Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Volume 5, Number 12: November 2005 ISSN 1534-0937 Walt Crawford

Bibs & Blather

A Mess of Verbiage

What determines whether a brief essay will appear as a secondary editorial in BIBS & BLATHER or as a Quicker Take in TRENDS & QUICK TAKES?

Originally, TRENDS & QUICK TAKES was about *trends*—items on various trends I saw happening or being predicted, where the discussion couldn't justify a PERSPECTIVE and didn't fit an established category.

I'm not much of a trendspotter, and admitted as much when I finally resigned from the LITA Top Tech Trends group, but I still put trends in that section when I do spot them. Meanwhile, the catchall term "quick takes" and the more recent "quicker takes" heading allowed me to add stuff that might really belong in *Walt at Random*.

There isn't much difference between QUICK TAKES/QUICKER TAKES and those portions of BIBS & BLATHER that don't comment on *C&I* itself. This time around, I'm putting the stuff under this heading for a good reason: *C&I* 5.11 had a TRENDS & QUICK TAKES and not a BIBS & BLATHER.

Got Feedback?

Feedback is always welcome at wcc[@]rlg.org and waltcrawford[@]gmail.com, but there's also a new address with a twist: **citesandinsights@gmail. com**.

Here's the twist: Anything sent to citesandinsights @gmail.com is *presumed to be submitted for publication, signed, under the Creative Commons BY-NC license.*

I almost always check with correspondents before incorporating feedback into *C&I*. That will *not* be the case with the new mailbox.

Sending something to citesandinsights@gmail. com doesn't assure it will be published—but it does mean I'll publish it without checking back with you.

If you're sending a question or something where you hope to get a response, I'd suggest one of the other addresses, since I'll probably check citesandinsights@gmail.com once a week or so.

Startling Screenshots

The September 2005 *EContent* "content news" section includes a two-page item, "Alacra sets up shop with the Alacra Store." Alacra will be offering a way to buy a single report from one of the business databases Alacra vends. It may be a good idea; I don't know.

What startled me was the illustration, a report ready to be purchased. The report is titled "What's so cool about Google Maps?" and is a "Quick Take" from Forrester Research. The description: "Google Maps elicits a visceral response in many new users: 'I'm never using MapQuest again.' However, customers' perceptions that Google Maps is more accurate than MapQuest or Yahoo! Maps are flat-out incorrect: All three online mapping sites get data from…"

Inside This Issue

The "quick take" might be interesting, although pretty minor—after all, how actionable is the promised information? Lately, in looking for directions, I've found AAA Maps and MSN Maps useful, but I usually check three sources…

What earned this item a place here is just below the title of the report: "**Price: $349.00**"

Which, I guess, is actually pretty cheap for a report from a firm like Forrester.

Can there be $349 worth of stuff to say about Google Maps in a Quick Take? (Anyone who wants to

send me $349 will get a *custom-made, signed, one-off* Quick Take, guaranteed to be at least as long as the ones that appear in *C&I*. I'm not going to hold my breath.) Maybe that's why I'll never be a highly paid researcher: I don't understand pricing and value.

Derivative Music

This belongs as part of a grander essay, but for now… I was reading Michelle Manafy's "edit this" in the July/August 2005 *EContent*, "DRM's demon days," about a remix album, DRM, and related issues. In discussing what Lawrence Lessig calls "our cut and paste culture," Manafy says:

> Upside: creative and intellectual output that stands high on the shoulders of others, greater than the sum of its parts. Downside: derivative drivel and outright thievery.

True enough—and I was reminded of some of the upside in the history of music, before hyper-restrictive copyright interpretations made it possible for even a tiny sample of a piece to be considered protected.

Case in point: a plagiarist called Johann Sebastian Bach—who built works on themes from other people and whose works served as inspiration for new pieces by others (and himself). Case in point: Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*—probably safe enough since there's a 343-year gap between the original and the "derivative work," but nonetheless a derivative work. And, to be sure, thousands of mediocre compositions whose only thematic worth comes directly from earlier pieces (and then there are the brilliant pastiches of Peter Schickele).

In my youth, I was an avid collector of music from the Baroque and the 20th century, with special emphasis on two great composers who, to some extent, represented the peak of their eras: Bach and Stravinsky. Which leads me to my final example of the value of derivative works—a piece I consider stunning but which is (apparently) relatively little-known: Stravinsky's transcription and orchestration of Bach's *Variations on 'Vom Himmel Hoch.'* It's Stravinsky's take on one of Bach's most memorable pieces, which in turn is based on a German Christmas carol. It's distinctly Stravinsky, distinctly Bach—and derivative.

Pennies per Megabyte

I was touched by that phrase, part of a lengthy *Business 2.0* article on future trends that I don't feel the need to comment on in general. It's part of a slightly unnerving section—the idea that, given RFIDs, GPS cell phones, and the like, "a store's retail system could detect that you're in the soap aisle, check out your brand preferences, and look up your cell-phone number. Then it might send you an SMS message informing you that Lever 2000 just went on sale."

Never mind that curious future: Consider "pennies per megabyte." That must mean at least two cents per megabyte, which translates to $20 per gigabyte. I suppose it's *possible* to spend $20 per gigabyte for server-class storage, but RAID technology encourages the use of big cheap consumer hard disks—which, as I write this, go for anywhere from $0.50 to $1 per gigabyte, with even external drives going for less than $1 per gigabyte. In other words, it's *megabytes per penny*—10 to 20 of them—and it's been that way for a while now. (Yes, it's astonishing. It's also true. Not only *can* you now equip a desktop PC with a terabyte of storage, it wouldn't cost much to do so.)

Net Media Perspective
Analogies, Gatekeepers and Blogging

I began using the term "net media" in BIBS & BLATHER: A LITTLE SPRING CLEANING (*C&I* 5:5, Spring 2005):

> I can't seem to get away from blogs, RSS, wikis, and the other tools and religions of internet culture. Think of this new section as an offshoot of TRENDS & QUICK TAKES on one hand and THE GOOD STUFF on the other. My first name for this section was "The Infosphere." But I've made fun of others for always wanting to use a neologism when there's already a perfectly good term. Since blogs, wikis, and these other things are basically just media that depend on the internet, I'll call them that: net media.

Since then, three essays explicitly carried the NET MEDIA label; three more could have.

Naming a thing affects your perceptions of that thing. Gathering a group of concepts under one name is a form of synthesis: An assertion that those concepts have something noteworthy in common. While NET MEDIA emerged as a label of convenience, I'm finding the term useful as a way of thinking about these "new things"—and as a way of relating these and other digital phenomena to the rest of life.

Net Media and Physical Media

Most of us rely on analogy to understand new things and phenomena and explain them to others. "It tastes

like chicken"—I've heard that said about rattlesnake meat, fried ants and other exotic foodstuffs. TV is just "radio with pictures" (a little too true of most TV shows). A blog is "like an electronic diary that anyone can read." Except when it isn't.

Helpful as analogies are to familiarize and explain, they can also be traps—particularly when combined with the natural tendency to oversimplify. A blog is *just* an electronic diary. (Well, no, it isn't.) An ejournal is just a journal that doesn't appear in print form. (Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.) An ebook is just like a print book but with a dedicated reader instead of dead trees. (Wrong on so many counts…)

To make matters worse, many of us love to create oppositions and assumed replacements. Ebooks *or* print books. Electronic journals *or* print journals. Blogs *in place of* newspapers and magazines. Now that we're in the third decade of widespread digital phenomena, it gets worse, as new digital phenomena are proposed as replacements for old ones. Email and lists must die, replaced by blogs, wikis, and IM!

We need to differentiate within net media, just as we should be better at differentiating within traditional media. Some listeners have been puzzled when I've said in speeches (and print) that there is no serials crisis for most public libraries, but it's a simple matter of differentiation. Magazines (the bulk of serials in most public libraries) have very little in common with scientific, technical, and medical scholarly journals (the heart of the journal pricing-and-access crisis, which is real) other than that both appear on a more-or-less regular schedule and both may appear in print form with consistent issue-to-issue cover and internal design. Magazines have different financial models than STM journals. Magazine prices increase much more slowly than STM journal prices (if at all). Most magazines rely far less heavily than STM journals on library subscriptions for their survival.

But that also oversimplifies the situation. There may be a quarter million current periodicals, only 10% of which are refereed scholarly journals. Lumping the other 90% together as magazines may be right in some ways but is terribly misleading in others.

Similar problems arise when people discuss blogs as though all blogs were the same thing—and go on to lump ezines and ejournals in with blogs.

We need analogies. But we also need to recognize the limits of analogy. Blogs *aren't* all just like diaries. Blogs don't all fit into any single medium with any clarity of definition. Blogging software is lightweight content management used to create several different kinds of net media that we find it convenient to lump together. Maybe we shouldn't.

These are half-finished thoughts, part of a continuum that began with a book proposal in early 2001: *A plurality of media: Stories in libraries*. That proposal resulted in a contract, which became the only book contract I've ever cancelled. At the time—2003—I was so involved with various columns and this journal that I couldn't focus on the book-length project. When I did focus on it, I found it was no longer a book I wanted to read, which meant it was a book I couldn't write.

That was then. The more I work with and write about various net media, the more I see the ideas in the book proposal coming back to life. With luck, there may be a series of commentaries, some as disorderly as this section, some more coherent. Over time, those commentaries could turn out to be a serial version of *A plurality of media*.

Or not. Remember my series of retrospective CD-ROM reviews?

The New Gatekeepers

WEBLOGGING ETHICS AND IMPACT, *C&I* 5:7 (May 2005), included several pages commenting on posts at Jon Garfunkel's *Civilities* blog (civilities.net), ending with three posts with the common title "The New Gatekeepers." I don't plan to rehash that discussion; see cites.boisestate.edu/v5i7d.htm.

Garfunkel continued the series. In "Part 5: The problem of crowds," he begins by noting a "mini-epidemic of interest" in the series (including my coverage). Ideas and posts spread through the internet in various ways; Gladwell uses "epidemic" and Rushkoff and Godin both use "virus" as an analogy. Garfunkel prefers "information cascade" (suggested by James Surowiecki, *The wisdom of crowds*). Surowiecki's book warns of the dangers of blindly accepting the wisdom of crowds. As Garfunkel notes, the blogosphere doesn't always avoid the problems of buying into the information cascade or virus of the day.

Positive forces urge us to go along. Who are you to question accepted wisdom? What's wrong with you, that you don't see what everyone else sees? Gary Jones, quoted in Garfunkel's essay, puts it this way:

> Perhaps the greatest impediment to improved social structures will be resistance from those dedicated to exploiting information cascades to achieve power and skew social behavior for gain. Activists of all stripes

> work to develop manipulative skills to cause cascades. They aren't interested in wisdom or good governance, they just want to make the sale, stampede the herd, win. They don't seek to inform, they seek to persuade. They don't value dissent, they demonize dissenters and try to marginalize them.

Garfunkel says he aims to "exonerate [individuals] somewhat by finding fault in the technology itself." He believes that the *architecture* of the blogosphere encourages cascades, as do "the values of those who drive the technology." I wonder.

> When it comes to information cascades, blogs are a big improvement to what came immediately before—email forwarding. With email chains it is virtually impossible for the average person to trace the source; all context is stripped off; there is no way to respond in a way that everyone will see it.

Maybe, although ethical writers always retain the original writer's name when forwarding. I'd suggest that electronic *lists* have as much to do with information cascades as email forwarding—and lists preserve the original context and provide for coherent responses that everyone can see. Are blogs an improvement over lists, or a step back? I'm not sure. They may be a step sideways.

Garfunkel provides an extended example of the "new gatekeepers" at work. It's a complicated story and you might do better to read Garfunkel's post directly (civilities.net/TheNewGatekeepers-Crowds), preferably linking through to the sources mentioned. The controversy involves a mix of blogs, traditional commercial net-based sources such as CNet, and physical media such as the San Francisco *Bay Guardian*. It seems to show that people were far more likely to spread an apparent scandal than to recognize a correction. Herewith "Garfunkel's hypothesis":

> People who blog have a much greater tendency to pass along incomplete quick impressions than balanced analyses written later, by a ratio of greater than seven to one. Or, the blogosphere breeds propaganda better than the corrections. I doubt that any serious person in civil society would be proud of that ratio. And I doubt that the traditional media [are] anywhere close to that ratio.

He then proceeds to recognize "a mistake I've made."

> The old gatekeepers and the new gatekeepers are not the same. Both, after all, influence what we watch and read. The difference is that the old gatekeepers do so by restricting information. The new gatekeepers do so by manipulating information cascades. Perhaps we shudder at the thought of information being restricted consciously. But it just may be preferable to having information manipulated without any awareness of the people involved.

Well…*are* there really "new gatekeepers"? Here's a list of "names in the last story:" Michael Bassik, Chris Nolan, Dan Gillmor, Michael Hirsh. Who on that list do *you* trust? Who *have you even heard of*?

Garfunkel uses Google and Technorati result "counts" as the basis for the extent to which a story has spread, using the Wendy's finger-in-the-chili story this time. I have trouble with that, and with the resulting 7:1 ratio. Right now, "wendy+finger" yields "1,750,000" items at Google, while "wendy + finger + arrested" yields "154,000." I don't believe that means the scandal spread "11 times as far" as the story. I'm not sure it means much of anything.

The equivalent Technorati search, done four months later, shows 6091 and 646 as compared to 3300 and 386 in late April—but when you look at the posts, you see how nonsensical the comparisons are. The second "wendy finger" post has *nothing* to do with the scandal. Several posts that *are* about the scandal don't use the word "arrested" but nonetheless are about the denouement, not the original scandal. Incidentally, making the Google search "wendy finger guilty OR arrest OR arrested OR hoax" yields more than 300,000 items. So much for ratios.

Maybe all this is somewhat irrelevant to *C&I* readers. Do you believe the most widely read library bloggers act as gatekeepers—that they do or can manipulate "information cascades," controlling the way we think about library issues? I'm skeptical, at least in our little corner of the blogosphere. But Garfunkel has wider concerns and he raises interesting questions.

"Part 7: Solutions" discusses "aggregatable declarations"—things like voting, signing petitions, participating in surveys, rating movies at IMDB or NetFlix, reviewing at Amazon or Zagat. "In all these cases, people take a *declarative* action which can then be summed up to form some *aggregate* picture of how many total people are making that statement."

Garfunkel calls aggregatable declarations "crucial for markets and democracies" and says it's unfortunate that "so much of the communications essential to both democracy and markets escapes aggregation." He then goes on to note "practical deployments"—e.g. Google PageRank and Technorati rank.

And here I see why I may be having so much trouble with Garfunkel's series—why I keep recommending it and talking about it, but disagree with so

much of it. Garfunkel's looking for ways to establish *significance*. I'm more interested in discussion and complexity. I believe Garfunkel's looking for the kind of simple "good/bad" rating that aggregatable declarations lead to. I don't much care whether most library bloggers prefer IM reference to separate virtual reference software—but I think it's interesting to see individual threads of discussion as to why one is better than the other. Some aspects of life require voting. Many are better served by discussion.

If you're with Garfunkel on this one, you'll find his suggested problems and solutions interesting. I wonder about the problems. For example:

> How can we get an appraisal of a given article, so that the publisher, and the readers, can be aware of how it has been received by its audience?

He suggests a response system with content rating on 17 aspects of an article. Do you really want to know what some array of strangers concluded about an article—or do you want to be guided to interesting articles by a handful of "trusted strangers," the bloggers you believe offer good advice? The other problems and solutions are more interesting, but I'm still a little wary. I'm not sure these are "problems" I find particularly interesting.

"Part 8: The future" is worth reading on its own. He cites a number of what I'd consider ethically questionable cases, notes that bloggers attack traditional media more than media attack bloggers (perhaps for the same reason that little-read bloggers spend more time talking about widely-read bloggers than the reverse), notes that the current system "rewards good writers and editors," and says he's working on a future that would provide a "more flat society."

Guess what? *Any* text-based system will reward "good writers and editors"—as it should. People are more likely to keep reading good writing. Why *should* people continue to read semiliterate blather when elegant essays are available?

Good writing and editing isn't gatekeeping or protecting an elite; it's learning the tools of the trade. If "the citizenry" is unwilling to learn enough eloquence to make cases clearly, "the citizenry" will not be read. There may be structural problems that keep giving those who already have voices even more listeners, but rewarding good writing isn't part of the problem. (Seth Finkelstein reacted to the "more flat society" possibility with some pessimism, mostly because it's such a difficult problem. "Nobody knows how to do good technology for non-hierarchical organizations…")

The 11 layers of citizen journalism

This essay, posted June 13, 2005 on PoynterOnline (www.poynter.org) by Steve Outing, isn't part of Garfunkel's series—but it relates to his ongoing issues and he commented on the essay at some length. Outing calls "citizen journalism" one of the "hottest buzzwords in the news business these days." What is it? "Harnessing the power of an audience permitted for the first time to truly participate in the news media." Okay. Outing sets forth eleven possible steps, beginning with "Opening up to public comment" through "Wiki journalism: Where the readers are editors."

It's an interesting list, although in some cases "citizen journalism" may overstate the nature of the process. Allowing reader comments on articles at publication websites? Some sites have been doing that for years (*PC Magazine*, *Slate*, possibly hundreds of others). Outing says such comments "routinely…bring up some point that was missed by the writer, or add new information that the reporter didn't know about." That can happen—but many commentary threads at popular journalistic sites tend to be more combative than informative. *Slate* doesn't call it "The Fray" for nothing.

The other layers are more interactive and perhaps more controversial. "Citizen blogs" as part of newspaper sites seem somewhat redundant—is location really a good basis for aggregating blogs?—but "transparency blogs" don't amount to much more than informal ombudsman efforts.

There's more here, quite a bit of it (it's a 13-page essay). In many cases, I'm not sure I see why a connection to a traditional newspaper or other outlet is particularly useful (other than as a way to increase ad revenue), but it's still interesting reading.

Garfunkel's commentary appeared on June 16. I like Garfunkel's formulation of "citizen journalism": "There's good stuff in the clutter that's written by folks who don't write professionally for a living." (I'm not sure which of two overlapping terms Garfunkel means. Most professional writers—people who are paid for their writing—do *not* write for a living.)

He then goes on to "deconstruct" Outing's layers. He seems to dismiss some of them (possibly correctly) as being nothing more than what newspapers already do. (But doesn't putting something on the web make it dramatically new and different, asks Walt with

tongue firmly in cheek?) As I go through the briefer "deconstruction," I think about "citizen initiatives" at my local metro daily, the San Francisco *Chronicle* (which has a robust Web presence at SFGate.com). Citizen add-on: They have a large "two cents" panel to add a range of brief perspective on key articles. Transparency blogs: They have some newsroom blogs—but they also have printed columns from a readers' representative/ombudsman. Inviting citizens to point out government issues that need attention: The *Chronicle*'s been running "Chronicle Watch" for some years now, where people call in with something that some local government needs to pay attention to, and the *Chronicle* publishes a daily take on new problems and whether old problems have yielded results. TV news operations have been doing this for years: It works.

I find it interesting that Garfunkel agrees that providing a print edition as part of citizen journalism is retrograde. "I'd say so. What people want in print are what print does best: great graphic spreads, catchy layouts, dense print (such as arts & entertainment list[ing]s)." Really? Garfunkel knows "what people [universally?] want" in print form?

By my standards, Outing's essay is far too long to read *except* in print, particularly if you want to contemplate his suggestions. Don't read Garfunkel's response without reading the original. If you're interested in this kind of "citizen journalism," read both and draw your own conclusions.

What do I think of *Civilities* and "constructive media"? At this point, I'm not sure. I suspect there's a fundamental disconnect in my worldview and Garfunkel's, possibly because I find net media more interesting in narrower fields.

I continue to be unconvinced that the so-called A-list has any special powers. Yes, they're the bloggers most likely to earn serious money from ads or other sponsorship. Yes, they have more readers. But if the blogosphere has any meaning at all (a debatable point), it is as a grotesquely complex universe of overlapping specialized and generalized spheres, with most of its participants more involved with smaller than larger spheres.

Other Blogging Notes and Papers

The blogging geyser

Perseus Development published "The blogging iceberg" in October 2003. At that time, based on a survey of 3,600-odd *hosted* weblogs, Perseus asserted that 4.1 million blogs had been created on the hosting services surveyed—and that 66% had been abandoned at least temporarily (no posts in the last two months), including more than a million "one day wonders." New blogs were being created so rapidly that the overall blogosphere continued to grow. That survey also includes age demographics, and a recent post on Perseus' "blog survey weblog" provides their current claim on age distribution for *hosted* weblogs: 0.3% are by people 50 and over. Compare that with the results of Meredith Farkas' survey of the biblioblogosphere, noted near the end of this section!

The commentary, posted on or before April 14, 2005, is based on a random survey of "10,000 blogs on twenty leading blog-hosting services." Extrapolating, Perseus estimates that 31.6 million blogs have been created *on hosting services*. It's important to point out this limitation in Perseus' studies, particularly given the number of high profile (and low profile) blogs that *don't* use BlogSpot, LiveJournal, MSN Spaces and the like. BlogSpot, LiveJournal and Xanga were all launched in 1999 and each have between 6.6 and 8.2 million hosted blogs as of 3/30/05. The biggest challenger is MSN Spaces, launched December 2004 with nearly 4.5 million blogs by 3/30/05.

Perseus uses a geometric expansion model to project future growth (that is, that percentage increases will continue), yielding an asserted 53.4 million hosted blogs by the end of the year. That's 22 million blogs in nine months, or more than had been created from 2000 through the end of 2004—but they could be right. (As they note, some social software applications include blogs as account features so that you wind up with millions of "incidental blogs"—ones that get created semi-automatically and may be *zero-day* wonders. I've seen one recent claim that there are already one hundred million blogs.)

The caveats at the end of the study are good and important, although slightly misleading. One caveat defines nonhosted blogs as "blogs that individuals maintain on their own servers using local software." Not really; they're just blogs that aren't part of blog-hosting services. *Walt at Random*, *hangingtogether.org*, and the *Webjunction* blog are all "nonhosted" blogs, that don't run on "their own servers." As with a few dozen other blogs, they operate on Lishost.org.

What I *don't* see in this survey is any analysis of how many blogs are still active. Once a hosted blog is created, can it ever disappear? When 30 people in a classroom or blogging demonstration all open

BlogSpot blogs and only one of them ever posts anything after the demonstration is done, what does that mean about the proliferation of blogs? Are there many more active weblogs than the 10 to 20 million that blog-tracking services claim to include? If the 66% morbidity rate of "The blogging iceberg" still holds, perhaps not: That would yield just over ten million active hosted blogs as of 3/30/05. That is still, to be sure, one hellaciously large number of "citizen journalists" or "diarists" or "blatherers"—or, more properly, all of the above and many more varieties of linkers and writers.

Copyright ownership in blogs

A brief editorial by Lesley Ellen Harris from *The Copyright & New Media Law Newsletter*, volume 2005, issue 1, as posted on the digital-copyright list on April 21 by the e. I'm not wild about Harris' definition of blogs—"A blog is basically a stream of consciousness discussion available to the public at large." But there's no question as to the next point:

> Blogs are original material, and once they are fixed in some form, saved digitally or in a printout, they are protected by most countries around the world. In fact, they would be protected for 50 to 70 years after an author's death—much beyond the life of any blog itself.

You can eliminate the words from "once" through "printout": You can't post something on a blog without saving it digitally, at which point it's a fixed expression and protected by copyright.

What about blogs done on the job or with the encouragement of the employer—say, for example, *hangingtogether* or Lorcan Dempsey's weblog? Who holds copyright in those blogs? "If an organization *requires* blogging as part of the duties of an individual, it is likely that the employer owns the content in the blog…" [emphasis added]. In other cases, it's cloudy. Most companies don't yet have weblog policies. Ownership is significant in that it determines who can authorize reproduction. That's only an issue if others wish to quote blogs in their entirety or use their contents in some other publication; linking to a blog entry shouldn't raise copyright issues.

Harris doesn't know of any lawsuits related to ownership, reproduction or redistribution of a blog's content—and notes that bloggers can always explicitly grant permission for distribution and reuse in the blog itself. I use the same Creative Commons license variant for *Walt at Random* as for *Cites & Insights*, quite deliberately: I'm delighted if any other blog (non-ad-supported) quotes all or part of an entry, or if a professional newsletter includes one of these essays—but I reserve commercial rights, on the chance that I'll bundle some of these essays and posts in book form. In fact, some blogs *have* been turned into books: It might not happen here, but it's not unprecedented. There's even a new "blook" award for such books.

Yahoo! personal blog guidelines: 1.0

I'm not sure how or when I got this (it's a PDF), but you should be able to find it. I haven't seen too many corporate guidelines for blogging. This one's terse and useful (and accompanied by advice from four experienced Yahoo bloggers, but I didn't click through to those subdocuments). Three guidelines offer legal parameters: The individual Yahoo is legally responsible for their blogged opinions—"In essence, you blog (or post on the blogs of others) at your own risk"—and confidential or proprietary information is off-limits for blogging. Yahoo! also asks Yahoos to contact "if a member of the media contacts you about a Yahoo!-related blog posting."

Then come four reasonably brief, nicely written "best practice guidelines," stated as recommendations in a paragraph that ends: "We encourage Yahoos to follow these guidelines, but it is not mandatory to do so. It's your choice. We really mean that." On the other hand, I would regard all four guidelines, each elaborated in one paragraph, as basic for anyone employed by an organization who blogs in any way related to that organization, and the first three make sense for all bloggers:

- Be respectful of your colleagues. (One aspect of that: let your manager know that you're blogging, although Yahoo! doesn't ask for prior clearance of posts.)
- Get your facts straight (particularly since you know more about your organization than a blog reader would).
- Provide context to your argument.
- Engage in private feedback (make it possible for other Yahoos to respond "off-blog").

In all four bullets, text in parentheses is my gloss or summary of the paragraph; the text up to the left parenthesis is the heading for the guideline. A nice, terse, permissive set of guidelines.

Don't bore me with your blog

Here's one I'm going to take issue with, posted by Susan Solomon on July 12, 2005 at MarketingProfs.com (www.marketingprofs.com). Solomon starts

out, "Blogs are beginning to bore me. Not all blogs, but many are getting on my nerves." So far, so good. A bit later: "What's wrong with most blogs? They're too chatty, like my first paragraph."

"If you're going to blog, become an expert on something… The best blogs provide chunks of great information… Don't make your blog look boring…. Pictures that illustrate your points are also fantastic… A blog is about originality and sizzling hot information in written and graphic form."

To which I say, most blogs aren't marketing blogs, and for you to dictate what all blogs should be is nonsense. Some of the blogs I enjoy most don't contain "information" at all; they contain essays on aspects of life, copyright, librarianship, whatever. As for "expert," that's a loaded word: What constitutes an expert? Am I an expert on copyright, net media, censorware, ebooks? I'm inclined to say no—and, by the way, most journalists are *not* experts on the topics they write about. *Walt at Random* looks "boring" in Solomon's terms, I think, and "pictures that illustrate your points" are few and far between in most blogs.

I do find some of Solomon's bullet points on "how to make a blog sizzle" worthwhile. No passion, no blogging. Take risks. Find your tone. Break from the pack. Be topical. Know your audience. In some cases, I'd argue with some of the expansions—particularly for a blog that isn't designed as a marketing tool—but the points are useful.

Most of the blogs I care about aren't marketing tools. When I realize that a blog *is* a marketing tool, all the sizzle in the world won't help: I'm gone.

Ethics in blogging (2005)

Thanks to *Professional-lurker*, whose July 24, 2005 post guided me to this July 18, 2005 report (weblogethics.blogspot.com) by Andy Koh, Alvin Lim, Ng Ee Soon, Benjamin H. Detenber, and Mark A. Cenite, all of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

The group prepared a stratified sampling web survey on ethics and collected 1,224 responses over three weeks. Of those responding, 73% considered their blogs personal, 27% non-personal; non-personal bloggers are typically older better-educated males, have more readers, spend more time on blogs, and update blogs more frequently than personal bloggers.

The survey posited four underlying ethical principals for blogging: Truth telling, accountability, minimizing harm, and attribution. When it comes to ethical beliefs, both groups valued attribution most highly. Personal bloggers valued minimizing harm and truth telling somewhat less highly (in that order) and accountability least. Non-personal bloggers valued truth telling almost as highly as attribution, minimizing harm significantly less highly—and, again, accountability least of all. In practice—as reported in a voluntary anonymous survey—personal bloggers *claimed* to minimize harm more than they told the truth and provided proper attribution, with accountability trailing. Non-personal bloggers claimed to attribute more than anything else—but in a near-deadlock with truth telling and minimizing harm.

Several blogging codes of ethics have been proposed—but both groups surveyed "are quite ambivalent as to whether a blogging code of ethics is needed." Here's an interesting tidbit: "It is estimated that no more than two dozen individuals in the US earn their living from blogging." There are *two dozen people* earning a living from blogging? Remarkable!

One in 10 visitors to blog sites uses RSS

That's the headline for an August 15, 2005 vnunet story by Robert Jacques, based on a Nielsen/NetRatings "Understanding the blogosphere" survey. It's actually 11% of the sample: Five percent using feed aggregation software, more than 6% using aggregation websites like Bloglines.

Is it plausible to estimate that the readership of a blog is more than ten times the blog's Bloglines subscriber base (given that Bloglines may be the largest but certainly isn't the only aggregator)? I'd love to think so, as that would give *Walt at Random* close to 2,000 readers—but I doubt it.

Here's an oddly useless factoid, even if you accept extrapolation from the survey: "The top 50 blogging and blog-related *sites* grew in popularity 31 per cent to attract 29.3m unique visitors during July 2005 as compared to the beginning of this year." The biggest site—a shocker, really—was MSN Spaces, with 3.3m (million) unique visitors in July. "Fark.com and Blogger ranked second and third." *Fark.com?* In any case, what can you determine from the "fact" that 3.3 million visitors reached some blog on MSN Spaces during July? Not much, as far as I can tell, particularly if there were really 4.5 million blogs there.

Discovering important bloggers based on analyzing blog threads

Here's a scary one, a paper presented at WWW2005, held May 10-14, 2005 in Chiba, Japan. The eight-page paper, very much formatted as a scientific trea-

tise, has five authors—two at Kyoto University, one each at NEC's Internet Systems Research Lab in Ikoma, Nara, Japan and NEC Laboratories America in Cupertino, and one at Japan's National Institute of Information and Communications Technology. It's *government-sponsored* research.

These five claim to have developed a method for identifying "important bloggers" *automatically* through computer algorithm, and "acquiring important content from their blog entries" so that it can be used to supplement other sites, e.g., news sites.

I'm not going to provide detailed commentary. There's a bunch of words in the paper that I resist regarding as subject to computational analysis, "important" being one of them. You may be more open to the idea. If so, I'm sure you can find the article.

The Biblioblogosphere

Meredith Farkas of *Information wants to be free* published the results of her demographic survey on library bloggers in mid-September. Go to meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/ and look for September 12, 2005 posts to reach the index posting. The survey included 19 questions and yielded 165 results, from 96 females and 69 males.

Farkas comments on the 58%/42% women/men breakdown: Since the 2002 *U.S. Statistical Abstract* shows that 82% of librarians are female, she concludes that males are more likely to blog than females. "What's up with that?" she says. One response is that the balance of women to men in library *technology* is almost 50-50 (as it is in LITA), and library technology types are much more likely to be bloggers.

Remember "the blogging geyser," where 0.3% of those with blogs on hosted services were 50 and over? 19 of Meredith's respondents, more than 11%, are 50 and over. I'm pretty sure the percentage of 50+ bloggers among those profiled in my own study is more than 10% and less than 15%, so this strikes me as just right. (Only five of the 165 were 60+, but that number has since grown to at least six.)

Farkas offers the breakdown of workplace settings—21.3% in large academic libraries, 15.2% in medium-sized academic libraries, 9.1% in large public libraries, 7.3% in small academic libraries, and so on—and then says "Who says there are no voices of academic librarianship?" The issue is *not* whether lots of academic librarians write blogs, but whether they write *about* issues of academic librarianship.

Half of those responding have had their blog for a year or less. "I wonder how many blogs don't make it past that milestone." I'm inclined to believe that people who respond to a survey are a bit more likely to keep blogging, but it's still a good question.

Quite a few library bloggers *don't* use traditional hosted services. For example, almost 21% use WordPress, second only to typically-hosted Blogger. The answers to "what type of library blog(s)?" can be multiple-choice, so the percentages don't add up, but almost 70% indicated one-author personal blogs, almost 46% one-author professional blogs, and 30 of those responding were involved with official library blogs for patrons.

Roughly 45% of those responding subscribe to or read 76 or more blogs, with 8.5% subscribing to more than 200. "I don't know how those of you who read more than 200 blogs manage to do it!" It's getting easier and easier, particularly with more bloggers choosing quality over quantity. I still have 230+ feeds in Bloglines, and even after being away for a week it took me less than two hours to plow through the posts. Most days, I spend half an hour (give or take) checking Bloglines, usually in a 15-minute morning session and another 15-minute evening session.

The last question was "Why do you blog?" The most common answers, after Farkas helpfully grouped the answers into categories: To share ideas with others/to communicate with colleagues, friends, family (40.5%); to record ideas for self/to keep current (24.1%); and to network/to build community (19%). There are eight other categories noted; I find it interesting that only 14 (12%) said "to write/to build up one's writing skills" and refreshing that only five (4.3%) said "to market self/self-promotion."

An interesting survey, carefully reported. **Worth reading** on its own; very good work.

The Library Stuff

Arnold, Stephen E., "Relevance and the end of objective hits," *Online* 29:5 (September/October 2005): 16-21.

> Information professionals expect search results to reflect their search query. This is what happens with traditional online search services.

That's the blurb for this fascinating article. Or, as the first sentence says: "Ask LexisNexis, Factiva, Dialog,

EBSCO*host*, or ProQuest to return information on, say, Macedonian weapons, and that's what you get." An exact match—without broadening, autotruncation (usually), the service trying to "outguess the searcher," or sponsored links.

That's not the case with Web search engines—and the *order* in which results are displayed is unpredictable: "Relevance ranking replaces objectivity." This encourages the "cottage industry of search optimizers." This article discusses the extent to which search engine optimization works and how it may affect the validity and relevance of search results.

Arnold is a careful writer: He notes that "search" is a single syllable that "embraces a mind-boggling range of meaning," and that "relevance" (in the Web search sense) is "another slippery fish." Traditional information retrieval experts think of relevance in terms of precision and recall—how effectively the search and engine *reject* stuff the searcher doesn't want (precision) and *include* everything the searcher does want (recall). That's not Web search "relevance."

I now understand the difference between search optimization "cheats" (hidden text, link farms, blog seeding/comment spam, metatag spamming, etc.) and what Arnold calls "organic optimization," which includes "surprisingly common-sense actions."

For example, dynamic URLs may interfere with page ranking; so may frames. Site maps may improve site indexing. Sites with current content tend to do better, as do sites with "thematically related content." Links from *reputable* sites help; links from questionable sites may hurt. *Good* metadata can help.

There's lots more here. **Highly recommended**.

Bell, Lori, and Tom Peters, "Digital library services for all," *American Libraries* 36:8 (September 2005): 46-9.

"Brick-and-mortar libraries can be intimidating places for print-impaired people, including those who are blind or visually impaired, or who have reading disabilities." That's the lead sentence for this article, which considers a number of recent technological and programmatic innovations to improve access for "print-impaired" patrons.

The first discussion doesn't seem to fit the overall topic. OPAL, Online Programming for All Libraries, is an interesting initiative to expand library programming through online collaboration and online programs. It's not clear from the description that OPAL's uses are limited to print-impaired patrons.

The others seem more specifically accessibility-oriented. MI-DTP, the Mid-Illinois Digital Talking Book Project, is a "year-long bakeoff" to test various downloadable digital audiobook systems and players. The Unabridged digital audiobook delivery service uses OverDrive's downloadable digital audiobooks as the basis for a delivery system. InfoEyes uses QuestionPoint as the basis for "a virtual reference and information service for the visually impaired."

A good article, including some useful concerns.

Cohen, Scott, ed., "Interviews: On the future of libraries," *Tennessee libraries* 55:2 (www.lib.utk.edu/~tla/TL/v55n2/interview552.htm)

This feature offers responses from 19 librarians to two questions: "What do you think libraries can do to remain viable in the age of the Internet?" and "What can libraries do to stay important to their patrons?"

Most respondents are from academic libraries; only three are from public libraries. That is, in some ways, a shame—particularly when you get comments such as this, from Rick Anderson's response: "Besides, the [research] skills we teach [college students] aren't going to have much applicability in the real world, where they won't have access to the library's resources." Anderson is at the University of Nevada-Reno, and he *seems* to be dismissing the possibility that public libraries have licensed databases and interlibrary loan facilities, or that graduates would have access to publicly-funded academic institutions that provide in-house access to their resources.

Responses vary considerably in length and tone. It's an interesting collection. **Recommended**.

Gall, James E., "Dispelling five myths about e-books," *Information Technology and Libraries* 24:1 (March 2005): 25-31.

What's the difference between an opinion piece on ebooks and a scholarly article in a refereed journal? In this case, 45 footnotes and the writer's Assistant Professor status—and the fact that it was submitted to a scholarly journal. It's worth reading, but I find it puzzling in some areas, specifically "myths" that I don't think are widely believed.

"Myth 1—E-books represent a new idea that has failed." Ebooks certainly aren't new and "failed" oversimplifies the complex marketplace. I'll argue that *dedicated ebook appliances* have demonstrated astonishing degrees of marketplace failure (although they're not all that new), but that's quite a different story.

"Myth 2—E-books are easily defined." That's why I published a nine-part breakdown in *American Libraries* (not cited) and others (such as Donald Hawkins) have published similarly complex views of the ebook market. Who says ebooks are easy to define?

"Myth 3—E-books and printed books are competing media." That's only a myth because the *asserted* competition failed so badly. The first paragraph under that head asserts a "protagonist/antagonist" stance for most articles that I haven't found in most *informed* discussions of ebooks over the past few years.

"Myth 4—E-books are expensive." Again, who's promulgating this so-called myth? Gall goes on to cite the huge costs of handling *printed forms* as a cost of "the printed page," which may be true but has nothing to do with either print books or ebooks.

"Myth 5—E-books are a passing fad." An odd fad, since they're only successful in a range of niche markets. That discussion ends with an astonishing statement: "In a few years, we may find that nontechnology-related endeavors are no longer represented in our information landscape." Say what?

As one who's been accused of raising straw men, I'm reluctant to make that accusation—but it's hard to avoid in this case. I found portions of the article interesting, but had to struggle against the urge to write detailed rejoinders. For example, he warns libraries that "committing to a technology that concurrently requires consumer success can be problematic"—but in most cases, committing to technologies that *lack* consumer success is either fatal or irrelevant. All in all, an odd, interesting, and frustrating discussion.

Mann, Thomas, "Google Print vs. onsite collections," *American Libraries* 36:7 (August 2005): 45-6.

There are, I believe, two separate (if intertwined) themes in this article—and one of them has received much more critical commentary than the other, perhaps unfortunately. The first theme is stated in the subhead: "Don't send your paper copies off to remote storage just yet." Mann points up this theme by recounting a comment during a meeting about Google Print: "[One librarian's] supervisor…looked forward to having 15 million electronic books so he could send to remote storage every paper copy with an online equivalent. That struck me as unwise…" In this theme, in what I regard as a valuable message, Mann points out the value of a physical collection shelved in subject-classified order.

I think Mann is right on the money here, quite apart from the ludicrousness of planning for big moves to remote storage based on the eventual possibility that some day you'll be able to get 15 million books on Google. You won't: Whatever the outcome of Google's legal conflicts with authors and publishers, most of those 15 million books will show up only as tiny extracts, since the majority of books in the "G5" (the five university libraries involved in Google Print) are still under copyright. As his detailed discussion makes clear, a good researcher *can* find things through browsing a classified collection that would be far more difficult, or even impossible, to find through full-text keyword searching of the same materials.

The other theme has to do with general problems in full-text searching of book collections, and particularly what Mann states as limitations in Google Print. A number of critics have assailed Mann for his assertions about what Google can and cannot do, noting that some of the things Google can't do now *might* be feasible in a future version. Here's one case:

> Google's software can only manipulate results within each keyword-defined set; it cannot build bridges *among* multiple sets using different words for the same idea, or covering different aspects of the same subject.

I agree that Mann may overstate the case against digital retrieval. Keyword searches aren't necessarily the only thing Google will be able to do in the future (or even the only thing it can do now); for another, a variety of techniques can enhance keyword searching to provide some of the power Mann asks for.

But that theme is basically two paragraphs out of a two-page article. Trashing the entire article because of those two paragraphs is unfortunate. I believe the more important theme is sound and deserves more attention. I'm afraid there's more than a little truth in Mann's possibly overstated final sentence, not only for book collections but also for retrieval in general:

> Our profession is in the grip of an uncritical infatuation with keyword searching as the sole avenue of access to book collections; if this is not corrected and counterbalanced, scholars throughout the nation may soon find that we librarians have traded our birthright for a mess of pottage.

Report of the NISO "blue ribbon" strategic planning panel, May 3, 2005, 25pp. (www.niso.org/members/secure/BRPrpt05.pdf)

The NISO Board formed a blue ribbon panel to consider the future of NISO. This report is the outcome. If you care about technical standards in libraries and publishing, it's worth reading—and hard to summarize, as it's a thoughtfully written 25 pages. From the summary:

> We believe that NISO must take three sets of actions, in this order:
>
> 1. Define the NISO constituency for the future and articulate the way that NISO will relate to that constituency.
>
> 2. Develop a well-synthesized framework that looks at the needs and priorities of that constituency, the technical standards landscape relevant to that constituency, and the ecology of other standards-related organizations relevant to that constituency. From this will follow a roadmap and priorities for standards development and for partnerships, collaborations, and other relationships with other players.
>
> 3. Deal with resource and funding constraints and needs.

NISO is unusual as ANSI-accredited standards developers go. Many (most) of its members are not major corporations. NISO standards and drafts are *open* standards: Not only are they developed in an appropriately open environment (while meeting ANSI requirements), the standards themselves are freely available as PDF downloads. That's highly unusual for accredited standards agencies.

The report makes some tough calls and recommendations. **Highly recommended** if you care about the topic—and maybe you should.

Library Access to Scholarship

The best sources for news and perspectives on open access continue to be Peter Suber's *Open Access News* weblog, www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html (and the monthly newsletter from Suber that's publicized on the blog); Charles W. Bailey, Jr.'s *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Weblog*, info.lib.uh.edu/sepb/sepw. htm; and Charles' other blog, *DigitalKoans,* www.escholarlypub.com/digitalkoans.

Those aren't the only sources. In her new job, Dorothea Salo's been offering some fascinating posts at *Caveat Lector,* cavlec.yarinareth.net, about the realities of running a DSpace installation. There are others.

One source has disappeared. As noted by Peter Suber on August 15, BioMed Central has ceased publishing *Open Access now.* That newsletter lasted a total of 23 issues between 2003 and today. BMC says that, since the newsletter began, "[O]pen access has truly come of age and has acquired unstoppable momentum. As a result of this success, *Open Access Now* is no longer being published…" Suber agrees that OA has unstoppable momentum but notes that he'll miss the newsletter for its "wonderful interviews" and "very useful profiles of OA initiatives." Suber also wants to see "more voices and perspectives [on OA], not fewer." The archive continues to be available, if you want to check out the 23 issues (they're all brief and professionally formatted).

Suber's desire for more voices and perspectives is natural and proper. If OA is to serve as an effective counterbalance to overpriced STM publishing and means to provide access for more people to more papers, it needs to be discussed broadly. Two things that might help encourage more people to discuss and implement OA more broadly:

- It would help if people didn't fear attack when they show more interest in OA publishing than in self-archiving.
- It would help if it was possible to discuss the *actual* costs of building and maintaining digital repositories that will serve scholarship in the long run without being hammered by persistent claims that it costs essentially nothing to self-archive, and that self-archiving is all OA really needs.

I've said these things before, even naming name (yes, that's a singular) and I have no reason to believe repetition will help. So here are my own notes on a selection of miscellaneous items and articles related to various aspects of scholarly publishing and library access, with a topical focus on the continuing struggle of various agencies to encourage or require OAI archiving. First, the miscellaneous items:

- On May 11, the Cornell University Faculty Senate endorsed another resolution concerning scholarly publishing. This one calls OA publishing "an increasingly effective option for scholarly communication." It calls for faculty to become familiar with pricing policies for journals in their specialties (a first-rate idea!), consider publishing in OA journals or reasonably-priced journals with brief embargo periods, and deposit articles in an OA reposi-

tory, and for the library to do its best to resist exorbitant subscription prices. It also "strongly urges tenured faculty to cease supporting publishers who engage in exorbitant pricing, by not submitting papers to, or refereeing for, the journals sold by those publishers, and by resigning from their editorial boards if more reasonable pricing policies are not forthcoming."

- C.Kelty of *Savage Minds* (savageminds.org) posted "Recursive public irony" on May 24, 2005. Kelty's article "Geeks, social imaginaries and recursive publics" appears in *Cultural Anthropology*. The irony: One of Kelty's friends, part of a group discussed in the article, spotted it at AnthroSource—but couldn't get at a copy because the friend isn't a member of the American Anthropological Association and wasn't ready to pony up $12 for a copy. As Kelty notes, the research was partially funded by NSF, "and any self-respecting American Taxpayer should balk at paying a second time for research they have already funded." Even Kelty can't get a copy of the article online although he has affiliations at Rice, MIT, and Harvard: None of them subscribe to AnthroSource—and his AAA membership doesn't seem to get him in. The association absolutely forbade a Creative Commons amendment to the standard author contract, with a message including this comment: "unlike the many commercial, for-profit publishers against which Creative Commons pits itself." Kelty calls that suggestion "asinine."
- The Canadian Library Association passed an OA resolution on June 17, encouraging both branches of OA and calling for CLA itself to implement OA. (Is ALA next? It should be…)
- BioMed Central issued a press release on June 23, 2005, "Open Access journals get impressive impact factors," and the title describes the release pretty well. Tony McSean of Elsevier found it necessary to beat down the enthusiasm, arguing that the impact factor results are "unremarkable…and certainly do not provide evidence to support the common assertion that the open access publishing model increases impact factor scores." I recommend Charles W. Bailey, Jr.'s July 11, 2005 *DigitalKoans* posting as a fine summary of the "controversy" and some sound reactions, including Charles' note that comparing young OA journals to old, well-established traditional journals is tricky—and David Goodman's comment that the real point here is that BMC titles "are at least as good as the average [of traditional journals] and the best of them well above average. For a new publisher, that is a major accomplishment."
- Speaking of *DigitalKoans*, you should also read the August 4, 2005 post entitled "The economics of free, scholar-produced e-journals." Charles knows this stuff: He founded *Public-Access Computer Systems Review* in 1990. The first internet-published scholarly e-journal probably dates back 18 years to *New Horizons in Adult Education*. Since then, quite a few of these low-overhead ejournals have appeared. They're OA—but they're not "author pays." The brief essay discusses the economics of such journals—which are increasingly plausible in an age of dirt-cheap storage, inexpensive server hardware, and free and cheap software.
- Elsevier never stops spinning. If it's really so sure OA doesn't threaten it, you wonder why Crispin Davis feels the need to assure financial analysts that "authors are really not very interested" in using OA journals and that "researches themselves don't like" open archiving. Peter Suber says Davis is "wrong on the facts" (in an August 5 *Open Access News* posting) and offers specific rebuttals.
- Ending up back at *DigitalKoans*, "The e-print deposit conundrum" appeared August 25. Another fine essay, considering ways to encourage scholars to take the few necessary actions to deposit their articles in digital archives; again, well worth reading.
- **Heads up**: The Open Content Alliance and its ambitious plans. I'm mentioning it here as particularly noteworthy (and access-oriented); I plan to look at OCA together with developments in Google Print in the near future.

NIH, RCUK, Wellcome: Building the Archives

Long-term *library* access to scholarship, including the scholarship published in monographs, requires the

kind of financial relief that OA publishing could potentially provide. OA archives may or may not provide financial relief, but they serve open access.

Several initiatives work to improve access by causing more research articles to be deposited in such archives. It now appears predictable that any such initiative will be met with resistance from both commercial and association publishers, raising cries and alarums about the terrible dangers of encouraging OA archiving. These notes cover a few items over the past several months relating to three somewhat-overlapping initiatives:

- NIH's policy encouraging PubMed Central archiving for all papers predominantly funded by NIH, but allowing up to a year's embargo for access. There's also the matter of PubChem, an NIH-created open access database of information about organic molecules and their biological impact.
- The Wellcome Trust policy that, beginning October 1, 2005, papers from new Wellcome Trust-funded research projects *must* be deposited in either PubMed Central or the future UK PubMed Central within six months of publication—a policy that will extend to existing projects in another year. The Wellcome Trust is a huge nongovernmental funder of biomedical research in the UK, spending £400 million per year and producing almost 3,500 papers each year, so this is a significant boost to OA. (As Peter Suber notes in *SPARC open access newsletter* 90 (October 2, 2005), Wellcome's policy "does not require publisher consent and therefore does not accommodate publisher resistance"—which *should* also be true of NIH and RCUK policies.)
- A draft policy by Research Councils UK (RCUK) to mandate self-archiving for articles produced from RCUK-funded projects—but a policy that allows for embargoes.

PubChem comes first because the American Chemical Society wants to restrict its content, fearing that it will interfere with sales of ACS' SciFinder Scholar and Chemical Abstracts Service.

In early June, Nobel laureate Richard J. Roberts wrote a widely-distributed letter pulling out of a January 2006 ACS-cosponsored conference in India because of ACS' opposition to PubChem. Roberts, an advisor to PubChem, asserts that it is "in no way a threat to anything ACS is doing" but rather complements ACS activities "and provides for the biological community an important resource that is not provided by CAS."

> My only interpretation of the recent actions by the ACS Board and management is that it is no longer trying to be a scientific society striving towards the goals of its Congressional charer, which is to represent the best interests of the scientists who form its membership. Rather it seems to be a commercial enterprise whose principle objective is to accumulate money…. [T]he recent actions of the ACS are a disgrace to its image in the USA and around the world.

Madeleine Jacobs, director and CEO of ACS, responded in a public letter the next day, calling Roberts "hardly a disinterested party" and claiming to "correct the misinformation that has been deliberately propagated by NIH staff and its consultants." Jacobs says "This is, after all, a controversy about science." Her letter—which is available in the SPARC Open Access Forum archives—claims that ACS does *not* oppose PubChem but "want[s] it to stay with its stated mission." Jacobs' reading of that mission says that PubChem would *only* provide access to data generated by one specific project. She goes on to state that PubChem duplicates the CAS Registry and includes a paragraph asserting a long-time conspiracy:

> It appears that there are individuals in the Library of Medicine who, for 25 years, have wanted to own the CAS Registry, and now that ACS, along with sister organizations, helped get NIH's budget doubled, they finally have the money to simply replicate the Registry. This is not speculation. We have strong evidence in the minutes from the ACS Board of Directors meetings in the 1979-80 timeframe, in the clear recollection of Dr. Mary Good…and in current information from people inside the Library. So there is much more going on than would first appear.

There it is: NLM conspired to put CAS Registry (which, incidentally, began with NSF grants) out of business. A startling charge, if true. But that's not the most startling statement in this letter. Try this one:

> We question the premise that the federal government should be the funder, publisher, and repository of all scientific information. That's what is happening now with NIH and the National Library of Medicine. Yes, Rudy Baum has called this "The Socialization of Science." Concerned citizens should be alarmed.

I'm alarmed—alarmed that a society of chemists is headed by someone capable of making such exaggerated claims. Jacobs goes on to note that NIH's $30 billion budget dwarfs the ACS budget and says NIH

"should use its money to support research grants to advance its mission." (I would suggest that using one-one hundredth of one percent of that money to *assure access to research results* might be considered an effective way to advance NIH's mission, but I'm not ACS.)

Jacobs goes on to defend the absurd lawsuit against Google: "The lawsuit against Google is about the use of a name we have had in the marketplace for many years: SciFinder Scholar. It is strictly about unfair competition, not about its product per se." So ACS *still* asserts that "Google Scholar" represents unfair competition for "SciFinder Scholar"!

Steve Heller wrote an open letter responding to Jacobs: "As for disinformation, you are way ahead of us all. You can add untruths, distortions, and misleading statements to that as well." Heller asserts first-person knowledge that Jacobs' conspiracy claim is false, notes that there is essentially no duplication of information between PubChem and CAS Registry, and puts the "$30 billion budget" number in context:

> How dare you use the total NIH budget of somewhat less than $30 billion to say that the *$3 million of PubChem funds* (most of which has nothing to do with chemicals) are competition or will put CAS out of business. [Emphasis added.]
>
> And give me a break—who can really take you seriously when you say 12 NLM employees can/will put 1300 CAS employees out of work? It is an insult to most every CAS employee to imply that they do so little that 1 NLM staff member can put 100 of them out of work.

Heller also has some choice words about the Google suit. I don't know the truth of all this; I do know that Jacobs' letter is so heavy-handed that it's hard to take seriously, particularly as she assaults a Nobel laureate.

Apparently ACS is trying to get Congress to restrict PubChem. A June 14 letter from the University of California Academic Council to Congressman Ralph Regula (chair of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations) notes that such restrictions are apparently being considered and points out the importance of PubChem. The letter includes a worry about "the chilling effect that the ACS campaign might have on creative attempts to increase access to science" and notes UC's considerable contributions to ACS publications (2,300 articles in the last 2.5 years, 72 editorial positions, etc.)

This particular dispute may be resolved, if we're to believe a piece in *Chemical & Engineering News* (an ACS publication). It notes that ACS is looking for assurance that PubChem won't disseminate "information on the commercial availability of compounds" and asks for steps to assure that PubChem data is "pertinent and derived from established, bona fide sources." This "olive branch" may or may not have anything to do with the heat noted above.

The weakened NIH public access policy has had some unfortunate side-effects. Some traditional publishers are "complying" by insisting on either a six month or twelve month embargo and (generally) refusing to allow the published versions of articles to be deposited. In some cases, the new embargo periods are longer than those previously required by journals—and some publishers and associations seem to imply that they've lengthened the embargoes in order to comply with NIH policies. *SPARC Open Access Newsletter* 86 (June 2, 2005) begins with an excellent discussion of the situation.

Unfortunately, submissions haven't started out all that well. A July 15, 2005 press release from the Alliance for Taxpayer Access gives these figures:

> Based on annual data, NIH funding is responsible for about 65,000 scholarly articles a year. Therefore, NIH grantees could have chosen to place approximately 11,000 articles on PubMed Central—making this taxpayer-funded research available free to the public. However, statistics provided by NIH this week show that only three percent of this number, or 340 articles accepted for publication, have been submitted by NIH grantees.

It's early—July was only two months into the process—but those are appallingly low figures, suggesting that the voluntary process may not be working.

Then there's the proposed RCUK policy—and here the response from ALPSP is so predictable that it's hardly worth recounting. This from *ALPSP News*:

> The proposed RCUK policy for mandated self-archiving would accelerate the move to a disastrous scenario in which the free availability of 'good enough' versions of journal articles will allow cash-strapped librarians to save money by cancelling subscriptions.
>
> This will destroy journals' financial viability, and thus their ability to support quality control processes (including peer review) and all the other benefits which flow to both authors and readers from inclusion in a prestigious journal. And this in turn will deprive learned societies of a vital income stream which helps to support all the other activities which benefit both their own research communities and the general public.

Disastrous scenario. Destroyed viability. Threat to peer review. And the indirect assertion that it is the *responsibility* of "cash-strapped libraries" to subsidize the non-publishing activities of professional societies.

One wonders what ALPSP believes "cash-strapped libraries" will do if ALPSP and its allies succeed in making sure that there are no alternatives to current journal prices and practices. Stop buying monographs altogether? Lay off staff? Or, ahem, cancel subscriptions even if that means less access?

ALPSP's full response has the usual claim, "ALPSP encourages the widest possible dissemination of research outputs"—but ALPSP's actions belie that claim. That response produces a powerful sense of déjà vu, with the usual self-serving rhetoric. The short form, a letter to the chair of the RCUK Executive Group, is even terser than the *ALPSP News* item: "We are convinced that RCUK's proposed policy will inevitably lead to the destruction of journals." The letter also "absolutely reject[s] unsupported assertions" that self-archiving "does not and will not damage journals"—and manages to twist ArXiv experience in a way that suggests actual damage.

Naturally, OA advocates refuted ALPSP's critique. An August 30 piece in the *Guardian* quotes both sides to some extent, and includes a surprising concession (sort of) from Sally Morris of ALPSP: That "those physics journals where 100% of content was open access had not lost subscriptions yet" ("yet" being several years after ArXiv began)—but added this oddity: "but there was a worrying trend of academics no longer reading the journals." And this curious formulation about peer review, not as a direct quote:

> Journals organise the all-important peer review process, which is the quality control for research—although the academics involved do it for free—and this has to be paid for somehow, she pointed out.

Ah. So it's not the cost of peer review, it's the cost of *organization*. When submissions and refereeing are handled electronically, that cost should amount to a modest spreadsheet or database (say, MySQL or Access) and a tiny amount of someone's time to track papers and results: The kind of thing that a good administrative assistant in an academic department could handle in a few hours a week for a midrange journal handling 100-200 submissions a year.

As reported at *Open Access News*, ALPSP met with RCUK representatives on September 16. ALPSP says it's "reassured that RCUK have agreed to explain to grant recipients why publishers might find it necessary to impose an embargo…for deposit of articles in order to protect subscription and licence sales, and also to insist that such embargoes must be observed." ALPSP also says RCUK will be "consulting publishers over the specification of the research which will be conducted over the next two years, to evaluate the likely effects of the policy…we hope that the research will be sufficiently objective to ensure that publishers do provide data on the effects, if any, on downloads, subscriptions/licence sales, and other measures of journal sustainability." Does this equate to "RCUK backed down"? Probably, at least to some extent. Here's Peter Suber's comment, given as a "PS":

> It looks like the RCUK will *not* close the "copyright loophole" in the current draft, which allows publishers to impose embargoes. Instead, it may even let publishers reword it to suit themselves.

Big initiatives can turn into baby steps, but those steps still constitute forward motion.

Articles and Essays

Gad-el-Hak, Mohamed, "Publish or perish—an ailing enterprise?" *Physics Today* 57:3 (March 2004): 81-82.

In June 2004, I commented about "an article I don't have access to, but would dearly love to read"—this one. Dr. Gad-el-Hak (Virginia Commonwealth) became aware of that comment and sent me a copy. It's an opinion piece and a lovely one, two dense pages of tight writing with strong opinions.

Gad-el-Hak begins with three events: An annual report from an engineering school whose dean "proudly listed 52 papers that he wrote in the course of the year"; a physics professor introduced "as the author of 80 books"; and a book Gad-el-Hak was asked to review that "was clearly never seen by a copyeditor and was mostly a shoddy cut-and-paste job from the author's doctoral dissertation—and worse, from the publications of others," priced at $100 for a 200-page book. He suggests a "syndrome of what is ailing academic publishing today."

Part of the problem is that publish-or-perish seems to emphasize quality over quantity; Gad-el-Hak says that at some institutions the process has "deteriorated into bean counting." He notes the results: "Many articles…remain without a single citation five or more years after publication."

> Although more difficult to measure, I presume even more papers remain unread by anyone other than

> their authors. The way some papers list their authors today, some articles may not even be read by all their respective coauthors.

He offers one measure of possible shortage or oversupply of journals within a field: "If, say, 80% of the journals in a given field accept 20% of the submitted papers, there is probably a need for those papers. If, on the other hand, 80% of the journals accept 80% of the manuscripts submitted, perhaps there is an excess of journals in that field." Note that this measure is independent of the *number* of journals in a field.

Gad-el-Hak says, "Hopping from one journal to another until something is eventually accepted for publication is fast becoming a pastime for some researchers." That's another way of putting something I believe: In too many fields, peer review doesn't determine *what* gets published, only *where* it gets published. In Gad-el-Hak's own specialty, fluid mechanics, there are at least 250 English-language journals—of which five, all from nonprofit organizations, have reasonable impact factors.

Gad-el-Hak offers "a few modest suggestions" for reform, including these:

- Resumés submitted to promotion and tenure committees should be limited to listing only 5-10 significant publications…
- Coauthors should contribute meaningfully to a publication…
- Researchers should decline to review or to serve as editors for what they suspect to be mediocre journals.

He also says a camera-ready manuscript should be a red flag for evaluating the quality of a book, but that one's tricky, based on my own experience of preparing final camera-ready pages for half a dozen books that went through full manuscript and copy editing before that final copy was prepared.

A forceful, interesting, worthwhile essay. **Highly recommended**.

Corrado, Edward M., "The importance of open access, open source, and open standards for libraries." *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* Spring 2005 (www.istl.org/05-spring/article2.html).

Corrado (College of New Jersey) offers a useful summary of what open access, open source, and open standards are all about and their benefits for librarianship. I wonder about his use of J. Willinsky's "nine flavors of open access," only three of which would be considered OA by most people in the field, and I'm a bit surprised that he ignores NISO in discussing open standards. Despite those qualms, it's a good piece (fully OA since it's in an OA ejournal—and yes, this is a refereed scholarly article). **Recommended**.

Shelton, Victoria, "Scientific research: The publication dilemma," *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* Spring 2005 (www.istl.org/05-spring/article1.html).

Shelton focuses on OA itself in a relatively brief, readable article. She says BioMed Central and PLoS "are in the center of the open access movement," and that may be true of one arm of OA, but there's a *lot* more to OA publishing than the high-profile BMC and PLoS. Yes, they get most of the publicity, but they don't account for the bulk of OA journals. Citing them *and only them* as "Open access leaders" (except for a closing paragraph about NIH and PubMed) gives short shrift to the many initiatives that preceded and accompany these two. **Recommended**.

Bailey, Charles W., Jr., "Key open access concepts," www.escholarlypub.com/oab/keyoaconcepts.htm

This excerpt from Bailey's *Open access bibliography: Liberating scholarly literature with e-prints and open access journals* (an OA publication available at the same address, replacing the last segment with "oab.htm"), is what its title implies: A relatively terse, very readable discussion of key concepts. Bailey gets the restrictive definition of OA as defined by BOAI right on the money. That definition of OA is restricted to peer review and requires not only free access but no restrictions (other than attribution and integrity) over reuse. A Creative Commons BY-NC license isn't good enough, since it restricts *commercial* reuse.

While Bailey also gives BMC and PLoS more prominence than other OA publishers, he mentions the *Directory of Open Access Journals* before mentioning the two publicity leaders. He glosses over one event at the start of PLoS slightly:

> Its first activity was to circulate an open letter that was intended to convince biomedical publishers to make their journals freely available within six months of publication. Roughly 34,000 scientists from 180 countries ultimately signed the letter, pledging not to publish in (or otherwise support) journals that did not meet this requirement by September 2001. When this letter did not invoke the desired response, the Public Library of Science began to publish its own open access journals.

All this is true, but there's one missing piece of "did not invoke the desired response": When publishers called the (possible) bluff of the 34,000 signatories, the letter was exposed as meaningless. Best estimates are that no more than 1% or 2% of the signers took any action beyond signing the letter.

Highly recommended. If you read all three of the articles noted above, you'll gain a fair background in what OA means—and should move on to the sources noted at the start of this section to keep up with current activities.

Maniatis, Petros, Mema Roussopoulos, T J Giuli, David S. H. Rosenthal, and Mary Baker, "The LOCKSS peer-to-peer digital preservation system," *ACM Transactions on Computer Systems* 23:1 (February 2005): 2-50. (berkeley.intel-research.net/maniatis/publications/TOCS2005.pdf).

I've talked about LOCKSS before. This massive paper tells you how it works. Here's the abstract:

> The LOCKSS project has developed and deployed in a world-wide test a peer-to-peer system for preserving access to journals and other archival information published on the Web. It consists of a large number of independent, low-cost, persistent Web caches that cooperate to detect and repair damage to their content by voting in "opinion polls." Based on this experience, we present a design for and simulations of a novel protocol for voting in systems of this kind. It incorporates rate limitation and intrusion detection to ensure that even some very powerful adversaries attacking over many years have only a small probability of causing irrecoverable damage before being detected.

I won't attempt to summarize or comment, except to note the key design principles (expanded in section 2 of the paper): Cheap storage is unreliable; no long-term secrets; use inertia; avoid third-party reputation; reduce predictability; intrusion detection is intrinsic; and assume a strong adversary.

If you find those principles mysterious but intriguing, go read the paper (it's nicely-formatted PDF). If you're interested in LOCKSS and have a mind for technical details, go read the paper. **Highly recommended** (for some readers).

JISC disciplinary differences report, August 3, 2005, 92pp. (www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Disciplinary Differences and Needs.doc)

This lengthy report looks at the needs of academic researchers in different disciplines for information resources; it's based on a survey of 780 UK research academics. The summary of key findings alone runs to four pages (44 findings), including these (among many others):

- "19. In terms of the single most essential resource, what stands out is the importance of journal articles for the medical and biological sciences; the importance of e-prints (pre and post) in the physical sciences and engineering; the broader mix in social sciences and the particular importance of books in languages and area studies.
- "36. The overwhelming majority of researchers in all disciplines do not know if their university has an institutional repository.
- "39. There is a high level of awareness of current debates about open access across the board.
- "40. The majority of researchers in all disciplines favour research funding bodies mandating self-archiving.
- "42. A surprisingly large minority of scholars think traditional peer review is ripe for replacement. The majority for traditional peer review was smallest in medical and biological sciences and social sciences."

Obviously that's just a taste of an in-depth report. Recommended for those interested in how different disciplines approach research and publication, at least in the UK.

Interesting & Peculiar Products

GoDVD! CT-200

As described in *The Perfect Vision* for September/October 2005, this $170 box from Sima Products may be the same unit I saw in use at an ALA Annual Conference, where it was noted as a legal way to make backup DVDs from commercial DVDs. It's also quite possibly a way to copy commercial videocassettes to DVD, although I wouldn't swear to that.

How does a DVD-copying device avoid DMCA problems? By operating in the analog domain.

The unit has S-video and composite-video inputs and outputs. The key here is that the box includes video signal processing options that would appear to undo certain forms of protection built into most commercial VHS and DVD products.

Is it legal? As far as I know, Sima hasn't been shut down (yet). Do you get perfect DVD-to-DVD copies?

Absolutely not: You lose menus and special features and you only get two-channel stereo. Video quality won't be as good as the original, but should be close.

Here's the disclaimer at www.simacorp.com:

> **Notice**: Use of these products for unauthorized duplication of copyrighted material from DVD, VHS or other media is prohibited under federal copyright laws. These products are intended for use in a manner consistent with and permissible by the fair use provisions of federal copyright laws.

ZoomInfo

It's not exactly a product; it's a website (www.zoominfo.com) and an interesting idea, carried out better than I would have expected. Go there and enter your name. See what happens. Try some people you know who have a significant "web presence."

Maybe you'll get nothing much, maybe something fairly strange—but maybe you'll get something that looks like a plausible third-party personal summary. Sometimes the summaries are pretty, good, sometimes they're pretty bad. Most are generated by "parsing" online information—but people can sign in and clean up their own information.

There's an article about ZoomInfo in the September 2005 *EContent*. The founder talks about privacy issues, noting that what ZoomInfo collects "tends to be the types of information people *want* people to know about them," and that it's all information deliberately placed on the open web: The company doesn't read court records, realty transactions, and the like.

TagSense

So you think some people are needlessly paranoid about RFID—that there couldn't *really* be dangers to privacy? Take a look at page 12 of the July/August 2005 *EContent*. TagSense and MediaMark Research are testing RFID as a means of measuring magazine *readership*—not only of a magazine issue, but also of specific pages. I'm not sure how this could work, but it implies considerably longer-range scanning than the couple of feet we're told is all that's possible (unless, of course, you're a hacker who *demonstrates* 60-foot readability). With any luck, the reader is carrying something with an RFID chip—new drivers' licenses, perhaps?—and the way is open for all sorts of research. Here's the final paragraph:

> She [Jean Bedford of Shore Communications] expects RFID to be used for plenty of market research within five years and to become so commonplace in 10 years that nobody takes much note of it, much like people treat barcodes today.

Slingbox

I mentioned this device in a recent copyright essay; the full-page review in *PC Magazine* 24:14 (August 23, 2005) offers more detail—although Bill Howard starts out noting that the $249 device "scratches an itch you may not yet have." Basically, the set-top box compresses live TV, satellite, or DVR video and transmits it over the internet to a single PC somewhere else. It's one-to-one transmission, with some quality loss. If you're on the road a lot and really, really want to watch local news or some show on your TiVo, and are willing to watch it on a notebook screen, *and* have broadband access at your hotel…then this might be just what you're looking for. *PC World* 23:9 has a half-page review, noting that the image quality may be disappointing unless you have ultrahigh bandwidth, but the reviewer "nonetheless found the Slingbox nifty." Their suggested use? "Have a craving to watch TV in the office?" Productivity is *such* a bore.

Copy-Limited PseudoCDs?

According to a "News & trends" item in the September 2005 *PC World*, Sony BMG and EMI have both "begun shipping compact discs using technology that limits the number of copies you can make of any disc to three." The story says *most* Sony BMG CDs sold in the U.S. by the end of the year will be pseudo-CDs (although the article fails to recognize the "pseudo" portion), with either this form of copy-protection or another form. Company people call it "a series of speed bumps" and claim that customers "find a limit of three copies to be fair."

Reading the article, it becomes clear that "speed bump" is the right word. First, the disc launches "its own audio player software" when you insert the CD in a PC—which means using Autorun, which many of us turn off. Unless the regular CD Audio tracks aren't really CD Audio tracks, so much for the limit. In any case, once you copy the CD tracks to PC and make one of your "three permitted CD" copies, the CD version is just another CD track—which has no protection. The article says the protection isn't meant to be unbreakable—it's basically a nuisance. The companies talk about "casual piracy," but I don't regard using my own CDs to make a range of mix CD-Rs as *any* form of piracy—and casual file-sharing with friends is also not piracy, a term that should be reserved for *commer-*

cial infringement. Ernest Miller's quoted in the article in a similar mood: He calls "casual piracy" "really a bit of propaganda. It's an effort to use language to frame the legal arguments." And, of course, part of an ongoing effort to erode fair use.

It's a little sad that the co-creator of the CD format is moving to pseudo-CDs; that leaves Philips to uphold the Red Book standard.

Flash RAM to Complement Hard Disks

That same September 2005 *PC World* offers an interesting "News & trends" piece, "Flash memory to speed up hard drives." Samsung plans to produce more "SSDs," pure flash drives to replace small hard disks, but there's still a huge price differential: $75 per gigabyte for flash RAM as compared to $1 per gigabyte for a 2.5" hard disk (smaller is always more expensive). One solution is a hybrid drive: small hard disks with 64MB or 128MB of fast flash RAM. By saving applications and data to the flash RAM when your notebook goes to sleep or idle mode, or when you're ready to power down, you'll be able to get back to work much more rapidly next time. Using the flash RAM as a "supercache" also means that the hard disk can power down most of the time, which will improve battery life. That requires OS changes, which should be present in the next version of Windows. All things considered, this seems like a sensible combination.

Surround Sound in a Box

That's the title of an unusual "roundup" in the September 2005 *PC World*—four options to provide some form of surround sound without installing a full set of speakers. You know you're dealing with a PC magazine when one criterion for success is "louder audio." But never mind. Highest rated among this somewhat oddball group is the most expensive unit, which I've seen discussed favorably elsewhere: Yamaha's $1,500 YSP-1 Digital Sound Projector. It's a 40.5" wide by 7.6" high by 4.6" deep box—look at those dimensions carefully—that has 42 speakers (40 little ones, two midrange) and loads of circuitry. If the device—about the right size to sit under or above a big-screen TV—is in the right position, signal processing and reflections off walls can work to provide remarkably effective surround sound, according to this and other reviews. You'll probably want to add a subwoofer, and it's not cheap—but it *does* include amplifiers, which helps to simplify matters.

Two Displays in One

I'm not sure whether this is interesting or peculiar: Sharp's prototype LCD display that shows two different full-screen images to two different viewers, depending on where you're sitting. I'm not making this up: A half-page note appears in the September 6, 2005 *PC Magazine*. Supposedly, the two-way displays will be available later this year. "The displays aren't cheap to make"—but Sharp is aiming for a target price 50% higher than existing displays.

Of the suggested uses, I can't really see the first (the person on the left browsing the web while the person on the right watches a video), but the second is plausible—an automobile display that shows a map to the driver, a movie to the shotgun passenger. Not that I'm thrilled with the idea of drivers looking at map displays instead of the road, but that doesn't appear to be illegal.

Epaper's Here, Again, or Not

Fujitsu claims to have *color* epaper with an image-memory function, able to withstand bending. "Public display advertising, including displays of information on curved surfaces, is one of several expected applications. The paper is to be commercialized in 2006." That's from the blurb in *PC Magazine* 24:15 (September 6, 2005). It sounds like a bendable thin-film display (and is based on film substrate); calling it e-paper seems to be a stretch. But isn't it wonderful that there will be yet another innovative way to show us ads?

"Pay to Peer"

Here's an odd one, or maybe not: Wurld Media's Peer Impact (also described in the September 6, 2005 *PC Magazine*). Supposedly, the service already has more than a million tracks from four of the music biggies. The difference from most buy-by-track services: Files can be purchased and downloaded *from your machine* after you've paid for them, and you earn "up to five percent of the song's price as credit for further purchases" if someone buys a file you recommended and downloads it from your PC. The company talks about "greater bandwidth and storage efficiencies"—but since the payment system requires that it be downloaded from *one* PC, not via a BitTorrent-like cascade, and since most home broadband setups limit uploading to a relatively slow pace (e.g., 384K) and may even limit total uploading each month, aren't we talking about slower downloading? Here's the charm-

ing closing statement, from Adam Klein at EMI, one of the RIAA members who's helped fight P2P every step of the way: "Peer-to-peer is a really good thing. It's the illegal use of peer-to-peer that's not a good thing." Except that the prevailing assumption from RIAA and MPAA has been that virtually *all* peer-to-peer is illegal.

Really Cheap Digital Cameras

You can pick up a digital camera for as little as $25. Should you? Jim Louderback's column in the September 6, 2005 *PC Magazine* addresses this question: He picked up four cheap digital cameras to see whether they would make good pictures. These are unusual brands: Digital Concepts, FlatFoto, Gemini—and the slightly better known Concord.

Radio Shack sold him an $80 FlatFoto, a 3MP camera with a 1.5" LCD display (the only image display in the lot—but the 16MB of internal memory only holds seven pictures, the flash was weak, and battery life was short. Target asked $48 for the Concord 1500: 1.3MP resolution, 8MB internal memory, AA batteries—but after he ran through (and replaced) the first set of batteries, the camera was dead.

What about a $25 Digital Concepts camera from Fry's or a $30 Gemini Micro Slim fro Walgreens? 640x480 images, tiny LCD status screen, no flash, no expandable memory slot.

None of the cameras produced 4x6 images "worth sharing," no matter what the light. "Bad design, bad results, anemic storage, and flimsy construction were only a few of the deficiencies of these products." He concludes that if you want a cheap digital camera, you should spring for the $170 Canon PowerShot 510. (Or you could buy a film camera—there are some decent 35mm units at around $100.)

The Good Stuff

It's not that there hasn't been lots of good stuff, but I describe most of it within perspectives, quick notes in mini-perspectives, and topical sections. That means the remnant items—things I want to mention that don't fit elsewhere—sit around longer. Such is life.

"The ten biggest problems in computing and how we'll solve them," *PC Magazine* 24:14 (August 23, 2005): 82-100, and accompanying articles "The net's next 10 years" (Sebastian Rupley), pp. 102-3, and "Beyond the PC, pp. 106-12.

This trio of articles makes up a big Hot Future piece, some of it fascinating, some a little improbable (perhaps), some needing to be viewed carefully. "It's impossible to find stuff" overstates the case for many reasonably organized PC users. We're assured that in a few years "recording and archiving everything we experience in our lives will be possible"—but why on earth would we *want* such universal recall?

Then there are better batteries: Once more, "super-efficient fuel cells" are just around the corner. Cade Metz says "surfing the web is too slow" in an article that felt like a child screaming for more toys *now*—"If you're streaming audio and video to your PC, downloading movies on demand, playing online games, or even sharing photos, you'll undoubtedly find yourself *praying* for additional bandwidth." [Emphasis added.] I might pray for world peace, good health, or a number of other things—but *additional bandwidth*? Have no fear, "Additional backbone bandwidth is sure to arrive in the next few years" (because we're *all* going to watch streaming on-demand movies, right?) and 80Mbps download speed will be available for "between $40 and $50 a month for voice and data, and a bit more for video."

Oh, your PC isn't fast enough either. "The leading 3D games don't always run as smoothly as they should. Full-motion video can be choppy." Wah, wah, wah: How can you *live* with such slow toys? (Cade Metz wrote both pieces, and I've seen enough of his style to suspect the subtle petulant-child approach is deliberate.) Faster processors are "just around the corner" (which is almost always true). That section ends, "Moore's law will one day reach its limit, but it's likely to ride out this decade. Maybe by then computers will be fast enough for us all." Wanna bet? People who complain about PC speed in 2005 will be complaining about PC speed in 2015, no matter *how* fast it is, because other people will develop resource-hog applications that push the PC's limits.

"Technologies are unrolling that hopefully will cover America with a wireless cloud extending from coast to coast by 2012, offering perfect voice calls and high-speed Internet." Save this issue: That's only seven years away. I don't get perfect voice calls on our *landline* phone, or any service at all inside our house on cell. I'm guessing conditions are a bit worse, particularly for wireless, in portions of the Mojave Desert and rural America. But I'm not Sky Dayton of EarthLink,

who promises, "The internet will subsume all networks and be as ubiquitous as oxygen."

The last section is a group of "future tech" essays about space, the military, health care, and the "responsive home." That last one gives me the creeps, just as it always has—you know, the "smart home" that knows when you've been sleeping, knows when you're awake, "adjust[s] the lighting, temperature, and other environmental factors to match moods and biorhythms" because all the inhabitants wear sensing devices to report where they are and their vital signs. PARC, formerly Xerox PARC, sees "the God phone," a "shared audio space" so you're *always* in "constant communication with people in other homes," no matter where you are. This is presumably a good thing. After all, if you're not chatting you might think, even contemplate, and we wouldn't want that.

Gottesman, Ben Z., "Make your photos great!" *PC Magazine* 24:6 (April 12, 2005): 95-106.

This section discusses techniques for improving digital photos in a range of different situations, as explained by a professional photographer and a graphics-software expert. Each of six essays shows a "before" and "after" situation and describes the tool used and how it was used. It's well worth reading as an unusually detailed and revealing set of case studies—even if you may have qualms (as I do) about getting (for example) the "perfect shot" of a natural scene by doctoring the picture you *actually* took. Two of the six cases bother me because they show magnificent "natural" pictures that never really happened, or at least weren't captured this way by this photographer—but if you think of them as photopainting, I guess there's no problem.

Karp, David A., "Who you gonna call?" *PC Magazine* 24:16 (September 20, 2005): 95-101.

This could go in "PC Progress" as a roundup, but it's a little more interesting than that. *PC Magazine* established three problems on a PC—one software, one hardware, one "malware"—then tried five different commercial computer support services to see who could deal with them effectively.

The results are fascinating. 888 Geek Help, which charges $1.75 a minute, never did ask for a credit card—but also provided no useful help at all. "So the call cost nothing, and we got exactly what we paid for." At least it only took 11 minutes. Geeks By Minute ($1.99 per minute, first minute free) made registration fast and easy—but it took them more than two hours to fix the three problems, at a cost of $284.57. While the service did go "farther to protect our PC than any other service," the cost and time rule out a recommendation. Geek Squad charges $79 per incident (and is the best known such service), but in 94 minutes managed to solve only one of three problems.

YourTechOnline.com at $40 for 30 minutes, $70 for an hour was fast, efficient, using a remote-control session to diagnose problems, and effective. In 26 minutes total (including five minutes on hold), all three problems were fixed for $40 (OK, $39.99) total. This service gets the Editors' Choice.

Miller, Ron, "Ebooks worm their way into the reference market," *EContent* 28:7/8 (July/August 2005): 30-34.

"Back in 2000 when it looked as though the entire world's content would soon be digitized, a myth developed that in the not-too-distant future, paper books would be supplanted by electronic books (ebooks)." That's the lead, and Miller goes on to say that this "vision (thankfully) has not come to fruition," before discussing *real* uses of "ebooks"—online reference tools, text collections like Safari, and more.

It's a good overview, although I'd place the date eight years earlier than Miller does. By 2000, most library people (I believe) had given up on the myth of dying paper books—except for those who now hope that Google Print and other initiatives will somehow make physical libraries and collections irrelevant.

Masthead

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