Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

100 Reasons for Doing *Cites & Insights*

G G F# E D G A B, B B B A G C B A, G A B A G E F# G, D B G A C B A G. Half, four quarters, four halves, four quarters, four halves, four quarters, four halves, four quarters, two halves, whole.

Some of you must have hummed this by now, and it's distinctly appropriate to the occasion: Old 100th, from the 1551 *Geneva Psalter*, attributed to Louis Bourgeois (c. 1510-c. 1561). One of the great old hymn tunes, given that name because the oldest hymn using the tune (at least in the 1966 *Methodist Hymnal*), from 1593, is (very) loosely based on Psalm 100: "All People That on Earth Do Dwell." You might know it better as the doxology, "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"—or, in a tougher mood, even "Before Jehovah's Awful Throne." It came to mind when I realized this was the 100th issue of *Cites & Insights*. No religious overtones here, but I do love a good tune with even better four-part harmony.

Back in 2000, if you'd said I'd do 100 of these, I'd probably have laughed. My original aim was 41—which made a total of a hundred of "these," including the 59 issues of "Trailing Edge Notes" and "Crawford's Corner" that preceded *Cites & Insights*. By the time I reached issue 25, I thought I might make it to a 50th issue, but I made no promises. In the 50th issue, I didn't say anything about anticipated lifespan—but, if pressed, I still would have said there was a less than even chance I'd make it to 100.

Then came Issue 75—or, rather, then came Issue 72. Remember issue 72? Does volume 6, issue 2 ring a bell? Or perhaps Midwinter 2006? There's another, more popular name, the one that heads the single 32-page essay—and I'd guess issue 72 will *always* be the most widely-read issue of *Cites & Insights*. (For the first five weeks of 2007, issue 72 was *still* the third-most-downloaded issue, nearly two years later.) If you'd asked at issue 75, I'd have said I couldn't imagine *not* getting to this point—unless major events interfered like, say, losing my job and having to reevaluate my life.

Turns out even that didn't do it.

Quite a milestone. A nice round number. You may be expecting a nostalgiafest. Not this time around. Nor will I give you a list of 100 items or even ten lists of ten items each.

This issue is composed of traditional *Cites & Insights* sections—with each subsection numbered at the end of the paragraph that closes a subsection. Thus, 100 reasons for *Cites & Insights*—making it (libraries) work, trends, quick takes, interesting products and the state of high-density optical discs, closing with purely fun essays in MY BACK PAGES. Enjoy. This chunk of blather is the first: [1].

Inside This Issue

Trends & Quick Takes

Sick Culture of Nonstop Accessibility

Not my words. I'm not *that* negative on other people choosing to be available all the time. I don't choose to do it and don't plan to, but that's my choice.

When Dan Costa uses that phrase in "Don't send that e-mail!" (October 2, 2007 *PC Magazine*) it's a little rueful since it follows this introduction:

> This cycle of e-mail abuse has to be broken, and I need your help. I'm not sure when it started, but for the past few months I have been checking e-mail before I go to sleep—not from my computer but from my Treo, while I am actually lying in bed. This is a problem, I know…

Do we need Online Anonymous, a 12-step program for email/IM/Twitter addicts? Costa provides a list of "reasons not to send e-mail" in an effort to clarify the "ever-fading line between healthy productivity and seriously obsessive behavior." He, ahem, e-mailed it to a bunch of colleagues, who added other good reasons—of which 29 appear here. Let's not linger on whether checking email obsessively has positive correlation with healthy productivity; that gets into the whole multitasking/CPA thing. The reasons are at least amusing and well worth reading. You'll find a longer list at www.gearlog.com/2007/06/costa_living_50_reasons_not_to. php (I guess the column gets written four months before it appears in print).

The #1 reason in the online column didn't make it into print: "You're drunk." Neither did these first-rate reasons not to send email:

> 6. Reply All includes the subject of your e-mail.....yes, Stephanie Chang, Editor of PC… I am talking to you.

> 7. Reply All often includes your coworkers, subordinates, and superiors and can easily be forwarded to their family and friends.

> 8. HR is on there, too.

It's a fine list. I wonder how many hundred copies have been circulated by email. Thousands? Tens of thousands? [2]

Ink Costs and Reality

The cost of supplies for inkjet printers has always been troublesome and cloudy—troublesome because those full-color 8x10 photo-quality glossy-paper renditions may be costing $1 *or more*, cloudy because the standards for stating supply costs have been lacking.

According to *PC Magazine*, there's progress. ISO/IEC 24711 specifies a test procedure for testing ink cost; ISO/IEC 24712 defines the types of pages to print. "In theory, yield claims based on the ISO/IEC standard should be fully comparable, regardless of the manufacturer." As reported in the October 2, 2007 issue, *PC* decided to run its own tests against five models that offer claimed yields based on the ISO/IEC standard: a Canon Pixma MP600, HP Officejet J5780 and Officejet Pro 5400dtn, Kodak EasyShare 5300 and Lexmark X3550. Three of these are multifunction units, two just printers. My new printer is as close to a Pixma MP600 as I could find—a Pixma MP610, presumably an incremental upgrade. *PC* used the most cost-effective cartridge in cases where you can buy ones with different capacities.

"All the claims passed our reality checks"— in every case, the manufacturer's claims were legitimate. This is good news. You have to understand that "per page" is based on a stated amount of ink coverage, typically 5% (about right for typical text documents or casual color graphics, *way* low for full-page photographs—and the standard doesn't claim to address photographic costs). The cost per page for monochrome pages ran from 1.4 cents per page for the HP Officejet K5400dtn, a relatively expensive printer with big cartridges (the black cartridge yields around 2,300 pages), to 4.4 cents for the Lexmark, a cheap printer with small cartridges. I was delighted to see that the Pixma ran less than three cents per monochrome page and less than a dime per color page—but I still print most pages in "fast mode," using half as much ink per page.

The article also considers total cost of ownership for light-duty and heavy-duty use over three years. While the big Officejet would cost the least for supplies over three years, it would be almost the *most* expensive as a light-duty printer because the purchase price is high; the Lexmark would cost the most to run but the least overall—*if* you average 80 monochrome and 20 color pages per month (that's *very* light use). If you're what I'd consider a medium user but they call "heavy duty" (200 monochrome and 100 color pages per month), the big Officejet's the cheapest any way you calculate—and the smaller Officejet is the most expensive. Kodak's "cheap supplies" printers? Most reports say they're not really all that cheap—and, in this case, those were the only monochrome cartridges yielding considerably less than 500 pages. Sure, you can buy the cartridges cheap, but if there's not much ink in them, they're not bargains. [3]

Life without Software

That's the title on Scott Spanbauer's article in the December 2007 *PC World,* recounting his one-week attempt to give up local ("desktop") applications for a week, working solely on the web. It's an interesting account. For Spanbauer's needs the move may make sense, although one wonders just what all those multiple AJAX sessions will do to responsiveness.

When someone says "basic e-mail, word processing and spreadsheet needs," note that different people define "basic" differently. Your specialized and basically useless Word features may be ones I use every day, and vice-versa. I'm not a good candidate for moving everything to the web, even though my work mornings are primarily done using web applications (and thin-terminal remote desktop apps). You might find this possibility interesting, and maybe connectivity won't be an issue for you. Worth a read. [4]

Life in 2032?

To kick off *PC Magazine*'s second quarter-century, Lance Ulanoff offers his own projection of what he thinks life will be like in 2032—or, apparently, what he'd *like* life to be like. There's a "telepresence android robot" doing all sorts of stuff, including attaching an 8x10 foot 3mm. thick OLED TV screen in whatever room he happens to be using. The car is *of course* on autopilot (stop me if you've heard this one before…), since all sorts of embedded sensors and onboard computers assure that nothing can go. Thing can go. Wrong. He's running Microsoft's web-based spreadsheet on Google OS. Medical nanobots take care of health problems. His "Acer/Gateway/Lenovo Thinkfold" has 128GB RAM and a 2TB solid-state drive—oh, and naturally, in the office he wears VR goggles and waves his hands around to manipulate data.

So far so good…and then he mentions a "red glow coming from my left arm," his *embedded RFID chip* signaling that his son is in the building. His wife calls to say a new HP has arrived, an all-in-one with a 21" screen and "2-inch optical HD drive" running "Macintosh OS ultimate" and recognizing "my Epson photo printer, digitizing tablet, and Canon all-in-one printer" when they're within a couple feet of the computer. He's adding stuff to his Facebook page and thinking about a blog post. There's also stuff about even more disposable gadgets—all of them biodegradable.

I don't know what to make of this. I fully anticipate being around in 2032, but I sure don't plan to have an embedded RFID chip in my arm. Nor, frankly, do I expect to see autopiloted cars in my lifetime, interesting as that might be. Unless *everyone* signs up for self-driving cars and highways, I just don't see how it can work—nor do I see where the trillions of dollars to convert the roadways will come from. As for medical nanobots—well, maybe.

What surprises me more is the conservatism. HP still being a dominant PC maker? Using an optical drive in 2032? Having both an Epson printer and Canon multifunction printer—and both blogging and maintaining Facebook pages? As for the mobile telepresence android robot ("roughly 5 feet tall and with the strength of a preteen," navigating the house on a Segway-balanced body, choosing matching clothes"), I think we've been promised multifunctional intelligent mobile household robots almost as long as we've been promised self-driving cars. Doesn't mean it might not happen some day. Check back with me in 25 years…that would be, let's see, *C&I* 33, whole issue 425 or thereabouts—if I'm still doing *C&I*! **[5]**

Good Sound Matters…or Does It?

Two commentaries on sound quality in an age of iPods appeared late last year in general-interest media. The sad one is Terry Teachout's "The deaf audiophile" in the November 10, 2007 *Wall Street Journal* online. Teachout thinks the iPod might be "the most culturally consequential" invention of the past decade—and says it and other players "are driving producers and engineers nuts." Teachout refers back to a September 2007 column saying that people in the music industry "increasingly assume their recordings will be heard as MP3s on an iPod music player" and are tailoring the product to sound best that way.

The problem is "that MP3 files are highly compressed" (not necessarily true) so "a piece of recorded music that is loaded onto an iPod and listened to on inexpensive earbuds doesn't sound as good as the same music recorded on a CD and played back on a stereo system equipped with high-quality speakers or headphones." Again, not *necessarily* true, depending on how the music is stored and what's meant by "inexpensive earbuds." Not all $10-$50 earbuds and headphones are as crappy as the ones supplied by Apple and most other MP3 player makers. Industry professionals say the result "is music that is loud but harsh and flat, and thus not enjoyable for long periods of time." I believe that to be true for 128Kbps MP3 or similar formats.

Teachout doesn't deny the charge. "True? Incontestably." Teachout is "well aware that the MP3 is, musically speaking, something of a blunt instrument." But *he doesn't care* (and doesn't seem to think we should)—partly because of the "near-miraculous convenience of MP3s" but because he's middle-aged and has age-related hearing loss, like about a third of boomers. (He spent "countless happy hours playing loud music" as a youth, which means the hearing loss is more than age-related.) So he doesn't hear high-frequency sounds as well as he did. "The good news is that I don't care…much." He says hearing loss "liberates you from the snare and delusion of audiophilia." He asserts that recorded music can "never hope to be more than a substitute for the real thing" (true)—and that "Stravinsky is still Stravinsky when you experience him through a $10 pair of earbuds. *He's* the point, not the earbuds."

Yes and no. I have moderate hearing loss too, especially in high frequencies. I know recorded music isn't the same as live music. But "Stravinsky is still Stravinsky" isn't exactly the point either. There's a *huge* gulf between replicating live music and living with

low-bitrate compressed tunes played over crappy earbuds. That gulf has nothing to do with MP3 as a technology, nothing to do with flash players, and precious little to do with inexpensive headsets. Teachout completely ignores the most important part of the complaint about overcompressed music: "not enjoyable for long periods of time." Which apparently has less to do with high-frequency hearing than with the nature of digital artifacts and overcompression. Maybe he doesn't get fatigued with bad MP3 sound. I do, and so do a lot of other people. [6]

Fred Kaplan wrote "In defense of audiophiles" at *Slate* on December 4, 2007. Kaplan was seduced by high-end audio and became a writer for high-end magazines. He writes in response to Teachout's article and a piece by Anthony Tommasini in the New York *Times* saying ordinary MP3 sound is "good enough." Tommasini says "easy access has trumped high fidelity" but also claims the compromises in MP3 are irrelevant.

Kaplan examines Teachout's points from a high-end perspective—and, sigh, Kaplan *also* seems to think all MP3 is the same, that it all flattens dynamic range and smears transients. Kaplan *correctly* notes the varying degrees of removal from the real thing. In the end, Kaplan argues that *only* a really good home stereo playing CDs or LPs is good enough. (Yes, Kaplan's another one who claims vinyl LPs offer much better sound than CDs.)

I'm tempted to say "a pox on both your houses," but instead I'll note my own experience. In my experience, high bitrate MP3—preferably 320Kbps, the highest rate supported—is, *for me*, indistinguishable from the original CDs, at least for anything short of full orchestral recordings. You're still getting more than 4:1 compression. My $49 2GB Sansa MP3 player holds my 220 favorite songs encoded at 320K, and if I spend another $30-$40 for a couple of gigs of plugin flash RAM, I can keep extending that. My brother uses iPods—and loads them, at least in part, with ALAC or FLAC tracks which are wholly lossless. There's nothing about iPods and Sansas that requires high compression; you just can't load quite as many tunes. Frankly, I'd *rather* have 200+ of my favorite tunes than 500 to 1,000 that I care less about.

The other piece is what you stick in your ears. I spent $10 for cheap Sony in-ear phones; they provide good, not great, sound, much better than the junk that came with my portable CD player or the earbuds that came with the Sansa. For use at home, or if I'm traveling for a long time, I have a $50 pair of on-the-ear headphones that offer *superb* sound…and the Sansa's audio circuitry is good enough to drive them well.

On that $100 setup ($49 player, $49 headphones), am I getting the equivalent of a $10,000 stereo system playing the best CDs? Probably not—although, I must admit, I'm beginning to believe that in some cases, audio CD-Rs created from 320K MP3s sound *better* than the original CDs. (There are semiplausible physical reasons this could be true, incidentally, although I'm not sure whether I buy into them.) But I can't listen to 128K MP3 on *any* headphones or speakers for more than 20-30 minutes without wanting to turn the music off—and with this $100 setup, I enjoy the music so much I tune out everything else and listen *into* the music.

Good sound *does* matter. You can get good sound with MP3…but probably not very good sound at 128K or 160K bitrates. Good sound gets rid of the irritations and provides at least 95% of what's there, without requiring a massive investment and sitting precisely in the one sweet spot to hear the most from your high-end system. [7]

Quicker Takes

It's always interesting to follow those with superior insight and insider's wisdom. Thus we have Lance Ulanoff, the current Editor-in-Chief of *PC Magazine* and a man of profound insight. He's one who decided *and declared* in mid-2006 that Blu-ray was doomed, that HD DVD must surely prevail. He's backed down a little on that, but here's another one. In an October 2, 2007 editorial, he says he expects that the deadline for analog TV—the date that analog over-the-air broadcasts go dark and broadcast TV goes entirely digital—will be "extended yet again, to 2011." That's part of an assertion that Google should *not* win any portion of the 700MHz spectrum (the spectrum freed up by the end of analog broadcasting, which is being auctioned off). Why? He doesn't think Google is prepared to handle mobile. "Verizon, AT&T, and Sprint know this business and would surely build a better network than Google ever could." Aren't we all delighted with how well these folks are doing now? It's an interesting attitude—essentially, that newcomers can't possibly do better than established firms. Such as, oh, AltaVista in web search? In any case, I think Ulanoff's expectation on the go-dark deadline is improbable; the steps to make the transition relatively painless are already in place and there *just isn't much outcry* to "save analog TV." But, of course, I'm not an industry insider like Ulanoff—I would surely never have known that Blu-ray was doomed, for example. Still don't. See later in this issue. [8]

- Aren't we a little tired of the "buying a car for a buck" metaphor as it relates to plummeting PC-related costs? The October 2, 2007 *PC Magazine* has a chart on the price per megabyte for storage. The curve is fairly linear and only covers the PC period (1981-2007, projected to 2010), from $700 per megabyte for Apple's first hard disk ($3,500 for 5MB in 1981) through the first terabyte drive ($399 for 1,000GB in 2007, that is, $0.399 per gigabyte or about 0.04 cents per megabyte), to an asserted (and, I believe, unlikely) ".002 cents per megabyte" in 2010. That's an astonishing curve—but the headline and text mess it up. The text says "you can have a terabyte for less than $200," which certainly was *not* true in October 2007 ($399 is not "less than $200"—and even in February 2008, I don't see a 1TB disk for less than $265), and the headline says "From highway robbery to runaway bargain." Sure, the text goes back to the first hard disks in 1956, $50,000 for 5MB ($10,000 per megabyte)—but that wasn't "highway robbery" in 1956. It was the cost of cutting-edge technology. Then there's the metaphor. The text ends "If car prices had followed the same curve, you could buy an SUV with pocket change." To which the only plausible reply is "and it would be one-tenth of an inch long." [9]
- Jim Louderback has an amusing "guide to social networks" in the October 16, 2007 *PC Magazine,* comparing them to bars. He thinks of MySpace as a "first college bar," LinkedIn as the bar at Morton's Steakhouse ("a great place to further your career. Just don't expect to have any fun"), Plaxo as a dive bar, Orkut as last year's hot nightclub, Twitter as "open mike night at a comedy club," and Facebook as, well, *this* year's hot place. Don't take it too seriously, but it's amusing. [10]
- You might find "Junkbusters!" in the November 2007 *PC World* worth reading, particularly if you recently purchased or are planning to purchase a new PC. It offers tips on how to get rid of the "crapware" that comes preloaded on most new PCs—you know, the music services, online games, eBay ads, etc.—and includes "junkratings" for ten desktops and notebooks. Worst: a Sony VAIO notebook with 27 preinstalled icons in the Welcome Center (apparently not unusual for mediacentric PCs), earning a rating almost 50% higher (worse) than the next-worst Toshiba notebook. The two "polite" systems? Desktops from Alienware and Polywell. A Gateway desktop and Lenovo notebook were "mildly annoying" (a bunch of system-tray applets on the Gateway, a bunch of "helpful" utilities on the Lenovo). The rest? All "infuriating," if not as bad as the Sony. [11]
- If I can trust anything in *Home Theater*, an item in the January 2008 issue is fascinating. It says the average plasma TV uses a whopping 328 watts, followed by 208 for rear-projection TVs, 193 for LCDs and 148 for CRTs (which are as inefficient *per square inch* as plasmas, but these days they're mostly smaller, older sets). It also says Sony, Hitachi and Sharp are jointly looking for ways to improve that, aiming to cut power consumption by half, with LED backlighting being one technology. [12]
- Yardena Arar's December 2007 *PC World* "skeptical shopper" column is about an unsettling new idea: Outsourced customer satisfaction. At some online retailers, you're now offered a "100% satisfaction guarantee" when you check out—for a 3% premium. That money goes to Assurz, which gives you 90 days to decide whether you want to keep the purchase and reimbursement for all charges, including shipping both ways, should you decide to return it. That's only if you just don't want it—if the unit's defective, you use regular channels. Three percent for buyer's remorse. Sure does make some brick-and-mortar retailers look good by comparison. [13]
- Another December 2007 *PC World* piece discusses the "10 biggest web annoyances," from dubious privacy policies to boring virtual worlds. "The expense of e-books" is #8, and there the commentary yields an odd villain: "Supposedly, much of the sticker price goes to authors, who receive the same amount of royalties per book sold, regardless of the book's form." Maybe so—but for most authors and most books, that amount is somewhere between 8% and 12% of the retail price, hardly the reason for ebook pricing. What the coverage fails to mention: Only about 14% of a typical book's *price* actually covers the cost of it being a physical book (that is, printing, paper, binding, shipping). [14]
- This may be redundant, but it's worth noting. *PC Magazine* scrapped its 22-issue-per-year schedule, going to old-fashioned monthly publication. That makes sense, since the 500-page issues that encouraged the more frequent publication have long since dwindled down to modest little issues. The first monthly is 154 pages but the second is down to 122 pages; I'm afraid *PC Magazine*'s glory days have long since passed. On the other hand, once again, two cheers for restoring at least *some* specs to prod-

uct reviews. It's an incomplete set and it's not on all products, but it's a lot better than we were getting for a while. And the smart car section seems to have disappeared; that's worth another half-cheer. [**15**]

➢ Speaking of abrupt changes in magazines, *The Perfect Vision* for January 2008 arrived with a special insert page…announcing its "merger" with *Playback*, a free digital magazine. Subscriptions and accounting being what they are, that means I start getting *The Abso!ute Sound*—a sister publication—again, shortly after letting my subscription lapse. Ah well… I tried out *Playback*. It uses texterity to display pages and took nearly two minutes before anything came up. After ten minutes experimenting, let's just say I didn't bookmark it or sign up for email reminders. As for the final issue…well, a second announcement of the "merger" uses "it's" wrongly; a writeup of a poll about internet usage assumes that anyone who isn't using the internet at home or at work is using it at…Starbuck's (I guess there are no public libraries in their world); a supposedly high-end home theater magazine can't even be bothered to measure TV contrast, much less provide any verifiable information. I won't miss it. [**16**]

➢ Finally, a few quick words about multitasking and continuous partial attention. A December 6, 2007 post at *What I learned today* notes some of the newer studies and articles pointing out that single-tasking yields better results, frequently in less time—and a December 3, 2007 post at *Attempting elegance* defended the blogger's multitasking as CPA and a good thing. It's quick because I added comments on each post asking whether the blogger felt they did their *best* work when multitasking or engaging in CPA—and in both cases, the blogger responded that, yes, there *are* times when they focus on one task and recognize that this yields their best work. Which means there's no disagreement: Almost all of us *appropriately* multitask much of the time (it may be "time wasting" but it's frequently essential for various reasons), but focus (which usually means *not* multitasking) is still valuable. As I said in one followup comment, "Much of the time, 'doing your best work' for that period of time *requires* CPA or multitasking, because 'being there' for a variety of interrupt-driven purposes is what's happening." I also noted that the few writers I've read who seem to claim that CPA is *always* preferable don't prove their point very well, because the essays seem less lucid than the writers should be capable of. [**17**]

Perspective: Tracking High-Def Discs

The first *Cites & Insights* mention of HD DVD or Blu-ray was in the Spring 2005 issue (*C&I* 5:5)—oddly, in a FOLLOWING UP section that wasn't following anything up. (It should have been a QUICK TAKE.) By then, the two formats had been announced but neither had reached the U.S. market. I believe the precursors to *Cites & Insights* (*Trailing Edge Notes*, later *Crawford's Corner*) did a good job of tracking DVD from the time it was suggested until the time it was a must-buy for libraries, so I thought it might be worth doing the same tracking for high-def discs. In Spring 2005, the news was that a January 2005 story on backwards compatibility was fundamentally erroneous, somehow managing to suggest both that HD DVD discs would be playable on DVD players (*wrong*) but that Blu-ray players might not be able to play regular DVDs (not impossible, but wildly implausible if Blu-ray's proponents had any hope of success).

There's been a fair amount of misinformation and peculiar speculation ever since, together with a format war that shouldn't be necessary. As usual, the publicity machines get rolling long before commercial products reach the market in any number. I thought the high-def disc process would take long enough that libraries could (and should) wait and that I'd be able to predict the point at which most libraries should be interested. I still think that's true—and I think that point may be approaching. [**18**]

Not as straightforward as DVD vs. VHS
The situation with high-density discs isn't comparable to that of DVDs. DVDs are so clearly superior to VHS (with the possible exception of longevity under library circulating conditions), and are so much cheaper to produce that consumers and producers alike had strong reasons to move to DVD. The pictures are clearly superior on almost any TV (let's say "any TV in proper working order"). DVDs began providing more than just the flick almost from the beginning. Studios learned rapidly that it made sense to sell loads of $20 DVDs from day one, instead of selling a few $99 videocassettes to rental stores and eventually bringing out $20-$25 versions. (Now, they bring out $15 and $10 and $6 DVD versions after a year or two.) The compact size, high capacity and direct-access capabilities of double-layer and double-sided DVDs, and the absurdly low manufacturing cost, opened a whole

new retail market—full-season sets of old TV shows. It was not unreasonable to predict that DVDs would move rapidly into the mass market once they reached early adopters and that they would push VHS off the market after a few more years.

High-def discs don't have those advantages. Yes, the picture's better—on the right TV sets, *if you care*. You need an HDTV to gain anything from a high-def disc. While most people out to buy new TVs in 2008 will almost certainly buy HDTVs, that wasn't true in 2005—and it still seems to be true that a very high percentage of HDTV owners *don't watch HDTV*. They think the "Available in HD" logo at the bottom of the screen means they're watching HDTV—but it doesn't. It means that the program *can* be seen in HDTV, not necessarily on the channel you're watching.

If you're not watching HDTV and don't see that you're missing anything, you're not a potential customer for high-def discs. If you *are* watching HDTV, you may or may not notice or care about the difference between upscaled DVD and high-def discs. After all, plain old DVD offers considerably better video quality than SDTV. There's no difference in convenience. So far, a few hundred flicks and maybe one or two TV shows are on high-def discs as compared to tens of thousands of DVDs. People have purchased DVDs much more than they ever purchased videocassettes, and may be less inclined to replace those DVDs. And, of course, DVD players (even upsampling ones) are now commodity products, while high-def players started out brutally expensive ($500 to $1,000 and more) and are still pricey (typically $200 to $300 or more—sometimes a *lot* more). The discs are more expensive too, but that's not a big deal—$25 to $30 for high-def discs as compared to $20 for new-release DVDs (but $5 to $10 for older flicks). Finally, let's not forget the effects of format wars on some sensible people: They'd just as soon postpone a purchase until it's straightened out.

All of which meant that my first prediction was the easiest: "It [high-def disc impact] won't be as fast as DVD itself." I also said "but it will come"—and I still believe that, although "an impact" may not ever mean replacing DVDs. [19]

Where we've been, where we are

I hope long-time readers have found my ongoing coverage useful. In June 2006 I said, "If I had to bet on one of the formats, I'd bet on Blu-ray" because it had the best technology and the broadest range of supporters—but also that, if I was a librarian, "I'd wait a year or two to see what develops." I also said the 2007 hol-

iday season might be crucial: "If players aren't selling by the hundreds of thousands and there aren't thousands of discs, both formats may be headed for niche status or failure." Depending on your definition of "players" and "hundreds," it's hard to judge the first half of that statement—but the second half's clear enough: As of the end of 2007, there were at most a few hundred films available in each format, and sales are apparently on the order of one or two percent of DVD sales. Headed for niche status? Maybe, unless movie studios eventually force the issue. Failure? Not for both formats, at least not in my opinion.

Toward the end of 2006 I said that, unless you were in a library supporting a film studies department (in which case you should have already been buying high-def discs in both formats, since they were cheap and extremely useful for film studies), you could sit back and wait. I think that was a reasonable statement for all but the most affluent public libraries.

In October 2007, I offered current guesses—and I think they were on the money. "At least one Blu-ray player at $400 or less" was available by Christmas (albeit just barely under $400). Five or six brands of Blu-ray did outsell the one (or two) brand(s) of HD DVD, and of course PlayStation 3 outsold HD DVD players many times over. Blu-ray discs continue to outsell HD DVD—apparently at an increasingly lopsided rate. I said the war would continue in 2008 with no clear winner. Since I said "in" rather than "through" 2008, I can waffle on that one. Finally, I said that if your users are asking for high-def, there's no reason to hold off. True then. True now.

What has happened between then and now is that most retail chains that carry video players also carry high-def players, and most places that carry substantial quantities of DVDs also carry high-def discs. Sears regularly advertises two or three brands of Blu-ray player, occasionally one HD DVD. The big electronics chains typically advertise three or four Blu-ray, one HD DVD, and one or both of the brand-name combo players. Target, Wal-mart, you name it—they sell at least one high-def player and they're probably selling both varieties of high-def discs. [20]

Bias and Perception

Is my ongoing coverage of high-def discs unbiased? I'd like to think so. I admire Sony as a technology innovator, but I detest Sony's role in the DRM fiasco. I write at a Sony LCD display and we watch a 10-year-old Sony XBR TV set, but my wife uses a Toshiba notebook, so we're supporting both prime players.

On the other hand, it seemed clear from the start that Blu-ray had two advantages over HD DVD, one small and one big, that made it an odds-on favorite if one format was to win out. The small advantage: Two-thirds more capacity per data layer. The big advantage: Sony learned from Betamax and got *lots* of manufacturers to support Blu-ray. At this point, I see five or six brands of Blu-ray players, two brands of dual-format players, and still just one brand of HD DVD player being advertised in stores.

Some people went out on the other limb—and once you've adopted a position, it's tough to admit you might be wrong. Lance Ulanoff of *PC Magazine* says he declared Blu-ray a doomed technology way back in mid-2006. In a December 4, 2007 "First word" column, he admits that it's still around and continues with an analysis that strongly suggests a bias. He refers to "Sony" and Toshiba, not mentioning the other major players behind Blu-ray. He says "you can burn 50GB discs with Blu-ray, while HD DVD has a 30GB limit," but that overlooks the fact that Blu-ray burners are available in a number of different units, where as far as I can tell HD DVD burners are barely on the market. (Toshiba does offer an HD DVD burner—on a $3,200 laptop.) Ulanoff "officially" retracts his claim of doom for Blu-ray—but he sure comes off as an HD DVD partisan. [21]

The Format War

How many drives for either format have actually sold? That depends—on whether you include game consoles and whether you include just players or also burners within PCs. A late November 2007 claim from the HD DVD group is that 750,000 players (including Xbox 360 add-ons) had been sold in North America—but Sony sold 3.4 million PlayStation 3 consoles, all Blu-ray players, in North America. That's more than a 4:1 ratio in Blu-ray's favor even if *no* standalone Blu-ray players had sold.

Blockbuster says it will focus on Blu-ray when expanding high-def offerings in its stores, based on existing rental numbers. In the UK, Woolworth's dropping HD DVD based on sales figures: Blu-ray discs were outselling HD DVD discs 10 to 1. Probably more significant than either of those: In early February 2008, Netflix—which has offered HD DVD and Blu-ray rentals since the formats became available—has announced that it only plans to offer Blu-ray in the future for those desiring high-def discs.

Warner Bros. had announced the Total Hi Def (THD) disc, with Blu-ray on one side and HD DVD on the other—but that was postponed from the 2007 holiday season until 2008. Here's what I wrote in December 2007: "If I had to guess, I'd guess it will never appear as Warner Bros. seems likely to drop HD DVD entirely." Good guess on my part. In January 2008 Warner announced it would drop HD DVD in spring 2008—a huge loss for HD DVD, since Warner was one of the biggest studios and was actively releasing in both high-def formats.

The supposed "big win" for HD DVD—Paramount and DreamWorks dropping Blu-ray releases—was expensive: $100 million to Paramount and $50 million to DreamWorks in the form of promotional support. Did it do HD DVD much good? Not so's you'd notice. Toshiba's also slashing prices on their players and ran a $2.7 million Super Bowl ad—but Gartner regards this as "useless resistance" in a somewhat hopeless quest. *Wired*'s online site includes a January 28, 2008 article concluding that HD DVD is toast. Perhaps more noteworthy: In the second week of January, only 15% of high-def disc sales were HD DVD, and *not one* of the top ten HD sellers was exclusively HD DVD. In 2007, Nielsen says HD DVD had about 35% of the (admittedly tiny) high-def market. (*Ars Technica* says that, the week after Warner announced it was going strictly Blu-ray, HD DVD *player* sales dropped from 14,558 to 1,758 while standalone Blu-ray player sales climbed from 15,257 to 21,770. That could be a meaningless curiosity. If it's a trend, the writing is indeed on the wall.)

The December 2007 *Perfect Vision* includes a four-page article on the "war," beginning with a somewhat questionable graphic—one that seems to show that studio support and released titles for the two formats are identical, that there are five "supporting disc-player brands" for HD DVD and ten for Blu-ray, that the cheapest Blu-ray player is $499 while there's a $199 HD DVD player—and that HD DVD players have outsold Blu-ray by three to two. Which makes it really odd that Blu-ray *discs* outsell HD DVD discs so widely and you can only find one brand of HD DVD-only player in most stores, compared to five or six Blu-ray brands. Maybe you've seen ads for Onkyo or Venturer HD DVD brands; I haven't. Those drive sales figures explicitly exclude game consoles and computers, areas where Blu-ray has an *enormous* lead over HD DVD. Other than the clear attempt to make the "war" more equal than it really is, the most interesting part of the story is research as to whether people care: When polled, only 8% of Americans were familiar with either HD DVD or Blu-ray—and only 3% planned to buy a high-def player. [22]

Players and Drives

Samsung released the BD-P1100 Combi Player. It's the second player to handle both Blu-ray and HD DVD—with more complete support for HD DVD than LG's first universal player. LG's released a second-generation dual-format player with complete support. Both run about $800.

The September 2007 *The Perfect Vision* reviews Sony's $499 BDP-S300 Blu-ray player, which *does* yield 1080p resolution, including 1080p/24 output for the growing numbers of TVs that can handle this. (1080p/24 yields ideal movie playback, since movies—not TV—are filmed at 24 frames per second). It offers a great feature set, great detail, gorgeous color, beautiful audio, support for the full range of writable CDs and DVDs (except, apparently, writable Blu-ray!). Deficiencies: The menu's slow and the remote is ordinary. *Sound and Vision* for September 2007 also reviews the Sony BDP-S300 and finds it generally fine, with quick load times and a fine picture. The highlights box doesn't mention slow menu response. It didn't test well enough to earn *S&V*'s seal of approval.

The August 2007 *PC World* reviews two set-top players and an internal drive. The $700 Samsong BD-P1200 (Blu-ray) and $450 Toshiba HD-A20 both score well, although you have to wonder about a review that mentions "softer volume" (huh?) as one of the virtues of the HD-A20. The $1,200 LG GGW-H10NI Super Multi Blue BD/Drive/HD DVD Reader apparently performs well as a burner—but, as with other similar cases, it can only *write* to Blu-ray discs, not recordable HD DVD.

The October 2007 *PC World* gives a Very Good rating to the $299 Pioneer BDC-2202, a DVD burner that plays Blu-ray (making it temporarily the cheapest way to watch Blu-ray). It loses points for software compatibility issues and as a relatively slow DVD burner—although for most applications, 8X DVD, 4X dual-layer DVD and 24X CD-R/RW is fast enough.

An October 2007 group review of Blu-ray players in *Home Theater* is problematic because the reviewer has an obvious and open bias toward HD DVD (and a "cute" writing style, along with apparent editorial encouragement to abuse readers who disagree with him). That means you get "highlights" such as "1080p/24, for those who want it"—a snide aside suggesting most people don't (early HD DVD players consistently lacked 1080p/24 support, leading this reviewer to dismiss it). Belittling features, praising Blu-ray drives only by comparison with his favored Toshiba—it's an appalling demonstration of journal-

ism gone bad. He reluctantly winds up with a "good" rating for the Samsung BD-P1200 and Panasonic DMP-BD10A—but adds a heading "Wait for Gen III?"

The October 2007 *Perfect Vision* includes a review of Toshiba's HD-A20 (then $500), the first HD DVD player to provide 1080p playback. (*Perfect Vision* doesn't dismiss that as "for those who want it," and it appears that this player only does 1080p/60, not 1080p/24.) It's $100 more expensive than another Toshiba model that sticks with 1080i. And, apparently, it doesn't do a very good job with 1080p: The reviewer got a better picture by cutting back to 1080i and letting the TV do the heavy lifting. Conclusion? You're better off with the cheaper HD-A2. (An earlier review in *Home Theater* came to similar conclusions.)

Here's the first sign of an actual HD DVD **burner**: A December 25, 2007 *PC Magazine* review for the Toshiba Qosmio G45-AV680. The notebook costs $3,200, is heavy (9.9lb.), isn't all that fast, and HD burning is much slower than Blu-ray burning, but if you really want to burn HD DVD, it's now possible. As for recordable media, I looked at OfficeDepot and Fry's/Outpost on January 31, 2008. OfficeDepot came up blank for HD DVD but had several Blu-ray writables. Outpost had one HD DVD recordable option, ten Blu-ray from five different producers.

Here's a dual-format PC drive—writing Blu-ray, reading HD DVD: the $400 LG GGW-H20L Super Multi Blue BD Drive/HD DVD Reader. (Some model name!) The January 2008 *PC World* gives it a Very Good (87) overall review; it's the second-generation "format agnostic" burner from LG, faster than its already-fast predecessor—and it's full featured as a DVD/CD burner, including LightScribe labeling.

Overall? Dual-format standalone players have dropped below $1,000 and now offer full-featured playback for both formats. Dual-format computer drives are available—and at least one of them will burn Blu-ray to boot. Competition pretty much assures that Blu-ray players will keep getting cheaper and better no matter what happens to HD DVD: I don't see Pioneer or Panasonic or Sharp or Samsung yielding the market to Sony. Although, in terms of overall sales, it's going to take a lot for anyone else to catch up with those millions of Blu-ray drives in Sony PlayStation 3s. [23]

My Current Take

I'm no expert and I could still be wrong, but I think it's reasonable to draw conclusions. I think there's a chance the format war will end this year, but also a

chance that it won't (Toshiba is a stubborn and profitable company).

➢ **Most probable**: Blu-ray becomes the sole commercially-viable format sometime in 2009 or possibly late 2008, but doesn't become a true DVD replacement unless studios force the issue by abandoning DVDs (which I regard as unlikely but certainly not impossible).

➢ **Plausible**: The two formats coexist indefinitely (with Blu-ray dominant), with very small shares of the market.

➢ **Implausible**: HD DVD becomes dominant. Could happen, but I don't see how.

➢ **Wild card**: People don't care about true high-def (probably true in too many cases), leaving degraded downloads and DVDs to make both Blu-ray and HD DVD irrelevant.

You think true high-def downloads will take over? With U.S. broadband capacities? I don't see where the needed 10x-20x increase in broadband capacity to the average household is going to come from—but what do I know?

This is the year high-def discs, primarily Blu-ray, *could* reach 5% to 10% market penetration, with a larger minority of more affluent consumers using them. (On the other hand, Netflix reports that only 0.3% of subscribers viewed *either* high-def format in the June-August 2007 period, which suggests the formats have a *long* way to go to reach 5% to 10%.) That means many libraries in affluent communities might want to start stocking them. Apparently, quite a few of you already are (I heard 3% cited as a figure in late 2007), and probably sensibly. Otherwise—for most public libraries—I'd wait until your community reaction panels start indicating a desire for them.

As for durability? HD DVDs should be roughly as durable as regular DVDs, which could either be good or bad news—although I'm guessing that changes in DVD packaging may have reduced some causes of DVD failure (fewer packages use the push-to-release hub, a prime cause of overstressed hubs and cracked discs). Blu-ray is different in two ways:

➢ The discs have special scratch-resistant surface coatings, coats that *should* resist casual damage considerably better than HD DVD, DVD or CD.

➢ The information layer is *much closer* to that special surface—which means that you *should not* even consider using abrasive DVD/CD repair mechanisms for Blu-ray discs. There isn't a thick enough layer to consider abrading it.

If you want to familiarize yourself with the technical details, Wikipedia's "Comparison of high definition optical disc formats" is a good place to start. Wikipe-

dia's articles on the two formats are more difficult, depending on when you read them: A primary and very active editor for both articles (and the comparison) appears to favor HD DVD—and it shows, although overall editing seems to be tending toward something approaching neutrality. **[24]**

Making it Work

What's "it"? Libraries. Social software in libraries. Balancing existing needs and new possibilities. Expanding patron involvement without biasing the library toward its richest, most connected patrons. Making libraries more valued cores of their communities.

That's what I said to lead off the first MAKING IT WORK in May 2007 (*C&I* 7:5), and maybe it bears repeating after a two-month absence. I also noted this, buried in BIBS & BLATHER in the same issue, when I formally dropped THE LIBRARY STUFF:

> To use webspeak, THE LIBRARY STUFF is now deprecated (like THE GOOD STUFF): It might appear again, but it's unlikely.
>
> That's *not* because Steven M. Cohen told me to stop using his term (he didn't). It's *certainly* not because I plan to write less about direct library issues—quite the opposite, as I believe the first four issues of 2007 show. If anything, a renewed concentration on libraries *as libraries* makes THE LIBRARY STUFF less useful as a section. It has no organizing principle other than alphabetical order by citation. It's useful as a way to comment on articles and longer posts, but not as a way to synthesize citations and insights on *topics*.
>
> Enter MAKING IT WORK, beginning in this issue and continuing as long and frequently as it feels right. My plan is to use the new section for topical discussions—not just "Library 2.0" or social software issues, but any library topics not covered elsewhere where I think interesting things are being said and feel I can add value to the discussion.

Although MAKING IT WORK appeared in six of the eight issues from May 2007 through the end of 2007, my holding space for raw material grew from one folder to two bulging Pendaflex hanging files—and I considered possible ways to make it a separate publication. Barring surprises, that now appears improbable for at least the next year or so, and I winnowed the source material severely.

Here are *bunches* of discussions on aspects of making libraries and librarians work better. This won't eliminate the backlog, but it helps—and it seems right that an issue featuring 100 reasons for *Cites & Insights* should devote more than 40 to the library field.

By the way, if you're looking for comments on library leadership, those are far more likely to turn up at the PALINET Leadership Network, pln.palinet.org. If you care about library leadership, you should be part of PLN. If you don't, then you'll appreciate that I'm not using space here to discuss leadership! [25]

Reading

Are libraries primarily about books? That's what the public seems to think (at least for public libraries), and I'd be hard-pressed to say they're wrong. I like the broader term "stories," and I'd agree with recent suggestions that "information"—the supposed center of libraries—is mostly the icing on the cake, with books and other resources being the cake itself. Libraries have "lost" their role as "the place for information"—a role I've long argued they never really had—but not their role as primary sources for stories about humans, civilization and community. Along with, in many cases, good advice on which free stories to pursue: Reader's advisory services.

Items in this section concern reader's advisory and the newish notion of Slow Reading. We begin with a Reader's Advisory guest column in *RUSQ—Reference and User Services Quarterly*. [26]

Academic libraries and extracurricular reading promotion

That's the title of Julie Elliott's Reader's Advisory piece in *RUSQ* 46:3 (Spring 2007), rusq.org/2008/01/05/academic-libraries-and-extracurricular-reading-promotion/. I haven't been reading *RUSQ*, and encountered this because Barbara Fister commented on it at *ACRLog*.

It's a good article, well worth reading. Excerpts:

I created a survey and corresponded with academic librarians across the United States to determine what academic libraries are doing to promote extracurricular reading, what barriers are keeping them from promoting it more, and why some of them do not actively promote reading.

To get a better idea of why recreational reading promotion is so scarce in academic libraries, I examined the history of reading promotion in academic librarianship. What I found was that it was not only elitism among past librarians that hampered the concept (or that could impede its future) but rather the same three culprits that hamper just about every project in our profession: budget, staff time, and space.

That is not to say that the idea of reading promotion in academic libraries is a nonstarter. Rather, I discovered that there are many librarians dedicated to the idea who have found creative methods of getting past the barriers of budget, time, and space to create programs and collections of value for their students, faculty, and staff. I also learned that nearly everyone I interviewed wants to continue the conversation and to begin collaborating with our public library colleagues to learn from their experience how to create better recreational reading resources for our students.

It's heartening to see a suggestion that academic libraries could learn from public libraries. While public and academic libraries serve different needs, they're not unrelated.

Elliott offers historical evidence that "encouraging extracurricular reading used to be a component of an academic library's mission." That seemed to decline by the 1960s, although an early One Book, One Campus program began in 1961-1962. Meanwhile, recreational reading collections seemed to be going unused by the 1950s and studies indicated that "the faculty did not always expect the students to use their library for such purposes." Was elitism part of this decline, with academic librarians promoting "only the best" literature? More important, almost certainly, was "ever-increasing demands on one's professional time and library resources."

In addition to increased responsibilities, fewer staff, and changing technologies such as television, academic librarians in the late 1950s were trying to brace themselves for the first wave of Baby Boomers, who they referred to as the rising tide. In addition to the effect of expanding services for students on the promotion of recreational reading, space in the library was also becoming an issue…

Others argued that by the 1970s, library schools' tendency to downplay RA led to a decline in reading promotion not just in academic libraries, but in all libraries.[Darlene Money in 1971]: "A primary reason for the decline in readers' advisory service (and this is true not just in public, but in academic, school, and special libraries as well), is that in a very few years the book has become de-emphasized … Reading is just not fashionable in the library world anymore."

Not that recreational collections disappeared entirely. A 1982 survey found that a majority of 110 libraries surveyed "are providing services to meet the recreational, or leisure, reading interests of their patrons." But browsing rooms were on the decline, and if they didn't disappear entirely were being staffed by students rather than librarians—or not staffed at all.

[Additionally], now librarians had to address the technology boom. This shift led to a need for academic librarians to instruct students on how best to manage their information choices. "The role of helping people access content has grown so much, we didn't mean to push out readers' advisory," said Barbara MacAdam, director of the Graduate Library at the University of Michigan. "[I]t is just that the accessing content part of the job has expanded so greatly … Readers' advisory in aca-

demic libraries has changed in that with all [the] technology that has changed, our role has changed. Technology has changed how we work and think."

In a later article, MacAdam notes the extent to which students were viewing reading as strictly functional: "Faculty, including librarians, have chosen to serve a discipline and the literature while college students generally expect that the discipline and the literature must serve them … College students seek the assurance that the material they are asked to read (and the time thus spent) will contribute directly to learning, academic success, and graduation."

Elliott's survey yielded 270 responses (not all complete) from mailings to ARL directors, Fiction_L, Collib_L, Colldev_L and some state discussion lists. She notes potential flaws in the survey—sending a request to Fiction_L might bias toward positive responses on recreational reading and the decision by some directors to opt out entirely "since their library did no [extracurricular reading] programming or promotion" might also bias it in that direction.

The results are nonetheless interesting. Slightly more than 70% of those surveyed said their library has a browsing area. Some institutions are collaborating with local public libraries. Fewer than half of those surveyed use book lists to promote recreational reading—and some libraries have added recreational collections because students requested them. Roughly 11% of college libraries surveyed have One Book, One Campus-type programs. Nearly 20% participate in campus or community reading programs.

There's still an attitude that recreational reading is an inferior use of academic library resources:

"Given the limited funds and time of the library as well, we are working just to keep up with the reference, instruction, and materials [students] need for class and research," wrote Bergman. "People are concerned about it being perceived that money being spent on nonacademic pursuits could leave the library open to budget cuts," wrote Moritz…

Another argument for why academic librarians do not promote extracurricular reading is that it might detract from the image of the librarian as information specialist and might ally academic librarians too closely to their public library counterparts. "[W]e tend to privilege finding information over reading and, perhaps, worry that promoting mere reading is what low-brow public libraries do (or, even worse, what Oprah does)," wrote Fister. "It's seen as a public library service," noted Moore. "Why do we think John Grisham, Agatha Christie, and Ted Dekker only belong in a public library?"

Anecdotally, several of the librarians interviewed for this story (and myself as well) who were enthusiastic about promoting recreational reading had prior experience as public librarians. Perhaps there is a connection between this public library experience and the belief that recreational reading is important. It was also expressed by some of the librarians interviewed that making connections between public and academic librarians on this issue would be beneficial. "Last summer my husband and I visited the San Jose State Library, which, as I'm sure you know, occupies the same building as the San Jose Public Library," wrote Bousfield. "Within one building patrons can meet research and recreational needs. That model might not be practical for all academic institutions, but greater communication and cooperation between public and academic libraries would help both to better serve patrons' needs."

Some of us scratch our heads over widespread negative reaction to the finding that the public mostly associates libraries with books. Barbara Fister is quoted as saying this gave her "the feeling that, in fact, many librarians have contempt for books and reading. And ordinary readers. I do think we need to help people understand what riches we have available, but it seems as if we're embarrassed about the number of books we have and would prefer to be in some other 'business' rather than books." Or, as Lianne Hartman puts it, "Perhaps there is a fear that adding *The Devil Wears Prada* somehow takes away from the 'academic weight' of the collection."

The belief that many college librarians do not read recreationally themselves was also suggested. The survey responses do not support this idea, but this could be due to the survey flaws previously mentioned. Forty-three percent of those surveyed noted that they read a book for fun at least once a week. Six percent stated that they rarely read for fun. "Many librarians do not have any reader's advisor skills, and unfortunately, some of us do not read recreationally," wrote Johnston.

Why do many academic librarians continue to promote "extracurricular" reading? Because they believe it's important for the overall education of college students. Because it's fulfilling. Sometimes because students ask for it.

Should academic libraries promote balance in students and faculty? If so, isn't "recreational" reading, reading *for the joy of reading*, part of that balance? [27]

Reading in the Vulgate

That's the title of Barbara Fister's May 19, 2007 post at *ACRLog* commenting on the article and the issue (acrlblog.org/2007/05/19/reading-in-the-vulgate/). Excerpts with no additional commentary:

Indulging in a fondness for books has become a contested territory. People think of books as our "brand" even though libraries offer much more. If we reinforce that outdated view of libraries by celebrating books, are we selling our libraries short—or are we honoring something

people actually love about libraries?... Is being irritated by popular forms of reading another kind of elitism?

Public libraries have long honored diverse reading tastes, but academic libraries are likely to be accused of wasting money if they purchase genre fiction or popular history (even if it's of high quality). Academic libraries that try to satisfy students' interest in reading outside the syllabus risk being tarred with the scarlet letter "O," encouraging reading for pleasure at the expense of reading seriously… [28]

The Gypsy Librarian comments

Angel Rivera posted "Article note: On academic libraries and RA" at *The gypsy librarian* on June 18, 2007 (gypsylibrarian.blogspot.com/2007/06/article-note-on-academic-libraries-and.html). Rivera notes that elitism isn't "just the old timers"—he sees "a new form of elitism [in L2 rhetoric] where it seems traditional reading is allowed to wither…because it does not fit within the cool toys schemes." Rivera notes a few of his own experiences with leisure reading.

> Recently, at the suggestion of some colleagues, our library put in place a small browsing area for leisure reading. The recent stats reveal it is getting use, which provides encouragement for this to continue. You see, give the students some good casual reading, and they will find it…
>
> New books areas are always popular. I know our New Books Shelf is a popular stop in our library.
>
> Eastern Illinois University has a graphic novel collection. We have bought some titles, but I think it is time we buy a lot more and seriously build a collection, both for academic interest as well as for recreational reading.

Commenting on other issues raised in the article:

> I hate [the] notion that somehow public librarians are beneath us academics... We should be collaborating a lot more, and RA is one area for that. After all, public librarians do have vast experience in the area. Why not tap into that? …Why should the public librarians have all the fun?
>
> While the notion of redefining the library and bringing in new users is certainly a good thing, doing it at the expense of regular or traditional users who may wish to have some quiet to actually read is not the way to do it… It really is as if somehow the librarians were suddenly embarrassed to have something called books in their buildings.

Some academic libraries *did* take reader's advisory courses, but note the final sentence here: "I took at least two courses in RA when I was in library school. I do have to point out that this was something I had to seek out. **The academic track does not really encourage such courses**, but I went and did it anyhow." [Emphasis added.] [29]

John Miedema on Reader's Advisory

Miedema had an eponymous blog before he founded *Slow reading* (johnmiedema.ca). As sometimes happens when blogs change names and addresses, previous posts can become difficult to locate. "Eight nascent concepts about Reader's Advisory" appeared June 3, 2007. You may or may not be able to locate the original, but in any case it serves as a bridge from here to subsections on slow reading.

Miedema was in the midst of an RA course and had "a ton of thoughts about adult reading and libraries." Some of those thoughts (paraphrasing):

➢ What is the role of community in personal reading? For Miedema, reading is solitary, and he wonders how book clubs affect reading.

➢ Isn't there room for both book blogs and book reviews in newspapers? He thinks there is, and questions the notion that online book reviews are cutting into the newspaper book review market. (My take: Newspaper book reviews are disappearing because publishers only advertise in New York media. No ads, no book reviews: That simple.)

➢ RA should claim the online catalog—or at least should play a bigger role in the design of OPAC interfaces than it has.

➢ Should libraries offer bibliotherapy?

➢ In addition to "more like this," should there be "something entirely different" services? Some of us look for variety when we read for pleasure.

Miedema also noted an early and brief attempt at a "slow" blog, which later became a primary focus. **Worth reading**, if you can locate the post. [30]

Book circulation since 1856

Here's an odd one: A paper by an FCC economist, Douglas A. Galbi, studying public library book circulation since 1856—but on a *per capita* basis for reported users of libraries. The title is "Book circulation per U.S. public library user since 1856." Draft 1.01 appeared on July 29, 2007 (www.galbithink.org/libraries/circulation.htm). The HTML version is 15 pages plus references and notes. The conclusion: "Library book circulation per user has no strong, long-run trend."

I question whether *per capita* use *by reported users*—as opposed to overall use or per capita use across the entire population—is a particularly meaningful figure. Build more libraries serving more people, including those disinclined to travel long distances to libraries, and overall per capita use is likely to fall, even while the resulting libraries are more successful in every meaningful way I can think of.

Thought experiment: Assume you only built public libraries in college towns and communities with

very high percentages of people with liberal arts degrees, and also at least one child per household. You'd probably have *very* high *per cap* circulation because your user base would be one with avid reading interests. But you're ambitious: You build out libraries, services and promotions so that you reach nearly everybody, including the less educated and those with less time on their hands. Maybe your new users only read one or two books a year instead of 30, 40 or 50.

Your *per cap* circulation drops. Your overall usage increases. Your *service to the community* increases. Galbi says that circulation per library user per year is a "meaningful, feasible measure of library use across long periods." Feasible, certainly: It's almost always reported. Meaningful? Not in isolation.

The graph seems a little ominous. Starting at around 13 circs in the 1850s, numbers jump around between 13 and 19 from study to study—but then drop to nine in 2004. But consider the reality: In 1856 (14 circs per user), 1,297 libraries reported an average of 5,856 circs per library. In 2004 (9 circs per user), 9,207 libraries reported an average of 163,797 circs per library. In other words, seven times as many libraries circulated *twenty-eight times* as many books *per library* or more than 198 times as many overall—but only two-thirds as many per user. Were there 198 times as many people in the U.S. in 2004 as in 1856? No, there were roughly nine times as many people. Are libraries only two-thirds as effective at serving avid readers, or are they serving the people of the nation more than twenty times as well?

Look at a closer comparison: 1923 vs. 2004. In 1923, circulation per user rounds to 15—but that comes from 5,080 libraries averaging 64.930 circulations each. The population in 1923 was 111.9 million (293.2 million in 2004). Basically, in 1923, public libraries reported a total of 329.8 million circulations—which, at 15 circulations per capita, means that they were serving 22 million people, or just over 20% of the total population. In 2004, public libraries reported a total of 1.5 *billion* circulations—which, at 9 circulations per capita, means they were serving 167.6 million people, or 57% of the total population.

To me, that says public libraries did a much better job of serving the nation in 2004 than they were in 1923, but part of that job was serving a much larger number of people, many of whom do not read as many items. [31]

Slow reading
As John Miedema puts it, "slow reading is about reading at a reflective pace." I've already mentioned the

blog—slowreading.wordpress.com or, more recently, johnmiedema.ca. (The related *Slow library* blog, loomware.typepad.com/slowlibrary/, seems to be moribund, although I encourage you to read the final post as of this writing—a review of *Balanced Libraries* that says "it could be the bible of the Slow Library movement.")

When you have a few minutes to reflect, take a look at the posts. This is not a call for people to read everything slowly. It recognizes the worth of digital technology for fast reading, "terrific when we need a quick, rough answer, but like fast food it often leaves one hungering for something more substantial." Many types of reading are improved by reading slowly—literature, local stories, deep research materials.

> Slow readers prefer books over screens, for the superior readability of paper, but also for the fixity of print. Print captures ideas and gives them a stillness that allows the reader to open deeply to them…
>
> Slow reading is closely associated with the larger Slow movement… Slow readers seek out local content, local readings and encourage micro-publishing… Slow reading is a form of resistance, challenging a hectic culture that requires speed readings of volumes of information fragments… Slow reading is recognition of the intrinsically worthy act of reading. It is good for our minds, our emotional health, our communities and planet.

Maybe a blog isn't the best place for writing about slow reading, which is also likely to be writing that *deserves* slow reading: It's hard to read a blog slowly, even in print form. Another post asks whether slow reading will be a casualty of "fast libraries"—the trend toward complete digitization and extent to which librarians think of books as just being information boxes. Miedema says that libraries wishing to support slow reading "need to keep their mission rooted in the essentials—books (including the fiction shelves), local libraries, and people living in communities." I already discussed that post in the December 2007 *Cites & Insights* which, like the August 2007 issue, was implicitly designed for slow reading, consisting entirely of relatively leisurely essays. Did people print it out and read it slowly, or did they skim each essay, mentally shouting "Get on with it!"? It's not my place to say. [32]

Philosophy

Philosophy? Really? Well, yes. Some posts and articles seem to be more about the philosophy of libraries of librarianship than anything else—or at least this makes a convenient spot for them.[33]

The four habits of highly effective librarians
Start with Todd Gilman's May 23, 2007 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* Careers section (chroni-

cle.com/jobs/news/2007/05/2007052301c/careers.html). It's a play on Stephen Covey's book, to be sure, but it's also an interesting list. Brief excerpts, reformatted for space:

> **Openness**. All too often, librarians—like all human beings—do not listen to one another. In a well-meaning attempt to be proactive we may dutifully invite co-workers or subordinates to weigh in on how we might improve some aspect of our services. If they say things we have already thought of, or agree with (or both), all is well.
>
> But if their responses are not what we expect (read: want) to hear, rather than question our assumptions, we become defensive… Let's face it: It's hard to take criticism, even if it's constructive. It's even harder to act on it and try to change our behavior, policies, or procedures…
>
> Openness entails a willingness to listen to what the facts are telling us.
>
> **Responsiveness**. It is what happens once openness has succeeded. Responsiveness means taking appropriate action based on careful listening…
>
> A willingness to experiment..is just one example of the enormous potential of responsiveness.
>
> **Collaboration**. By that, I refer to the desirability of working—not in isolation, as so many of us do—but with one's fellow librarians to get a job done…
>
> A great way to encourage a more collaborative attitude generally would be to set up one or more librarywide wikis. With wikis, librarians from all over the campus can collaborate virtually to establish best practices, solve common problems, and generally feel more connected with their peers…
>
> **Communication**. Nothing is more frustrating than business-related e-mail messages going unanswered for weeks at a time—if indeed they are answered at all. E-mail has made timely communication so much easier than ever before. The mind boggles that some people persist in ignoring it altogether or treating it as though it were back issues of *The New Yorker* that they hope to get caught up on one day…
>
> In the unfortunate event that a controversial decision has to be made quickly, or by fewer people (or both), at the very least stakeholders should be warned that the matter is under consideration. Choosing an open means of communicating the decision (e.g., a public assembly), and in a timely way—before rumors start and people become upset—can go a long way toward avoiding ruffled feathers and bringing coworkers on board with you…

Go read the whole article. It's not long and Gilman makes good points. As one who's never been as collaborative as might be desired, I have difficulty arguing with any of what he says. [34]

My job in 10 years: Physical and virtual spaces
I discussed John Dupuis' "my job in 10 years" series at *Confessions of a science librarian* before (*C&I* 7:6 and 7:10). Somehow I omitted this essay, which appeared May 31, 2007 (jdupuis.blogspot.com/ 2007/05/my-job-in-

10-years-physical-and-virtual.html). You can get the whole series with attachments as a 41-page PDF. It it wouldn't take much to turn it into a short book. Need I mention that it's **well worth reading**—even if (or particularly because) I don't agree with everything Dupuis says?

Just a sampling of what Dupuis says about spaces (physical and virtual), from his perspective as an academic science librarian:

> I think we need to make sure we continue to give students the kinds of spaces they need for their academic work: formal collaborative spaces, informal group spaces, quiet study, lab spaces where they have access to the software they need to do their assignment and can do research. All these things are important now and will continue to be important in the future…
>
> It would be great if we also had some fun and relaxing times and spaces too…
>
> We need spaces that are conducive to roaming reference, to ad hoc group consultations in study and lab areas, some sort of reference desk will probably still be in use and of course we will definitely need labs and workshops for instruction activities…
>
> [W]e are often stuck with older buildings full of stuff… While we might like to ship our bound journals and print books off into storage to make room for other kinds of uses, at the moment that would be a huge disservice to our patrons…
>
> Perhaps the biggest challenge to overcome will be monetary. Adding new space or doing major renovations to existing space isn't cheap…
>
> **Virtual Spaces**…. Basically all web-based applications, past, present and future.
>
> Just as the internet today would be almost unimaginable to us 10 years ago, so too the internet will evolve in unpredictable and unimaginable ways in the next 10 years, thus making any attempt to discern exactly what shape our online presences will take over the next decade will be difficult to say the least…
>
> [W]e should not be afraid to make mistakes… Flying headlong into every shiny new technology, magpie-like, is probably a waste of precious resources, but always being the slow and steady tortoise in equally risky…

I may appear to be more tortoise-oriented than Dupuis, but that's at least partly to balance a period in which shiny new things seemed ascendant in library discussion. I think that period is ending; it's important not to have the pendulum swing to inaction. [35]

Some of the trends Dupuis thinks we should be watching (omitting several):

> * **The social web**: Social networking software is the hottest thing going right now, but it's impossible to tell how what shape these embryonic systems will take and how permanent and wide ranging a lot of the innovations will be…

* **User-created content**: It's something that isn't going away either: blogs, wikis, mashups, photos, tags, personal data stuff like LibraryThing databases..

* **Virtual worlds…**are a very interesting phenomenon to watch. They certainly have a huge future as gaming environments but it will be interesting to see if they take off as business, educational and leisure environments…

* **Mobile and ubiquitous computing**: They are already huge trends and they will only get bigger.

* **OPACs**:…I hesitate to make any predictions myself, but I would be extremely surprised if what we call the OPAC is at all recognizable in 10 years…

* **Special Collections**: One trend that's not going away is libraries creating and publishing their own content…

* **Serendipity**:…By far the largest category of stuff we should keep our eyes on: the stuff I've forgotten, can't imagine or seriously underestimate the importance of.

I continue to have trouble with ubiquitous computing, but it's certainly something to watch. The library as publisher is a growing theme in several realms, including public libraries; it's one I've favored for some time. [36]

On the other hand… considerations that cannot be ignored:

* **Creeping commercialization**:… We mustn't forget that we are public institutions and we have a duty to spend public money in a appropriate way…

* **Privacy**: Our patrons may not care about their privacy, but it is our professional duty to protect it for them whether they want us to or not… If you don't think privacy is important, two words: Patriot Act.

OK, stop right here. **Go read the whole pos**t. I'll wait. "Whether they want us to or not…" is an important clause, not to be dismissed lightly, particularly on the altar of Doing It Just Like the Commercial Guys.

* **Offensive content:** Radical trust and user-generated content are great things, but what do you do the first time someone posts racist, sexist or otherwise offensive or hateful content, the first time there's an incident of bullying or harassment of students, faculty or staff?...

* **Build it, and …:** What if we build social spaces where patrons can network and create content and...they just don't?...How do we make our virtual spaces interesting and fun enough to attract users' attention and yet useful enough to be worth our time and energy -- and theirs too. Students want their own social spaces, and may not be as interested as we would like to think in "official" social spaces.

* **Digital divide**: There's a couple of digital divides we have to keep in mind. We have to be aware that not all our students have the economic resources to play with the latest gadgetry so we have to make sure we design our offerings to be accessible to everyone. We also have to remember that not all our students want to be engaged with all the latest technologies; there's a wide range of aptitudes and inclinations within any student body…

* **Preservation**: If we create systems that have user-generated content and if we digitize special collections and host journals, in other words if we are stewards of unique content, we will have to ensure the long-term preservation of that content…

* **Academic integrity/intellectual property**: Sharing is one thing, stealing is another. Or is it? What's the difference and how can you tell?...

* **Patience**:…The challenge is not to be too impatient for things to work themselves out...

* **Vision drift**. In our rush to be all things to all people, we can't forget that our core mission is always going to be connected to the academic mission of our institution.

My job in 10 years? To plan an active role in moving my institution forward in a sane, balanced way that also embraces the endless possibilities of new technological and social patterns. To advocate for better systems and spaces for our patrons, to plan, to facilitate, to organize, to help build, to advertise, to cajole, to promote, to teach. To see the interrelationships between physical and virtual spaces, how one can be used to promote the other, how they are complementary not competing. To promote our physical and virtual spaces to faculty, students and staff. To raise funds to implement grand ideas, to make tough decisions, to understand trade-offs.

I hope I'm still around and still involved with libraries in 2017. I'd like to sit down with Dupuis at an OLA SuperConference, Access or some other setting and see how this all works out. [37]

Strategy without philosophy

Bo Kinney posted this on May 28, 2007 at *The letter Z* (letterz.wordpress.com). The direct focus was an incident last year related to library unions, management relations and the focus of a public library's collection. A number of high-profile bloggers jumped all over librarians who seemed to oppose popular material. It was not a pretty scene and might best be forgotten.

The heart of the post should not be forgotten. Kinney sees

a rush to change to meet every caprice of technology and pop culture, and a characterization of those who question this attitude as hopelessly out-of-touch. Change is good, sometimes, and librarians, like everyone, should be open to it. But change is something that should be embarked on critically and carefully. Much of the change I see happening in libraries seems to be coming from a place of fear, out of a belief that if libraries don't "stay relevant" they will disappear. But if staying relevant means catering to the whims of users at the expense of libraries' values, is it worth it? And what *are* libraries' values? Simply giving users what they ask for, or using librarians' knowledge, skills, and professional expertise to help them find things they might never have thought to ask for?

The post cites Charlie Robinson of "Give 'em what they want" fame and suggests Robinson's reasoning is somewhat circular:

> Successful libraries are well-used libraries, therefore libraries should buy things that people will use. What's missing is any philosophical justification for this definition of success. Why should libraries collect only materials that people ask for? Without reflection on this question, this strategy is bankrupt of any kind of principle…

After contrasting Robinson's tenets with the 1852 Boston Public Library *Report to the City of Boston*, which may seem a little elitist today, Kinney says "Public libraries have a philosophical foundation: promoting democracy by providing access, for ordinary people, to the information required to make wise political decisions." The post closes: "Libraries won't stay vital by simply capitulating to demands. They will stay vital by serving a vital role in society. To do this, they must be run by philosophy, not merely strategy."

As one who advocates balance, I believe in balance between "what they want" and the long-term needs of "the people's university." Kinney makes a good point: There needs to be some philosophy behind the strategies—a long-term mission underlying day-to-day decisions. [38]

Big or small?

Jenn Riley posted this at *TechEssence.info* on June 16, 2007 (techessence.info). Riley asks a tough question:

> Should you focus your efforts on a smaller number of really big technology projects, or a larger number of smaller projects?

Riley notes that big projects (Endeca, Google Book Search partnerships) get more press—but smaller projects "can also have considerable impact… Often the simplest idea, quickly implemented, will fill a great user need."

Sometimes, as with digitization projects, it may be possible to start small and wind up with big results—and "An iterative approach can serve to make projects that once were considered large smaller over time." That means avoiding complacency and learning from experience.

A good, relatively brief post, raising points that deserve thought by any library with many potential projects and limited resources—and doesn't that include almost everyone? [39]

Reason to change

Maybe that's the wrong title (a July 11, 2007 post at *Academic librarian*, blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/), since the post refers back to Wayne Bivens-Tatum's article in *Library Philosophy and Practice* "Technological change, universal access, and the end of the library."

The article (available at digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/88) is more deeply philosophical than I choose to be here (and I'm not sure I fully understand it), but Bivens-Tatum concludes by suggesting that

> thinking philosophically about the end of the library remains our most fruitful approach to rationally informed action… Unless we want to act irrationally and thoughtlessly, then librarians must reflect on the end of the library, and reflecting on the end of the library also means reflecting on the end of our society.

Now, before you react, be aware that Bivens-Tatum (a philosophy and religion librarian at Princeton) does not use "end of the library" to mean the death of libraries. He's using a different meaning, perhaps most commonly encountered in the phrase "means and ends"—Merriam-Webster's sense 4 is "the goal toward which an agent acts or should act…the object by virtue of or for the sake of which an event takes place."

The post discusses "how to persuade people to make changes willingly, assuming that the change is rational and has a coherent end in view." Bivens-Tatum discusses one common change called for: learning or learning about new technologies. He asks "Why might people keep up with the latest gadgets and tools?" and offers four possibilities, each discussed in one paragraph:

➢ They like change. "Some people just get bored with their regular routines."
➢ They like to learn about new stuff.
➢ Change is good for the library users. (In this discussion, Bivens-Tatum offers a nice expansion of the idea that libraries are there to serve users: "Even if your concept of the library user includes, like mine does, library users not yet born.")
➢ Change is good for the librarians.

As Bivens-Tatum notes, if change helps the users *but hurts the librarians*, most librarians may be reluctant to go along unless forced change—and "forced change is itself a way to hurt people." To maintain any sort of staff morale and buy in, you need to persuade them. That's not always easy, but it's worth thinking about. [40]

professional hunters & gatherers of information

What you believe to be the primary role of libraries and librarians must depend partly on what *kind* of library you're dealing with. That said, this July 28, 2007 post at *explodedlibrary.info* (www.explodedlibrary.info) offers a sharply different philosophy of libraries and librarianship than my own—and it's possible that we're both right, depending on circumstances and kind of library.

Here's a little of what Morgan Wilson has to say, leaving out some excellent discussion well worth reading in the original:

> People…have gotten out of the habit of using the library as the first place to go to find information. Many users have a strong perception that most of time, they'll be able to find what they need without using the library—whether as a place or as a collection of electronic resources….
>
> The consequence of this perception is that most of my users use the library as a last resort, when they have tried searching for something and have failed. This is a huge change from the pre-internet days, which I can just vaguely remember from my first years as an undergraduate, where research meant using a library in some shape or form, most often going into the library…
>
> Searching often contains plenty of traps and deadends, which can make it quite frustrating at times. I think that this is a constant… The difference is that in 1990, the searcher was most often inside the library when encountering these difficulties, and from there, it was not such a leap to walk up to the reference desk and ask for help…
>
> Compare that with today. Our users are pretty much on their own at the beginning…It's very easy for somebody to waste an hour or two on an unproductive search on Google. Then out of desperation, that same person might try the library's electronic collection and will get even worse results..
>
> If such a person does approach the library reference desk after this ordeal, they deserve better than to be subjected to a reference interview which assumes that they've hardly thought about their subject at all…
>
> In the past 20 years, the way that people look for information has been turned on its head. How have libraries responded to this? For the most part, it's all been by improving the library resources…But improved resources alone are not enough to stop people from wondering what we're useful for. While paying attention to improving resources, we've neglected services… What is needed a fundamental repositioning of what librarians are about, we provide services to help people find, evaluate and use information effectively. Maintaining a collection and providing resources are still relevant, but only in so far as they support the main purpose.

True for special libraries? Probably (with exceptions). True for academic libraries? Maybe. True for public libraries? I'm inclined to disagree, but you already know that. [41]

Patron or customer (and why?)

Some philosophical discussions seem likely never to end, and it's hard to decide whether or not they really matter. Take the issue raised in that heading, also the title of Brent Wagner's piece in the July 15, 2007 *Library Journal*. Wagner works at Denver Public Library. He doesn't remember hearing "customer" used to apply to library users in Iowa or Massachusetts—but he certainly hears it at DPL and sees it in the literature. That may be partly the "be like a business" theme (another *important* philosophical discussion, one I'm not including here) but there may be more to it.

To some, "patron" seems old-fashioned and, well, patronizing. To others, including Wagner and me, "*customer* tacitly embraces a business model. One could argue it even embodies a dumbing-down mentality." The customer, after all, is never wrong (a silly cliché that successful businesses know better than to believe). As Wagner notes, some businesses are tending the other way—bartenders at his favorite bar call him a "patron," and some shopping centers have valet parking "for patrons." Meantime, to Wagner the term patron "connotes a deep respect." As a public library user, I detest the word "customer." I'm not a customer. I pay tax money; the library uses my money and other money from some 72,000 people to serve a range of common goals. I also patronize the library—I use it. I don't buy anything from it and I don't expect the library to base its decisions solely on my needs.

Does the terminology matter? I'm not sure. [42]

A few of the books, none of the rules

That's Liz Burns' title for an August 5, 2007 post at *Pop goes the library* (www.popgoesthelibrary.com) about the "recycling library" in Mantoloking, New Jersey—basically some bookshelves where people bring in their old books and take someone else's old books. "There are no library cards and there are no rules."

Burns says, "What do people want? **Books**. What don't they want? **Rules**." She also notes that Mantoloking is the wealthiest community in New Jersey (423 people with $114K per capita income) and is in Ocean County, New Jersey, which has a large, well-funded public library system. Residents can almost certainly buy any book they really want and have good public library resources nearby.

> But bottom line, what do they want? **Books.** And they want them with little fuss: no cards, no rules, no returns. And, of course, no real funding and, apparently, no real expectations about what will be there. As mentioned in the article, it's about recreational reading: *"People have more time to read in the summer, especially if they are going to the beach. This is an easy way to get a book or two to read."*

Burns thinks a recycling library gives people "a way to get rid of unwanted books and feel good about it. It's an interesting local option about what to do with books that libraries don't want as donations and that people don't want to hang onto." Here's the final paragraph:

> It's also interesting that people are willing to give up a wide range of selection in favor of convenience. But, of

course, this is a community that has other options (the Ocean County Library, bookstores) if what they really want isn't on the recycling library bookshelf.

I don't think that's what's happening (the newspaper article linked to in the post is no longer available, so it's hard to be sure). I don't think people are "giving up" anything—they're using *another* option, one that supplements rather than replacing the library (and is admittedly nearer). I've been to a fair number of public libraries with their own paperback-exchange shelves, where people drop off old books (paperbacks, but that's not a significant limit) and pick up other ones. I'd guess most cruise ship libraries have book-exchange shelves to supplement the purchased collections; I know I've contributed to such shelves and read books others had dropped off.

I'm not sure the "rules" discussion really means much. A tiny affluent community makes space for a local book exchange. Nice, but not necessarily relevant to public libraries or their rules and procedures. [43]

Fast/slow food/information, parts I and II

Two posts at *Slow reading*, on December 6 and 8, 2007. John Miedema was thinking about how much easier it is to write academic papers these days and wondered whether the speed of research (and ease of cut-and-paste "writing") yields better papers. He stayed at a Hilton with a sign outside the restaurant: "We may not serve fast food, but we have fast service." That inspired a graph on quality and service with fast and slow axes—using food in this case. For quality, "fast" means low in sensory experience—food that "goes down easy" but doesn't yield much of an experience. He puts McDonald's in the lower left quadrant: Fast food, fast service. He accepts that the Hilton claim could be legitimate: "slow" food with fast service. "The Hilton is not a five-star restaurant but it is not bad." (One reason I tend to prefer Hiltons is that their restaurants almost always have varied menus with reasonably good food, frequently featuring some local entrees: To me, they're a cut above most chain-hotel restaurants. So I guess I'm with Miedema here.) He puts the "locavore" diet (eating only or primarily food grown within 100 miles) in the upper right quadrant: Slow food, slow preparation. And, of course, "every town has one" of the restaurants in the lower right corner: Slow service and entirely forgettable food.

His point is *not* that one quadrant is superior in all cases.

> We do in fact like to have a variety of eating options, depending on our current schedule, budget, mood and perspective. If this spectrum of choices is normal for eating, **why do so many people predict or fret that eve-**

rything is only going to get faster in information services? That is my key question. The popular media keep telling us that traditional library reference is dead because of on-line services like Google, and that the future of reading is the next version of the eBook. Given the pattern above, doesn't it make more sense to think that as the digital rush subsides, information services will settle into a similar enduring spectrum of faster and slower services, each suitable for different people's needs and circumstances?

Stop. Go back to that paragraph. Read it mindfully. That's easier from the printed page, but it's possible to read mindfully online. [44]

Think Miedema might have a point? I do. Sure, it's another "and not or" situation—but it's one that speaks to the persistence of the human condition. On to the second post, where Miedema does a similar graph for information—after noting that, for most of us, the 100-mile diet really *doesn't* work for every meal on every day…any more than it's a good idea to eat all the time at McDonald's.

> "Don't make me think" is the battle cry of the digerati. Librarians begin to think that if libraries are to survive, their services must become more like Google and YouTube. I believe there is partial truth in that statement, but it is wrong to think the only direction for library services is faster.

This graph has Searchability and Readability as its axes, again with "slow" and "fast" at ends. As Miedema notes, finding information and reading stuff are distinct concepts. "Every computer is hooked to a printer for a good reason." (OK, many computers *aren't* hooked to printers, but never mind…) He puts Google-on-a-monitor lower left (fast search, fast read), a person and an ebook reader lower right (talking to others is "slow" searching but facilitates *richer* information retrieval; ebooks tend to support fast reading.) Upper left? Google and a book: Finding stuff fast and reading it in print form, at leisure. Finally, upper right: a person and a print book—more deliberate (slower, maybe richer) searching, more deliberate (slower, richer) reading.

It's not an either/or choice. "Looking for a recipe? Google it. Looking for philosophical insight? Talk to people and read books slowly." He believes we may be getting there:

> Somewhere in the nineties, librarians began to think that everything was just going to get faster. For awhile it did. But the rush of the information age is beginning to subside. Web 2.0 represents a turning point in which progress requires engaging people more, a sort of "You" turn. As the dust clears, we see how digital technology complements traditional information seeking and learning.

After you've digested these posts, try some others at *Slow reading*—including a four-part series on "The facets of voluntary slow reading," posted January 21-24, 2008. [45]

Hassles

A few quick notes about library change and attendant hassles, a topic discussed at length in *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change*.

One cluster begins with a David Lee King post (www.davidleeking.com) from April 23, 2007, "How can we change the unchangeable, or David's rant." King reports on a conference session he did. I passed on the post, since I avoid commenting on conference reports in general. But this may be different. Portions:

> I asked if attendees had learned something innovative or new at the conference that they'd like to take back to their libraries. Almost everyone raised their hands. Then I followed up with this question: how many will take that cool, innovative idea back to their libraries, and hit a brick wall with administrators when they try to implement that idea.
>
> **Almost everyone raised their hands.**
>
> This is not good.

Let's assume King's reporting correctly—*almost everyone* assumes they'll hit a brick wall with new ideas from conferences. In which case, I agree with King: "This is not good." King says "Techie librarians are discouraged" and thinks they'll either stop caring or move to more innovative libraries. He wonders why administrators would send people to a technology conference if they don't plan to take advantage of the learning. He generalizes about the field and administrators, but that doesn't negate his points. (The comments are interesting, and King eventually comes to agree that not *all* administrators are brick walls.) In any case, some followup posts seem worth discussing briefly. [46]

Brick walls and brickbats

That's Tim Hodson's title for an April 26, 2007 post at *Information takes over* (informationtakesover.co.uk). Hodson's heard the same message and offers a few ideas for dealing with resistance. Excerpts, all of which strike me as good ideas:

> Talk about it. Name drop the new things that you want to do, and keep name dropping…
>
> Start talking to other departments…
>
> Mention the cost savings and the service improvements…
>
> Get front-line staff on your side…
>
> Get your users to make their feelings vocal. After all, none of these technologies should be implemented with a "it's for your own good" attitude; there is no bigger turn off.

That last one's interesting, as it suggests that innovations should *serve the users* and their demonstrable needs and desires: Good advice not always heard. Then there's the final paragraph, good and frequently unheeded advice:

> But please no Brickbats. The argument that goes something like "you are so out of touch, you are a dinosaur, can't you see your library is changing?" will almost certainly leave you feeling despondent and your manager feeling bruised. [47]

The following takes place between 12 AM and 1 AM

John Blyberg, *blyberg.net* (www.blyberg.net), April 27, 2007, commenting on King's post. Excerpts:

> The world has its share of myopic administrators. This is certainly not unique to libraries, though… There are several reasons why administrators buck original ideas.
>
> Primarily, new ideas represent change and change equals risk. Many people in middle and upper management know that risk translates into a higher possibility of failure…
>
> Some people also just don't like to step out of their comfort zone. They don't want to absorb new things…
>
> I think that Dave should have followed up his question with, "How many of you are going ahead with implementing your ideas anyway?" Those are the people I want to work with. If you love what you're doing, then do it.

That one's interesting, if sometimes dangerous. In lots of cases, it's sound advice: Better to ask forgiveness than permission. Want an intrastaff blog or wiki to show how effective these tools can be? In many cases, "just do it" is the right answer.

On the other hand… Implementing ideas that will change the public face of the library, without at least a modicum of approval from some higher level, is dangerous, and properly so. I think Blyberg recognizes that when he continues "you've got to…cover your behind, and remain within your sphere of authority." That's followed by "If you're sharp enough to have a great idea, however, chances are you're sharp enough to figure out a way to get some traction behind it." Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

The comments on this post are particularly interesting—including one from Blyberg in which he uses "so you get fired" twice when responding to a comment. It must be nice to be in a position where being fired is viewed as a career opportunity, and "simply look for another place to work" is sound advice for dealing with managerial difficulties. [48]

Resistance to change

T. Scott (tscott.typepad.com) commented on King's post and some related posts in a typically thoughtful post on April 27, 2007. Excerpts:

You'd think, from reading some of these, that it is only in libraries that these difficulties appear, that there is something particular in the "traditional" librarian mindset that makes them unusually unwilling to make the changes that are blisteringly obvious to the clear-minded techno-savvy youngsters around them. It simply isn't so…

Frustrated with libraries? Try implementing change in the medical school curriculum…

The depressing part of this fact is that implementing change in libraries is a much more difficult and long-term process than simply beating troglodyte tottering library directors over the head with L2.0 slogans. The positive part is that there actually is a rich literature on change management and that change does, in fact, happen. But if you are of the early adopter temperament and mindset, it will never happen quickly enough or go as far as you would like. Just get used to that so that you don't get too frustrated and burn out. Realize that you're in it for the journey, as they say….

You need to understand the mechanics of change resistance so that you know what you're really dealing with and you need to be able to clearly and explicitly describe why a particular change is an important one for your organization.

You need to figure out what keeps the person in charge awake at night… You shouldn't be asking yourself, "How do I get my organization to accept X?" Rather ask, "What is one of the critical needs my organization has that X can help to resolve?" And it has to be something that your boss sees as a critical need, not just you.

You have to recognize the hard truth that most organizations are not going to be on the leading edge, and that some of them will be on the trailing edge. Most of 'em are going to be bumbling along in the middle. Patience and a sense of perspective are essential for your mental health. A good sense of humor helps too…

Not much to comment on here, other than to suggest reading the whole post. [49]

Four things to consider when changing the unchangeable

We come back to David Lee King, who did this followup post on May 27, 2007. He summarizes four themes he saw in the comments: management problems, finding champions, creating a vision and training administrators. An interesting brief post (and, I believe, a reasonably fair concise summary of the comments). I'd change "training administrators" to "educating administrators," and I'm a little less ready to put down "too much work, too little time" to "poor management" (King says you can just change job descriptions and responsibilities).

The one bone I would pick with this post is the following one-sentence paragraph:

Same with budget constraints—most emerging technology doesn't cost any actual money (just time and staff resources), so budget isn't really an issue.

Sorry, David, but saying time and staff resources aren't money doesn't make it so. Maybe that really does come back to "too much work, too little time." Yes, in a way, that's a management problem, but an appropriate management response may be "and that means we really can't allocate time and staff to your project." Why not? Because staff resources not only represent real money, in most libraries they represent the *dominant* expense—and "changing job descriptions, responsibilities, etc." doesn't magically increase the time and staff available. (I wonder whether this is a disconnect between people who work in large organizations and those who've dealt with very small ones. In a large organization, there usually *is* some slop: You usually can free up some time by juggling responsibilities. In a four-person library where one of the four has an MLS, it tends to be a lot tougher.) [50]

Balance

Debbie Abilock wrote "Blogsense, not blogvangelism" in the January/February 2006 *Knowledge Quest*. (If you're not familiar with *Knowledge Quest*, it's the American Association of School Librarian's bimonthly professional journal/magazine; I found this at *KQ on the web* (www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/), which includes expanded articles and original content.)

Abilock sees "a schism between self-identified blog evangelists and well-respected school librarians." Before 2006, relatively few teacher-librarians were blogging. (Meredith Farkas' latest survey still shows only 5.4% of libloggers working in school libraries, as compared to roughly a third each in public and academic libraries.). She wondered why—and asked. Lots of school librarians said they didn't have time; some didn't see any compelling professional need to blog; some were tired of learning curves. Others disdained "vanity journalism" or thought blogging was an inferior way to communicate.

Then there are those who avidly read, including blogs, but don't think of themselves as authors. She notes that most any school librarian *writes*—but they may not understand blogging. And, not surprisingly in schools, there are cases where The Word has come down that blogging is not allowed.

How is this a balance discussion? Because balance works both ways. On one hand, blog evangelists may have oversold the virtues of blogging back then (and *certainly* oversold the extent to which library blogs would yield community participation)—but, as Ab-

ilock points out, school librarians may be missing out on benefits gained through professional interaction in blogs and other media. Abilock thinks school librarians are right to ask questions about blogging and its benefits, but notes that blogs can help make library and librarian assets visible and build communities. This may be an awkward summary; the original is a three-page PDF, which you'll find at www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume34/34-3_Abilock.pdf. **[51]**

Future librarians: how today's young professionals see tomorrow's profession

Speaking of PDFs, here's one from *SCONUL Focus* (www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/), SCONUL being the UK's Society of College, National and University Libraries. It's from Issue 40, Spring 2007; you can get it as RTF or PDF.

Antony Brewerton asked young professionals (those under 40) to consider what libraries will look like in the future, what will be real and what virtual, what will make for successful service and the future roles of information professionals. Nine responses appear in the five-page article—and the first, from Pete Smith, warmed my heart in its very first paragraph:

> Here *and* there. Virtual *and* physical. To borrow Walt Crawford's word, *balanced*.

Without claiming ownership of a 420-year-old word, that's a wonderful intro to Smith's vision of libraries of futures: "places where the products of human imagination are made available, and where new forms of production and sharing are made possible." He anticipates lots of virtual information services—but he sees libraries as being about "information in its context" and sees physical libraries having roles as community spaces. A balanced future, in other words.

I can't say that all the responses are equally balanced. Some (not all) seem quite ready to drop "library" and "librarian." Some (certainly not all) seem convinced of an all-digital future. It's an interesting group of responses from a somewhat different group of librarians.

Pete Smith offers another balanced perspective in "The middling sort," a November 22, 2007 post at *Library too* (havemercia.wordpress.com). The core sentence on what he's looking for: "A new perspective where it's not about holding the middle but rejecting the opposites and looking for a better synthesis." A fine way of putting it. **[52]**

Collection development as fairness

When I talk about balance, it's not just life/work balance or balance between current services and new ideas or between physical and digital resources. There's also the balance between *today*'s patrons and the full community of a library, which extends through time as well as space. Wayne Bivens-Tatum addresses that in this August 28, 2007 post at *Academic librarian*.

> The most frequent argument I encounter is that collection development, like public service, must be devoted to the user. I couldn't agree more. In fact, I'm sometimes tempted to say that collection development is a public service, if we understand the terms properly. Collection development should be devoted to the user, but the question then becomes, who is the user of the research library?
>
> Most librarians have an easy answer to that question. The users are those people who come into your library, who currently need your services. In an academic library, it's standard policy to collect materials needed to support the current curriculum, which usually makes everyone happy, unless the university starts up a new research program and the library has no materials to support it because they've never collected them.
>
> However, I think this is an insufficient definition of the user of the research library. The user of the research library shouldn't be confused with the current users. I think it was Edmund Burke who described society as a partnership between the living, the dead, and the yet unborn. This is also a good way to think of a research library. The living are certainly benefiting from collection decisions made by the dead, and we the living selectors owe it to the researchers yet unborn to collect not just for the moment, but as much as possible for all time.

There's more, but that's the key section for my purposes. I think that final paragraph applies in full to every major academic library, in part to every academic library that claims to be something more than a subsidized bookstore—and, in greater or lesser part, to most public libraries as well. I've called it "the long collection" or "the slow collection" in the past, and Bivens-Tatum says it well here. We need balance between the apparent needs of today's users and the long-term needs of the community. **[53]**

On being free

A short take from Andrew Finegan, *Librarian idol* (librarianidol.blogspot.com), on August 14, 2007. After noting common responses to having something offered for free, he continues:

> A little while ago, I heard the phrase "Free—not as in free beer, but as in free kittens" when describing free web-based tools for setting up online services. And today, to my surprise, when a work colleague jumped on the "Hey! Let's make a library blog!" bandwagon, I, strangely enough, found myself saying "No. We're not ready yet. Our team doesn't have the right attitude, our

council's current publications policy won't allow for it, our current client-base isn't going to embrace it and we just don't have the resources!"

"We don't have the resources? But it's free!"

Yeah. *Free, as in free kittens.*

I'm all for libraries blogging—when it makes sense for them and there's some reason to believe (a) they'll keep it going and (b) there's a ready audience or it otherwise fills a need. (a) is by no means trivial—lovely as it is, WordPress doesn't write your posts for you.

Finegan also says something else, challenging the notion that free is inferior. "I'd like to think that public libraries should be free, but not cheap. Just because we're free, doesn't mean that we should sacrifice quality." (Of course, public libraries *aren't* free— they're commonly supported through prepayment.) Finegan suggests a slogan: "Public libraries—Free but not cheap." [54]

Not-so-splendid isolation

Here's an unusual one, challenging the notion that librarians should exert every effort to "going where the users are." Harold N. Boyer, writing in the September 15, 2007 *Library Journal* (www.libraryjournal. com/article/CA6476388.htm), is concerned that technology is "threatening to divorce the physical library from the user as more 'at-home' services translate into less reason to visit the library." A little more:

> I'm speaking of services like email reference, database usage from home, downloading books and movies at home, remote holds, and home delivery of materials. In return for a modicum of convenience, each and every one of these services is helping to defeat the community purpose of the public library, contributing to the alienation of community members from one another instead of strengthening the library as a vital local gathering place.

> The library profession seems to have shot itself in the foot by attempting to placate those who perceive themselves as too busy to come to the library. While the continued desire for books in libraries is evidenced by holds (which are now largely placed electronically), we've made it so that patrons at many libraries do not even have to get out of their cars to pick up the titles they reserve…

> A vital part of the library's mission is and has always been to serve as a focal point for neighborhood interaction, the up-close-and-personal, everyday kind of activity that defines neighborhoods and brings residents together. So it puzzles me that libraries currently choose to employ technology to diffuse their strengths.

> We don't see other components of a community similarly dispersing their resources and strong points. School activities, whether athletics, instruction, plays, or recreation, still center on the school…

The history of public libraries in America has been a struggle to involve the library with its neighborhood. While the library's information mission can be broadly achieved, traditionally, no effort has been spared to encourage the physical use of the library. Why has this ideal suddenly changed?..

> Rather than employing technology to bring our communities together… we are instead encouraging our patrons to sit in front of computer screens in not-so-splendid isolation.

> If public libraries become ineffectual and are consigned to the dustbin of history, I'm afraid we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

I'm an optimist by nature, and I see heavy use of our library as place—but Boyer raises a valid point on the need to balance libraries as virtual resources with libraries as *places* and physical centers for the community. [55]

doing what we can do

Laura Crossett suggests that even very small libraries can play a part in building the long collection, or at least a collection that goes beyond immediate expressed needs, in this November 14, 2007 *lis.dom* post (www.newrambler.net/lisdom). She starts by noting the number of library problems still best solved by non-technological solutions—and suggesting that librarians "think a little more about what we offer that technology does not."

One fine suggestion, particularly for places without good local bookstores (a situation far too common in smaller towns and some larger ones!):

> As I see it, a library in such a situation has a responsibility not only to provide books (and movies and CDs and magazines and newspapers), but to provide as a broad an array as possible, and to introduce things that people otherwise simply won't run into. That's something any library can do, and it doesn't require much. If you're a small and poor library, just consider making one book in your monthly book order something off the beaten track, or one book every other month, if it's a month when James Patterson has two new ones out that you have to buy. When you think about "going where your users are," also try to think about going where they aren't, and then figuring out a way to lead them there.

> We don't beat Google by trying to best Google. We beat Google by being the thing–the things, really–that Google can never be.

Give 'em what they want? Define "they" more broadly—and find ways to broaden their wants. [56]

Sensory overload: Mark all as read

Finally for this cluster, a short post about personal balance from Abigail Goben, the *Hedgehog librarian* (hedgehoglibrarian.blogspot.com) on February 1, 2008.

She notes that small children reach sensory overload and respond with a "Meltdown with a capital M"—and adults go through similar things. Goben lists some evidence she's seeing of people responding to overload. Excerpts:

> In my RSS feeds, there's been a trend to show how over loaded, over networked, and divided amongst things we are. It's a decent reflection: I've gotten three new social network invitations in the past month. I have one friend who hasn't read her Bloglines in the better part of two months--and will probably go in and hit "Mark All as Read" soon. Even David Rothman—who is a large cheerleader for being selective and careful in how much you're subscribing yourself to—seems to have a new social network for physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals a couple of times a month. Jennie pointed out that she's paying attention to fewer of her Facebook alerts (me too!).

> We all jumped in and now it's a balancing act. Carefully weeding the feeds that annoy us or just duplicate what we've read elsewhere. Truly, I can only read about the same library science or Britney Spears story so many times. And if one more person points me to John Blyberg's recent post—I just might have a "capital M" Meltdown myself.

"We all jumped in and now it's a balancing act." Some of "we all" didn't jump in quite as deeply and are faster to bail out of social-network overload—but it's *still* a balancing act. I love LSW Meebo; it offers a virtual equivalent to the casual conversations I'm missing as a telecommuter. I hate LSW Meebo: I can't really write or even read carefully while I'm connected. [57]

Oh, and speaking of John Blyberg's recent post…ah, but that's another cluster.

Library 2.0 Debased

That's the title of John Blyberg's January 17, 2008 post (www.blyberg.net/2008/01/17/library-20-debased/) that kicked off this series of responses (and probably quite a few I haven't seen). Technically, this post is partly a response to *another* post about librarian cultural awareness, but Blyberg takes things in a very different direction. Given that I disagree with Blyberg on some of the big questions in libraries (I'm part of the camp that doesn't believe most libraries are fundamentally at risk), you might wonder whether I'm excerpting and interpreting fairly. I can only suggest that you **read the post yourself**. (That's why I provide the full URL above, not just the overall blog URL.) A few excerpts:

> I've been feeling, for a while now, that the term Library 2.0 has been co-opted by a growing group of libraries, librarians, and particularly vendors to push an agenda of "change" that deflects attention from some very real issues and concerns without really changing anything. It's

very evident in the profusion of L2-centric workshops and conferences that there is a significant snake-oil market in the bibliosphere. We're blindly casting about for a panacea and it's making us look like fools…

> Perhaps the most significant area of neglect is our failure to recognize that Library 2.0 is a delicate ecology. Like Web 2.0, it represents technology that is inherently disruptive on many levels. Not only does Web 2.0 undermine notions of authority and control, but its economic and human costs are very real….

> We need to understand how our internal information ecology works and how to tend to it. How and where we interface with our users is where the rubber meets the road and should merit a little more thought than simply thrusting a MySpace page in their face or building a new library in Second Life–a service our users overwhelmingly do not use and, which seems to me, like a creepy post-apocalyptic wasteland. I'll even turn the tables on myself and admit that I was wrong about local tagging in the OPAC. SOPAC was by-and-large a success, but its use of user-contributed tags is a failure…

> We need to understand that, while it's all right to tip the balance and fail occasionally, we're more likely to do so if we're arbitrarily introducing technology that isn't properly integrated into our overarching information framework. Of course, that means we have to have a working framework to begin with that complements and adheres to our tradition of solid, proven librarianship…

> The true pursuit of Library 2.0 involves a thorough recalibration of process, policy, physical spaces, staffing, and technology so that any hand-offs in the patron's library experience are truly seamless. We can learn a lot about collaboration and individual empowerment from Web 2.0, but we cannot be subsumed by it because we have a mission that eclipses "don't be evil" which is the closest thing to a conscience the Web will ever have.

There's a *lot* more to the post (it's not long, just over two print pages, but Blyberg packs a lot of thoughts into those words)—but I think these sections represent the base from which most reactions flowed. While there were only seven comments when I printed off this post, there are 51 as of February 8, 2008. That includes linkbacks from most of the posts noted below, but also many others. I won't comment on the comments; when you read the post, read the comments as well. For that matter, I won't comment directly on the post. I think I agree with most of what Blyberg is saying in these excerpts, except that I continue to believe that "Library 2.0" as anything more than a collection of tools is an artificial construct with little or nothing behind it. [58]

Blyberg speaks: Safe to come out of hiding

Rochelle Hartman wrote this on January 18, 2008 at *Tinfoil + raccoon* (rochellejustrochelle.typepad.com/copilot/). She starts with "Hey kids, it's time for some uncritical

me-tooism" and quotes the same paragraph that begins my excerpts. A little more of what Hartman has to say:

> I felt responsible, in some tiny way, for helping to cobble together the lumbering 2.0 monster. I don't mean to imply that it's not relevant at all. But from where I was sitting as a public library reference manager and front-liner, it seemed like tech.0 was getting a lopsided helping of attention from other bloggers and the established library press.
>
> I've been in and out of the 2.0 stream for awhile… [In my new job,] I was tossing out 2.0 at my new colleagues like beads at Mardi Gras…. Some of it stuck and has become a seamless part of how we work, like Meebo IM. There's a gaming program here that's the purview of Teen services. It's regularly scheduled, well attended and means a great deal to a miniscule and static portion of our users (you know, like book clubs).
>
> After about six months in my position, I was able to step back, breathe, and realize that 2.0 in the tech sense was not a service priority for adult reference or, really, for the community we serve. We deployed Flickr, a blog, MySpace, even a YouTube account, most of which ended up being inexpensive experiments that had zero impact in any direction…
>
> Our community still appears to want fairly traditional library services, slightly tweaked for the 21st century. Our circ has continued to climb, largely due to a significant increase in AV checkouts. We are buying just about every new series that comes out on DVD, and we're buying multiple copies… The reference desk is hopping. We're not reaching for print reference as much, but we still reach for it…
>
> We are working toward a long-range plan. It's in the early stages, but I think we're heading to the conclusion that we need to hear more from our community. Not from folks who walk in the door and and love us already. Not from pundits and trendsetters in the field. And I think we've learned enough that it's time to hush our mouths and just listen for awhile.

I *know* I'm leaving out some great stuff. I think this captures the gist: From her perspective, *in her library*, some things worked, some things had no impact, *people still want books and other materials*, and she's decided that *listening* to the community is more important than implementing hot new things right away. Hard to argue with that. [59]

Twopointopians and the pure faith

The thickest printout in this cluster is for this *Annoyed Librarian* post from January 21, 2008 (annoyedlibrarian.blogspot.com)—not so much for what AL has to say (that's just a little longer than Blyberg's post), but for 40+ comments that follow. Like AL or hate them/him/her/it, AL topped Meredith Farkas' "Favorite Blogs" poll for a reason—and while part of that

reason may be snarky entertainment, AL's posts are rarely entirely devoid of meaning.

> The post is called Library 2.0 Debased, which implies that he thinks Library 2.0 was ever anything important as a concept. And near the end there's a line about the "true spirit of Library 2.0." Talk of the "true spirit" of something and how it has been debased always reminds me of the cultic aspects of the twopointopians. There's a true spirit that's been debased, you see, so we have to get back to the pure faith somehow. Library 2.0 has something to it, even if we don't know what it is. We have to keep the stupid term and keep searching for the true revelation, which will undoubtedly come some day.

Would I put it that harshly? No. Is AL entirely off-base? Again, no: "true spirit of Library 2.0" (which I didn't quote) doesn't thrill me either. Which doesn't mean I agree with everything AL has to say here.

> The fact that this post has been picked up by so many other blogs helps me identify the dissatisfied twopointopians, those hoping to renew the faith. The twopointopians only listen to their own.

I don't believe that's generally true. I'm acquainted with too many people who might qualify as "twopointopians" in AL's view (including some of those cited in this cluster), who I *know* read *Walt at random* or *Cites & Insights* and other skeptical perspectives and who engage in honest, thoughtful discussions. AL paints with a broad brush, intentionally so. (I disagree with *most* of what AL offers in this post—but not all.)

AL lectures the "late sheep"—the ones coming late to the Library 2.0 party, who "go to any talk or workshop with '2.0' in the title…who get all excited by workshops where you set up a blog that you will never post to, a wiki that you will never update, or a feed reader that you will never visit again… You have only yourself to blame… There aren't any coherent ideas behind the 2.0 fad, so it's no wonder the late sheep have debased the faith." She/they/he/it has a point…the Library 2.0 "movement" (as John Blyberg himself labeled it some time back) does appear to lack a coherent overall vision beyond listening to and working with a library's community, which has been part of good library operations for a very long time.

The comments—ah, the comments. AL draws the most vehement and appalling anonymous and pseudonymous commenters of any liblog I'm aware of—and some thoughtful, useful comments (sometimes the signed ones) get buried in the muck. I won't comment on them. [60]

The essence of Library2.0?

Meredith Farkas posted this on January 24, 2008 at *Information wants to be free* (meredith.wolfwater.com/

wordpress/). Some commenters at AL seem to think Farkas is a "twopointopian." If she is, then so am I. This *is* a fairly long post. Portions:

> I found John Blyberg's post, Library 2.0 Debased, very interesting and in many ways, a breath of fresh air. I agree with him on a lot of levels. I agree that mistakes have been made. I think there has been a lot of confusing rhetoric about Library 2.0. I think a lot of people lost touch with what their patrons actually needed and wanted and started implementing cool technologies because they thought that was what Library 2.0 was about. I think the only thing we really disagree on is Library 2.0 actually has a single coherent definition.

> Anyone who's read my blog or has been to one of my talks where I mention Library 2.0 knows that I have always been uncomfortable with the label. I always felt like the 2.0 label and bandwagon wasn't productive and that it would end up leading to more confusion and navel-gazing than anything else. I was right and wrong, I think. Perhaps it was because of the Library 2.0 bandwagon that the Learning 2.0 movement exists now… Could it have happened without Library 2.0? Perhaps. Hard to say.

> But still, I think the movement has had some negative impact as well, and that is due, largely, to a lack of a clear conception of what 2.0 is and how one can get there. It has confused and alienated a lot of people…

> Trying to capture the essence of Library 2.0 is like trying to capture the wind. I still don't understand what Library 1.0 looks like, so I have a hard time understanding exactly what 2.0 might look like. No matter what the definition, though, when you start hearing people say that every library should have a blog, you know things have gone too far and that folks have lost site of the goal: to do right by our patrons.

> I think Library 2.0 led to a lot of librarians losing their way and you can see that in the huge number of library blogs, Flickr account and MySpace pages that haven't been updated in months or years… We should always be focused on our patrons' needs. Not every library needs a public-facing blog. Not everyone has a population that wants to read news about the library or book reviews. Not everyone has a population that wants to have a dialog with the library. Unless you see a real need that could be filled by a blog, your library does not need a blog.

> What I always hoped to see come out of the Library 2.0 movement is exactly what never did. I wanted to see a greater culture of assessment in libraries. Are you doing more assessment than you did before? If so, bravo! But I don't hear people talking much about assessment, which makes me think that Library 2.0 hasn't impacted that area enough. And yet, I can't think of anything more integral to Library 2.0. How can we know what our patrons need and want if we're not doing assessment?

Farkas offers her own definition of Library 2.0—and concludes that it's what any good library should be

doing (and many are). "The fact is, this isn't exactly revolutionary. And good librarians have embraced these ideas for decades and decades. We have always had librarians who are change oriented and those who are change-averse. We still do."

After more not quoted here, Farkas concludes:

> I guess what I'm trying to say is that I think the Library 2.0 movement itself is to blame for a lot of the not-so-well-thought-out technology implementations we've seen out there. There hasn't been enough focus on assessment, on knowing our users, and on really understanding the cultures of these online communities/tools we're getting ourselves into… I think every blogger, writer and speaker who discusses Library 2.0, social software, etc. should ask themselves if they focus enough on assessment and understanding each individual library's population before jumping into this stuff (or if they only focus on the tools). Because, if we're not doing that, we're doing people a grave disservice.

There's *very* little I'd disagree with here or in the rest of the post—including the point that "Learning 2.0," a positive development (and one that PALINET Leadership Network may be part of, if you stretch a point), is a good outcome of the "Library 2.0" term. (The comments here are mostly signed and generally more coherent than some of those at AL—and include one from John Blyberg, who seems to believe that "Web 2.0" is "a historical moment in human development.") [61]

The jig's up, we cheated: Library 2.0 recanted

Let's finish this cluster with a few shorter pieces. Jeff Scott posted this on January 24, 2008 at *Gather no dust* (gathernodust.blogspot.com). Scott overstates the extent to which Blyberg called Library 2.0 a failure, but goes on to make interesting comments about too many "Library 2.0" applications:

> The problem is that we didn't wait for the users to do this; we did this for them thinking they wanted it. It is a typical problem for many libraries. We are guessing and have a tendency to do so with our users…

> We tried to get their attention using these tools, but we don't utilize them in a way that works. I try to use any video or photos to help patrons see something they may have missed. The reality is, if they wanted to be there, they would have made the time. It just ends up being cute, not essential…

> Library 2.0 is about changing our systems and providing more interaction with our public and feedback. Good libraries were doing that anyway. They are open to change and make the change based on the need. It isn't that difficult. The technology tools afford another way to provide contact, but it is only a technology contact, not people contact.

The reality is that most people love their libraries and they don't have a big enough issue so that it ends up in a blog or is spread around, only librarians do.

In a comment, Scott admits that this post (the first part especially, which I didn't quote here) was partly tongue in cheek—but it's clear that, like me, Scott (who runs a public library) doesn't see libraries as endangered creatures: "The reality is that most people love their libraries." Will they love them more with "Library 2.0" tools? Maybe, in some cases, if that's what *this particular community* and *this particular library* find as common ground. [62]

Librarian 2.0 not Library2.0

Michelle McLean waited a couple of days: This post appeared on *Connecting librarian* (connectinglibrarian.com) on January 30, 2008. She read several of the other posts, including one of mine that was only peripherally on topic. She also relates this back to Ryan Deschamp's post ("We asked for Library 2.0 and got Librarians 2.0"), which I discussed in *C&I* 7:11 (October 2007) and gets referenced in later posts that may be discussed, well, later.

I am rethinking my whole attitude to Library 2.0… I know that I have been leading that bandwagon from my small perch and so I have some responsibility in that blame…

If we want to stop the bandwagon leading our libraries astray and see them focused on users and services, then maybe as individuals we need to drop the Library 2.0 and focus on being Librarian 2.0's—at work and outside of it and just help our libraries to utilise and adapt the Web 2.0 tools that are appropriate for our users and our services. Our libraries should always have that focus anyway—regardless of what tools are available—it's not one size fits all.

So my part will be to drop Library 2.0, but continue to be a Librarian 2.0, instituting Web 2.0 tools in my library as our users needs are assessed and I find that Web 2.0 is the best option. If Web 2.0 tools are not the best option, then we won't go there…

These are exciting times, with exciting new tools to play with. So I will continue having fun with them, inside and outside of work. However, I will also keep my focus on our users and do my best as a public librarian to provide them with best service possible—whatever means that will require—Web 2.0 or not.

It really pains me to leave out most of the rest, but you know where to find it. [63]

Blyberg on L 2.0-a response (parts 1 and 2)

Simon Chamberlain posted these relatively brief essays on January 30, 2008. The first part gives Blyberg enormous credit for admitting that SOPAC's user tagging "is a failure"—but argues with "failure":

I'd like to suggest that John hasn't really failed though - what he's done is found a method that hasn't worked (or hasn't worked yet, or didn't work in his particular case). That's a good thing! Now he (and we) know that we need to try something different. The original idea was good (IMHO), but the execution failed, because (John suggests) a small group of taggers, with an interest in one particular area (manga) contributed most of the tags. There weren't enough tags contributed by readers with other interests.

Chamberlain suggests increasing the number of people providing tags—aggregating data from LibraryThing or WorldCat or Amazon. Do all three of those *have* enough user tags to make a difference? I've heard it suggested that only LibraryThing succeeds, and that only because people are tagging their own collections. Still, this is an interesting and useful response. [64]

The second part notes AL's post—and says it's worth a read:

I'd say it is *especially* worth a read if you think you will disagree with AL. Why? Well, we know that groupthink is bad. Only listening to people who are already inclined to share your point of view is a way to make bad decisions. That's incredibly well documented in the psychological literature. For those with a more contemporary focus, it's also mentioned in *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Having more information improves decision making.

Chamberlain says the comments are worth reading:

It's clear that many of AL's readers see Library 2.0 as a technology focused movement, maybe even as the victim of hype/technolust. That's **not** how Library 2.0 advocates see themselves or the movement… But plainly, the message they are trying to convey hasn't got through to AL's readers. "We" (meaning all of us) **don't** all know what Library 2.0 is…

Chamberlain then lists more posts and notes that they "provide support for my argument that 'we' don't have a clear definition of Library 2.0." Indeed "we" don't. I don't see the need for more comment. [65]

Interesting & Peculiar Products
Flashy Labels

If you buy a new PC with a DVD burner, there's a good chance it will include either LightScribe or LabelFlash—both ways of creating disc labels directly on specialized recordable CD and DVD media. The October 2007 *Perfect Vision* includes a test run of both systems, which use the laser itself to make the label.

LightScribe produces very readable labels on relatively inexpensive, widely available media—but the software won't allow you to include track names as part of the label. LabelFlash is faster and can import

track names—but the media are more expensive and harder to find, and the labels are low-contrast.

You can also buy printable CDs and DVDs and do full-color printing with relatively inexpensive printers (some inkjet and multifunction printers also do CDs and DVDs). Bill Machrone (who seems to have moved here from *PC Magazine)* seems oddly dismissive of that solution: "they're just another way to use up expensive ink cartridges. Besides, do you really need color?" Then there's another solution (other than CD marking pens), one I've always used with considerable satisfaction but that reviewers seem to despise: Adhesive-backed paper labels. Here's Machrone's take: "They can be a pain to line up properly and render a disc unusable if you mount the label off center." I suppose that if you don't use the spindle that (I believe) comes with the starter kit for every labeling system, that might be true—but why would you do that? Yes, you have to be a little careful when you're mounting the label—but I get great-looking labels with photo-quality backgrounds, at a total cost (CD-R plus label stock plus ink) that's probably less than the special discs needed for these other solutions. [66]

Green PCs

There are now Vista PCs with Energy Star 4.0 labels and some with other "green" labels, such as the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) Gold certification. I'd love to see comparable noise ratings too, although energy-efficient PCs should also typically be fairly quiet. A November 2007 *PC World* review includes three "value desktop" PCs, one power laptop and an all-purpose laptop, all Energy 4.0 certified. The two higher-rated desktops also carry the EPEAT Gold certification. Dell's OptiPlex 755 Mini-Tower earns a Very Good rating and runs $1,272; the $1,368 HP rp5700 Long Lifecycle Desktop earns a Good—it's considerably slower and the least power-efficient of the tested desktops, but it comes with a five-year warranty. You won't save a ton of money using any of these, but they certainly use less power: When fully powered up but idling, the Dell uses 44 watts and the Enano only 24, where a tested gaming PC uses 418 watts. (That's an extreme case—gaming PCs tend to be power-hogs.)

PC World seems to be emulating the old *PC* in not providing specs with some reviews;, so I went online to see what you get for $1,272 on the Dell. Not a whole lot: a 2.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E4500 CPU, 2GB RAM, integrated graphics and sound, a 160GB hard disk, a CD burner/DVD reader, Windows Vista

Business—oh, and a 20" LCD display and three-year warranty. That's a fairly minimal configuration at a fairly high price. When I priced the OptiPlex mini-tower in late January 2008, without a display but with the same CPU and RAM, a 250GB hard disk and a DVD burner, I got a total of $779—still not dirt-cheap, but a *whole* lot more reasonable. (The 20" display goes for $264. If I was buying this system, I'd bump it to 3GB RAM and go to the next higher CPU at 2.33GHz; the total would be $874 without display.)

The Enano is interesting: It's *tiny* and uses a notebook processor, but a fast one (the 2GHz Core 2 Duo T7200). It's expensive ($1,500 with 19" display) and hard to expand, but you do get 3GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, a DVD burner, and extremely low power consumption in a case that's a mere 8.8x6.8x1.65" and weighs 3lbs. [67]

Really Cheap Laptops

Sure, there's the OLPC XO, for those who don't mind a healthy heap of ideology along with their $188 (really $400, but you get one—eventually—and some kid gets the other one), but it's not the only option. A one-page December 2007 *PC World* piece runs down the three units the magazine was aware of at press time.

The OLPC has a 7.5" 1200x900 screen and uses a low-power AMD Geode LX-700 CPU; it has 256MB RAM, 1GB flash storage, runs a special version of Linux with a kid-oriented user interface and is designed to work under most any conditions. Touch typing? Not likely.

The Intel Classmate PC has been sent to pilot programs in several developing nations. It will cost about the same as the OLPC, but you don't get Negroponte—instead you get an Intel Celeron CPU, a 7" 800x480 display, 256MB RAM and 2GB flash storage—and a unit that might be more powerful but isn't nearly as flashy.

Finally, for the rest of us, there's the Asus Eee (or eee) PC: $400 for the top unit (as low as $260 for other models, maybe), with a 7" 800x480 screen, 4GB flash and 512MB RAM in the $400 unit, an Intel CPU and a more business-oriented approach, still in a small, very light (2lb.), rugged package. All three have 802.11b/g; the Intel and Asus include Ethernet, while the OLPC has mesh networking; the ASUS includes a webcam (as does the OLPC), a card reader for expansion, and USB ports. Since it's the only one you can buy as a standard business transaction, it's a different animal…and a fairly tempting one. [68]

TVs for People with Lots of Green

Heard of Runco? It makes high-end front projection TVs. It also makes flat panels—including the CinemaWall XP-103DHD 1080p plasma display, with lots of neato special circuitry to improve the circuitry. "CinemaWall" is right—this beast is a 103"-diagonal picture. And it only costs $99,995! I wonder how much power it draws… [69]

That Dangerous Word "Near"

Hot to get a Vudu box? According to the December 2007 *Perfect Vision*, it's a $399 box that offers "downloadable movies for rent or purchase" over the internet—at "roughly the same" prices as your local video store. The article is one of those that recognizes no other choice than "driving to Blockbuster" to get a movie, but never mind—the kicker here is that you pay full DVD price and get "near DVD quality"—maybe the same "near" that makes 128Kbps MP3 "near-CD quality" to people who don't listen. When I see "near DVD quality," I think "VHS quality," although the truth could be somewhere in between. Do you get DVD extras? Unlikely. Are you really *buying* the movie for that "roughly the same" price? Even more unlikely—that is, unlike a real DVD, I'll bet you can't give it to someone else or circulate it from a library. (I checked the website. The box is down to $295. They're vague about actual video quality, but real-time viewing only requires a 2Mbps broadband connection, so you're talking a *lot* more compression than DVD itself. And, no, you don't really own the movies: You have no first-sale rights. Clearly not a library item, and it makes Netflix look awfully good.) [70]

Recording on an MP3 Player!

"Ever wish you could record something on the fly without tapes, discs, batteries, or cables?" That's the lead sentence for a breathless pre-review for the XtremeMac MicroMemo, a $59 thingie that you plug into an iPod nano (second generation) or iPod video. It includes a microphone and enables the iPod to "record interviews, meetings, lectures…whatever you desire." Wowie zowie: What an idea. Now, if only my $49 Sansa MP3 player could record with a $59 plugin…oh, wait. The Sansa already has a built-in microphone and audio recording capabilities (also FM tuner and the ability to record from FM). So, come to think of it, do dozens of other non-Apple MP3 players.

Of course, different people have different assumptions about what portable players should include. Rob Enderle seems to think we all want browsers and Wi-Fi in our portable players. Ever notice what Wi-Fi does to battery life? I'd like to believe there's an inherent conflict between wanting compactness and battery life and feeling the need to have a browser in all devices. But Enderle's always quotable and has made a good career out of that; who am I to doubt? [71]

How About a $3,000 Table Radio?

You read that right: $3,000 for a "portable entertainment system" that's 16x9x7.25"—which means the speakers can't be far enough apart for much stereo separation—and includes a CD/DVD player, radio and alarm OK, so it's an alarm clock too. Astonishingly (and, of course, with no actual graphs or test results), the review gives the Meridian F80 Tabletop Music System the *highest possible rating* for sound quality—ten out of a possible ten. For an 80watt 14lb. box that's "really cool" and may deliver "surprisingly robust bass" but can't *conceivably* compare in sound quality to a well-chosen $3,000 stereo system. This from the video equivalent to *The Abso!ute Sound*—I guess standards really are different here. Oh, the unit's designed by Ferrari and has a glossy bright-yellow or red or black or silver arc across its top and sides.

For $3,000, you don't get an iPod dock; that will come later, for "less than $200." Meanwhile, you get a "truly unique product that will certainly appeal to anyone who values sound quality, stylish design, and all-around high performance." And doesn't fret much about money. [72]

Denser Memory

It's not a product yet, but it could be in another 18 months, if the January 2008 *PC World* report is right. It says Arizona State's developed a new memory technology, programmable metallization cell, to replace flash memory—with roughly 1,000 times the density and "essentially zero" additional costs. If you could actually increase the cost-effectiveness of flash memory by 1,000 times *and* have it last for an indefinite number of state changes, it might finally be a cost-effective alternative to hard disks. Within 18 months, hard disk storage should be down to about ten or fifteen cents a gigabyte (that is, $100 to $150 for a terabyte internal drive); while 1,000x current cost-effectiveness would suggest a $20 two-terabyte USB drive, I'd be happy with, say, a $20 500GB drive—particularly if it has no moving parts and is as durable as typical USB drives. [73]

They Can't All Be Winners

The January 2008 *PC Magazine* includes a bunch of special features for the magazine's 25th anniversary. I thought one deserved special mention: "The most memorable tech flops." Remember some of these winners? Memory Shift, the first memory manager for PCs—part of DOS 1.1, when IBM PCs came with 128 kilobytes of RAM. Microsoft Bob—and Windows 98 Me. IBM's PCjr and PS/2. PointCast. DataPlay prerecorded half-dollar-size optical discs. Flooz and Beenz. And, to be sure, the NeXT.

The next feature includes a few odd highlights from the pages of early *PC* issues—e.g., the Compaq "portable" from October 1983, "super-fast 2400-Baud modems" from September 1984, an ad for the first Windows in 1986, 33MHz speed demons in 1990—and the Versatron Footmouse from August 1987. And, showing that *PC* has both a memory and a heart, they reprint the famous January 17, 1989 issue with *PC*'s Technical Excellence award—with the model holding a plaque clearly engraved "Technichal Excellence." (The feature also shows one of the horrendous 3D testing charts from 1990, an innovation that made *PC*'s comparison charts essentially useless while it lasted.) [74]

Editors' Choices and Other Winners

PC Magazine gives an Editors' Choice to an unusual system protection utility: ThreatFire 3 from PC Tools. It detects malware by its behavior and appears to be unusually successful at blocking malware installation—including brand-new threats. There's no configuration and it's free. On the other hand, the $30 Pro edition wasn't any good at clearing existing infections. As of November 6, 2007, *PC*'s Editors' Choice for internet security suites is Norton Internet Security 2008—with a great firewall, new identity protection, slow but effective virus/spyware scanning. The January 2008 *PC World* roundup also scores Norton Internet Security highest and gives it the Best Buy, with Kaspersky Lab Internet Security a close second, McAfee and BitDefender not far behind. I see that all of the top-ranked internet security suites now sell with three-PC licenses; for typical home use, that's both sensible and refreshing. [75]

Mobile phones

There's an unusual four-way comparative review in the October 2, 2007 *PC Magazine*: The Motorola Razr²—as you get it from four different phone companies. They're all the same (three of them are V9m, one is V9); they're all different! Three of the four—Verizon, Sprint, AT&T—earn Editors' Choice awards. What's different? Mostly software, and that turns out to make a lot of difference—e.g., the AT&T model has less than two-thirds the battery life of the others but has the best call quality. [76]

Mac winners

Two Macs earn Editors' Choices in the October 16, 2007 *PC Magazine*—which is also the issue that appears to "bring back the specs," with a specs paragraph at the end of each product review (two cheers!). At $1,649 with 2GB RAM (and a 320GB hard disk), the Apple iMac (20-inch Aluminum) isn't cheap but it's sleek and reasonably powerful (2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo CPU, ATI 256MB graphics card) and has more recyclable components than previous iMacs. The $1,999 Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch (LED)—are these really the model names?—is considerably faster than the regular MacBook, and although LED backlighting doesn't improve the image, it does yield longer battery life. Let's see: compared to the desktop, you're paying 20% more for a slightly slower dual-core CPU, much smaller hard disk (120GB vs. 320GB), and roughly one-quarter smaller display. As notebook-to-desktop comparisons go, that makes the MacBook Pro a relative bargain. [77]

MP3/media players

Want a tiny, reasonably cheap MP3 player—"tiny" as in 3.2x1.0x0.4" (0.8oz.)? *PC Magazine* finds the $90 Samsung YP-U3 Editors' Choice-worthy. That gets you 2GB storage, "great FM radio," voice recording, touch-sensitive buttons—and a bright 1.8" OLED display. This replaces the Sansa Express as *PC*'s choice—apparently because it's skinnier and "a little slicker." Since I paid $50 rather than $80 for the 2GB Sansa and think I might eventually use the expandability (the Samsung doesn't have an expansion slot), I'll deal with the slight extra bulk, thank you.

For larger units, *PC* still loves iPods. The November 6, 2007 issue gives Editors' Choice awards to the $300-$400 iPod touch (although the "earbuds suck," as do most earbuds that come with MP3 players) and the $149-$199 iPod nano (which has "crappy earbuds"). On the other hand, the January 2008 issue awards Editors' Choice for a hard-disk MP3 player to the $250 Microsoft Zune 80GB, a "good-looking, feature-loaded device that bests the iPod classic" with a larger screen, wireless player-to-player sharing and FM radio. (The review doesn't say whether it has voice recording.) As you'd expect, the earbuds "aren't great,"

which is one of the kinder comments I've seen on included earbuds. [78]

HDTV

I'm not sure I'd rely on a PC magazine for TV reviews—but these days I'm not that wild about the TV magazines either. The November 2007 *PC World* has a major article on "which HDTV is right for you?"—limiting the comparison to LCD and plasma, since presumably no proper PC user would be caught dead using a rear-projection TV. The tests included five plasmas and seven LCDs. Most "were capable of producing superb pictures." Best Buy goes to Samsung's $1,600 LN-T4061, a 40" LCD with 1920x1080 resolution, although it didn't do a great job with standard-definition material (including all those DVDs you own). [79]

PDF generators

Here's an unusual comparison: PDF creators. A November 6, 2007 *PC Magazine* roundup includes four of them, one free. Not surprisingly, Adobe Acrobat 8 Standard gets the Editors' Choice; the two other priced products (PDF Converter Professional 4, $100, and deskPDF Professional, $30) tie for second with 3.5 dots to Acrobat's 4 dots. [80]

Printers [16]

If you need serious photo printing at bigger-than-usual sizes, you may appreciate the Canon Pixma Pro9000 ($500). *PC Magazine* gives it an Editors' Choice (November 6, 2007 issue) for exceptional quality and the ability to print on fine-art paper at sizes up to 13x19 inches. It uses eight ink cartridges and, while it's slow as a business printer, it's a very fast photo printer (two minutes to do a photo-quality 8x10 print). With semigloss paper, the unit tested "perfect on almost every point" other than a slight tint on a monochrome photo. The reviewer was so impressed with results on Canon's fine art papers (e.g., museum etching, photo rag) that he plans to frame some of the results.

For other printing needs, other printers make more sense. If you need to do a *lot* of color printing (but not photo-quality and not water-resistant), the HP Officejet Pro K5400dtn Color Printer ($250) gets an Editors' Choice for speed and paper handling (two paper trays and duplexer), and supply costs are low, although text quality isn't quite up to lasers.

Among snapshot printers—specialized printers really designed strictly for printing small photos (usually 4x6), the December 2007 *PC World* likes Epson's $100 PictureMate Dash best—but it's another one of those confounding *PC World* "Best Buy." The

unit has the second-worst print quality of the five tested units—HP, Canon and Sony units all yield better color photos. Yes, the Epson's a little cheaper per print ($0.26, where the others are $0.27 to $0.29) and faster—but shouldn't output quality count for a *lot* in a printer that has no reason for being other than to print photos? [81]

Digital cameras

You'll take those snapshots with a digital camera, presumably, an area where the quality bar keeps rising. The January 2008 *PC World* roundup has cameras with resolution as high as 12 megapixels—and some very capable models as low as $200. Of 16 cameras tested the *lowest* resolution was seven megapixels. Best Buy: The $300 Fujifilm FinePix F50fd, a 12 megapixel camera that's not all that hot looking but offers very good image quality and has all the latest features. [82]

Personal computers

Big fat PC buying guides are always interesting. *PC Magazine*'s November 6, 2007 guide offers Editors' Choices in several categories. For mainstream desktops, winners ar the $1,649 Apple iMac 20-inch Aluminum and $2,199 HP Pavilion Media Center TV m8100y PC (that's without a display), brutally expensive but including one of the few drives that can read both Blu-ray and HD DVD (and write Blu-ray as well as CD and DVD); oddly, even at that exalted price, it only has 2GB RAM and a 250GB hard disk. The $1,260 Lenovo ThinkCentre M553 gets a nod as a business desktop. Dell's $499 Inspiron 531s is the award winner for budget desktops—and although you don't get the hottest CPU around, you do get 2GB RAM and a 160GB hard disk, although there's no DVD burner. *Three* units get the nod as Media Centers, but without specs: the $750 HP Pavilion a6130n, $1,800 HP TouchSmart IQ770 PC (an all-in-one PC), and the $999 Velocity Micro Vector GX Campus Edition 2007. Gamer? All gamers have big budgets, I assume, but the Editors' Choice is actually the *cheapest* of those reviewed—a mere $5,400, for the HP Blackbird 002. Then there are notebooks. That same guide—it's a long one for today's truncated PC magazines, 14 pages in all—gives an Editors' Choice to the $2,300 Lenovo ThinkPad X60 Tablet as a tablet PC and to the $4,024 (!) Dell XPS 1730 and $1,949 HP Pavilion dv9500t as desktop-replacement laptops.

Moving beyond the big fat guide, the December 25, 2007 *PC Magazine* replaces the Lenovo X60 Tablet's award with one for the $1,934 Lenovo ThinkPad X61 Tablet—cheaper by almost $400, with a great keyboard, tough magnesium-alloy frame and good performance.

The January 2008 issue crowns anew all-in-one winner, Dell's $2,399 XPS One (base price $1,449. As tested it's equipped with a 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6550 dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, 500GB hard disk, Blu-ray burner, ATI Radeon graphics card with 128MB RAM driving a 20" LCD widescreen, and an ATSC (HDTV) tuner. It comes with Adobe Element Studio, a suite that's powerful but no match for iLife. [83]

Office suites

Here's an unusual one: Office suites, specifically including online services. While Microsoft Office 2007 gets an Editors' Choice and deserves it, Google Docs Beta *also* gets an Editors' Choice, if a slightly lower rating. If you're doing basic documents, spreadsheets and presentations, Google Docs "is the best online tool." [84]

My Back Pages
The Hidden Costs of Cheap PCs

I should be sympathetic o the approach taken by Dan Costa in this November 20, 2007 *PC Magazine* column—focusing on recurring costs of PC ownership as the main culprit in the "digital divide," with cheap PCs not a solution.

Except that he gets his facts wrong, at least for a user who actually wants to save money. He has you immediately buying MS Office for $149, Adobe Photoshop Elements for $99 and a security suite for $50 (plus $40/year renewal)—and then paying "$40 or so" for minimal broadband. He concludes that the annual outlay for using a PC "climbs well past $500," not including electricity. "All these costs are per computer"—and, heck, this typical user has "three systems in my tiny New York apartment, plus a few backup systems hidden in the closet." Sure, he mentions free alternatives, but briefly.

That sentence about "per computer" puts Costa's column in the MY BACK PAGES category all by itself. I don't know about you, but at our house (two people, two computers), we sure don't pay for separate broadband connections for each computer—and, for that matter, we pay AT&T $20 a month for DSL broadband, not $40. When I signed up for DSL, AT&T (SBC at the time) offered a wifi router for $50; it's worked fine for my Ethernet-connected desktop and my wife's wifi-connected notebook. And, you know, that $149 MS Office 2007 Home & Student Edition is good for up to three PCs, as are some

(most?) Internet security suites—and, as he admits, GIMP is a free and reasonable alternative to Photoshop Elements for a lot of users, assuming you don't use web services for your photo editing. [85]

Not a Lone Voice…

From time to time I grumped about *PC Magazine*'s transformations—not only from a fat, text-heavy "bible of personal computing" to a slender magazine (reduced ad revenue explains most of that), but also from a PC-centric publication with complete data in reviews to yet another slick publication covering too many areas in too little detail, aimed at people with short attention spans and lots of money.

Here's the start of the final paragraph in Jim Louderback's August 21, 2007 "First Word": "A few issues ago, I asked whether we were meeting your needs. The response was overwhelming. Most of you asked for more core PC coverage and less of the other stuff."

We shall see. Not right away, apparently, based on the September 4 issue—which devotes two pages to four products, none of which would seem worth including in a magazine with limited space and so many possibilities. After glancing at these four, I jotted down "Why so much crap?" Consider: a $300 "music phone" that's "just okay" as a phone (oh, sorry, I forgot: that doesn't matter any more); a $500 "smartphone" with enough design flaws to get a two-dot rating; a $3560 video/audio iPod boombox with mediocre sound and a modestly larger video display; and a $130 iPod boombox that "looks good, sounds bad." Well, maybe if phone quality doesn't matter in a high-style phone, sound quality doesn't matter in a stylish iPod boombox. After all, looking good is all that matters.

On the other hand… I wrote the above some months ago. Since then, there are clear signs of improvement. Most PC/notebook reviews now do include a small-type paragraph providing some of the essentials about the hardware itself. More coverage seems to be devoted to personal computers and peripherals, less to "lifestyle" stuff and automobiles. All things considered, *PC Magazine*'s changes seem to be in the right direction.[86]

Poor Widdle Stephie

Stephen Manes is upset with Gmail and says so in his October 2007 *PC World* column. Why? Because he's filled up the 2,877MB free storage space for his Gmail account, which he's set to handle all of his email. Of course, as a columnist for a big publication, Manes gets a lot of email and spam.

Since Manes explicitly endorses "the keep-everything model," he can't be selective about what he retains. He was "forced to violate the pristine integrity" of that model. And, of course, he paid—well, nothing—for this insufficiently robust example of infinite storage. (As I write this, the free storage is up to 6.4GB, more than twice as much as cited by Manes.)

He makes a legitimate point about one Gmail limitation: There's no way to sort mail. I wish there was. For one thing, as he notes, that's a great way to reduce storage needs: Sort by size (descending) and off all those huge attachments you didn't care about in the first place.

His solution? Not to switch to Yahoo Mail (which claims truly unlimited storage) but to pay $20 a year for another six gigabytes at Gmail. That's not a terrible price. Maybe it's just me, but I'd probably be loath to write too critical a column about a free service not offering 100% of what I'd like to see. But, of course, I'm not Stephen Manes. Or John Dvorak, for that matter, who would probably suggest a conspiracy. [87]

FiOS Pricing

Lawrence E. Ullman writes an extremely upbeat commentary on his own experience with Verizon FiOS (Fiber Optic Service) in the October 2007 *The Perfect Vision*. It's fiber *to the house*, not just to the neighborhood. It sounds good—but Ulman may think it's more of a bargain than I do. (He also suggests that, like cable, DSL "rarely delivers on it's promised bandwidth"—yes, the incorrect apostrophe is in the slick-magazine professionally-edited original—but it's been my experience that DSL typically does yield the promised speed. Maybe we're lucky.)

He gives dribs and drabs of the prices, but here's what I came up with, *not* including phone service (and you have to buy phone as part of the bundle). $40 minimum for the internet service. $43 for the "core programming" TV service. $10 for an HD-capable set-top box (without DVR). That's $93/month, not including phone, premium cable channels, DVR, or multiroom capabilities. Hmm. We're currently paying $35/month for cable and DSL (including fees and taxes, which I'll wager aren't part of that $93/month). We get all the TV we want to watch and all the internet speed we have any use for. I don't think $93/month is outrageous (and I'd guess people wind up spending a lot more in reality)—but it's not a wonderful bargain either. [88]

Mood Music?

The Winter 2008 *The Perfect Vision* includes an odd "Long view" column by Scott Wilkinson on the XPod, a system to "automate the selection process" of choosing "just the right tune" for your current mood. A sensor called SenseWear monitors things like skin temperature, heart rate and galvanic skin responses. Supposedly, if you have that info, you can determine the person's emotional state "with a high degree of accuracy—typically in the 70 to 90 percent range." (I love what gets called "accuracy"—would you award high marks to a speech recognition system, say, that got anywhere from one to three out of every ten words wrong? Or, better, tax preparation software that yielded correct returns 70% to 90% of the time?)

So you wear this armband and stay within range of a laptop that receives data, selects songs based on your mood, and sends them to a PDA. You can tweak the results. (Does that affect your mood?) Actually, as it turns out, currently the XPod only selects music based on how active you are—whether you're sitting, walking or running.

The piece says the research is in its infancy…but could eventually supply "just the right music for any situation." Wilkinson seems impressed: "One day, mobile music players could automatically provide the soundtrack for our lives."

I'm not sure any additional comment is needed. Let's just say I'm probably not in the target demographic. [89]

Shedding It

This one's bemusing: a one-page piece in the January 2008 *Sound & Vision* noting that you can (or could) buy a replica of the "garden shed" where Peter Gabriel does much of his writing and recording—for $250,000. The replica, including a full Solid State Logic mixing console, was built for the Audio Engineering Society conference last year.

I must admit, when I read "garden shed" I was a little surprised by the interior size of the shed: 240 square feet. That means interior dimensions of 20x12 feet (or 16x15 or whatever). I always think of sheds as being in the sub-100-square-foot category. But, when I do a little searching, I find that you can indeed buy sheds larger than 240 square feet. The one shown in the photograph looks like a nice little cabin, porch and all. (Peter Gabriel prefers a shed studio to a basement studio because the ceilings are higher: "There's a little more room for your brain in here.") [90]

Columns of Convenience

The new half-page *Sound & Vision* columns, which seem to be around 250-300 words, don't allow for great depth in any case, but one in the January 2008 issue surprised me even so. Gary Dell-Abate ("*Gadget Guy*" and executive producer of *The Howard Stern Show*) was asked to review Acoustic Research's AWD510 wireless 5.1-channel headphones ($250). After a little blather, he says he likes them a lot, basically. He says they're easy to set up, include connectors, "drown out room noise almost completely," and offer "crystal-clear sound" with a wide operating range.

But there's a key element of the product's range that he doesn't address *at all*, quite apart from saying a little more than "crystal clear" about the sound quality. Namely, "5.1-channel"—these headphones are supposed to produce a surround-sound experience. Do they? Did he even listen to any surround-sound material? Not a word—as though he wasn't even aware of the surround-sound issue. [91]

It's Only Money

When I realize that people are buying art, scarcity and prestige rather than any plausible objective value, there's no point in noting absurd prices—after all, it's only money. Still, publications like *Stereophile* and *The Abso!ute Sound*, and especially writers like Michael Fremer, seem convinced that it *is* about objective value, so I can't resist once in a while.

Take the October 2007 *Stereophile* and Michael Fremer's column therein, where I jotted "There's one born…" after reading the first few paragraphs. Why? Well, Boulder Amplifier produced a $30,000 preamplifier at the request of a distributor (presumably one with some customers with huge bank balances bothering them) and figured to sell about a dozen of them—and finds they're still selling "three or four *per month*—more than 200 sold so far." And then there's Goldmund's new Reference II turntable. They're only making 25. Each one costs $300,000. Three hundred thousand dollars. For a turntable. Well, heck, Fremer swears that his $100,000 cheapo is worth every penny of whatever (unstated) deeply-discounted reviewer's price he paid. So will the Goldmund be three times as good? What a stupid question. [92]

Which makes it refreshing and astonishing to see reviews like Robert J. Reina's, in the same issue, for Infinity's Primus P162 loudspeaker. It's sensitive (it doesn't need a big amplifier). For a small speaker, it has decent bass response, down to about 50Hz, and fairly smooth response throughout the rest of the au-

dio band. It measured well and performed well—Reina liked it for "detailed, uncolored, dynamic, and involving home-theater experiences independent of the type of music or volume level." It is, in short, a *musical* speaker (but not by sweetening what's played), worthy of serious listening. Price? $298. A pair.

Not that peculiar price-value ratios are limited to audio. The January 2008 *PC Magazine* notes some "gadgets of the rich and famous," but with no pretense that they make sense. There's a diamond-encrusted Nokia phone for $73,000 and a 24-karat gold plated MacBook with diamond accents (price not given). There's also a $4,000 iPod speaker system with vacuum tubes—oops, back to audio. [93]

Losing Your Way

Sticking with *Stereophile* for the nonce, the editorial in the November 2007 issue is startling and could be a wake-up call to audiophiles and the high-end audio industry—but I don't think it will be. The magazine celebrated its 45th anniversary, founded by J. Gordon Holt, who left another magazine because he felt their editorial coverage was influenced by advertising. "If no one else will publish a magazine that calls the shots as it sees them, I'll do it myself." He did—and was replaced as editor roughly two decades ago, leaving the magazine entirely in 1999. The current editor believes "*Stereophile* still hews true to the goals he established in 1962," but based on the speech the editor quotes from—a 15-year-old-speech—I doubt Holt would agree. Holt thought it was the goal of high fidelity to offer, well, high *fidelity*: To sound like "the real thing" as much as possible.

He believes what I've been seeing said more and more blatantly: "We seem to have come to a tacit agreement that it's no longer necessary, or even desirable, for a home music system to sound like the real thing." The goal now seems to be for the *system* to be a musical instrument—for it to make music sound "pretty" no matter how it was originally recorded.

Holt thinks the industry has lost its direction. The new editor emailed some followup questions to Holt, who's clear about what he thinks. As compared to 1992, he no longer thinks the high end has lost its way *in the same manner*. Nope, it's *worse:* "There's no hope now." Because it was found difficult to perfectly reproduce the sound of performance, that goal has been abandoned. "Today, 'good sound' is whatever one likes." As one of *Stereophile*'s writers put it, "fidelity is irrelevant to music." He doesn't expect future music lovers to care or even know about fidelity—

and, of course, the only use of long reviews at that point is to find a reviewer whose personal preference matches yours, since there's no objective standard.

Holt achieved an enormous amount—and he feels everything he achieved lost its relevance within a decade. "Audio as a hobby is dying, largely by its own hand." The absolute refusal of high-end gurus to *consider* double-blind testing as a tool, the extent to which the current editor makes excuses for ghastly measured performance if one of his golden-eared writers thinks the equipment *makes pretty music*…well, it's hard to argue with Holt. More's the pity. [94]

Why does this bother me? For the same reasons I'd be bothered by a TV set that turned all scenery into versions of the Mediterranean and California wine country: Sure, it's beautiful, but life isn't always one kind of beauty. I'd be bothered if an ebook reader translated every text into an uplifting, ennobling experience or if a DVD player turned every movie into a romantic comedy. Some music *is* aggressive. Some music is "ugly," depending on your own tastes. Maybe you should be able to adjust your equipment to tone down the parts that bother you, but you should at least start from a point that reproduces what was recorded as faithfully as possible. If I want to put on rose-colored glasses, I should at least be aware that I'm shading my worldview.

The high end has an oddly split view. On one hand, fidelity doesn't matter. On the other hand, tone controls—which allow you to *consciously* modify music playback to suit your own taste, but might theoretically introduce some small perturbations in fidelity—are anathema to the high end. So we get Sam Tellig, in the January 2008 *Stereophile*, praising a $7,000 loudspeaker for a great many things—one of which is that it has a "tweeter setting" that allows you to boost or cut the treble by a small amount (1.5dB or 3dB per octave). "It's wonderful to have this flexibility. Perhaps other speaker manufacturers can explain why they don't offer it." But shouldn't tone controls be on the amplifier or receiver? [95]

Doesn't Anybody Speak the Language?

So I'm reading Maureen C. Jenson's "prologue" in the January 2008 *Home Theater*. She's the editor.

In the first paragraph, she says, "Today, with February 2009—the official launch date of HDTV for all American families—just a short year from now…" To which I say, *hunh?* Next paragraph: "We've launched a brand-new column specifically geared to not only ad-dress the upcoming mandatory transmission of HD television signals," to which I again say, *hunh?*

Both statements are somewhere between wrong and nonsensical, and you'd think that the editor of a major magazine would know a little better. HDTV was launched in the U.S. in 1997 (commercially in 1998). There is no such thing as "mandatory transmission of HD television signals," in February 2009 or otherwise.

What will happen in February 2009 is that analog TV broadcasting in the U.S. will cease. You could, I suppose, call that the date of "DTV for all American families," noting that DTV—digital TV—and HDTV are *not the same thing*. That's also nonsense, of course: Cable can continue to provide analog signals and there will be cheap digital/analog set-top boxes. There just is no "mandatory transmission of HD television signals"—the FCC's requiring digital signals but not mandating high resolution.

Look, if this was in *Maxim* or *New Yorker*, I'd let it pass. "What the hell, they're not technology experts, they just confused HDTV with DTV." But *Home Theater* claims to be an authoritative source, and the new column will "answer your questions" on HDTV. But if the editor doesn't understand the basics, why should we expect those answers to be right? [96]

Hmm. Later in that issue, a "wireless report card" includes a brief review of the Sony VAIO VGF-WA1 wireless digital musical streamer, a $350 box incorporating DRM (hey, it's Sony) so you can stream all sorts of audio files from your Windows PC. We're informed that the system "has its own 128-megabyte hard drive" and the review refers to its "hard drive" two more times. My immediate response refers to bovine excrement, since I don't think there *are* any 128MB hard drives on the market and would expect Sony to incorporate a small flash drive into a unit like this. Indeed, Sony's website says "128MB memory," either RAM or flash (the unit's now $199). I agree with the review that this is pretty chintzy—after all, a 2GB Sony flash drive goes for $20 or so. But whatever the memory is, *it isn't a hard drive*, and it's shockingly ignorant to read that in a review. [97]

Ad Claims I Flatly Disbelieve…

The ad: ESET Smart Security. The medium: December 2007 *PC World*. The claim:

> There are many software security solutions to choose from, but only one can actually think.

Amazing. I know of no AI researcher who will claim we're anywhere *close* to having software that thinks,

but here's an internet security suite making that claim. I think I'll go elsewhere… **[98]**

…And Odd Rhetorical Questions

If I seem to be riding editors of video and home theater magazines, well, them's the breaks. Bob Ankosko edits *The Perfect Vision*, and his December 2007 editorial bemoans those who buy HDTVs and don't get equally expensive surround-sound systems to go with them. "If you're spending more than a grand on a new HDTV…try to budget at least as much as you plan to spend on the TV for a sound system." Ankosko would *hate* us: We're watching a 10-year-old 32" Sony XBR (because the picture's still so good we're not rushing to buy a wide-screen HDTV just yet)—and, don't tell him, but we use the TV's built-in stereo speakers (with fairly effective pseudo-surround). His take?

> What good is a big beautiful picture without riveting sound that puts you on the edge of your seat?

The way that question appears, it's clearly intended to be rhetorical—but, sorry, Bob, at least in our household, we're generally not interested in being "on the edge of our seats" when we're watching TV, whether it be broadcast or DVD. (We also find we're a lot more interested in story telling than in car crashes and explosions, so maybe we're just not the right clientele.)

(I assume it was Ankosko's decision to run an interview with a Paramount executive after Paramount took the bribe to release exclusively in HD DVD; it's one of those interviews where the questions appear to have been written by the interviewee. Read the interview and you'd believe HD DVD was the clear surefire winner.) **[99]**

Fun with Numbers and Other Stuff

There's a heading I could use in every issue. This time, it's *The Perfect Vision*, where a small item notes the 25th anniversary of audio CDs and says "(and Goodbye?)." The text *does* say "the CD still accounts for the majority of music industry revenues" but continues "but the tide is quickly turning." In fact, as of 2006, CDs still accounted for 90% of music industry revenues. Maybe "the writing is on the wall," but CDs aren't quite dead yet. (*The Perfect Vision*, as it turns out, *is*: January 2008 was its final issue.)

I won't even give a John Dvorak potshot a name; it's too easy. Still, in his December 25, 2007 *PC Magazine* rant he gripes about the fact that Windows is still called Windows after 20 years. "If car companies kept their names this long we'd still be driving Ford Galaxies or Chevy Bel Airs." So I guess Dvorak thinks no sane car company would stick with a car model name for, oh, 20 years? Hmm. My first Honda Civic was a 1975 model. One of our two Honda Civics at the moment is a 2005. It's one of the world's best-selling, most highly regarded cars. Odd how Honda's too brain-dead to realize they have to scrap the model name. Come to think of it, Honda started making Accords in 1976—and Toyota started selling Corollas in 1966. Good thing U.S. car companies are as smart as Dvorak and know you can't keep a model name, That's probably why GM and Ford are trouncing Honda and Toyota in sales. **[100]**

A Short Bonus Item

Copyfitting *Cites & Insights* is always an interesting process (not for you, but you're mostly not layout geeks). I condense the space in one paragraph by 0.1 points to eliminate a short last line. I cut a subhead's size from 16 points to 15 points to turn two short lines into one long line. I even eliminate a few words or a sentence to avoid white space at the bottom of columns or bad breaks in paragraphs.

Always, the goal is to fill some even number of pages as precisely as possible. Usually, that means trimming—even cutting pieces from essays and holding them for later issues.

But what if you want exactly 100 subsections? No way to trim to 34 pages. Instead, you get this item.

Masthead

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ8i3.pdf