Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

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Volume 7, Number 1: January 2007 ISSN 1534-0937 Walt Crawford

Bibs & Blather

Navel Gazing Part 6

Few things have remained constant throughout *Cites & Insights*' history. There's the title, the primary (usually sole) author and publisher, the price and the principal format. I was going to say "and the ISSN," but it appears I didn't have an ISSN until the fourth issue. Technically, the subtitle's remained constant—but the banner typography implies (correctly) that "Crawford at Large" remains mostly to avoid getting a new ISSN, since it's smaller than the motto beneath it.

There is one other constant since January 2002. The first essay in the first issue of each volume is BIBS & BLATHER, with a portion of the essay devoted to self-examination: Looking back at the previous volume and offering predictions for the current volume.

Last year's navel gazing exercise, "No Year's Resolutions," recounted each previous year's stated plans and how they worked out. I won't repeat that. I will note that this issue passes Crawford's Guideline—*C&I* has survived six years, making it a success within periodical literature even if it fails thereafter. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on your preferences), it's not failing any time soon, barring even larger unforeseen circumstances than those of 2006.

Last Year in Review

Even though I said "No year's resolution" for 2006, I did offer a very short list of "modest expectations":

> No fewer than 12 and no more than 30 pages per issue; no fewer than 12 and no more than 16 issues; continued foci on copyright and net media without abandoning other interesting areas. Maybe another reader's survey toward the end of the year; maybe not.

Later in that essay, I noted that I had "said elsewhere that I didn't plan a January issue until *very* late in the month…and didn't plan an extra Midwinter issue coming out just before the ALA Midwinter Meeting." I said that while wondering whether I'd be wrong on both counts.

I was, in a manner that also blew the first of the modest expectations. The January 2006 issue came out on December 20, 2005—which isn't *very* late in the month. Not only was there a Midwinter 2006 issue, it was the longest issue ever at 32 pages: LIBRARY 2.0 AND "LIBRARY 2.0." So much for "no more than 30 pages per issue," although no other issue exceeded 30 pages. That was also the most widely read *C&I* ever (more than 10,000 PDF downloads and 11,800 HTML hits), and I regard it as a landmark in the literature, so I won't apologize for the length.

Number of issues: That's been fairly constant—13 in 2001, 15 in 2002, and 14 each year since.

Inside This Issue

Foci: I probably wrote as much about copyright as in 2005, but the eight essays represented 10.3% of the 2006 content, down from 12.9% in 2005, and copyright occupied fifth or sixth place instead of second. As for net media, that depends on your definition: Six essays representing 13.9% of the content related to blogging, wikipedia and the like, but three Library 2.0-related essays for another 15.6%. A little more detail on coverage in 2006 follows later.

Survey: I didn't do an overall survey because it's clear that I wouldn't base future coverage primarily on reader feedback—*particularly* given that it would be difficult to get even 10% of readers to respond. I did raise four specific issues in posts at *Walt at random*. In no case did I receive more than seven responses.

Extent and coverage: My original hope for *C&I* was to do 144 to 192 pages per year. What actually happened: 224 pages in volume 1; 262 in volume 2; 278 in volume 3; 308 in volume 4; and 324 in volume 5. Last year, I hoped for somewhere between 280 and 320 pages; the volume totaled 362 pages (page totals exclude indexes). Along the way I tweaked the layout and typography—but most of those changes *increased* the number of words per page. Last year totaled nearly 277,000 words.

Coverage was reasonably varied. Most copy (64%) was within PERSPECTIVES; a third was library-focused. Heaviest topical coverage (with some overlap) was (in descending order) on balance, Library 2.0, net media (including blogs), copyright, access, and Google Book Search/OCA. Frequent multitopic sections included six LIBRARY STUFF, six TRENDS & QUICK TAKES, eight MY BACK PAGES, three old movies, two OLD MEDIA/NEW MEDIA essays and four INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS.

This Year's Plans

The mini-survey asked questions about four portions of *C&I* I was actively considering dropping. Here's the results, informed by a handful of your comments:

- PC PROGRESS is gone. When there are Editors' Choices (*PC Magazine*) and Best Buys (*PC World*) that appear worth mentioning, I'll include them in INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS.
- THE CENSORWARE CHRONICLES disappeared of its own accord.
- LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP will stick around This is one case where reader feedback changed my mind.
- INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS overlaps with TRENDS & QUICK TAKES and MY BACK PAGES, but it has a place. It will continue.

As for frequency and length, I'll stick with "no fewer than 12 and no more than 15 issues" and *aim* for issue lengths between 16 and 30 pages.

Books

I've been threatening to do print-on-demand books for some time now. My first idea was to reprint old material (columns and articles as well as *C&I* essays) in updated value-added collections. The overwhelming flood of reader enthusiasm for such an idea has encouraged me not to spend too much energy on that idea just yet; "collective yawn" overstates the interest.

I have six other book ideas that aren't reprints-with-commentary, all of them ones I believe would be worth doing but none of them likely to achieve sales that justify traditional publishing (at least by ALA Editions): In other words, ideal candidates for Lulu or Café Press (or some other PoD provider).

I've started work on the first of the six, recognizing that there's no better than a fifty-fifty chance of completing it in a reasonable time frame. I'm hedging my bets: Some of the draft chapters will appear as PERSPECTIVES in *Cites & Insights*. If, after half a year or so, I conclude that it's not going to happen or wouldn't make a good book, I'll probably use the rest of the completed chapters that way. If the book *does* prove workable, at least half of it will *not* have appeared previously in *C&I*.

Working on the book shouldn't hurt *C&I*,—but it might reduce the number of extra issues and blockbuster essays. Then again, it might not.

I would *love* to have feedback on experiences with Lulu, Café Press (as a book fulfillment agency) or direct competitors—how much they charge for shipping (what gets added to the posted price), whether the sites work well, the print quality of the books. I've heard mostly good things about both of them, but I have yet to set up an account with either. You know the address: waltcrawford@gmail.com.

Perspective

Book Searching: OCA/GBS Update

What's happened since the last OCA/GBS perspective (*C&I* 6:6, Spring 2006)? Less than might have been expected. It seems unlikely that we'll ever run out of commentaries based on the notion that Open Content Alliance and Google Library Project somehow mean either the death of print books or the death of library circulating collections.

For those in a hurry, here's a quick summary:

- Google continues to scan books at unknown rates and Google Book Search now includes enough of those books that we can see both the uses and limits of GBS. Google *is* making public-domain books downloadable, if you don't mind PDFs with "Scanned by Google" on every page. GBS now makes Worldcat and other library searching available more often.

- The big October Open Content Alliance spectacular didn't happen. The OCA website shows signs of inattention. If there's an OCA site searching scanned books, it's well hidden.
- Despite its early public lead, Yahoo! doesn't have *any* visible presence as a source of book-related information or scans. Microsoft has introduced a beta version of Live Search Books, part of the rebranding of MSN Search and based on Microsoft's OCA scans. Those books are *also* available as downloadable PDFs—if you don't mind a "Digitized by Microsoft" watermark on each page. So far, the interface only offers the books themselves, with no "Find in a library" or "Buy this book" links.
- The Internet Archive includes 35,000 books scanned as part of OCA (as of early December), including some—but apparently not all—of those at Live Search Books. These are also downloadable as PDFs—the exact same PDFs as on Live Search Books, for those books scanned thanks to Microsoft.
- The Google copyright suits are still active and not yet in court. Google is attempting to subpoena information from Yahoo! and others regarding their book digitization efforts.

That's the gist. Detailed comments follow.

First, however, there's Barbara Fister's December 9, 2006 *ACRLog* post, "The big book has missing pages." This charmer references Kevin Kelly's silly manifesto and notes that Kelly's "Big Book o'Everything" is "a long way from reality" and some reasons why—e.g., even if Google and OCA complete their projects, roughly 80% of the books out there would not be available in anything more than snippets. "Even if Google can convince the courts what they're doing is legal, the user will only be able to view scraps, and certainly won't be able to do any of the interactive remixing that Kelly envisions." Fister notes the "school of thought" (based on limited real-world experience) that full-text online access to book content "is not going to destroy the industry—it might just save it." I'm not sure that a $55 billion industry (U.S., which suggests around $110 billion worldwide) growing at 3.4% a year (U.S.) *needs* "saving," but it's also far from destruction.

Google Book Search

An April 18, 2006 item at *OptimizationWeek.com* offers notes from John Wilkin's April 3 talk on the University of Michigan and Google, held at Ann Arbor's public library. Wilkin estimated that the UM portion of Google's project, digitizing seven million bound volumes, would be completed by July 2011—and noted that UM had been digitizing books at a rate of 5,000 to 8,000 volumes per year until Google came along.

Google Librarian Newsletter

Google issued a short series of *Google Librarian Newsletter*s, the final one appearing in June 2006. That issue included an introduction to GBS by Jen Grant (product marketing manager), with noting that founders Page and Brin asked this question early on: "What if every book in the world could be scanned and sorted for relevance by analyzing the number and quality of citations from other books?" Apart from the usual Googlish simplification as to what "relevance" means, it's an interesting way to lead into GBS. Discussing problems inherent in the fact (credited to OCLC) that only 20% of extant books are in the public domain, Grant cites an estimate that only 5% are in print—which seems likely. "That leaves 75 percent or more of the world's book in [a twilight zone]." Given the GBS goal "to build a comprehensive index that enables people to discover all books," Google needed a way to handle the "twilight zone" books—thus the snippet approach.

Ben Bunnell (another Google manager) offers "Find a page from your past" in the same issue, beginning "The idea that within our lifetimes, people everywhere will be able to search all the world's books from their desktops thrills me." Bunnell notes examples of "interesting uses" of GBS for family research; it's an interesting commentary that stresses GBS as a way of *locating* books that might be of interest, not primarily a way of *reading* them.

I contributed "Libraries and Google/Google Book Search: No competition!" to the same issue. I focused on locality, expertise, community, and resources—four "reasons libraries don't need to fear Google Book Search or Google itself." Briefly (since the article's readily available):

- Every good library is a *local* library—and libraries do local better than Google.
- GBS "will be a fine way to discover the more obscure portions of books, and obscure books in general. But librarians and library catalogs offer *expertise*—professional education and knowledge to guide users whose needs are out of the ordinary, and classification methods

to support comprehensive retrieval and guide people to the materials they need."

- "Good libraries aren't just local libraries. They're *places* that serve their communities in that regard. Good libraries build and preserve communities. 'Cybercommunities' can be fascinating—but the physical community continues to be vital." I note that Google can strengthen a library's role in the community.
- "Need I state the obvious? Google Book Search helps people *discover* books. Libraries help them *read* books."

I also took Google to task somewhat—which delayed publication of the article and resulted in a Google response from the editor. My grumps:

- Many Google Book Search books published prior to 1923, *necessarily* in the public domain, show only snippets when they should show the whole book. The same is true for quite a few government publications almost certainly in the public domain within the U.S.
- There should be a "Find this book in a library" link for *every* book that originates in the Google Library Project and for every book in the public domain. That wasn't the case the last time I tried date-limited searching.
- Ideally, *every* result in Google Book Search should include a "Find this book in a library" link—after all, even books supplied by publishers show purchase links for sources other than the publisher. If Google Book Search is to be a great way to discover books, it should include all the great ways to *get* the books.

Summarizing the responses, the editor said Google was digitizing quickly and would change some books from "snippet view" to "full view" later on—and Google agreed on the second and third points. Google Book Search *does* now show either "Find this book in a library" or "Find libraries" on all or almost all book results, and that's a significant improvement.

John Dupuis noted my article in a June 27, 2006 post at *Confessions of a science librarian*, "Google Book Search @ your reference desk." He recounted an incident in which a young woman was writing a paper on space elevators and needed a book reference. The catalog didn't help.

> Well, I immediately went into Google Book Search and searched on "space elevator." Lo and behold, we immediately found a few books which seemed to have significant sections on space elevators. Checking our catalogue, we figured out which ones are in our collection. The student went away very happy…. I also immediately ordered a bunch of the books that we discovered that aren't in our collection.

With "Find in a library" fully active, Dupuis should be able to handle both pieces of that transaction from the Google interface—*showing* the university's online catalog as books are found. That's a win-win situation.

Search me?

That's the title of Bob Thompson's August 13, 2006 Washington *Post* story, a long story (nine print pages) that begins and ends with *This is our land*, a slim blue 1950 family travelogue by Lillian Dean found in Stanford's stacks at E169 D3. Thompson discusses the journey that book will eventually make to an "undisclosed location" to be scanned. He considers the copyright controversies—and Andrew Herkovic (Stanford) notes this "Vantage Press" book as a "great example," since it's highly probable (say 90%) that the copyright was never renewed—but "if you were the corporate counsel for Stanford, Google or anybody else, is 10 to 1 good enough?"

The story covers a lot of ground, including Google's semi-humble beginnings (it wasn't just a garage, and the owner who rented the garage, three bedrooms and two bathrooms to Google is now Google's VP for product management) and the founding of GBS. Stanford's Michael Keller was enthusiastic. He notes reasons—one of which, preservation, seems a bit iffy given the apparent quality of GBS scans. Currently, Stanford only provides out-of-print materials, but Keller believes Google's scanning is fair use.

Thompson talks to Allan Adler (AAP) and Paul Aiken (Authors Guild), both of whom make questionable claims about GBS. Adler says the Google database "in essence would be the world's largest digital library" and Aiken says "it's an attempt to avoid licensing. Without the ability to say no, a rights holder really has nothing to license." It would be interesting to poke at Aiken about fair use, but I suspect the answers would be unsatisfactory. As Thompson summarizes, "Permission, permission is their refrain."

There's more—Google's analogy between web searching and GBS, publishers' denial that the analogy works, and so on. It's a good piece, worth reading.

University of California joins Google Library Project

In August, UC announced it would join the Google Library Project. One early commentary struck me as extreme: "Google 'Showtimes' the UC library system,"

posted August 13, 2006 by Jeff Ubois at *Television archiving*. Immediately noting that this was a "secret agreement," Ubois presumes the agreement "may enrich Google's shareholders at public expense." After quoting Brewster Kahle about providing "universal access to all human knowledge, within our lifetime," Ubois says "[I]t's troubling to see public institutions *transfer cultural assets*, accumulated with public funds, into private hands without disclosing the terms of the transaction." [Emphasis added.]

How is UC transferring assets? It's lending books, which will be returned (they never leave the building in most cases). That's (part of) what libraries do. As for "without disclosing," it doesn't take much research to find out that California is (like Michigan) a state in which that "secret" contract was only secret until someone filed a formal request to see it, since it involved a public agency. "UC should expect and welcome public comment if its inventory is effectively being privatized"—but that's not what's happening.

Ubois presumes that Google's contract must be like Showtime's offensive contract with the Smithsonian, which did provide exclusive access for some length of time—thus the neoverb in the post title.

> UC's agreement is probably not explicitly exclusive. But as a practical matter, scanning doesn't happen twice… This deal will be costly for UC in staff time and other resources, and the chances that another vendor will come through and duplicate the work are slim.

This discussion is based on pure speculation—and happens to be *false*, since UC was already an OCA partner and Microsoft *was already scanning* UC books and documents!

Ubois makes things worse: Assuming Google's efficient, it won't scan a Berkeley copy of something it's scanned at Harvard, and restrictions may make it difficult for Berkeley to borrow Harvard's digital copy. "The student of 2012 will have a choice: go to the complete digital library, owned by Google, or go to the partial digital library of his or her own university."

That's nonsense. The student of 2012 won't be able to get the book from Google's so-called digital library anyway if the book's not in the public domain, which means the student can do exactly what he or she can do now: Go read the actual, honest-to-trees, printed book, either UC's copy (if there is one) or one loaned from another library.

Then Ubois asks a series of questions, at least some of which make the same assumptions. For example: "Is it reasonable to ask the public to pay a second time…for material already purchased, simply because it's now necessary to convert the format in which it is stored?" But UC is **not** "converting the format" in which books are stored. It's adding new search capabilities to find print books, which still exist as print books.

Ubois concludes, "By acquiescing to Google's demands for secrecy, UC has compromised the public interest, and set a dangerous precedent for the rest of the academic community." Which is *truly* strange, given that UC is by no means the first academic institution to sign a confidential Google contract, unless we assume that Stanford, Harvard, and Oxford aren't prestigious enough to set precedent. And given that UC knew the "secret agreement" could not be kept secret. As with Michigan, both UC and Google must have known that the confidentiality clause was not enforceable and the contract would be secret only until someone asked to see it. (UM says it always planned to post its contract.)

The contract was posted later in August. A *Computerworld* story notes that the contract grants Google sole discretion over use of the scanned material *in Google's services*, which is scarcely surprising—and that it explicitly prevents charging end-user fees for searching and viewing search results or for access to the full text of public domain works. UC also agrees not to charge for services using the scanned material (excluding value-added services) and that it won't license or sell the digital material provided by Google to a third party, or distribute more than 10% of it to other libraries and educational institutions. Finally, Google promises to return the books in the same condition (or pay for or replace them) and has 15 business days (three weeks) to scan a given book.

Karen Coyle compared Michigan and UC contracts carefully. She notes that UC's contract is silent about quality control for the scans (probably a good thing, given GLP's early results)—and that UC managed to get "image coordinates" so they can highlight searched words on displayed pages (not in Michigan's contract). There's a lot more to Coyle's analysis, posted August 29, 2006 at *Coyle's InFormation*.

Later notes and developments: A chronological potpourri

Phil Bradley spent some time with GBS and commented in an August 31, 2006 search on his blog, "Google Book Search—to download or not download?" You'll get the tone from the beginning:

> In theory Google Book Search now allows users to download out of copyright books for nothing. In practice, it's the usual Google botched disaster that we're getting used to.

Bradley notes that it's difficult to find books you can download—and when you do, "they're often either so old [as] to be illegible, or they've been badly scanned so it's almost impossible to read." Bradley tried some Shakespeare, to compare the results "with the Google disaster that is Google's Shakespeare Collection." He found 14 (of 23 searched) that he could immediately download, although "most of the editions would have been difficult to read, to say the very least"—but that's better than the three at the special collection.

An August 31, 2006 press release from the University of Michigan notes that digital works from the Google project are now enhancing UM's online catalog via MBooks, a system "intended to support scholarly research." Mbooks provides a page-turning function, the ability to change resolution and change format, updated bibliographic information, and persistent URLs. Users may determine the number of times a search term appears on each page of *any* scanned book but apparently even UM researchers won't be able to view the entirety of books still in copyright.

Finding a downloadable book at Google, I noted the special page that comes along. It's an interesting document and includes usage guidelines, fortunately *after* saying "Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians." One interesting guideline: "Maintain attribution"—specifically, don't remove the Google watermark from each page. That's not an entirely unreasonable request, and it's stated as a request, not a demand. There's another: "Make non-commercial use of the files." The books themselves are in the public domain, which means you're perfectly free to make *any* use of them—but Google's asserting a right in the scanned version. A September 4, 2006 post by Bill McCoy on his Adobe blog questions Google's "pseudo-license" and repeats Ubois' assertion, in a different manner: "Just because you've got a huge pile of cash and were first in line with a cozy no-bid deal to do this scanning—a deal that *cannot even be repeated given the wear and tear on collection items*—doesn't create a special exemption to [public domain]." [Emphasis added.] But Google and OCA both assert that their scanning methods create no more wear and tear than reading a book. McCoy's assertion doesn't work for books that are ever circulated, and certainly doesn't work for UC (as one example). McCoy's counter-examples are flawed. Google is not claiming ownership of public domain works, *only of its scans*. Google isn't preventing libraries from lending the books that Google scanned and anyone (Microsoft, Yahoo, me) is free to scan a borrowed book and, if it's in the public domain, do anything we want with *our* scan.

Christina Pikas responded to some of the negative posts on GBS in a September 4, 2006 post at *Christina's LIS rant*. "In my world, I've found [GBS] to be pretty helpful." She deals with scientific information, where "you go from less reliable but close to the research to nailed down but far from the cutting edge." She's used GBS to improve access to her library's collection, e.g., searching the scientific name of an uncommon bacterium, which pointed to a molecular biology textbook the library owned. As she concludes, "YMMV," a basic principle for GBS.

By October, some publishers were beginning to admit that GBS is *helping* sales, as reported by Jeffrey Goldfarb in an October 6, 2006 Reuters story. Oxford University Press estimates that a million customers have viewed 12,000 OUP titles (from the Google Publisher segment of GBS). Springer Science + Business reports growth in backlist sales based on GBS. Penguin finds more success from Amazon—and specialized publisher Osprey found healthy growth from both sources.

Karen Coyle posts an important lesson from early GBS scanning in an October 24, 2006 post at *Coyle's InFormation*: "Google Book Search is NOT a library backup." GBS uses uncorrected OCR, which "means that there are many errors that remain in the extracted text" (including all line-break hyphenation). Also, it's not digitizing everything: Some books are too delicate, some will be problematic. "Quality control is generally low" (she provides egregious examples). None of this came as a surprise to most digital librarians, according to a comment from Dorothea Salo.

Péter Jacsó reviewed GBS for *Péter's digital reference shelf* (downloaded November 3, 2006); it's an extensive and negative review, **well worth reading**. He notes the "ignorance, illiteracy and innumeracy" of the software—"OR" searches yielding fewer results than one of the two terms (or *more* results than the sum of the two terms!), limits that don't work, inconsistent handling of full-view books, confusing hit counts. Google doesn't say how many books are in GBS (or in the full-view portion), always problematic for a database. There's a lot more here, and although

some of it seems based on using GBS as a source for actual reference information rather than a way to find books, it's nonetheless a good, tough review.

Mick O'Leary wasn't thrilled with GBS either, as he recounts in a November 2006 *Information Today* review. I'm not sure why O'Leary believes that GBS and Amazon's Search Inside! "promise to affect the future of library book collections profoundly." (O'Leary repeats the claim that you can get past three-page and five-page limitations on in-copyright views by searching for distinctive words on the last page of the excerpt. I've never seen that work, at least not in Google, and would love to see repeatable examples.) He says correctly that GBS, if completed, "will be useful primarily as a library finding tool"—and seems to dismiss the importance of that, saying "these books have already lost much of their value" because knowledge advances so rapidly. O'Leary dismisses public domain books as being "of interest only to scholars and other specialized researchers." I'm not sure what to make of this review, but the synopsis is flat-out wrong: "Google Book Search is Google's grand project to create a universal full-text e-book library." That's simply not true, according to everything Google's said, unless by "library" you mean "collection whose contents you can determine but not see."

In October, the University of Wisconsin at Madison became the eighth library in the Google project, focusing on public domain materials, following the Complutense University of Madrid (which announced its participation on September 26). The University of Virginia Library announced its participation on November 14, 2006, focusing on American history, literature, and humanities.

Finally, for now, November news coverage indicates that Google has subpoenaed information on the book digitization efforts of Yahoo! and Amazon—and that both have denied access to the information.

OCA and Live Search Books

There's not a lot to say about OCA since this Spring other than the summary notes at the top of this piece. The promised October rollout didn't happen. 60-odd people attended an OCA workshop in October 2006—but as of mid-December, the OCA website shows the October 20 event as being in the future. The website for the OCA workshops has a faulty digital certificate; the "discussion area" has eight discussion sections, only one of which has any topics (that topic consisting of one anonymous post with no responses). On the home site, the "press page" shows stories through November 2005. The "Next Steps" page claims a November 2006 update date but appears to date from late 2005. The FAQ says "All content in the OCA archive will be available through the website. In addition, Yahoo! will index all content stored by the OCA to make it available to the broadest set of Internet users"—but there's no search function on the OCA site. (A recent note: the Sloan Foundation's kicking in $1 million, directly to Internet Archive, to support OCA digitizing.)

Fortunately, while the OCA level seems moribund, there's some action within the ranks—although not, as far as I can tell, by Yahoo!, the partner with the highest initial profile.

Microsoft made good on its October 2005 promise to join OCA and to release a book search service. Books.live.com went live (in beta) on December 6, 2006. "Microsoft Live Search Books" (LSB) may be awkward, but it's part of Microsoft's general rebranding from MSN to Windows Live. A December 6 post at *ResourceShelf* offers an excellent brief history of LSB, including links to earlier stories. Gary Price focuses less on competition than on choices: "The more options and tools information professionals have the better. Even Google's CEO, Eric Schmidt, has said that search is NOT a zero-sum game."

Microsoft plans to integrate book content with the rest of Windows Live Search, presumably with an available limit for books only. The beta release includes "noncopyright" books from UC, Toronto and the British Library, with books from NYPL, Cornell, and the American Museum of Veterinary Medicine coming soon. (NYPL is also involved in both OCA and Google Library Project.) Price notes some features of LSB and that "Scanning looks nice from what we've seen." (I put "noncopyright" in quotes because LSB includes quite a few oral histories from Bancroft's Regional Oral History project that are much more recent than 1923, and those don't appear to be in the public domain.)

CDLINFO Newsletter for December 14, 2006 offers an update on UC's participation in OCA, noting LSB as a "new portal to access UC libraries books scanned by the Internet Archive for the Open Content Alliance." The discussion calls LSB "serendipitously fruitful" and notes some interesting local searches. The scanning facilities for UC books are hosted at the two UC regional storage facilities. The article identifies the original focus as Americana, says books pro-

vided are identified based on catalog searches (they're not just taking a shelf at a time), and says the non-damaging nature of Internet Archive's scanning was affirmed by a test of 800 Berkeley mathematics books. It's an interesting article.

Tom Peters comments on LSB in a December 12, 2006 post at *ALA TechSource*. "After playing around for an hour or so…I have to admit—against some vague sense that my better judgment is failing me—that I like it." Unfortunately, Peters follows that by repeating a report that "LSB does not work well—or at all—when using browsing software other than Internet Explorer." That's generally not the case; most users of other browsers (certainly including Firefox) have used LSB without difficulty. Peters does interesting searches—and offers interesting comments. He doesn't like the name of the service, but that's really an issue with Microsoft's online services in general. He wonders why there's no overall count for the collection—as do I, although the same can be said of GBS and Amazon. (Internet Archive *does* provide a count for its American Libraries text collection, just over 35,000 at this writing—but that collection does not include everything on LSB.)

After reading Peters' post, I did a little experimenting using his favorite search terms ("phrenology" and "spontaneous combustion"). Here's what I found:

- LSB yielded 687 items for "phrenology" and was only willing to show the first 250 of them. It yielded 219 for "spontaneous combustion" (as a phrase; Peters' 660 must be the two words, which yield 887 on December 15, 2006), and would show all 219 of those. (There appears to be a firm limit of 250 viewable results in the current LSB, as the 887-book result also stops at 250.)
- Neither of those searches yielded any results in Internet Archive's text collection or American Libraries collection, even though the LSB PDF downloads come from IA servers; the two are clearly out of synch.
- Google Book Search yielded 2,618 for "phrenology"—but would show only 139 books, indicating a typically wifty total result count. For the phrase "spontaneous combustion," GBS showed 1,041, of which 512 were actually available.
- Restricting GBS to full-view books reduced the first result to 1,603 and the *actual* result to a mere 63, either one-quarter or one-tenth of LSB's result. The second search came down to 699 claimed, 489 actual.

Rick Roche discussed experiments using LSB as a genealogy tool in a December 18, 2006 post at *ricklibrarian*. Some searches came up empty, others did better. He urges Microsoft to add a proximity search. I suspect a California genealogist might do better at this point, given the source of most early material in the database—and it's clear that the database has just begun. Roche suggests LSB as a tool even in its current state, since it's free and can yield surprising results.

Conclusions

Microsoft has posted a significant (and presumably growing) collection of public domain materials in Live Search Books. The scans appear to be more carefully done than some at GBS, although Karen Coyle indicates that the OCR is still pretty poor. As with GBS, the PDF downloads include watermarks on each page (Microsoft's watermark is light and small).

Otherwise, OCA seems to be missing in action. That may change over the next few months.

The reality of Google Book Search is much less enchanting than the promise; many of the scans seem pretty poor. None of this should be terribly surprising, although it may be disappointing.

Both projects can enhance discoverability for library collections, although LSB must first add "Find a library" functionality. Enhanced discoverability should mean increased use of print collections. Neither project, as far as I can tell, has any serious potential to disrupt libraries or make their print collections less valuable. Neither project will yield a universal digital library. Nor should they be expected to.

Trends & Quick Takes

The True Face of Piracy

"Inside DVD piracy" by Rob Medich in the November 2006 *Sound & Vision* tells an interesting story—how "cammers" videotape new movies at preview showings and pass the goods along to illicit manufacturers, distributors and dealers. The FBI arrested more than a dozen people in what the article calls an "international crime ring" and possibly the biggest DVD piracy operation around.

Supposedly, this operation has "deprived the movie studios of an estimated $5.8 billion in revenues over the years." That's a tricky claim (would people

buying the third-rate pirate DVDs from guys in front of theatres *really* pay $20 or $10 a ticket to see the legit movie?), but let's assume it's correct (noting that it's not $5.8 billion *per year*, but still a nice chunk of change). The claim is that this one group of pirates accounts for 80% of the piracy.

I believe commercial pirates should be prosecuted. I thought the law against using (or possessing) camcorders in movie theaters was perfectly reasonable. What's great here, though, is one specific figure, given the absolute paranoia of MPAA about copy protection, DRM, and peer-to-peer copying:

> According to the Motion Picture Association of America, **roughly 97%** of movie pirating starts with theater cammers, who make about $400,000 a year from their efforts. [Emphasis added.]

In other words, even leaving out other sources of commercial piracy, casual "piracy" is not a big deal: maybe $175 million "over the years" for an industry that grosses better than $30 billion a year between theaters and DVD sales. If "over the years" means six years, that's less than one-tenth of one percent.

Public Library Use

The November 2006 *American Libraries* includes figures from the annual Index of American Public Library Circulation. According to that study, adult circulation grew by 1.8% between 2004 and 2005 and juvenile circulation was flat—but expenditures grew by 5.1%.

A caveat: These figures are based on a stratified sampling of larger public libraries (serving 25,000 or more), this year including 283 libraries. It completely ignores the huge range of smaller libraries and should be considered indicative, not conclusive.

Thomas J. Hennen, Jr. offers the 2006 version of his public library ratings in the same issue. These ratings attempt to be reasonably comprehensive. The "2006 version" is primarily calendar 2003 numbers, and includes just over 9,000 libraries. Those libraries show a circulation increase of 2.3% over the previous year, topping two billion circulations (up from about 1.6 billion a decade earlier). Operating expenditures were up 4.2%, and circulation per capita was up 1.2%, breaking seven items per capita.

The two studies use different time periods and different populations, so it's a little hard to make comparisons. In any case, public libraries continue to serve the public well on a massive scale and at a reasonable price, even if that price does go up.

The Future Past

Harry McCracken's "Techlog" in the November 2006 *PC World* is a charming look back at some technological predictions the magazine has made over the last 23 years. They were on the money about the computer mouse—in 1983! But they were also enthusiastic about Windows 1.0 and thought it would emerge in April 1984 (it came out in November 1984, but the first useful Windows was years later). They predicted IBM's PCjr "will revolutionize the way we live and learn"—and printed the 1987 prediction of a display-company honcho that "within 15 years, LCD monitors will be common and may reach 1000 lines of resolution." So far so good. "He also says they'll be monochrome." Seen many high-def monochrome LCD displays lately (or ever)?

In 1998, *PC World* guessed executives might dump laptops in favor of Windows CE-based PDA-like mininotebooks. In 1999, they touted the Device Bay standard for hotswapping PC components—and in 2002 they anticipated that the new version of Windows (then called Longhorn, now Vista) would ship in late 2004 or 2005. Overall, their track record was pretty decent as forecasts go.

Everybody Talkin' Bout Heaven Ain't Goin' There

That was the lyric that went through my mind as I read Heidi Dawley's November 7, 2006 article at *Media Life*, "With web TV, more glimmer than gold." The tease: "Lots of talk of people watching TV online." The substance: "For all the talk it turns out a small share of web users are actually doing it, watching television online. And while that may change over time, it will still be a ways off." The article reports on a recent Consumer Internet Barometer study, finding that about 10% of internet users had watched TV on the internet in the third quarter—and most of that was news. "Perhaps more significant, that viewing was in addition to regular TV watching, not at its expense."

That helps explain why networks are putting lots of their stuff on the internet. We were surprised by the quality when we watched a missed episode of one network show on my 19" Sony LCD: If anything, it seemed *higher* quality than our first-rate 32" Sony XBR TV—maybe because our cable system does a mediocre job with broadcast signals. The networks are cooperating because they're finding this is incremental traffic, not replacement traffic.

None of this has much to do with YouTube and its ilk. Do you watch YouTube videos *in preference to* (say) *Men in Trees* or *Bones* or *Studio 60* or whatever shows you like? More likely, the internet video is bits and pieces of extra fun, a time-waster that doesn't reduce your broadcast-TV time.

Multitasking Continued

I find it interesting that more and more people are recognizing (and studies continue to demonstrate) that multitasking is, to use my phrase, "a great way to do several things badly." Not that it matters much to people who always multitask—but they're not really paying attention anyway. Two more data points…

- Mary Ellen Bates writes "Emails and IMs and feeds—oh, my!" in the November 2006 *EContent*, talking about the "deluge of information that comes at us each and every day." While it's not the focus of the column, I was taken with this statement: "No, I do not believe it is possible to read email effectively while also talking on the phone and IMing a friend on the side. Each activity gets one-third of the attention it deserves; our brains can't truly multitask." If I would disagree with anything here, it's the fraction: In practice, context switching uses enough attention that each activity is probably getting *at most* one-fourth of the attention it deserves.
- Barbara Fister writes "Paying attention" on *ACRLog* (October 28, 2006), noting a *Business Week* article in which someone says the advertising in MySpace "can be so subtle that kids don't distinguish it from content." Fister rightly worries about this blurring of the lines. "In a similar way, TV stations which identify their programs as 'news' are in fact offering documentary and even 'infotainment,' while staunchly clinging to the 'news' designator. This is, of course, one of the tasks of information fluency librarians: to alert folks to the ways the lines are blurred." But Fister also suspects one culprit: "I think this blurring is an offshoot of 'continuous partial attention"… While multitasking can be useful, there is still value in the ability to focus on one task, and educators have a role in conveying that message." It gets worse: "A group of students told me that the one thing they'd find most challenging about the voluntary simplicity movement was not giving up things. It was spending time alone to think, relax, and get to know themselves and their values." Marc Meola commented, wondering how libraries can create environments that "promote focusing on one task" and notes, "even the corporate world realizes that multitasking doesn't work, and that 'what now passes for multitasking used to be called not paying attention' [quoting a *Wall Street Journal* article]."

Quicker Takes

In the most recent (and final) PC PROGRESS, *C&I* November 2006, I grumped about a *PC World* digital camera roundup that gave the highest rating to a camera with the *worst* image quality among the top 10. I wasn't the only one appalled by that; a letter in the November issue suggests, "[M]ost people would agree that the most important job of any camera is to produce a high-quality image." There's an editorial response: "We acknowledge that our camera ratings may need reweighting. We are doing a regularly scheduled review of our ratings and believe readers will like the changes that should result." It's a start.

- Seth Finkelstein writes about "search engine optimization and the commodification of social relationships" at *Infothought* (October 20, 2006). He's discussing the uproar over blogging-for-bucks schemes and noting that such schemes are as much about search engine optimization as about good publicity. The people paying for posts *don't* care if you post mean things about their product, as long as the post results in higher search engine rankings. He wonders about the whole issue of commercializing social relationships—e.g., A-list blogs that are really commercial magazines in blog form, paid writers and all. And he offers a variation on the old "would you have sex for a million dollars?" joke. Briefly, company asks blogger: "Would you write about me in return for an advisory board membership?" Blogger says yes. Company: "Would you write about me for ten bucks?" Blogger: "What kind of a flack do you think I am?" Company: "We've established that. Now we're just arguing over price." (Sorry if I mangled the joke, Seth—but you make excellent points here.)

- Mark Lindner struck a nerve with "habitually probing generalist" at *Off the mark* (October 20, 2006—a good day for quicker takes!). He's reading assigned articles for an LIS course, including an article by C.L. Palmer, "Structures and strategies of interdisciplinary science." Palmer discusses the research practices of such scientists, identifying four primary research modes, one of which is "generalist." Briefly, generalists use individualistic approaches, tend to work alone, habitually probe (often in unfamiliar domains), build their own knowledge bases through learning and asking broad questions, and strive for synthesis. We don't all spend all our time in one mode—but boy, do I recognize my own frequently-solitary habits in that description. If Lindner offers his "habitually probing generalist" shirts for sale, I might buy one—and I *never* buy message shirts.

Finding a Balance
Patrons and the Library

Here's a novel idea: Organizations should pay attention to the people who use their services and pay their bills. Here's another one: Organizations should find ways to involve *all* the people within their community who could or should use their services.

Those ideas don't seem novel? Maybe not. To hear some people talk about it, you'd think being patron-oriented is a startling change for libraries and librarianship. Here's how one radical librarian put it:

"Every reader his book. Every book its reader. *Save the time of the reader*." [Emphasis added.]

You know the source: S.R. Ranganathan, 1931, *Five Laws of Library Science*. The laws still make sense, especially if "book" is defined more broadly. I can't imagine there are too many librarians who haven't read those laws—and I don't imagine there are too many librarians who don't care about their patrons.

What's the Problem?

Maybe there isn't a problem. Some libraries are doing a fine job of staying in touch with their patrons' needs and desires. But I'm sure some librarians pay lip service to patron orientation more than they actively seek ways to maintain better contact, and that some libraries are good at "listening" to patrons but not quite so good at *hearing* them.

As with most of today's pushes for transformation, maybe it's not so much principles as techniques. Technology provides new ways to stay in touch with patrons, new ways to provide service. Technology can also enable patrons to be *active* parts of the library community in ways that weren't previously feasible.

It's not difficult to go overboard in patron orientation. Library users can be as mistaken and wrongheaded as librarians and frequently are: They may not be "broken" but they can certainly be wrong. "Give 'em what they want" is a great idea in moderation, but potentially disastrous if it becomes the overriding principle for all library decisions. If librarians don't know more than patrons about *some* things, why are they being paid to be librarians? For that matter, keeping touch with who "they" are and what "they" want—or, more to the point, what they expect *from the library*—is neither simple nor likely to be perfect.

Making Patrons Part of the Library

Here's one way to look at patron orientation within a balanced library:

Patrons should be *part* of the library, and the library community should include the broadest feasible range of patrons from within the service community.

- As *part* of your library, patron needs are clearly important—but so are other needs within the library community.
- As *part* of your library, patrons can contribute intellectual effort as well as tax money and volunteer hours (and Friends membership), in ways that can improve and enhance (but probably not replace) traditional cataloging and recommendation services.
- As *part* of your library, some subset of patrons should be involved in much of your planning and decision-making—but librarians need to lead the library community just as specialists lead other specialized communities.
- Reaching out to bring more patrons into your library community means respecting the existing community as well; that's balance.

Joshua M. Neff, in discussing "beta is forever" in a September 10, 2006 post at *The goblin in the library*, notes "libraries have *always* tried to gear their services and programming to their users…and done their best to tweak…their services and programs" (emphasis added)—but worries about the felt need to "have all

the wrinkles ironed out before we present anything to the public."

Neff looks at "beta is forever" differently, saying it "means always being mindful that what we do, we do for our patrons" and "means openly bringing our patrons in on what we do." Later, he rewords that:

> We need to include our patrons, because who better to improve services and programs than the people who actually take advantage of them?

While the thrust of the post is the need for continuing refinement (which you can either call "beta is forever" or, more familiarly, continuous monitoring and improvement: Google and Microsoft don't stop refining and improving software just because they drop the "beta" label), I find that it fits here. Including patrons as part of the process, making them integral to the library rather than merely customers, may be key to balanced improvement.

Laura Cohen thinks along the same lines in a September 19, 2006 post at *Library 2.0: An academic's perspective:* "Library 2.0 and the academic conundrum."

> Library 2.0 turns the role of academic librarians on its head. In the library 2.0 world view, user needs, preferences, practices, comfort zones, interests and skills in their handling of information converge to drive library services. Their participation in the creation and use of these services forges the library. Ultimately, users become our peers.

"Ultimately, users become our peers." I would disagree that current user needs should drive *all* of an academic library's practices, but making the patrons peers of the librarians *in some respects* makes sense. On the other hand, the next paragraph in the post strikes me oddly. It lists some of the traditional roles of academic librarians—but where those roles are legitimate (instructors, guides to researchers, classifiers), they continue to be vital. Academic librarians have always been more "guide on the side" than "sage on the stage" (to use a contrast popular a few years ago). Realistically, student needs, preferences, and practices *also* drive "classroom services" (very few academic institutions keep teaching classes with no students)—but that doesn't negate the special skills and roles of faculty members.

What Do Patrons Want?

That question comes up repeatedly in blogs and elsewhere. There are no easy answers, given the basic confounding factors:

- The patrons of each community are unique.
- Very few patron communities are homogeneous; different patrons have different wants and needs.
- Patron desires and needs change over time, and those needs they believe the library should fulfill are influenced by previous experience with *this* library and other libraries.
- There are no ways to gain complete pictures of patron wants and needs. Feedback mechanisms providing more than anecdotal evidence are expensive and clumsy—and they need to be continual, since the makeup of the community and tools available to the library continue to change.

None of these says it's hopeless or that librarians shouldn't keep as much in touch with patrons as possible. They do, I believe, argue against knee-jerk "whatever patrons want" reactions.

What do freshmen want?

The ubiquitous librarian asked that question in an August 7, 2006 post. Faced with a new incoming class at Georgia Tech, he wondered, "So what do they want from us?" He asked 30 random students within the appropriate Facebook group that very question; 16 responded. That's anecdotal, but still useful.

> The top expectation? Resources! Just about all of the respondents expressed desire for a quality collection, with five mentioning a wide range of materials on all topics. Nothing shocking, but the words that kept surfacing were fast, online, and easy.
>
> The second most frequently mentioned desire was quiet space. The library world (or maybe just us?) has been so focused on creating group and social spaces, but students definitely expect to use the library for escape.

Specific responses included the desire for "nooks and crannies so that I can study without seeing my friends every two minutes," "a quiet place for me to study," "a place to study where silence is enforced"—but also "research resources and such" and "a large range of books on every topic, a helpful library staff." Anecdotally, place—more specifically a *quiet* place—matters a lot, and so do books (as well as online resources).

Working with the patrons

Laura Cohen set down a list of "twenty things I want to ask our users" in an October 6, 2006 post at *Library 2.0: An academic's perspective*. She expresses the need to "work actively with our constituencies to find out what they need and how they want these needs to be delivered" and wants to ask questions ranging from the philosophical to the practical. When balanced

with the long-term goals of the library, this form of direct user involvement as part of the library could be particularly beneficial in academic libraries, where the connections between librarians and patrons may have frayed over the decades. A few of the questions:

> 5. Why do you go to the library?
>
> 7. Do you want the library Web site to be more like Google, Yahoo!, or something in between?
>
> 8. What's useful about the library Web site? What's problematic? What's missing?
>
> 13. Do you blog? If so, what service or software do you use, and what do you blog about?
>
> 14. Do you engage in tagging? If so, where? Would tagging of library research materials be useful to you?
>
> 16. If the library created a browser toolbar, what kinds of things would you like it to include?

It's **worth reading** and thinking about the whole list, but consider some of these. Number 5 *does* refer to library as place (the first question asks users to explain the role of the library in their life); its open-endedness is interesting. Number 7 may be difficult, particularly since—while Google is the most prominent search engine—Yahoo! is *used* more commonly than Google, indicating that both models work for tens of millions of users. Number 8 (and 9, which asks the same questions about the catalog) should elicit worthwhile feedback, although it's difficult for people to suggest what's missing unless possibilities are offered.

Number 16 is incomplete, or could be usefully modified: A more crucial question, I believe, is "What functionality would make a library browser toolbar useful enough for you to download and use it?" Number 14 is tricky: It assumes patrons know what "tagging" means, and that they understand the social-software meaning, not the graffiti artist's meaning. On the other hand, it's a vital question if a library's considering opening the catalog to folksonomy.

Then there's number 13—and I admit to puzzlement. If I was a student asked that question, I think my answer might be "What business is that of yours—and how does it relate to my use of the library?" While libraries need to find ways to make patrons part of the library, there are limits. I wonder whether question 13 doesn't fall into the same category (NOYDB, to use an acronym) as "Do you date? What is your sexual preference?"

Despite my problems with three of the twenty questions and sense that #13 is out of place, it makes sense to formulate this year's list of things a library would like to know—as long as you recognize it would be impractical to expect all, or a significant fraction, of your patrons to answer such a lengthy set of questions. If 1,000 students and 100 faculty members *did* answer all 20 questions, what would you do with the responses? The set can, as Cohen suggests, "get us thinking"—and part of that thinking should be how you can use narrower surveys and other feedback mechanisms to integrate patrons into your library. I'd suggest being as nonintrusive as possible; if there's no clear connection between the question and library services, why ask the question?

What do writers and readers expect of the library?

"What do patrons want?" is an overbroad question, to be sure. Lorcan Dempsey gets the question right in this September 20, 2006 post at *Lorcan Dempsey's weblog*, discussing a Danish study of library perceptions and expectations by Birte Christensen-Dalsgaard. Patrons may want many things that they would *never* expect the library to supply (and might be appalled if the library attempted to supply them). While it's wonderful to speak of exceeding expectations, we may go too far if we exceed reasonable boundaries.

Dempsey doesn't summarize the entire report (which I haven't yet read). Some of his notes are particularly relevant as you think about integrating patrons into the library and the limits of such integration. The study categorized three library-usage persona: the "drive-in user" (using the library in a goal-oriented way), the "worker bee" (using the physical space but not necessarily using library resources), and the library enthusiast (knowledgeable, uses library services, interacts with staff). "Library staff tend to be disappointed that the drive-in users do not make user of other services; not unsurprisingly, they 'express delight' about library enthusiasts." But all three personae represent legitimate segments of the patron community. A balanced library will find ways to integrate all of them while encouraging, but not forcing, the first two to expand their connections with the library. I've never asked the reference librarians at my public library for help; that doesn't make them less valuable or me less whole as a library user.

The Christensen-Dalsgaard report notes, "[P]eople tend not to use the library for searching, but once something is found, they do look to the library to get it." That makes Google and the library *not* direct competitors—but I wonder how many of you read

that as a failure on the part of libraries? I don't. If patrons use *some* library tools as part of the patrons' overall research toolkits, how is it a failure that they don't use *all* of them?

Other findings of the report may also be useful in seeking balance, while recognizing that every user community is distinct. "Users expect library instruction to be goal-oriented." Is this a surprise? "Students appreciated the physical locale of the library as a workplace…"

Will they tell us? Do they want *change?*

"Library 2.0" appeared on *Life as I know it* on September 4, 2006. Jennifer, the blogger, notes Nicole Engard's musing about making *her* patrons (lawyers) part of the library: "I sometimes wonder if our audience (lawyers) will ever want to participate in the creation of 'both the physical and virtual services' in the library." Extending that thought to academic libraries, Jennifer notes:

> College students are often uninterested in participating in user groups, focus groups, taking surveys or offering constructive thoughts. They are much more likely to tell you what they do not like. As such, they are not necessarily thinking about how the library can serve them better—just about what doesn't work for them. This presents an interesting challenge.

As the writer notes, there are limits to "Build it and [they] will come": "Implementing new services just to get a reaction one way or the other isn't a great way to make changes—actually, it is an awful way."

What happens if patrons *won't* indicate a need for the new? Jennifer finds that situation locally:

> I don't have patrons rallying for new services—they appear (through surveys, etc.) to be content with what we offer. As such, library staff don't see any particular need to try new services. Without patrons demanding some of these new library 2.0 services or engaged library staff, it is difficult to justify them to the administration. So, in the meantime, I keep watching all of the exciting things that are happening and making small changes one at a time.

Maybe the patrons *are* part of that library, and maybe the appropriate balance in that case *does* call for continuity more than change. There's nothing wrong with "making small changes one at a time"—and there's a lot right with paying attention to patrons who seem satisfied with what they're getting, as long as that doesn't mean an unwillingness to consider extensions to what's working well. It's possible—it's *likely*—that for many libraries, the best course of action in 2007 is to do what they did in 2006 very well and keep thinking about what changes might make sense for 2008. Balanced change may be slower than revolutionary change, but it's also a lot less bloody.

Laura Cohen raises similar questions in an academic library context in "Collaboration in Library 2.0: Can it really happen?" (posted October 13, 2006 at *Library 2.0: An academic's perspective*). She notes that "Library 2.0" requires active collaboration between librarians and patrons—and wonders whether patrons are interested in such collaboration.

> We'd like them to help us develop our Web sites, tag our content, comment on our blogs, collaborate with us in developing library services, provide advice to their peers about library resources and services, podcast with us, and so on. We expect that they'll be happy to see us on "their" community sites and will actively engage us in these spaces.

Cohen notes MyLibrary as a cautionary tale: Big when first released, many MyLibrary systems never really caught on with students. Cohen's "waiting to see how much use is made of the review writing, table of contents and notes features in WorldCat." She notes that adding social networking takes effort on the part of librarians—but also on the part of users. "So what if we launch Library 2.0. Will anyone come in the way that we hope?"

The Balanced Approach

It's a matter of balance—not only making patrons integral to the library community, but balancing what you hear from anecdotal and survey feedback with known needs and long-term issues.

The customer is always…what?

Jessamyn West is surely as patron-oriented as any librarian I know of, but she wonders just how far patron orientation can go in this October 21, 2006 post. She links to a post on *InfoBreakers* in which a patron felt that the library should *automatically* renew books that were due while she was on vacation, particularly since she had "told someone" she would be on vacation. The writer at *InfoBreaker* noted:

> I know, I know, customer service is at the core of Library 2.0. Finding new ways to connect with customers and redefining how we connected in the old channels. But where are the boundaries of Library 2.0? At what point do we say, "You're just going to have to look elsewhere for help on that."?

As West put it, "As we try to open our communities and have patrons 'join the conversation' and be more interactive with users, how do we learn to set new boundaries?" West continues:

> If the library was totally democratic, would users still fine themselves? Implement noise policies? Shirt/shoes dress codes? We know they would be unlikely to, as a group, create their own ILS or their own classification system (no, folksonomy is not a classification system, yes it is very useful on its own). So my question is and has been, what is the role for the librarian, the supposed "information expert" in our 2.0 vision of ourselves? We facilitate access to information surely. However, there are many people, librarians and patrons, deeply in love with the idea of library as place.

After some other comments, West closes: "How much do we bend to meet our users? How much do we expect them to bend to meet us?" *Both* questions must be asked if libraries are to find a balanced approach that integrates patrons into libraries. The patron is part of the library community; that doesn't mean they always behave appropriately, and it certainly doesn't make any patron the *boss* of the library community.

InfoBreaker continued the discussion on October 24 with "The customer is always right…except when they're wrong." The writer wonders whether librarians are being neutered as a profession—and notes that patron expectations need to be balanced against *other* patron expectations. Waive the fines for the vacationer, and books aren't available for other patrons. This writer is thinking about balance and the *mix* of patrons that make up a library community, as evidenced in this closing paragraph (excerpted):

> [O]ur policies need to be designed in such a way that we maximize the publicness of our public libraries. That as a resource, it remains for as many people as possible to use. Our collections, our services and our missions ought to be developed and judged by their betterment of the public good and the public's access to resources, rather than the tech savvy, the teens or the people who are standing in front of you at the time, and often that means stopping one person's swing to keep the other's nose.

If that final reference is obscure, it's because I omitted Oliver Wendell Holmes' saying, "The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins." A balanced approach to patron orientation means not only respecting the needs and rights of *all* patrons, but also considering the needs of the future community and preserving the record of the community.

Jennifer at *Life as I know it* commented on November 4, 2006, "Is it all about the customer?"

> [Ho]w far should we go to provide our patrons with services they want and/or need[?] In a perfect world, the answer should be as far as possible. However, in reality, there are all sorts of constraints that limit what services we can provide—time, money, knowledge, resources, technology, government regulations, etc. Ultimately, we are trying to provide the best services to our patrons with the resources that we possess. And I'm really working hard to figure out how best to do this. Allocation of resources is not an easy task. We all need to make decisions about what we can do - and conversely what we cannot… Balance is key to this equation. [Loads of unpaid overtime isn't the answer.] [A]dding resources that current staff can't support isn't the answer either. It is all about the customer—but providing the best service to the customer doesn't always mean doing everything that the customer wants. We can only work with what we have.

"Providing the best service to the customer doesn't always mean doing everything that the customer wants." It is, indeed, a question of balance—and balance across all patrons within the library community sometimes means ignoring certain felt needs.

Reality and Special Needs

Yes, patrons need to be integrated into library planning and operations, and new technologies and media provide more ways to do this. No, library services shouldn't be about doing "whatever the patrons ask for." Sometimes it's necessary to set aside what some patrons might want in order to serve the broader community—or to keep working at all.

Unfortunately, it's also easy to *assume* that changes will suit patrons. *The Jurassic Librarian* discussed this in an October 25, 2006 post, "Librarians to patrons: Drop dead." Noting that libraries are, indeed, frequently innovators and early adopters of technology, Jurassic notes that this can go too far:

> [W]e tend to deploy new technology in libraries ***without regard to patron wishes***. We simply bull ahead. We don't ask permission. We assume we know what is best for our patrons. We don't learn from patrons' daily struggles with machines and interfaces.

The example given: Replacing card catalogs with online catalogs. I won't quote the whole discussion, but it's true (in most libraries) that "Nobody asked our patrons about the change." It's also true that card catalogs were "constructed on a human scale" and online catalogs continue to confound and, in essence, reduce library service for "those who cannot use information technology and those who refuse to use it."

It's a tricky example. Whatever their flaws, online catalogs do offer richer access than card catalogs—but they continue to be weaker in some areas (Jurassic quotes a 1999 *American Libraries* article where I discussed this issue). Realistically, most libraries couldn't afford the labor involved in maintaining a card catalog—but I suspect most librarians also believed, and

still believe, that they were doing their patrons a favor by making the change.

Would libraries be better off if they had involved patrons from the start and followed the advice to stick with card catalogs? Would that have been the advice from patrons? Would we be better off now if the first two generations of online catalogs had never existed? I have no answers, but I suspect answers involve more complex equations than just following patron leads.

Finally for this discussion, I'll quote from a Publib post by Aaron Smith relating to the requirement that libraries should involve *all* patrons as part of the library community—and that a balanced approach means paying special attention to special needs:

> Is there a more radically egalitarian institution than the American public library? We have this variety of users precisely because we accept all comers and serve them without bias. Most of us make every effort to come as closely to this ideal as possible.

Good libraries not only accept all comers, they make special efforts to serve those most in need of service. Good libraries—particularly good public libraries—pay special attention to the minorities, to those not readily served by majoritarian goods. I think that issue deserves more exploration—and I explored a group of related issues in a 2001 *American Libraries* article which is not available on the open web and many of you probably haven't read. The article appears below (with a different title), in full but in its submitted rather than published form.

Patrons, Libraries and the Pareto Principle[1]

The best public libraries are exceptional institutions—where "exceptional" is a literal description, not an encomium. Good public libraries cater to *exceptions*: to the ideas, people, and literature too often ignored in a majoritarian society. The best public libraries are "counter-Pareto" institutions: they go beyond the Pareto Principle for the long-term good of the community.

What's the Pareto Principle? You've almost certainly used the observation even if you don't recall the name. Think of it as the 20:80 (or 80:20) rule. Twenty percent of the contributors in a field account for 80% of the field. So, for example, 20% of a restaurant's menu probably generates 80% of its business; 20% of a store's customers produce 80% of its business; 20% of currently-released movies will do 80% of the box office business; 20% of advertising produces 80% of results. On the flip side, 20% of customers will generate 80% of the complaints—and solving 20% of the problems in a process may resolve 80% of the failures. The Pareto Principle holds true in an astonishingly wide variety of fields, including many aspects of librarianship.

Vilfredo Pareto and J.M. Juran

Who was Pareto? Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) was an economist, sociological theorist, and—supposedly—avid gardener. Born in Paris, he graduated from the University of Turin and was a professor of political economy at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. Pareto observed that 20% of the population of Italy owned 80% of the land. According to one citation, he later observed that 20% of the peapods in his garden yielded 80% of the peas.

Did Vilfredo Pareto formulate a principle stating that, in most fields, a few of the contributors (20%) account for the bulk of the effect (80%)? Probably not. According to Dr. J. M. Juran, "Dean of American consultants on quality control," the first published use of the term "Pareto Principle" was in the paper "Universals in Management Planning and Controlling," *The Management Review*, October 1954. Juran generalized Pareto's observations to other fields and chose to use Pareto's name for that generalization.

Dr. Juran's belated confession that the Pareto principle should probably be the Juran principle comes in a charming article, "The Non-Pareto Principle: Mea Culpa" (http://www.juran.com/research/articles/SP7518.html). As he notes, it's far too late to rename the principle of unequal distribution.

Pareto offered an observation in one field—one that echoed and quantified similar observations from previous scholars. Juran generalized the observation into a principle that seems to hold across most endeavors. That's all to the good: the Pareto Principle (whether rightly named or not) is useful shorthand for the sort of distribution that seems prevalent in many areas.

Juran went one step further, a step that made sense for quality control but causes problems elsewhere. He characterized the Pareto Principle as separating the "vital few" from the "trivial many." When you're locating the 20% of problems in a system that cause 80% of the difficulties in using that system, the distinction makes sense—particularly because you

[1] This section appeared, possibly with editorial changes, as "Exceptional Institutions: Libraries and the Pareto Principle" in *American Libraries* 32:6 (June/July 2001), pp. 72-74. What appears here is the original draft submitted on November 10, 2000.

can proceed in an iterative fashion. That is, once you've corrected the worst 20%, chances are that 20% of the *remaining* problems—16% of the original—are causing 80% of the *remaining* difficulties—again, 16% of the original. Solve those (36% of the original problems) and you've approached perfection (eliminating 96% of the original difficulties).

When the Pareto Principle becomes the basis for decision-making, "trivial" can be a tricky word, as it slides quickly over into "irrelevant." You see that at some banks, stock brokerages, and other service institutions, where nearly all customer service is aimed at the 20% of depositors who represent 80% of the deposits: the rest of us are trivial. Some stores seem intent on reducing their customer base to the "vital" 20%; from a purely profit-oriented perspective, that may be a reasonable attitude.

Even in the private sector, businesses run into trouble when they try to apply the Pareto Principle too broadly. Crown bookstores carry the 20% (or less) of books that represent 80% of sales—but Borders, Barnes & Noble, and similar superstores find it much more profitable to carry much of the "irrelevant" 80%.

A similar situation may be playing out for video rentals. Pundits wrote off neighborhood video stores some years back: video-on-demand, offering the 20% of movies that people really want to see, would wipe them out. But the video rental stores survive; even though most of us do indeed stick to the new releases (and to a minority of those), we appreciate the broader selection and will pay a few cents extra to have it available.

For that matter, some financial institutions have benefited from the Pareto orientation of their competitors. It's not unusual for people to move from the irrelevant 80% to the vital 20% as their conditions improve. People with reasonable memories make a point of avoiding those institutions that shunned them when they were struggling; that's a rational tendency that favors more egalitarian institutions.

Libraries: Counter-Pareto Institutions?

It may be useful to think of public libraries as counter-Pareto institutions. Good public libraries concentrate on the other 20%: the 20% of needs and uses *not* satisfied by the "vital" 20% of resources, and the users left out by majoritarian services.

Consider some ways that the Pareto Principle affects libraries, and why libraries need to focus on the exceptions:

- Most of us get at least 80% of our information and entertainment from sources other than public libraries: TV, newspapers, magazine subscriptions, and so on. It's more difficult to satisfy the other 20% of our information and entertainment needs; if we're sensible, we look to public libraries for those exceptional needs.
- 80% of public library users may be satisfied with small popular collections, as they're looking for best sellers and evergreens. Almost any library can satisfy those requirements; good libraries work to handle the special needs of the other 20%. That may mean that 80% of your collection goes to serve 20% of user needs—and maybe that's the way it should be.
- 80% of the user population of a typical public library can probably afford to buy all the books they want or need. Libraries are the most vital for the 20% who can't afford to buy their own materials.
- User surveys will show the 20% of library services that meet 80% of needs. Those may not be the most important services for the health of your community, particularly if you degrade the other 80% of services.

I am neither qualified to suggest formulas for incorporating counter-Pareto thinking nor brave enough to do so. Most libraries don't adhere to pure Pareto thinking in any case: it's a rare public library that devotes 80% of its acquisition budget to the 20% of materials that will yield 80% of the circulation, even though a case could be made for doing so. On the other hand, most public libraries also don't spread acquisitions funds evenly across the entire spectrum of publishing; you do—properly—devote more dollars to the materials most likely to be widely used and to meet your own community's immediate needs.

Counter-Pareto Thinking: A Hypothetical Budget

Counter-Pareto thinking might suggest some balances. The numbers and ratios used here are illustrative and reflect a profound ignorance of current public library selection and budgeting process: this is entirely hypothetical. Let's assume a $1 million materials budget (suggesting at least a $5 million operating budget), with 20% set aside for reference, special local collections, and digital resources, leaving $800,000.

If your library knows borrowing patterns and has use-oriented acquisitions policies, it's fair to suggest

that 40% of the remaining budget should be devoted to the "top 20%"—the items that will get 80% of potential circulation. That's $320,000, leaving $480,000.

Take another chunk out: 40% devoted to the next 20%--the materials that will fill 80% of remaining user needs. That's $192,000—and you've now met 96% of likely user needs. (This assumes that the Pareto Principle does work iteratively for circulation patterns. That may not be true, but it's a reasonable starting point.)

Following these allocations—two levels of "giving 'em what they want"—you have $288,000 available to meet special needs and to expand the horizons of your users. Should some portion of that money go to alternative literature, small press books, and the resources that will make your most frequent users extremely uncomfortable? Possibly so; it's reasonable to suggest that any good public library should have something in it to offend (or at least upset) almost anybody.

Even if you take a strongly majoritarian perspective and allocate half of your funds to the best-selling 20%, and do that twice, there should still be deliberate funding for exceptional cases. At the end of the first two cuts, $200,000 should be available. $200,000 will buy a lot of specialized resources, alternative literature, and small press books—and it will help to build a diverse, lasting collection that will grow with your public as their needs and tastes change.

I'm not suggesting any radical changes in budgeting. My naïve guess, based on browsing within a range of public libraries around the country, is that public libraries *do* engage in counter-Pareto thinking (perhaps unconsciously). While the difficult areas of publishing may receive less attention than they deserve, most good libraries do go well beyond what would be needed to serve everyday needs and popular demand. Instead of buying bestsellers at saturation levels, libraries buy and lease enough copies to be responsive while allocating some funds to important items that may circulate once a decade—but that will mean far more than any bestseller to the rare users who read those items.

Conclusion

The counter-Pareto perspective may clarify some misleading claims about the future of libraries. "Give 'em what they want" has always been a Pareto assertion: focus on the predictable materials that will please 80% of users. "Give 'em what they *need*," the counter-Pareto assertion, is much more difficult to carry out. Good libraries do both.

The Whole Library Community

If a library finds that it can't serve 100% of the needs of 100% of its potential patrons, where should it do a less than ideal job? Consider a worst case: based on unusually effective patron interaction, it's clear that 20% of the patrons will be unsatisfied no matter how resources are distributed and services are defined—but the library can determine *which* 20%. To make a silly hypothetical even sillier, let's assume that one set of choices will result in "inferior" service as defined by the 20% most technologically adept patrons in the service community—and that the other plausible set of choices will delight them, but will result in inferior service to the 20% *least* technologically adept patrons.

Which direction would you choose?

Faced with this implausible dichotomy, I know which course I would argue for, and I think my choice is obvious from the section above. The 20% least technologically adept patrons are almost certainly the 20% *most* in need of library services—they're likely to be those left behind in various ways.

In the real world of most libraries, you should never face such a stark choice. But if someone tells you it's OK to ignore 20% as long as you please 80%, think long and hard about *which* 20% you'll ignore. A balanced public library maintains its soul and its character as the most egalitarian, most accessible public agency: one place offering free services where nobody should ever be ashamed to show up.

Interesting & Peculiar Products

Burwen Bobcat

Here's a case where I don't know what to make of a product—and might not even after there have been some reviews, given the market it's aiming for. Burwen Bobcat is software, a plugin for Windows Media Player. According to an early writeup in the October 2006 *Absolute Sound*, it's "a proprietary, patent-pending, computation-intensive process…that does three things: It applies a new form of rapid, high-frequency reverberation... Bobcat restores the leading edges of transients to their original steepness. Bobcat can…apply extremely precise equalization adjustment optimized for various types of material. Overall, the idea is to create audio waveforms that more closely

resemble those that originate from high-quality analog recorders (but without the associated noise)."

The claims are where things get dicey. Mark Levinson (a high-end audio person) claims Bobcat turns 128K MP3 files into "sound quality on a par with, if not better than, that of SACDs"—and that it will turn files ripped from CDs (without compression) into "the finest digital audio sound he has yet heard—sound he likens to that of analog master tape."

Does it work? To date, I haven't read any reviews (but I'm behind on reading). It's not cheap: Figure a minimum of $1,500, bundled with hardware. It's designed to appeal to high-end audiophiles. I question whether you can restore the quality lost in 128K MP3s, but then I don't much believe in magic.

Will reviews tell the story? That's hard to say. High-end audio magazines have run a few too many reviews praising the huge, unmistakable, "anyone with ears can hear them" effects of such miracle cures as freezing your CDs, marking the edges of CDs with green ink, putting coins in certain points on top of speakers, having special clocks somewhere in the listening room [I am not making this up], setting stones or blocks of wood (but only the right stones or wood) on components, *demagnetizing* vinyl recordings…the list goes on and on. I'm not *quite* ready to say that some high-end reviewers manage to hear whatever they think they should hear…

Meanwhile, expect a followup when there are loads of reviews. Maybe. I can think of better things to do with $1,500, and in any case my ears aren't golden enough, although I can certainly hear the loss in 128K MP3 and, even more easily, sense the listening fatigue of low-bitrate audio.

Flash Hard Drives

Sure, it's an oxymoron, but the name suggests what these are: Big flash drives intended to replace hard disks. An October 2006 *PC World* piece discusses Samsung's new 32GB SSD (solid state drive), which is already in a Japanese Samsung notebook (not yet available in the U.S.). As the article notes, "32GB may not satisfy multimedia addicts, but it's plenty for average business users"—at least until Vista comes along!

Initially, these drives are designed for portable devices. They're too expensive for desktop PCs, given that the memory alone costs about $16 per gigabyte, with integration adding to that. *PC World* tested the Samsung SSD against two contemporary 5400RPM notebook drives from Seagate (one with perpendicular recording, one longitudinal). Since most notebook drives are 5400RPM or slower (as opposed to desktop drives, mostly 7200RPM, some faster), that's a sensible comparison—and for most tests, the SSD was faster. Much faster for finding a file and running Nero Express; just a bit faster for booting up (35 seconds rather than 42) and copying files and folders.

The SSD is a lot more expensive but does have some selling points: It's silent, light, shock resistant—and it draws very little power.

Hot Notebooks

Both figuratively (Intel's Core 2 Duo dual-CPU chip produces fast results) and literally: The base of one "laptop" reached 114 degrees in *PC Magazine* testing—and they found temperatures as high as 120°F in one case. Right now, these notebooks are mostly for gamers; one good choice appears to be Dell's XPS M1710, which costs $3,789 (ouch!) but gets very good test results. It's loaded, with 2GB RAM, 512MB *graphics* RAM, a 100GB 7,200RPM disk (relatively unusual for a notebook), a DVD burner, and a 17" widescreen display—but it also weighs just under nine pounds and has mediocre battery life (2 hours 23 minutes).

At the opposite end of the price scale, the same November 7, 2007 *PC Magazine* that gives an Editors' Choice to the Dell XPS M1710 includes a "real-world testing" look at laptops you can buy for less than $600. It's an interesting story with an odd lot of machines, including a "GQ" (Fry's Electronics house brand) that cost $349 and is mostly a joke to enable a cheapo ad price—the sales reps didn't want to sell him the unit. Not surprising: the CPU is pathetically slow (it's a VIA, intended for embedded devices and consumer electronics), the hard disk runs at 4,200 RPM, it took *four to six times* as long to run benchmarks as a typical laptop—and the battery lasted about 90 minutes. There was one winner: Gateway's $579 MX6214, with a 1.67GHz Celeron CPU, 512MB RAM (the others had 256MB, barely enough to run Windows XP with "shared" graphics memory), a 15.4" display, a DVD burner, an 80GB 5,400RPM hard disk, close to three hours battery life, and performance not too much slower than a $1,000 notebook.

Editors' Choices and Best Buys

With the demise of PC PROGRESS, this subsection will feature products that are interesting primarily because either *PC Magazine* or *PC World* regards them as the

best choices among similar products at the time of review—the products receive either Editors' Choice (*PC Magazine*) or Best Buy (*PC World*) awards. I won't include every such product, but will include those I think worth noting.

For really big computer displays, *PC World* (November 2006) favors the $719 Dell UltraSharp 2407WFP, with impressive scores across the board, a wide range of adjustments and connections, support for HDCP, and a relatively low price. Or you could spend $2,749 for an Apple 24" display—but that one happens to have a powerful Mac built in, with a Core 2 Duo T7600, webcam, 500GB hard disk, and other goodies; the November 21, 2006 *PC Magazine* gives it an Editors' Choice. One oddity: Photshop runs almost twice as fast on the iMac 24" under Windows as it does under OS X!

Digital cameras can be divided into several overlapping segments. *PC World* uses "advanced" for cameras that fall between point-and-shoot and digital SLRs. Best Buy in a November 2006 roundup is the $285 Fujifilm FinePix S5200; it's only 5 megapixels, but it has a 10:1 opltical zoom and great battery life—and yes, it has "superior" image quality. *PC Magazine* awards simultaneous Editors' Choices to *two* digital SLRs, the $799 Canon Eos Digital Rebel XTi and $1000 Nikon D80—both body only, add $100 to $300 for a lens. Both offer 10MP performance and quality images; both are for serious photographers.

I'm a little surprised that HP's LightScribe technology (which allows you to burn a monochrome label directly onto specially formulated recordable CDs and DVDs, using the laser itself to create the label) has proliferated as much as it has. A November 2006 *PC World* roundup of DVD drives finds LightScribe on two of the five internal and three of the five external burners, including the two Best Buys: the $85 LG Electronics GSA-H10L internal drive and the $75 Samsung SE-S164L external burner. I'm astonished that you can buy a 16x name-brand dual-layer multiformat DVD burner for $75, much less one with LightScribe; it even comes with Nero Express. Oh, and both drives are *truly* multiformat, handling every DVD and CD format including DVD-RAM.

Perspective

The Death of the Disc?

I'm reminded of the early 1990s (and periodically since), when the death of print was being predicted regularly and with complete authority—or, more narrowly, the death of print books. That death has been postponed indefinitely

Some of us who objected to the notion did so not only on the basis that books work so well for most lengthy stories, but because new media and technologies *rarely* replace older ones rapidly or entirely unless the old form is seriously flawed, and maybe not even then. Radio didn't replace reading. TV didn't replace the movies or radio. And so on.

But "death of…" predictions keep coming. Some observers seem convinced that any significant upstart means the doom of existing methods. So it is, lately, with discs—CD and DVD alike. A few data points and comments on what's likely to be a long story, since physical media aren't disappearing any time soon and pundits will always be with us.

Hi-Def DVD

Sean Cooper tells us "why HD-DVD and Blu-ray are dead on arrival" in "The death of the disc," *Slate,* November 16, 2006. His thesis is not that the format war dooms hi-def discs (which might be true). "No, the new formats are doomed because shiny little discs will soon be history."

Why? First, because you'll rent or buy high-def movies on the internet, and Cooper seems to think the Xbox 360 will be a big part of this. Never mind how long it would take to transmit a 30GB file over typical broadband; Cooper doesn't pay much attention to that issue. Never mind, either, that the Xbox 360 only has a 20GB hard disk.

Second, there's cable on demand—and it *does* seem likely that on-demand high-def will be part of the picture.

Third, "pricey hardware": "After spending $3,000 or more on an HDTV and multichannel audio gear, nobody's in the mood to burn another pile of cash." Two things are wrong with that theory: You can get an HDTV for a *lot* less than $3,000 (and most people apparently don't buy serious multichannel audio equipment) and high-def disc drive prices will certainly come down. The truly bizarre part of this section is Cooper's suggestion that including Blu-ray in

Sony's PlayStation 3 (the cheapest way to buy a Blu-ray drive right now) "could sink Sony's new console—and maybe even the new company when Blu-ray stalls out." Sony sure had trouble selling that first half million units—and does anyone really believe that PlayStation devotees are primarily buying the game console to play hi-def movies?

Finally, there's the "inevitable" bit: "The rise of the hard drive." This paragraph confuses so many different issues it's laughable. He talks about the costs of "embedding a piece of plastic with data" (that is, pressing a disc), packaging it, shipping it to retailers, and stocking it on shelves, as compared to the cheapness of downloading. But the costs of producing, packaging, and shipping almost certainly come to $1.50 a pop or less (probably a *lot* less). Cooper tries to support his case thusly: "On iTunes an album costs about 10 bucks—as much as $8 less than some CD retailers charge, partially because of the reduced cost of getting music to buyers online." Right. "Some" retailers may charge $18 for CDs, but others charge $10 to $12, sometimes less. Cooper even thinks buying bunches of movies *delivered on a hard disk* is a wave of the future, apparently based on the bizarre *New Yorker* hard disk (which costs several times as much as the 9 DVDs): "In a few years, you'll buy every episode of *The West Wing* on a drive the size of a deck of cards rather than on 45 DVDs in a box the size of your microwave oven." The *West Wing* complete set is big because the publisher wanted it that way and provides extra materials. Even without hi-def you can ship 45 DVDs in a box less than 6x5x5" (four 50-movie packs, with a sleeve for each DVD). With two-layer high-def discs, that complete set would fit on no more than nine DVDs, which don't require much of a package and weigh less than a pound.

From Dying DVDs to Dead CDs

The real basis for Cooper's prediction:

> [C]onsumers want it to change. Music buyers used their modems to force the major labels into the fear zone and Tower Records into bankruptcy. The same will happen to the movie studios and DVD retailers unless they curb their disc addiction.

Maybe so, but not based on the evidence cited. Music *buyers* (as opposed to freeloaders) still get considerably less than 10% of their music via downloads. There's some evidence that legal download rates are no longer accelerating very rapidly. A December 6, 2006 *Wall Street Journal* story shows digital song sales peaking in the first quarter of 2006 and level, but a little lower, in the second and third quarters. At roughly 140 million songs per quarter, the revenue adds up to somewhere around $600 million—roughly 6% of CD sales. A Forrester survey (since partially disclaimed) suggests iTunes business is *dropping*.

Claims that downloading caused Tower's bankruptcy ignore economic reality. Tower went under because it *was* charging $18 for CDs and full list for DVDs when other retailers were charging a whole lot less. When Tower started its going-out-of-business sale, I wasn't the only one to notice that, *even at 30% off*, Tower's prices were too high.

High-def optical discs might not make it, but "the death of the disc" is, I believe, the least likely reason for their failure.

Paul Farbi writes "For Tower Records, end of disc" in the December 11, 2006 Washington *Post*—again claiming that Tower's failure means the end of physical discs themselves. Farbi says, "Anything that can be squeezed down to ones and zeros and moved around at the speed of electrons doesn't have to be stacked in plastic cases, shoved into bins and splayed over aisles under fluorescent lights anymore. *All of it's going online*." [Emphasis added.]

Farbi mourns this supposed inevitability. He'll miss Tower.

> There will never be the same sense of wonder on iTunes, the same joy of discovery and intoxicating power of musical abundance that hit you every time you walked into even the dinkiest Tower or any comparable record store. There it lay before you—unheard! unseen! unfoundled!—potential treasures beckoning from row upon row of wooden bins.

There are two separate issues here: Whether brick-and-mortar record stores are disappearing and whether discs themselves are on the way out. After all, Amazon, Tower.com (which is *not* bankrupt, as far as I know) and other online sites sell a lot of CDs and can indeed offer "wider and speedier access to more tunes than any Tower could ever stock"—even if they ship those tunes to you on plastic discs in jewel boxes. But it's not even that simple. Let's continue with Farbi's lament—which really isn't for the death of CDs as much as it is for the death of Tower.

> I hear the music geeks whining: Tower wasn't the cheapest place around, and it often employed contemptuous or conveniently nonexistent salespeople. It also pushed the same Top 40 pap as the marts (Wal- and K), the big boxes (Best Buy, Barnes & Noble, etc.) and the surviving chain mall stores. Yeah, yeah and yeah. And so what?

Farbi grew up near two Southern California Tower stores including the "holy pilgrimage site" on the Sunset strip. Even as he describes the kind of store that finally drove me away from Tower entirely, he evinces a nostalgia that's nice to hear but has little to do with what's happening. Along the way, he gets confused. One of Tower's strengths was diversity—the bigger stores stocked a *lot* of music, including CDs that will never show up at Wal-Mart. Here's Farbi's take on that, albeit in the guise of deploring online choices:

> The future portends more abundance and choice than Russ Solomon [Tower's founder] could ever have stacked in his biggest store. But something's being lost in this vast and unending digital banquet. Tower's downward arc tracks the fragmentation of musical tastes into 10,000 little pieces. We're well past the point where broad musical consensus is possible.
>
> That means there might never be another Beatles or U2… More shocking, Tower's fall suggests the end of "standards."

But those arguments suggest that Tower was *bad* for music, since it *stocked* those 10,000 little pieces—that we'd be better off with payola-based radio and Wal-Mart's top hundred so we'd all hear the same music. Just like we were better off when we all watched the same TV shows on three networks, presumably.

Price, not format

Farbi talks about Tower clinging "to bricks and mortar and $17.99 CDs." He's half right. Lots of bricks and mortar stores sell lots of CDs—indie record stores and the "mall chains" but also extensive selections at Target, Best Buy, and other chains that shall go unnamed. What they don't do very well with is $17.99 CDs, not unless they've established special loyalties and provide great service to make up for grotesquely overcharging.

The record industry treated CDs with a level of greed it didn't show when LPs were dominant—maybe because there are fewer major record companies than there used to be. CDs started out expensive because they were new, better in some ways and expensive to produce—although they soon became cheaper than LPs to produce and package. (For both LPs and CDs, the package costs more than the disc.) But LPs *declined* steadily in price as the years went on; CD suggested retail prices didn't—and even went up.

You had to know CDs couldn't cost much of anything to produce, given all the freebies. It didn't take much research to learn that artists weren't getting huge chunks of the take. There was simply no legitimate reason for CD prices not to decline—right now, $6 to $9 should be about right. (Classical fans know that Naxos has produced a few thousand high-quality original recordings, profitably, at $8 or less.) But the labels wanted $18—or more, if they could get it.

I stopped buying at Tower partly because the prices were too high, partly because the music was so loud and offensive I couldn't stand to be in the store. I still buy CDs now and then—for example, a fair number of Sony's two-disc "Essentials" artist compilations—but I buy them at Target ($12 to $14 for an "Essentials" package that equals four or five original CDs), secondhand at SecondSpin, via Amazon, or elsewhere. I won't pay more than $12 for a single CD, and I believe $10 is a fair price.

Tower priced itself out of the market and made itself unattractive to us less-young folk who have the money to buy CDs and prefer a physical package with top-notch sound, but don't like being subjected to painfully loud music while we're shopping.

Tower disappearing doesn't mean CDs, or physical media in general, are done for. There's room for downloading **and** CDs, just as there's room for ebooks (where they work better) **and** print books.

The Celestial Jukebox

That seems to be some people's dream of a media future. No DVDs (HD, Blu-ray, or regular), no CDs, no nothing—just whatever you want when you want it, for a slight fee. Hollywood's only too happy to offer different forms of movies—for the right price and under the right controls. But does it work well? The September 2006 *Sound & Vision* includes "S&V's guide to movie downloads," an overview and set of test drives of three legal movie download services—Movielink, CinemaNow and Guba.

The writer, Michael Antonoff, touts the "advantages": "With a download, there's no need to drive to the store or walk to your mailbox. There's no case to open, no packaging to throw away. Just point your browser…" I'm not sure how "no need to walk to your mailbox" is a big selling point unless the only mail you get is from Netflix (and the walk to *our* mailbox is zero steps, since it's right by the front door)—but perhaps true couch potatoes consider opening the mailbox too much trouble. Of course, some folks might consider it mildly burdensome to have to use a PC connected to the big-screen HDTV, but you'll get over that, right?

How did the three do? Movielink charges $20 for a current movie—the same price as a DVD, but without DVD extras. For that, you get stereo sound and an

image that "reminded me of a VHS cassette." You can burn it to a DVD, but only as a Windows Media Video file that plays on up to three computers. So you lose DVD extras, you're back to videocassette sound and picture quality, and you've saved…nothing.

Movielink's owned by a bunch of studios. How about CinemaNow, owned by one studio (Lionsgate), Microsoft, Cisco, and Blockbuster? It's a whole four cents cheaper: $19.95 instead of $19.99. Some movies download fast (13 minutes for *Fun with Dick and Jane*, but then you own *Fun with Dick and Jane)* and some don't (*four hours* for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*). Once again, you don't get DVD extras (although a handful of movies come in true DVD form). While the writer doesn't specifically comment on CinemaNow picture quality, his summation says, "[N]othing I saw came close to matching a good DVD." Guba? Back up to $19.99—and, as with CinemaNow, there were technical issues. Unlike the other two, Guba won't let you burn even a protected WMV file to DVD—but you can transfer your DVD-priced less-than-DVD quality no-special-features movie to an Archos AV700 portable player.

The writer concludes that these full-priced movies "could be a nice fit for the midget-screen-and-earbuds crowd" when DRM issues are straightened out. After all, on a midget screen with earbuds, mediocre picture quality and loss of surround sound and extra features won't matter—even if you did pay the full price of a current-feature DVD.

Why not? People seem willing to pay $2 or $3 for a ringtone when a full song goes for $0.99.

My own take on the "celestial jukebox" includes the old saying, "Be careful what you wish for." It's *typically* the case that downloaded media don't offer the same quality as physical media (although you can buy some downloadable music in lossless-compression formats). It's *almost always* the case that downloaded media eliminate most fair use and first sale rights through digital restrictions (or "rights") management; emusic.com is just about the only exception I'm aware of. It's *certain* that, if pay-per-use (the fundamental "jukebox" model) becomes dominant, Big Media will make sure you wind up paying *more* for those uses than you did to buy media. If you believe Big Media's going to lower overall prices when it totally controls each usage, you haven't been paying attention.

Saying prices will come down because downloading is cheaper than physical distribution ignores the recent history of Big Media. CDs cost almost nothing to produce—but CD prices only came down after antitrust litigation, and even then Tower retained artificially high prices. As for DVDs, the real cost of the medium (I've heard $0.06 for single-layer DVDs) can be suggested by the number of advertising DVDs and dollar-store DVDs. If you can make money selling 12 DVDs with 50 movies for $15, then the DVD itself is not a major factor in the price of DVDs. You can *count* on the universal jukebox being more expensive for most people, for lower quality, than physical media.

Fortunately, physical media aren't going away any time soon, and that's a very good thing.

My Back Pages

Citizens or Consumers?

"Putting the net in neutral" in the September 2006 *EContent* discusses net neutrality (in scare quotes in the article) and comes up with a great quote from an academic: "It's…possible that a network owner could discriminate in a way that benefits consumers, like guaranteeing higher-priority transmission for movie downloads." The word "consumer" is critical here: Something *you pay for* (as a consumer) will get priority over something that, say, you create or read for free (as a citizen). There's no plausible *social* policy that favors paid movie downloads over blogs or shareware downloads, but such a policy would certainly favor consumers over citizens.

The same article includes a remarkably ahistorical comment from the CEO of Gusto.com: "I don't know how much, if any, government money has been invested in building the infrastructure that exists today." DARPA? Never heard of 'em. Universities and government labs as the contractors for the original internet? You're making it up, right?

Breaking Through Barriers

It's an inspiring two-page spread in the October 2006 *Business 2.0*: "Grinding out success next to Starbucks"—how five companies "broke through Starbuck's barriers to entry and carved out profitable niches."

I guess to my old-fashioned mind, "barriers to entry" implies pre-existing—Starbuck's was around first and put up these barriers to newer upstarts. And Starbuck's has been around *forever*—or since 1971, when the company was founded. Now, with 11,000 locations, it takes in $6.4 billion a year. How could a latecomer fight that?

One way is to be a small fry: None of the five coffee retailers named does more than $300 million a year. The supposed strategies of the five may be another way. But as for breaking through barriers to *entry,* consider three of the five:

- Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf was founded in 1963.
- Peet's was founded in 1966—and, notoriously, Starbuck's founders knew Alfred Peet and originally purchased their coffee beans from him.
- Costa Coffee was founded the same year as Starbuck's, but in London; it certainly didn't face "barriers to entry" from those folks out in Seattle until years later.

But what the heck, it makes a good story. (Personal input: I *know* Peet's predates Starbuck's because I was buying beans at Peet's first Berkeley store as early as 1968.)

Be Careful What You Wish For (Part 295)

I'm not slamming *Business 2.0* this time: Jeffrey Pfeffer's October 2006 "The human factor" column makes perfectly good sense—"Why free agents don't feel free." He starts with an anecdote: Chatting with a freelance writer, she mentioned that she'd asked her clients to start paying by the job rather than by the hour. "Billing by the hour, she said, made her less satisfied with her job—especially when she *wasn't* working, at which times she would worry about the opportunity cost of not being on the clock."

Pfeffer notes that, in the late 1990s, lots of pundits thought many of us would decide to become free agents and love it. Part of that has become true, not always by choice: About 9.2% of workers are now independent contractors, up from 7.9% in 2001. "But I don't know many people today who feel liberated as a result." One study shows that people who went into contract work for a more flexible lifestyle "came to obsess about Ben Franklin's notion that time is money." They have trouble taking time off—and when they are on vacation, they spend their time thinking about missed income opportunities. "So leisure time became just as anxiety-ridden as actual work."

Pfeffer concludes, "We need to find ways to shield ourselves from the practices of billing time and hourly payment" if we want to be happier and not work-obsessed. It's hard not to agree.

Beyond HD

What? You bought that 1080p wide-screen TV, you've got your antenna or satellite or cable HD service, you actually know that you're watching HD—and you're trying to decide between HD DVD and Blu-ray as the final, ultimate, best picture ever?

Hold on there, bucko! Eric Taub's story in the September 2006 *Sound & Vision* carries the chilling title above: HD isn't good enough. NHK, which pioneered HDTV (in the 1970s!), is working on the next step, Ultra High Definition TV. "Its resolution will be so high it'll make your new big-screen plasma look about as sharp as the 1950s Sylvania HaloLight in your grandparents' attic." UHDTV will have *16 times* the maximum resolution of HDTV: 4320x7680 pixels, with 22.2-channel surround sound (ten speakers at normal height, nine over your head, three at your feet). The first demos use 440" screens. If you have room for a 37-foot screen, you may also be ready to mount 24 speakers around your home theater!

Of course, the files are a wee bit large. Uncompressed, 18 minutes require 3.5 **terabytes** of disk space—but then, uncompressed HDTV is also enormous (1.5 gigabits per second, or roughly eleven gigabytes per minute).

Anything produced for UHDTV would be captured digitally—35mm film doesn't have 4K resolution, much less the 7.6K of UHDTV. The best film-to-HD transfers take place at 4K, converted to the roughly 2K of HDTV as the final step. That also makes sense: It's akin to the rule that to capture 20KHz sound you need to encode at 40KHz.

The good news, if you're wondering about the lifespan of your hot new TV: NHK doesn't expect UHDTV to hit the market until around 2025.

63 New Products That You Just Gotta Have!

That's the line on the cover of the October 3, 2006 *PC Magazine*, right below "What's Hot Now." I knew that required comment—for example, totaling up the cost of those 63 "just gotta have" products and estimating how many of them a rational person would feel they "just gotta have."

Here's the thing about *this* issue: It's a phony. I couldn't find 63 new products *at all*—and certainly nowhere near 63 that anyone "just gotta have." The only way I could reach 56 (not 63) was to count *every* product mentioned, including the lowest-rated products in group reviews, and including every *old* product in their "The Best Stuff" standing feature.

Leaving those out, I count six Editors' Choices—presumably the only products we really "just gotta have"—and 40 products that didn't earn Editors'

Choice. Buying all six of the Editors' Choices would set you back a little more than $3,100. Maybe you "gotta have" a hot-looking "music phone" that doesn't have speakerphone functions and has poor battery life (Chocolate by LG), a 32" LCD HDTV (Sharp LC-32D40U), a 160GB external hard disk (Seagate ST9160821U2-RK), a document scanner (Xerox DocuMate 152), Quicken Basic 2007, and a monochrome laser all-in-one printer (Brother MFC-8860DN, which would *seem* to make the scanner redundant, but never mind).

So far so good. Oddly, of the four "hot" products on the cover, only two are among those six Editors' Choices. The other cover hotties are a "luscious Lamborghini laptop" by Asus that gets a so-so 3.5-dot rating and costs $2,800 and a similarly-rated $1,800 Sony VAIO VGN-UX180P Micro PC, a strange device halfway between a small notebook and a large PDA, with "less than desirable performance" and a keyboard that's "difficult to do any real work on."

I guess you "just gotta have" both of those as well. What else? The 40 non-Editors' Choice products add up to around $33,000 total and include a digital SLR, yet another iPod speaker system, a GPS navigator, a webcam, *seven more* LCD HDTVs, *six more* document scanners, a low-rated security suite, more utility software, "the other" money software (MS Money Essentials), another all-in-one printer, open-source CRM, and another cell phone.

I just gotta laugh. Or sigh, given the many years during which *PC Magazine* had the best personal computing content and cover lines that honestly related to the contents of the magazine.

The November 21, 2006 *PC Magazine* makes me wonder whether the cover writers simply don't read the magazine. It says "Meet Your New PC!" in inch-high all caps, followed by "Why These Breakthrough New Consoles Could Win the War of the Living Room." The cover illustrations are the Sony PlayStation 3, Microsoft XBox 360, and Nintendo Wii. The article itself says near the end of the introduction: "Does this next gen of consoles actually signal the end of the PC? We don't think so; not just yet." But then, Sony was notorious for its six-year-old prediction that the PlayStation 2 would "wipe out the dinosaurs and supplant the PC in the home."

How Much is that Audiophile Amplifier?

I was mildly bemused by three adjacent amplifier reviews in the October 2006 *Stereophile*—all positive reviews, all presumably of gear that's not out of place in the high end. Some high-end writers are now admitting that the extreme price differentials in this equipment can be as much about pride of possession and the costs of handcrafted products as about actual audible benefit, although most writers still proclaim that every super-expensive item clearly sounds better than mere very-expensive gear.

The third review covers a solid, high quality integrated amp for people still wedded to stereo: the $900 NAD C372, rated 150 watts per channel continuous power into 8 ohms. It's also typical in size and weight—roughly 17x13x5", a little over 26 pounds. The second and first offer interesting variations.

The second, Sonic Impact 5062 Super T, only produces 6 watts into 8 ohms (actually a little less), but that's enough for sensitive speakers—and it costs all of **$159**. That's the upgraded model; the base model's $39. The frequency response isn't perfect at the high end, but the review's still positive. It's a shrimp: 7.5x7.5x3.25", 2lbs.

Then there's the first. It produces 280 watts per channel continuous into 8 ohms and, like the NAD, has a neutral sound (as any good amp should). It's a trifle bigger: *Four* boxes, one of them 22x17x9" and 103lb., two power supplies *each* 17x16x6" and 70lb., and a 17x16x6", 57lb. battery pack. If that sounds like a big heap of equipment, the price matches: the ASR Emitter II Exclusive costs $24,900.

I can think of several reasons why the NAD is legitimately worth six times as much as the Sonic Impact. I'm sure some people will find the ASR worth 26.7 times as much as the NAD. I'm not their intended market anyway—that's more those who will buy $100,000 turntables (I'm not making that up).

Here's a fourthdifferent data point, the Joule Electra VZN-80 MK V Emerald OTL Stereo Amplifier, which costs a mere $16,000. It's interesting not so much because of the price (it claims to produce 80 watts per channel into 8 ohms, 50 into 4 ohms, so on a price-per-watt basis it's the most expensive unit here) but because of the review, in *The Absolute Sound* for December 2006. *TAS* doesn't do *any* measurements, so we can only take the word of the reviewer—and that word's interesting. After touting the wonderfulness of OTL (output transformerless) amplifiers, she says: "The sonics of the Joule VZN-80 did give me a bit of a struggle… I don't mean to suggest that the amp sounds bad and I'm trying to figure out a way to dance around it." That's quite an admission:

She's trying to avoid admitting that the amp is "too gorgeous"— it apparently masks detail and substitutes "lushness and bloom" for reproducing the music as recorded. I suspect measurements would be pretty bad—but then, it's a mere $16,000.

Really Cheap Expertise

Maybe this is a trend—part of "crowdsourcing," where you use the "wisdom of the crowd" to avoid paying for expertise. ChaCha is different. As described in the October 17, 2006 *PC Magazine*, it's searching with a guide: "armies of paid human assistants who specialize in certain topic areas" and help searchers in real time. Sort of like librarians and virtual or IM reference, but with only one search engine—and the claim that human assistance "hasn't been tried before" in web searching "in terms of the real-time interaction we're pursuing." It's free—with ads.

> Do you have a friend who recently received a diagnosis of breast cancer? A topic expert who knows how to navigate available Web information about the general category of cancer and the specific type of breast cancer can instant-message with your friend as she searches, helping to narrow down results so that she finds sought-after information quickly.

Maybe it's *better* than librarians: You'll have a "topic expert" for a specific type of breast cancer. But consider the level of expertise you're likely to get:

> Some ChaCha guides earn $5 an hour to aid in searches, while experienced ones with good success rates can make twice that.

So you have an "expert" making $5 to $10 an hour—and that rate *has* to be a contract rate, which means no fringe benefits. (If there's even the hint of these guides being employees, $5 an hour would be illegal—that's below even the stingy Federal minimum wage.) To get a comparable hourly rate for a full-time employee, add 30 to 40% for fringe benefits and the employer-paid portion of Social Security. In other words, the *really great* experts at ChaCha are making the equivalent of $3.75 to $7.50 an hour or $7,500 to $15,000 a year full-time equivalent. You should really expect some hot expertise for that kind of money!

Gingerly Coping with Segway

I started covering "It" in 2001, back when it was called "It," then "Ginger." Remember those halcyon days? Somebody got a huge book advance for a book about "It"—but nobody knew what It was. We eventually found out that Ginger (nee It) was a new something-or-other from Dean Kamen, who has invented some marvelous things. Ginger was Bigger than Big. Steve Jobs talked about designing cities around it. John Doerr said it would be "more significant than the World Wide Web." Someone said it would make Dean Kamen richer than Bill Gates.

When Ginger turned into the Segway Human Transporter—first assumed to be a "hydrogen-powered" device that couldn't fall over, then revealed to be battery-powered—the hype didn't let up. Dean Kamen said the factory would be producing 10,000 Segways *a week* by the end of 2002—half a million a year. The company started lobbying states to make this 80lb. 12mph scooter sidewalk-legal. Supporters called it revolutionary and made analogies saying the Segway was to cars as cars are to horses and buggies.

Fast forward to 2006. As the *Business 2.0* "hits & misses" page notes, Segway recalled all the transporters—because a software glitch can reverse the direction of the wheels, "which can cause a rider to fall." As part of the recall, Segway revealed how many of the transporters it's actually sold so far. *Business 2.0* contrasts the actual number with what it says the company predicted, "50,000 to 100,000 units in the first year alone"—which is at least a bit more modest than 10,000 a week.

Actual sales in almost five years? 23,500. An average of fewer than 6,000 a year or 120 a week.

I still don't see any way to ride a Segway without looking incredibly dorky. I suppose using a Segway instead of walking helps to achieve the apparent American ideal of being badly overweight.

Masthead

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, Volume 7, Number 1, Whole Issue 85, ISSN 1534-0937, a journal of libraries, policy, technology and media, is written and produced by Walt Crawford, a senior analyst at OCLC.

Cites & Insights is sponsored by YBP Library Services, http://www.ybp.com.

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