Cites & Insights
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Trends & Quick Takes
Too Tired to Rip?

Leander Kahney tells an odd story in a January 25 *Wired News* article, "Pay service turns CDs into MP3s." Nova Spivack, "a well-heeled New Yorker and technophile," was dying to own an iPod—but he "couldn't face the chore of converting 1,000-plus CDs to digital format."

RipDigital to the rescue. "For about a dollar a disc, the company converts entire CD collections to MP3 files, all nicely organized by artist and album." A few days after Spivack boxed up the CDs, he got them back with an external hard drive containing all the MP3 files, burned at a "near-CD" 224k rate. (At that rate, most people will *not* hear flaws, on most music, under most circumstances.)

Spivack says he had "my collection on my iPod" ten minutes after plugging in the hard drive and the iPod. Maybe. Assuming an average length of 40 minutes per CD, that's not possible: Apple doesn't make an iPod with enough capacity for 1,000 average-length albums ripped at 224k. But Spivack is delighted. "Having digitized his collection, Spivack tossed all the CD cases in the trash." He's "never going to touch another CD. I'm not even going to look at another CD." Whatever.

RipDigital initially targeted DJs, radio stations, and "institutions like hotels and libraries" (which leaves out a teeny-tiny issue about libraries being able to circulate ripped music!), but were surprised at how much demand there was from "audiophiles" and collectors. Well, maybe not audiophiles: True golden-ears money-no-object audiophiles would consider *any* lossy compression, including 224k MP3, as an unforgivable sin against the music. And a true collector cares about the liner notes and other stuff that you lose when all your music is on a disk.

Truth in reporting: Most of the music I listen to these days is on CD-Rs, in audio CD form but expanded from 192k and 320k MP3 files ripped from our CD collection. But I'm not a true audiophile by a long shot, at least not by today's standards.

Joe Wilcox at Jupiter Research was surprised anyone would pay for RipDigital's service. "Wilcox said he ripped 400 CDs of his own on a Sunday afternoon. 'It's not that painful,' he said." He also doubted that CDs are doomed, since Jupiter predicts that downloading will represent a single-digit share of the music market for "the next several years." Again, I wonder about some of this: Even at the most generous definition of "afternoon," that's more than one CD per minute, and I don't believe that's possible on a single PC. Ripping isn't hard or slow (I figure 2-3 minutes per typical audio CD), but it's not instantaneous either.

Inside This Issue

Spivack gets the final word in the article, and it places him firmly in the mindset continuum. "I've become a total iPod fanatic. In the week I've got this, I've spent about $500 at the Apple music store. My productivity is going down. Now all I do is play with digital music." But hey, he's a CEO (Radar Networks), so who cares?

Our Candidate, Howard Dean

Isn't political journalism wonderful? The groupthink decides what's going to happen, and *they're never wrong*. Take, for instance, John Heilemann's "Face Time" column in the January/February 2004 *Business 2.0*, "Labor's new look." It was probably written in December. It's about Andy Stern, head of the Service Employees International Union, and SEIU's endorsement of Howard Dean for President. And here's the part I just love:

> The SEIU and AFSCME are two of the largest and most politically potent unions in the country. By throwing their money and organizing prowess behind Dean, they may have changed his nomination from highly likely to virtually inevitable.

The column goes on to describe how Stern may become a "kingmaker" thanks to his prescient move to

back the man who's clearly going to be the Democratic nominee. Here's a little more, to show just how detailed and infallible political punditry really is:

> Among political professionals, the consensus now is that the nomination is Dean's to lose. He has the most money, the best organization, and the only message that's caught fire with most hard-core Democrats. And by winning over the SEIU and AF-SCME, he delivered a crippling blow to the candidate I'd argue was his most dangerous rival, longtime union favorite Dick Gephardt.

There it is: The only real nomination battle was between Dean and Gephardt. Kerry was never in it.

Doesn't Anyone Understand Measurements?

It's finally happened. The mythical five-inch optical drive has become so ingrained among technology journalists that Bill Howard (who should know better) has taken the next step. In "What's new with notebooks" in the February 17, 2004 *PC Magazine*, he includes this remarkable sentence: "And 9.5-mm optical drives will replace 12.7-mm ones, letting notebooks with such drives maintain a thickness of just 1 inch."

Except that there's *no such thing as a 12.7-mm optical drive*, at least not in any consumer device. Howard is wrong in both magnitude and actual size. "127-mm" (or 12.7 cm) is another way of saying five inches. CDs and DVDs (and CD-Rs and DVD-Rs) aren't five inches across and never have been, even though many writers call them either five-inch discs or, worse, five-and-a-quarter inch discs.

Full-size optical discs are twelve centimeters or 120mm in diameter, just under 4¾ inches. 12.7-mm would be half an inch in diameter. That's a small disk: Roughly the size of the hole in real-world CDs and DVDs.

For that matter, existing mini-CD-Rs aren't 9.5cm or 95mm (roughly 3¾ inches); they're 8cm (just over 3 inches) in diameter. For all I know, 95mm discs might be on the horizon, but that seems like an odd and improbable intermediate given the established market.

I don't buy the possibility that Howard is referring to the drive size rather than the disc size. Optical drives are almost always designed to fit the bays that used to hold diskette drives; they're usually some six inches wide. Roughly 15.2cm or 152mm, if you prefer. That's an approximation; I didn't open my computer to do an exact measurement.

Who cares? Well, if you're relying on *PC Magazine* for tests and all sorts of technological assertions, you should. Lack of numeracy seems particularly unfortunate in technology journalism.

Science Fiction: For Adults Only?

One of those odd dustups in intellectual freedom happened February 12, 2004 in Michigan. A child ordered *Asimov's Science Fiction* through QSP, an agency that sells subscriptions as part of school fundraising drives. The child's parent objected to the content, contacted *Asimov's*, then called WOOD TV News 8—which apparently ran a sensational report saying *Asimov's* was pornographic: "Full of sexual content," "an adults-only magazine" that "contained stories about sex, drugs, and molestation." The story claimed QSP had dropped *Asimov's* as a result of the parental complaint.

When I first heard about this, my reaction (as an *Asimov's* reader since its inception 27 years ago) was "Whah?" Sure, there are stories that mention sex and drugs. *Asimov's* is a science fiction magazine with some of the best writing in the field and a fairly wide-open approach to "science fiction." I like it the best of the three established "monthlies" in the field. (*Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact* is the great home for "hard science fiction" and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* does more fantasy.) I'd say perhaps 5% of the stories might shock parents intent on shielding their children from reality, although a higher percentage may be out of reach of most younger children because of vocabulary and sophisticated narrative techniques.

Asimov's posted a response to the WOOD TV story on its website (www.asimovs.com), noting that the QSP catalog is used to sell magazines to family members and parents' coworkers, that *many* of the magazines in the catalogs are for adults (including *Esquire, Vogue, Elle)*, that *Asimov's* was listed under "Science/Technology/Environmental," not under "Children," and that *Asimov's* had severed the relationship with QSP—months before the news report—for financial reasons. The response also noted *Asimov's* track record: 40 Hugo awards and 24 Nebula awards for fiction, 17 Hugo awards for Best Editor (out of 26 possibilities!).

The rejoinder notes, "Our disappointment in their distortion of the facts is profound. In our opinion, Ms. Andersen and the News 8 channel are not practicing journalism, but sensationalism. They know, better than most, that 'sex sells.'"

I have no doubt that reading *Asimov's* encourages a youngster to think for herself and add new concepts to his repertoire. I have even less doubt that this constitutes pornographic activity in some minds. I started reading *Analog* (actually, *Astounding* at the time) and other science fiction magazines and books before I was a teenager. Somehow, I survived with my morality and ethics largely intact.

Recycling Hard Drives

When you get rid of old computers—library or personal, desktop or notebook, by selling, donating, recycling, or junking—do you worry about what's on the hard disks? Should you? Simson Garfinkel thinks you should—and he has evidence that most people don't pay enough attention to this issue.

You already know that deleting a file doesn't do much of anything, right? The file's still there; only the name has changed. Windows FDisk "reformats" the disk—but it doesn't overwrite most of the data sectors. (In his *CSO* article "Hard-Disk Risk," Garfinkel says FDisk overwrites 0.01% of the sectors on a 10GB drive. The article is a year old, but the problem hasn't changed.)

Garfinkel's anecdotal evidence began with a trip to one of the "used computer stuff" stores in Silicon Valley. He noted 10GB drives on sale for $30 (which was a bargain a few years ago), and when he asked if information had been cleared from the drives, the staffer said they ran FDisk—which doesn't do the job. Worse, the warehouse had stacks of $5 disks "as is and untested"—so FDisk hadn't even been run. He picked up 20 of them just for fun, took them home and did some "forensic analysis."

Several drives had source code from local companies. One had a confidential biotech memorandum. One had internal corporate spreadsheets. He was intrigued enough to try buying disks elsewhere, and picked up large quantities of drives on EBay. With help, he analyzed the content of more than 150 hard drives; between one-third and one-half still had significant amounts of confidential data. Only 10% had been properly sanitized.

What data? One disk had apparently been in an ATM and had loads of financial transactions. Two had more than 5,000 credit card numbers.

> Another had e-mail and personal financial records of a 45-year-old fellow in Georgia. The man is divorced, paying child support and dating a woman he met in Savannah. And, oh yeah, he's really into pornography.

It doesn't have to be that way. As he notes, there are dozens of programs to clean your hard drive by repeatedly overwriting data files with random bit patterns. Some are designed to assure that deleted files on an active system stay deleted; others, "disk sanitizers," overwrite *every* block on a disk drive repeatedly, then fill the disk with zeros. Ideally, the programs come on a bootable floppy or CD-ROM; boot, verify, and your disk will soon be *truly* unreadable. (Norton SystemWorks and Norton Utilities include a file-wiping utility that overwrites a file up to three times, meeting DoD standards.)

NIST on Archiving CDs and DVDs

NIST continues to do interesting work on compatibility and survival rates for optical discs. A one-page "Quick Reference Guide for Care and Handling" if you plan on archiving CDs and DVDs is available at www.itl.nist.gov/div895/carefordisc/disccare.html.

The 11 "Dos," 10 "Do nots," and four "CD do nots" all make sense if you plan true long-term retention—including storing discs vertically, cleaning them using radial strokes (from the center of the disc toward the outer edge), and avoiding pens, pencils, or fine-tip markers (other than those specifically designed for such use) to write on the label side. The recommendations also emphasize the fragility of the label side of a DVD, and recommend gold reflective layer CD-Rs for archival purposes.

One recommendation is to not use adhesive labels—and I think that's right if you plan to keep a disc around for decades. (I certainly agree that you should never try to peel off or reposition a label.) For everyday CD-R use, however, where you don't expect the CD-R to last more than a decade or so, I believe today's CD/DVD labels are sufficiently well designed to be more beneficial than harmful. At least I'm not going to stop using them on my own compilations—but *none* of those have archival value. Similarly, while upright storage makes sense for the years, horizontal storage within cases shouldn't do much damage for a few days or weeks. Also, I've found that the simplest and most effective way to clean grungy NetFlix DVDs—and one of the two ways NetFlix recommends—is a quick spray of window cleaner, wiped off radially.

High-Definition Video Recording

The February 17, 2004 *Wired News* article by Katie Dean is a classic good news/bad news story. The title is "TiVo gets huge horsepower boost," but that's misleading, since only one of the four units discussed carries the TiVo brand.

The good news: digital video recorders (DVRs, or PVRs as I've called them in the past) will be capable of high-definition recording in the near future. That means much larger hard disks, since it takes roughly 9GB to store one hour of HDTV—already MPEG2 compressed, since that's how HDTV is transmitted. Two of the units have been out since December, the other are either out now or will be soon. Dish satellite subscribers can get the $1,000 DishPlayer, which has a 250GB hard disk and three tuners (so you can watch one program and record two others). LG will offer what may be the first retail HDTV DVR, a $1,000 unit with a 120GB hard drive and three tuners. Finally, DirecTV subscribers will be able to buy a $1,000 TiVo unit with a 250GB

hard disk and *four* tuners, two for DirecTV and two for over-the-air HDTV.

The bad news: All of these units include robust user restraints ("copy protection"), using existing flags to restrict use of HDTV output and (probably) the Broadcast Flag to limit use of over-the-air signals. The only way you'll get the quality you're paying for is if the display or other device has the right "clearance" and Big Media has decided that you should be allowed to watch the content you've already paid for in the manner you desire.

Michael Powell's Other Face

You should be able to find FCC Chairman Michael K. Powell's speech, "Preserving Internet freedom: Guiding principles for the industry," on the Internet. It's not long (six single-spaced pages); it was given at a Silicon Flatirons Symposium on February 8, 2004.

Powell is impressive in his call for an open internet with little or no government regulation. He even comes up with four "Internet Freedoms":

➢ **Freedom to access content**: Consumers should have access to their choice of legal content on high-speed connections.
➢ **Freedom to use applications**: Consumers should be able to run applications of their choice.
➢ **Freedom to attach personal devices**: "Consumers should be permitted to attach any devices they choose to the connection in their homes."
➢ **Freedom to obtain service plan information**.

All this becomes a little confusing when you realize that Michael Powell is the same person who made sure the Broadcast Flag was enacted—which, of course, pretty much eliminates the second and third "freedoms" when it comes to digital television, and embeds government regulation deeply within the personal computing system. I wonder whether anybody called him on that contradiction?

The First Amendment and Ralph Nader

Lawrence Lessig believes that Ralph Nader was at least partially responsible for Gore losing the 2000 election to Bush. He would just as soon not see Nader run this year, and has said so in his weblog. Many people who believe Nader made that difference and think he's being a self-centered fool in running again; Lessig's comments wouldn't be picked up here just because he takes that position.

Nader argues that running for President is a First Amendment right. That's true (if you're American-born and old enough). Based on that claim, a number of people (notably including Aaron Swartz in *his*

weblog) have attacked Lessig and suggested that telling Nader not to run is violating Nader's First Amendment rights. There have been any number of postings and loads of comments, on Lessig's blog, Swartz' blog, Seth Finkelstein's Infothought blog, and elsewhere.

This argument is bizarre. As Lessig notes, it is *not* inconsistent with free speech values to criticize someone else's speech or symbolic action.

> Indeed, the whole reason we need a space for free speech is so some people can tell other people that their speech is wrong, or harmful, or both…and then the other people can decide whether to respect the views that were criticizing them. "Free speech" absolutely does not mean that I have to like what you say. Nor does it mean I have to refrain from criticizing what you say. Such an idea insults, I believe, the very notion of free speech: which is to use argument to reach understanding, both about what to do, and about what to say.

Comments provide interesting variations. Bulent Murtezaoglu notes that Lessig could delete Bulent's comment and ban him from the site without violating the First Amendment, because Lessig isn't the government. Seth Finkelstein offers a nice comment on the claim that Gore ran a lousy campaign, the major reason he lost: Each individual straw heaped on a camel's back can say, "Who me? Wasn't me. I'm just one straw! What sort of a big strong camel is this, if he can't deal with one more straw on his back? The solution is to get a better camel!"

The oddity here is the concept that any criticism of speech constitutes a denial of First Amendment rights. I've seen a similar oddity—claiming that a publisher that fails to publish something is somehow censoring it, or that libraries that fail to buy a particular book are censoring it. It doesn't work that way. The First Amendment protects your right to speak. It does not protect nor imply a right for you to be heard, or for your speech to be disseminated. And it surely does not say that others can't call you a jerk and suggest you go home and shut up. As long as those "others" aren't government agents with the power to punish you for saying something.

100 Generations of CD-R Rerecording

If you ever made a cassette copy of a cassette copy of a record, you know it didn't sound that great—and if you ever looked at a third-generation video-cassette copy, you should be aware of generational losses. Theoretically, digital copies shouldn't lose data. A report of an extended experiment testing that notion appears at www.dslwebserver.com/main/100-gen-cdr-test.html; it's fascinating.

The person took a CD, then copied it to another CD, then copied that to yet another CD, and so on—spreading the generations across three different

CD-R burners and three brands of CD-R (two name-brand, one lesser-known). Each copy was done on the fly using Nero Express. The CD-R had 500 megabytes of files of different types. There were no write errors during the process. The tester had software that performs bit-by-bit comparisons. The results—fortunately or unfortunately—were about what I'd expect: The 100th generation CD-R was precisely the same as the original CD-R, bit for bit. "This doesn't mean that all CD-writers and media are prefect, but it goes to show how mature the technology has become."

These weren't terribly high-speed tests: Only one brand of CD-R was rated at 40x, and none of the burners wrote faster than 32x. I'm not sure you'd get the same results at, say, 48x using no-name CD-Rs—but I'm not sure you wouldn't. (My own experience with music CD-Rs suggests that 42x burns of full 80-minute CD-Rs, using branded data blanks, may yield discs that are less readable than slower burns and shorter discs, but I haven't done extended tests.)

Quicker Takes

➢ I don't know what to say about social networking software yet (and may never), so haven't said much of anything. (I'm somewhat passively part of Orkut, but no other network. So far, I don't see the point.) Those who think social networking is something hot should treasure John Dvorak's March 2, 2004 *PC Magazine* column. Not because he supports the idea—but because he thinks it's a "crock." It's another of Dvorak's screeds against us "touchy-feely" utopians in Silicon Valley, and he's convinced that it's all about digging into our pockets, presumably for value-added extras. I have no idea whether social networking software really does make any sense, but having Dvorak denounce an idea as absurd is almost enough reason to think it's worth considering.

➢ After my keynote at a recent event, one question was what I thought about Copyright Clearance Center's role in the rising cost of acquiring scientific, technical, and medical resources. I replied (honestly) that I didn't know anything about it—but a March 2004 *Library Journal* news item offers one clue. CCC increased its own fee for content licensing from $0.30 a transaction to $3.00 a transaction as of March 15, 2004, with no press release and a "concerted effort" to alert customers that probably only reached about half of CCC's academic customers. CCC claims it's not really such a big increase be-

cause the old $0.30 fee was per copy, while the new one is per transaction—so if you're licensing more than 10 copies of one article at one shot, you save money. And, CCC also pointed out, it's not a 900% increase in fees—because it doesn't affect the royalties themselves, and CCC's fee only represented 2% of a typical university library's permission fees. So if the library spent $2,880 last year ($48 of that going to CCC), that cost would increase a mere 15% this year (the extra $432 to CCC). So, you see, there's no cause for alarm: After all, what's 15%?

➢ RIAA's ongoing screaming over lower CD sales and its assertion that those losses come from widespread piracy have been covered in COPYRIGHT CURRENTS…but I thought it worth noting that CD sales are *rising* in the U.S., and have been for some months now. Sales for the first quarter of 2004 are nearly 10% higher than the first quarter of 2003, according to SoundScan. Maybe it's because some decent albums are coming out; maybe it's because there's some pricing improvement. Has RIAA backed off on its claims that rampant piracy is killing its members? Of course not; the industry continues to whine and press for restrictive legislation.

➢ The Segway has done so well that Dean Kamen's had to raise $31 million to keep it going—adding to the $100 million already spent on this marvel. (Details from a February 12, 2004 *Wall Street Journal* story.) Kamen has usually sold rights to his inventions—which include a portable insulin pump and other truly significant developments—to other companies, but he was apparently as deluded about the Segway's potential as were Steve Jobs and Amazon's Jeff Bezos. Sales projections for the first year—November 2002 to October 2003—were 50,000 to 100,000. In fact, no more than 6,000 were sold through September 2003 (when they were all recalled to correct a software problem that causes people to fall off the $4,000 scooters); the company isn't saying how many were sold after that. What amazes me is that the new investors—mostly friends of Kamen—seem to have the same "This will change the world!" attitude as previous advocates. The people who are taking over operation of the Segway business aren't shy: Ronald A. Bills says, "This is an amazing, revolutionary piece of equipment that can really bring some value to humans across the globe." And viewers of *Arrested*

Development get to see just how suave you look riding the device.

➢ Life for EZ-D, the self-destructive pseudo-DVDs, continues to be harsh, according to a January 29 Katie Dean story at *Wired News*. Twenty Austin grocery stores that were stocking the movies (about 30 of them, all from Disney divisions, selling for "about $7") have stopped because "It didn't turn out to be an item that our customers were looking for." Maybe you *can* go broke underestimating the intelligence of American consumers.

➢ Two quick Apple-related items. First, a wonderful list at "As the Apple turns" showing some of the *silent* tracks you can buy at the iTunes Music Store for $0.99 each. The item lists nine tracks, ranging from four seconds ("(Silent) [1]" by Slum Village) to almost two minutes ("Silence" by Bill Schaeffer). Three tracks are labeled [EXPLICIT], apparently for the dirty non-lyrics the silences don't have—and you can buy [CLEAN] versions of those three. There's also a 16-minute silent track by Deuter, entitled "15 minutes silence," but that's an Album-Only purchase. At least silence is preferable to what happened when Overclockers.com posted a "barely believable hoax" in early February. The hoaxer claimed he received a Mac dual-processor G5 for Christmas, but really wanted a Windows PC—so he swapped out the insides of the $3,000 Mac and substituted "the guts of a cheapo PC." (All details from a February 4 *Wired News* story.) The hoaxer's email box quickly filled with 1,300 messages including death threats and the like. "You will surely burn in hell for an eternity for this one." One email said the hoaxer should be hung by his testicles and set on fire; at least one more said he was going to hell. The whole thing was a joke, but even after that was explained, Macmaniacs didn't let up. "I'm a parent, and if my son did something like this I'd kill him." The hoaxer's comment: "Mac users are nuttier than a fruitcake."

Perspective
Speaking and Attention: It All Depends?

Elizabeth Lane Lawley (henceforth Liz) posted an entry on her high-profile weblog, *mamamusings*, enti-

tled "confessions of a backchannel queen." She was at an invitational symposium. The meeting room was "laptop-enabled, with power and Wifi to spare…so I headed straight for IRC." (Internet chat software, for those even more ignorant of this stuff than I am.). "At the last few tech conferences I've been at, there's been an IRC channel specifically to talk about what's happening in the presentations…so I set one up for today's symposium, and people started trickling in." This means that people who've chosen to go to a conference session immediately set up a real-time text conversation so they can be typing in their own commentary *while the speakers are speaking* in the same room.

You can see the whole essay and the dozens of comments that followed at mamamusings.net; it's in the March 2004 archives.

Liz says she's more comfortable expressing opinions in the text-based IRC environment than she would be face-to-face—and she "was an active participant in the ongoing backchannel as the various speakers presented their information." After lunch, she posted critical comments about a speaker's presentation and someone else called her to task. He wondered whether it was fair to criticize someone not there to defend themselves, noted that this was a scary audience, and suggested they should be more generous. Liz felt this comment "had a chilling effect, and it made me reluctant to do the kind of stream-of-consciousness chatter in the channel that I find often sparks the best responses and conversation. Context is everything, of course." She notes that people who know her know not to take her snarkier comments too seriously (sometimes we do, sometimes we don't—I think Liz takes it easy on me because I'm just a grumpy old coot).

Did Liz stop backchatting and "monitor the content" (that is, give the speakers undivided attention)? Nope. She set up another channel "specifically to house the smart-ass remarks." The results, apparently, were that the original channel quieted down—and the second channel got extreme enough so "people were noticing the ripples of laughter at times when laughter seemed inappropriate." Still, she concluded that what she got from the backchannel(s) "equaled or surpassed" what she got from the speakers—and planned to be back on IRC for the rest of the conference, "maybe in more than one channel again, maybe not." She also asserted that the backchannel is intended "to help make your presentation better."

Weblog Comments

There were *lots* of comments on this posting, but if it hadn't been for the very first one, I might have

skipped the whole thing. Dorothea Salo (who I've never met but whose thinking and writing I also admire) said, "Knowledge that such a channel would be available and employed would nudge me pretty strongly toward not presenting at a particular conference.… There's just something that feels wrong about using the comfort you find in the textual environment to rip into the comfort of others—especially others who, at that moment, are putting a lot more of themselves on the line than any of the backchannelers."

Liz, an educator and pundit, responded that she spends most working hours "dealing with rooms full of people looking for stuff to tear down about what I'm saying" and that the backchannel "doesn't create these ideas or comments. It simply reveals them." She would rather "let this stuff out in a semi-open environment than try to pretend that it doesn't exist." She believes the backchannel lets her "understand how people are responding" and modify her presentation if need be—and to be "more realistic about the value of being up in front of a room of people, talking at (instead of with) them." She went on to suggest that people are opposed to backchannels because they haven't taken part: "Fear of the unknown is a powerful thing."

Salo responded that feedback is good but negative feedback has a tendency to snowball—then said, "We can agree to disagree. The impression I still get, though, is that yes, these channels can create negativity where it didn't exist before and no, they don't improve the presentation for everybody." She also noted that a speaker will typically not be part of the backchannel, at least not if they're doing a planned presentation! She noted the difference between a challenging room (where "energy flows openly between speaker and challengers") and a negative room, with people snarking and laughing for no apparent reason.

That was the beginning. To cite some of the many other comments:

➢ One person who has never used chat software *during* a conference presentation noted, "It strikes me as being a way to keep distance from what's going on."

➢ Scott A. Golder thought that the backchannel looked like "rudeness, however cloaked in 'technology' it may have been." He considered it disrespectful to go to someone's talk and not pay attention—as though you opened up a newspaper while the speaker was speaking. He thought a speaker should be given time to say what they have to say before dialogue takes over—and would hate to see wireless access make it socially acceptable to be disrespectful to a speaker.

➢ Liz didn't buy that. She called the backchannel "an opportunity for people to raise valid questions and criticisms, and have a dialog about them" and "an occasional outlet for shifting focus from the speaker." She didn't think that was always rude—an assertion followed by noting that lecture mode "is an awful way to convey most kinds of information" and that you don't learn well while sitting on uncomfortable chairs for hours on end, listening and not participating. She didn't consider it disrespectful to comment on a talk while it's going on—and wondered whether a whispered conversation with tablemates was better than a text backchannel. Finally, Liz noted that you can't dictate attention, and that the burden is on the speaker "to make what you're saying relevant and accessible." And that some people's presentation skills don't improve because they don't learn from the responses of the audience."

➢ Golder responded: most of the time it *was* rude not to pay attention, critique and dialog should take place after the presentation (with the benefit of not missing anything potentially of value), and when you've committed to attending a talk, you should go to the whole thing.

➢ I stepped in (after more pro-backchannel comments) to side with Salo.

I'd be reluctant to present at a conference where I knew participants considered it reasonable and not impolite to carry on their own e-discussions (or actual discussions) during my presentation, commenting on that presentation. Particularly if they somehow believed that those discussions, which I wouldn't see (at least not in real time, not without disrupting the presentation), were supposed to be for my own good."

Fortunately, as I noted, I'm not part of the technorati and unlikely to be invited to events like this.

I guess social norms are different for different situations. Where I am speaking—always by invitation, pretty much always to librarians, never more than a few times a year—I expect that people who bother to show up will at least be listening for the first few minutes, not splitting their attention between me and backchatter. If I don't keep them interested, then that's my problem, to be sure. I'd look for signs of obvious boredom, too many people walking out, or significant snoring as indications that things had gone awry. (Incidentally, I do *not* regard it as impolite to quietly exit a presentation if it doesn't interest you—I regard it as realistic.)

➢ Shane Curcuru also saw differences of social groups and norms. At conferences like JavaOne and ApacheCon, "I'd say that

speakers should expect that there will be backchannels." At library conferences, maybe not, "although I know a number of librarian bloggers that would create one..." "The social appropriateness will vary widely depending on the kind of conference it is. Curcuru went on to say that ubiquitous laptops, Wifi, chat software "means that online behavior during large group gatherings is probably here to stay no matter what."

➤ Back-and-forth about the actual circumstances followed. Joi Ito chimed in, noting that he dropped out of school because he won't sit through boring presentations. If a conference presentation is boring, "I'll start reading email or walk into the hallway and have a discussion with someone." Ito thinks the backchannel is *more* on topic than walking out of the room. Ito would love to receive text messages during his presentations.

➤ Ralph Poole objected to inattention: "If one is not interested in the topic or the speaker, leave the room!"

➤ Eirik Newth, a professional lecturer, discussed the practical problems of split attention for the lecturer and the extent to which the speaker *loses* visual feedback from an audience typing away on wireless devices.

➤ Ito came back to slap down anyone who argues that people should pay attention. "Isn't 'stiff competition' generally good? I think lecturing as a form of transmission of information has had too little competition and maybe a little back channel will help get rid of the boring drills and ugly power points."

➤ Adam (no last name given) disagreed. If the speaker's taken the trouble to work out a line of argument, the whole thread may break down if they're not allowed to develop their point. "If you as listener are gracious enough to let me have enough space to express what I'm getting at, then you can have an informed place from which to disagree with me if you are still so inclined." Adam finds himself increasingly in situations "where there's what I regard as an intolerable disrespect for the basic (twentieth century) conventions of discourse."

After that, things got strange (and I do mean *strange*). One person noted cases where *panelists* appear to be checking email or backchatting, *on the podium*, while another panelist is speaking! The discussion continued with Liz differentiating between "engaged" speakers who work with their audiences and those who just run through their PowerPoints, reading a canned presentation. She suggested that

backchat happens primarily with the latter; when the speaker's involved, so is the audience.

Finally (for now), Salo added a posting on her own Caveat Lector weblog. Excerpts:

> I know what it is that bugs me about the backchannel. I think. Let me write it down and see if I've got it right.
>
> Individual people tune out of presentations individually, and do individual things to cope with their boredom (or their two-track nature, whichever). This is inevitable—and what's more, it's okay. It doesn't threaten a presenter's status as The Important Thing Going On In The Room.
>
> ...But a backchannel? Could *well* be more absorbing than a presentation, for reasons that have little to do with the nature or quality of the presentation. [We humans] prefer running our mouths to running our ears. Can even *good* presentations stand up to that? Should we really ask them to?

A Few Unpersuasive Arguments

I didn't intersperse my comments above (except for the comment I made on the weblog) for the same reason I no longer intersperse responses to letters in FEEDBACK. While I left out quite a few postings, I wanted to retain the flow of the discussion.

First, some cases where I find arguments wholly unpersuasive:

➤ Unless the backchannel is visible to the speaker during a presentation (with the agreement of the speaker), I don't see how it can "make your presentation better." If the speaker does the same presentation repeatedly and the backchannel is archived, maybe there's a case. (I can imagine an audience member handing me a transcript and telling me to "study it for your own good," or pointing me to an online archive to do so—but I can't imagine my reaction!)

➤ There's no contradiction between talking at people and talking with them. Good conference presentations include time for discussion, questions, even challenges—but good presentations also have narrative flow.

➤ I don't buy the idea that speakers (and listeners) who dislike the idea of a backchannel just haven't tried it.

➤ "Hours on end of sitting on uncomfortable chairs listening and not participating" is terrible. I agree. No conference should be set up that way. I also agree that lectures aren't a great way to convey information—one reason I *never* set out to arrange speeches and don't attend many lectures. Neither point has much to do with whether, *once you've decided to attend a speech*, it's polite or reason-

able to start chattering away with others while the lecture is going on.

> Joi Ito may hate lectures. That doesn't mean that lectures have no place or that all presentations are ways of enforcing rote learning. "Boring drills" haven't been part of any presentation I've been to; wish I could say the same for ugly PowerPoint presentations.

I originally called these straw men. That's too harsh. This list is also a distraction from the points I'm clumsily trying to make. Let's get on to that before *all* of you out there fall asleep.

My Own Take as a Speaker

I speak occasionally—four to six events most years, never more than eight trips per year. I'm not on the "speaking circuit," rarely repeat the same presentation, and almost always speak by invitation. Maybe this discussion hit me harder because of timing. As I read it (and wrote the first draft of this essay), I'd just returned from one freestanding speaking engagement. A couple of days later, I left to keynote a conference. And a couple of weeks later, just before revising this piece, I attended—but did not speak at—a conference dominated by the technological elite. I was looking for things at that third event that I would never have thought of before this discussion. (I didn't find them, which may or may not be meaningful. It's worth noting that no more than 5-10% of participants in any session used notebooks during the session, although many more had them handy.)

If your group has invited me to speak, that imposes no obligation on you *personally* to attend the speech. Don't show up if you're already pretty sure you don't want to hear me.

If you *do* decide to attend, I appreciate the courtesy of, say, five minutes of full attention—*listening* to me long enough to get some sense of whether I'm worth listening to. I find it hard to believe that you're really listening to me if you're simultaneously monitoring a backchannel, much less participating.

I do *not* expect you to sit raptly (or feign attention) through my entire speech if I'm boring you, telling you things you already know or otherwise not deserving your attention. If you leave quietly (and I notice), I'll assume I wasn't meeting your needs or you had other demands on your time. If it's clear that many people are fading away, I'll wrap it up or change directions. Unless a presentation requires PowerPoint, I keep the lights up so I can see you and you can see me. I'll use PowerPoint later this spring for a presentation that *absolutely* requires visuals—and it will be the first time in five years or so.

Feel free to leave if you're bored. If you disagree with me me, stick around and speak up during the discussion period. I *always* try to leave room for discussion, and I welcome challenges.

Carrying on noticeable or audible conversations during my talk (or anyone else's talk) is simply rude. Go out in the hallway. If you're more involved with your electronics than with what I'm saying, I regard that as a little rude as well, and if you later raise a question that suggests you weren't really listening, I won't be surprised.

If you're backchatting without being obvious, I won't know about it. It won't improve my presentation—I won't have a notebook running while I speak, and my speeches change direction often enough already without adding real-time chat to the mix. All I'll know is that you're not paying attention. But hey, as long as it's not widespread, I'll just tune you out as you're tuning me out. If it's lots of people I'll stop dead in my tracks and start the discussion.

If you leave after giving me a fair chance (five minutes minimum, ten minutes maximum), feel free to give me a bad rating on the conference survey form. If you stick around and hate it, make that clear. Maybe I'm a bad fit for the conference. Maybe, if you have specific comments, you *will* help me improve later presentations. Or maybe you just don't learn from me in "lecture" form. That's fine with me. I do a lot more writing than speaking and plan to keep it that way. You're welcome to make snarky comments about my speeches during hallway discussions and over drinks. Some of you (too few!) will make them to me. Don't be surprised if I agree with your criticism.

…and as a Listener

I do *not* feel I'm obliged to stay throughout a presentation, at least not in most cases. If I'm not getting anything from a speaker and there's a way to leave unobtrusively, I'll leave. I don't think that's rude. Life is too short. (Sometimes, particularly after I've spoken, it's just fatigue and the loss of adrenaline setting in: I'd rather leave than fall asleep.) If I conclude that the speaker is an idiot, that I know a lot more about the topic than they do (and they're not providing new perspectives), or that the topic just doesn't interest me—well, I'm out of there. Usually.

I *do* feel I should give a speaker a chance. That means giving the speaker my undivided attention for five or ten minutes. I take notes—in longhand, because I found early on that even as a touch typist, typing distracts me from listening, where handwriting doesn't. (That may be generational. I'm a fast touch typist, but maybe if I'd started using a notebook computer in high school, typing would be as non-distracting as handwriting. For me, it isn't.)

I may take snarky notes. I rarely challenge a speaker in a hostile manner, and in most cases I won't challenge a speaker unless I respect what they've said. Again, life is too short. I have no compunctions about discussing a session's shortcomings in casual conversation.

It's my job as an attendee to make intelligent choices on which sessions to attend. It's my job to give you a chance. It's your job to tell me and the other listeners something new, fresh, different, interesting. Much of the time, what you have to say is worthwhile, but just isn't relevant to my needs. In which case, I'll leave…as quietly as possible. It may not be a reflection on you at all. (If you're *horrendously* bad, I'll probably stick around to see how it all turns out.)

If I engage in vocal backchat during the session and in the room where you're speaking, I'm wrong, I'm rude, and I apologize. But once I'm out in the hallway, you're fair game—just as I'm fair game for listeners and ex-listeners.

Type of Conference, Type of Presentation

Maybe the norms are different for different types of conferences and for different types of sessions within a conference. I could be snarky and suggest that some of today's technorati have decided politeness is old-fashioned and nobody deserves their full attention, but I'm sure that's not true. A few possibilities:

➢ A single-track conference (no choices: one speech at a time) where the presenters fill their time slots from beginning to end with canned presentations, leaving no time for discussion or challenges. This is the worst possible situation from an attendee's view. If you've paid big bucks to attend, you probably feel the need to sit through all the speeches. You have my pity—and if you open a backchannel, I can understand why.

➢ A humane single-track conference with lots of time between sessions and lots of time for discussion within sessions. Here I think there's less excuse for listeners *expecting* to divide their attention between speaker and backchannel. Maybe some people really have mutated so they're able to listen attentively to a speaker and carry on a textual conversation simultaneously. I'm skeptical; in my experience, multitasking usually means doing several things badly. Maybe I'm wrong.

➢ Multi-track conferences where speakers are expected to leave time for discussion. If you don't care about what's being said, *leave*. You're using a chair that could be used by someone else, someone who might benefit from the speaker.

These are all traditional events. As a speaker, I'm frequently in the oddball situation—at a multitrack conference as a keynote or plenary speaker without directly competing program sessions. There are *always* other things to do—exhibits, hallway conversations, sleeping in late, taking a long walk, chatting with friends in the lobby bar. I don't expect everyone at a conference to attend a keynote. I *do* expect that when I'm part of one of several simultaneous sessions, people will be there because they want to be, not because it's expected.

What about other kinds of presentations and other kinds of conferences?

➢ If the technorati gather with the *expectation* that text feedback will go on during a presentation, visible to the speaker, more power to all involved. It's a different kind of speaking and situation. I imagine it could be quite effective or quite disruptive. I don't see how an effective linear argument can be mounted in an atmosphere of continuous interruption, but maybe that's because I haven't been to these conferences.

➢ I agree completely that lectures are a lousy way to learn for many people, myself included. (That's one of several reasons I stopped at a BA.) You can have sessions where an invited speaker is really a discussion leader—tasked to offer introductory remarks, then lead discussion for the rest of the session. Last year at the Alaska Library Association conference, after hearing feedback on my keynote, I transformed my other two programs into introduction-and-discussion sessions. It was great. If anyone wants to invite me to do a session in that manner, I'd probably love it—but are you going to pay expenses and an honorarium for a few minutes of prepared remarks? (I've seen one keynote where the big-name speaker, paid far more than I'll ever see for a keynote, read a previously-published essay for five minutes, then said he wanted to discuss whatever topics interested us for the rest of the hour. As a discussion section, it might have been great; as a keynote, "ripoff" was my immediate response and that of some other audience members.)

➢ Then there are panel discussions. There's a big difference between a multispeaker session, which can work out so the last speaker has little or no time because other speakers hogged their slots, and a true discussion (brief remarks from each speaker and lots of back-and-forth). I'm not sure what the social norms should be in either case. I am sure I

prefer the latter (and dread being the last speaker in a multispeaker panel, unless I know there's a hardnosed timekeeper).

Wimpy Conclusion: It Depends

As a speaker, I'd appreciate your full attention for a few minutes—and I'd rather have you leave than sit there pretending to listen or chatting with others.

As a listener, I believe the speaker and listener both have obligations. If the speaker isn't meeting my needs, my obligations shouldn't require staying the course but do require minimizing disruption.

As a conference attendee, I want discussion. I also want to be inspired and intrigued by speakers, in ways that open discussions rarely manage.

I don't want to hear you read that published article aloud, when I could read it myself in one-fifth the time. I do want to hear what you have to say, have the chance to probe further—and, ideally, have informal chances later to discuss things.

Is text backchat rude? That depends. If it's done *as a matter of course*, I think it is.

Is audible backchat within the meeting room rude? Pretty much always.

Can you *really* get the most out of a speech while participating in a backchannel? I can't prove otherwise, but I'm doubtful.

Feedback and Followup

It's been too long—but there's been less feedback than usual. Either you're bored, I'm screwing up less than usual, or you're just too busy. I suspect the last.

Seth Finkelstein noted an Into the Future item on Page 1 of the March 2004 issue, where I said, "The May 2005 "Crawford Files" in *American Libraries* offers my own brief description of the future I'd like to see." His comment: "Good trick!" Well, I *could* be a year ahead on my columns, but I'm not: I meant May 2004—out any day now.

Remember my "ALA question" (February 2004), whether anyone had been turned away from a meeting at ALA or Midwinter? While I never did receive any positive responses, Peter Murray sent this note:

> I can't remember being discouraged from attending an ALA meeting, although I can certainly remember being very lost at my first conference. (Finding a home in LITA helped.) I can remember some awkwardness over the years, but at those times I attributed it to the fact that I was coming to a meeting when I didn't specifically *have* to be there (e.g., the look in someone's face is "Why is he here when there are so many other things to do—and I *have* to be here?").

As a committee chair, though, I can maybe offer a different perspective. In the LITA Regional Institutes committee (RIC), as with Program Planning and others, specific individuals are mentioned by name and critiqued in the process of building and ensuring the best programming possible. This can be awkward given friendships and the close-knit nature of the profession, but necessary and healthy. There were no non-committee members at the RIC meeting at Midwinter, but if there had been I would have asked them to play by the same ground rules as committee members: Frank and honest discussions are necessary, and the contents of them need to stay in the room.

> I don't know if that was the case with the person with whom you spoke, but under the conditions described above I can imagine it happening.

Peter's case is one of those fuzzy areas, where the "personnel matters" exemption to the open-meetings policy may apply.

Eli Edwards also offered a take on LITA and its attitude toward newcomers:

> I went to the LITA Town Hall, simply because I wanted to learn more about LITA. I walk in and it's a packed room! With a breakfast buffet (provided by Adobe e-Books)! I grab a plate and a seat at one of the tables. The people I met were really friendly and included me in their conversation before the program got underway.

> Towards the end of the program, there was a group discussion on what people liked about and wanted from LITA... That's when I 'fessed up that I wasn't a member. My tablemates were so gracious and friendly in welcoming me to a LITA event and encouraged me to get more involved. I introduced myself as your benign stalker, and they all agreed that I couldn't find a better person to stalk at an ALA conference. When the tables reported on their discussion, I was pressed into service as secretary. If all LITA events are as open, interesting and fun, I look forward to going to more of them.

> I also attended the ITAL editorial meeting, and while it was a much more closed discussion, myself and the other spectator were greeted by the editorial board after it adjourned and everyone was also very nice. Mr. Marmion was extremely nice and helpful.

> So, right now, I'm really impressed by LITA. I think it's highly unlikely that I'll become a technology/systems librarian, so I'm not sure how much a LITA membership will be a good fit with me, but I hope to continue to keep an eye out for LITA at future ALA conferences.

To which I can only respond that you don't need to be a technology or systems librarian to find LITA worthwhile—or at least we/they hope that's true. I do know that the division does try hard to welcome new involvement; for one thing, the unusual organization of the division (no sections, very few committees, mostly self-organizing Interest Groups) almost demands such an attitude.

Bill Drew commented on a few things in the February 2004 issue. My first "Way We're Wired" essay caused him to consider how he adopts technology—e.g., he swore he'd never have a cell phone until a family health emergency convinced him to buy one, which he's kept. (We also have a cell phone only because of possible emergency contact needs.) He's a "selective early adopter," particularly of Internet-based technologies. There's more, but much of the feedback is a little dated at this late remove (my fault: his email arrived on February 11). Of course, Bill Drew also spearheaded a LITA-L discussion that has encouraged me to contemplate resigning from LITA's Top Technology Trends group, but that's another can of worms entirely.

The Library Stuff

A few clusters of library stuff this time around plus some miscellany. Assume these are all recommended, sometimes with caveats.

OpenURL

Beckert, Jeroen, and Lyudmila Balakireva, Patrick Hochstenbach, and Herbert Van de Sompel, "Using MPEG-21 DIP and NISO OpenURL for the dynamic dissemination of complex digital objects in the Los Alamos National Library Digital Library," *D-Lib Magazine* 10:2 (February 2004). www.dlib.org

This 20-page article could equally well be grouped under "digital repositories" or "digital archives," or for that matter "open access" or "digital publishing." It is, to some extent, a "how we do it good" article—but one with broader implications. LANL operates a huge collection of digital resources (five terabytes as of the article), including licensed resources and locally generated material. There's not one central repository; instead, LANL has "a multitude of autonomous OAI-PMH repositories," with a central Repository Index. Features of the repository system that appear noteworthy include use of the MPEG-21 Digital Item Declaration Language to represent complex objects and MPEG-21 Digital Item Processing to execute services, but also fairly sophisticated use of NISO Z39.88, OpenURL 1.0, to handle a variety of information and processing requests. OpenURL 1.0 supports a much wider variety of possible uses than the original OpenURL ("OpenURL 0.1")—one reason the Z39.88 documents are so formidable.

This is one in a series of papers describing LANL's system and its implications. My guess is that most others will also appear in *D-Lib*. If you're interested in complex digital resource collections,

they're worth tracking. Note that Van de Sompel was largely responsible for creating OpenURL, then SFX, when he was at the University of Ghent.

McDonald, John, and Eric F. Van de Velde, "The lure of linking," *Library Journal* (April 1, 2004).

This brief article (three single-spaced pages with sidebars on a fourth page) discusses the first production implementation of OpenURL (as a commercially available service) in a U.S. academic library, at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). Caltech went live in April 2001 and its students took to it rapidly. The article offers lists of currently available OpenURL resolvers and comments from those who are building their own or adding new services. A good quick read that encourages wider use of OpenURL within libraries—and, in the new broader standard, possibly outside as well.

Samuels, Harry E., "OpenURL: A tutorial," Endeavor Information Systems.

This one-sheet PDF offers a quick introduction to OpenURLs (with the LinkFinderPlus slant you'd expect), using the technique of going through an OpenURL piece by piece. I would take issue with the implications of one comment—that is, that ISSN, volume, issue, date, and starting page is "usually all of the metadata that LinkFinderPlus or any link resolver needs to link to a full-text article." That's literally true—if the full-text article is in an aggregation that's directly addressable by ISSN, volume, issue, and starting page. That's not always the case and failing to provide the lead author, article title, and journal title handicaps the resolver and the user. It's a minor objection, since the next example adds article title and journal title (but omits author).

Sutherland, Alison, and Peter Green, "An OpenURL resolver (SFX) in action: The answer to a librarian's prayer or a burden for technical services?"

This article comes from a presentation at a recent VALA (Victoria Association for Library Automation) conference and should be readily findable. Both authors are at Curtin University of Technology (Australia). They discuss Curtin's implementation of the SFX OpenURL resolver, OpenURL itself, staffing effects, advantages and disadvantages, and some ongoing issues.

I won't say the presentation is without issues, as almost any OpenURL presentation is likely to be (fair warning to OSU librarians: Don't expect perfection from me in late May!). For example, an excellent graphic showing a CSA article search result, the SFX window, and the resulting full-text window, is

confusing when compared to the claimed text of the OpenURL and comments on what SFX requires:

➢ The claimed OpenURL text includes only the journal title, date, volume, issue, starting page and (surprisingly), character set—but the SFX window shows the article title as well. While SFX could generate the (also shown) ISSN from the journal title, it can't possibly generate the article title at that point. I would expect that CSA's OpenURL also includes "atitle" (article title), and probably also ISSN and author fields.

➢ Two paragraphs down is this sentence: "The minimum requirement by the SFX resolver for generating a link is the presence of an ISSN and Year when a threshold is specified in the KB or only an ISSN when there is no specified threshold." Without getting into "threshold" (described a little later), this suggests that SFX won't handle an OpenURL that lacks an ISSN, which is (fortunately) not the case and would invalidate the example OpenURL.

The article also mentions Z39.88-2003 as being released in April 2003, but while the *draft* NISO Z39.88 (OpenURL 1.0) was indeed released for a trial period at that point, I don't believe it carried the "2003" suffix and it was most decidedly not a NISO standard at that point. The version of Z39.88 recently balloted, the first version to reach ballot stage (in February 2004), includes small but significant changes from the April 2003 version. (Trust me on this one. I specified RLG's trial implementation of OpenURL 1.0, the only OpenURL 1.0 source implementation to report completed interoperability testing protocols with resolvers during the several-month trial period. I'm now specifying *changes* to that implementation to bring it in line with the final balloted standard.)

Those are minor points. What makes this discussion particularly worthwhile is the commentary on *real* issues in making OpenURL work within an institution. For example, Curtin doesn't typically subscribe to all of the journals in a collection, so they can't activate all those full-text targets with one click: They must consider date ranges and availability in each journal. Curtin also does a fair amount of semi-random testing, informing Ex Libris of problems encountered along the way. The article discusses some reasons for "dead links," OpenURLs that appear to promise full text but don't yield it.

> Do not think that SFX will save you work. The beauty of SFX is that it provides seamless access to information for the client. But SFX is only ever going to be as good as the attention you give it.

All in all, a fascinating look into real-world OpenURL use from the library's perspective—something that's hard to get from those of us who write either from an OpenURL vendor's perspective or, as in my case, from that of an OpenURL source.

Google Matters

These aren't all library-related items and they're not all articles. But then, Google searches turn up things you weren't expecting, for all the usual reasons and some that might not be apparent.

Edward W. Felten talked about "Googlocracy" in a February 3, 2004 posting at *Freedom to tinker*. He noted the "conventional wisdom" that Google is becoming less useful because people are manipulating its rankings. He thinks the wisdom is wrong. "It ignores the most important fact about how Google works: Google is a voting scheme. Google is not a mysterious Oracle of Truth but a numerical scheme for aggregating the preferences expressed by web authors. It's a form of democracy—call it Googlocracy." He goes on about this for a bit, ending: "Like democracy, Googlocracy won't always get the very best answer. Perfection is far too much to ask. Realistically, all we can hope for is that Googlocracy gets a pretty good answer, almost always. By that standard, it succeeds. Googlocracy is the worst form of page ranking, except for all of the others that have been tried." I see what Felten is saying—but my grumps that Google isn't as useful as it used to be are *not* based on the idea that people are trying to manipulate its rankings. Rather, I believe the sheer effect of weblogs (and blogrolls) and Google's own changes in its ranking systems have tended to confuse Google results. That's purely a personal observation and I could be entirely wrong.

Gary Price had a February 17 *ResourceShelf* comment about a Washington *Post* article on "life in the age of Google," an article that quotes him (in "a 45 minute conversation boiled down to a few words"). "I wish journalists would stop making it an either libraries OR Google thing. Having a variety of resources and using the right one at the right time are what matters most." He notes some of the problems with the article and, as usual, some of the reasons that libraries can't be replaced by Google—and that Peter Lyman's quote about Google winning the "war" was, well, simplistic at best.

Beehner, Lionel, "Lies, damned lies, and Google," *Mediabistro*, downloaded February 18, 2004.

This brief piece discusses the tendency of (lazy) writers to prove points by using Google results, and the essential fact that such result sizes are inherently

meaningless. "What's a simpler, or faster, way of quantifying a trend than typing a key word or phrase into Google? Type in almost any person, place, or thing, and Google will bounce back to you a neat numerical value that calculates that person, place, or thing's importance to this world." He cites a February 2 *New Yorker* article in which a TV critic demonstrates that the female body is more interesting than the male because "naked men" yields around 600,000 Google results while "naked women" yields more than a million.

Worse examples follow. An LA *Times* story says that Frank Deford is a "distinguished writer" and uses as evidence: "A Google search of his name produces more than 21,000 hits." (Hmm. That makes me either six times as famous as Deford or one-quarter as famous, depending on whether the *Times* person used quotes. Either result is meaningless.)

The point of this piece is that Google result counts are not very accurate ways to gauge the popularity of a person or an idea. I tend to agree with the conclusion: "Plugging Google in a story has become almost a telltale sign of sloppy reporting a hack's version of a Rolodex." He also notes that one of two *New Yorker* writers mentioned appears to be twice as popular as the other—partly because the one shares a name with a prolific porn star.

Seth Finkelstein noted the article and some errors within it. He notes the lack of any indication as to whether searches mentioned were surrounded by quotes. Without them, "many of the number reported are utterly and completely meaningless. They don't even do the silly measure of the phrase the journalist thinks they measure." His example: the words 'hot' and 'dog' keyed as a two-word Google search would yield pages about hot days on which dogs are unhappy, where "hot dog" is at least *more* likely to yield frankfurter-related stories (or stories about surfing, or…). He verifies that the *Mediabistro* article gets it wrong in at least one case, when it passes on a report that the phrase "permanent resident cards CA" yields 92,200 sites on the subject:

> NO. The *phrases* return zero or a few hits. The *words* return that many hits, but having a lot of pages with the four words "permanent" "resident" "cards" "CA" somewhere on them is not *"staggering."*

> Sigh, Flash—journalists write nonsense. Not news at 11.

Bell, Steven J., "The infodiet: How libraries can offer an appetizing alternative to Google," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50:24 (February 20, 2004).

This is a good brief commentary on ways that libraries can respond to the "competition" from Google, both by explaining what they have and (in some cases) offering simple search interfaces and offering clear added value. While **recommending** the piece, I take issue with one of Bell's definitions: He refers to commercially produced databases as "aggregators." While there are full-text aggregations, databases are not inherently aggregations just as databases aren't all full text (and shouldn't be).

Marylaine Block's Ex Libris

Block, Marylaine, "How about ignorance management?" *Ex Libris* 203.

I could do without another claim that Amazon's finding system to sell certain books is so much better than library catalogs, but the idea of managing internal ignorance is interesting. Her suggestions for libraries include professional training, or at least multiple subscriptions to the professional journals (so staff don't have to wait six months to see them), mentoring, training during staff meetings, internal weblogs, and cataloging local expertise. "Above all, I think that continuously developing professional competence should be part of the job description." Well worth thinking about, as usual.

Block, Marylaine, "In need of a better business model," *Ex Libris* 207.

Block argues that "the information place" doesn't work very well as the business model for today's libraries. Since I've been making the same argument in speeches for more than a decade and devoted a couple of pages of *Being Analog* to refuting that slogan (pp. 75+), it's hard to disagree. "The problem with the information place model is that most people are convinced they don't need libraries for information now that they have the internet." I think it goes further than that. Libraries were never *the* place that people met their primary information needs—but I'm repeating myself. Go read the book.

Block offers several alternatives: The community place, the self-improvement place, the idea place, a culture place, an education place, a readers' place, and the kids' place. All interesting suggestions, although "the" always makes me nervous. Maybe libraries continue to be complex organisms with complex services, which is a tougher story to tell.

Block, Marylaine, "Natural partners," *Ex Libris* 208. (marylaine.com/exlibris/xlibnnn. html, where "nnn" is the issue.)

"What do libraries share with museums, historical societies, schools, colleges, orchestras, and arts organizations? Well, yes, they *are* underfunded public agencies, true enough. But they are also the cultural infrastructure of the community they serve."

Block goes on to suggest various ways that these "logical allies" can work together. Many libraries and museums already cooperate, almost always to mutual benefit. For that matter, the current motto of my employer (RLG) is "Where museums, libraries, and archives intersect," a reasonable statement given the nature of its membership. Broadening coalitions to other cultural organizations makes good sense; her suggestions offer good starting points.

Other Items

"A dozen primers on standards," *Computers in Libraries* 24:2 (February 2004). (www.infotoday.com/cilmag/feb04/primers. shtml)

An interesting assemblage of brief "primers" on items such as ARK (Archival Resource Key), METS (Metadata Encoding & Transmission Standard), OAI-PMH (Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting), and Shibboleth (not an acronym). In most cases, the primers are prepared by people involved in development of the "standard" (these aren't all true standards) or reasonably expert users. The only thing that gives me pause is careful reading of one primer in an area where I have personal expertise, OpenURL. The essay includes one misleading implication (that OpenURL always uses HTTP GET, when in fact HTTP POST is both valid and preferable for secure transmission of long metadata strings) and one somewhat questionable note (the suggestion that the draft OpenURL standard is "in use by many information providers and library software vendors," when what's in use is almost always a precursor version). Those are minor issues in a generally good commentary, and I'll assume that other primers are equally good with minor problems.

Etches-Johnson, Amanda, "Look Mom, I got my name in print! Lessons learned by a publishing neophyte," Liscareer.com, March 2004.

I have trouble thinking of Etches-Johnson as unpublished, given the quality and extent of her web writing. But she says her first formal publication will be a chapter in a book coming out this fall. Meanwhile, she offers some lessons. Or, as she says, "a few of the things I'm glad I did, but mostly the things I *should* have done."

Her six lessons, without her excellent commentary: 1. Talk about yourself. 2. If you want to write, you'd better write. 3. It's easier to write about something you're interested in than to pretend to be interested in something you're writing about. 4. Know thy editors and talk to them. 5. Don't sweat the grammar. 6. Two heads are better than one and three heads are better than two.

While these are all excellent suggestions (when amplified and refined with her comments, in particular #5), I'll point particularly to #2 and #3. Maybe you should read #3 and her comments three or four times. I've read too many articles that seem to show disinterest on the part of the writers. I've probably written one or two, but I surely hope to avoid such exercises in futility in the future. Maybe there are "those gifted writers who can make any topic sound engaging." Etches-Johnson admits that she's not one of them. Neither am I, but I sure have read enough who fail to do so. More's the pity. (In case this commentary is too vague, I **highly recommend** reading this article.)

Frost, William J., "Do we want or need metasearching?" *Library Journal*, April 1, 2004.

The item itself is a "Backtalk" commentary—less than 1.5 pages as printed, with a contrarian view of metasearching (or federated search or distributed search). Frost argues that students need to learn to select research tools, and that selecting databases is part of that process. He questions the acceptability of "good enough" results, notes that metasearching is costly, and doubts that it's as good a use of time and money as adding more content and doing good bibliographic instruction. I wouldn't have cited it; as a brief opinion piece, it doesn't offer enough detail or background to deserve additional study.

Then there are the Web4Lib responses—at least 20 of them (to Frost's posting linking to his commentary and to each other) over five days. I was impressed by the level of the discussion (lots of thought, no flaming) and the expertise of the participants (including Roy Tennant, Thomas Dowling, Karen Coyle and Karen Schneider, Eric Lease Morgan and others).

A quick summary of the stream, with few direct quotes and without contributors' names (the ideas stand on their own), may suggest things to think further about—both regarding the concept of metasearching and the systems out there. I'm not offering my opinion here, partly because I still don't know enough, partly because database interfaces are a big part of my day job.

The first post asserted that Frost had "some unfortunate and incorrect assumptions" and confused metasearch possibilities and current implementations. It noted that one-stop searching with intermixed results is not the only approach, that we're at an early stage of metasearch, that metasearch is not intended to replace direct access, and that we shouldn't dismiss metasearch possibilities just yet. One interesting commentary was on Frost's push for

bibliographic instruction as a solution: "I wish you great success in this endeavor, but in the end you must surely realize it is futile. At least it is at my university." This poster noted the need to put "the intelligence of a reference librarian into our systems" and to build user-oriented systems. The post ended by welcoming a "ripping good debate," and made a good start to such a debate.

The next response, noting that Frost had commended general-purpose databases as serving most undergrad needs, commented that (some) general-purpose databases are *themselves* effectively metasearch systems, offering the lowest common denominator searchability to their component parts—and, further, that many vendors have offered combined database searching for years.

Another post asserted that library services are no different than other web services and that libraries really only serve expert users. Another participant argued that "We need to accept the fact that most students could care less about retrieving high quality research" and that metasearching tools were improving. Another questioned one poster's attempt to generalize from Google user experience to research user experience. "Whatever the merits of metasearching, if we implicitly sell it to our users as being Google for Library Databases, they'll expect it to be just that and will justifiably char-broil us when they find that it isn't"—which it almost surely won't be. (Off-list, I responded with my only comment: Effective relevance ranking across disparate databases including large results is pretty nearly impossible, unless every database uses the same relevance ranking methodology—which won't happen.) Another poster believed it *could* be "Google for Library Databases" a bit down the road, using the Google engine. (A later response suggested that Googling existing databases was unlikely if only because information aggregators almost certainly won't allow their content to be spidered.)

The next post discussed techniques that could be used to make search interfaces "smarter," such as "did you mean" possibilities, suggesting alternative search strategies (which some of us already do), and so on. After that, one librarian discussed their current experience with metasearch, noting the enormous potential to give the target audience simple access to high-quality information but also noting the extent to which it isn't Google: "We are happy to have displayed responses from at least one data source in 5-30 seconds," as opposed to Google's typical 3-4 second response time. That comment drew a sigh: "If only we had Google's resources!... We have to be realistic about what we can do with our resources. Although Google's technology may look like magic, it's based on a huge amount of

computing power." (That's true: Google has *thousands* of homebrew PC-class Unix-based computers and software that can take advantage of massive parallelism; Google is also a *much* bigger business than any library systems vendor.)

A delayed response to "why not Google?" noted that Google runs against full text, where most library databases have only metadata. No one has shown that the same (ranking) techniques will work well for both. And, of course, databases don't have intersite links. The question, then, is what is it about Google that people like, and how much of it can be done in libraries?

By now (the second day of discussion), the thread had taken on the leapfrog effect that you get with large lists: Post 15 is more likely to respond to Post 11 or 12 than to Post 14, because (even without moderation) there are propagation delays and it takes time to *compose* a thoughtful response—and "thoughtful" was the order of the day. The next post noted response time as a major design problem, particularly because some usability testing shows that undergrads won't wait 20 seconds for results—and that, on the database side, metasearching yields a *lot* more searches against each database. This post suggested OAI harvesting as a solution, building a local combined index—essentially doing a Google and substituting a form of crawling for multi-database searching. A response noted that database owners would argue that this gave away their assets as well as obliterating branding.

Another response agreed that such harvesting would be ideal, but didn't think it was likely, if only for branding reasons. This respondent noted that their institution has set a four-second timeout for each resource, but caching previous results so temporary slowness doesn't knock out a resource. (That raises interesting questions about heterogeneity of searches: How often does the same search come from more than one user within two days? Are "common searches" *really* "common" in university libraries? My own sample log analysis would suggest otherwise, at least for our databases.)

With regard to branding, one library firebrand (sorry, couldn't resist that) found it ironic that database vendors complained about diminished branding while making it difficult for libraries to put their own brand on those paid-for resources. A partial response raised a library/consortium branding issue for metasearching—and seconded the first person's complaint about difficulties in cobranding a database, at least as I read it. (Doesn't most cobranding occur at the library menu level?)

A subthread suggested that library catalogs would work better if they searched the full text of the books. A response questioned that assertion (as I

would and have), noting that full text searches don't work well for abstract topics or topics composed of common words—and that full-text searching in a large collection is problematic. If studies suggesting that people tend to approach a search using fairly broad terms are correct (as seems likely), then problems with full-text searching are even greater. The first person suggested that a search should cast as wide a net as possible, with retrieval mechanisms doing the appropriate ranking—to which a third party said this "emphasize[d] the parts that are hardest in a metasearch environment." It's easier to go find lots of stuff than it is to determine which of that stuff is relevant for a search. "How far can we develop our ability to filter, rank, sort and so on in an environment where those capabilities have to be implemented as third-party services bolted on to a bunch of native interfaces?"

That's as far as I captured the stream, and I think it dwindled after that. If you're a Web4lib member, you might consider going to the "Meta-searching" thread in a month or two and reviewing what was said (the posts begin on April 1, 2004). Do you agree? Do you have more information that would shed more light? Would this discussion improve real-time discussions at appropriate LITA interest groups and in other venues? I found it fascinating and enlightening, and was sorely tempted to participate more than I did. Think of this citation as a **recommendation** to review the thread as a thoughtful multipart conversation on real-world issues in library metasearch development and implementation.

Interesting & Peculiar Products
Kaleidescape Movie Server

Sometimes when I'm feeling affluent, it's good to be reminded that the term has many meanings. *Sound & Vision* certainly isn't aimed at plutocrats. Compared to high-end stereo magazines, it's Everyman's publication. Which makes John Sciacca's highly favorable review of this device (in the February/March 2004 issue) all the more amazing.

"This device" is a "system that does for movies what hard-drive storage has already done for music." Understand the problem that's being solved: "Why should you be forced to enjoy your DVDs in the same old 20th-century manner?...And how do you manage that library of 100, 200, or 500 titles? How do remember what movies you have or decide what you want to watch?" 100 DVDs: That's enough to require a four-foot shelf! No wonder people are des-

perate for a solution! What if they had 200 books or CDs? How would they ever find what they wanted? What to do, what to do?

The solution consists of a DVD reader, a movie player, and a server. The server holds up to 12 hard disks. All the pieces connect via "Fast" Ethernet (100Mbps, not 1Gbps). The movie player connects to your TV. You load all your DVDs onto the hard disk, pulling information from a web-based database in the process, then play them from the server. The database service makes this into "a video godsend," according to the review, because it makes "the act of selecting a movie entertaining in itself." You can sort by actor! You can sort by genre! You can sort by director or MPAA rating! Heck, you can browse by the cover—let's see you choose one out of 200 boring old physical DVDs by looking at covers!

Oh, and when you pause on a cover, the device gives you other titles that are "like" that one. "This sounds simple—Amazon.com does it all the time—but I found it to be *phenomenally* cool, and I spent *lots* of time with it." Sciacca even made a game out of predicting what Kaleidescape would pick. (I suppose you could do that with Netflix, which has a great "more like this" capability—but that would miss the coolest aspect of this server, coming soon.)

Here's what's really cool. You get all this functionality for a mere $27,000 with enough disk space for 160 DVDs (presumably four 300GB drives). Since you spent as much as $3,200 for those 160 DVDs, this seems like a real bargain: You're paying a bit less than *nine times as much* so you don't have to alphabetize boxes and can do neat sorting. If you want to store 440 DVDs, the maximum capacity of one server, that will be $33,000. If you have two TVs, figure another $4,000 for another movie player—and, after all, a good DVD drive would cost $100 or so!

By the way, the lab tests of the unit were "slightly disappointing," given that it emulates a progressive-scan DVD drive. Well, you know, for a mere $26,500 more than a first-rate DVD player would cost, or $23,000 more than 160 DVDs *and* a first-rate player, what do you expect? Perfection?

I guess I'm not really affluent after all. We own more than 70 DVDs, but so far keeping track of them hasn't been an issue. If it was, I think I could bring myself to key the necessary information into Access or Excel so I could do all those fancy sorts. At least to save $26,000, I could!

Media Center PCs

They've been around for a while—PCs running Microsoft Windows XP Media Center Edition, designed to be the core of your home entertainment

system. Some work better than others, and for dorm rooms and apartments some all-in-one systems may make good sense. But, as Michael Antonoff's review of the Dell Dimension 4600C Media Center in the February/March 2004 *Sound & Vision* reminds me, they all share one or two significant problems, at least to date. Video quality tends to be underwhelming, particularly if you try to connect them to a regular TV. That's partly due to second-rate tuner circuitry as compared to good TVs, but it's also partly because of differences in how monitors and TVs are designed.

This review also considers downloadable movie services, in this case CinemaNow. For $3.99, Antonoff bought the right to watch *Chicago* as often as he wanted—over one 24-hour period (beginning when he hit Play for the first time, not when the movie started downloading). If you're too lazy to deal with video rental stores (or you detest Blockbuster/Hollywood and have no alternatives) and if Netflix doesn't work for you, maybe this makes sense—except for the results. "The picture was VHS quality." Say what?

It gets worse. "Though you can pause and play, you can't fast scan in either direction. Instead, I could only hit Replay to go back in 7-second increments or Skip to move ahead 30 seconds at a time." Chapter selections? Extra features? Commentary tracks? Not in this digital wonderland.

Gigabeat G20

It's another hard disk-based MP3 player—but it uses Toshiba's very small hard disk, making it a little thinner and a little lighter than Apple's 20GB iPod, with the same capacity. It doesn't have Apple's superior user interface, but *Wired*'s "Fetish" section thinks it's hot stuff. Of course, for a true fetishist, money is no object: "Sure, you'll have to pay *a bit more* for this Japanese import, but for PC users it's worth every cent." Full list for the 20GB iPod is $399; competitors such as Dell's 20GB player run $299 or less. The Gigabeat is $599: "A bit more."

MSN on Your Wrist

Michael J. Miller of *PC Magazine* thinks they're neat—but Miller is a true gadget freak. In the same "Forward Thinking" column that discusses the $179 Fossil Wrist Net and $200 Suunto N3 "wrist top" watches, he also discusses multifunction "cell phones," declaring along the way that "Now everyone is carrying a lightweight phone with better coverage, features, and pricing than ever." You say you're one of the 40% of Americans who don't carry a cell phone at all? You're nobody: *everyone* carries a multifeature phone. (I'm nobody, in case you're interested…but you already knew that.)

Anyway, these watches work with the MSN Direct service ($9.95 a month or $59.95 a year) to "deliver several kinds of information, including national, business, international, or sports news headlines; stock prices of specific companies; and basic market indices." You can also get calendar items sent from your desktop and receive MSN Messenger messages. They even tell the time (when they're not providing a few characters of stuff)! Each watch has a unique ID, so you only receive the information you want—or, rather, the channels you program.

You do have to recharge the watch *every two days*, but isn't it worth it to have headlines with you 24 hours a day? Miller looks forward to "getting the traffic report for a selected route." Oh joy: Now, there's something else for that Volvo driver who's (mostly) in the next lane to be paying attention to instead of the road and other drivers. He's checking his infowatch.

At least we have one more way to identify ubergeeks. These watches are seriously large, even though that yields a pretty small screen.

"DVD-Quality" Theater in Your Pocket

If Microsoft on your wrist isn't wonderful enough, consider the Portable Media Center, "a new version of media software for pocket-size devices with 3.5-inch displays, 64MB RAM, and hard drives with capacities of 20GB, 40GB, and 60GB." The February 17 *PC Magazine* commentary shows a Creative gadget, one of several soon to ship at $400 to $700.

The devices use Windows Media 9 Series and the WMA format. Microsoft claims that you can store "175 hours of video" on the 40GB device. That's 125MB per hour, roughly one-twentieth the bitrate of professionally compressed MPEG-2 on a DVD. MPEG-2 already represents *enormous* lossy compression. The article claims that CinemaNow will provide "DVD-quality digital movies" for rental. Can you retain DVD quality with 5% of MPEG-2 bitrate? I don't believe it—and every review I've ever seen of high-compression WMA or high-compression MPEG-4, reviewed by someone who cares more about visual quality than technology, says it's not possible.

Of course, it may not matter: You can't see DVD quality on a 3.5" display anyway. Take away the improbable quality claims and you may have a neato plaything, if you really feel the need to watch endless hours of video on a tiny little screen.

CorelDraw Soldiers On

CorelDraw has always offered an interesting alternative to Adobe's drawing and photo-editing program. That's still true, with CorelDraw Graphics Suite 12—a true bargain at $400 ($179 upgrade, $99 educational version), given that Adobe's rough equivalent is $1,200. CorelDraw 12 is an impressive illustration program with strong typographic tools (it can be used to layout publications up to 99 pages); Photo-Paint 12 has some of the best "natural media" tools for bitmapped work; and R.A.V.E. 3 offers good animation tools. The suite also includes a screen-capture utility, CorelTrace 12 to convert bitmapped images to vectors, the usual immense library of graphics and typefaces, and a few other tools. CorelDraw also supports Unicode and offers file compatibility for almost everything except the RAW digicam forma.

Epson Perfection 4870 Photo

How good can a consumer-priced desktop flatbed scanner be? According to Daniel and Sally Wiener Grotta's four-dot review of this $450 unit (*PC Magazine* 23:4, March 2, 2004), very good indeed. The scanner incorporates Digital ICE technology to reduce or eliminate dust, scratches, and tears in prints and transparency—and Epson's new Easy Photo Fix to restore faded prints and reduce film grain. It scans in 48-bit color with 4800x9600 dpi resolution, includes a built-in transparency adapter that allows scanning of up to eight 35mm slides at once, and comes with a robust software bundle. About the only problem is that the fixed sensitivity for Digital ICE is a little low, so it doesn't reduce scratches as much as some other models.

Which brings us to the next page of *PC Magazine* 23:4, where the Grottas review a $150 scanner that also supports Digital ICE. The Microtek ScanMaker 1300 is much slower (particularly with Digital ICE enabled), includes transparency support, and has a good software bundle—although it offers more mainstream resolution (4800x2400).

Offtopic Perspective
Staying on the Treadmill

That's not a metaphor for working hard or meeting my writing commitments. It's a literal title for a personal commentary that's entirely "off topic" for *Cites & Insights*—the kind of thing I might write about in a weblog, if I had a weblog. Feel free to skip it.

This is an absurdly long anecdote, because—well, just because. It's about a lazy middle-aged person trying to maintain enough motivation for regular exercise, both for cardiovascular health and to remain among the 33% of American adults who *aren't* overweight. I enjoy walking and can walk five or ten miles with no real difficulty—but that takes too much time on weekdays and is rough in inclement weather. So, years ago, I acquired a rowing machine, using it in front of the TV for 15 or 20 minutes a day, 4 or 5 days a week.

It helped in terms of lung capacity (I don't get out of breath at the top of a hill any more), but it wasn't burning many calories—I could barely work up a sweat. After a while, I got rid of the rowing machine and purchased an inexpensive stair-climbing/stepping machine. That worked better for a few years: By steadily increasing the friction settings on the pistons, I could work up a sweat and burn a few calories, and by adding a boombox I could listen to *Marketplace* while exercising. I burned through three pulleys on the stepper, but eventually got really bored with it as well.

When I found I was dropping to three exercise days a week and finding excuses to avoid those, I talked it over with my wife. I knew a good treadmill was the best long-term solution and that it suited my style, since I *do* enjoy walking. We found a good midrange (i.e., $1,000) treadmill and installed it in the garage, passing the stepper on to someone else.

First I figured I'd read while walking. That worked—badly. You move too much to read effectively (or at least I do). My standard workout was and is about 20 minutes at 3.6 miles per hour (which turns out to be my normal walking speed), on a 4% to 5% incline: Not strenuous, but enough to make a difference if I do it at least four or five days a week. I needed something to *motivate* me to stay on the treadmill.

Enter the Old Movies

Now we combine a stream from a few years back, when I wrote about a fledgling magazine in DVD form, *InsideDVD*. Each issue was a double-sided DVD with a full-length motion picture on one side, magazine features on the other. I subscribed out of curiosity. The magazine led a fitful existence for some time, then merged with an awful fanboy print movie magazine. In all, eleven issues emerged over several years before it fell apart completely. The merged publication offered a great incentive: A 40-movie DVD "starter pack" free with a $50 renewal or subscription. Eventually, the box arrived—ten thematic doublefold cardboard sleeves in a box, each sleeve having two double-sized DVDs.

Additionally, Treeline Films released "50 Movie Pack Family Classics," 50 movies on a dozen double-sided two-layer DVDs. I saw it at $40, then $30, but

didn't buy—then Rite-Aid offered it, for one week only, at $19.95. Well, what the heck. I saw there were five duplicates from the 40-pack, but that still left 45 new movies. So here I am with 85 old movies and no real time to watch them.

"You know, if I had a little TV and DVD player out in the garage, I could watch the movies 20 minutes at a time while walking on the treadmill. I bet that would keep me motivated!" Lo and behold, late last fall, Circuit City had a two-day sale: A special purchase of Apex 13" color TVs with DVD player built in, $90 total.

It worked. I started exercising more regularly, five or six days a week. With pictures I didn't care for, viewing in 20-minute chunks made them more palatable. With good pictures, I had *real* motivation to keep exercising: What would happen next?

There was one more problem, as I realized when I moved beyond the first pack (all silent movies). Between the treadmill itself and my fast, heavy pace, it was difficult to hear dialogue over the noise of exercise, particularly since the soundtracks on damaged old prints weren't great to begin with.

For another $40, I added an over-the-ear set of wireless headphones with a sleek little radio-frequency stereo transmitter. Problem solved. The headphones muffle the treadmill noise and give me fully audible soundtracks without blowing out the TV speakers.

When I'm not on the road now, I *always* exercise at least six days a week, sometimes seven. When I run out of the 85 movies (in about a year, since I'm halfway through the first box and watch about 1.5 movies a week this way), I'll find more big boxes of old movies at good prices or other things to watch. Going through the multiple commentary tracks on the first *Lord of the Rings* four-DVD edition: That's something like 14 hours (42 days) right there! And there's always the public library…

What movies have I watched, and how good were they? I thought you'd never ask. You *might* find this relevant. While *Total Movies & Entertainment* (the merged publication) is gone, they must have shipped 10,000 or 20,000 of those 40-movie boxes. I wouldn't be surprised if boxes appear on EBay from time to time, although I didn't find any in a quick search. Is the set worth $20? Probably. $40? That depends on your taste in movies and whether you can cope with the variable-quality prints.

Here, then, my personal take on what I've watched so far, which is the first four packs and the first three movies on the fifth. I may add more brief "reviews" in later issues. I may not.

Quick Comments on the First 18 Movies

In all cases, assume that the prints (video and sound quality) are viewable but not pristine quality unless I mention otherwise. A word or three may be missing due to patches. Almost every movie comes with four chapter breaks, assigned fairly arbitrarily based on length. Some information comes from IMDB, since I didn't copy things down while watching the movies. Timings are taken directly from the DVDs. I don't know most classic cinema; excuse my ignorance.

I've organized the movies as they are in the box: By supposed theme.

Classic Movie Masterpieces

Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potyomkin), 1925, Russian, B&W, silent with dedicated orchestral score and some Russian narration, 1:06.

> A classic, more drama than propaganda, with a more-than-adequate print.

The General, 1927, Buster Keaton, B&W, silent, 1:40.

> I don't know much of Keaton's work, and was expecting something more obviously humorous, but this is well-acted and distinctly worth watching—even if the "gray" leaning of some early moviemakers, when it comes to the Civil War, was pretty evident. Adequate print.

Intolerance, 1916, B&W, silent, D.W. Griffith (director, writer), Lillian Gish and a cast of (literally) thousands, 2:42.

> Admittedly a poor print, but if this is Griffith's masterpiece, it's for reasons I missed, other than sheer magnitude of effort. "Interminable" seems like a better name; I never did discover a coherent plot. It lasted 162 minutes; it seemed like an eternity.

Classic Tales

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 1920, B&W, silent with wholly-unrelated pipe organ music, John S. Robertson (dir.), John Barrymore, Nita Naldi, 1:22.

> Poor to very poor print, great performance. I'd like to see this one in a restored version.

Scrooge, 1935, B&W, Henry Edwards (dir.), Seymour Hicks, 1:00.

> The first true sound film in the set, but the print is so bad that I found it unwatchable.

A Farewell to Arms, 1932, B&W, Frank Borzage (dir.), Gary Cooper, Helen Hayes, Adolphe Menjou, 1:18.

> The print varies from mediocre to very poor—but the movie itself is excellent, and thoroughly enjoyable in spite of the print.

Cyrano de Bergerac, 1950, B&W, Michael Gordon (dir.), Jose Ferrer as Cyrano, 1:52.

The highlight of the four-pack: A superb perform-ance in a well-staged rendition of the tale. Mediocre to poor print (and, oddly, with Ferrer's credit clipped off at the start), but good enough so it didn't much matter. High on my list to watch again.

Comedy & Romance

Road to Bali, 1952, color, Hal Walker (dir.), Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Dorothy Lamour, cameos by Bob Crosby, Jerry Lewis, Dean Martin, Jane Russell, 1:31.

> Color! Sound! Comedy! The first *Road* picture I've ever seen. As I expected, lightweight—and quite en-joyable. The print was good enough to stay out of the picture's way.

Africa Screams, 1949, B&W, Charles Barton (dir.), Bud Abbott, Lou Costello, Clyde Beatty, Frank Buck, Max Baer, Buddy Baer, Shemp Howard, Joe Besser, 1:19.

> I tend to think of Abbott & Costello as over-the-top comedians. This relatively low-key movie—certainly comedy, but mostly not scenery chewing—was a pleasant surprise. (Yes, even with two of the Three Stooges playing smaller parts.) Decent print.

At War with the Army, 1950, B&W, Hal Walker (dir.), Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, Polly Bergen, 1:32.

> Early Martin & Lewis, with Jerry Lewis a little less extreme than in some later pictures. Well done. The print is scratchy but watchable.

The Pajama Game, 1957, color, George Abbott & Stanley Donen (dirs.), Doris Day, John Raitt, Eddie Foy Jr., 1:41.

> Remember "Hernando's Hideaway"? It's from this movie. Not a great musical, but a good one, and Doris Day does a fine job. Acceptable print.

Crime

Dressed to Kill, 1946, B&W, Roy William Neill (dir.), Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes, Nigel Bruce as Dr. Watson, 1:08. (The last Rathbone/Holmes movie.)

> Fair print quality, and Rathbone as Holmes is as good as you might expect. A pleasure.

The Kennel Murder Case, 1933, B&W, Michael Curtiz (dir.), William Powell as Philo Vance, Mary Astor, 1:13.

> Decent print, good story, acting appropriate for the genre. Another pleasure.

Dick Tracy, Detective, 1945, B&W, William A. Berke (dir.), Morgan Conway as Dick Tracy, Anne Jeffreys as Tess Truehart, Mike Mazurki, 1:01.

> I'd never seen any of the 1940s Dick Tracy movies, and was pleasantly surprised that they're not car-toons-on-film. At least this one wasn't. Decent print. Certainly not a classic, but better than I expected. If you think of it as an early b&w TV series episode, it's just fine.

Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome, 1947, B&W, John Rawlins (dir.), Ralph Byrd as Dick Tracy, Boris Karloff as Gruesome, Anne Gynne as Tess Truehart, 1:05.

> Boris Karloff in a one-hour Dick Tracy flick? Yes, and he does a fine job. The print's fairly good, the acting's appropriate.

Famous Directors, Cult Classics

Meet John Doe, 1941, B&W, Frank Capra (dir.), Gary Cooper, Barbara Stanwyck, Edward Arnold, Walter Brennan, Spring Byington, James Gleason, Gene Lockhart, Regis Toomey, 2:02.

> Great cast, great story, pretty good print, and Capra's social-consciousness direction. I can't think of much bad to say about this movie. I'll *certainly* watch it again, probably more than once.

His Girl Friday, 1940, B&W, Howard Hawks (dir.), Cary Grant, Rosalind Russell, Ralph Bellamy, Gene Lockhart, 1:31.

> One of several film adaptations of "The Front Page," this is another thoroughly enjoyable movie with a strong cast. The style is sometimes a bit frenetic, but Hawks presumably considered that appropriate for the story. Fairly good print, another sure repeat.

The Stranger, 1946, B&W, Orson Welles (dir.), Ed-ward G. Robinson, Loretta Young, Orson Welles, 1:35.

> I'm really not a film scholar: I'd never heard of this movie. Enthralling, with Orson Welles very Orson Welles-ish as a post-war Nazi hiding in America, Loretta Young fine as his new bride, and Edward G. Robinson excellent as an agent of the war crimes tri-bunal. Good to very good print.

There's More

Enough for now. After a little more writing and some household chores, it's time for the third quarter of *Beat the Devil*, last of the "Famous Directors, Cult Classics" group.

The Good Stuff

Caplan, Priscilla, "Patents and open stan-dards," *Information Standards Quarterly* 14:4 (October 2003), available as a white paper at niso.org.

> This white paper grew out of an incident during the development of Z39.88, OpenURL. Two years into the committee's work, NISO learned that a company had filed a patent application for a method of link resolution—and the company's president was a member of the committee. The president (Eric Hellman of Openly) maintained that the claims in the patent weren't essential for OpenURL and that

he'd be happy to grant no-cost licenses for the technology. The incident raised questions about open standards: Can true standards, such as those developed by NISO, be developed and implemented properly when patents may interfere?

The OpenURL situation isn't unique. Some time after JPEG was adopted as a standard, a small company acquired an older company that had filed a patent for the compression technology in JPEG—and the new company wanted royalties from every company implementing JPEG compression (except for satellite broadcasting). Unless the JPEG committee can challenge the claim, ISO may withdraw JPEG as a standard.

This paper raises the key question: Does patented intellectual property ever belong in open standards (true technical standards, as opposed to "industry standards" and the like)? Some writers say that this is only workable if the patents can be licensed at no cost; others object to any licensing requirement as part of standards implementation. ISO and IEC don't bar such inclusions, even with costs, as long as licenses can be obtained under "reasonable and non-discriminatory terms." ANSI has a similarly lax requirement. The situation is more complicated with some Internet-related standards bodies. The brief paper concludes that NISO needs an explicit patent policy—and that such a policy won't close the discussion as to whether patents with priced licenses ("RAND licenses," for reasonable and non-discriminatory) have any place in NISO or any other open standards.

On September 25, 2003, the NISO Board of Directors adopted such a policy, seeking to avoid embedded patents whenever possible.

Scigliano, Eric, "Ten technologies that refuse to die," *Technology Review* February 2004.

Remember paper? It was great in its time, but that time long since passed. Right?

Scigliano offers a list of "venerable survivors" that have seemingly been "surpassed and superseded…written off as road kill on the highway of progress," but that have survived not as cult artifacts but because they fill real needs.

Here's the list, without his discussions: Analog watches, dot-matrix printers, typewriters, broadcast radio, pagers, reel-to-reel tape, vacuum tubes, fax machines, mainframe computers, and Fortran.

It's an interesting list. Analog watches simply do what they do more elegantly than digital watches—you can see that "it's about five of three" faster than you can make out "2:54:45" and interpret it. "In the end, how a device performs its essential job matters more than its extra functions." Dot matrix printers

(that is, impact dot matrix, since nearly all modern printers use matrices of dots, including lasers and inkjets) make no sense for PCs but are *great* for high-speed, cheap, reliable back-office printing. And so on. A fascinating read.

Shirky, Clay, "Fame vs fortune: Micropayments and free content," shirky.com/writings/fame_vs_fortune.html. (Originally published September 5, 2003.)

Shirky believes that new micropayment schemes will fail just as earlier ones have, not simply because of poor implementation but because "the trend towards freely offered content is an epochal change, to which micropayments are a pointless response." To some extent, this is a "content wants to be free" view—but there may be more than that.

Shirky notes that many creative types (using the broadest sense of "creative") are more interested in being "famous"—that is, widely read—than in being well-compensated for their creativity. But Shirky also believes that online content has high substitutability—you'll read something else if there's any barrier to reading one thing, even if the first thing is better. If that's true (and it may be), it's a sad commentary.

Does this mean all content becomes free? No, but it suggests that for-fee content will either come via subscription (magazines, online services) or in physical chunks that add value to online equivalents (books, DVDs, sometimes CDs), although Shirky only mentions subscriptions.

That there's a shift in the overall "publishing" world is undeniable. Is Shirky right? I'm not sure, but he's worth reading and thinking about. And, of course, the price is right.

The Details

URL: cites.boisestate.edu/civ4i6.pdf