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Bibs & Blather
Should I Care About What You Write?

It happened again—this time by surprise. A library school of considerable renown is putting up interesting compilations of notes and resources on worthwhile topics, including a recent pair on "the library as place." They're long enough to justify and almost require printing: the first half of the two-parter ran to 18 pages when I printed it out.

And, whoops, the printout was missing the last few characters or words on most lines. It was useless. I had to go back, highlight all the text, copy it to Word, and print it out from there. After wasting some paper and swearing under my breath—particularly since the second part didn't have the problem.

It was only a surprise because it was a web document, not a long post on a Movable Type or TypePad blog (that is, blog using Six Apart software). There, I'm almost used to the document resisting attempts to print it out conveniently. Not that you lose the last characters of each line; instead, you just lose everything after the first print page (and usually waste a leading page for the header). The solution? Highlight the text, copy it to Word, and print it out from there—in other words, party like it's 1999. Except for some blogs where it's apparently impossible to highlight a portion of the text: You get the whole blog, or you get nothing.

I wrote about this in April 2005, reprinting and expanding a July 2002 *eContent* column, "Print•a•bil•i•ty." You'll find that article in *C&I* 5:6, or go directly to http://citesandinsights.info/v5i6b.htm. The problem hasn't gone away with revisions to Six Apart software or Firefox. Instead, it's gotten worse as more people have adopted TypePad and Movable Type. It's not that such blogs *can't* be printer-friendly, but most of them aren't.

Increasingly, I find myself asking the question above when I encounter such situations. You've written something more than 400 to 700 words long (one page, depending on your margins). That's long enough that I might want to print it, save it, and reflect on it—especially if it's a multipage commentary. But you seem to insist that I either switch to Internet Explorer or read it on the screen. Why is that?

➢ You don't think your writing deserves more than a glance. I'm not supposed to come back to it later. If the message isn't obvious from screen reading, it can be ignored.

Inside This Issue

➢ You *really prefer* Internet Explorer. Those Firefox extensions? Too new-fangled for you. Resistance to malware? Hey, take some chances in life! So what if 20%—most likely the most advanced 20% of your users—are using Firefox? Internet Explorer is *da bomb*!

➢ You never thought about it: You've never given enough consideration to your readers to *see* how your weblog functions.

➢ You weren't aware of the problem.

I won't buy the last one any longer, at least not from anyone who reads *C&I* or *Walt at Random*. I find it hard to take the second reason seriously, given that so many hot new extensions *only* work with Firefox.

That leaves the first or the third reason. Which is it in your case?

If it's "none of the above," you should *at least* bug Six Apart about fixing their code so it plays well with Firefox. (It usually, *but not always,* plays *very* well with IE when it comes to printing, so it's certainly possible. One wonders just what tricks they're using to work so well with IE and *so badly* with Firefox.) I've seen templates that print out just fine, so I know it's possible. (Blogger has Firefox problems too, but only for *very* long posts. Bill Drew managed to tweak his Blogger template to fix the problem with a few minutes' work, but few others have followed his lead. Still, relatively few posts are long enough to encounter Blogger's creeping-column FireFox problem.)

I try to play fair when considering material for a perspective or essay. When one of the bloggers I really respect posts a long essay with the problem, I'll probably go to the trouble of copying-and-pasting or switching to IE temporarily. But for marginal cases, or those bloggers whom part of me would just as soon ignore, it's awfully easy to say, "Apparently they don't want readers to care much about what they write, so why should I?"

Net Media Perspective
What About Wikipedia?

I was going to title this one "Wikis and Blogs," then recognized that nearly all the stuff I have related to wikis is about one wiki in particular: *Wikipedia*. *Wikipedia* is no more representative of wikis as a medium than *Instapundit* is representative of blogs. As for blogs—well, once I was through with the *Wikipedia* section, the essay was too long to add another section.

If users decided *Wikipedia* and *Instapundit* were worthless and dangerous and avoided both of them entirely, that would say nothing about the validity or worth of wikis and blogs as net media. Wikis offer one set of net-based media possibilities with considerable strengths and some significant weaknesses. They're ideal for some situations, workable for some others, and probably the wrong tool in other cases. That sentence is just as true with "Blogs" as a first word. Or "Podcasts." Or "Ebooks."

Given the strong feelings *Wikipedia* arouses in various circles, I should interject a personal opinion first. I use *Wikipedia* as a starting point in many cases. Just now, I needed to do a work-related task from home that required editing Unix files (which I never do) with vi (which I find opaque) based on a cheat

sheet from a Unix manual (which was wrong). *Wikipedia* pointed me to a tutorial that solved the problem. I suspected it would be the fastest route to a verifiable answer. It was. I've never used *Britannica* all that much. I have a current *Encarta* DVD and almost never use it. I consider them all complementary. I don't trust *Wikipedia*'s "neutral" point of view and I find many of the essays poorly written—but it's great for what it is.

First, two wiki-related items I had on hand that *aren't* about *Wikipedia*: "Wikis and access control" from Karen Coombs of *Library web chic* (August 11, 2006) and "What are wikis good for?" from Meredith Farkas of *Information wants to be free* (August 20, 2006). Both comment on a post on Web4Lib, specifically the following paragraph:

> I am repeatedly impressed by how often, when librarians consider wikis, their first thought seems to be of access control. The idea of "just anybody being able to edit our Web pages" seems somehow innately abhorrent. It leads me to wonder if they "get" the very idea of a wiki.

Coombs says the post "subtly brings up the questions of 'what is a wiki' and 'why would I want to use one' and offers a brief, straightforward, well-considered response. Excerpting:

> In my mind, the primary characteristics of a wiki are easy collaborative document editing and creation. Wikis allow multiple people to easily contribute to the same document and track the modification[s] to that document… For me a wiki doesn't have to have open editing for everyone… Wikis are very versatile and can be used…in a number of different ways.

Wikis *support* easy collaboration and open editing. They don't *require* open editing for everyone in the world. There's no inherent requirement for anonymous contribution or editing, and different parts of a wiki can have different levels of access control. As Coombs notes, "defacement" can be an issue: Users should *not* be able to change catalog records or the library's hours at will, even if you're allowing wiki-based user comments on library holdings.

Farkas notes that people seem to think the "idea of a wiki" means universal open editing, but even the "open-minded" founder recognized the need for limits. For one thing, the "users" of a given wiki may not be the universe: a staff wiki within a library *shouldn't* be open for editing (or viewing) by patrons.

In the real world, open is a relative term. *Wikipedia* has always had access control measures; more have been added recently. These days, spam may be more of a problem on wikis than deliberately bad content (paraphrasing from Farkas' comment), but in

any case 100% openness to editing by anybody in the universe isn't plausible in most situations.

Farkas makes excellent points: A wiki that doesn't get much collaboration may still be worthwhile. In the real world, most small-scale wikis probably don't get defaced: "Other than spam from bots, I have never had any of my wikis defaced. There does need to be some level of trust involved in collaborative editing." If there's a general attitude of mistrust in a multiperson content-generation situation, maybe a traditional CMS makes more sense than a wiki.

Wikipedia vs. Britannica

In December 2005, *Nature* published an article comparing the accuracy of *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s online edition with *Wikipedia*. The article concluded that differences in accuracy between the two were "not particularly great."

Britannica wasn't thrilled with the article. The company released a 20-page refutation in March 2006, "Fatally flawed: Refuting the recent study on encyclopedic accuracy by the journal *Nature*." *Britannica*'s summary: "Almost everything about the journal's investigation, from the criteria for identifying inaccuracies to the discrepancy between the article text and its headline, was wrong and misleading." The refutation calls the study "without value."

Definitions come into play here. The discrepancy between headline and text? The headline said *Wikipedia* "comes close" in terms of accuracy of science entries. The text notes one-third more inaccuracies in *Wikipedia*. Is that "close"? It depends. If *Britannica* gets 99.7% of the facts in science articles correctly and *Wikipedia* gets 99.6% right, "close" is right. If the figures are 70% and 60%, *Wikipedia* isn't that close.

There's no good way to tell which of these two applies. We know the study was small (42 pairs of articles), but *Nature* didn't release all the original data to *Britannica*, so it's hard to replicate the study. *Britannica* says some of its supposed articles were either from yearbooks, from *Britannica Student Encyclopedia*, or just the introduction to an article rather than the entire article—and since "critical omissions" is one type of "error," that's important. *Britannica* cites other problems: apparent "patchwork" portions of articles sent out for review, failure to check factual assertions of reviewers, and failure to distinguish minor errors from major ones.

It does seem clear that *Nature* accepted as "errors" what most scientists would regard as differences of opinion. Taken as a whole, the *Britannica* response seems to undermine the validity of *Nature*'s article, at least partially.

Nature rejected *Britannica*'s accusations: "[We] are confident our comparison was fair." *Nature* claims *Britannica* didn't detail its complaints before publishing the open letter. *Nature* admits using excerpts "to ensure comparable lengths"—which is a *very* odd way to compare the quality of two different sources with radically different editorial approaches! The facts in a 300-word introduction to a 6,000-word article may be comparable to those in a 300-word article; that does *not* make the two sources comparable.

Nature explains away not checking the reviewers' assertions by saying they didn't check on either side—so they don't believe this introduces a bias. That's also a hard one to swallow. But not as hard as this:

> We note that *Britannica* has taken issue with less than half the points that our reviewers raised.

The reviewers raised 123 points on 42 articles from *Britannica* (or some publication from the company), as compared to 162 from *Wikipedia*. If *Britannica* is correct—that, say, 60 of the 123 points are invalid criticisms—then the score would be dramatically different: more than 2.5 times as many errors per article in *Wikipedia* as in *Britannica*.

Apart from the size of the study and what sounds like sloppy methodology, the *Science* study focuses only on science. That's natural, but makes it less than satisfactory as a general claim of comparability. I'd expect *Wikipedia* to be strong on science, technology and popular culture; I'd expect *Britannica* to be stronger on history, the humanities, the "serious" arts, and all that—and I'd expect *Britannica* to have more polished writing, particularly in longer essays.

Paula Berinstein devoted a fairly long article to comparing the two encyclopedias in the March 2006 *Searcher*: "Wikipedia and *Britannica*: The kid's all right (and so's the old man)" She devotes more space to the "kid" than to the "old man," but attempts to compare their processes and audience. She does not discuss the *Nature* dustup (and, given lead times for print publications, may not have known about it).

Is there a battle between the two? Yes, to the extent that *Wikipedia* claims to be the best encyclopedia in the world—and blatantly, given that *Wikipedia* devotes long pages to correcting errors in *Britannica*.

> The primary question for info pros is, of course, reliability. Can "the public" concoct and maintain a free, authoritative encyclopedia that's unbiased, complete, and

reliable? If not, then *Britannica* may rest on its laurels and its good name, although with the Web so free and accessible, it's been taking licks for some years. But if the answer is "Yes," what happens to that shining beacon of scholarship, its publishers, and its academic contributors? Is encyclopedia publishing a "zero sum" game?

Is this a zero-sum game—is there room for only one? I say no. The return of *Britannica* to new print editions suggests not. The existence of other competitors suggests not—*Encarta*'s still putting out new editions, there's a 2006 print *World Book*, and *Encyclopedia Americana* is still around in one form or another.

Berinstein compares *Wikipedia* and *Britannica* in several areas: contributors, audience, mission, scope, and process. She notes that *Wikipedia* contributors tend to be "people with time on their hands"—since you not only need to contribute, you need to *stay* involved if your material or edit is controversial. The core group for *Wikipedia* is some 2,000 contributors, but there are tens of thousands who have done one or two edits (including me). *Britannica*'s contributors are paid, chosen for their expertise, and have included more than 100 Nobel laureates; it's a surprisingly large group, with 4,800 worldwide.

While Berinstein says *Wikipedia*'s audience differs from *Britannica*'s, I'm not sure that's true in any fundamental way, especially given the existence of a free online subset of *Britannica*. As for mission, *Wikipedia* stresses breadth and freedom while *Britannica* stresses being "authoritative" and "definitive."

"Delving into the scope of each illustrates that the two differ enough to make [comparing] a vain exercise. Wikipedia is large and diffuse. *Britannica* is finite and well-defined." Oddly, although *Wikipedia* "tells you how to make coffee," the guidelines say subjects should be "notable." That's a controversial requirement; Jimmy Wales falls back on "verifiability" and the rule that *Wikipedia* doesn't include original research—there must always be references to some outside source. (What's notable? There's a brief article on me in the German *Wikipedia*—but not in the English-language one, and I see no plausible reason to change the latter situation.)

There's an interesting description of the *Wikipedia* process and how it's changing and being enforced. Jimmy Wales gets quoted a lot. His response to people who come under attack is "they are being attacked because they're being preposterous." Larry Sanger's criticisms are mentioned, along with a sampling of responses—some of them enlightening ("Wikipedia

isn't supposed to be the same thing as an encyclopedia"), some of them less so ("Experts are 'hoity-toity'"). There's much less discussion of *Britannica*'s process because it's traditional, involving known experts and editorial review.

Then there's authority. Jimmy Wales always has an out: "Wikipedia is very much a work in progress." But Wales is adamant (and correct) that *no* encyclopedia should be considered authoritative. I don't know what to make of Peter Morville's conclusion that *Wikipedia* "beats *Britannica*" because, according to Morville, "authority derives from the information architecture, visual design, governance and brand…and…widespread faith in intellectual honesty and the power of collective intelligence." Morville's hard on *Britannica*, saying it's "riddled with errors" and has the bias of "corporate correctness."

In the end, Berinstein calls *Wikipedia* "a great starting point" and "Zen-like." She thinks the problems will be worked out. As for *Britannica*? "Flawed, yes. Behind the times with regard to non-Western and minority leadership, sure. Indispensable? You betcha."

Other Wikipedia Notes

On April 15, 2006, danah boyd posted "on being notable in Wikipedia" at *apophenia*. Justin Hall created a Wikipedia entry for her, which she found "very peculiar." After some taunting and edits, there emerged a discussion "about whether or not i was notable enough" (danah boyd has a thing about capital letters): people wanted "proof" of her importance. boyd notes "Wikipedia is not prepared to handle domain experts," an interesting comment on the project.

It's a fascinating discussion, noting errors in the profile (some tiny, some larger based on mistakes made elsewhere)—and noting the peculiar situation of a living person who's aware of their profile. "It is culturally inappropriate for me to edit my entry" (Jimmy Wales apologized for editing his—but he nonetheless did it). "No one asks me to fact check—journalists matter more than me." Boyd is properly bugged that *media* accounts matter more than the facts. She'd rather have the profile deleted than go on in the state it was on April 13. The post is just over one page—but when I looked at it on April 24, there were already more than eight pages of comments. As you'd expect in a case like this, the comments vary and can be as interesting as the post itself: people who think *Wikipedia* should reflect the priorities of the mainstream, notes that *Wikipedia* guidelines *do* allow

people to correct errors about themselves, a *very* long and somewhat incoherent discussion, and others who have had similar experiences.

Along similar lines, Seth Finkelstein has a piece in The *Guardian* (September 28, 2006), "I'm on Wikipedia, get me out of here." He is—and doesn't want to be. The piece has been there since February 2004. It was vandalized in March 2006 and Finkelstein concluded that "the article's existence seemed…overall to be harmful rather than helpful."

> For people who are not very prominent, Wikipedia biographies can be an "attractive nuisance." It says, to every troll, vandal, and score-settler, "Here's an article about a person where you can, with no accountability whatsoever, write any libel, defamation, or smear. It won't be a marginal comment with the social status of an inconsequential rant, but rather will be made prominent about the person, and reputation-laundered with the institutional status of an encyclopedia."

When someone else suggested Finkelstein might not be notable enough for an entry, "I agreed—and strongly argued the case against myself." But the process used by *Wikipedia* did not result in consensus—and the article stayed. Finkelstein notes the extent to which the project has "evolved elaborate rhetorical responses to criticism" and the tendency of participants to trivialize failures of quality control.

> Institutionally, Wikipedia has a difficult problem: to allow anyone to decline to be a subject of an article would be an admission that the supposed collective editing process is deeply flawed.

He cites Angela Beesley, a former Wikimedia board member who wants her own page removed: "I'm sick of this article being trolled. It's full of lies and nonsense." But like Finkelstein's, *it's still there*. As of September 29, both articles are "semi-protected" and have lengthy discussion pages, with Finkelstein's including extended discussions *on* September 29 as to why it's inappropriate for someone to opt out of a *Wikipedia* entry. I must admit that, apart from politicians, Nobel Prize winners, and perhaps people with some high level of celebrity, I don't get this position at all. You can choose *not* to be listed in *Who's Who in America*. Why is it inappropriate for someone who's mildly notable but not a world-class celebrity or politician to ask to be left out of *Wikipedia*?

Peter Binkley wrote "Wikipedia grows up" for *Feliciter* and posted it on April 30, 2006 at *Quædam cuisdam*. He notes that *Wikipedia* passed its fifth birthday in January 2006 and addresses the question of whether the *Wikipedia* process can produce an au-

thoritative encyclopedia. "Common sense says no" (followed by quick reasons), but the reality is more promising. Binkley says "the openness of the Wikipedia model irritates its critics beyond endurance," citing a "parents" group that claims an "underground cabal of pedophiles" edits *Wikipedia*, a few high-profile incidents, and a silly class-action suit. Binkley applauds the strength of the project in popular culture and current technology, notes that it has much to offer in the realm of politics, and suggests that active wikipedians are "ideal library patrons."

Steve Lawson offers a short note on "Lurving Wikipedia" at *See also…* on June 13, 2006. He particularly loves its combination of "neutral" viewpoint and inclusion of wildly varied pop-culture items. He finds himself (or loses himself) following links from article to article. He also quotes Jimmy Wales' key comment about a student getting a bad grade because the student relied on *Wikipedia*: "For God's sake, you're in college; don't cite [any] encyclopedia."

That quote turns up in a June 15, 2006 post by John Dupuis at *Confessions of a science librarian*, itself primarily quotes from Scott McLemee and a *LISNews* report on Jimmy Wales. McLemee, who has a sizable personal library and access to unusually good library resources, admits to glancing over at least half a dozen *Wikipedia* entries in a typical week and notes its particular thoroughness on "topics far off the beaten path." Wales offers a partial defense of *Wikipedia*: "It's good enough knowledge, depending on what your purpose is." Dupuis' take: "Wikipedia is a good place to get started, get some basic information and a few good links, but you really can't use it as the last word in a university level paper."

Traditional media on Wikipedia

The *New Yorker* devoted a long article to *Wikipedia* in its July 31, 2006 issue: "Know it all" by Stacy Schiff. The article notes the millionth article (in the English edition): an entry on Jordanhill, a railway station in Glasgow. The entry was edited "more than four hundred times by dozens of people" within its first 24 hours on the site. That's followed by comparisons to *Britannica*—primarily lots of odd topics that won't show up in the traditional encyclopedia. (One point: *very* early *Britannica*s *did* include how-to articles, but no more—that's now a *Wikipedia* distinction.)

One wonders about "notable" given that "there are detailed entries for each of the twelve finalists on this season's 'American Idol'"—could people honestly

argue that danah boyd is *less* notable than the 12th-"best" talent on that show? If "notable" and "popular" are synonymous, the answer's easy but unfortunate.

It's an interesting profile, as you'd expect from *New Yorker*. There are notes on some of the most prodigious contributors (and the snarky comment that "Wikipedia may be the world's most ambitious vanity press"—which I'd argue is false, given that articles aren't signed and many contributors use pseudonyms). The project has growing pains: the portion of the site's content devoted to coordination and discussion has doubled, from 15% in simpler times to 30% (of a *much* larger whole) in October 2005: "People are talking about governance, not working on content."

It's hard not to agree with one pointed remark: "For all its protocol, Wikipedia's bureaucracy doesn't necessarily favor truth." The "neutral point of view" can work against the truth, as demonstrated in one case relating to global warming.

Then there's Wales. What can you say about this?

> Wales has said that he would consider Britannica a competitor, "except that I think they will be crushed out of existence within five years."

Apparently Wales is also fond of saying "If it isn't on Google, it doesn't exist," so there's consistency here.

The article is worth reading. David Robinson commented on it in a guest post at *Freedom to tinker* (July 28, 2006). He noted the article as "a showcase for some of the things old-line publications still do best"—excellent writing and first-rate fact-checking.

> When reading Wikipedia, one has to react to surprising claims by entertaining the possibility that they might not be true. The less plausible a claim sounds, the more skepticism one must have when considering it… [I]mplausible or surprising claims in Wikipedia often get taken with a grain or more of salt, and not believed—and on the other hand, plausible-sounding falsehoods are, as a result of their seeming plausibility, less likely to be detected.

In magazines with strong fact-checking groups, it's not a question of *trying hard* to get things right: "It means that someone's job depends on their being right." Robinson says most Time Inc. magazines use something close to word-for-word fact checking and verification. He concludes, "I am not a Wikipedia denialist. It is, and will continue to be, an important and valuable resource. But the expensive, arguably old fashioned approach of *The New Yorker* and other magazines still delivers a level of quality I haven't found, and do not expect to find, in the world of community-created content."

The September 2006 *Atlantic Monthly* included an even longer discussion, "The hive" by Marshall Poe. (As with the *New Yorker* piece, you can find this on the free web.) Poe is one who was being "considered for deletion" (he created a one-line entry on himself), and in the end the entry remained—but that's just the wrap for a gushing, unbalanced tribute to *Wikipedia*. He believes it may one day be "the most comprehensive repository of knowledge in human history." He provides a thoroughly favorable profile of Jimmy Wales, then brings in Larry Sanger. At this point, there's a remarkable generalization: "Larry Sanger fits the profile of almost every Internet early adopter: he'd been a good student, played Dungeons & Dragons, and tinkered with PCs as a youth." *Played Dungeons & Dragons*? As an attribute of "almost every" Internet user? Give me a break.

A long discussion on the early days of the project concludes with this judgment: "Sanger made two great contributions to Wikipedia: he built it, and he left it." No Neutral Point of View here!

Where the *Atlantic* piece goes sour for me is in the section headed "What is Wikipedia?" and continuing to "Common Knowledge." Poe *approvingly* says *Wikipedia* makes truth a matter of current majority opinion: "On Wikipedia, an apple is what the contributors say it is *right now*… Yes, that means that if the community changes its mind and decides that two plus two equals five, then two plus two does equal five." Poe characterizes the *Nature* comparison as saying *Britannica* articles are "only marginally more accurate" (which *Nature* didn't say, and in many areas a 33% difference isn't marginal), and asserts "it is a widely accepted view that Wikipedia is comparable to *Britannica*." Vandalism? No real problem.

Poe reiterates his apparent conclusion that facts—"all nominal information about objects of widely shared experience"—should be a matter of majority rule. "When you want to find out *what something is*, you will go to Wikipedia, for that is where common knowledge will, by convention, be archived and updated and made freely available." Which, among other things, means that if all Americans were *Wikipedia* contributors, *evolution would be a myth*—since according to the polls I've seen, a majority of Americans don't believe in evolution. And there's no global warming and we'll never run out of oil.

So the greatest encyclopedia is one which makes truth a simple matter of majority rule? I find that concept offensive—and I found the article disappointing.

The *Wall Street Journal* didn't profile *Wikipedia*. Instead, it had Jimmy Wales and Dale Hoiberg (editor-in-chief of *Britannica*) carry on an email debate (September 12, 2006). It's an odd debate, with Wales disclaiming anti-elitist attitudes and arguing "encyclopedias should not be locked up under the control of a single organization." Hoiberg questions the notion that "simply having a lot of people freely editing encyclopedia articles produces more balanced coverage" and touts *Britannica*'s community of more than 4,000 scholars and experts. He responds to Wales' "locked up" by noting that a free society has many voices—and "a reliable and well-written reference work helps keep the quality of the debate high."

Wales comes back, "Artificially excluding good people from the process is not the best way to gather accurate knowledge"—but where is the indication that *Britannica*'s process is "artificial"? Wales claims *Britannica* "would have a very hard time attracting the kind of talent that we have"—which Hoiberg suggests is ironic, since he suspects *Wikipedia* doesn't have more than a hundred Nobel Prize winners as contributors. Wales isn't being ironic: "Britannica's contributors, while sometimes distinguished, are relatively few in number as compared to the number of high quality people that Wikipedia is able to rely on." How does Wales know they're "high quality"? He provides no evidence—and given the general pseudonymity, it would be hard to do so. In the exchange, Wales makes it clear that he regards *Wikipedia* as a *replacement*, not a competitor—he wants *Britannica* to disappear in favor of his "new model." He keeps attacking: When Hoiberg says "nothing in [Wikipedia's] model suggests we should change what we do," Wales responds "Fitting words for an epitaph."

Who's right? David H. Freedman talks about "the idiocy of crowds" in an *Inc.* piece—not arguing against group efforts, but noting they're not always the best way to proceed. Wales and Poe don't regard vandalism as a problem. A *Guardian* article says "every three seconds a Wikipedia page is rendered inaccurate" (quoting from Freedman's article).

Sanger Strikes Back: Citizendium?

Larry Sanger helped found *Wikipedia*. There's no dispute about that. He's expressed his unhappiness about *Wikipedia*'s lack of regard for expertise.

And he's trying to do something about it. Go to www.citizendium.org; you'll find the papers discussed below (as opposed to the *Many 2 many* posts), an

FAQ, and if you're interested that's the place to watch the project unfold—assuming it does unfold.

Toward a new compendium of knowledge (longer version) is a 12-page essay with elements of manifesto, but mostly hope and design. Sanger's intrigued by the idea that "*Tens of millions of intellectuals can work together, if they so choose*" (emphasis in the original). "Whenever I think about this now, I literally quiver with excitement." He makes an odd prediction:

> In the next year, by the end of 2007, *every* major university, library, museum, archive, professional organization, government, and corporation will be asking themselves with increasing urgency: how, using what systems and methods, can we pool *the entire world's* intellectual resources to create the ideal information resource? What worldwide projects and organizations should we join or help to create?

I find that prediction so improbable that—much as I'm intrigued by Sanger's idea—I can't take him seriously on that point. Many professional organizations and corporations are essentially *incapable* of "asking themselves" questions like that, quite apart from governments and other agencies.

Sanger discusses *Wikipedia* as "an early prototype" of "how [open source hacker] principles should be applied to reference, scholarly, and educational content." He considers himself a fan of *Wikipedia*—and wants "to *help launch* something better, if that's possible." He notes a few historical details—including his claim that Nupedia's history has been told badly. He cites four "serious and endemic problems" with *Wikipedia*: ineffective and inconsistent rule enforcement, anonymity serving as a troll magnet, insular leadership, and his claim that "this arguably dysfunctional community is extremely off-putting to some of the most potentially valuable contributors, namely, academics." He finds it likely that *Wikipedia* "will *never* escape its amateurism"—indeed, that it's *committed* to amateurism. "In an *encyclopedia*, there's something wrong with that."

His solution? *Citizendium*, a fork of *Wikipedia* with a messy name that means Citizens' Compendium. The fork would be "progressive." It would start by importing all of *Wikipedia* (which is legal given the GNU Free Documentation License and also, he thinks, "*morally* permitted"). Then people—experts, he hopes—will start changing *Citizendium* articles and adding new ones. When refresh sweeps are done to pick up new and modified *Wikipedia* articles, such articles will *only* be picked up if there haven't been changes in the *Citizendium* version.

He plans three main changes in the editorial process: Inviting experts to serve as editors, requiring that all contributors use their real names and follow a charter, and reversing some of the "feature creep" in *Wikipedia*. He offers more details for the proposed editorial system and asserts there will not be top-down bureaucratic structures. Insisting on real-name participation and expecting people to follow a brief charter should help avoid trolls, and there will be "constables" to eject "the project's inevitable, tiresome trolls" based on a clear set of rules. Feature creep? I don't understand some of this, but he anticipates eliminating subject categories, portal pages, and "user boxes," and relegating all project news to a single multi-poster blog.

Two other differences are interesting. He insists on a "zero tolerance policy" toward copyright and libel abuses—and anticipates "much more courteous treatment" for living subjects, including (maybe) the ability to "request removal of biographies about themselves—if they are not politicians or other prominent public persons—or even to have a crucial editorial role in the articles about themselves." Are we not all experts about ourselves? Finally: *Citizendium* will be called an experimental workspace and compendium. It will require a vote of the project's governing body/bodies to call it an encyclopedia. "It's a wiki that *aspires* to be as good as a real encyclopedia."

He'd like to see lots of real-world meetings to organize the project, and he'd like to see those meetings in universities and colleges. He plans to organize an English-language project first with others following.

Clay Shirky posted "Larry Sanger, Citizendium, and the problem of expertise" at *Many 2 many* on September 18, 2006. Shirky's not much for subtlety: He asserts that Sanger's opinions are based on three beliefs, then states "All three beliefs are false." Shirky says experts don't exist independent of institutions—so much for Albert Einstein, independent scholars, and thousands of others who would generally be considered experts. "You cannot have expertise without institutional overhead." Later, he says "experts are real," which seems contradictory. There's more here, but I was most struck by that odd assertion.

Two days later, Sanger responded (in a guest post, posted in full by Shirky). He accuses Shirky of building a "straw Sanger" by psychologizing about him and showing an "annoying tendency to characterize my assumptions uncharitably and without evidence." He questions Shirky's certainty that *Citizendium* will fail

(repeated several times in different ways), "but clearly he badly wants it to fail." There's a *lot* more here (the response is longer than the original post), including a side note that Shirky has his facts about Nupedia wrong. While I find Sanger's style overwrought at times, in this particular exchange I believe Sanger gets the best of it. Shirky does indeed spout all sorts of certainties and assumptions for which he appears to have no evidence. But I'm hardly an unbiased observer; given Shirky's overweening insistence that crowds of amateurs are superior to supposed experts (his whole "folksonomy rules!" schtick), I'm surprised to see him claiming to define expertise—except, I suppose, to knock it down.

There's a second Sanger essay at the *Citizendium* site, about half the length of the first: "How open collaboration works: an introduction for scholars." It's interesting and clarifies that Sanger thinks of *scholars*—academics—as his prime source of experts. I disagree with Shirky that expertise requires institution, but that assumption may be closer to Sanger's beliefs based on this paper. Or maybe not: it's early in the project to read too much into it. The essay explains open source software and why it matters—and how the vision behind open source software can be extended to other forms of collectively owned work. He sees a breakdown between open source software projects (for which, he says, there's often a small set of "senior developers") and *Wikipedia*, which lacks "senior *content* developers." "Clearly, the job of applying the OSS model to encyclopedias is unfinished."

> I think it's time that the editors of the world—meaning academics, scientists, and others whose work essentially involves editing—got involved, not necessarily in Wikipedia, but in similar, suitably altered projects. I want to encourage you scholars, who make it your life's work to know and teach stuff, to become students of the wonders and beauties of OSS development, and think about how it can be applied to the development of content.

I wonder how many scientists consider themselves editors—or whether this passage indicates Sanger could use an editor. (Yes, I know, I could also use an editor.) That leads into a brief discussion of *Citizendium* and notes on "promoters of OSS and open content" who say "these projects won't, or even can't work." I won't quote the stirring paragraph that follows, but here are Sanger's final two paragraphs:

> These well-meaning but wrongheaded promoters of OSS and open content seem to think that open collaboration is a method reserved exclusively to amateurs, students, the "general public," and so forth.

Let's prove them wrong.

What's interesting is how unwilling some folks are to give Sanger that chance. It's not just Shirky. On September 20, 2006, Nicholas Carr posted "What will kill Citizendium" at *Rough type*. He's no great fan of *Wikipedia*'s current state and calls Shirky's critique (echoed by Cory Doctorow, surprise, surprise) "top-shelf guff, which reveals…that intellectuals make the very best anti-intellectuals." But Carr's still writing off Citizendium before it begins, if for different reasons:

> Citizendium's flaw does not lie in having too much faith in what Shirky dismissively calls "the rugged condition of expertise." Its flaw lies in not having enough faith in it. By creating a vague bureaucratic system in which experts gain their Citizendium credentials through community certification, Sanger is, in fact, reducing expertise to a social construct and thus rendering it meaningless, or at least turning it into a bone of endless and silly contention. He wants to have it both ways, and as a result will likely do no better than create another Wikipedia: a vast, labyrinthine garden of mediocrity.

That post is followed by a number of lengthy comments, including responses from Carr almost as long as the post itself. Larry Sanger gets involved, noting that the process isn't set in stone and that it's a practical process, not a theoretical issue: "What *process* should be followed for identifying *Citizendium* editors?" He notes that he's made one proposal—and wonders what Carr would propose. Carr's in the business of criticizing, at least here: His only proposal is "You grant intellectual authority by some form of fiat." In the response, he has "doubt that this solution is going to solve the problems," which is softer than the forthright "kill" title on the post. Some commenters are more willing to give Sanger a chance.

My own take? *Wikipedia* continues to be useful (as Sanger agrees) and flawed (in ways that Jimmy Wales can't accept). *Citizendium* is an interesting idea that may or may not fly. Traditional encyclopedias aren't likely to be "crushed" anytime soon.

Trends & Quick Takes

Enough Free Stuff to Write About

Free desktop software, that is: True "freeware." "101 fabulous freebies" by Dylan Tweney in the May 2006 *PC World* lists a bunch of them—and, as Harry McCracken notes in his editorial, it's been a few years since *PC World* did an annual freebie roundup. "The

planet's supply of no-charge gems seemed to be dwindling, as some acquired price tags and others simply vanished." The old days weren't always wonderful: "In the old days, free stuff was full of quirky interfaces and bugs." That seems less typical these days.

Overstatements? Of course. McCracken says disk space now costs "pennies per gigabyte" which, while technically true, is stretching the truth (I wouldn't call half a buck "pennies," and server-class storage still costs more than a buck per gigabyte). The article tease says, "The best things in life aren't just free—they're indispensable." There are nice items in this rambling list (which combines freeware and free web services)—but I'd be hard-pressed to call many of these "indispensable." Best Bet awards go to Gmail, Blogger (I'll take WordPress any day), Abilon (an RSS aggregator—but it may be an orphan, and it's a desktop aggregator, making it less useful for people who check feeds both at home and at work), and Revver (a video hosting site that puts ads next to your videos).

All the software's available from a directory at find.pcworld.com/52516.

Privacy or a Candy Bar?

Susan Crawford blogged about a frightening survey (posted April 6, 2006 at scrawford.blogware.com): Three-quarters of office workers were willing to give up their passwords in exchange for a candy bar. "Other surveys show that passwords will be given up for cheap pens or for nothing at all—just because someone asked."

The connection to privacy? If you're willing to give away your passwords, you're *automatically* willing to give up online privacy (whether you know it or not)—and lots of kids don't seem concerned about privacy. Why care? "We care about privacy because we live in a weirdly split world." When people *find out* they're being tracked, they get nervous and maybe a little crazy.

Crawford believes "within the next year or so there will be a tremendous privacy-related backlash related to search/advertising and social network applications" and it will come from some unexpected direction. "It will come because people don't realize how public the internet is." That was written in April; so far the backlash on one big privacy scandal (AOL's release of sort-of-anonymized search logs) hasn't been "tremendous," but there's plenty of time.

People who use social networks "may feel that they're just having a conversation with their friends"

with no awareness of data mining. Almost nobody reads end-user license agreements or privacy notices (how can you, using a 5-line window for an enormously long text written obscurely?), and most people aren't too concerned about "minor" privacy issues.

There's a lot more to Crawford's post. She believes "the real battle over privacy has to do with how much the telcos [and other ISPs] will know…and who they're willing to share it with." We all know how wonderful the "telcos" (now down to two, essentially) are about protecting information…

Homo Conexus

James Fallows wrote this article in *Technology Review* (downloaded September 5, 2006 from technologyreview.com). Fallows tried to "live entirely on Web 2.0 for two weeks"—and in the process faced what he calls "the Dodgeball truth":

> This comes at the moment when you realize that one of life's possibilities—a product, an adventure, an offer, an idea—is really meant for people younger than you.

Why Dodgeball? Because of his reaction to Dodgeball.com, a social networking site designed "to help you figure out, at any moment of the day or night, whether your friends or people who might be friendly are nearby." [Yes, this is the article in which Fallows is annoyed by the term "mashing up"—which he relates to "what in English we call 'combining.'"] His take: "Dodgeball is light, mobile, interactive. And for the life of me, I can't imagine when I would use it." He knows how to find the people who matter to him. "Dodgeball is meant for people in their 20s—my children's age. Anyone my age who has signed up is probably also lurking on MySpace."

Anyway, Fallows did this thing: "For a couple of weeks this spring, I shifted as many of my activities as possible onto the Web, using new, hip technologies." He shopped for everything except food on eBay. He used Babel Fish for his translations. He stored his files on Gmail, uploaded photos to Flickr, called people on Skype, decided on books using Amazon's recommendations, watched videos at YouTube, listened to music through Pandora and Musicmatch, kept his schedule on Google Calendar, his to-do list on Voo2do, his outlines on iOutliner. He wrote the article using Writely.

He does note that a lot of these sites and services "are terrific for people of any vintage, and they can handle more of one's daily chores than I would ever have imagined." His major conclusions after the period are that the new web is "a continuum of new ideas," not a single big innovation; "we don't actually live in an online world"—there are times when online information just isn't reachable; handhelds don't work as well as they should; "most is not all"—some web services may have primary functions, but lack the expert functions that specialized users need; Web 2.0's "collective intelligence" may be good at yes/no decisions but not so hot for nuance; and "all this outpouring of knowledge is inspiring…but it is also potentially tragic" (the trust problem).

He doubts he'll ever use Writely again. He'll use *Wikipedia* pages "when they come up high in a search and I have a way to double-check any crucial facts." "As for MySpace—nah!" But he likes Google Calendar (now that his wife also uses it); he uses Google Earth *a lot*; and he's sold on Gmail as a backup site, Flickr as a way to share photos, and eBay.

> I still don't like the label Web 2.0, I will continue to mock those who say "mash up," and I will never use Dodgeball. But I'm glad for what this experiment has forced me to see.

Quicker Takes

Roy Tennant offers a nuanced discussion about "the perils of prediction" in his September 15, 2006 *Library Journal* column with that title. "Predicting the future accurately is extremely difficult" indeed. It's not easy to steer between the wall of hype (and tendency to look at one hot new trend in isolation) and the cliff of denial (focusing on the cloud behind every silver lining). Tennant points out that new technologies and services are assumed to have majority or universal status *far* ahead of reality—don't *you* assume that every teenager is on MySpace and that everybody owns an iPod? Tennant's brief observations are well worth considering when you're ready to predict—or deny—the Next Big Thing.

➢ A few months ago, I became aware of *Good math, bad math*, a blog by Mark C. Chu-Carroll at scienceblogs.com/goodmath. If you're an Intelligent Design person claiming mathematical reasons for your belief, you'll really hate this site. In late June 2006, I was impressed by Chu-Carroll's take on conservative blog claims that *An inconvenient truth* couldn't attract people to see the "propaganda film" after the first week or so. The number they use is dollars per screen-showing, and that's an easy number to misuse. Yes, the documentary dropped from $70,333 per showing over the

first weekend (the highest ever for a documentary) to $12,334 by its third week—but the *actual gross* went from $281,000 that first weekend to $1,505,000 the third weekend—and continued to rise after that. Not surprising: It was only in four theaters the first weekend, but 122 the third. So the movie was only "tanking" if you used a peculiar statistic. By comparison, the final *Star Wars* movie did $4,500 *per theater* on its fourth weekend—not *per showing* but *per theater*—about the same as the documentary (which went to 404 theaters the 4th weekend). Somehow, "*An Inconvenient truth* is only as popular as *Star Wars 3*" might not be the message such blogs as *powerline* want to convey.

➤ I'm not the only one who finds "x 2.0" (solve for any value of "x") a tiresome formulation. Andy at *TinkerX* (www.tinkerx.com), a marketing person, takes this on in a September 18, 2006 post, "enough 2.0" (illustrated with "enough2.0" in a beautifully 2.0-style form, "BETA" seal and all). Andy gets "about 32,009% of the USRDA of buzz and hype" because that's his job—and "it takes a lot, a whole lot…a really, really big friggin' lot to make me tired of a catch-phrase." He's tired of "2.0." He thinks "Web 2.0" mostly gets used for stuff that's just part of the web (what "Web 1.0" was *supposed* to be)—and is tired of extending that suffix to everything else. "Now everything has to be friggin' 2.0, dunn' it? We've got Enterprise 2.0 and Banking 2.0. There's Education 2.0 and Cinema 2.0 and…"

➤ This *really* goes a long way back, but (as NBC would say), it was new to me. Kathy Sierra posted a fine short essay on *Creating passionate users* on March 9, 2005: "Your brain on multitasking." She believes—as do I—that multitasking is a great way to do several things badly, although she doesn't use that phrase. She has a diagram suggesting that doing four things simultaneously takes *longer* than doing them one at a time. I suspect that's true—and I'm sure they don't get done as well. There are studies to show that multitasking *doesn't* work (refer to her post for links)—but people just can't seem to get away from it. Sierra focuses on *mindfulness*: being *aware* of what you're doing. Mindfulness and

multitasking don't mix. She notes how great it would be if, when you're talking with someone, you each gave the conversation *your full attention*—without watching TV, texting, or reading at the same time. She says to turn off the TV unless you're *watching* something (which works for us). "If you want to get more done, *be mindful*. If you want to have more time, *be mindful*. Mindful means *one thing at a time*. It's how the brain works, no matter how you try to convince yourself [otherwise]." Distractions *always* distract—but maybe that's OK "if you're quite content to let the quality of the work go down, or to be *rude* to the person you're talking to." One comment does note "specific, limited combinations of things" where multitasking works—listening to music while driving, for example. I'm never going to convince committed multitaskers that they're missing out on doing and living their best. But I believe they are—and although, as Sierra says, young'uns may learn to do faster context-switching, there's *still* a big hit on focus and perception.

Old Media/New Media Perspective
Tracking Hi-Def Discs

Now that both HD DVD and Blu-ray are on the market, there's a *lot* of press about the formats, the players and what it all means. I think it's worth tracking on an ongoing basis—but not worth doing anything about unless you're a very early adopter or your college or university has a film school.

When Will It Matter?

When DVD emerged (in the mid-1990s, but not as a major consumer medium until late 1998 or 1999), I covered it throughout the early years—with periodic suggestions as to when it could be considered serious. I looked for aggressive advertising by September of half a dozen or more DVD players from at least three brands, with price points as low as $350; players at two or more of Target, Sears, Radio Shack, and K-Mart; more than 200 DVDs at typical local stores (including "at least a couple dozen winners"); some heavily discounted discs; and rentals.

For hi-def discs to be considered a *serious* consumer medium, one libraries should start buying, the

same or similar guidelines may apply. But the situation is different: Where DVD was a fundamentally new medium, hi-def discs represent a quality jump that's probably less significant to most users.

Anyone with a halfway decent TV set and decent eyesight could see the difference in quality between a DVD and a videocassette, quite apart from convenience, compactness, longer life with careful handling, and extras. For hi-def, you need an HDTV—and most observers say you need at least a 42" set to really notice the difference. If you sit far away from your set, you may not really notice the difference even then—and some people won't notice or won't care regardless. That's not snobbery. It's been demonstrated that a substantial percentage of people who buy HDTVs never actually hook them up to hi-def *signals*, and aren't aware that they're missing out.

By my old standards, hi-def absolutely won't matter this year: Too few players at too high prices, too little advertising—and way too few discs. There *are* rentals: Netflix has already integrated hi-def into its system. Why not? The discs are the same size and weight and don't cost much more.

Will it matter in 2007? I'd be surprised, at least as a mass market medium. But if the format war—and apparent premature release of the first players for each format—don't sink hi-def discs altogether, it *could* become a significant niche medium in 2007 or 2008, with a few million players in use. At that point, more affluent libraries in communities with lots of early adopters will want to consider putting a few hundred bucks into small hi-def collections—maybe.

Based on mass-market criteria, I'd ignore the area for a year or two. But given the niche possibilities, I think it's worth covering in some detail. If you think this is too much detail, skip the rest of the article or go to the last section.

Because the two formats are receiving so much media attention, I'm noting *each* writeup of an early player or drive. This early coverage is also commentary on the hype machine itself: The ease with which some journalists proclaim huge success under almost any circumstances.

HD DVD and Two-Format Comparisons

Toshiba produced the first high-density drives to reach the retail market: the $799 HD-XA1 and $500 HD-A1. Both units are Pentium-based computers running Linux; both units are nearly identical in performance. Some observers believe that Toshiba is tak-

ing a substantial loss on every HD-A1 sold. Toshiba also produced a Qosmio notebook with an HD DVD *player* that's also a CD and DVD burner. As of this writing, no HD DVD recorders have appeared.

Sound and Vision

Pages 61-64 of the June 2006 issue offer a "special test report" of the HD-XA1. The piece begins with "the three most important things you should know" about the device: It's a computer; "Like any computer—especially one with a *new, unproven* operating system—it performs well on some functions, but not others"; "If you can get past the 'not others,' then you're in for one very serious ride." [Emphasis added: That "new, unproven" operating system is Linux.]

That second point sounds like Big Trouble Ahead. The reviewer says HD DVD is "a giant success," based on half a dozen movies and one player. HD DVDs "crushed" standard DVDs "every time" and "were better than virtually every HDTV broadcast of film-based content I could find"—and I'd expect both statements to be true. You get lots of details on what HD DVD buys you (recognize grainy film stock in *Million Dollar Baby*, see more saturated colors, get more detail). Sound is superior. It saves bookmarks—"Awesome!"

It also took 80 seconds from power-on to getting a menu and 50 to 70 seconds to recognize a new disc. Other actions were also sluggish.

If you have the right equipment and all, HD DVD offers *much* better video and significantly better sound than regular DVD. Will that matter enough?

The October 2006 issue reviews five high-def discs, one of them—*Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*—available in *both* formats. Blu-ray doesn't come off as well as HD DVD (one assumes they were using the corrected Samsung player, see below); it does better in *Species* and *Stealth*. *The Fugitive* comes off well in HD DVD; *Van Helsing* just fair. All of these are judgments on high-def picture and sound quality, not on the movies themselves. Who expected *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* to be the pinnacle of quality cinema?

PC Magazine

A 1.5-page July 2006 feature offers a quick comparison of Blu-ray vs. HD DVD and reviews Toshiba's $499 HD-A1. It's a 2.5-dot (out of five) review, mediocre by any standards. The Toshiba is "a classic early-adopter product, with its well-hyped bling, clunky feel, technical limitations, minimal software support, and relatively steep price tag." The HD-A1 is "essentially a large Linux-powered PC with an HD

DVD drive." They call the menu system "outstanding" and the remote control "awkward." The HD-A1 does a good job of "upscaling" DVDs but there's a "noticeable difference" between those and true HD DVD. As with other reviews, the biggest problem with the player is "brutal waiting times." Still, even with a mere 20 movies available, on a set at least 42" or larger, "it could be worth it. Yes, at times the video is just that good."

The August 8, 2006 issue includes a review of the Toshiba Qosmio G35-AV650, the first notebook PC with a built-in HD DVD drive. The half-page review concludes that the HD DVD drive *holds back* the unit as a whole. While the 17" LCD has 1900x1200 resolution, a "17-inch screen doesn't do HD justice." The drive is a burner—but only for DVDs, not HD DVDs. At three dots, this $3,000 unit is no bargain.

PC World

A three-page "news & trends" piece in July 2006 discusses both formats and offers an odd "test" of the Toshiba HD-A1 (not the XA1). The video was "eye-catchingly brilliant" and offered a clear advantage over regular DVD—but the player is bulky, sluggish, and has an awkward remote. The article also includes a quick note on the $3,000 Toshiba Qosmio G35-AV650 notebook—and two early Blu-ray devices, Pioneer's $1,000 BDR-101A drive and Sony's $3,500 laptop, both of which will burn as well as playback (although the Pioneer *only* burns Blu-ray discs). It took about 45 minutes to burn 22GB onto TDK BD-R media—that's the equivalent of five regular DVD-Rs. "[Y]ou may be best off waiting a bit to take the high-def DVD plunge."

Consumer Reports

"High-def DVD: Why you should hit 'pause'" (August 2006) gives the conclusion away in the title. *CR*'s tested the Toshiba and found "sharper, more detailed images than regular DVD"—but has seven reasons you should consider this "more a development to track than a technology you should invest in now": The format war, expensive early players, the likelihood that you'll only get full hi-def disc performance from a 1080p-capable HDTV, glitches in early players, lack of some promised features, tight availability— and "other sources of HD movies are growing."

Home Theater

The August 2006 issue features a silly "gearworks" piece in which Geoffrey Morison disassembles a Toshiba HD-XA1 and shows what's inside. No big surprise: it's a Linux PC. Morrison feels obliged to say, "If

it ran Windows, it would take five minutes to boot and crash all the time." That's nonsense—it's hard to see how a Windows box could take longer to start up than the Toshiba does, and XP rarely crashes—but it's true that it would be nuts to use Windows for a dedicated system like this. The review itself, of the HD-XA1, is enthusiastic about picture quality and tries to minimize the flaws of the player while acknowledging some of them. (If you touch remote buttons a little too hard, the remote signals twice and the player *ignores* the command. Keep trying and the player locks up.) This review clarifies what you get for the $300 difference between the HD-A1 and HD-XA1: a backlit remote, a motorized door, and a "better enclosure." A one-page roundup covers the dozen HD DVD titles available when the issue came out. Other than *Serenity* (the instant demo disc), one question is how many of these dozen you really want to see again.

The October 2006 issue reviews four HD DVD discs, which may give some idea of the star material that's coming out: *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (the only one that gets a full five-eyeballs for video quality), along with *Lethal Weapon* and *Enter the Dragon* (which doesn't look that much better than the DVD). Incidentally, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* is a twofer: one side's DVD, the other's HD DVD.

The Perfect Vision

The July/August 2006 issue reviews the more expensive Toshiba, again an enthusiastic review despite flaws. "Overall, I'd say that Toshiba's first foray into the brave new world of HD DVD is a big success." The summary box includes several of the problems— including one I didn't notice elsewhere: If you hit Stop instead of Pause, you're SOL—the disc restarts *from the beginning*, not from where you left off.

In the September 2006 issue, the "Industry insider" section cites a June Samsung forecast that high-def formats will sell some 620,000 machines *this year*—400,000 players and 220,000 recorders, 60% Blu-ray, 40% HD DVD. That seems optimistic given the current state of affairs. The forecast goes on to show wild growth, up to around 47 million devices sold in 2010. Anything's possible, I suppose. The same section notes that Samsung's not ready (yet) to produce a universal high-def player. LG Electronics does plan such a player.

PC World

A comparative review in the September 2006 issue considers laptops with hi-def drives: Toshiba's $3,000

Qosmio G35-AV650 with an HD DVD *player*, and Sony's $3,499 VAIO VGN-AR190G with a Blu-ray *burner*. Both units have high-gloss 17" screens with 1920x1200 resolution (the Toshiba may be brighter); both have a 2GHz Intel Core Duo T2500 CPU, 1GB RAM and 200GB disk, both are hefty (10.4lb. for the Toshiba, 8.3 for the Sony); and the Toshiba will only output 1080i to an external TV, while the Sony exports 1080p. There are problems with the DVD playback software on the Sony; playback wasn't as smooth as on the Toshiba. Given that the Toshiba's less expensive, had much better battery life, and offered smoother playback, it got a higher rating: 86 (very good) to the Sony's 79 (good)—but only the Sony can *write* 25GB to a disc.

A "plugged in" note in the same issue discusses Ricoh optics to make universal players easier to build, but the writer also says the whole situation has turned him off: "[D]o me a favor and wake me in a couple of years, when multiformat drivers should be available and possibly even affordable."

Blu-ray

Blu-ray drives took longer but were *still* apparently rushed to market, as were the discs. On the other hand, Blu-ray recorders—built into Sony VAIO PCs and as internal drives available for sale—were available well before any HD DVD recorders, and Blu-ray was the first to be available from more than one vendor. (There's an RCA HD DVD player, but it's just a Toshiba with an RCA label.)

PC Magazine

The August 8, 2006 issue reviews the first PC with a built-in Blu-ray burner, Sony's $2,250 VAIO VCG-RC310G. It's "fast and attractive" and can burn single and dual-layer Blu-ray discs (the latter holding 50GB), but the process isn't that fast: 22GB took 44 minutes to burn and another 44 to verify. "The temperamental drive keeps us from recommending this system wholeheartedly."

In the August 22, 2006 issue, the Samsung BD-P1000 Blu-ray player gets a strong four dots despite its $1000 price and complaints about the remote control. The brief review includes this telling phrase: "While most of us await an affordable player that supports both of the HD disc formats…"

Sony's $3,500 VAIO VGN-AR190G notebook gets 3.5 dots; it includes a Blu-ray burner, but the playback software's apparently buggy and the drive's *very*

slow: 90 minutes to burn 22GB on a recordable disc, *three hours* on a rewritable. The advice: It's a great laptop. But hold off on taking the HD plunge until Sony hammers out some software issues—and more Blu-ray titles hit the shelves."

The Perfect Vision

The cover story for September 2006, "Hurray for Blu-ray!" links to a five-page technical discussion of Blu-ray (and comparison with DVD) and mixed review of the $1,000 Samsung BD-P1000. On the plus side, the Samsung *does* produce 1080p output, is twice as responsive as the Toshiba (47 seconds from power up to first image) and has enough sense to pick up from where you left off if you hit Stop, then Play. It also (unlike the Toshiba) decodes color correctly and yields good 720p output. Unfortunately, the first Samsungs also had noise reduction turned on in a video chip, resulting in softening of the ultrasharp image: It just didn't look like true high-def. That problem should be fixed in most production players. As with the Toshiba, the favorable review boils down to *"it's **gonna** be great."*

A sidebar in the technical section describes Sony's Terre Haute (IN) disc manufacturing facility, which should have a dozen Blu-ray lines in operation by the time you read this. October U.S. capacity is nearly five million discs per month, of which up to 1.5 million can be 50GB dual-layer discs. The most interesting part: Where DVDs are mastered in a 12-step, "environmentally unfriendly, physically distributed routine," BD mastering is a five-step single-box process—faster, more compact, easier on the environment, and yielding discs that have a tough topcoat right out of the box, "tougher and more scratch-resistant than either CDs or DVDs." Sony expects Blu-ray costs to be 15% higher than DVD by this fall—does that mean 6.9 cents (see below)?

PC World

The August 2006 issue includes a half-page test report of a lesser-known Blu-ray drive: the I-O Data BRD-UM2/U, $999. Unlike the first drive they tested (the Pioneer BDR-101A), this one also burns CD and DVD discs. Otherwise, its performance is similar to the Pioneer for BD-R discs. It's a lot slower for rewritable BD-RE: almost 98 minutes to format a disk and packet-write 22GB of data, as compared to less than 45 minutes to master 22GB to a BD-R disk. Still, the BRD-UM2/U does everything (except HD DVD): dual-layer multi-format DVD, CD, even DVD-RAM. It

comes with a strong software bundle and gets a high 87 rating.

A full-page September 2006 review calls Samsung's Blu-ray player "well-crafted but pricey," notes that it's quieter than the Toshiba and has a better display (as well as having faster navigation and more intelligent choices). Either the noise-reduction problem had been solved by this time or *PC World*'s reviewer was less critical; she found the two formats comparably stunning.

Sound & Vision

The September 2006 cover's upbeat: "Blu-Ray Blasts Off! Exclusive! World's First Player Tested: Samsung's $1,000 Beauty. World's First Discs: 4 Movies Go Head to Head." You gotta love "Exclusive!," since other magazines in this genre *also* reviewed the Samsung player in the September issue and *PC* reviewed it in an August issue.

The writeup, "Blu Adventure: Unraveling the mysteries of Samsung's Blu-ray player," is more subdued. It's more about the mystery than anything else—why didn't the picture look a lot better? I've noted the apparent answer above; this discussion goes into more detail on the process leading up to the discovery and other aspects of the BD-P1000's performance. The reviewer found *no* difference between 1080i and 1080p output (1080p is one edge the Samsung has over the Toshiba)—and it turns out there are good reasons that, for movies at least, there *shouldn't* be any difference. On the plus side, the Samsung yielded the best sound quality the reviewers have ever heard from a DVD (via uncompressed high-res PCM), does a great job of upconverting regular DVDs, looks good (it's a handsome design), and works faster than the Toshiba. On the minus side…well, it gets stranger here, because they were able to review a second player with the noise reduction turned off. The picture was better, but variably so, which may be the fault of the early discs or may mean that more work is needed on the player's electronics. It's conceivable that compression techniques are partly to blame: Most early HD DVD discs are dual-layer 30GB discs using VC-1, while almost all early Blu-ray discs are single-layer 25GB discs using MPEG2, which doesn't compress as much. Right now, HD DVD wins for picture quality.

"4 movies go head to head" is a review of the first four Blu-ray discs they could get their hands on—and since *none* of the four gets better than a "Good" rating for picture quality, there's little point in discussing

them (sound quality was exceptional in some cases). Except for one thing: Not only didn't the movies have any new extras, some stripped out some of the extras from the DVD. Pay more, get less: What a concept!

Home Theater

Yes, this October 2006 review of the Samsung BD-P1000 was a little late. But it comes with the same gonzo extra as *Home Theater*'s Toshiba review: Geoff Morrison disassembling a player to show what it looks like inside. The point? The Samsung's innards look a lot more like a regular DVD player than the Toshiba Linux box—and the MPEG decoder chip is the same one used in the Toshiba players. The review itself is subtitled "The war begins…with a whimper." That's appropriate. The Samsung had better ergonomics than the Toshiba, a better remote, better response time—and the visual problems already mentioned. Morrison believes it's as much the fault of the DVDs as the player. He says you'll have to wait and see. "In the meantime, I'll be enjoying HD DVD."

Other Notes and Commentary

"10 reasons why high definition DVD formats have already failed"—posted June 21, 2006 at *Audioholics online a/v magazine* (www.audioholics.com)—calls the HD DVD/Blu-ray war "the most ridiculous thing I've seen in a long time" and offers ten reasons "HD DVD and Blu-ray Disc will never turn into the dominant formats for digital media viewing"—which, I would note, is quite different from "failed." (As a parallel, I can't imagine *any* ebook observer who would call ebooks a "failure" if they had 25% of the book publishing market—even though that wouldn't make them the dominant format for book reading.)

The ten reasons? There's a certain amount of condescension for "Billy Bob" and other ordinary consumers, but some reasons seem sound—including the obvious "format wars don't sell players." HD DVD and Blu-ray don't offer the convenience breakthrough that DVD did; "studios are conservative, greedy and unmotivated" to provide the mass release of high-def titles that we need; Sony's Playstation3 (which will include a Blu-ray player) isn't going to save the day; and the newfound skepticism of the media certainly doesn't help. Some seem less significant—e.g., the "false start" of the first Toshiba HD DVD players without support for the highest resolution video or audio.

An August 29, 2006 story in the Los Angeles *Times* is surprisingly upbeat about high-def, even as

it's a movie-industry story highlighting the importance of continued growth in DVD sales. The sale of *nine* Samsung Blu-ray players in a West LA Best Buy is "poetry to Hollywood's ears," as some sort of indication that high-def DVDs will take off. Why is this important? "The DVD go-go years are over." Not that DVDs aren't selling, but sales are no longer growing rapidly—and people won't buy crappy movies for $20 these days.

The story shows how much studios loved DVDs: They could "make and market one for $5 and then sell it to consumers for more than $17, a tidy profit of at least $12 bucks per disc." How much cash could that generate? *Finding Nemo* is the all-time DVD best-seller: $537 million—even more than its astonishing $340 million U.S. box office. Not that sales are either small or falling: Expectations are about 3.2% *more* sales this year, for about $24.6 billion. Studios also rip off the creative artists (gee, that's new)—royalties are typically based on 20% of net income.

It's a somewhat cynical story, saying many people have "rafts of the shiny jewel cases they've never even opened." (Hmm. DVDs normally don't come in shiny jewel cases; they come in longboxes that are typically not all that shiny. Never mind.) Maybe that's true in LA; do most of you have tons of DVDs you have no expectation of ever watching?

Studio people are optimistic. One Fox executive expects a 10-20% household penetration (presumably for Blu-ray, which Fox is backing) "next Christmas" (2006 or 2007?) and 50% household penetration within four years. Given that you probably can't tell the difference from regular DVD on anything smaller than a 42" screen, that seems unlikely.

Reuters had a breathless story on September 26, 2006, on how "New technology could nip DVD format war in the bud." It's a blurb for New Medium Enterprises (NME), an outfit that says it can reliably produce multilayer discs "containing one film in different, competing formats." Actually, NME talks about the discs; the "competing formats" idea appears to come from the journalist. Since both HD DVD and Blu-ray *already* provide for multiple layers, it's not at all clear that NME could legitimately produce a dual-format disc (other than as a two-sided disc, which is already theoretically possible). Maybe they could, but just having a high-yield multilayer process isn't the only issue. One interesting note in the article: Apparent production costs for single-layer DVDs are around six cents. *Six cents*. Toward the end, it gets stranger:

NME talks about discs with up to ten different layers—and it's created its own player. Which means *yet another incompatible format*.

Don Labriola provides an excellent overview in "Battle of the New DVDs," *PC Magazine* 25:17 (October 3, 2006). He provides some of the backstory (including how Hollywood's increasingly paranoid DRM requirements delayed both launches), notes that both players and discs were rushed to market "and many of them look it," and generally offers a crisp overview. Sidebars offer quick summaries of the five units *PC* has reviewed to date (the Toshiba player and Qosmio notebook for HD DVD, Pioneer's Blu-ray burner, the Samsung Blu-ray player and Sony VAIO notebook) and a "bottom line" page saying "it's way too soon now for most people to buy" and indicating when some missing features might show up. Two side-by-side comparisons are particularly interesting. A face-off provides similar format comparisons to ones I've seen before and notes which studios currently claim exclusive support for one format: Universal for HD DVD, Disney, Fox, Lionsgate, MGM, and Sony for Blu ray, with Warner and Paramount supporting both. Then they offer "our picks right now and in the future"—and if you read them carefully, you'll see their take is basically mine. While HD DVD has advantages right now (picture quality, selection and cost), they anticipate that "when the smoke clears" everything will be tied—*except* picture quality and disc selection, where they expect Blu-ray to emerge as the winner.

My Take

The question above was "When will it matter?" Another version of that question drops the first word. Given the results of several years' experience with hi-def *audio* (SACD and DVD-A), "will it matter?" is a reasonable question with no clear answer.

I'm not in the "heavenly jukebox" crowd; I believe millions of people like to *own* their movies and TV series and will continue to buy physical discs—particularly given the vagaries of DRM in the download market. Not that people won't also download for a fee; there's plenty of room for multiple preferences. I don't believe downloading will be the doom of hi-def DVD.

Indifference is another matter. People love wide-screen TVs (although most people still don't have them). Most widescreen TVs are also HDTVs—but many buyers never actually *watch* HDTV, because they don't realize that they need to tune to different over-

the-air channels or buy a different tier of cable or sat-ellite service. If people don't care about true HDTV, they may not care about hi-def optical discs. But for now, it's just too early to tell.

As to the format war, here's my own take, as of early October. If there's any life at all in this market-place, Blu-ray is the likely winner—even though the initial players are absurdly overpriced. Why?

Marketing. Ad dollars. Visibility. Sony and part-ners (primarily Sony, I suspect) are running *lots* of multipage ads in *lots* of magazines pushing the won-ders of Blu-ray. The magazines are well chosen: home theater, technology, lifestyle, affluent households. Meanwhile, there have been one or two HD DVD ads, but no big, ongoing campaign.

As for my other benchmark—what shows up in Sunday store flyers?—HD DVD's early lead was wasted, with two tiny ads in two Sears flyers over three months. Blu-ray's starting to show up now, and it's showing up in more inserts, although still not enough to be meaningful. Then there's the software. Overstock is already selling both formats, typically at around $20; Amazon has generally set a $20 price as well. Including all items marked "In stock" or "Typi-cally ships in 1-2 days," I see 46 Blu-ray releases and 36 odd HD-DVD releases as of October 17, 2006.

You can be certain of one thing. Unlike videocas-settes, you can keep buying DVDs with no fear that they'll be useless in any near future. I believe that high def players will either stall completely or enter the marketplace fairly slowly—but in any case, *both* for-mats will absolutely play regular DVDs, and make them look better in the process.

Unless you're supporting a film studies depart-ment, can sit back and watch the drama unfold.

PC Progress
February-October 2006

As usual, "P" means *PC Magazine*, "W" means *PC World*. When I forget an identification, "Real-World Testing" and "First Looks" both mean *PC Magazine*.

Cell Phones

This "First Looks" roundup [P25:3] includes three new phones with "a range of cool features." One earns an Editors' Choice, and that's not surprising since it's a new version of one of the hottest recent phones: the

Motorola RAZR V3c, $420 (or $200 and up with Veri-zon contract), the first RAZR for Verizon users. A little thicker and heavier than the original RAZR and a little less flashy (gunmetal gray). Otherwise, it replaces GSM with CDMA and substitutes iTap predictive text for T9. The camera now offers 1.3mp detail and the phone supports V Cast broadband.

Desktop Computers

PC's buying guide [P25:12] focuses on Media Center PCs and favors the $2,700 Sony VAIO XL2 Digital Media Center, which consists of a receiver-styled PC and a 200-disc DVD/CD changer. The unit actually ties (4 dots) with six other units mentioned, priced from $550 to $4,781.

This roundup tests six "economical desktops" with dual-core CPUs [W24:8]. They're not rock bot-tom units, with prices ranging from $1,064 to $1,500 (including 17" or 19" LCDs), but they're also not high-end. The Best Buy goes to HP's $1,300 Pavilion Media Center m7490n, largely for its extras. The cheapest system, Dell's $1,064 Dimension E510, is very close: both have 81 PCW Ratings.

Digital Cameras

"Can you get a good camera for $150? How about $88?" *Digital* camera, that is. That's the question asked in this Real-World Testing roundup of four 4mp and 5mp cameras costing under $150 (with mini-reviews of three more under $200). The answer? Sort of (with discounts and rebates), and not yet. The highest rated of the group at 3.5 dots, Canon's PowerShot A340 offers 4x optical zoom and "very good pictures." The $88 camera, Polaroid's PDC 5080 (no zoom), gets a dismal single dot for "dreadful performance and pic-ture quality," with pictures not much better than a camera phone.

This roundup of midrange point-and-shoot digi-tal cameras [W24:9] features ten units ranging from $300 to $500; all have at least one interesting feature such as a big LCD screen (3" or larger), in-camera panoramic stitching, antishake technology, built-in wifi (?), a ruggedized case, or ultralong battery life. The top-rated camera (Casio's $299 Exilim EX-Z600) has great battery life but only *fair* image quality, actu-ally the worst of the ten cameras. I don't understand a ratings schema that puts so little weight on the quality of the pictures: Isn't that why you buy a $300 to $500 camera? If you want "very good" image quality, you drop down to the sixth of ten, HP's $399 Photosmart

R927—but it has poor battery life. (Eight other cameras all rated "good" on image quality.)

Digital Videocameras

Another *PC* mini-guide [P25:12] selects the $1,400 Sony HDR-HC1 as a digital camcorder, notably for its HD recording capabilities (on standard MiniDV tape). It has 10x optical zoom and takes 2.8 megapixel stills.

PC World [24:8] offers more detail on five MiniDV cameras but didn't include HD models. Although the blurb touts camcorders "for as little as $400," the Best Buy costs more than twice that much: Panasonic's $1,000 PV-GS500, with three CCD sensors, 12x optical zoom, and generally superior image quality and battery life.

Displays

Three large LCD displays designed to save desktop space [P25:6], none good enough for an Editors' Choice. Highest-rated: the $649 HP LP2065, a 20.1" display with 1600x1200 resolution. It pivots and comes with Pivot Pro software.

A "Real-World Testing" roundup covers four *cheap* 19" LCDs—none costing more than $200 after rebates, although they include one $569 20" widescreen for comparison. The CMV CT-934D gets the Editors' Choice; it offers 1280x1024 resolution, includes decent stereo speakers, and has very good color quality (not great gray performance). You'll get some artifacts on fast motion and they'll only replace the panel if there are more than four dead or stuck pixels within the first year. Still: $199.99 for a 19" display! The Dell Ultrasharp 2007WFP scores higher and offers 40% more viewing area, but it's also almost three times as expensive.

GPS Units

This review [W24:5] looks at mapping websites and in-car GPS units. Highest-rated among the mapping sites: Windows Live Local, with Yahoo Local Maps second and Google Local third. MapQuest is showing its age, although that's mostly through lack of Gee-Whiz features. Among dashboard GPS units, the $600 TomTom Go 300 gets the best rating; it's also tied for most expensive.

Multifunction Printers

PC World's latest mini-roundup [W24:3] covers multifunction inkjets. Best Buy is the $200 Canon Pixma MP500; it's relatively fast and offers very good text quality, and for $200 you get built-in duplexing and dual paper trays. If you plan to do film scanning and don't want to spend $440 for Canon's Pixma MP950, go for the second place unit, the $180 Epson Stylus CX7800; good prints but slow printing unless you tweak the driver.

Notebook Computers

"Desktop killers" is an old refrain for notebooks, and this roundup [W24:6] doesn't make it fresher. You always get more for your money with a desktop and the lead sentences here are just silly: "Go on, admit it. You've been thinking about ditching your desktop in favor of a laptop." I use a gorgeous 19" LCD display. I use a wonderful wireless ergonomic keyboard and mouse. The computer? It's somewhere over to the side on the floor. Why would I want to "ditch" that for a keyboard that would take me back to painful wrists and a smaller screen? These are very powerful notebooks at *very* high prices. The Best Buys are HP's $2,200 Pavilion dv8000z (17" screen, 9.2lb., 3hrs. battery life) and $2,548 Toshiba Qozmio G35-AV600 (10.1lbs., nearly 4-hour battery life, also 17" screen). Both have dual-layer multiformat DVD burners. Both of these have TV tuners.

A *PC Magazine* "buying guide" [P25:14] for back-to-school notebooks gives the nod to Dell's $999 Inspiron E505, with an Intel Core Duo CPU, 1GB RAM, ATI graphics, and dual-layer multiformat DVD burner; the screen is 1280x800 (15.4").

Portable Music Players

One way to make portable music players more effective is portable speakers, covered in a mini-roundup [P25:14]. Editors' Choice is the $160 Think Outside BoomTube H_20_1, a metal cylinder containing two detachable speakers on either end with dual 2.2" "subwoofers" (lower midrange speakers) and an amp in the center. Alternatives include Logitech's $65 mm28 for value, Apple's $349 iPod Hi-Fi for big parties, Altec Lansing's $200 inMotion iM9 for the great outdoors (ruggedized and in its own little backpack), and Creative's $80 TravelDock 900, "decent sound from something the size of a sunglasses case."

Portable DVD Players

The Perfect Vision (July/August 2006) reviews six portable DVD units costing $400 or less, with an overall commentary followed by individual one-page reviews. (A sidebar covers three higher-quality earphones to

replace the mediocrities supplied with most players; $10 for Sennheiser MX 400 ear buds will do.) There's no clear winner, but standouts appear to be Philips' $399 PET102 (10.2" screen, good battery life, but it's on the bulky side) and Sony's $200 DVP-FX810 (8" LCD but it swivels, excellent battery life).

Printers

This mini-roundup includes four office printers in four different categories, three of them Editors' Choices. The $499 Lexmark C522n earns that honor as an inexpensive color laser printer "with great performance, excellent text output, and good graphics and photo quality." Add $300 for a 500-sheet paper tray (it starts with 250 sheets). For tabloid printing, Ricoh's $675 Aficio G7500 offers "laser-class speed and quality" with its Gel-Sprinter technology, spraying viscous ink from a nozzle. For heavy-duty ink jet use, consider HP's $199 Officejet Pro K550. HP calls it the "world's fastest desktop printer," which is false, but "it's certainly the fastest by far in this price class, at least for business applications."

Color lasers are now cheap enough for home use and robust enough for small offices. This roundup [W24:6] features ten models costing $400 to $1,000. Quality has improved since *PC World*'s last low-cost color laser roundup; the Best Buy, Dell's $500 3100cn, earns Superior scores for text, line art, and grayscale graphics—but it's only Good for graphics and photos. It's rated at 25 pages per minute for text, 5 pages for graphics; it tested at 17.8 text, 3.4 graphics. The Dell also includes an extra paper tray.

A mini-roundup of color lasers for small offices [P25:14] gives an Editors' Choice to the $1,499 Xerox Phaser 6300DN for "blazing-fast speed" and "great-looking output." It includes a duplexer. Alternate recommendations include the $300 HP Color LaserJet 1600 for value, $400 Lexmark C500n as a "well-balanced" choice (particularly if you plan to print mostly monochrome pages), and $600 Oki Printing Solutions C5500n as a speed demon.

A "real-world testing" feature [P25:14] looks at small-office multifunction printers at $130 or less with automatic document feeder and stand-alone faxing, although the reviewer bent the price limit slightly (to $132). That option, Lexmark's X7350, came in as best of this low-priced lot for a mix of features, speed and quality. Oddly, one of the four units reviewed did *not* have either an ADF or a fax modem, and doesn't print color—but it's a cheap laser-based unit.

Projectors

This group review [W24:4] features the "top 10" business projectors, ranging in price from $899 to $2,895. They're all XGA (1024x768) resolution and weigh anywhere from 2.4 pounds to 8.6 pounds (but only two heft six pounds or more), so they're all reasonably portable. Best Buy goes to NEC's $2,195 LT35 for its automated features and bright, high-quality images, but the next four places are the four cheapest projectors in the review, all $1,000 or less.

Storage Devices

This roundup [W24:5] reviews six one-terabyte external disks: Three "direct-attached storage" (classic external disks) and three network-attached storage (NAS). One issue with big multidrive units like this is flexibility: Can you configure them for something other than RAID 0 and swap out drives readily? Swapping out drives is easy in four finalists and feasible in the other two; all but one of the six supports some lower-capacity/high-reliability RAID version.

Best Buy among direct-attached units is Maxtor's $825 One Touch III Turbo: Even though drives are hard to replace, it performed well and had good backup software. Best Buy among NAS units is the $1,199 Infrant Technologies ReadyNAS NV, loaded with features and easy to upgrade. These are still at least two-drive units; single-drive 1TB capacity isn't quite on the consumer market yet (as this is written).

Utility Software

This roundup [P25:3] covers security suites. None is perfect (although antivirus protection should be uniformly reliable these days). Editors' Choice is ZoneAlarm Security Suite 6.0 for its first-rate firewall and antispam, although its spyware protection needs help. If you use separate spam and spyware solutions and don't care about parental control, Norton Internet Security is also a good choice. Since none of the suites has great spyware protection, you should also read the anti-spyware roundup that follows. You need more than one (don't use the "live scan" features of more than one). Editors' Choices: Spy Sweeper 4.5 and Spyware Doctor 3.2, each $30 per year.

Another suite roundup [W24:7] includes ten contenders—once again, all very good antivirus but not uniform elsewhere. Best Buy is Norton Internet Security 2006, with McAfee Internet Security Suite 2006 a close second; ZoneAlarm came in 6th.

A *PC* miniguide [P25:12] continues to give the Editors' Choice to ZoneAlarm 6.0 with eTrust second.

This antivirus roundup [W24:3] finds, as usual, that pretty much every commercial antivirus program identifies and blocks 100% of recognized threats, as long as you keep the signatures updated. Ratings get a little tricky: *PC World* focused on how software would do if you *didn't* keep the signatures up to date as a theoretical measure of the software's ability to handle new threats. The roundup also takes the somewhat irritating (OK, stupid) slant of disabling all other components (except antivirus) in security suites, to avoid such suites having an "unfair advantage" over standalone programs. Say what? Isn't it a *good* thing for the components of a suite to strengthen one another? With peculiarities like that, I'm not sure BitDefender 9 Standard's Best Buy ranking means much. ZoneALarm isn't even on the list. Why? Because they couldn't test it without turning off OSFirewall!

Web Services

Who does the best local mapping? A *PC Magazine* "First Looks" roundup [P25:4] looks at five such services, including A9.com Maps and AOL Local. Editors' Choice goes to Windows Live Local, "one of the most addictive Web search tools out there."

Copyright Currents

When I split COPYRIGHT CURRENTS into four parts (*C&I* 5:5) I left an out: "If there's a set of issues that won't fit in those subcategories, COPYRIGHT CURRENTS remains available." There should have been one other out: "If new directions and topics don't leave room for thorough discussion of copyright categories, I may do overall roundups."

Fair Use and Infringement

The Free Expression Policy Project has established a Fair Use Network at www.fairusenetwork.org. I heartily recommend it when you're asked how fair use applies in a given situation. There's even a blog.

CleanFlicks

It's legal for a manufacturer to sell a DVD player that "cleans up" movies as they're being played, as long as the viewer has explicitly made the choice to use the clean-up feature, there's an "altered" message on the screen before the movie starts, and there's no perma-

nent copy of the modified flick. I thought that constituted fair use and the Family Movie Act explicitly legalized it. That's the ClearPlay model. If you're hot to watch censored movies, ClearPlay will sell you a DVD player with built-in download features for $69.

CleanFlicks had a different idea: Buy multiple copies of DVDs and sell edited DVD-Rs, one "cleaned-up" copy for each original DVD it buys. In July 2006, the District Court for Colorado granted partial summary judgment in favor of the movie studios: Clean-Flicks *does* infringe copyright. The judge cited the Family Movie Act, noting that Congress explicitly legalized technologies that do *not* make a permanent copy of the edited movie. He found that censoring was not transformative. He dismissed CleanFlicks' argument that it wasn't harming studio revenues and used a standard that's odd in American copyright law, where moral rights usually aren't at issue:

> The argument…has superficial appeal but it ignores the intrinsic value of the right to control the content of the copyrighted work which is the essence of the law of copyright.

Studios did not claim a DMCA violation, although CleanFlicks had to circumvent DVD encryption to make altered copies. Ed Felten (source for much of this) tends to agree with Tim Lee that studios were nervous about DMCA's overbreadth. While Clean-Flicks' edited DVD-Rs aren't encrypted, that wasn't a primary issue in the ruling. Ed Felten closed his July 10 *Freedom to tinker* commentary with this note:

> In theory CleanFlicks can appeal this decision, but my guess is that they'll run out of money and fold before any appeal can happen.

As of August 31, the company had shut its doors.

Comments on Felten's post were wide-ranging and in some cases well argued. I refer you to the post if you're interested. Seth Finkelstein did a same-day *Infothought* post suggesting studios may have avoided a DMCA claim because they didn't want the court to have "the fabled sympathetic DMCA circumvention defendant, one charged with circumvention but making fair use in a socially approved cause." As he notes, studios could have always *come back* with a DMCA claim if they lost on copyright infringement—so why bring up DMCA if it's not necessary?

The RIAA and Copyright

Just how badly have the four major record companies been hurt by rampant piracy and P2P excesses? Based on the industry's own statistics, 2005 may have been more profitable than 2004 (as stated by Chris Ander-

son, quoted in *Deep links*). CD sales continued to decline (from 767 million in 2004, which was an increase from 2003, to 705 million in 2005), but online and mobile sales appear to have made up the difference—because distribution costs are so low. Total revenue was down slightly (0.8%), but it seems likely that total *costs* were down more. How rapidly is digital distribution replacing physical sales? That's tough to say. While the *unit* count for downloaded music is impressive—385 million downloaded units as compared to 748 million physical units—most of those units are singles. On a revenue basis, downloaded music yielded less than 5% of the revenue of physical music—but mobile and subscription sales equal another 5% or so. EFF concludes that a "veritable pot of gold" awaits the music industry if it drops DRM and vastly expands available catalogs for legal downloading.

You can use the RIAA's figures to show something very different: "In 2005, music went digital" according to Andrew Raff's April 4, 2006 post at *IPTAblog*. Of course, more than 99% of recorded music is *already* digital, since the only analog music being sold is $11 million worth of cassettes and $27 million worth of LPs and vinyl singles, but Raff means "digital distribution." How does he support this claim? Simple:

> According to the RIAA, physical unit sales dropped by 8% from 2004 and revenue from those sales dropped by 7.9%. In contrast, digital sales increased by 166.2% in terms of unit sales and 174.5% in revenue.

That's the classic meaningless "percentage over small base" statistic unless it can be sustained over several years. Legal downloaded music wasn't tracked until 2004. In 2004, total value was $183.4 million. In 2005, $503.6 million. Impressive—but still a tiny piece of the music business.

RIAA vs. XM Radio

The big four record labels (RIAA's members) have sued XM Radio because some new XM receivers record broadcast music in a way that's convenient for the user. Wait—isn't home recording of broadcast music *explicitly* legal or at least well-established fair use? More to the point, doesn't the Audio Home Recording Act explicitly provide for home taping of digital signals? A snarky response is that RIAA and MPAA don't believe in fair use—and maybe that's right. In a filing as part of DMCA rulemaking, RIAA seems to assert that your ability to rip *your own CDs* to MP3 or an iPod is *not* fair use but represents "authorization" from the copyright owner. (See *Deep links* for February 15,

2006) As for AHRA, the RIAA pretends that the law doesn't exist or that it applies only to *taping*, that is, recording on tape as a medium.

What do the new receivers do? Buffer XM's stream so you can store up to 50 hours of recordings—and so that when you hear a track you like, you can click to save that track. You probably thought you could do that now when recording off the air—but the RIAA disagrees, or at least says it's illegal to make it convenient.

RIAA's suit against XM includes nine counts. *Deep links* for May 17, 2006 lists the counts and links to the complaint. At the very least, the idea that a permanent home recording of a broadcast signal represents infringement seems counter to established law and practice. The EFF post says the lawsuit touches on seven larger issues: an attack on home taping/recording; forgetting AHRA; claiming that transmission+recording=distribution; broadening "inducement" to shut down as much innovation as possible; holding design against innovators; and using statutory damages to chill innovation. Statutory damages get interesting: RIAA seeks $150,000 in damages *for each song recorded by any XM subscriber*—and claims that every song represents an infringement, since one of the receivers maintains a buffer.

DRM: "The customer is always wrong"

I **recommend** "The customer is always wrong: A user's guide to DRM in online music," an EFF white paper available at www.eff.org/IP/ DRM/guide/. When I picked it up—more than a year ago—it printed out at eight pages; it hasn't changed much since then, except to add DRM-free legal download alternatives (emusic probably the best-known of the lot). The guide discusses DRM briefly, then shows portions of four advertising pitches followed by the facts about each situation. First there's iTunes, which says "Own it forever and a day"; the headline on the discussion: "The facts: You bought it, but they still own it"—since they can change your use rights for already-"purchased" items (and have done so) and since you can't really give away or sell the downloads you "own." Then comes Microsoft WMA and "playsforsure": "The facts: With DRM, nothing truly 'plays for sure.'" Protected WMA can't be ported to other players—and you could wind up with useless content. RealNetwork's "freedom of music choice" is exposed: "RealNetworks doesn't offer real freedom of choice" because Real also uses proprietary DRM. Finally, there's the legal Nap-

ster 2.0, "All the music you want. Any way you want it." EFF adds to that second phrase: "So long as you pay for it over and over again." Napster 2.0 charges extra to use a portable player. Napster 2.0 charges extra if you want to burn a song to CD. Napster 2.0 charges extra if you want to use more than three computers. Napster never allows the sorts of rights you'd expect if you actually *bought* something—not even the "ownership" service. It's a striking guide.

DMCA Discussions

The Cato Institute, neither socialist nor left wing, released "Circumventing competition: The perverse consequences of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act" by Timothy Lee on March 21, 2006 (#564 in Cato's Policy Analysis Series). The 27-page analysis begins with a questionable statement: "The courts have a proven track record of fashioning balanced remedies for the copyright challenges created by new technologies." I'll agree that the courts have done better in this area than Congress has, but balanced?

Lee immediately proceeds to take DMCA to task. It's anti-competitive. It "reduces options and competition in how consumers enjoy media and entertainment." "Worst of all, DRM technologies are clumsy and ineffective; they inconvenience legitimate users but do little to stop pirates." Pretty much what some of us have been saying ever since DMCA was passed—and getting called anti-copyright and pro-piracy for our views. Lee doesn't believe repealing DMCA would lead to intellectual property anarchy; as he points out, courts have been developing a body of law that doesn't ignore copyright holders.

That's in the one-page summary. The analysis itself provides considerable detail and doesn't mince words. "The DMCA puts its thumb on the scales of justice on the side of copyright holders." Lee agrees that the 2000 decision in *UMG Records v. MP3.com*, the decision that shut down MP3.com, "illustrates that, if anything, the scales of justice were already tilted in favor of copyright holders."

Lee understands the importance of fair use: "Our culture would be impoverished without fair use." He also understands how the growing "culture of permission" is hamstringing fair use and impairing creativity, and offers excellent examples. Later, he makes a good comparison of what book publishers can and can't do with the excess force afforded digital publishers. A book publisher can't use copyright law to limit photocopying for personal use, "where the book can be read, or what brand of reading glasses the user may use"—but digital publishers are making entirely comparable limitations backed up by DMCA. Try using your legal iPod to play your legal WMA downloads—or, at least until recently, your legal Linux PC to view your legally-purchased DVD. Digital publishers can (and do) negate first-sale rights, preventing users from lending or giving items away. All of this is because fair use is not a defense against DMCA, which effectively eliminates fair use for fully-digital media.

Lee points out that VCRs would almost certainly not have gotten industry approval under a DMCA scheme (the MPAA violently opposed them), and would thus not have reached the market. Lee recounts some of the most blatant abuses of DMCA, including some you may have missed (HP threatening to sue security researchers for publicizing vulnerabilities in its Tru64 OS; Blackboard *successfully* enjoining university students from presenting research on security flaws). As for piracy, Lee properly calls DMCA the "Maginot Line of the war on piracy"—useless against true pirates or determined downloaders, but hard on people who want to do the right thing.

What puts Cato on the same side as EFF? Cato is a libertarian thinktank, strongly in favor of competition and opposed to excessive government regulation. Cato also appears to be *consistent*: Applying its principles even when they appear to conflict with the interests of big business. In the case of DMCA, that leads to a strong, well-argued denunciation of the act.

Cato held a half-day conference in April. An April 27, 2006 post on the *USACM technology policy weblog* noted that there was little common ground, leading to a battle over "whether or not copyright policy generally and DMCA specifically have met the challenges of the digital age." You have one pro-DMCA congressperson (the report is ambiguous as to whether it's Lamar Alexander or someone named "Smith") saying "DMCA is the foundation for the nation's digital economy" and "DMCA makes capitalism work in the digital economy." Rep. Zoë Lofgren, who has sponsored balancing acts, said Congress "overreached" with DMCA and the act hampered innovation. If you've paid attention to misleadingly named foundations, you won't be surprised that Solveig Singleton of the Progress & Freedom Foundation defended the DMCA and dismissed Timothy Lee's arguments against it. Amazingly, she cited the Ed Felten incident as a *success story* for DMCA because the suit was eventually

dropped. Some participants were at the other extreme, questioning whether we need copyright at all.

PFF and IPI

I downloaded Solveig Singleton's "The DMCA dialectic: Towards constructive criticism" (May 11, 2006) from the Progress & Freedom Foundation, fully intending to do a normal commentary. I have loads of red marks throughout the five-page commentary, but I see little point in mentioning them. Much of it strikes me as incoherent or argument by assertion, ignoring evidence that doesn't fit a preconceived outcome.

Singleton says critics understate the difficulty and mistake the nature of the problem DMCA helps solve and calls it "everyone's problem." The problem? How to "exclude free riders." Singleton calls it an "error" in Lee's paper when he says the Blackboard injunction involved "citing" the DMCA, "although a letter to the students mentioned the DMCA." I'm sure there's some subtle distinction between "citing" and "mentioning," but it's a distinction likely to be lost on university students threatened with a felony. Singleton says a fair use exception "would not work well and is not needed" and that "few significant fair uses" are affected by DRM, although as far as I can see those "few" represent 100% of fair use. "Consumer demand is the best protection for convenient access to new works, whether that ultimately takes the same form of past 'fair uses' or new ones." In other words, fair use is *irrelevant* if we can think of citizens as "consumers." In the end, Singleton is saying (badly) that all commentary "needs" to be pro-DMCA.

EFF's *Deep links* properly takes the document to task, as does Ed Felten, who refutes some of the discussion by citing *facts*. PFF is a market-oriented think tank; looking at other items on PFF's site, it's consistently in favor of the most extreme copyright protection. One item calls TiVo "parasitic." "Progress & Freedom" would seem to be a fitting name for this group in Orwell's 1984, but perhaps not in our 2006.

Another group issued another pro-DMCA piece in June 2006: "A bad trade: Will Congress unwittingly repeal the [DMCA] and violate our trade treaties?" from the Institute for Policy Innovation, written by Lee Hollaar. It's firmly pro-DMCA and uses the WIPO copyright treaty (heavily influenced by U.S. desires) as a pro-DMCA cudgel.

Hollaar attacks Rick Boucher's DMCRA and pushes the notion that "coming up with" any legitimate use would avoid DMCA liability. Oddly, Hollaar offers convincing evidence *for* DMCRA: "For almost every copyrighted work of any commercial value there is some fair use." Since DMCA prevents such fair use, DMCA is bad law. DMCRA would add the following to DMCA: "It is not a violation…to circumvent a technological measure in order to obtain access to the work for purposes of making noninfringing use of the work." What could be more legitimate, more straightforward, more in keeping with the Constitutional basis for copyright? Hollaar:

> With that change, you would only violate the circumvention by access section…if you also infringe. But infringement is already prohibited by the copyright statutes, and so Section 1201(a) becomes redundant.

You would only be guilty of violating a copyright-protection law if you infringed copyright. What a concept! Naturally, Hollaar goes on to assure us that DMCA isn't "causing real problems." The "handful of cases" doesn't matter. Opponents of DMCA engage in "overheated rhetoric." Besides, now that the U.S. has gotten anti-circumvention language into WIPO agreements, we're bound by the international law we helped to create. Isn't that cute?

Tim Lee (author of the anti-DMCA Cato analysis) commented on Hollaar's article in a *Technology liberation front* post on June 22, 2006. He says the treaty-obligation argument isn't persuasive, "given the amount of weight the United States carries in the international arena," and that "the anti-circumvention provisions of WIPO were inserted largely at the urging of the Clinton administration." [Reminder: When it comes to unbalanced copyright law, political party labels are meaningless. Democrats are as likely as Republicans to push for excessive "protection" of Hollywood interests.] Lee also disagrees with Hollaar's remarkable claim that Ed Felten's speech was not chilled by RIAA's DMCA-related letter. "The fact that the RIAA 'backed off' after their threat succeeded in preventing the publication of the paper at the Information Hiding Workshop hardly proves that Felten had nothing to worry about."

The comment stream on this post gets interesting. Ed Felten is upset about repeated claims by pro-DMCA writers that his speech was not chilled:

> DMCA boosters can repeat the speech-was-not-chilled claim as often as they like, but it's still false. There are two big examples of the chill. First, WE ACTUALLY DID WITHDRAW THE PAPER FROM PUBLICATION at the Information Hiding Workshop. Second, ONE OF MY COLLEAGUES LOST HIS JOB BECAUSE OF THE PAPER. Sorry for yelling, but I'm sick of having this lie repeated.

Lee Hollaar commented, calling the second "yelled" statement "extraordinary, since such a dramatic claim does not appear to be made in the litigation." Ed Felten took offense:

> I'm not sure what you're trying to imply when you call my statement "extraordinary." If you're trying to imply that the statement is false, then all I can say is that you should have talked to some of the people involved before making assertions about what did or didn't happen…. Your statement that the RIAA withdrew their threat before we filed the suit is also false. What evidence do you have to support it?

Hollaar, says he wasn't trying to imply anything. He repeats that he would have expected to see a job loss in the pleadings and quotes some of the judge's findings. Felten came back, noting that the letter disclaiming RIAA litigation (mentioned by the judge) was sent *after* Felten and associates filed suit. Hollaar uses a *press release* as his proof of the order of events—to which Felten responds "A release which they did not affirm to us in a signed letter, or even verbally?"—and once again looks for "the record" over a colleague losing a job. Felten's response: "If you've ever had a friend or colleague forced out of a job under difficult circumstances, perhaps you can understand why that person might not want to announce the details of what happened to the whole world (including prospective employers) right away." Hollaar appears to be saying that, if it isn't in the judicial record, *it didn't happen*, even if an eyewitness affirms that it did.

Bill Herman posted a rebuttal to Hollaar's article at *shouting loudly*. "I have to be honest here: Hollaar's 'bad trade' is a bad article." Herman makes the case that treaty anti-circumvention language is "obviously there because US negotiators insisted." He rebuts Hollaar's favorable comments on DRM in the marketplace, notes the ready availability of circumvention measures, and asks: "If we're not stopping piracy, why strip these rights from regular consumers?"

He rebuts a paragraph I didn't bother to mention, one in which Hollaar claims there was generally no opposition to the anticircumvention provisions when DMCA was being considered. Herman cites the record, including testimony from library associations. Herman does a fine job of dealing with the notion that DMCA must be fine, since there haven't been all that many DMCA-based lawsuits.

> Thanks to 1201 [DMCA], librarians are less able to archive our digital heritage. Teachers, students, and garden-variety end users are less able to help themselves to reclaim their legal rights to fair use. Encryption re-searchers are less able to innovate (or to help us solve problems like Sony's rootkit). All because of the mere threat of litigation—regardless of the admittedly low number of cases that actually go to trial or result in cease-and-desist notices. We wouldn't say that a society that only occasionally beats and jails journalists has no problems respecting a free press. Make a few "examples" and most of the others will behave. Likewise, the mere threat of litigation backed by occasional lawsuits is a clear suppression of the right to make noninfringing uses of materials that are under digital lockdown.

Herman offers more notes—then takes "one parting swipe" at the publisher, the Institute for Policy Innovation. Hermann notes their motto: "Advocating lower taxes, fewer regulations, and a smaller, less-intrusive government." Herman's comment: "When will the so-called 'laissez-faire' groups just come out and admit that they're pro-regulation or anti-regulation depending on whichever is in the best interests of the biggest corporations?"

Following Up

A few updates on items previously covered.

Orphan works legislation

Rep. Lamar Smith introduced the Orphan Works Act of 2006 (HR 5439) on May 22, 2006. Gigi B. Sohn of Public Knowledge called it a significant improvement over the Copyright Office draft legislation, but argued for additional changes (specifically a cap on potential damages rather than "reasonable compensation").

In September, "to the dismay of many supporters" (*American Libraries*), the bill was folded into a more complicated and controversial bill, HR 6052, the Copyright Modernization Act of 2006. The House abandoned it altogether on September 27, 2006. For now, orphan works legislation is dead. Miriam Nisbet said, "Libraries will absolutely renew their efforts on an orphan work solution in the next Congress."

MGM v Grokster

The *ARL Bimonthly Report* 244 (February 2006) begins with "The Grokster decision: The basics & key talking points," by Peggy Hoon (NCSU). Hoon makes seven key points. Summarizing and combining:

➢ The Grokster case is about uses of Grokster technology, *not* P2P technology in general.
➢ The Supreme Court's finding on liability involves "clear expression or other affirmative steps taken to foster infringement," not merely capability.
➢ Companies that do *not* take such active steps aren't inherently guilty of infringement;

knowledge of infringing potential does not imply liability, as long as you haven't encouraged infringement.

➤ Policing use is not required in the absence of evidence of intent to induce infringement.

➤ *Grokster* is a pro-consumer decision "that strikes a careful balance between encouraging innovation and protecting copyright."

➤ Universities probably don't need to do anything new; they surely don't actively induce copyright infringement now (and in fact have substantial copyright education activities).

Tomas A. Lipinski wrote "The legal landscape after *MGM v. Grokster*, part 2: Understanding the impact on innovation" in the February 2006 ASIS&T *Bulletin*. He notes that the new form of copyright liability is "applicable in limited standards" and that the *Sony* rule is still law. The court rejected MGM's request to provide a quantifiable test of "substantial" noninfringing use: It's not good enough to say "We claim that 90% of this technology's use is infringing, therefore the makers of the technology are liable for infringement, even though they never encouraged such infringement."

As part of an excellent discussion (worth reading in full), Lipinski offers three lessons (paraphrased):

➤ Entrepreneurs should not make any statements suggesting illegitimate use of a technology, directly or indirectly. "Deliberate acts of good faith should be the rule of the day."

➤ "Network protocols should be designed where feasible to respond to blatant abuses through system flags" (such as excessive downloading).

➤ If there are fees, they must not be designed so that more infringement means more revenue.

Analog hole

Perhaps the most appalling betrayal of past agreements and compromises is big media's push to close the "analog hole"—the possibility of making fair use of digital media by recording them while in analog form, as they must be for use. After years of promising that consumers could always use the analog hole if they really needed to sample or record or whatever, big media asked for a bill to regulate and essentially outlaw the analog hole.

The good news—and the latest news I've seen—came in a June 21, 2006 item at Public Knowledge: "Senators skeptical of need to fill analog hole." It recounts Gigi Sohn's testimony as to why the bill would be a terrible idea—and why it's an attempt to solve a problem that hasn't been established *as* a problem. In the process, the bill would appear to restrict or eliminate the making of fair use excerpts of digital media and restrict legal uses of media. Sohn's full testimony is available at Public Knowledge's website.

A Conclusion of Sorts

I suspect that this year's overall "good news" will turn out to be the same as last year's: While no legislation was passed to redress some of the imbalance in copyright law, at least no legislation made things even worse. That's a victory of sorts.

My Back Pages
How Low is Too Low?

Pages 12-13 of the July 2006 *Home Theater* are full-page ads from Atlantic Technology, which makes speakers. The ad is photographs of a two-page typed letter from AT's president to "All Atlantic Dealers," with the title "Beware of the 'Dirty Little Secret' About Home Theater in a Box." Reproducing the letter in the ad spreads the word to home theater enthusiasts—very few of which, I suspect, need this alert.

You can buy an HTIB (home theater in a box) for less than $300. You get a five-channel receiver with a built-in DVD player, five speakers, and a powered "subwoofer." If you're watching a movie with the speakers set up all around you, it may sound OK.

The letter goes on to spell out what's behind that "OK"—and why listening to two-channel music instead of surround-sound movie sound may reveal the truth about dirt-cheap HTIB. You *can't* produce five high-quality speakers, a true powered subwoofer, a five-channel receiver, and a DVD player for $300—not and make a profit or break even. Good speakers cost money. So do good receivers and DVD players, but there ever-cheaper electronics keep pushing costs and prices down.

I've heard some el cheapo speakers, the kind you get when six speakers, a DVD player, and a five-channel amp cost $300 or less. *They sound it.* I'm no snob. I *love* the six-year-old Altec Lansing generated-surround speakers I use with my PC. I happily listen to music in the car, using factory-equipment speakers. But there are limits, and too many rock-bottom HTIBs abandon any sense of quality sound in order to go below those limits.

How low *can* you go and get decent sound? The September 2006 *Perfect Vision* reviews SLS Audio's Q-Line Silver, which doesn't include a DVD player but does include five identical satellite speakers, a subwoofer, and a 5.1 channel A/V receiver. The review is favorable. The satellites have ribbon tweeters, each satellite uses two 4" "woofers" to get a little more bass, and the subwoofer is decent as long as you don't expect miracles. The receiver, an OEM unit from Sherwood, is apparently pretty good. The whole setup costs $799.95 (called "Sub-$800" in the headline). So, if the review is right, you can get serious sound in a home theater package for under $1,000 (adding $100 to $200 for a good DVD player)—but not for $300.

The Ultimate iDrive

That's the heading on one of "The 20 smartest companies to start now," a set of ideas in the September 2006 *Business 2.0*. A venture capitalist is ready to invest $5 million for a "qualified 20-person team" to deliver a prototype of "an in-dash computer with a keyboard built into the steering wheel and a full-screen heads-up display projected on the windshield."

The guy who thinks this is a neat idea talks about "obvious safety implications"—but the way he sees it, reading your email superimposed over that boring old road (and pedestrians and other cars) is ever so much *safer* than "looking down and taking one or both hands off the wheel to play with their BlackBerry."

Despite strong evidence that using a cell phone is more dangerous while driving than having had a couple of drinks, venture capitalists want us to be *checking email* while we're driving. Superimposed on the road. Which automatically means your view of dangers is somewhat obscured—even while your attention is badly split. What a neat idea!

The Joys of Academe

If I had been a better student and better researcher, and if I hadn't found an interesting opportunity at the UC Berkeley library, it's conceivable that I might have stayed in grad school—maybe even getting a PhD in Rhetoric. (Unlikely, but conceivable.) Once in a while, I'm reminded of how that might have turned out, and I don't feel so bad about flunking out of grad school.

Quoted from a call for articles for a scholarly compilation, posted at *A Library Writer's Blog*:

> Despite the continuing rise of memory studies in various disciplines, there is yet no consistent, comprehensive, or

metacritical publication accounting for the library as a specific archival form.

Nevertheless, literatures involve, necessarily, if implicitly or symbolically, a relation to the archival forms of the text—that is, traditionally speaking, a relation to the codex and the library. This relation to textual holdings in various (metaphorical and literal) senses clearly involves often unacknowledged complexities of institutional, technical and cultural issues. Indeed, the relation between writing and the library has often been problematic: the library may appear not only as a place of memory, security, and knowledge, but of loss, trauma, and indeterminacy. Such issues appear to be particularly apt for these times: in the context of digitisation, the traditional forms of textual accumulation seem to be in the process of their displacement and even their obsolescence.

The editor welcomes papers from postdoctoral scholars which pursue a critical analysis of literatures and their archives from a multiplicity of approaches: classical and mediaeval memory systems; literary-critical analyses of the figure of the library; philosophical encounters with literature and its texts; analyses of techniques of inscription and the history of the book; analysis of the symbolic connotations of the library from cultural studies; the appearance of textual-archival forms within historical and contemporary art; sociological accounts of literature and the library within public culture; architectural readings of the library within the built environment, etc.

The publication thus aims to cover a broad historical scope—from classical mnemonics to current issues of digitisation—via an Interdisciplinary approach, in order to provide an original and definitive text for this field of knowledge.

Whew. What can I say?

Masthead

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ6i13.pdf