent reconsideration of those figures, based on looking closely at the survey on which they were based. Same publisher, 2001, *Technical Report and Data File Users Manual for the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey*. I base these comments on a secondary source, "Will anyone accept the good news on literacy?"—an essay by Dennis Baron in the February 1, 2002 *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Other than one or two newspaper articles, that's the only mention I've seen of this thrillingly titled reconsideration. [2:5, April 2002]

That's the beginning of six pages discussing the faults with the 1992 publication and the surprising unwillingness of literacy advocates to accept the 2001 data. I just can't keep out of trouble: My reaction to NEA's sky-is-falling "literary reading" survey was also at odds with the whole field of crisis-mongers. One thing remains clear: Too many people who consider themselves intellectual and highly literate have appallingly low mathematical literacy and understanding of statistics and survey methodology problems.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES: TO BLOG OR NOT TO BLOG. OK, I'm guilty: I wrote an article about Weblogs as part of a cluster of *American Libraries* articles on the circle of gifts, and I rely on a dozen or so Weblogs to point to items for commentary in *Cites & Insights*... I was reminded...that most Weblogs are much more personal (and self-oriented) than the ones I monitor—by a charming *Wired News* piece by Farhad Manjoo, posted February 18, 2002: "Blah, blah, blah and blog." Manjoo notes the strongest indication that

Weblogs are now mainstream: NPR ran a piece on them... Here's what I found peculiar about the *Wired News* piece: comments from Dave Winer. Somehow, he seems to think that *everyone* should be building Weblogs—that they are social goods of some sort. He's not the only one. "Asked if he'd like to live in a world where virtually everyone blogs, [Winer] chuckled and said, 'Yeah, I think it would be a great thing. It's not that you want to read them. But people have the desire to express themselves, and I think it's tremendously powerful activity. If you write everyday, your writing improves, your thinking improves.'" I'm not sure I can buy that as a general proposition—and I am sure that most good writing is something more than spur of the moment jottings. [2:6, Early Spring 2002]

As Dylan did not say, "So I would not feel so all alone, everybody must go blog." Maybe, for lots of people, writing everyday *without* making that writing part of the public record is a better way to improve writing and thinking.

PERSPECTIVE: LONG-TERM ACCESS TO LIBRARY ZINES. Marylaine Block said it in *Ex Libris* 135 (March 22-29 2002): "Who's going to preserve zine content?" She focused on library-related zines, defining the field broadly enough to include this experiment as well as *Library Juice*, and raised two issues: Who would assure long-term access and who would provide the indexing that these publications deserve? Should *Library Literature* index *Cites & Insights*, *NewBreed Librarian*, the *FOS Newsletter* and *Ex Libris* alongside *American Libraries* and *Online*? I'm not sure, and I'm not the person to make that call. Do these and other library-related online zines and newsletters matter—enough so that they should be preserved for long-term access by scholars and librarians even after their founders lose interest or run out of money? Yes, I believe they do, even if that sounds self-interested. [2:7, May 2002]

Thus began the call for participation in COWLZ, the Caucus/ Coalition/ Consortium/ Cluster/ Committee of Online and Web-based Library-related Zines/Newsletters. The COWLZ initiative resulted in *Cites & Insights*' current home and a dark archiving effort. Other than that...well, I think the publishers involved are still looking for a few other folks to take leadership roles. If you think the COWLZ cause makes sense, that is.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Divx Redux? That's the headline on a brief item in *Sound & Vision* 67:3, and it's not a bad description of another Night of the Living Brain-Dead idea: SpectraDisc. The company has received a U.S. patent for a DVD coating that "makes

a disc self-destruct after a predetermined length of time once its package is opened.” The company, of course, sees this as “a compelling alternative to video rental.” (Can you say “Netflix”? I thought you could.) Writers (Brian C. Fenton in this case) are getting smarter: “It doesn’t seem very friendly to the environment to toss a disc in the trash after one or two plays instead of returning it for someone else to rent.” He loses me in the next item, “Better than a floppy,” pushing a tiny flash-memory “drive” that plugs into a USB port and costs \$40 for 16 megabytes up to \$900 for one gigabyte. (\$900 for one gigabyte? The Apple iPod starts to look *awfully* good at that point.) [He went on to call microdiskettes obsolete, which I took objection to.] [2:8, June 2002]

I was fundamentally wrong here. Yes, \$40 for a 16MB USB drive was too high for mass adoption (\$900 for a 1GB drive was absurd). Calling microdiskettes “obsolete” in 2002—as opposed to “obsolescent”—was silly. But even overpriced USB drives may have marked the beginning of the end for diskettes, along with ubiquitous CD burners and dirt-cheap CD-Rs. The \$19 I just paid for a 128MB USB drive seems reasonable.

PRODUCT WATCH... Look, Up In the Sky, It’s SuperDVD? “The DVD may be headed for obsolescence.” How’s that for a grabber—and this was in *PC Magazine*, not *Wired*. The story: InPhase Technologies claimed a “demonstrable phase” of Tapestry, a holographic data storage system capable of storing 100GB on one CD-size disk. You’ve heard holographic storage as the great medium right around the corner before—for more than a decade now. Skip Kilsdonk says it’s true this time, and who are you to doubt him? “The DVD is at the end of its life, and holographic-data storage is the start of the next level. This is the future of content distribution. In 10 to 15 years, holographic-data storage will replace just about every application that uses other existing technologies.” A “product” will arrive in 2004. A five-year-old technology is “at the end of its life” because it might be supplanted in 10 to 15 years. Trash your DVD players now! The new technology will *replace everything else*. Heard that before? Still using obsolete platters of spinning rust-coated metal or glass to store data, a technology invented half a century ago and long-since obsolescent? Some day, holographic storage will arrive. Maybe this time it’s for real. Wiping out everything else—and worth printing a tombstone “DVD...we hardly knew thee”—in June 2002? The item appears in *PC Magazine*’s “Pipeline” section, but “Hypeline” seems more appropriate. [2:9, July 2002]

To the best of my knowledge, the product never arrived. Some day, perhaps, holographic storage will be

big—but the ridiculous improvements in hard disk capacity and price make it a difficult target. A terabyte in a desktop? Available right now for very little money.

BIBS & BLATHER: I JUST DON’T KNOW... Some articles and postings don’t seem to belong anywhere in my regular slots, but I feel obliged to make some comment. Take, for example, Abby Kalan’s “On my mind” commentary in the May 2002 *American Libraries*, “Are we sabotaging ourselves with our ‘professional’ image?” She says librarians *do* wear “last century’s clothing” (“We’re all guilty,” one of those universal phrases that sets me off) and that librarians need to “think like capitalists.” Focusing on “customers” makes sense to me. It’s the start of the column that got to me. She notes a friend’s “librarian fantasy”—the one where a cliché librarian, “suddenly overcome with desire, casts off the glasses, unpins the hair, and voilà, she is every heterosexual man’s fantasy woman. Of course, this friend would never have created such a fantasy about a doctor or a lawyer.” Read that last sentence again. Maybe she’s *only* talking her about her friend. But 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. [2:10, August 2002]

No comment required.

BIBS & BLATHER: SILVER ANNIVERSARIES (PLUS OR MINUS ONE)... **Minus one, almost:** I finally bought a new computer, and *almost* went with a 2.4GHz Pentium 4. That’s “24” in some sense, isn’t it? Ah well; since my old PC was a Celeron-400, I decided that a “mere” 2.26GHz Pentium 4 would be good enough at a considerable savings. (In the only real timed test I could do—the time it takes to run Adobe Acrobat on an 18-page issue, producing the PDF file via Distiller, the new PC is almost precisely five times as fast as the old one, if you’re wondering: less than 11 seconds as compared to 55 seconds.) [2:11, Silver Edition: Mid-August 2002]

I’m still pleased with the Silver Edition (and it was only 14 pages!)—and, by the way, the “new computer” I bought in August 2002 *still* feels new—although I have added 512MB RAM to the original 256MB, and the original CD burner crapped out after 18 months or so (a new one cost \$30 and took 10 minutes to replace). Otherwise, it still feels new and still works great. The fact that a 2.5-year-old PC “still feels new” to a PC aficionado is a bit disturbing.

COPYRIGHT CURRENTS... If some of these copyright-related issues don’t seem to relate to libraries, take a longer view. “First they came for the peer-to-peer people. Then they came for those who watched TV

and skipped commercials....” If intermediaries succeed in narrowing fair use and first-sale rights to the point of invisibility, giving immortality to corporate copyright, eliminating the public domain by stages, and making copyright protection more important than technological development or free speech, it will most certainly affect every aspect of libraries. [2:12, September 2002]

That was the second paragraph of a COPYRIGHT CURRENTS that covered a broader area of concerns. I think librarians still need to take a broader view.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... DVD and Digital TV? An August 12 *Wired News* article by Brad King, “DVDs could spark digital TV sales,” manages to drop a fair amount of misinformation into a single page. “Forget Washington politicking, the 30 million people who own DVD players will be the ones who cast the deciding votes on the success of digital television.” Why? Because “without a high-definition TV, DVD owners might as well watch a VHS tape, because the picture and sound quality are limited.” But with the right TV, “DVDs deliver everything DTV promises—from theater-quality pictures to Internet interactivity...” Hold on right there. Anyone who believes watching DVD on a high-quality analog TV is equivalent to watching VHS is either blind, has never seen a high-quality analog TV, or just doesn’t much care. DVD delivers pictures that are just slightly better than S-VHS (but there never have been many prerecorded S-VHS cassettes), or roughly twice as good as VHS. On any properly built TV with an S-Video input. How much more actual picture information do you get from DVD on a high-definition TV (HDTV)? Zero, nada, rien. There is no more information on the disc... [2:13, October 2002]

Silly me, expecting technological accuracy from *Wired*.

PERSPECTIVE: BLOWING IT: MUSIC PUBLISHERS AND CD-R. [After discussing why I now make lots of “mix CD-Rs,” entirely from CDs that I own...and noting that some RIAA people have called this inappropriate, even a form of theft.) I don’t appreciate being called a thief... I *really* don’t appreciate efforts to assure that I can’t produce my own CD-Rs. Fortunately, those efforts seem to be receding in the U.S., at least for the moment—but the RIAA sees no conflict between the Home Recording Act and making such recording impossible, and we’ll see future efforts to preclude copying without additional payment... We have enough money to buy as many CDs as we want. We have deep personal biases against theft. We also have enough music already, if the music industry wants to go to such lengths to damage our names and preclude our enjoyment of the music we pay for. We

both hate shopping, and it’s remarkably easy to stay out of record stores and off of CDNow and its competitors. Push us away hard enough, often enough, and eventually we won’t come back. [2:14, November 2002]

These days, the RIAA isn’t pushing for an end to custom CD-Rs—but they still believe they should be able to control all uses you make of music. They’re still wrong, ethically and legally.

EBOOKS AND ETEXT. Has there been any drama in the ebook field since October? That depends on your definition of ebooks, your definition of drama, and most of all how optimistic or gullible you are about Microsoft’s latest “killer app.” If you’re a believer, you’ll be encouraged that Gemstar’s now running *useful* ads for what’s now the Gemstar ebook appliance in *TV Guide*—that is, you can actually do something with the information in the ad. Has there been a surge of interest in ebook appliances? Well...not so’s you’d notice. [2:15, December 2002]

That didn’t last long—either actionable ads in *TV Guide* or Gemstar in the ebook market.

2003

A COPYRIGHT-AND-MEDIA PERSPECTIVE: ELCOMSOFT/SKLYAROV: DMCA COMES TO TRIAL... Final paragraph: It’s lovely that one Big Media spokesperson complained about a newer program to allow DVD copying, claiming that it was like offering crowbars for sale that any criminal could buy to break into houses. As at least one journalist noted, most hardware stores *do* sell crowbars—which, as with DVD-copying software, have perfectly legitimate uses. [3:1, January 2003]

That comment revealed just how far extreme copyright folks want to take things: What would be legal in the physical world (selling crowbars with both legal and illegal uses) should be outlawed in the digital realm (selling programs that can infringe copyright, no matter how many legal uses they have).

INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS... Who Needs Speakers? A charming one-page “brave new home” column in the October 2002 *Sound & Vision* considers the Olympia Soundbug, a \$50 3x1" device that “turns any flat surface into a speaker.” It plugs into the headphone jack of your notebook, CD player or whatever and has a suction cup to attach to said flat surface—preferably a “glossy, smooth, hard, flat surface” like a kitchen wall or window. Essentially, the Soundbug has the equivalent of a speaker’s driving coil and uses the surface instead of a cone. Speaker cones aren’t just flat surfaces (and usually aren’t flat);

they're highly engineered materials. Laura Evenson tried various surfaces and settings but never got more than mediocre results—the best by using the top of a piano. Well, she did get one “better result”—by ripping the thing apart and applying the audio exciter directly to one of her teeth. “Talk about a seismic subwoofer! My mouth cavity produced the best soundboard yet!” Her verdict: “Coolness factor: 10. Sound for the dollar: 5.” But it sure is cute. [3:2, February 2003]

Similar devices pop up from time to time—but they don't work very well because the physics don't really make sense.

PERSPECTIVE: MIDWINTER MUSINGS... Ever since the *LITA Newsletter* cut issue sizes by more than half, then converted to Web publication, then—almost immediately—disappeared altogether, I've missed it. More to the point, I don't know what happens at LITA programs I don't attend and in the two dozen or more LITA Interest Groups. I feel out of touch with my home division... During the nine years I edited the *LITA Newsletter*, I never thought of it as the glue holding LITA together, but it was a primary means of communication within the division.... What were the high points of LITA's programs during the 2002 Annual Conference? I haven't the vaguest idea, and I don't know where to find that information. What was discussed at LITA IGs at Midwinter and Annual 2002? I would have reviewed that (and their current plans) before selecting IGs to visit at Midwinter 2003—but no reports are available. Nor will there be reports from Philadelphia, at least not ones that are easy to access. I miss them. I miss the sense of continuity, variety, and overall context that the *Newsletter* provided. [3:3, March 2003]

I heard some promises of action from LITA officialdom and backed down from the suggestion, later in that essay, of starting a “*LITA Newsletter*-equivalent” in conjunction with *C&I*. I gave LITA two years—well, 21 months—before starting the broader *C&I* initiative. Maybe that's not long enough for ALA's cutting-edge division to act. More's the pity. (Yes, I paid my divisional dues, an astonishing \$60. This year, at least, while I see all the benefits I'm overlooking.)

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Playing an LP without a Turntable The story appeared on Wired News, February 25, 2003: Ofer Springer's Digital Needle. It's the work of a 22-year-old student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and I believe it works—just about as well as Springer claims (and demonstrates). You take four scans of an LP on a high-res flatbed scanner (which isn't big enough to scan the LP in one pass), stitch the sections together, and run the program—

which follows the image of the groove as it spirals around the scan, generating sound based on the pattern within the groove. It's a stunt (as Springer admits) but an interesting one. The resulting sound is recognizable as a particular piece of music, barely. As one audio engineer pointed out, looking at lateral motions doesn't do much good for most LPs: each channel is encoded on the diagonal, combining vertical and horizontal changes. [3:4, April 2003]

Springer's software may have been silly—but a later iteration of the same fundamental idea may be a great way to digitize old recordings, particularly ones so brittle as to be unplayable. The new system uses (as I remember) scanning electron microscopes instead of a flatbed scanner—but the principle is the same. (As I noted in that piece, there is a noncontact turntable—ELF's \$10,000+ Laser Turntable.)

PERSPECTIVE: THE SHIFTING COMMONS: MUSINGS ON GENERALIZATION.... People tend to generalize from their own situation, and that's usually a mistake—even in this sentence. While it's reasonable to criticize positive generalizations—“Everybody will or should do x”—it's too easy to fall into negative generalizations in the process: “Nobody should do y.” ... **Gary Stix: “Some rights reserved”** Stix posted this essay at ScientificAmerican.com on February 10... The final paragraph is the only real commentary and worth quoting in its entirety: “Some legal pundits will question whether an idea that downplays the profit motive will ever be widely embraced. Creative Commons, however, could help ensure that the Internet remains more than a shopping mall. For his part, Lessig, who last year argued futilely before the U.S. Supreme Court against an extension of the term of existing copyrights, has translated words into action. Now it will be up to scholars, scientists, independent filmmakers and others to show that at least part of their work can be shared and that a commons for creative exchange can become a reality in cyberspace.” I would argue with part of the first sentence. “Some rights reserved” doesn't so much downplay the profit motive as provide for fine-tuning... But the rest of the comment is on the money—and many of us are happy to share *part* of our work, without endangering profits from the rest of it. [3:5, Spring 2003]

I continue to be surprised at how unwilling people are to recognize the reality of balanced-copyright efforts. Creative Commons is not against profit, not against copyright, not against intellectual property. It aims to provide more flexible approaches for those of us who see value in flexibility.

THE LIBRARY STUFF... Doty, Paul, “Fish, fire, and fallacies: Approaches to information technology and

higher education,” *portal: Libraries and the academy* 2:4 (2002): 647-52. Must libraries and universities rebuild themselves to meet the technological expectations of intractable teenagers? Do we really know what those expectations are? Doty questions some standing assumptions about the expectations of youth and goes on to suggest some alternatives. He believes (correctly, in my opinion) that the “inevitable” movement of most or all higher education to online forms is neither inevitable nor particularly likely, at least for undergraduate education. Quite the opposite: “Unless students have no option but online delivery, they are going to measure their education in terms of change.” In some ways, this is another “human nature” argument, one that makes excellent sense. It has little to do with the many areas in which distance and online education can be important, particularly for lifelong learning and second-career coursework. Sure, some kids really want to stay at home while they go to college—but many, perhaps most, *really* don’t. Thoughtful ones recognize that socialization is an important part of the undergraduate experience, and that part of socialization is distance from the past. I suspect a lot of kids who grow up in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts are *disinclined* to apply to Harvard or MIT. [3:6, May 2003]

Universities have been disappointed that distance education hasn’t been more successful than it has (not that it’s been a failure). Doty’s essay offers some useful reasons why.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Big Bucks for Handheld Movies? ... Maybe there are lots of people who find a PDA screen more than adequate for watching movies and think that’s a valuable use. It strikes me as more than a little bizarre for a couple of reasons—even at MPEG1’s low quality, a movie’s going to use 250 to 375 megabytes (according to a writeup on Mazingo in the March 2003 *EContent*), and that’s a hefty chunk of removable storage. Mazingo’s in the business of vending downloadable multimedia—highly “rights managed” downloadable multimedia—for Pocket PCs and Palm PDAs. The premium package costs \$14.95 a month for “unlimited updates,” and of course the company official can’t say how many of the 75,000 total subscribers actually pay that... I was just intrigued enough to see what’s in the current package. Four music videos, two very old movies, five oddball TV shows, various regional Weather Channel forecasts, and a heap of other stuff—well, go look for yourself: www.mazingo.net. If it’s true that “millions of people” read lengthy texts from their Palm PDAs (and I can’t prove it’s not), then I can believe that thousands of people pay \$14.95 a month for this service—plus the price of a broadband connection to

download the stuff and memory cards to store it. To each their own. [3:7, June 2003]

Is Mazingo still around? I haven’t heard much hoopla, but anything’s possible. Or would they be selling movies on cell phones these days?

INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS... The Big Portable Screen. It’s always more interesting to see a strongly positive Mac review in *PC Magazine*—and not that unusual. A full-page “First look” in the May 27, 2003 issue gives four dots to Apple’s \$3,299 PowerBook G4. It’s not cheap and it’s not ultraportable—but it’s a remarkable system. Most remarkable: the wide-screen 17.1" LCD display (1440x900). That’s a 14.5x9" display sitting directly in front of the keyboard. Assuming that you sit the same distance from the notebook’s keyboard as you would with a desktop, that means the visual angle is equivalent to using a 14x23" (26" diagonal) desktop display! [3:8, July 2003]

The PowerBook G4 had one of the first 17" notebook displays. It wouldn’t be the last—and some Windows notebooks have much higher resolution. Still, a stunning achievement for mid-2003, even at that price.

COPING WITH CIPA: A CENSORWARE SPECIAL. ... You could look at the outcome and say, “SCOTUS [the Supreme Court of the United States] said filters work. Install them and get over it.” A number of pro-filtering triumphalists seem to be saying that, some going so far as to assert that a national consensus has been reached and libraries that don’t use censorware—even in cities where the local sentiment strongly opposes them—are failing to “serve the public.” It’s almost impossible to argue rationally with the triumphalists, so I won’t bother. As for the “Get over it” response, it’s wrong on several counts, as has become increasingly clear since the decision came down... The title of this essay is deliberate. Libraries need to cope with CIPA—and that does not mean slapping Bess or WebSense on every library computer, raking in that big federal subsidy, and moving on. This is an evolving story of some complexity. What’s here is a checkpoint written over two weeks in June and July. I include quite a few newspaper editorials and articles because CIPAS is as much 9,000 local stories as it is one national story. [3:9, Midsummer 2003]

You’re still coping with CIPA—and I take considerable pride in that special issue.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Thinking about Clicking. I wasn’t sure whether to put this in “Cheap shots” or ignore it: An essay in *Ubiquity* by M.O. Thirunarayanan (Florida International University), “From thinkers to clickers: The World Wide Web and the

transformation of the essence of being human.”... This author says flatly that the web “is slowly but surely transforming the lives of human beings who are beginning to make the sad transition from being thinkers to becoming ‘clickers.’” Web users are compared to Skinner’s pigeons, and there’s a comparison of books (“much more conducive to promoting thinking than the sophisticated Web,” “a slow medium”) and the web (“clicking dominates thinking” and so on.) And, as we (all?) “aimlessly click...through cyberspace, hyperclick hysteria sets in, and people lose their bearings in cyberspace and have to click their way back to more familiar cyber territories.” There’s certainly *some* hysteria at work here... [3:10, August 2003]

I had more comments—almost a page in all—but why bother? When someone says “X has transformed people,” particularly where X has been around less than a decade, that grain of salt needs to take on boulder-like proportions.

PERSPECTIVE: WEBLOGGING: A TOOL, NOT A MEDIUM. A mini-tempest has sprung up recently *on* a few weblogs *about* weblogging—specifically, whether there is or should be a set of standards for how weblogs are maintained. There’s nothing new about weblogs spending too much time on weblogging—that seems endemic to the “blogosphere.” This one’s a little different, and watching the controversy reminded me of a theme from my abandoned media book: “Most of what we think of as individual media are actually clusters of related media, and it damages our understanding of a medium to clump related media together.” [3:11, September 2003]

Oddly enough, later in that perspective I say this: “I believe weblogs that purport to be forms of journalism should have some of the ethical characteristics of other journalistic media.” So I guess I’m on Karen Schneider’s side. Big surprise.

MINI-PERSPECTIVES: 41 AT 58. ... 3. Big News: People Still Read Print Ah, those baby boomers. This fall’s Pew Internet study says that the “older tech elite” (ages 42-62, which covers a lot more than the baby boom) “are fond of technologies yet fall back on more traditional ways and means of doing things.” That’s from an AP story on the report, but the plaintive “yet” fits my image of most Pew Internet reports. While 44% of this group gets online news on a typical day, 60% read a newspaper. “By contrast,” 39% of the “younger tech elite” get online news and 42% read a newspaper. Note that newspaper readership *among the technologically elite of the next generation is still higher than online news usage*. Sigh. John Horrigan of Pew thinks it’s “social conditioning”—you know,

we used to use card catalogs and “relied on stacks of books in the library.” “For young folks, *pretty much everything* is done electronically.” And the study to demonstrate this is? Some technologically knowledgeable old fogies would say we read print newspapers and use books *because they work*, and that we use online sources *because they work* for different purposes. But “social conditioning” is how you put it when you’re selling the Wonders of Internet Life. [3:12, October 2003]

No further comment required.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES... Six Degrees of Separation. Somehow, “six degrees of separation” moved from a parlor game for movie buffs and IMDB enthusiasts to a bizarre general theory of social interaction—that a short chain of acquaintances (six links or less) can be found between almost any two people in the world.... There was never a good reason to generalize from “Six degrees of Kevin Bacon.” Show biz is a small and highly connected community... Similarly, I suspect that you can find “six degrees of separation” or less between any two people within the library field, and certainly among those in the field who go to conferences. I’m slightly acquainted with two or three thousand people in the field. If you figure that each of those is acquainted with at least two or three hundred *other* people in the field, it doesn’t take long to subsume the 130,000 professionals or quarter million (or whatever) library-related employees... Once you leave a field, you need to look for other communities—and lots of us don’t belong to that many communities. I’d be astonished if “six degrees of separation” for the world as a whole, or even for the United States, worked out in practice. It’s a community thing. [3:13, November 2003]

Was I denying the usefulness of social networking software? Heaven forbid, although my experience with Orkut was (shall we say) not positive. Still...

THE GOOD STUFF. Adams, Irene, “Overcoming web page printing problems,” *Online* 27:5 (September/October 2003): 36-41. If you’ve never had trouble printing out a web page, you’re a lot luckier than I am—or you don’t print web resources much. There’s nothing like printing out a 20-page article, noting that you’re missing about two words on each line, and finding there’s no good way to solve the problem. There have been articles that I planned to use in *Cites & Insight* that never made it because the hassle of getting a readable print copy outweighed the value of the piece.... This **highly recommended** article won’t solve all your printing problems—but it will surely help with some of them. [3:14, December 2003]

I wish I could say this problem has improved. Even with Firefox and its attempts to fit to paper, too many websites—particularly weblogs—withstand any attempts to get a clean printout. My assumption now is that the owners of these sites *really don't want* anyone to quote them. Far be it from me to ignore their preferences (Blogline emails work wonders in such cases).

2004

COPYRIGHT CURRENTS...SCO and Unix...[Discussing a claim by Darl McBride of SCO that the GNU Public License, under which Linux is freely distributed, is unconstitutional!] McBride goes on, emphasizing the “left” in copyleft and calling it a “stance against intellectual property laws.” ...He says the issue is clear: “Do you support copyrights and ownership of intellectual property... or do you support ‘free’—as in free from ownership—intellectual property envisioned by the Free Software Foundation, Red Hat and others? *There really is no middle ground. The future of the global economy hangs in the balance.*” [Emphasis added.]... He also claims “to promote the Progress of Science and the useful arts...” *inherently* includes a profit motive, and that protection for this profit motive includes a Constitutional dimension. I don't remember anything in *Eldred v Ashcroft* that said profit, *in and of itself*, justified longer copyright protection, and I surely don't see the phrase “to promote increased profit” in the Constitution, but I'm not as clever a reader as McBride. In essence, McBride is claiming that it is *unconstitutional* to give away software! [4:1, January 2004]

SCO continues to sue IBM and others, claiming that Linux violates its property rights. I haven't heard any SCO arguments sillier than this one—but that would be difficult.

A IS FOR AAC: A DISCURSIVE GLOSSARY... KTD. Kids These Days. KTD and the spelled-out phrase represent my offhand summary of an “argument” made by many advocates of digital-everything, convergence, the death of books, and so on... In essence, KTD proponents believe that today's young people are mutants, and the rest of us must plan to redo everything to suit their preferences. ...To my mind, KTD ranks right up there with “inevitable” as a way to foreclose serious discussion and to win arguments without actual evidence. KTD don't read books? Tell publishers—not just Scholastic (*Harry Potter*) but the others, since children's books and juvenile literature are among the healthiest segments of publishing... Yes, today's kids and teenagers are more comfortable with technology than we were back then—how could they not be? One result, from what I've seen, is that fewer

of them fall in love with technology for its own sake: They recognize tools for what they are....[4:2, Midwinter 2004]

I don't use “KTD” much because I try so hard to avoid controversy—but it's still a common and frequently silly way to make an argument.

INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS... Friendster and its Foes. The January 20, 2004 *PC Magazine* includes a review of five social-networking services—Friendster, Friendzy, LinkedIn, Ryze, and Tribe.net... There's a lot to be said for networking (speaking as one who was never much good at it). Do digital “six degrees of separation” services actually foster wider networking, or is something else going on? “Friend” and “acquaintance” are very different words, fuzzy as both are. The acquaintance of an acquaintance of my acquaintance could be someone I'd detest—but the possibilities are interesting... I wonder whether they're tools that really only work if you're wired the right way? [4:3, February 2004]

Later, someone invited me to join Orkut. I did. I accepted invitations to be people's friends, including some people I've never met. Other than invitations to join strange groups focusing on the Middle East, I never saw much happen other than an ever-growing absurd number of people in my “network”—a number that remained absurdly high when I eliminated all but two friends. I've deleted the Orkut bookmark, but I'm probably still on their rolls. I'm not wired the right way, apparently.

THE WAY WE'RE WIRED: AMAZON, NETFLIX AND HYPOCRISY. [After citing feedback that questions my support of local booksellers in preference to Amazon, while I also use NetFlix]...I haven't said this in quite a while, and perhaps never in a sufficiently straightforward manner.: If you have a locally owned video/DVD store in your neighborhood that stocks the movies you want to rent, and you find that store an agreeable place to do business, you should *certainly* favor that store over NetFlix. Conversely, if there are no locally owned bookstores in your area, or you are repelled by the local bookstores, then you should evaluate chain stores and internet bookstores to see which ones suit you best. [4:4, March 2004]

It makes sense to support local businesses when local businesses *want* to be supported and make that support worthwhile. That will continue to be true.

THE BROADCAST FLAG AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE... How to sum this all up? Here's my quick, uninformal, non-lawyer take: The Broadcast Flag proposed rulemaking is an end-run around Congress' apparent unwillingness to enact something as hor-

rendous as CBDTPA. While ineffective at solving any known problem, the Broadcast Flag would provide an opening for Big Media to insist on other “enforcement” measures that would cripple computers and many other electronic devices. The case for the Broadcast Flag appears internally inconsistent and at odds with technological reality.... On its own, perhaps irrelevant for libraries and librarians. As a har-binger, well worth watching. [4:5, April 2004]

That was quoted from *Cites & Insights* 3:1—and it’s still a good quick summary as to why librarians should care.

PERSPECTIVE: SPEAKING AND ATTENTION: IT ALL DEPENDS? ...[Conclusion] As a speaker, I’d appreciate your full attention for a few minutes—and I’d rather have you leave than sit there pretending to listen or chatting with others. As a listener, I believe the speaker and listener both have obligations. If the speaker isn’t meeting my needs, my obligations shouldn’t require staying the course but do require minimizing disruption. As a conference attendee, I want discussion. I also want to be inspired and intrigued by speakers, in ways that open discussions rarely manage. I don’t want to hear you read that published article aloud, when I could read it myself in one-fifth the time. I do want to hear what you have to say, have the chance to probe further—and, ideally, have informal chances later to discuss things. Is text backchat rude? That depends. If it’s done *as a matter of course*, I think it is. Is audible backchat within the meeting room rude? Pretty much always. Can you *really* get the most out of a speech while participating in a backchannel? I can’t prove otherwise, but I’m doubtful. [4:6, May 2004]

Fact is, I *do* think backchat is both rude and distracting, unless it’s known in advance to all parties and institutionalized in a way that makes it (conceivably) useful to the speaker.

TRENDS & QUICK TAKES: RFID in Books? Why Not People? That’s the dream of Applied Digital Solutions... The company “is hoping that Americans can be persuaded to implant RFID chips under their skin to identify themselves when using a credit card or ATM, a technology the company calls VeriPay.” The spokesman for ADS says he’s been “chipped” and that having RFID surgically implanted is ever so much better: after all, you can’t leave your forearm in a taxi. Chris Hoofnagle of the Electronic Privacy Information Center isn’t thrilled. “When your bank card is compromised, all you have to do is make a call to the issuer. In this case you have to make a call to a surgeon.” The short piece doesn’t suggest how much it would cost to *have* a surgeon implant this device... Heck, you won’t have to give your teenager a GPS-

enabled cell phone and insist that it be on standby. Once she’s chipped, you should be able to track him anywhere, anytime. As, presumably, could anyone else, including any government agency or clever stalker. No wonder it’s hard to write satire these days. [4:7, June 2004]

Have you been chipped yet? Call me a very late adopter on this one...

COPYRIGHT PERSPECTIVE: TRUE PIRACY AND OTHER THOUGHTS... I’ve heard the argument that, since digital transmission makes it easy to pass around perfect copies of anything that can be digitized, copyright is outmoded and people need to find other ways to earn a living. That’s excusing unethical behavior on the basis of technological imperatives. Telling me to “live with it” because that’s the way things are is a sneering, me-first response. It makes me want to scream. It does not, however, make me want to “put ‘em all in jail” or lock up creations with digital restrictions management so tight that everything becomes pay-per-use. I believe most people understand that balanced copyright involves ethics as well as enforceability. [4:8, Mid-June 2004]

That’s from the middle of an extended essay that could have been a “Where I Stand” piece. Anyone who believes I’m opposed to copyright or the ability of creators to profit from their creations should go back and read it.

PERSPECTIVE: GOOD ADVICE: MAKING SOME LISTS... [Quoting Eli Edwards’ *Confessions of a mad librarian*]: ALA unit webpages listing programming (for a division or roundtable) are your friends: Unit programming may help you decide which units work for you. “Your friends, physical and virtual, within ALA are your friends.” Go to programs involving people you know, respect, and admire. If you don’t like the program, leave. [4:9, July 2004]

Just a taste (two bullet points of 41 total) of a compilation from various weblogs (of hints for making the most of an ALA conference, and suggestions for presenters) that’s definitely worth reviewing—either for Midwinter, if this issue comes out early, or in advance of Annual.

PERSPECTIVE: THE READING DISASTER (OR NOT)... Do I believe the NEA report identifies a crisis? Not really. The NEA did not identify a decline in reading. It *may* have identified a decline in the *percentage* of adult Americans who read what the NEA identifies as literature. It’s *possible* (but a good deal less certain) that the NEA identified a slight decline in the percentage of adult Americans who read books in a given year. That one’s tougher... The possibility that less than

half the adult population reads literature each year fails to fill me with dismay. Can anyone identify any period prior to World War II in which a majority of the population of *any* nation read book-length literature each year? [4:10, August 2004]

NEA continues to tout its report as proof of a Major Crisis, and a variety of Chicken Littles use it to support their own crises. I still think it's mostly crisis-mongering.

PERSPECTIVE: THE QUALITY CONTRADICTION... Some people just don't notice differences in some areas. I think we're all more sensitive in some areas than in others. Women generally hear better than men do (and tend to be particularly sensitive to some forms of distortion). Old farts like me usually have degraded high frequency hearing... There are loads of areas in which I don't pay attention to, or even understand, the differences between the good and the best. We *do* see the difference between good broadcast/cable TV and the same show recorded on regular VHS, even at full speed; that's why we've never owned anything but an S-VHS VCR or used anything but S-VHS to tape shows. I've never understood why more people didn't see the difference. But maybe that's the wrong issue. Maybe they *see* the difference but don't care. [4:11, September 2004]

Another essay I'm fairly proud of, even if it was long and repetitive.

PERSPECTIVE: WIKIPEDIA AND WORTH. Late summer saw a whole bunch of foofaraw about wikis and specifically Wikipedia. After one columnist suggested Wikipedia as a resource for computer history, other writers assaulted Wikipedia as worthless trash; at least one librarian made noises about the difference between online junk and authoritative sources; some wiki advocates pontificated about the awesome error correcting capabilities of community-based collaborative media. [4:12, October 2004]

Thus began a three-page perspective that may be worth mentioning mostly because the "worth of Wikipedia" issue came back in a *big* way in late December 2004 and beyond. I have a bunch of online essays, blog entries, and list postings that may turn into a follow-up perspective—but, looking back at October, I'm not sure a follow-up is needed.

PERSPECTIVE: ADVOCACY? ... To the extent that I wind up advocating certain positions, it's because I find them more coherent and more in line with my overall worldview than alternatives. To the extent that I argue against other positions, it's because I find them incoherent, inhumane, or sharply at odds with my underlying beliefs. My columns in various magazines

have generally been intended to describe, educate and sometimes synthesize. I don't believe I've been trying to persuade, except to the extent that "If you believe in X, then maybe you ought to consider Y" could be considered persuasion. [4:13, November 2004]

Worth repeating: I don't regard myself as primarily an advocate, although I can't be sure that's a fair assessment. Peter Suber has used the term "independent" to describe my apparent stance on open access issues. I like that.

INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS... Surface-Conduction Electron Emitters. Here's one contender for high-quality, low-power big displays, eventually. It's another version of a technology I've discussed in the past (3:10 and before), a variant on CRT technology that uses huge numbers of tiny emitters between two plates. Unlike LCD, DLP and LCoS, SEDs generate light directly. It's been a long time coming... Now, in a September announcement, the two companies say they're investing \$1.8 billion in a venture to manufacture the displays—and assert they'll turn out 3,000 50-inch panels a month next year, aiming for 3 million units a year by 2010. Toshiba plans to use SEDs for TV sets bigger than 32", LCDs for smaller sets. [4:14, December 2004]

I'm guessing you'll see SED-based big-screen sets in 2006, but very few (at plausible prices) in 2005. But who knows?

Masthead

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