Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Bibs & Blather

Sponsorship, Semi-Retired and Other Quandaries

This issue of *Cites & Insights* and regular issues for May and June 2010 are sponsored by the Library Society of the World (LSW)—as is my attendance at the ALA 2010 Annual Conference in June.

For those of you who read *Walt at Random*, that's probably all you need to know, as the rest of this has already appeared in posts beginning March 13, 2010. For the rest of you—those who *don't* read *Walt at Random* or don't remember the posts—read on.

The Surprise

On March 11, I had a brief phone conversation with the person at LYRASIS who's in charge of the Library Leadership Network. The gist of this conversation was that my services would no longer be paid for after March 2010.

Here's part of what I said in a March 13, 2010 post at *Walt at Random*:

I'm not entirely sure what I'll do next, but some things are clear:

➢ I could really use a sponsor for *Cites & Insights* (or, I suppose, a whole lot more donations than I've gotten so far!). That's no longer "extra money."

➢ If someone knows of something (possibly very part time, definitely not more than half time, definitely not involving relocating, possibly project-oriented) that suits my peculiar set of skills as a library writer, editor, speaker and systems analyst, I'd be delighted to hear about it. (Anybody setting up a center for serious evidence-based librarianship? I'd love to do some qualitative as well as quantitative research on how library blogs are working and what's working best, for example, but that can't happen

without explicit advance sponsorship: Selling the results is clearly not working.)

➢ There's mild urgency on one point: I'm supposed to be speaking in a program at ALA Annual this year, and with a nearly complete loss of earned income, it's a little hard to justify the costs of the conference…

➢ Yes, I'm delighted to be semi-retired. No, we're not going to starve, be put out of house and home, or go begging. On the other hand, "semi-" suits me; I'd like to keep actively involved in the library field and believe I still have much to offer. It would be nice to have some portion of that involvement recognized as valuable in the form of compensation.

Feel free to get in touch (waltcrawford at gmail dot com)…

Inside This Issue

I also sent related email to contacts I'd contacted three years ago, when I was terminated with much longer notice and generous severance benefits, and to a list of library bloggers whose work formed a key part of the best articles I was doing for Library Leadership Network.

The Followup

Two days later, after various discussions on- and offline with family and friends, I posted "Getting to ALA, Keeping a hand in—or not." The gist:

One fairly immediate issue has to do with whether I'll be at ALA in Washington. This concerns budget, but also a promised speech during the conference (which would, apparently, be my 2010 speech–I seem to be back to one per year). That relates, somewhat indirectly, to a longer-term question having to do with the status of *Cites & Insights* (and, I suppose, this blog).

Namely…the question of whether my work is meaningful (and appreciated) enough to continue, or

whether I should abandon it and spend time entirely on other things, maybe more local. Part of going to ALA or other conferences is keeping in touch; the question is whether that's worthwhile.

A dear friend asked whether I really thought my work was appreciated. I responded, well, yes, I seem to have pretty good readership and a few people tell me so now and then...

Then this dear friend nudged me: "So, are they buying your books or donating to help keep *Cites & Insights* going? Does so-called appreciation really mean anything?"

Um.

Well, four people so far have donated to keep *C&I* going.

As to book sales to individuals...perhaps the less said the better. If you exclude library-held copies as reported in Worldcat.org, that leaves an even dozen sales of *But Still They Blog*, 50 for *The Liblog Landscape*, 28 for *Academic Library Blogs*, 52 for *Public Library Blogs*, and 214 for *Balanced Libraries*...and, well, no more than seven for the various paperback annuals of *C&I*...

So far, I don't really have a convincing answer for my dear friend. Or one that convinces me that "keeping a hand in" justifies the cost of ALA...

The dear friend is suggesting that maybe it's time for me to wholly retire from the library field. Is the dear friend right?

Followup...: I've been informed, just a few minutes ago, of clear evidence that the dear friend is wrong, and I am grateful for that evidence. It looks much more likely that I will be going to ALA Annual, at least this year...and keeping on with *C&I* while we see what future possibilities arise. Oh, and may I just say "LSW FTW"?

Key comments on this post related to following my own bliss and my usefulness within the field—but the LSW action was *action*. (It's still going on: They're accepting donations through April 5, 2010, and I'm accepting PayPal donations until I have a long-term sponsor lined up—right on the *C&I* home page.) Five more people have sent direct PayPal donations; I believe the number who collaborated on the LSW idea is much larger.

It's now clear that I have enough support to pay for ALA Annual. I'll be there from late Friday morning through Sunday evening. Since the terms of the LSW fundraising are that additional funds should be applied to *C&I* sponsorship, I'm counting *all* LSW fundraising as *C&I* sponsorship for now (but using most of it to pay for ALA).

Can I say what an extraordinary gesture this is? Can I say how much I admire the librarians, most of them much younger than me, who make up the non-association that is LSW?

I did say some of that, in the third post in the series, "Seriously: A post in progress" (March 18, 2010). Excerpts:

...To my surprise (and pleasure), some of the Library Society of the World non-members quietly organized a project to send me to ALA–and help support *C&I* with any extra money they raised. Between other donations that came in directly and what they've already reported, we're close enough to the likely costs that I have no doubt they'll get there.

Oh, I'm still looking for sponsors, possible projects, possible ways forward, and have a couple of things brewing, but I'm cheerier about the whole thing, even if the long-term road is no clearer than before.

Seriously?

The thing about LSW is that it's an unorganization, mostly (not) composed of relatively younger librarians. I've been semi-involved for some time, although I distanced myself for a while because of a personality conflict (not resolved, but since ignored 'cause it's really irrelevant to LSW in general). Two folks earned their *LJ* Movers & Shakers badges this year because of LSW (Josh Neff and Steve Lawson), but there are a bunch more M&S honorees within LSW–and, to be sure the raft of Shovers & Makers, LSW's own non-award.

I like dealing with LSW because they're interesting people who have interesting things to say and because they don't, usually, treat me as either a scummy non-librarian or a boring old fart. They take me just as seriously as they take themselves–which, within LSW (now primarily but not exclusively a FriendFeed group), means "serious professionally, but not personally."

And in the FF thread (hidden from me at the start) about the ALA funding, there were some nice things said by people about how I'd recognized what they were doing early on–in one case, maybe, before anybody else took her work seriously. I've cited quite a few LSW people within *Cites & Insights* and, at times, columns in print magazines–and I've cited them because they have worthwhile things to say. In other words, I've taken them seriously.

This should be no big deal. When a 23-year-old fresh out of library school has significant things to say about what libraries are or should be doing, the 23-year-old should be taken seriously. So,

most assuredly, should a 35-year-old library director...or even a student who's just entered library school or is *thinking* of doing so.

I read a lot of blogs. When people say interesting, thoughtful, provocative, worthwhile things, I flag them for use–and I treat them seriously. Doesn't really much matter whether the blogger is young, a newbie, shy of refereed professional publications, or an Established Major Name...

If I was still doing the Library Leadership Network, I'd be planning a piece on the network of contributors who provide most of the content– and that network of contributors is, largely, somewhat younger and heavy on LSW folks. My resources for *C&I*, a superset of that network, are similar. I take them seriously because they have serious things to say–sometimes, and sometimes usefully, said in less-than-serious ways.

That doesn't mean I always agree with them or expect them to agree with me. Indeed, taking issue with something someone says can be part of taking them seriously–if you regard them as frivolous, why bother disagreeing?

There's more, to be sure. Chatting with LSW folks helps keep me a bit younger, and helps keep me involved.

This latest situation reminds me that it works both ways–that what I do does matter to others. They treat me seriously, too.

Seriously. Oh, and seriously, **thanks**.

Sponsors Still Needed, Projects Still Possible

LSW's actions did two things, the second considerably more important than the first:

➢ Made sure I'll be at ALA (and do my 15-20 minute talk at a Sunday morning program).

➢ Told me that what I do *is* valued.

Long-term issues still remain. I'm trying to put together some posts on *Walt at Random* explicating "some of the possibilities I'm considering" in more detail. (That didn't work out at all the last time I did it, but times change.) Since I'm still trying to put those details together, I can't give you a list here, beyond what's in the first post above.

I think a combined quant/qual study on how public library blogs actually *work*—and, specifically, what blogs and kinds of post seem to succeed best—would be very valuable to the field. I've given up on the possibility that it's worth doing on spec, with value recognized in book or other sales. For it to work, it has to be funded as a research

project. The abysmal sales for *But Still They Blog*— which, as with all the other books except *Balanced Libraries*, has so far received no additional sales in March—doesn't encourage me to do any of that stuff except with advance sponsorship. I suspect that library schools will swallow up any money that's out there for doing research, and maybe that's the way it should be.

I did spell out some issues on this ejournal itself, where I believe I do add substantial value to the field and in some ways would like to keep doing so. Here's the gist of the March 22, 20910 post on "Keeping C&I going":

As long as I believe I'm actually adding value and that value is appreciated, I'd like to keep a hand in– to maintain some involvement in the library field at the national/international level. (As opposed to dropping out and maybe joining the local Friends, getting more involved at the local level.)

The LSW response and other responses to that second post convince me that *some* people, at least, value *Cites & Insights* and the other work I do in the field. That appreciation (and, I guess, personal appreciation) is enough to get me to ALA Annual this year, at least for part of the conference. It's also enough, already, to assure that *C&I* will keep going through...well, through ALA Annual.

The longer-term question is whether the perceived value translates into enough to justify the time and other expenditures, as compared to other things I could be doing (or others would like me to do).

If the answer is Yes, I'd love to keep doing *C&I* for some time to come.

The best way to express that answer is through sponsorship–or, I suppose, through the Andersonomics answer, where some modest number of fans loves my work so much that they pay enough to keep it going. What does he say? 1,000 fans at $100 each per year: Presto, a pretty decent living.

Fan-based support is one possibility. 1,000 at $100 is so far beyond the realm of possibility (or need) that I won't mention it again. 200 at $50 would, for "fan-based" sponsorship, be a more than acceptable level. But I don't see that happening, at least based on results to date (even with LSW's work).

Sponsorship

Last night, a close friend (no, not the same close friend mentioned before) asked how much it actually costs to keep *C&I* going. There are two answers, and only one is really relevant:

1. **Direct cash outlay**: Very little. LISHost hosting fees, domain fees, the cost of Acrobat upgrades (I probably wouldn't need Acrobat otherwise),

some portion of the cost of broadband, etc. Certainly a three-digit annual number; depending on how you break things down, probably a relatively low three-digit annual number.

2. **Time, effort, "opportunity cost:"** Large. I don't track exactly how much time I spend on *C&I* directly or indirectly, but it's probably in the neighborhood of 15 to 20 hours a week overall. I've had suggestions of other things I should be doing with some of that time (cough more chores cough but also various local things that could yield revenue)…

What does that translate to in dollars? That's tricky, because it's part of a larger whole–and the revenue portions of that larger whole have mostly disappeared…

When I had sponsorship, it ranged in the medium four digits a year. Would that be enough now? Maybe–for "bare" sponsorship (that is, with credit on the front & back of each issue and on the website. For expanded sponsorship (with ads in *C&I* or "words from the sponsor") probably not–and that level of sponsorship certainly wouldn't encourage me to keep going to ALA beyond this summer. (Taking *C&I* behind a pay wall or requiring paid subscriptions isn't a plausible option, I don't believe.)

An appropriate sum would need to be negotiated. That sum could include speaking or writing for the sponsor, at some appropriate level.

Who could sponsor C&I? My general answer is "anybody I don't normally write about," so as to avoid possible conflict of interest. That answer includes, as a minimum:

➢ Bibliographic utilities or their competitors

➢ Vendors of integrated library systems (or disintegrated library systems, for that matter)

➢ Book wholesalers, distributors or other library suppliers

➢ Foundations (with one obvious exception, but there's no way Pew was going to sponsor me anyway)

➢ Consortia

➢ Publishers (with possible exceptions).

➢ And probably others I haven't thought of…

Will *C&I* go away if there's no sponsorship and donations dry up? I honestly don't have an answer to that question. Appreciation is nice, but at some point it doesn't pay the bills…

What else is there to say? I have a couple of vague nibbles. There are some project possibilities, again pretty vague at this point. My wife has an interesting suggestion about using my print-on-demand publishing experience to help others, probably locally, partly on a voluntary basis, possibly for fees—and some interesting comments about the values of turning most of my attention toward local possibilities in general.

I have no plans to return to full-time work. But I'm also not quite ready for full-time retirement, particularly from the field.

The Zeitgeist
hypePad and buzzkill

Once upon a time, there was a handheld product designed to revolutionize personal computing, from a company never known for small ideas or modest goals. The device was reasonably light, large enough for a good-size screen, used a sophisticated mobile-oriented operating system and efficient low-power CPU and seemed likely to be a huge hit.

It was introduced to great fanfare after quite a bit of advance publicity, much of it free to the company. When it first went on sale, it sold out within hours, with thousands of people paying $800 to get their hands on it. And then…

While the company is Apple, this isn't the iPad. It was the Newton, or, rather, Apple's MessagePad series of devices using the Newton OS. When the Newton first appeared, in 1993, it seemed likely to be a very big deal—if not in its first iteration, then once minor problems were ironed out. It was a prototypical tablet computer. The first one measured 7.25" high by 4.5" wide by 0.75" thick, weighed a bit less than a pound and had not only a touch screen and virtual keyboard, but also handwriting recognition. That model used AAA batteries, yielding poor battery life—but the MessagePad 110, introduced in March 1994, had *great* battery life (21 hours with backlight on, 30 hours without backlight).

Some Apple Newton loyalists would disagree, but most observers regard the Newton as a failure. It may have been ahead of its time (by about 16 years); it may have been too ambitious; it was almost certainly overpriced for what it was. One problem was the mismatch between Apple's ambitions and the screens and processors of the day. Until 1997, Newton models had 320x240-pixel black-and-white screens and CPUs that would barely qualify as peripheral drivers in today's market. The

handwriting recognition was, to put it charitably, quixotic, a problem that all by itself may have doomed widespread adoption. The last Newton devices jumped to 480x320 16-shade grayscale screens and the handwriting recognition apparently improved considerably—but by then it was too late. It was a little too big for most pockets, a little too wide for people with small hands to hold comfortably. Apple shut down the Newton OS and all hardware development in early 1998. Some people still use and swear by their Newtons, 12 years later.

Not Really a Parallel

There are parallels between the Apple Newton and the hypePad—sorry, iPad—but they're weak. John Sculley introduced the Newton; when Jobs returned, he killed it. The Newton was closer in form factor to a PDA than a tablet computer. Apple was a much smaller and weaker company in the mid-1990s, with no real experience in producing mass-market products that might be closer to consumer electronics than personal computing. The communications infrastructure wasn't in place.

Newton was a *platform*: The original devices were manufactured by Sharp *for* Apple, and Sharp produced its own Newton-based models, as did Motorola and Digital Ocean.

It's not clear that anyone outside Apple knows how many Newton devices actually sold or how much money Apple lost on the device. At its peak, the Newton user community measured around 200,000. I suspect we'll be told how many iPads are sold (unless the numbers are much lower than most observers expect)—and it seems *very* unlikely that Apple will lose money on the product.

Apple proclaimed Newton to herald a major shift in personal computing. Apple got loads of free publicity before producing the product. And there's the question of other-worldliness. We hear from Steve Jobs and others that the iPad is magical. Meanwhile, Albert M. Muñiz Jr. and Hope Jensen Schau published "Religiosity in the Abandoned Apple Newton Brand Community" in the March 2005 *Journal of Consumer Research*. (You can find the 11-page PDF at userinnovation.mit.edu/papers/MunizSchauNewton.pdf.)

Not Directly About the Product

This essay—or the section of this essay that isn't about a Google introduction—isn't primarily about the Apple iPad as a product. It's about the *hype-Pad*—the level and tone of advance publicity, the extent to which a product not yet on the market is seen as inevitably dominating and replacing whole categories of other products, the nearly-religious aspects of iPad hype.

I haven't tested an iPad. Neither has anyone else, although lots of writers seem to think ten minutes of fiddling with tightly-controlled samples constitutes a product review. I have no idea how successful the iPad is likely to be. I deliberately published this before the first Apple iPads were delivered to customers. While I'll discuss the product, this is about process and publicity—the zeitgeist.

Before the Before

It's unusual for a product to be called a category-changer or revolutionary before it's on the market. It's *very* unusual for a product to be widely hailed and roundly debated when no such product has been announced. That's the power of Steve Jobs: The ability to get tens of millions of dollars of free publicity without admitting a product exists.

Consider *some* of the coverage just in *Wired* and on *Wired.com*—and I could easily multiply this by tens or hundreds of other outlets:

➢ July 23, 2008: Brian X. Chen reports on a story in *MacDailyNews* with a "tip from an anonymous source" that Apple would introduce a MacBook Touch in the fall of 2008—which, Chen says, "would essentially be a larger, more powerful iPhone." It was supposed to be out by the end of October 2008, with a glass screen a bit smaller than the MacBook, full OS X, slot-loading optical drive, running all Mac apps.

➢ December 31, 2008: Brian X. Chen reports a rumor that a Mac Tablet is coming in Fall 2009—as verified by "three independent sources close to Apple" to TechCrunch, which called it a "large form iPod touch." This one would have a 7" or 9" screen. Chen thought the rumor solid enough to assign a price ($700-$800). At this point, "Mac Tablet" seemed fairly solid as the name of the device.

➢ March 16, 2009: Chen reported Seth Weintraub's "solid argument" why Apple would announce a Mac Tablet on March 17, 2009. The device now had a 9" or 10" screen. This time Chen, while regarding a Mac tablet as "inevitable," thought the March 17 date unlikely.

- April 23, 2009: Charlie Sorrel says "Apple COO Reveals Plans for Touch Tablet—Kinda." Sorrel is smart enough not to suggest dates. He notes Apple's sneering comments about netbooks as a category and concludes the tablet would be "like a giant iPhone, an impossibly thin touch-screen device which avoids the problems of a cramped keyboard by simply not having one, and combats battery life troubles by simply scaling up the iPhone, which enjoys battery life way longer that that found in a netbook."
- May 4, 2009: Dylan Tweney jumps in, noting the likely announcement of a "large-screen Kindle" (the Kindle DX) but doing some preemptive trashing, beginning with the headline: "Large-Screen Kindle Won't Mean Squat if Apple Tablet Arrives," with—as usual—a known-fake picture of an over-size iPod Touch. Tweney was already busy beating up on dedicated ebook readers, saying poor battery life and less-readable screens *don't matter* because people want multipurpose devices.
- May 21, 2009: Another Chen story notes mounting evidence that Apple will deliver a "touchscreen tablet" in 2010, based on the reasoning of a Piper Jaffray analyst. This version was assumed to be "an oversized iPod Touch" with a 7-to-10 inch display, costing $500 to $700. Chen assumed the tablet would have the Mac name. **Note this story: Except for the name, it's close to the truth.**
- A July 13, 2009 story by Priya Ganapati passed on the rumor that the $800 Apple Tablet (note the missing "Mac") would be available in October 2009. This story came from Taiwan and reported a 9.7" touchscreen—and *Wired* was being a bit more skeptical. Ganapati did note Apple's labeling of netbooks as "junky" within context: "Apple known for its obfuscation while working on a new product..." As noted, an $800 tablet isn't *really* a netbook competitor...
- July 27, 2009: Sorrel's back with a premature story: a "confirmation" by the *Financial Times* that Apple would release "the new oversized iPod Touch" in September 2009—with a 10" screen, no cell connection and an apparent intent of reviving full-album music

sales at iTunes by bundling interactive booklets and sleeve notes.
- In August, there was a lot of hoohaw about 2010 and tablets *in general*, with Chen assailing anybody who wasn't a true believer in the category. There were, by now, lots of unbelievers, people who felt that the tablet form factor just isn't a big winner for most people. While Chen claimed that *Wired* wants to start dialogue, in this case he went out of his way to belittle anybody who disagreed with him and, in essence (but not in those words), accuse them of being clueless Luddites. (I discussed this piece on page 12 of the February 2010 *Cites & Insights*.)
- By September 29, 2009—with, oops, no oversized iPod Touch on the market and no Apple Tablet a month away—Chen told us "Everything We Know About Apple's Touchscreen Tablet" (with the tiresome fake oversized iPod photo as usual). Based on various sources, this story had a tablet coming in early 2010 with a 10.7" screen with "something like 5-6 times the resolution of an iPod touch," running the iPhone OS—and with versions with and without 3G networking. It would cost $700 to $900. The report cites more than half a dozen sources. **Note this story too: It's almost on the money**.
- Finally—for this sequence—Charlie Sorrel was back on November 19, 2009 with a piece that may have been based on *deliberate* Apple obfuscation: "iTablet Gains OLED Display, Delayed Until Late 2010." Note the shift from "Apple Tablet" or "Mac tablet" to an "i-name," although one that didn't sound like a feminine hygiene product. This time, the supposed sources were component manufacturers and the delay was because of an Apple change in direction. The new direction? Two tablets, one with a 10.6" LCD screen, one with a 9.7" OLED (organic light-emitting diode) screen, with the latter selling for around $2,200—or maybe $1,200 to $1,500 by launch time. Sorrel called this story "truly bewildering" and noted the only place you can buy an iTablet: "the Atlantis Apple Store, which is staffed by unicorns."

These early reports lacked most of the over-the-top rhetoric encountered after The Announcement

actually happened, although some sources (and many blog posts and comments) weren't so reserved. But the sheer volume and persistence of these stories is remarkable, particularly for a set of product categories (tablet computers, oversize media players) with few success stories.

Holy Moses!

Just before the January 27, 2010 announcement, some people managed to look at the broader picture. Alan D. Mutter wrote "Holy Moses! Media need to gear up for tablets" on January 8, 2010 at *Reflections of a Newsosaur*. Mutter is concerned not with the "iSlate" (his guess at a name) on its own but with "the dazzling new gizmos coming from Apple, Microsoft and a host of other technovators."

Mutter thinks the *category* is revolutionary and seems to assume it will inevitably succeed.

> Tablets have the capability of revolutionizing newspapers, magazines, book publishing, television, movies, communications, applications and gaming. They also will further stress the tattered advertising and subscription models on which the change-averse legacy media continue to rely.
>
> Tablets will rock the media as much, if not more, than the Internet, because they will powerfully combine ubiquitous connectivity, elegant displays, powerful computing and extreme portability. As the future Swiss Army knife of media platforms, they have the potential to obsolete not just print, broadcast television and Filofaxs but also desktops, laptops and smart phones.

Read that last sentence again. Does "hypePad" seem too strong a description? Mutter mentions the anticipated "iSlate" offering, "a lot like an iPhone fitted with a 9.5-inch diagonal screen vs. the 3.5-inch display on the original, ground-breaking smart phone." He then tells media companies what they *must* do to adapt to these devices which he believes will wipe out all other media *and devices*: Add more multimedia to news and ads, include real-time content delivery in "nearly all media offerings," personalize (since he assumes that not only will everything you do on a tablet be tracked, but that GPS in every unit means that tracking will know where you are at all times), assist (sell lots of apps!) and target ("create highly individualized news and entertainment products that represently highly targetable advertising opportunities.")

There are so many generalizations in that brief piece it's hard to know where to start. Mutter's blunt in his closing, even though he doesn't see

most "legacy media companies" moving rapidly into his idea of tablet computing: "Because tablets represent the last, best do-over for media companies, however, here's hoping the continuing erosion of their traditional businesses will impel them to act before it's too late." Because, you know, *everything else is going away.*

Some commenters argued against Mutter's universalisms and several noted the problematic form factor of tablets, but others noted people calling tablets "the wave of the future" and saying we'll have "several scattered around our homes." (One comment was great: "Cool. I plan to finance one of these by selling my Newton.")

The Flat Computer Society

Here's a slightly less thrilled take on tablets and the supposed iSlate from Farhad Manjoo on January 12, 2010 in *Slate*. The subtitle: "Everyone's ecstatic about the Apple tablet. But what are we supposed to do with it?" It's *not* an attack on the device—still two weeks away from introduction—but a bit of history and touch of questioning. That question mark is legitimate; it's not a flat-out dismissal.

Manjoo takes us back to a few years after Apple gave up on the Newton: Comdex 2001 with Bill Gates on stage, heralding "the next great era in computing"—the tablet PC.

> The Microsoft founder showed off several machines that looked very much like Etch-a-Sketch pads. Each was about the size of a glossy magazine, 2 inches thick, and carried no keyboard—you interacted with the machine solely through its touch-sensitive screen.

Gates said "I'm already using a tablet as my everyday computer" and "Within five years, I predict it will be the most popular form of PC sold in America." Manjoo asks: Was Gates wrong or was he premature? He notes the raft of tablet PCs and reading devices announced at the January 2010 Consumer Electronics Show...and, of course, the forthcoming Apple announcement.

> If it's everything it's cracked up to be, the iSlate—as some believe it will be called—could finally spark the tablet fire. Or will it?

Manjoo owns up to being pessimistic about the iPod and insufficiently optimistic about the iPhone, but he's also "been onboard the tablet train" for years.

> The more that leaks out about the iSlate, however, the more I'm getting pre-orderer's remorse. Can

such a device really capture a wide market? In particular, I'm worried about the price: I was excited for a tablet that sold for $400 or $500, but if Apple's machine costs more than $800 (as some reports suggest it will), I won't be nearly as bullish.

It's *certainly* true that tablets make more sense now than in 2001 because of better components and a change in how we use computers (from primarily business tools to "the world's most powerful procrastination machines"). He notes that the boom in netbooks—and it *is* a boom, not a failed category, with analysts projecting 36 million netbooks sold in 2010—"was really an expression of customers' interest in second PCs" that are relatively useless for work but great for goofing off. Manjoo *does* believe cheap tablet computers (in the $300+ range) will "soon zoom past netbooks in popularity," but he thinks Apple was positioning the "iSlate" as a laptop replacement rather than an extra device—and that's a risky move. Still, he's questioning, not denying, and Manjoo *wants* tablets to take off like crazy.

I'm not saying Apple won't succeed. I'm simply puzzled about its course—but that, of course, is how all great innovations are greeted. Steve Jobs likes to say that customers don't really know what they want until some inventor comes along and shows it to them. What's the point of an $800 machine that lacks a keyboard? I'm not sure, but I'm hoping Apple will show me.

The Flood: January 27 and 28

A calm, low-key, reasoned commentary from Nicholas Carr. His lead sentence: "The PC era ended this morning at ten o'clock Pacific time, when Steve Jobs mounted a San Francisco stage to unveil the iPad, Apple's version of a tablet computer." The title of his *Rough Type* version (of a piece that appears in *The New Republic*): "Hello iPad, Goodbye PC." What more is there to say?

Carr's second sentence either undermines the first or suggests a vaguely bizarre worldview: "What made the moment epochal was not so much the gadget itself—an oversized iPod Touch tricked out with an e-reader application and a few other new features—but the clouds of hype that attended its arrival." So the "era of PCs" is kaput *because of hype?* Hype to which Carr substantially added, to be sure.

Carr notes that consumers have shunned tablets over the past decade—"Tablets were a solution to a problem no one had." (That's not true; tablets have been successful in a variety of niche markets.) Ah, but *suddenly* everything's changed:

The rapturous anticipation of Apple's tablet—the buildup to Jobs's announcement blurred the line between media feeding-frenzy and orgiastic pagan ritual—shows that our attitude to the tablet form has shifted. Tablets suddenly look attractive. Why? Because the nature of personal computing has changed.

Alternatively, it shows that the Reality Distortion Field continues to be strong, *particularly* given the lack of orgiastic reception for the tablets introduced at CES two weeks earlier. The hype says more about it being an Apple product than it does about personal computing.

Carr says that "until recently" (January 26?) we mainly used computers to run local software—where now we use them "mainly to connect to the vast databases of the Internet." Now that the Internet *has absorbed* all traditional media (this is already a done deal!), we look at computers as "multifunctional media players." This makes the old-style PC "into a dinosaur." He goes on...with even more generalizations.

With the iPad, Apple is hoping to bridge all the niches. It wants to deliver the killer device for the cloud era, a machine that will define computing's new age in the way that the Windows PC defined the old age. The iPad is, as Jobs said today, "something in the middle," a multipurpose gadget aimed at the sweet spot between the tiny smartphone and the traditional laptop. If it succeeds, we'll all be using iPads to play iTunes, read iBooks, watch iShows, and engage in iChats. It will be an iWorld.

We'll *all*. Not that he's entirely sold—both because the iPad's more expensive than Kindles and netbooks but also because the form factor's still awkward. That doesn't matter: Carr, in his newish role as futurist guru, calls the iPad "the clearest sign yet that we've entered a new era of computing."

The Products Themselves

I didn't tag many January 27 pieces. Maybe I was hoping for the perspective provided by one more day. It is worth noting Ars Technica's clear, unhyped coverage of the announcement itself ("magical and revolutionary...at an unbelievable price" is Jobs speaking, not Ars Technica) and the description of the iPad (or iPads):

Then Jobs brought out the iPad, which looks much like an oversized iPhone. It features an in-

terface that is essentially a hybrid between Mac OS X and iPhone OS. In addition to browsing the Web, included applications also give users access to iTunes media, including HD video content, calendars, photos, contacts, and more. The built-in e-mail client also looks like a hybrid between Mail on the Mac and Mail on the iPhone. Text entry is done with a large, on-screen QWERTY keyboard, which seemed very responsive during Jobs' demo.

The iPad hardware itself is built using a custom Apple-designed chip dubbed the "A4," running at 1GHz. It features a 9.7-inch, 1024x768 IPS LCD display with full multitouch input. It also packs in 802.11n WiFi, Bluetooth 2.1 EDR, an accelerometer, a compass, a speaker, a microphone, a 30-pin dock connector, and a 10-hour battery capable of a full month of standby time. All of that hardware is contained in a unibody aluminum case that is half an inch thick and weighs a scant 1.5 pounds.

The iPad will come in 16GB, 32GB, and 64GB versions, starting at $499. The 32GB version will sell for $599, and the 64GB model for $699. That's far less than the oft-rumored $1,000 price point. Models with integrated 3G networking will be available a month later for an additional $130.

"Scant" may be a value judgment (1.5 pounds is several times the weight of a smartphone or iPod Touch, but lighter than any netbook and not bad for a large-screen media player), but otherwise this is good reporting. As far as I can see, none of the early predictions was right—but some of them weren't wrong by that much.

In a way *Ars Technica* is the straightman to *Wired*'s euphoria. It's owned by the same outfit, Condé Nast. I usually find a couple dozen comments on interesting stories. For this one, with comments presented 40 to the page, it appears there were nearly *500 comments*—and that may not be surprising. First commenters here, at a relatively objective site, weren't thrilled. The first: "Yawn. And I had high hopes." The third: "No OLED screen? That kills all of my interest..." And by the sixth, the inevitable comparison was being made: "iPad: Apple's new Feminine Hygiene product." Several took shots at Jobs' dismissal of netbooks. (One said flatly, and I suspect correctly, that "a month of standby time" was "a lie"—just as it is in most phone ads.) Fans came on board a bit later. Some thought the prices were "shockingly low"; others thought they were too high. (A lot seems to do with whether the commenter is a Mac person or not—by Mac standards, the prices *are*

low.) *Of course*, some who favored it considered *anybody* who doubted it to be a troll. *Of course*, some who weren't impressed were much too negative. That's how comments work, even on a relatively moderate site.

Factual points worth noting when considering the stuff that follows:

➢ **As an ereader**, the iPad has lower resolution and worse daytime readability than e-Ink readers, along with considerably worse battery life and a higher price.

➢ **As a netbook replacement**, the iPad's limited in several respects—no builtin webcam, no multitasking (which may be the most important issue), no ability to use existing software, no USB ports—and a physical keyboard is an (overpriced) add-on. It's also more expensive.

➢ **Those points may not matter**, at least to some buyers, but are worth considering when you read that this will sweep away other product categories.

➢ **Given not only the proprietary OS but also the proprietary CPU**, Apple may be able to enforce more restrictive DRM (and competitive lockout) on this device than on other devices. That's not a given, but Apple's track record is far from reassuring. Saying "it's got a browser, that solves everything" is simply not true...not as long as the browser is also under Apple's control.

This Changes Everything for Media (or Doesn't)
David Crotty addressed this in *the scholarly kitchen*. He thinks "the vast majority" of press and commenters are missing the point in lamenting the lack of laptop features—apparently he saw a different slice of the commentary than I did. He focuses on Jobs' question, "Is there room for a third category of device in the middle? Something that's between a laptop and a smartphone?"

Crotty immediately buys Jobs' dismissal: "Right now that category is being filled by netbooks, which, as Jobs notes, are just really cheap, crappy notebooks." He sees a "huge market" buying netbooks "because they just want an inexpensive device to do simple tasks like answer e-mail, browse the internet, update their Facebook pages, and watch video. That's the target audience for the iPad."

That might or might not be true, and at $250 to $350 (or a lot less with a 2-year wireless con-

tract), millions of people may think they've *already* found such a device.

> For about the minimum price for a decent laptop, you can soon…get a device that's designed for those needs and provides an allegedly better user experience. It's not meant to replace laptops—it's meant to create a new level somewhere below a laptop for those with lesser needs.

Note the sleight of hand here. Yes, the cheapest iPad sells for about the minimum price of a decent **laptop**—but also for about *twice* the price of a **netbook**. Oddly enough, Crotty doesn't find himself in the market.

Crotty says the iPad "does seem to be a nail in Kindle's coffin"—by comparing the price of Kindle's *most expensive* model (the DX) with the cheapest iPad. He thinks Microsoft Office will lose out as well.

I include this first through happenstance, but it's a fair example of the strange leaps that commenters made. In responding to comments, Crotty first engages in the typical "If this wins, then everything else must lose" meme…and *eventually* says "winner-loser" is a bad reporting style.

Lots of advance hype considered the importance of the iPad for "saving the media," whatever that might mean. Eliot Van Buskirk offered his speculations on the iPad's effects on various media in a *Wired* Epicenter post. After eulogizing the device itself—it's versatile, it "gets out of the way," it's intuitive and—unstated but implied—it *has* to be a huge success—he offers "**definite** implications for each of the major media industries." He doesn't call them speculations: These are *definite*:

➢ Some new people might contemplate ebooks, but "books have not fared well during the growth of other electronic media" (which could also be stated "physical books continue to do well" but that's not what he means, I don't think)—in other words, why read when there are Fun Things to do?

➢ The iPad will "provide a small boost to sales of and subscriptions to all types of video in the iTunes store," but downloads haven't caused a mass exodus from cable and satellite and probably won't now.

➢ Van Buskirk doesn't appear to much *like* print, and he's disappointed that the iPad version of a newspaper wasn't "sexier." But "it will make any well-designed, high-quality publication look good" and means magazine publishers can embed video into articles (getting away from boring text).

➢ Support for the iTunes "LP format" (a full album with extras") is a Big Deal and the iPad will boost full-album sales.

An odd post at *Joho the Blog!* says more about David Weinberger's dismissal of books than about the iPad. Titled "The iPad is the future of the past of books," he says the iPad "ups the Kindle ante by making an e-book more like a television set." He's not sure it will do well, but says it's not the future of reading—because, Weinberger's decided,

> The future of reading is social. The future of reading blurs reading and writing. The future of reading is the networking of readers, writers, content, comments, and metadata, all in one continuous-on mash.

The post ends with a quote from Tim Bray calling the iPad a "pretty sweet tool for consuming media" but useless for creative people. The point of the post is Weinberger's certainty that all "reading" should be some form of networking. I don't buy the premise as a universal future ("social reading" has always been *part* of the landscape). Jim Milles commented in "The Future of Reading, or Do Scholars Really Want 'Social Scholarship'" (at *Buffalo Wings and Toasted Ravioli*). He's doubtful: he doesn't see much "social scholarship."

> Scholars in law and sociolegal studies (and, I suspect, in many other fields) don't seem to want the sort of fluid, boundaryless interaction of reader with the written text that futurists like Weinberger predict. I doubt that many casual readers of popular literature want that either. Certainly some Harry Potter fans like discussing their favorite books in online groups or creating fan fiction, but I suspect the vast majority of readers prefer to consume their literature in the traditional way, as artifact and object separate from the reader.

Alan Mutter asked "media thought leaders" for reactions.

➢ Richard Gingras (Salon Media) calls the iPad "effectively a tablet laptop with full support for standard web-browsing" and doesn't see it changing the game for publishers.

➢ Jerry Ceppos (Reynolds School of Journalism, U. Nevada Reno) says it does nothing to change the real question—will consumers pay for news? His answer is "Probably not." But he thinks "it's cool and I want one."

- ➢ Alan Jacobson, a *former* newspaper editor who now runs some kind of dotcom, says newspaper content "doesn't cut it" and media company offerings "aren't unique and compelling enough to gain broad and intense use," that users won't pay for content…and that the iPad is "too big to be small and too small to be big."
- ➢ Rick Edmonds (Poynter Institute) finds "excellent potential as an added revenue stream" but probably not enough to be a dominant platform or a savior.
- ➢ John Arthur—formerly with the LA *Times*—doesn't see the iPad "saving print" and thinks *print* should save print.
- ➢ Peter Zollman, an ad-and-interactive-media guy, still looks for people to pay for online content and doesn't see the iPad as a game-changer. On the other hand, John Temple (now in a "for-profit online news startup") *does* think it can live up to its hype—but doesn't know whether enough people will pay for a third device. (He seems to assume *everyone* does or will own an iPhone.)
- ➢ Howard Owens (who runs a local online news site) is excited about the iPad as "a journalism tool" (really?) more than a publishing platform. He doesn't see people paying for content on any device with access to "the open network."
- ➢ Tim McGuire (professor of media economics at ASU) thinks "iPad has it right" but also notes that first-generation products seldom live up to such heavy hype.
- ➢ James Gold talks about "customer asset management" and precise knowledge of who each customer is, *where* they are and their demographics. "The unlocked potential is unleashed when you integrate deep consumer insight and the ability to establish and manage relationships for advertisers in a medium that is compelling for consumers." I can't wait.

It Will/It Won't Kill the Kindle

The New York *Times*' Bits Blog played it both ways, Brad Stone offering "Three Reasons Why the iPad WON'T Kill Amazon's Kindle" and Nick Bilton responding with a post with the same title, substituting "WILL" for "WON'T." Summarizing:

- ➢ Stone: The Kindle is for book lovers, and the iPad is not. Amazon will continue to im-

prove on the Kindle. The Kindle store will continue to thrive. (Ah, but Stone still has all media "inexorably" shifting to digital.)
- ➢ Bilton: Content is changing, but the Kindle is not. (He calls the iPad "a tectonic shift to the e-reader and e-bookmarketplace.") The Kindle's technology isn't evolving fast enough. The Kindle is too expensive for a single-purpose device.

Do two of Bilton's three reasons sound like different forms of the same thing? They do to me, but what do I know? Bilton *does* think Amazon might "sell more books on the iPad than Apple could through its new iTunes bookstore"—which assumes Apple can't or won't prevent such sales from happening. Note here again: $250 vs. $500 makes the **$250** device too expensive.

Comments on both posts are all over the place, including Apple loyalists who think the iPad must inevitably conquer all…and Kindle users who aren't about to trade e-ink for a backlit screen. A few recognize the possibility that there's room for more than one product to do well, although win/lose seems to be the only meme most writers can handle.

I'm not an advocate of the Kindle *or* the iPad: I *really* don't have a horse in this race. If I was buying a new device larger than an MP3 player, it would probably be a netbook in the $300-$350 range. I neither travel enough nor buy enough books to be an e-reader candidate.

Fred Vogelstein chimed in at *Wired* with "The iPad *Will* Violate the Kindle's Space, and Other First Impressions." He starts with "let's cut through the hype"—but then says he'd buy one, that it's better than the Kindle and "costs about the same," after playing with one for 10 minutes he might ditch his *laptop* for it, the color screen *all by itself* makes book-reading better…and layout and graphics are better. No hype here! He's also ready to drop all paper media in favor of the iPad. He's convinced others will buy it—with this impressive piece of market research by assumption:

> Well, I've seen estimates that said Amazon sold 3 million Kindles last year. Unless for some insane reason book publishers decide not to make their books available on the iPad—and five big ones already have—if you'd buy a Kindle, you'd definitely buy an iPad.
>
> Then there are the gamers. I've seen estimates that conclude that Apple has sold 30 million iPod

Touches. Why? Not because it's a great music player, but because many think it's better than a Nintendo DS. You can't stick the iPad in your pocket, but the gaming experience is so much better because the screen is so much bigger that I predict many will happily trade.

So Apple already has a built in market that approaches 35 million users. That's before you count anyone who buys an iPad just because it's cool.

Got that? *Everybody* who *owns* a Kindle is hot to replace it with a twice-as-expensive non-e-Ink unit; he's convinced that people buy iPod Touches as gaming devices—and *real* portability doesn't matter... Don't you love hype-free articles with sober considerations? Notably, *every* Kindle owner who commented disagreed.

What's Missing or Wrong (or a Straw Man)
Charlie Sorrel offers "Ten Things Missing from the iPad" at *Wired*'s Gadget Lab, in a summary where he calls the iPad "little more than a giant iPhone...that doesn't even make calls." When he gets to the list, he's mostly *responding* to supposed lacks rather than enumerating them.

The list:
➢ Flash (he thinks this lack will kill Flash, not the iPad)
➢ OLED
➢ USB ("a USB port would mean installing drivers...")
➢ GPS (only true for non-3G models)
➢ Multitasking ("it will matter not at all to the target users, who will be using the iPad to browse and consume media");
➢ Keyboard (but there's a proprietary $70 keyboard accessory, meaning that "despite its simplified nature, the iPad is enough laptop for many people")
➢ Camera (he thinks version 2 will have a webcam)
➢ Verizon (doesn't use world-standard GSM SIM cards);
➢ 16:9 display ratio ("it's a compromise, and a good one")
➢ HDMI (use your other computers).

Sorrel has an answer for everything. This is another *Wired* Ode to All Things Apple disguised as a critique. The first comment nails it: "Article should be retitled: '10 Things You're Dumb for Complaining About Now Go Buy an iPad." I was amused by the assertion that Apple's objection to Flash is that

Flash isn't an open standard. So everything else about Apple and the iPad is open and non-proprietary, from CPU to expansion slots and operating system? As one commenter notes, Sorrel also universalizes: "**we all** have our iPhones."

As reported in a January 27 *Ars Technica* item about the "Moses Tablet," a half-dozen people from the Free Software Foundation staged a small protest outside the Apple announcement event objecting to Apple's heavy reliance on DRM and closed, proprietary models.

David Coursey of *PC World* offered "Why the iPad Isn't Ready for the Office" on January 28 at *The Industry Standard*. It's another "criticism" with a creamy center inside:

As for "real" business applications, in the hands of talented developers, the iPad could turn into something useful, if not revolutionary. Though today it would be hard to justify asking the boss buy iPads for employees, in coming months that could change.

Coursey thinks the iPad "looks like one heck of an e-reader," a great way to carry custom reference and video material, great for education applications, excellent for presentations. But he's not sure Apple will sell enough to make the iPad interesting for business app developers, feels the lack of a built-in keyboard, dislikes the lack of stylus support or *any* handwriting recognition—and thinks this is *not* a revolutionary third-category device. "Apple needs people to think it is, but it's really not that different from a really big iPod."

In another *Industry Standard* item, this one by *Computerworld*'s Gregg Keizer, a hardware expert is quoted as calling the 3G iPad pricing "ridiculous." Aaron Vronko says the lowest end is cheaper than he expected—but since a good 3G chip runs $7, he finds the $130 premium odd. He thinks they're underpricing the $499 unit, using higher-priced units to subsidize it.

We hear more from Vronko via Tom Kaneshige in a January 28 *Industry Standard* item, this one offering "four of the iPad's biggest whiffs":
➢ He was hoping for an OLED—but those aren't readily available in 10" size at this point. He thought Apple would use a 7" OLED; the 10" LCD is the major drain on battery life.
➢ He expected a camera, but assumes it was missing for price reasons—a webcam on

front for video chat, that is, since a regular camera would make little sense on such a large object.

➢ "Big screen, small thinking": He was expecting 1280x720 resolution, which would support 720HDTV directly, rather than 1024x768, "an old computer monitor type of resolution."

➢ He argues that Jobs' claim that the iPad offers the best browsing experience is nonsense, as long as Flash is missing. "Without Flash, it's really not a full web experience."

Adam Patch discussed "The Problem with the Apple iPad" at *lifehacker*. Patch begins by saying the iPad does a lot of things really well "particularly compared to its competition"—although that depends on the definition of competition. He frames this as a race the iPad always wins. Compared to the Kindle, it's not as eye-friendly and battery life is "seriously short"—but that doesn't matter because it's about the same size, "can do infinitely more" and "it's *beautiful*" (do you sense another "pretending to criticize" article?). Not a word about price. Compared to netbooks? Patch has never owned a netbook and doesn't see lots of them, so *he doesn't see the market as existing*. And netbooks aren't sexy and the iPod is—which makes it better. So far, we have two "sexy and beautiful beats cheap and useful" comparisons. What's the worm in this particular Apple? The iPad is completely locked down.

> Apple's saying to consumers: "Trade in choice for a guarantee that this will work exactly as we designed it to, and you'll never be upset with a computer again." Unfortunately there's no reason to believe the trade is necessary.

Patch assumes he's talking to "power users" and thinks it's a bad idea to tell Apple "we're cool with them taking away our choice" by purchasing iPads. So, even though Patch seems to value looks and sexiness over all else, he's trying "to discourage readers from buying an iPad." The Free Software Foundation sends a similar message with Peter Brown's "iPad is iBad for Freedom," with the line: "With new tablet device, Apple's Steve Jobs pushes unprecedented extension of DRM to a new class of general purpose computers."

Adrian Ludwig of Adobe posted a grump about the iPad's lack of Flash:

> It looks like Apple is continuing to impose restrictions on their devices that limit both content pub-

lishers and consumers. Unlike many other ebook readers using the ePub file format, consumers will not be able to access ePub content with Apple's DRM technology on devices made by other manufacturers. And without Flash support, iPad users will not be able to access the full range of web content, including over 70% of games and 75% of video on the web.

> If I want to use the iPad to connect to Disney, Hulu, Miniclip, Farmville, ESPN, Kongregate, or JibJab—not to mention the millions of other sites on the web—I'll be out of luck.

Adam Frucci offers "8 Things That Suck About the iPad" at *Gizmodo*. Noting that lots of other people there are "psyched about the iPad," he's underwhelmed for these reasons: "Big, ugly bezel"; no multitasking; no cameras; touchscreen keyboard; no HDMI output; the name itself; no Flash; "adapters, adapters, adapters"—that is, you need adapters for almost any extensions, even USB; not widescreen; doesn't support T-Mobile 3G; and a closed app ecosystem.

Why It's Insanely Great or a World-Changer
Stephen Fry finds himself part of "the Church of Apple" in "iPad About" at *The New Adventures of Mr Stephen Fry*." It's a tough post to summarize, if only because it fairly drools with adoration for Steve Jobs. Fry assumes smartphones have only evolved *because* of the iPhone. He regards the iPhone and iPad as "gorgeous, beautifully made, very powerful and capable of development into something extraordinary."

> Like the first iPhone, iPad 1.0 is a John the Baptist preparing the way of what is to come, but also like iPhone 1.0 (and Jokanaan himself too come to that) iPad 1.0 is still fantastic enough in its own right to be classed as a stunningly exciting object, one that you will want NOW and one that will not be matched this year by any company. In the future, when it has two cameras for fully featured video conferencing, GPS and who knows what else built in (1080 HD TV reception and recording and nano projection, for example) and when the iBook store has recorded its 100 millionth download and the thousands of accessories and peripherals that have invented uses for iPad that we simply can't now imagine—when that has happened it will all have seemed so natural and inevitable that today's nay-sayers and sceptics will have forgotten that they ever doubted its potential.

Whew. He dismisses all shortcomings by essentially saying once you've touched one, you'll know *this*

transforms everything (or at least all print media). The price is "shockingly low." Total control of everything by Apple is wonderful and great. He admits how he (and, he says, other Apple users) feel about anything from Apple: "we salivate, dribble, coo, sigh, grin and bubble with delight." It's not just insanely great, it's "soul-scorchingly beautiful to use."

Louis Gray, in "iPad Wins on Casual Computing, Content Consumption," recognizes he's known as an Apple fanboy so avoided jumping in...for one day. After which he's "unimpressed" with anyone pointing out shortcomings, suggests it's silly for anyone to question Apple's design decisions because *they're always right* (he names all of Apple's successes and avoids any of the failures)...in other words, behaves like a classic Apple fanboy. He sees it as "an amazing content consumption device" and the stepping stone to the virtual "cloud machine" "which we may all see some day." He claims the iPad "does about 90% of what you have come to expect from a traditional $1,000 to $2,000 laptop" and uses "fantastic" a lot. Since you can't install third-party software, it's a *purer* experience. It "simply makes sense" and he *knows* it's better without even seeing one. In the end, it's simple: "So it's time to stop complaining about dream machines and misplaced expectations, and time to start trusting Steve."

Mixed Reactions

Ars Technica offered "Insanely great? Ars reacts to the Apple iPad" just before midnight on January 27. They note that this launch lacks "the near-universal 'Apple has changed the game' sentiment that followed the launch of the iPhone"—but say it *could*. Staffers offered a range of opinions:

➤ Jon Stokes doesn't see it as a "no-brainer upgrade over everything else in the world" (which he says the iPhone clearly was)—but he'll buy one anyway, 'cause he views it as part of his job.

➤ Eric Bangeman is surprised it's not more expensive (he expected $700-$800 as a starting point) and thinks the $499 price point is key to both competing with the Kindle and being a plausible textbook/teenage device.

➤ Nate Anderson worries about category-straddling devices and how people will like multitouch on a device this large.

➤ Ben Kuchera (gaming editor) is "incredibly excited" about the iPad as a gaming device but notes that 99.9% of iPhone games are "terrible." He sees promise, but "no sane person is going to buy it for games."

➤ John Timmer notes that the iPad fits exactly where Jobs says it does—somewhere between a phone and a notebook—and finds this disappointing, as it isn't close enough to either of the others to be useful for him.

➤ Aurich Lawson (creative director) is interested in the iPad's potential as a "jack-of-all-trades media device"—and "most important" for him is whether he can read a comic book on it. He thinks it's "good enough" to be his $500+ "comic reader for 2010."

➤ Chris Foresman looks at office-like applications and seems to think the iPad has these covered pretty well.

➤ John Siracusa ("Ars Apple specialist") finds the iPad "pretty much what I expected" but isn't happy about the lack of USB and SD card slots and the "relative dearth of big content deals."

David Coursey has "Six Reasons You Want an iPad, Six Reasons You Don't" at *The Industry Standard*.

➤ **Buy it now**: It's "undeniably cool"; it may be "the best e-reader?"; it should be great for gaming; it "makes it easy to share media" (two *very* close friends can watch a movie together); it has applications; and "time may be on your side."

➤ **Hold off**: No subsidy for the 3G version; the 4:3 aspect ratio makes it less interesting for watching movies; "it's not much of a work machine"; you get better battery life for book reading on a Kindle or Nook; it's a "tweener, in the bad sense of the word"; and the excitement may have died down by the time it actually ships.

Brian Lamb gathered other opinions in "They said it..." at *abject learning*. He quotes Jay Rosen as finding it interesting that the iPad "shifts back to 'read only' from the read write web." Douglas Rushkoff figures Apple used the "closed iPhone system" rather than OS X *because* OS X doesn't force you to do everything through Apple. Mike Caulfield thinks the iPad can help the "old paradigm" for education (student as consumer, not active participant) survive. Lamb "can't help but fear that the open web wave has crested, and what we are enjoying so much right now is the retrenchment of proprietary

platforms and the internet configured as a virtual shopping centre."

Librarian Reactions

T. Scott Plutchak says "I might want one of those" at *T.Scott.* He says he's not really a gadget guy but switched to a laptop long ago—and he owns *five iPods* (but no smartphone). He thinks he could do 95% of what he does on his laptop "pretty well" with an iPad and keyboard.

> My lack of interest in the Kindle has caused me just a slight twinge of professional guilt. I feel like I ought to become proficient with it just so I can better assess what the impact might be on books, reading, publishing, libraries, etc.—the world of my supposed expertise. The iPad could help me assuage a bit of that guilt as well.

Plutchak's seen more negative than positive reviews but dismisses them because he doesn't think geeks are the target audience.

Josh Greenberg wrote "Books, iTunes and Rental" at *Epistemographer*. The hook: "I'm wondering about the business model for books in the iTunes Store, and whether there will be an opening for circulating (particularly public) libraries or not." What interests Greenberg is the iTunes movie-rental option and the possibility of applying that to books. Here's where things get odd—as though Greenberg assumes everybody's going to use the iPad for everything:

> "But doesn't that kill libraries," one might ask? It definitely expands the market for books beyond those who want to pay full price and have access in perpetuity, but this isn't necessarily bad for libraries IF there's a mechanism for institutional funding of user rentals...

He's suggesting libraries *pick up the tab* for book rentals, an odd role for public libraries. None of this means much unless the iPad becomes ubiquitous.

Phil Bradley offered his "First thoughts on the iPad" on his eponymous blog. He thinks it looks like "just a big iPhone," thinks the lack of multi-tasking is a pain but "not a deal breaker"; doesn't care about the camera or HDMI; finds the lack of Flash an annoyance; and isn't sure about the keyboard—but "Why people are trying to turn the iPad into a laptop, or complaining when it's not one when it's not supposed to be, defeats me." The key here: "I'm really keen on the idea of using it as an e-Book reader. It's the first item that I've looked at which actually makes me think I'd really actively

enjoy reading from it." He thinks it will "kill the Kindle." Apparently e-Ink isn't an issue.

Doug Johnson offers "The iPad—end of computing as we know it" in *The Blue Skunk Blog*, and the discussion is really more related to schools than to libraries in general. He quotes Dennis Fazio, "a long-time forward thinker in Minnesota technology circles," who could hardly be more enthusiastic about the iPad:

> Apple introduced their iPad today and my observation is that we finally have the fourth player in the quartet of technology advances that will change our civilization. Personal computers, the Internet, ubiquitous wireless and now portable personal displays. We now have all of the world's information always at our fingertips and instant visual communication to anyone anywhere in the world at all times virtually where ever we are.

Whew. *All* of the world's information; "instant visual communication to anyone anywhere in the world" despite the lack of a webcam, since presumably *everyone everywhere in the world* will buy an iPad (or already has a suitable device) right off the bat. Fazio goes further: He thinks the iPad and "its many variations and imitations" has "made obsolete a whole trade show's load of technology in one sweep"—by which he means netbooks, thin clients, desktop computers and more. They've "seen the end of their days approaching not so far off anymore." Pretty broad claims, compounded by what might be excessive praise for a device Fazio could not yet have tested thoroughly: the iPad 's "much less fragile and expensive than a PC" (really? never seen a $500-$800 fully-equipped PC? and this handheld with its glass screen is somehow indestructible?).

Johnson—again, for classrooms—isn't so certain about the iPad, but his district is making a "deliberate move toward cloud-based computing" in any case, hoping to see "a webbrowser being the only software needed on most devices we use in schools within 5 years." Personally, Johnson finds himself with considerable "shiny-gadget lust" for the iPad. *Within the classroom environment*, this may all make sense. (One commenter does wonder what makes a non-multitasking device with no webcam and no Flash support infinitely better than a netbook, but there are always Luddites, right?) In a comment, Fazio makes it clear that he sees the iPad as a catalyst to rebuild classrooms and classroom education—slightly broader ambi-

tions. There's an excellent comment pointing out that the iPad is strong for consumption, very weak for creation, which says something about educational goals.

David Lee King uses a question mark in his post title "iPad–a Game Changer?" but that's silly, given the first sentence: "I don't attempt to predict stuff very often, but I think this one's safe—I think Apple's new iPad is most definitely a game changer." He lists things it will "supposedly do," notes the multitouch capabilities and seems to think students could use this *to write papers* along with everything else. He says libraries should use it for roving reference and, wrongly, that it's "the same price as a netbook laptop." But, of course, better in so many ways. He does end by admitting "maybe I'm just gushing at the cool new toy."

He asked what others thought, and got 26 comments. Chad Haefele, not exactly a Luddite, doesn't buy it because he relies on multitasking—and knows damn well that netbooks cost a lot less than $500-$800. "IreneVan" suggests Apple actually give some of them to public libraries. "Bibliokick" describes it as "a larger, upgraded version of the iPod Touch" and loves his Kindle as a non-backlit ebook reader. Jen Waller says "the iPad blows the Kindle out of the water" and has "brilliant and unexpected" pricing, even though she misses a webcam and multitasking. Heather Braum couldn't cope with a non-touch-sensitive device—but Jaclyn McKewan prefers an e-ink ebook reader for book reading and a laptop for other stuff. "thewikiman" calls it "an engagement changer" and thinks it will do better than past tablets (a low bar!) and maybe work as a "convenient alternative to physical books" (he doesn't buy into "eBooks will kill print"), and calls it "quite cheap!" Luis E. Mendez simply says this is a "better screen" than the Kindle or nook and a game changer. Melissa thinks it could be great for us old folk—although "no" doesn't see fixed-income old folks "shelling out the upfront costs or the monthly data charges." (King responds that the cheap ones don't have monthly data charges—but that makes them a lot less useful as communication devices. He doesn't seem to buy price as an issue. Melissa says wifi's so available that it's not an issue: "Seniors just need to know where to go.")

Lauren Pressley wrote "Content Creators and Consumers (and the iPad)" at *Lauren's Library Blog*. She thinks things on the web are shifting from mass creation to primarily consumption (that is, "regular folks" are mostly tweeting, not contributing long-form content) with organizations creating more of the content—and the iPad may be "aiming at the segment of the population that is more consumer than producer of information." She uses computers primarily for production, but doesn't assume everybody else does. She's *admittedly* a "big Mac fan" and was thinking about how the iPad could fit into her life—and doesn't think it does. "And it seems to me we might begin seeing a divergence in computer purchasing options. Those who want to primarily consume information may begin opting for this type of tablet. Those who produce a fair amount of content will still go for a laptop (with keyboard, multitasking, and enough memory/power for video and audio work). And those producers who like to talk about technology will probably have both." It's a refreshing perspective, clearly articulated and with the note that Pressley isn't wild about devices that shift people away from creation.

That's just the first two days.

Later Thoughts

Was there are consensus within two days? Not really, although few writers were willing to write off the iPad altogether (some *commenters* were, but some commenters would argue against electricity). Let's look at some later commentaries—where "later" is limited to January 29, 2010 through March 18, 2010.

This Changes Everything

Brian X. Chen describes an epiphany in "What the iPad Means for the Future of Computing," February 1, 2010 at *Wired*'s Gadget Lab. He used LinkedIn on his iPhone "and it hit me: This is the future of mobile computing, the mobile web—the mobile *experience*." No "busy, tab-infested UIs," but instead "beautiful bubbly icons screaming 'Touch me!'" So "computing" (that is, selecting an app) is going to "become much easier." He's convinced touchscreen tablet browsing "is going to be far more pleasant than the web experience we're used to today." He dislikes tabs. He dislikes boxes. "The iPad is going to be the first computer to eliminate the social divide"—you know, the one that keeps "children and the elderly" from being able to use computers?

If you think about how a computer like this will impact people sociologically, suddenly the iPad is far more than a larger iPod Touch, as many have described it. It's the computer for everyone: an idea Apple has been working toward for years.

Chen pulls back from that gushing universalism, but after some slightly misleading numbers leaves no doubt: "**we're all** heading with Apple into the future of computing, and it's looking quite bright." (Emphasis added.) The first comment is a classic:

True; the iPad will be the computer for everyone—except the people who use a computer. It is the platform for millions to enter cyberspace and everything that goes along with it; except for the people who have been using it for years. It will be an open door to thousands of ebooks—except for the people who are serious readers enough to go for the (much cheaper and stronger—in that sense) ebook reader. It is everything and nothing.

Dan Cohen's "The PITS and the iPad" (January 30, 2010, *Dan Cohen's Digital Humanities Blog*) looks back 31 years to Jef Raskin's original 1979 list of design goals for the Mac as "a computer designed for the Person In The Street." Raskin described the PITS Computer as:

One that will be truly pleasant to use, that will require the user to do nothing that will threaten his or her perverse delight in being able to say: "I don't know the first thing about computers," and one which will be profitable to sell, service and provide software for.

You might think that any number of computers have been designed with these criteria in mind, but not so. Any system which requires a user to ever see the interior, for any reason, does not meet these specifications... As a rule of thumb, if an item does not stand on a table by itself, and if it does not have its own case, or if it does not look like a complete consumer item in [and] of itself, then it is taboo.

If the computer must be opened for any reason other than repair (for which our prospective user must be assumed incompetent) even at the dealer's, then it does not meet our requirements.

Seeing the guts is taboo. Things in sockets is taboo (unless to make servicing cheaper without imposing too large an initial cost). Billions of keys on the keyboard is taboo. Computerese is taboo...

There must not be a plethora of configurations. It is better to offer a variety of case colors than to have variable amounts of memory. It is better to manufacture versions in Early American, Contemporary, and Louis XIV than to have any external wires beyond a power cord.

And you get ten points if you can eliminate the power cord...

It is most important that a given piece of software will run on any and every computer built to this specification...

It is expected that sales of software will be an important part of the profit strategy for the computer.

Cohen thinks the iPad *is* the PITS Computer and calls the tech community's "negative reaction" "the shockwave of the past," as Raskin's and Jobs' "radical vision" finally catches up to reality. I guess the questions are whether a closed appliance-style computer is really more desirable than an open, configurable device (is this *really* the computing model for the future, or just a fancy consumption device?)—and whether "people in the street" are eager to embrace it. I have no answers to those questions. One commenter agreed this was the iPad vision and added "which is exactly why I've progressively been moving away from Apple products," noting the extent to which Apple goes out of its way to preclude competition.

Henry Blodget at *Advertising Age* finds the iPad revolutionary in a January 29, 2010 article "Flawed Debut, but Apple's iPad Is the Future of Computing." (Note: not *a* future but *the* future.) He was disappointed by the actual device but found two elements "revolutionary and profound": the price and the way it's likely to be used, "which is fundamentally different than how both computers and mobile gadgets are used." As to price, Blodget simply asserts that you'll be able to buy the low-end iPad for $199 in three years, so that's all taken care of. As for use, he sees it as "puttering around the house"—that is, media consumption and entertainment. He sees "many households" buying *groups* of these to leave lying around the house. We'll all just walk around picking these things up to do, well, everything. And Apple will sell "tens of millions (eventually, hundreds of millions) of them a year. Eventually, **every household will have them**." (Emphasis added.) If the name Henry Blodget rings a bell, look into 2002 SEC lawsuits.

Ethan Nicholas writes "Why My Mom's Next Computer Is Going To Be An iPad" on January 31, 2010 at *TechCrunch*. Nicholas develops iPhone games. He's one of those who saw loads of "hate" after the announcement and has a simple response for the supposed tsunami of hateful anti-iPad commentary: "Well, the unwashed masses on the Internet

also predicted that the iPod would be a failure. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now."

> The iPad is a computer for people who don't like computers. People who don't like the idea of upgrading their 3D drivers, or adjusting their screen resolution, or installing new memory. Who don't understand why their computer gets slower and slower the longer they own it, who have 25 icons in their system tray and have to wait ten minutes for their system to boot up every day.

My computer hasn't gotten slower and slower over time, has never taken more than 90 seconds to boot (typically 45-60 seconds)—and doesn't have 25 icons in its system tray. Who *are* these people with 10-minute boot times? In any case, the iPad has fewer things to screw up—and his answer for any doubts is "My Mom." Apparently, like *everyone who doesn't live and breathe computers*, her computer runs incredibly slowly, stops printing, and has a "million other random things" happen to it. And the iPad is perfect for her—she can consume media (which Nicholas calls "using a computer") but won't be *allowed* to install stuff that might slow it down, etc., etc.

Nicholas says there are "millions upon millions" of such people out there. "And they finally have a chance to become productive, self-sufficient computer users instead of constantly asking family members to fix their computers or, even worse, keeping the Geek Squad in business." Nicholas thinks they all need the iPad and it's going to "redefine computing."

The comments are wonderful, particularly when someone brings up the cost of W3G access and someone else says, "oh, just use wifi," since *of course* everybody who can't get their computer to print has an always-functional, never-problematic wifi network at home. For that matter, I'm not convinced "Mom" will be able to print from her iPad without help. Print *to what*?

A March 5, 2010 story by Gregg Keizer at *Computerworld* reports on a survey suggesting that the iPad will "seriously disrupt" the dedicated ebook reader business. Why? Because in a survey just after the iPad announcement, of those who planned to *purchase one of several devices listed*, more planned to buy an iPad than a Kindle or Nook or Sony Reader. But that "huge wave of pre-launch demand" amounts to 4% of respondents saying they're very likely to buy one, 9% saying they're somewhat likely. The latter percentage has gone *down* from a pre-

announcement survey; the former is the same. ChangeWave thinks this is a big deal because the original iPhone didn't have such high numbers (they were 3% and 6%, respectively—with the right scale, those are *huge* differences). As to disruptive effects? When *current* ereader owners were asked whether they would have purchased an iPad instead, 27% said yes—but 45% said no. There's a cloud in all this silver lining for Apple: One of four people planning to buy iPads are postponing plans to buy *other* Apple products.

Not So Fast

No doubt some people outside the U.S. hoped the iPad would give them what the Kindle doesn't—easy ways to purchase ebooks wirelessly. Turns out that's not the case, at least not initially. As Charlie Sorrel notes in a January 29, 2010 piece on *Wired*'s Gadge Lab, the iBooks application is US-only. Writing from Spain, he says that's a disappointment but no surprise.

Scott Gilbertson offers "Why Flash Isn't Going Anywhere, iPad Be Damned" at *webmonkey* on February 1, 2010. As he notes, many tech pundits are declaring the demise of Flash and its replacement by HTML5—and iPads won't do Flash. Gilbertson isn't buying it near term: "Even if it does eventually fade away, Flash will still be with us for quite some time because there's currently nothing to replace it with." While HTML5 allows you to embed videos in a web page, the browser still needs to *show* the video. "[N]o matter which option you choose...the best scenario is that 20 to 25 percent of the web sees your video without needing a plug-in." Whereas 99% of the web will see your video if you use Flash. A related article by Farhad Manjoo, "Did Steve Jobs Just Kill Flash?" (at *Slate*) notes that Flash runs badly on Mac OS X (as compared to Windows) because Apple wouldn't give it access to "key pathways" and Jobs doesn't much care for Adobe. Adobe notes that 19 of the top 20 smartphone manufacturers are adopting Flash. Manjoo says Flash isn't dying "but it has probably peaked."

Tom Conlon writes "The iPad's Closed System: Sometimes I Hate Being Right" on January 29, 2010 at *Popular Science*. He takes us back to the 1984 Super Bowl "Big Brother" ad—you know, the one where the Mac signifies a new era of freedom?

> My, how times have changed. Here we are more than 25 years later and the despotic, all-knowing face up

there on that giant screen now belongs to Steve Jobs—and Big Brother Steve is holding an iPad.

In August 2009, Conlon warned that the rumored Apple tablet could reduce "digital freedom" by being more like an iPhone than like a Mac laptop. "This should scare you because it will be the biggest leap yet towards the notion of a completely closed 'desktop' operating system." He notes that he was accused of being a Windows person who'd never used a Mac and was probably on Microsoft's payroll—where, in fact, he's "a fairly die-hard Mac fan." He loves the Macintosh; he just doesn't love Apple. He's fairly certain the iPad's use of the iPhone OS rather than OS X is because "OS X is too open. You can download and install any program you want. You can watch TV shows and movies from a variety of sources. You can purchase and listen to music however you prefer. Heck, you can poke around a file system. But you can't do any of this on the iPhone OS, and thus the iPad."

> You can do on the iPad only what Apple allows. And if you are allowed to do something, you have to go through iTunes or MobileMe to do it. Apple makes a nice chunk of change on everything you do, but more importantly it gets to play gatekeeper. In OS X, Apple can't block you from using apps it doesn't like or competes with. But it famously blocks you from doing so on the iPhone and now presumably on the iPad, which is connected to the same App Store. How long before it blocks movies, TV shows, songs, books and even web sites? Scoff now, but don't be so naïve as to believe that this isn't possible.

Conlon is worried that Apple's grooming iPhone OS as a *successor* to OS X. "I think it would make the swap today if it thought it could get away with it."

> I like being right as much as the next guy, but I don't want to be right about this. Twenty years from now, I don't want to look back and say, "I told you so." I don't want to bore children with wild tales of the old days when we had things like file systems and we could run two programs at once. So let's be careful with the iPad. Don't trash your laptops for one just yet.

Conlon's not the only one. Alex Payne writes "On the iPad" on January 28, 2010 at his eponymous blog (al3x.net), calling the iPad "an attractive, thoughtfully designed, deeply cynical thing," a "digital consumption device" that's a tragedy *because* it "truly seems to offer a better model of computing for many people—perhaps the majority of people." He notes that, if he'd had an iPad

rather than a real computer as a kid, he probably wouldn't be a programmer today. "The future of personal computing that the iPad shows us is both seductive and dystopian. It's not a future I want to bring into my home."

David Parry (University of Texas) writes "The iPad and Higher Education" on February 8, 2010 on *profhacker*. Parry's decidedly a Mac person—he owns a MacBook Pro (before that a MacBook, before that a PowerBook) and calls his iPhone "perhaps the technology item I could least live without." He says:

> I will not be buying an iPad.
>
> What is more, I am going to make the case that you shouldn't either, or at least if you are in education you shouldn't be lying awake at night trying to think of a way to convince your Dean that these need to be purchased for you or your students.

He notes some of the advance "this will change *everything*" hype and Alex Payne's comment. As far as *changing* education goes, he feels the iPad "is designed with textbook makers in mind"—and, given its closed nature, with likelihood that big textbook manufacturers will have *more* control. He thinks school systems should spend money on open source textbooks rather than iPads.

Perhaps more to the point, "I don't want my students to be only media consumers. To be successful engaged citizens with control over their own life path, they need to be critical consumers and creators of media, not passive consumers. This device is designed for passive consumption."

Daniel Akst writes "The iPad Could Drive Readers to Distraction" on February 12, 2010 at *The Wall Street Journal*, saying that the days of losing yourself in a good book "may soon be over" if (when?) we all read them on iPads instead:

> The trouble is that the iPad, due this spring, isn't just a reader with a few minor bells and whistles, like the Amazon Kindle, Sony Reader and Barnes & Noble nook. It's also a full-fledged Web surfer and email device, a stereo, a game player, and a machine for watching movies and TV shows. Since it will run iPhone apps, it's also potentially a telephone, a calculator, a GPS device, an instant-messaging pad, a Facebook portal, a clock, a calendar, a restaurant guide, a contraption for studying Bulgarian, a collection of nude photos, a compass, a carpenter's level and God only knows what else.
>
> When viewed on an iPad, books we now find utterly absorbing—with fast-moving narratives that

keep us up half the night turning pages—may soak up our attention a little less effectively. Just imagine trying to focus on some boring textbook in the face of all that frantic yoo-hooing from the iPad's many other groovy functions.

But…*the iPad doesn't multitask*. If you're reading a book, *that's all you're doing*. Other functions are no more "frantically yoo-hooing" than the TV (off) or radio (also off) or magazine (on the coffee table) are yelling at me when I'm reading a print book. It gets stranger: Akst claims "technology is moving toward forcing us to use a single device for practically everything we do, making concentration on any one thing that much harder."

Here's an odd one: Brad Moon, reporting on "Six Months With an eBook Reader" in a March 9, 2010 article at *Wired*'s GeekDad. Moon's all about "making digital transitions," so the result of his six-month experiment with a Sony Reader Pocket is almost foreordained: "Reading is all digital for me from now on." He never thinks he'll "downgrade back to paper." But this article is about the iPad, and Moon considers that. Does he regret not waiting for the iPad? No.

> Despite having a "free pass" to buy an iPad when it becomes available (this earned by ceding the right to choose appliances to my wife during our kitchen reno), I think I'll hold off. I want an eBook reader that I can carry around and read on the beach. I want a display that I can easily read in the daylight and a battery that lasts for weeks between charges. I read novels for the most part, and they're black text on a white page, so color is moot, unless you count nice displays of the book's cover. When I do take the plunge on an iPad, I may do some reading on it, but I can't see the day when a tablet that's too big to pocket, expensive enough to make me cringe if I accidentally dropped it, not the greatest for reading in daylight and with battery life measured in hour instead of days, becomes my daily go-to device for reading eBooks; eComics, sure, but that's something for another day. The iPad may eventually replace my MacBook Air as the lightweight device I use to stay in touch and dabble at writing while I'm off camping, but only if/when Apple caves and allows multiple applications to run simultaneously.

Mixed Opinions

Chris Foresman writes "The iPad doesn't have a camera, but does it matter?" at *Ars Technica* on January 29, 2010. He notes evidence that Apple originally planned to include a camera—and "our

feeling is that, despite the complaints, that lack of a camera won't affect the iPad's popularity or usability." Why not? It's too big to use as a regular camera—and Foresman doesn't think a webcam would work well because people will use the iPad sitting on their laps, and a webcam "pointed up at your chin isn't the most flattering angle." "We" also get the impression that video chat is really a novelty. Overall, Foresman doesn't think the lack will have "any significant impact on the current-generation iPad's sales." (A number of commenters took issue with the "video chat's a novelty that wears off quickly" comment.)

Remember Dan Cohen's historical musings—that the iPad is the 31-years-later realization of the original Mac vision as closed, appliance-style computing for the "Person In The Street"? Jonathan Zittrain has argued that this *is* the future—that we were headed for the replacement of general-purpose computers with locked-down appliances. Ed Felten posted "iPad to Test Zittrain's 'Future of the Internet' Thesis" on February 4, 2010:

> Apple's new iPad will put Zittrain's thesis to the test. The iPad, as announced, has aspects of both an appliance and a general purpose computer. (Zittrain would say "generative", but I'll stick with the standard computer science term "general purpose".) Will the appliance side kill the general-purpose side?…
>
> For the iPad to become a Zittrain-type appliance, two things must happen. First, Apple must remain picky about which apps are available in the App Store. Second, Apple must limit the device's browser so that it lacks the features that make today's browsers viable application platforms. Will Apple be able to limit their product in this way, despite competition from other, more general-purpose tablets? I doubt it.
>
> But even this—even an appliance-style iPad—would not be enough to prove Zittrain's thesis. Zittrain argued not just that appliances would exist, but that they would replace general purpose computers. Amazon's kindle is an appliance, but it doesn't prove Zittrain's thesis because nobody is ditching their laptop in favor of a Kindle. Instead, the Kindle is an extra device which is used for its purpose, while the general-purpose device is used for everything else. If the iPad ends up like the Kindle—a complement to the laptop or netbook, rather than a replacement for it—this will not prove Zittrain's thesis.
>
> It seems unlikely, then, that the iPad, even if it succeeds, will provide strong support for Zittrain's

thesis. General-purpose computers are so useful that we're not likely to abandon them.

Which is not to say the iPad couldn't be enormously successful. Zittrain also commented on the iPad (in the *Financial Times*, on February 3, 2010) and notes that Apple can remove and change content on appliance devices and that the iPad moves strongly toward the closed model. His closing comment: "Mr Jobs ushered in the personal computer era and now he is trying to usher it out. We should focus on preserving our freedoms, even as the devices we acquire become more attractive and easier to use."

For some reason, way too many observers concluded that the somewhat booklike displays on e-Ink readers, touted by most everybody as a great advantage when the Kindle first appeared, are now "stuck in a time warp" because the iPad has full color. Priya Ganapati discusses that issue in a February 4, 2010 *Wired* Gadget Lab piece, "Qualcomm Aims to Bring Color, Video to E-Readers." Supposedly, "Mirasol" will be used in ereaders by Fall 2010, with color and speedy refresh rates—but also the low power consumption and lack of backlighting that make e-Ink readers desirable. As the article notes, some kinds of content require color (cookbooks, comics, some textbooks, magazines). At present, Mirasol seems to offer less contrast and poorer grayscale support than e-Ink, and almost certainly not fast enough refresh for video, but (supposedly) even better battery life than e-Ink.

How did fever change between advance hype and, say, the announcement plus a few days? A Chris Foresman story at *Ars Technica* on February 8, 2010 discusses a survey by Retrevo ("the ultimate electronics marketplace")—and finds that it's a case of "lies, damned lies and statistics." Retrevo says "iPad hoopla" has passed, with more than twice as many respondents saying they were uninterested a week after the iPad was announced than before it was announced—but with three times as many saying they would like to buy one. Still, that's 9% as compared to 3%, among a group clearly interested in buying new gadgets.

Foresman's wording is a little odd. The earlier survey showed 26% *who had heard of the device* and weren't interested, a figure that rose to 52% after the announcement. There's another big chunk, those who neither know nor care—which dropped from 35% to 18%. So, realistically, the number who are not interested in buying one went from 61% to 70%: Not much of a change. (One commenter makes a classic error, expanding 9% of a self-selected gadget-buyer poll to "25 million people"—that is, 9% of all Americans. One is reminded of the percentage games played by companies in the dot-com era: "Why, if only 10% of people use this, we'll be wealthy!" Another gets it exactly right, I think: "This is evidence that the iPad is going to be a failure! This is evidence that the iPad is going to be a success! ...This is evidence that no one has a clue as to how the device is going to perform in the market, because not a single unit has been sold.")

This one's a little silly, but for the record: Kit Eaton writes "Report: $499 iPad Costs Apple $230 to Make, Bring on the Discounts!" on February 10 at *Fast Company*. The company iSuppli guesses what each component in the iPad costs—I say "guesses" because *iSupply could not have disassembled an actual iPad*—and comes up with a total of $229.35 for the cheapest iPad. The article notes that an "apparently huge margin" between parts cost and retail price shouldn't be a surprise for an Apple product—and that this leaves lots of room for discounting. Which is fine, except for three huge caveats:

➢ iSuppli doesn't actually *know* what the components are or how much they cost.
➢ The hardware costs for a computer, and particularly for a slick mobile device, *shouldn't* be the majority of the price in most cases. Design and software both cost money, quite apart from profit.
➢ Unless Apple intends to sell all iPads directly, it won't be getting $499; it will be getting a wholesale price.

I don't think this article provides any reason to believe the base iPad is overpriced.

Librarians on the iPad

Tony Tallent writes "Subjectivity, Opinions, iPads" at *yes to know* on January 30, 2009. Here's the core:

Often when a new product or innovative service emerges (even if it is in a field not directly related to what we do), our thinking can be inspired or refreshed. With the unveiling of the iPad this week, ears and eyes all over the globe were perked and peeled, ready for inspiration. Along with the applause there came some notable criticism of this latest Apple offering that won't be widely available

for a couple of months. What can such an innovation or new product release teach us? An interesting post on 52 Weeks of UX, offers a suggestion: "what if the iPad simply isn't for the people who are critiquing it?"

The overall point—that needs and expectations differ—is a good one.

Scott Douglas posts "The Kindle Killer Isn't Very Killer" on January 29, 2010 at *Speak Quietly*. He assumes "people will obviously buy" the iPad "because it's cool"—but finds a number of flaws.

> The biggest flaw for me is there is no USB...
>
> There's also no HDMI out; sure, you can get an A/V adaptor to hook it up to your TV, but it would be so much easier if you didn't have to.
>
> You can only customize it if Apple says it's okay. That really stinks. Every computer has limitations, but this thing is really locked down...
>
> I don't use webcams often, but I like the feature. They're dirt cheap to put on computers, so what gives Apple?...
>
> Wanna upgrade? Wait for the next version to come out and buy a new one. That's not the case with netbooks and computers...
>
> How about that 10 hour battery? That's great until it begins to deteriorate, which all batteries quickly do. There's no replaceable battery.
>
> But Apple has a great commercial, and that's why everyone, I'll admit myself included, is lusting after this thing.

Douglas should know better: "everyone" is most certainly *not* "lusting after" iPads.

Kate Davis writes "ipad: will i or won't i?" on January 31, 2010 at *virtually a librarian*. Davis makes no bones about being an "Apple girl"—but also an "eBook fiend." And she's interested in how the iPad could work for her personally. Excerpts:

> What I want personally is a device on which I can browse the web, answer email, read feeds (and follow links) and read books. I'm not a huge mobile web user–other than for social networking sites, I really find my phone too small for web browsing or feed reading. So I carry my MacBook or my eee PC around. And, seeing I already carry an eBook reader, I'd love to combine book reading functionality with web browsing in a single device that's optimised for both...
>
> The iPad looks like a slick device, and yes, I'd love to buy one in 56ish days time, when they become available, just because it's sexy (regardless of the flaws that have been pointed out around the place--particularly the fact that it's pretty much entirely geared for content consumption and fails

on the production front). But a lot remains to be seen about this device, particularly on the eBook front, and that's probably of the most concern to me at this point.

Before she buys one, she wants to be sure she can use ePub *with DRM* from *any* major distributor (and libraries), not just the iBooks store. She also wonders about long-term readability (she finds eInk much more comfortable than computer screens), how hot the iPad gets under sustained use and whether battery life is as good as promised. She talks about battery life in terms of "multitasking," but that may be a language issue (the iPad doesn't multitask).

> Much as I'd love to run out and buy this thing, I'm just not sure I can justify it unless it's going to meet my needs on the eBook front. And that certainly is something I'm not sure about just yet.

Thomas Brevik offers "iPad and Libraries—some thoughts" on February 1, 2010 at *Librarian 1.5*. He wants to get his hands on one (and his ICT department has preordered one) but he thinks it will be easy to top—on the technical side:

> One of my first reactions to Steve Jobs presentation of the iPad was that this is Apple´s gift to Google. It will take very little effort to top this. Just add a camera and flash support to a touch screen with the Android operating system and you have an iPad killer. On the purely technical/OS side of the device that is. What probably will sell the iPad is the ease of use for non-techies. A lot of blogposts and twitter comments have called this the first true "everybody computer." They might have a point. My iPod touch is equally popular with my three-year-old, my ten-year-old and myself, who all use it in many different ways. A larger device appeals to all of us.

He's more interested in the apps than in the hardware. "One thing I am sure of is that we will all be surprised by the diversity of apps and the uses to which the iPad will be put to." He also expects a "plethora of iPad-like devices" primarily running Google Android or Windows 7 Mobile. As for libraries?

> For libraries the iPad will have little immediate impact. What it probably will do, if it is a hit in the marketplace, is that it will fuel reader demand for e-books. I predict that it will be a slow development, but maybe too fast for many librarians...

He sees two main challenges: How to get content from libraries to the iPad (he suggests avoiding the iBook store—and assumes that's possible) and whether the iPad will "change the media habits of

readers." He thinks that's likely; of course, he also seems to assume massive success. He says iPhone users are changing library offerings, although the iPhone accounts for less than 3% of all phones. Is this catering to special interests?

The blogger at *Library Hat* offers "What the iPad is and isn't" on January 31, 2010. She doesn't think the iPad will kill netbooks and ereaders and she doesn't think buying one right off the bat is a good idea—but she wants one. "And hopefully I will hack it." She views the iPad as primarily a media consumption device and says there's "no excuse" for it to be locked down with no user control. She's arguing that the iPad *should* be configurable and hackable.

The *Krafty Librarian* weighs in with "The iPad and Thoughts on Usage in Libraries and Hospitals" on February 3, 2010. Krafty likes the *concept* of an iPad, "I am just not sure I like the iPad." Krafty thinks "Steve Jobs needs to get over his anti Adobe Flash issues" (and suggests that Flash being buggy on Mac platforms might be Apple's fault) and notes how often the "broken Lego" comes up on Krafty's iPhone.

> Until there is an answer to the Flash (or lack of Flash) problem, it will be difficult to use the iPad for animation or Internet video purposes. Why is this a problem? There are lots of great medical animations and videos on surgeries, exercises, procedures, etc. that are very beneficial to professionals as well as consumers.

Krafty notes other video problems—the 4x3 ratio, inability to display HD content natively—and the AT&T 3G issue. There's also a discussion of ebook formats and what's needed for a clinical tablet. Krafty also notes that hospitals tend not to use Macs or support iPhones. Krafty ends on a positive note:

> I don't know if the iPad will make an immediate big splash in healthcare and or medical libraries. However, in typical Apple form they have turned up the heat on the portable market. They have created a really cool portable device for under $500. I anticipate us seeing more changes due to the ripples the iPad has caused by jumping into the ultraportable pool that has been dominated by inexpensive netbooks. It makes for interesting times. Who would have thought in 2000 that ten years later would have one of the most popular music players that is also a phone?

the radical patron (call them "trp" for short) claims "iPad is a gamechanger for libraries" in a February 3,

2010 post—and, while trp isn't a librarian, this is clearly library-related. trp uses a *Sports Illustrated* concept video and claim by *Advertising Age* that "in three years" we'll be buying three or four $199 iPads each and leaving them lying around the house to conclude that the iPad significantly changes people's relationship with the type of content people access via libraries. trp seems to buy Henry Blodget's "vision" hook, line and sinker—and, while offering no projections, asks this question: "What will the role of public and academic libraries be in 8–10 years when rich, contextual content becomes so portable and widely available?" To date, nobody's responded. My own response would be that the *Advertising Age* projection is so silly that the question doesn't deserve an answer.

Kenley Neufeld writes "I Am Not A Gadget: A Buddhist's iPad Dilemma" on February 20, 2010 at *misc.joy*. He wants an iPad—but how can he justify it with a fixed household budget, balance the desire to reduce consumption and the need (he says "need") to stay current with technology, balance ubiquitous computing and family harmony, and cope with the environmental cost? "When is enough enough?"

Neufeld says he doesn't own many gadgets "compared to many"—but those include an iPod, an iPhone 3G, a Flip HD and a MacBook Pro. Each new gadget adds its own environmental impact, and he's supposed to be mindful about these things. So he considers each aspect. The cost, it turns out, is not an issue. Because Neufeld is, he says, a leader in his profession who teaches technology, he *needs* to maintain currency and awareness (which apparently means *buying* new gadgets). He's aware that yet another device could "continue to degrade interpersonal relationships"—and hasn't solved this one. As for environmental impact, the iPad's not terrible in this regard, but it's still another device.

> Ultimately, this is an exercise in deep looking; exactly what the Mindfulness Trainings and my Teacher asks us to do. I will continue to ponder, consider, argue, reconcile, meditate, and discuss until the moment a decision is made.

Notes and Conclusions

If you believe Apple views the iPad as a competitor to dedicated ebook readers—and, given the iTunes bookstore, how can you *not* believe that—then you

may also remember Steve Jobs' absurd statement a while back that "people don't read any more."

This, it turns out, is consistent with Jobs' style. Brian X. Chen, who seems to wear the cheerleader uniform for Apple with great flair, noted this in a February 16, 2010 story at *Wired*'s Gadget Lab: "Steve Jobs' 6 Sneakiest Statements." So, for example, Jobs said during a 2008 "earnings call" that Apple could not make a $500 computer that was not a piece of junk.

> Nice one, Steve. You got us there. Actually, you've fooled us not once or twice, but at least six times, by our count. What follows is a list of five more famously misleading quotes that Jobs pulled from his bag of tricks.

➤ In 2003, Jobs told Walt Mossberg that Apple wasn't working on a tablet because "people want keyboards… We look at the tablet, and we think it is going to fail." Which explains why Apple filed a patent for a touch tablet device in 2004 and, according to lots of evidence, has been working on a tablet for many years.

➤ Jobs also told Mossberg Apple wasn't likely to produce a cell phone: "We didn't think we'd do well in the cellphone business."

➤ The next one is that "People don't read any more" line—which appeared *twice* when Jobs was putting down the Kindle. The first time: "It doesn't matter how good or bad the product is, the fact is that people don't read any more." The second: "The whole conception is flawed at the top because people don't read any more." In the middle: The claim that 40% of the people in the U.S. read one book or less last year—which, even if true, leaves 60% that read *more* than one, quite apart from all the other reading. But, you know, Steve Jobs is Steve Jobs.

➤ Again in 2003, Jobs said "I'm not convinced people want to watch movies on a tiny little screen." The fifth-generation iPod, released two years later (and probably being planned in 2003), played video in a 2.7" screen.

➤ In September 2009, when David Pogue asked Jobs why there was a camera in the iPod Nano but not the iPod Touch, he said it was to keep the price down and "we don't need to add new stuff." That's possible—but apparently the Touch case has a gap just the right size for a camera, and there were technical problems in adding one.

I note these mostly because if Steve Ballmer or Bill Gates (or Larry Ellison, for that matter) pulled this sort of thing, they would be attacked pretty roundly by the press. Jobs, of course, is different. Commenters were practically foaming at the mouth at this criticism of Saint Jobs, although not all of them: "Steve doesn't make such statements on purpose. He just doesn't care what he said before and simply randomly changes his mind. There is nothing mythical about it."

Projections I've seen are that Apple should sell out its initial inventory in early April (if not before)—but the initial inventory is probably around 250,000 units. Most market-watchers project between one and three million sales for the year as a whole. (Most estimates are that 36 million netbooks will be sold this year and even more in 2011—apparently not everyone sees netbooks as doomed worthless crap.)

Would a million units be failure? Would three million be success? Those may not be the right questions. The right questions, I believe, are:

➤ Does the iPad change everything?
➤ Will the iPad displace other categories— ebook readers, notebook computers, netbook computers, open computing in general?
➤ Was all the hype justified?

I know my guesses and opinions. I believe in multiplicity. I regard the iPod's absurdly large market share as an anomaly driven more by iTunes than by the iPods themselves. I will point out that "everybody owns an iPhone" redefines "everybody" as *three percent of those buying cell phones* and, currently, about 18% of those buying smartphones. (Remember: *most people* who buy cell phones still buy them as phones, and don't pay for smarts.)

I'd guess Apple will make money off the iPad— and it will not kill off other product categories. It might dominate the market for $500-$800 keyboardless devices that are too big to fit in regular pockets and have color LCD screens. I'm not sure how big that market really is. (Neither is anyone else.) For me, the form factor's a killer—but I'm not the target market, I don't think. I don't travel enough, I don't *consume media* relentlessly (and I like my video on a big screen, thank you), I'm heavily a creator as a computer user (and have never once had a 10-minute bootup, *ever* in 27 years of personal computing).

In the end, this essay isn't about the product itself. It's about the hype.

hypePad

A word about "hypePad." I came up with the term independently, but claim no originality. Binging it *after* writing this draft, I see a surprisingly small set of results: 31. Most of those relate to TypePad, not the iPad.

Google shows "about 1,810," and a few of those do appear to be snarky references to the iPad. A big reason for the results difference may be that Google includes "hype pad" and even "hype. Pad" as legitimate results, so that, for example, one Thai restaurant review shows up. "About 1,800" seems to resolve to 109 results, basically equivalent to Bing's 31 in terms of actual iPad mentions.

Buzzkill: Google Screws Up

The big story on the iPad was advance hype—not from Apple itself but from a swarm of Apple-watchers, a swarm so thick that some observers concluded (wrongly) that Apple had an ownership stake in *Wired* and other outlets.

In contrast, Google Buzz didn't have much advance hype. Instead, it seemed to appear out of nowhere—without any action on the part of millions of sudden users. If you used Gmail or Google Reader, you'd suddenly find that you were part of Google Buzz—with some set of followers and people you were following, a set established by Google without your permission.

Google Buzz seems to be a variant on Friend-Feed—but without FriendFeed's wholly optional, opt-in nature. It may have aspects of both Friend-Feed and Facebook. The big difference: Google Buzz was suddenly *just there*.

This surprising act of arrogance on Google's part did not sit well with people. Even those who were busily figuring out problems for which Google Wave might be a solution were a bit dismayed by the way Google Buzz was introduced. Google relies heavily on trust—our trust that searches are handled appropriately, our trust that Google won't misuse the mass of data it acquires and, for the naïve among us, trust that "Don't be evil" actually means something. Google Buzz may be an eye-opener for many people.

Let's look at some of the reactions over the first few weeks.

Buzz—VERY annoying and potentially dangerous

Phil Bradley nailed it right off the bat, in this February 11, 2010 post. Excerpts:

> Well, I've been playing around with Buzz for a few hours, and it's driving me nuts. The most annoying thing that I've found with it so far is that it just dumps notifications into my Gmail inbox as well as into the Buzz folder. What genius at Google thought that was a good idea? I see a post on Twitter, then I see the same thing again in my inbox, and then I see it for the third time in the Buzz folder. This is not sensible…
>
> I've always been very ambivalent about Google—it's a superb resource, innovative, creative and so on, but there is another side to the coin. They stifle development, they poke their noses into everything, they think that they know best, and they're rubbish at social media…
>
> I was also taken aback when Buzz informed me about the people I was following. Hang on a moment! When I want to follow someone, I will tell the application thanks very much—not the other way around. Another problem that's surfaced is the privacy flaw. Because Buzz automatically sets all this up, AND by default makes it public it's therefore possible to go into a profile and take a look to see who they email and chat with the most. Talk a lot to a competitor? How about a secret girl/boy friend? That actually might not be that secret any more.
>
> Google is going to whine on about how that can be changed, and yes it can, except that it's not intuitive…
>
> It's clear to me that Google simply doesn't properly understand social media. What Google understands is using anything and everything they can to extend their reach into the lives of as many people who use the internet as possible. Buzz is simply another incarnation of this. A good social media product is designed to make my life easier, but that's the very last thing that Buzz does…

That's about as good a summary of the situation as you could get, and I could stop right there. I see no need to add my own gloss to Bradley's commentary. Notably, the very first comment was an attack that had much the flavor of Apple fanboy responses to iPad criticisms, but this time from an apparent Google fanboy.

Sorry, Google: I'm just not buzzed about Buzz

I don't read much of Robert X. Cringely these days, maybe because I don't visit *InfoWorld* on a regular basis. The long-standing pseudonymous tech commentator/humorist offered his commentary

on February 10, 2010, (the day after the announcement/surprise implementation) and it's a good one, starting:

> I wake up each morning with the same mix of hope and dread. I hope Google will buy me for a princely sum and allow me to retire to some sandy beach where they serve mojitos 24/7. And I fear Google will simply invent a better version of me, forcing me to get a job as a greeter at Wal-Mart.
>
> This must be what Facebook, Twitter, Plurk, MySpace, et al experience every day. Unable or unwilling to acquire those services, Google has decided to reinvent them (or copy, depending on your point of view) with Google Buzz.

He calls Buzz "Google's latest attempt to drop a 16-ton weight on the heads of Facebook and Twitter" and notes some of the similarities and differences. He goes on to recount his own experiences as the supposed 1% of Gmail users who were *invited* to Buzz before the rest of us got it willy-nilly. He saw conversations mostly about Buzz not working very well—and then it stopped working entirely. His headline offers his opinion.

Buzz Buzz Buzz

John Scalzi on February 11, 2010 at *Whatever*—and he's switched on Buzz (he had a choice?)

> because what I need more than anything else in the world is to have yet one more social network to be on. That said, my reaction to it so far seems to be similar to the reaction of most of the people I've seen on it, which is "okay, now what?" Because to be blunt about it, if GBuzz is just replicating what I already have going on Facebook/Twitter, I'm not going to end up using it much, because I already have Facebook and Twitter accounts, and GBuzz porting itself into my GMail isn't enough to make it special or convenient. So we'll see how to shakes out.

He doesn't think Google's going to do much in social media unless it buys Twitter or Facebook—unless you're in Brazil, "in which case Orkut rocks your socks." But he's leaving Buzz enabled.

With *Whatever*, the comments—usually literate and well-informed, usually prolific—are half the story. In this case, there were 44 responses in the first three days, some favoring Buzz (including one classic "don't underestimate google") and some discussion as to whether the auto-follow list is or isn't evil. One person proposed that all the Google services were even more ways to target advertising at us more effectively; another assumes Google wants to take over everybody's computer by

making us *want* them to. One noted how rapidly ex-spouses had found the new stalking tool.

Google Responds to Critics

It only took two days—until February 11—for Google to make *some* changes for the better, as reported in this *ReadWriteWeb* article. They made the "turn it off" feature more obvious and made it possible to block people—but you still got bunches of followers by default and had to opt out rather than opting in.

Apologize for invading our privacy? Not Google: Instead, they bragged that "tens of millions of people have checked Buzz out, creating over 9 million posts and comments." Given how Buzz was implemented, the first claim is almost silly: "We forced everybody to have this thingie, and most of them tried it once."

Dear Google

This February 13, 2010 post by Neil Saunders at *What You're Doing Is Rather Desperate* is well-written enough to quote in full:

> I think you're a pretty good company. I like many of your products and use them daily, for work and at home. I admire many of your innovations and technical solutions.
>
> But this Buzz thing. You've really messed up. Two points:
>
> 1. Social networks should always be opt-in. Never, never opt-out. I choose whether to join in the first place. If I do join, I choose who to connect with, what to share and who can see it. And I expect complete control over the entire process, from the outset.
>
> 2. My list of email contacts is not a social network. It's a list of people with whom I've corresponded by email at least once. That's all they have in common. Furthermore, there's a big difference between them exposing their public profiles and me exposing their presence in my address book.
>
> I am normally an enthusiastic, early-adopter of new web tools and a pretty "tech-savvy" individual. Yet Buzz has me confused, annoyed and eager to disable it as fast as I can. It's not me, it's you.
>
> I hope that you put more thought into how your next release might impact your users.

In this case, commenters agreed—and two found that they're much more nervous about their use of *other* Google products. So am I, to be honest: I love Gmail but I wonder...

Google May Offer Buzz Independently From Gmail

That's a February 12 item by Danny Sullivan at *search engine land*—and it certainly shows the

depth of Google's understanding of what they did for stalkers and others. Are they pulling Buzz *out* of Gmail and Google Reader, so that you have to explicitly enable it? Nope: "We think that Buzz within Gmail is a great experience, and we'll keep offering that as well." But they assume loads of people who aren't Gmail users also want that "great experience" through separate Buzz accounts.

There's a lot more in the 1,200-word story about privacy and other concerns.

Must Read

Go to *Fugitivus* (fugitivus.wordpress.com) and read "Harriet Jacobs" post from February 11, 2010: "Fuck you, Google." **Do it now.** I'll wait.

For those not at a computer, "Harriet Jacobs" (not her real name) has an abusive ex-husband who's her third most frequent Gmail contact after her boyfriend and her mother. Buzz automatically allowed her frequent contacts access to her Google Reader comments without telling her. Apparently she's finding that, *having opted out of Buzz*, she can't block new people from following her on Google Reader. This brings Buzz up to the level of personal safety and drew loads of responses. As noted by one commenter, while she can fix most of this, *she shouldn't have to*. One commenter offered the excuse that what Buzz did is what Facebook does—and rapidly drew the answer that *Facebook doesn't do it automatically*. Nobody signs up for Facebook expecting it to be a private email system.

Online social networks: 1, getting it wrong

This one's from Maxine Clark at *Petrona*, posted February 14, 2010. She links Buzz and Google's acquisition of Aardvark, "a semi-automatic question and answer service"—that is, if you join it either to ask or answer questions, you start getting questions delivered based on the three areas of expertise you specify (you're required to specify areas of expertise in order to use Aardvark). She assumes Google will integrate Aardvark into Buzz. She recognizes Buzz's automatic opt-in as "doing it wrong" right off the bat, but she sees the potential integration as making things even worse (she has some Aardvark experience):

> I assume that by its acquisition of Aardvark, Google will be integrating it into its Buzz feature, leading to a life of hell as one is constantly interrupted by lunatic questions and arguments from people who don't like one's answers. I hope I shan't have to find out anything about it, as I have no interest in sign-

ing up to it in its new incarnation, but I hope that the filtering functions are improved so that users receive relevant questions, and I hope that there is some system for blocking/reporting inappropriate and abusive questioners.

Her key issue is what most people saw: "if a company wants to introduce a social network onto an existing service, the users should be invited to join it, not automatically signed up to it, and the users should be able to control how they use it."

Horse: Out. Barn Door: Locked

According to a *Downloadsquad* item on February 14, 2010, Google disabled the autofollow feature for new Buzz users, offering "suggested friends" instead. Jay Hathaway calls this a "smart move on Google's part" and continues:

> Buzz is an interesting concept, and it could very easily have become tainted with privacy complaints and cries of Big Brother. Way to go, privacy watchdogs of the web, for calling for a change. Way to go, Google, for implementing it so quickly.

This smacks of apologetics. Google turned on tens of millions of Gmail and Google Reader accounts with the autofollow feature already in place. The damage was already done. "Fixed" or not, Google should have known better—but then, Google's CEO is on record with a variant of the "if you have nothing to hide..." excuse for invading privacy. (A February 15, 2010 story at *The Industry Standard* offers more details on this over-several-weeks change, including an apology of sorts: Not for screwing up but for "the concern we've caused.")

lifehacker had a story about this on February 16, 2010, with Google saying it should have done more internal testing—but as for the "lightning speed" of the fixes, the first comment comes from someone who had been experimenting with moving from Thunderbird to Gmail—and who, on February 15 (after the "we've fixed it" announcements) found that Google had exposed his Gmail contact list to Facebook without his permission.

When the Electronic Frontier Foundation covered the changes in a February 16, 2010 *Deeplinks* post, Kurt Opsahl said it well:

> Though Google responded quickly to these privacy concerns, they never should have happened in the first place. While Buzz previously had a lot of these privacy options available, the user interface failed to provide users with the setting users had reasonably expected. Google should follow fair information practices and make secondary uses of

information only with clear, unequivocal user consent and control.

With Buzz, Google takes another giant step towards turning into Microsoft

That's the headline on John Naughton's "TheObserver" column in the February 14, 2010 *Guardian*—and it's wildly unfair to Microsoft. Naughton describes the surprise all us Gmail users got and calls it "breathtakingly crass and intrusive and takes astonishing liberties with your privacy."

So far, so good. But Naughton's more interested in taking a swipe at Microsoft, so he draws the parallel of Microsoft bundling Internet Explorer into Windows in 1995. Huh? Sure, that made Internet Explorer the default browser for lots of people—mostly people who didn't *have* a browser—but it's not at all the same thing. Some of what Naughton says about the Buzz introduction:

> Now think of the implications. Of course it's potentially embarrassing for people who conduct personal relationships or confidential business via email, but it could also be life-threatening. Suppose you're a political activist living in an authoritarian country. You use Gmail because it's slightly less risky than other systems. Many of your Gmail contacts are other activists, inside and outside your country. Under the Buzz defaults, they would suddenly be exposed to anyone who checked your Google profile.

1995: "Here's a browser all set up for you to use." Tell me how this has *any* of the same implications? I suppose Naughton figures that a Microsoft analogy is the worst thing he can say about Google; too bad he's smeared Microsoft in the attempt.

More Buzz—Exit Stage Left

Scott Vine at *Informationoverlord* on February 22, 2010. He "want(s) to like Buzz, honest, I do."

> I can also see how it could become both good and useful. But so it is easy to look at the whole exercise as a lesson of how to really fuck something up. Then again this also may be too simplistic a view. Around 32 million Gmail users got Buzz a couple of weeks ago and registered over 9 million Posts and Comments within its first couple of days according to Mashable. These are not numbers to be sniffed at. If it keeps up those kind of numbers then even the moans of the like of me and other 'geeks' won't stop this from making a big splash.

Still, Vine has some "further moans." For one thing, he's one of those who had a Google profile long before Buzz—but if you want to get rid of Buzz, you have to delete your profile. "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong, Wrong, Wrong." He finds the mobile version mostly useless because he's not willing to disclose his location—and finds that Buzz adds the location even when he says not to. He hasn't disabled Buzz entirely, but he's turned off pretty much all sharing. With few exceptions, "I don't have enough levels of trust for the product or (simple) control over what I might wish to do with it to use it as is. Amongst friends, I don't think I'm alone in coming to this conclusion."

Google Buzzkill

I *certainly* don't claim credit for turning Buzz into Buzzkill. Rebecca MacKinnon probably wasn't the first to do so either, in this February 18, 2010 post at *Freedom to Tinker*. The first paragraph is a classic:

> The launch of Google Buzz, the new social networking service tied to GMail, was a fiasco to say the least. Its default settings exposed people's e-mail contacts in frightening ways with serious privacy and human rights implications. Evgeny Morozov, who specializes in analyzing how authoritarian regimes use the Internet, put it bluntly last Friday in a blog post: "If I were working for the Iranian or the Chinese government, I would immediately dispatch my Internet geek squads to check on Google Buzz accounts for political activists and see if they have any connections that were previously unknown to the government."

That's the start of a thoughtful 1,200-word post. She notes that it's already damaged Google's reputation—but also "an unknown number of users who found themselves and their contacts exposed in ways they did not choose or want." (A class action suit has already been filed.) She reports that some of the problems have been fixed but doesn't let Google off the hook:

> Whatever happens, I do think that Google fully deserves the negative press it has gotten and continues to get for the thoughtless way in which Buzz was rolled out. There are senior people at Google whose job it is to focus on free expression issues, and others who work full time on privacy issues. Either the Buzz development team completely failed to consult with these people or were allowed to ignore them.

Other Reactions

A February 11, 2010 post at *Enquiring Minds Want to Know* offers mixed reactions, liking the "mashed together bits" of other Google services but disliking the auto-follow and auto-opt in fea-

tures. This person chose to keep using it for a while, but didn't really see a purpose.

Dave Lankes argues that Google needs to talk to librarians in a February 13, 2010 post at *Virtual Dave...Real Blog*. Except that he's mostly talking about a need for librarians to have more sophisticated conversations about privacy with patrons—and it appears from the post that Lankes is one of those who thinks libraries should let patrons give up reading-history confidentiality as long as it's an "informed" decision. (One comment doesn't help, as it assumes only "terrorists" would ever come under investigation. Some librarians lack much historical sense, I'm afraid.) I don't buy that "exposing complexities and education" is going to work well enough that giving up confidentiality will *truly* be an informed decision—not when librarians themselves don't understand the issues.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation offered "Protect Your Privacy on Google Buzz" in a February 12, 2010 *Deeplinks* item, with a good summary of what you need to do—but, again, you should never have had to take these steps in the first place. (The post says "Buzz has upset a lot of people" but doesn't seem to come down as hard on Google as EFF would come down on other companies. I draw no conclusions.)

But then there's Ben Parr at *Mashable.com*, informing us that Buzz "has completely changed the game"—that it's a huge hit with "simply stellar" numbers, "embraced" by users and "taken off" as a service, that *the way it was introduced* was a "brilliant move" and that it's the greatest thing since hyperlinks. (I made that last one up, but there are a bunch of drooling quotes from people who jes' *love* Buzz.) Privacy issues? Google "is responding with lightning speed"—days after *causing* the problem. "In a few months, few will remember these privacy snafus" and will "forgive and forget." There's a chart showing that Buzz is already "bigger than Twitter"—because there are more Gmail users than Twitter users! The close:

> The social media landscape has been permanently altered. To ignore Buzz would be a costly mistake, because Google has finally created the definition of a game-changer.

I'd offer a taste of the comments, but each one appears three to six times in a row, at least on the first page, and I soon exceeded my tolerance for *Mashable*'s page.

According to a February 14, 2010 *The Industry Standard* story, it only took two days before spammers started to hit Buzz. The claim comes from Websense, so it's mostly another cry for companies to make sure they have a "security solution" in place...like Websense.

I might say more about Louis Gray's "Google Lets Fearmongers and Unbelievers Opt Out of Buzz" (February 18, 2010 at *louisgray.com*), but it's harder to type with one central finger extended into the air. Gray speaks of "overwrought cries of fear and anguish" and "privacy-shrieking luddites." He claims the asserted problems were all conjecture.

> But again, the shrill minority has taken its pound of flesh, as Google's momentum with Buzz has taken body blow after body blow, primarily from an older generation of tech bloggers and business journalists unwilling or undesiring to embrace today's world of active sharing and aggregation.

That's just a taste of Gray's furious denunciation of anybody who recognizes a problem. He speaks of "tin foil hat nonsense." When Johnny Worthington, in the first comment, speaks of choice and the need for opt-in, not opt-out, his response is classic: "Choice is good. Adoption is great." It was *right* for Google to do what it did as an "aggressive competitive move." Worthington's response is excellent: "So screw your users as long as you're a success? Sorry, no." I wonder whether "Harriett Jacobs" reads Louis Gray and is reassured that she doesn't exist and there are no problems? (Paul Boutin, an experienced technology journalist, says *very explicitly* in a March 14, 2010 *VentureBeat* item that Buzz *did* reveal some of VentureBeat's insider informants as part of Boutin's personal network, with no warning or option. "That's the kind of mistake for which an apology won't do." But, you know, Paul Boutin's probably a tin-foil-wearing luddite, right?)

A February 22, 2010 post at *What's Next: Top Trends* notes the default actions of Buzz and sees the trend that Louis Gray seems to celebrate:

> A few years ago you would have been at least asked whether you wanted your privacy invaded. Nowadays people just assume you won't mind. This might seem like a storm in a teacup but think about it. Anyone that you are deemed to be "following" is now publicly available on your Google profile to anyone who takes a look. You can (eventually) remove this feature but why should you if

you didn't ask for it in the first place? In Cyber-space everyone can hear you screeeeeeam!

David Armano (Edelman Digital) offers an interesting perspective in "How Social Is Too Social?" at *Logic + Emotion* on February 25, 2010 (darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion). He poses a hypothetical: You start a transaction at an ATM and a crowd of people starts looking over your shoulder. The ATM is in a public setting—but you expect the transaction to be private. "While this scenario is extreme, it seems to suggest that maybe not everything is better with friends, despite the fact this seems to be the approach, so far, of social networking services." He cites Buzz as a poster child for this issue, particularly as Buzz "socializes" other products such as Google Reader. Some things *should* be more social—but maybe not everything. "Let's be clear. This isn't a technological issue. It's an *anthropological* one. Businesses that are looking to benefit from social technologies are going to need better and more intimate understandings of the people and cultures of those they hope will leverage their services.... But the truth that's becoming easier to see is that some things aren't meant to be social (think e-mail and one to one messaging)."

Ryan Tate offers "Six Delusions of Google's Arrogant Leaders" on March 12, 2010 at *Valleywag*. He notes some of the "delusional self-righteousness" in Eric Schmidt's comments at an Abu Dhabi "media summit" and calls the current remarks "just the latest in a series of prominent self-righteous statements from Googlers." The six delusions: It's not about the money. Google's wealth means Google "gets it." Google must sacrifice user privacy to grow. Users are hungry for Google synergy. Google is a worker's utopia. The outraged users are *confused*. And, to be sure, that last one involves repeating one of Eric Schmidt's classic statements: "If you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place." Tell that to abused spouses.

Thinking about the Parallels

Both Google and Apple are large companies in Silicon Valley, both of which rely heavily on user trust and faith. Both have groups of admirers who proclaim they can do no wrong and assail doubters.

As far as I can tell, Apple didn't *actively* generate the level of hype, although the company certain-ly did its share of leaking and dissembling. Most of the hypePad story is about reactions and expectations, not about the device itself or Apple's handling of it. I've never been much of an Apple person, and I'm not a great fan of Steve Jobs. That said, and discounting nonsense like "magical" and "revolutionary," the iPad will succeed or fail largely on its own merits. While those merits may not meet *my* needs—and while I do believe you're better off thinking of the iPad as an appliance, not another kind of computer, and that the closed model is dangerous—there's no doubt its merits are real. It's up to the public, early adopters and others, to decide whether the tablet form factor finally makes sense. It's up to other companies to raise the bar that the iPad sets—which, depending on what people are looking for, may be easy or difficult.

Google was in charge of its own destiny. Google screwed up big time. I've generally been a cautious fan of Google. I like Gmail a lot. I think the Google Books project has many good aspects and *could have been* a blow for fair use (if Google hadn't caved). I'll be more cautious in the future about turning any part of my virtual life over to my former neighbors in Mountain View. Where I've usually been negatively disposed toward Apple, I've usually been positive (if cautious) about Google. In this case, *Google screwed up*. With any luck, Buzz will go the way of Orkut and Google users will get a lot more cautious.

Apple +1, Google -1. Is that a fair parallel?