Bibs & Blather

Projects and Rejects

Those of you who read this self-indulgent five-part post on *Walt at random* might not choose to read it again, although it's somewhat cleaned up and short-ened. On the other hand, I've added a couple of notes in the second section—but it's stuff you don't need to know yet.

Do What You Care About

Back in late spring—just before ALA Annual—I found myself a little down: Short of energy for writing and, more important, inspiration to do anything major. At the time, I wrote a post saying "I'm hoping ALA Annual 2008 will mark a turning point, that I'll emerge with more inspiration and recovered energy."

It did. I did. Since that post, I've turned out the August 2008 *Cites & Insights*–a good solid issue if I do say so myself–and gotten off to a good start on the project I plan to pursue.

So I thought I should expand on matters a little.

Yes, Anaheim helped—not the city, but ALA Annual itself. I listened and talked to enough people to gain back some inspiration and energy.

One particular conversation helped a lot—and, unfortunately, I don't remember who the conversation was with. It might have been Fred Gertler before ALA. It might have been Tom Wilson during ALA. It might have been someone else entirely… and, come to think of it, it could very well have been Joan Frye Williams.

After a brief discussion of the situation–several possible projects, very little inspiration, and really discouraging sales and lack of feedback on the library blog books–this old friend made a key comment, which I'll paraphrase as

> **What do you really care about? Do that.**

Good advice–along with the counterpart:

> **What are you still doing that you no longer care about? Stop doing that.**

I'd been trying to do a somewhat impersonal calculus which could be summarized as:

> Where do I provide added value, in areas that librarians should care about, and where there's a reasonable chance what I do will be read (and, if in book form, paid for)?

That turns out to be too complicated. The simpler formulation–which a good Left Coaster like me might translate as "Follow your bliss"–makes more sense.

I'm using two informal analyses based on this proposition, one for projects too big for *Cites & Insights*, one for *Cites & Insights* itself.

Inside This Issue

➢ Am I interested enough in the results of a project to make it more worthwhile than, say, working on music or reading, even if book sales might never amount to minimum-wage compensation for the time spent?

➢ Should I still be writing about a topic–even if I've written about it in the past?

In the first case, the answer turns out to be **Yes** for one project, which I'll tentatively describe shortly, and **No** for another project unless something changes fair-ly drastically in the next few months–and I'll discuss that issue in "The one that probably won't happen."

In the second case, I should look at each area I've been covering—and say, for each one,

> **Do I still care enough–and add enough value–to bother with this?**

For *Cites & Insights* as a whole, the answer is clearly **Yes**–particularly if I slough off the areas for which the answer is now **No**.

That discussion is the basis for the final section. In the meantime, I'll admit that I'm probably drop-

ping one area entirely (where I'd slowed down anyway). Last weekend, I reviewed the contents of the Censorware folder…and, after thinking about it, recycled all the paper, stripped the folder label, and returned the folder to my stock of blank folders.

Why? I could provide several reasons, but it boils down to not caring enough about the value I can add.

Wrapping up this post, it may boil down to conserving energy to retain inspiration. By reducing the overall set of possibilities, I believe I can do a better job on the ones that remain—and avoid bogging down in overall disenchantment and the resulting ennui.

The Liblog Landscape

As will be obvious to some of you), I've been tinkering with this one for quite some time…

I started keeping notes on the project. Here are some of those notes with some small-text annotations.

Initial inclusions
- ➢ All blogs in 2005 "top 60″ study as first baseline; all blogs that meet currency criteria included in 2008.
- ➢ All blogs in 2006 "great middle" study as second baseline; all blogs that meet currency criteria included in 2008.
- ➢ All other blogs found in IWTBF "Favorite blogs" study, or LISWiki, or LISZen source list, or "tag cloud" source list, or my own discoveries, as of 3/1/08, that match all criteria below.

   "IWTBF": Information Wants to be Free.

Criteria for preliminary inclusion
- ➢ In English
- ➢ Not clearly defined as an official library blog.
- ➢ Somehow related to library people.
- ➢ Reachable
- ➢ **Established**: At least one post before January 1, 2008
- ➢ **Not defunct**: At least one post after August 31, 2007 (as of March 1, 2008)
- ➢ **Visible**: Sum of Bloglines subscriptions and Technorati "Authority" at least 9 (thus, rounds to 1.0 on Visibility scale) when tested in first two weeks of March 2008

   Those criteria are for *additional* blogs, those not in one of the early surveys–and I'm still pondering "not defunct." The "Established" and "Visible" criteria are firm, so that there's some kind of starting point and so that truly "under the radar" blogs–the ones designed for a small circle of friends–can stay that way.

Blogs added and blogs not added
Some blogs appear in more than one source. Favorites came first. "Others" came last. I believe LISZen came second and don't remember the order of the others.

- ➢ Favorites: 48 added.
- ➢ LISZen: 81 added
- ➢ LISWiki: 37 added
- ➢ Cloud: 9 added
- ➢ Others (wcc's picks): 29 added.
- ➢ **Total added: 204**
- ➢ Not added because too new: Five.
- ➢ Not added because invisible: 92.
- ➢ Not added because available but defunct: 97.
- ➢ Not added because not reachable: 57.

Adding clearly defunct and not reachable yields more than 150 defunct of about 450 candidates–about a 33% mortality rate.

   At some point, the numbers don't add up. That shouldn't be surprising…

Baseline and bizarre experiment
There were 542 blogs in the spreadsheet at this point—all in my Bloglines list.

For two weeks, I tracked how many new posts appeared in twice-a-day checks.

Completion of experiment on 542 blogs: Over two weeks there were, on average, 221 posts per day, or 0.41 posts per blog. By comparison, the 213 blogs in the 2006 survey had an average of 104 posts per day or 0.49 posts per blog—not a convincing difference. (By comparison, the 60 blogs in the 2005 survey had an average of 55 posts per day or 0.92 posts per blog, but that was a handpicked set of blogs.)

First assumption—that, on average, libloggers are posting less often: Not proved, and the evidence is weak at best.

Next steps
Doing March-May 2007 scans for some portion of the 2005/2006 blogs, both as background for TxLA…and to get a sense of whether I want to continue this.

Issues include: Should I be tracking illustrations? Should I be tracking # of posts in which links appear? To what extent do blogs allow easy tracking of length, etc? For now: **Yes** on illustrations. **No** on links. If blogs hide posts, I'm not tracking length.

   I've since been able to track length for most WordPress blogs that "hide posts"—because you can page back indefinitely rather than going to the archives. If that works, I've done it for 2007 and 2008 both.

Blogs deleted during 2007 scan
- ➢ *Society for librarians who say m….* **Reason**: Just not going to do that one.
- ➢ *dulemba.com*: **Reason**: No indication of any library focus or interest.
- ➢ *Five weeks to a social library*. **Reason**: Hidden posts in archive, and this was a "termed" blog, mostly for course participants.

Second run: Blogrolls

Process: Looked at blogrolls for blogs already in list, based on:

➢ Front-page blogrolls (no blogrolls from links)
➢ Plausible length of blogroll
➢ Some evidence of library focus for blogroll

Scan and results

Roughly 100 blogrolls checked in early May 2008. Results:

➢ Added: 46 blogs (new total: 585)
➢ Invisible: 21+
➢ Defunct (no posts in 2008, or no posts in March-April 2008): 42+
➢ Official library (not obvious from name): 4+
➢ Too new (no 2007 posts): 4
➢ Not library-related at all: 15+

Decisions along the way

For now, I'm leaving in blogs with no posts in March-May 2008 if they had posts in March-May 2007 or were in one of the two earlier surveys.

I'm deleting blogs that had no posts in March-May 2007 and no posts in March-May 2008 and weren't in one of the two surveys unless they've (a) been around for a long time or (b) have posts in June 2008 or later. I may need to rethink that decision.

That's the end of the notes–for now, at least. Here's what I believe is happening at this point:

2008 Metrics and Initial Text

I'm currently going through blogs, noting:

➢ Brief information for each one: name, tagline if any, who it's by if that's clear or if it's a group, when it began, the visibility measure, up to three of the most popular categories or tags or labels if easy to determine, the software used if obvious, whether it's sans or serif and noting if it's fully justified text and if it's an odd text/background combination, and the URL
➢ Number of posts during March-May 2008
➢ Total length of posts
➢ Number of comments and number of figures
➢ The same information for March-May 2007 if I didn't pick it up before
➢ General affiliation of the blogger if evident
➢ In some cases, a sentence about the nature of the blog
➢ In a very few cases, a fragment of a post that I found particularly intriguing.

The raw numbers go into a spreadsheet. The text goes into Word chapters, alphabetically by sortable blog name—as the first pass of a multipass process.

This is **not** a fast process, although a two-display system makes it faster. How fast is "not fast"? It can take anywhere from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours to go through five blogs, and I try to do five or ten at a time. There's a two-minute (or so) setup process, but I find that doing more than ten at a time makes me nuts. Some days I do five, some ten, some (rarely) fifteen…and some none at all, because I'm focused on other things such as columns or *C&I*.

As of August 15, 2008, I've done 405 of 583 (there was a duplicate in that "584″ count)–but that turns out to be 397 of 574, because I deleted eight blogs along the way, typically because they disappeared entirely and weren't in an earlier study or because they're defunct and were alive for too short a period to be included (e.g., your typical "create a blog for class" blog).

I'm two-thirds of the way through. My current target–-taking into account *Cites & Insights*, columns, mental health, maybe a short vacation–-is 50 blogs a week, which should get me through the whole list right around the time I turn 63…

But wait! There's more!

At that point, depending on various factors (phase of the moon, feedback, offers of support, health, what have you), I could do another "additions" pass–picking up more English-language liblogs that fit the general criteria, working from blogrolls again. If that happens there's the metrics process for each new blog…and, since 2007 metrics would also be needed, I figure one to two hours for each fivesome.

I might also do a "subtractions" pass. Maybe the non-English blogs in the 2006 survey should be deleted. Maybe there are other categories that should be deleted… But at some point I'll have a "complete" spreadsheet matched with a set of chapters.

After all the metrics gathering is done, comes the analysis. **Lots** of analysis. How much and what kind of analysis? I'm not quite sure.

I *am* sure I'll look at averages, medians, standard deviations, outliers and quintiles for each significant metric—and that "significant metrics" will include changes from 2007 to 2008 for those blogs with posts in both March-May periods. I suspect I'll define quintiles differently for comments and figures, looking at quintiles of blogs with *some* comments or figures and overall percentages that have none at all.

I suspect I'll do some correlations. I'm sure I won't do the "toss everything into SPSS and see what significant correlations emerge" style of correlation.

Wrapping it all up

Then I'll write the manuscript—several chapters of analysis (how many I don't yet know), followed by the alphabetic chapters, each of which will require a re-

write (for example, filling in pieces that emerge from overall analysis).

Then I'll produce it, probably as a book, possibly with a few overall comments on the blog or in *C&I*.

When? I have no idea. If I get it out before ALA Midwinter Meeting 2009, I'll be fairly happy.

If someone comes forward with some form of adequate sponsorship, I'd be delighted to make a PDF version free or run major amounts of the analysis in *Cites & Insights*. Otherwise, that's unlikely.

A late note about content

I'm looking at sheer length and what makes sense in a book. I suspect that, once I'm done, I'll *summarize* blog program usage and use of sans or serif and drop it from individual blogs. I also suspect I'll drop the blog's URL: better to get that from the spreadsheet or I'll provide, and they change and can usually be searched readily. I might drop blogger's names, I might drop affiliation or simplify it—and I suspect most brief comments about what's in a blog will disappear, particularly if the blog's name or tagline is reasonably indicative. Quotes from blogs? Very few (if any) will remain.

The One That Probably Won't Happen

By now, I'll assume most of you are aware of my twin 2007 projects: *Public Library Blogs: 252 Examples* and *Academic Library Blogs: 231 Examples*.

For all the talk about why libraries (every library, most libraries, or whatever) should be doing blogs and what wonderful benefits they'll derive, I believe these are the first objective looks at what's actually out there, other than a few handpicked examples.

I believe they were landmark projects, at least deserving discussion and criticism.

Two shrubs fall in the forest. No one hears.

They were wholly ignored by the gurus of library blogging. *Wholly*.

Reacting charitably, I'll assume none of those gurus are aware of *Cites & Insights* or *Walt at Random*, and so were and are wholly unaware of the books.

There are less charitable reactions, to be sure. Kate Davis, one of that remarkable group of Australian libloggers, raised one possibility in a March 14, 2008 post at *virtually a librarian*.

A July 12, 2008 post at *Marcus' World* seems to argue that social software and other initiatives should not be evaluated–or at least not yet. I'm trying to avoid the phrase "faith-based librarianship," but when I'm told that we shouldn't be asking whether new services are effective, I have to wonder. To my mind, a perfectly legitimate objection would be "You're not measuring the right things"—which then raises the issue of what those right things would be. To say that we shouldn't be asking such questions at all—that seems a bit odd.

Maybe it was a bad idea to begin with

I'm entirely willing to agree that the books might (should?) have been done differently, with a lot more discussion of analytics and a lot less text from each blog. I thought examples would be useful. Maybe they are, but they made it easy to dismiss the book as "just stuff taken from the blogs." That's wildly unfair, I believe, but I'm biased.

Going forward or not

The public library portion of the project was (is) somewhat interesting on its own merits, but was a lot of work for very little apparent result.

The academic library portion of the project, frankly, got less interesting as time went on. And was even more work for even less apparent result.

So there's very little in me wanting to take the next step, which would involve longitudinal studies (looking at changes in blogs over time) and a lot more up-front discussion.

If there was external sponsorship, or if things suddenly picked up this Fall, that could change–in which case, I'd look at the possibility of doing a two-year comparison (2007 & 2009). Most likely, though, I'll write this one off as a reject.

Notes from the comments

Dorothea Salo added an extremely useful comment. What she says (skipping the first paragraph):

> The printed book was simply the wrong information-delivery vehicle for this project.
>
> Consider: I find a blog that looks interesting. I have to open up my browser and type in its URL, or Google for it; either process is error-prone. I want to compare it to another blog found on a different page. This involves the cognitive load of deciding whether to flip back and forth in the book, or open both blogs in my browser (with the attendant typing of yet another URL).
>
> If I find a blog I like and want to save, the printed book does not help me remember it where remembrance is most useful: namely, my browser or my del.icio.us or my FriendFeed. Likewise, if I've been reading it for a while and want to refresh my memory on what you said about it, I have to go dig up a print book… when I'm sitting at my computer!
>
> This project makes worlds more sense as a Web project, where to investigate a blog I need only click a link. The trouble there, of course, is finding someone to pay for your work… but you've had that trouble already with the print books, no? Perhaps sponsorship might have

been more readily available had the end-product been of more immediate utility.

Balanced Libraries was a book, it makes sense as a book, it works fine as a book. The blog books needed not to be books, even ebooks. (What good would they have been on a Kindle? Not much.)

A very good point—and one that, Salo agreed, probably doesn't apply to *The Liblog Landscape*. Salo's comment is helping me decide what stays in the manuscript and what goes.

Move Along, Nothing Happening Here

The fourth post in the series of five offered details on actual sales for the two library blog books.

How "Doing What You Care About" Might Affect *Cites & Insights*

Remember when *Cites & Insights* was all about personal computing?

That's a trick question. *C&I* was never "all about personal computing." The informal definition in the first issue was "Libraries, Media, Technology & Stuff." I'd estimate that the first issue was roughly half PC-related, half otherwise.

PC-related material dwindled over the years, partly because the field got less interesting, more because there were other topics I was more interested in.

Looking at the "current list" of recurring sections (on *C&I*'s About page),there's only one that's on the "maybe not" list:

Copyright. Sigh. I just don't know. I did something in the August issue and three issues earlier, and I'm not sure my heart was in either one. I won't say copyright coverage is going to disappear—but it might seem that way, except for special cases.

What about new areas? They emerge, slowly–and sometimes only as a series of PERSPECTIVES.

As for *C&I* itself, 2008 may be the first year that it's "only" a monthly, but most issues are a bit on the long side. I wouldn't attach much significance to either of those facts.

Perspective
Updating the Book Discovery Projects

One big piece of bad news (but not wholly bad). A handful of items along the way. And, to finish off, a blogging controversy that might belong in MY BACK PAGES rather than here. If nothing else, this piece brings us up to date since the January 2008 Discovering BOOKS: AN OCA/GBS RETROSPECTIVE (*C&I* 8:1).

Live Search Books Goes Away

On May 23, 2008, Microsoft announced, "We are ending the Live Search Books and Live Search Academic projects and…both sites will be taken down next week. Books and scholarly publications will continue to be integrated into our Search results, but not through separate indexes." That's in the first paragraph of "Book search winding down" at the *Live search* blog (blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/). The kicker comes in the next paragraph:

This also means that we are winding down our digitization initiatives, including our library scanning and our in-copyright book programs. We recognize that this decision comes as disappointing news to our partners, the publishing and academic communities, and Live Search users.

The post says Microsoft digitized 750,000 books and indexed 80 million journal articles.

Based on our experience, we foresee that the best way for a search engine to make book content available will be by crawling content repositories created by book publishers and libraries. With our investments, the technology to create these repositories is now available at lower costs for those with the commercial interest or public mandate to digitize book content.

The "not wholly bad" part—particularly for those of us who found the Live Search Books platform more congenial than Google Book Search?

We intend to provide publishers with digital copies of their scanned books. **We are also removing our contractual restrictions placed on the digitized library content** and making the scanning equipment available to our digitization partners and libraries to continue digitization programs. We hope that our investments will help increase the discoverability of all the valuable content that resides in the world of books and scholarly publications. (Emphasis added.)

Mike Buschman, who was involved with these projects for almost two years, blogged about them on May 26, 2008 and June 7, 2008 at *Mike Buschman's blog* (mikebuschman.spaces.live.com/Blog/). He was "dumb-founded at the decision" and cited other comments noting that Google isn't making any money from Google Book Search either, but manages to keep it going. He also notes Brewster Kahle's comment regarding more than 300,000 public domain books that Microsoft had paid to scan—all of which are available at the Internet Archive—and thanked Microsoft for letting IA and other partners keep the equipment.

As reported in the second post, Brewster Kahle took an opportunity to take an indirect shot at some

other book-scanning project. He called the announcement "a wakeup call" and said "The idea of a couple of corporations owning the history of intellectual discourse is a bad idea. That should be the job of libraries and publishers, not one corporation." The concept that scanning books still held in and owned by libraries means the scanning firms "own the history of intellectual discourse" is misleading discourse.

Buschman says "digitizing this vast store of knowledge and making them freely and publicly accessible is rightly part of the libraries' mission"—which may be true, but leaves out a crucial item, namely money, not just the tens of millions required for scanning but ongoing money required for robust *access* to the scanned materials. Some commenters have offered an interesting handwave, saying grant money is readily available for these projects. If that's true, then why isn't the Open Content Alliance rolling in dough and making a fully-populated online system that works better than it does?

As an odd sidelight, Buschman's second post quotes a May 29, 2008 item at *eWeek.com* including this statement: "Google was asked by eWEEK when it could expect to see some Book Search results…" **Say what?** Google Book Search was returning results in October 2006; it was returning much larger results in June 2007 and again in December 2007.

At least one reasonably informed reaction to this shutdown was that it would feed Google's monopoly. That shouldn't be the case, if the Open Content Alliance makes progress—but it's a natural conclusion.

More reactions and analysis

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* ran "Microsoft's book-search project has a surprise ending" in its May 29, 2008 issue. The article, by Andrea L. Foster, gives the facts, notes that "Microsoft was not as ambitious as Google" in its aims, and quotes Anne Kenney (Cornell) as saying "It would have meant an awful lot of additional investment in this area for Microsoft to be a real competitor."

Cornell was working with both Microsoft and Google, as the article notes, partly because Google would digitize Cornell's in-copyright agricultural-life-sciences collection and non-English materials. (Microsoft was only scanning English-language public domain materials.) Both Kenney and Michigan's Paul Courant noted that competition was a good thing.

Paul Courant commented at his own blog, *Au Courant*, on May 31, 2008 (paulcourant.net/):

> I want to emphasize…that I completely agree with Brewster Kahle that it would be a very bad thing if a single corporation were in control of the cultural record. Indeed,

it would be bad if, as is the case with much of audio and video, the control were divided up amongst several corporations. Nonprofit organizations, emphatically including research libraries, are the natural stewards of information that will be of value to society for the indefinite future, precisely because we are driven by a mission of preservation and access, rather than by profit. Good thing, then, that the University of Michigan and other universities whose collections are being digitized by Google continue to hold the original copies of their print works, and also receive and preserve copies of the image files and associated text files that are produced by Google's nondestructive scanning of these works.

> I will miss Microsoft, and I hope that others will take its place—again, the more the merrier. In the meantime, the University of Michigan Library now has well over a million digitized books in its catalogue, with the number growing by thousands every day. Visit us online at www.lib.umich.edu. Our catalog will allow search of all of the digitized works, and full view of those that are in the public domain.

Dan Cohen (director of George Mason University's Center for History and New Media) discussed the situation in a May 29, 2008 post at *Dan Cohen* (www.dancohen.org):

> This leaves Microsoft's partner… the Internet Archive, somewhat in the lurch, although Microsoft has done the right thing and removed the contractual restrictions on the books they digitized so they may become part of IA's fully open collection (as part of the broader Open Content Alliance), which now has about 400,000 volumes. Also still on the playing field is the Universal Digital Library (a/k/a the Million Books Project), which has 1.5 million volumes.

> And then there's Google and its Book Search program. For those keeping score at home, my sources tell me that Google, which coyly likes to say it has digitized "over a million books" so far, has actually finished scanning *five* million. It will be hard for non-profits like IA to catch up with Google without some game-changing funding or major new partnerships.

> Foundations like the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation have generously made substantial (million-dollar) grants to add to the digital public domain. But with the cost of digitizing 10 million pre-1923 books at around $300 million, where might this scale of funds and new partners come from? To whom can the Open Content Alliance turn to replace Microsoft?

> Frankly, I've never understood why institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton haven't made a substantial commitment to a project like OCA. Each of these universities has seen its endowment grow into the tens of billions in the last decade, and each has the means and (upon reflection) the motive to do a mass book digitization project of Google's scale. $300 million sounds like a lot, but it's less than 1% of Harvard's endowment and my guess is that the amount is considerably less than all

three universities are spending to build and fund laboratories for cutting-edge sciences like genomics. And a 10 million public-domain book digitization project is just the kind of outrageously grand project HYP should be doing, especially if they value the humanities as much as the sciences….

In one stroke HYP could create enormous good will with a moon-shot program to rival Google's: free books for the world… And beyond access, the project could enable new forms of scholarship through computational access to a massive corpora of full texts…. [**Several worthwhile paragraphs omitted**.]

Is this likely to happen? Of course not. HYP and other wealthy institutions are being asked to spend their prodigious endowments on many other things, and are reluctant to up their spending rate at all. But I believe a HYP or HYP-like solution is much more likely than public funding for this kind of project, as the Human Genome Project received.

You might find the rest of the post interesting reading. Could it happen? And beyond the $300 million for scanning, what would it cost to *maintain* the digital collections in robust, rapidly accessible, high quality form? I think the idea's wonderful; I **know** that long-term effective digital access is not "free," even if disk space is supposedly cheaper than dirt.

Open Content Alliance

The bad news first: Looking at OCA's website, I see little evidence of any change since October 2007. That's the most recent "News" item. The "Next Steps" tab brings up a *2006* work agenda. The OCA collection at Internet Archive amounts to less than 21,000 items (the Microsoft collection, more than 300,000 items, is separate). At least that's growing, if slowly. The website gives the feeling of not being maintained.

Two short items and one longer item may be worth noting:

➢ Roy Tennant contributed "Mobilizing collections: from storehouse to scanning factory" to hangingtogether.org on January 2, 2008 (hangingtogether.org/). The post describes a visit to UC's Northern Regional Library Facility (NLRF), a five-million-volume storage facility serving five Northern California UC campuses—and it includes notes on "the scanning operation of the Open Content Alliance." There's also a Google scanning operation at UC—but, of course, "staff were not at liberty to show or tell" them about that one. (As of this writing, the University of California Libraries account for more than 165,000 items at the Internet Archives, or a little more than 70% of the total from American libraries.)

➢ Open access news for April 17, 2008 notes a page at the California Digital Library site on UC's mass digitization projects; you'll find it at www.cdlib.org/inside/projects/massdig/. The page includes frequently asked questions, the actual contracts with Google, Internet Archive and Microsoft, and various other items. It's an interesting page.

➢ "The race to the shelf continues" appeared in *Searcher* 16:1 (January 2008) and it's freely available online (www.infotoday.com/searcher/jan08/Ashmore_Grogg.shtml). At more than four pages of small print, it's a long, interesting treatment that also looks at Amazon's scanning projects. The article briefly mentions Microsoft (then still active), which makes some of the coverage of OCA a little strange. To wit, Brewster Kahle said more than 200,000 books had been scanned by October 2007 and the article says OCA is adding "about 12,000 books a month to its collection." But if you remove Microsoft's 300,000 books, there just isn't much left—as noted earlier, less than 21,000 carry the "Open Content Alliance" label.

Google Book Search

Google continues to add partners and scan books. A few brief items from the last half year:

➢ A lengthy piece, "Google Book Search: The good, the bad, & the ugly," appears in the January 1, 2008 *Campus Technology* (www.campus-technology.com). Dian Schaffhauser calls the project "simultaneously visionary and crude." There's a good description of what you see at GBS—but it's not quite right, as it conflates the limited view you get when Google has an agreement with a publisher and the snippet view you get in other cases (and, indeed, erroneously calls page views "snippets"). There's a description of UC's arrangement, comments on GBS from a grad student (who *does* understand that snippets aren't pages), what seems to be an awful lot of copy from or about Kirtas as to what's wrong with Google and various comments on storage and compression. It's an odd piece, relying as it does on comments on how things *could* work in the absence of information from Google on how things *do* work. You'll find it interesting, but you won't really learn much new about GBS.

➢ Charles Edward Smith wrote "A few thoughts on the Google Books Library Project" in *EDUCAUSE Quarterly* 31:1 (January-March 2008). He's a computer systems administrator—and somehow believes that digitizing *preserves* the

information in books, which is almost certainly not the case with Google's fast-and-sloppy scanning. The key quote: "Only by transforming knowledge contained in print to new and easily accessible digital formats can we guarantee its survival." Really? Yes, GBS should make the existence of books more widely accessible—make books more findable—but I see nothing to suggest that it makes the contents of the books more permanent. (But then, Smith also says "The only way to really learn how to use a major research library is on your own, first hesitantly, and then through endless questions to the staff." Really?) Smith also asserts that nobody will *notice* if books disappear once the contents have been "transferred."

➢ John Wilkin pokes at openness in "Did I say 'theoretical'? Openness and Google Books digitization," posted April 25, 2008 on *John Wilkin's blog* (scholarlypublishing.org/jpwilkin/). Wilkin is at the University of Michigan and has been closely involved in Michigan's Google partnership and the library's own scanning initiatives. He was surprised to be quoted as saying that Brewster Kahle's position regarding the openness of Google's public domain books was "theoretical," since he thinks he said "polemical." He looks at the "practical part of openness"—what most people want and what's possible through Michigan's online services. Michigan's Making of America project and its Google-scanned public domain material offer free viewing, searching and printing—and for MOA, even OCR downloading. And, by the way, for Google public domain material Michigan also does what Open Content Alliance's FAQ seems to require for openness: You can download the PDF version. In a comment, Kahle objects to Wilkin calling Michigan's efforts "open," somehow bringing open source and CC licenses into the discussion and using the word "crippled" to describe downloaded versions (apparently those that are just PDF images and don't include full test). Wilkin calls this "precisely the sort of rhetoric that's muddying the waters," says there's a continuum of access and openness, notes that Michigan does work with OCA (on its own scanning)—oh, and by the way, notes that OCA *itself* allows contributors to restrict use (as Microsoft did until recently).

➢ Then there's the downloadable file of U.S. book copyright renewals. Non-digital records for pre-1978 renewals of books published between 1923 and 1963 were scanned by Carnegie Mellon and cleaned up by Project Gutenberg and the Distributed Proofreaders project. Google managed to combine that with the online records from 1978 on and create a single XML file, downloadable at dl.google.com/rights/books/renewals/google-renewals-20080516.zip. As Jacob Kramer-Duffield notes in a June 25, 2008 post at *Digital natives* (blogs.law.harvard.edu/digitalnatives/):

> This is, whatever your other feelings are about Google Book Search more generally, a wonderful advance in public accessibility of information. The list of what books are in the public domain can and will be used not just by Google Book Search in its ongoing (and arguably proprietary) book-scanning project, but also by other efforts like Brewster Kahle's Open Content Alliance. Google comes in for a lot of criticism, but it's worth acknowledging those times when they follow through on their stated goal of "organizing the world's information," and this is one of them.

Open Library and Search Results

Then there's Open Library or OpenLibrary (usage is inconsistent). Until recently, I thought OpenLibrary would be the user interface for OCA books—and maybe it is. But it's also something different and something more, with a goal of "one web page for every book ever published." It's at openlibrary.org and you can explore the site yourself.

For now, I'm just looking at the interface—which appears to be used both in OpenLibrary (for 230,000 texts, so far) and from Internet Archive (for a much larger collection). The flipbook two-page view—the only one you get directly from OpenLibrary—is interesting but not always usable, since it doesn't have a zoom function and presents book pages in unreadably small type (the browser's own size modification facilities may help, as may Windows' accessibility functions). Using "Modesto" as a search, neither of the first two fully viewable results was readable. IA's version of the flip interface seems to use more of the screen, resulting in more readable pages.

At this point, I have to say that although Google's scans are supposedly inferior, the interface makes the books much more *readable*—with built-in scaling tools and a choice of one-page or two-page interface. This seems a shame. You'd expect that OCA would find a way to make its superior scans more readable.

A few numbers

I'd love to do comparisons between GBS and Live Search Books—but that's no longer possible. So let's look at some of the searches done in previous reports.

Searches include Tom Peters' favorites, "Phrenology" and "Spontaneous combustion," and three Stephen Leary used: "next attack," "homeland security" and "sapajous." We'll look at Google Book Search,

Open Library, Internet Archive texts, Universal Library at ulib.org—and, just for fun, two others: Mirlyn at the University of Michigan and Live Search (which should, presumably, still index books from Live Search Books). All searches done on August 2, 2008, with earlier comparisons as noted.

Google Book Search

When full-view items are available, the viewer works very well, with readable images—and, in at least some cases I tried, you can switch to a text view that shows OCR output, for better or worse. There are also full PDF downloads. I am seeing sponsored links (in some cases) at the bottom of the book viewer, so there is apparently some revenue associated with Google Book Search.

➢ **Phrenology**: 1,700, including 1,644 full view—but the list stops at 200. These are *lower* numbers than on December 7, 2007, when I found 2,080, including 2,372 full view (well, at least the numbers now make more sense)—and Google was willing to show 211. (When Tom Peters tried this in late 2006, he got 2,618—but 1,603 full view, of which 63 were actually viewable.) Where did the other 728 claimed books and 11 viewable books go?

➢ **Spontaneous combustion**: 2,170, including 1,163 full view. The list stops at 366 "of 566." These are increases over December 2007, when I found 1,890 total, 1,007 full view, and 385 viewable. So the *viewable* number has declined slightly. In late 2006, Peters got 1,041 total, including 699 full view (489 actually viewable).

➢ **Next attack**: 1,194, including 738 full view (the list ends at 332 "of 532"). In December 2007, those numbers were 1,038, 705, and 344 respectively. In June 2007, they were 732 and 250 viewable.

➢ **Homeland security**: 3,000, including 614 full view (the list ends at 187 "of 287"). December 2007: 3,250 in all, 709 full view and 164 viewable. So the gross results have declined—but more books are actually viewable.

➢ **Sapajous**: 725 total, 667 full view, 353 "of 553: viewable. (The first book shows an exception to Google's normal bitonal scanning—there's a full-color plate on p. x.) December 2007: 688 in all, 650 full view, 366 viewable—slight *decreases* in each case. June 2007: 645, of which 416 were viewable.

Open Library (beta)

The viewer is handsome, but in some of my tests only yielded readable results by zooming in at least three levels in Firefox or using Vista's accessibility magnifier. (In others, where the original book is smaller, the default view is crisp and, because it's color, more "book-like" than Google Book Search.) I didn't see any PDF download capability, "find in a library" option or plain-text option. But the reader is pretty. (Actually, buy and borrow links *are* sometimes available—but on the general single-book interface, *not* the book reader—and seemingly not when they're scanned books. Download *is* available, but only on the book description page.) Depending on where in the interface you click "Read online" for a given title, you may get either Open Library's direct two-page viewer or the Internet Archive's version, which yields larger and more readable pages.

This really is a beta system: To get back to a search that is *not* limited to scanned books after you've limited a search to scanned books, you have to click on the small-type "Open Library" tag to go back to the home page. On the other hand, it's a considerable improvement over the beta site as of December 2007.

➢ **Phrenology**: 296, including 26 scanned books—but only 18 using "search full text" option. In December 2007, there were 85, including three scanned books.

➢ **Spontaneous combustion**: 32, including one scanned book. (As compared to 20 total and one scanned book in December 2007). But this time, "search full text" yields 19 books—so the general search interface is, in fact, an *inferior* way to discover the full-text books.

➢ **Next attack**: Eight, including no scanned or full-text-available books.

➢ **Homeland security**: 612, including no scanned or full-text-available books (even though more than 100 are government documents and should be in the public domain).

➢ **Sapajous**: No result.

Internet Archive texts

The search result page and the single-book overview are both somewhat annoying because they keep changing the pages shown as thumbnail or small images, which doesn't add real information but has the distracting effect of animated GIFs in the interface. IA's single-item interface (with metadata and all) does yield several different downloads, including PDF, bitonal PDF, TXT or "full text" and a flip book two-page viewer that's similar to the one at Open Library, but with *considerably* larger pages that yield much better readability at the expense of a slightly cramped control section. Because you can't go directly from the results list to the viewer, it's clear that you *can* download—but "find in a library" doesn't appear to be available.

As far as I can tell, all texts are viewable. As with Open Library, the individual results aren't numbered.

- ➢ **Phrenology**: 46—a considerable improvement from the 25 in December 2007.
- ➢ **Spontaneous combustion**: One book. For some reason, one of the two available in December 2007 has disappeared. (It spontaneously combusted?)
- ➢ **Next attack**: Eight books. (The same eight as at Open Library? Probably.)
- ➢ **Homeland security**: Three items—all of them downloadable as PDF but not viewable in the flip book.
- ➢ **Sapajous**: No result.

Universal Library (ulib.org)

This still appears to be only a title search. A portion of the "million book" UDL collection is in the Internet Archive, but most is not. There is a viewing system, but I could never actually view anything with it. The most recent stats are from November 24, 2007.

- ➢ **Phrenology**: Five, of which three show page counts other than 0—as compared to ten with four 0-page results in December 2007.
- ➢ **Spontaneous combustion**: No matches for the phrase, one 0-page item for the two words. Same as in December 2007.
- ➢ **Next attack**: No result as phrase or as words.
- ➢ **Homeland security**: One 155 item (supposedly a book with that title, by George W. Bush, from China), not actually viewable.
- ➢ **Sapajous**: No result.

Mirlyn (University of Michigan)

This is a library catalog, so you'd expect very different results. It does, however, link to the MBooks viewer, which is similar to Google's viewer but with somewhat more precise zoom options and no two-page option. It does offer the choice of viewing as image or text (but they seem to have cleaned up text formatting as compared to Google, for the first, Google-scanned book). You can download as PDF—but only 10 pages at a time.

- ➢ **Phrenology**: 208 results, including 41 MBooks Online (full text).
- ➢ **Spontaneous combustion**: 17 results, including one Mbooks Online book—but it's not fully viewable.
- ➢ **Next attack**: Three results including no Mbooks Online items.
- ➢ **Homeland security**: 1,453 items—including four MDP results, two of them MBooks Online, one full text (a recent government document)
- ➢ **Sapajous**: No result.

Live Search

I can see no plausible way to extract full-text books from Live Search results—and, as with other web search engines, the results for many searches are unrealistically large. So, for example, "Phrenology" yields 254,000 results—of which only the first 1,000 are available. I accidentally encountered a full-text book—but it's from Michigan's Making of America project and shows up in that project's excellent and different page viewer.

I didn't do the other searches. If the books scanned by Microsoft are included in Live Search, they're effectively lost in the bulk of other results.

Did Google Sucker Librarians?

In a word, **no**—but let's spend a few words on it.

Steven Cohen posted "How Google used librarians…and got away with it" on June 29, 2008 at *Library stuff* (www.librarystuff.net)—which, like Google, has ads but costs nothing to the end-user. You can read the post and its 38 comments yourself. Cohen said "used," not "suckered"—but he certainly doesn't regard "used" as a neutral or favorable term. He's making much of the fact that Google's Librarian Newsletter and Library Central Blog were both quiet for a year and Google didn't exhibit at ALA Annual 2008.

I'll quote the first paragraph, as it sets the tone:

> I know when I'm being used. It's a learned trait after being used many times by friends, family, and colleagues.

Funny thing: I don't believe I've ever been "used" by friends or family, but I suppose it depends on one's definition. In any case, as Cohen tells the story, Google "decided to buddy up with ALA and the entire library community" so libraries would give them access to books. He's disappointed with Google—and "in librarians who actually fell for this blatant marketing scheme." He asks "Will [librarians] fight back?" I'm not sure what we/you are supposed to "fight back" against. Here's more, and it says a lot about Cohen, his attitudes toward books and libraries:

> There is no doubt in my mind that the entire library community was used. ALA was used. Those academic institutions that signed up were used. And those librarians that played a part in the PR stunt were used. I saw this coming (and I'm not the only one)
>
> So, Google will continue to use librarians, scan their books, profit from it, and then leave us in the information dust to rot like an old microfilm machine.

I've considered Cohen a friend, but I resent and reject his direct attack (since I'm one of those who "played a part in the PR stunt" by writing a piece for Google's newsletter). The idea that, by making library books *more discoverable*, Google will "leave us in the information dust to rot like an old microfilm machine" is beyond my understanding.

The comments are interesting. Some old axes (at least one having *nothing* to do with Google) are ground, a fair number of people disagree, a few agree, a couple people bring up the in-copyright suits (naturally asserting that there *is no* legal issue, presumably why the suits haven't been settled in 2+ years), one person makes the odd assertion that nobody will use Google Book Search unless librarians encourage it (really?), and one simply asserts that Google *will* start delivering all books. The only arguments I saw for GBS damaging libraries were based on the assumption that this would happen. (At least one other post backed Cohen's assertion.)

Meredith Farkas "just [didn't] get it" in "Love for sale" on July 10, 2008 at *Information wants to be free* (Meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/). She doesn't see anything nefarious in the blog going away. She always recognized that Google's a company. And here's how she sees Google's "using" research libraries:

> So, there are all these libraries with awesome collections that aren't being digitized. Google comes in and says "hey, we'll digitize your books for free and let you have the digital copies for your students." Google was not doing this for the good of those libraries; they were doing it for the good of Google. But clearly the Universities also saw how this project was in their best interests or their lawyers wouldn't have signed off on it. These Universities now have tons of their books in digital format that students, faculty and staff can enjoy from anywhere. University of Michigan makes them available in their catalog. It's awesome. Maybe I'm naive, but none of this really gets me up in arms.

Farkas has distance learners studying military history. She's "insanely grateful" to Google because so many pre-1923 books are now available online. It's an interesting post, as are the comments (although they cover a narrower range than on Cohen's post).

Laura "Rikhei" Harris offered "My take on Google Librarian Central's year of silence" on July 10, 2008 at *Llyfrgellydd* (llyfrgellydd.info), looking at the blog and the newsletter and noting how *little* of either had anything to do with the Google Library Project.

> The conclusion I **have** drawn from the year of silence is that Google no longer finds a relationship with librarians to be beneficial. This doesn't make me feel used, or abandoned - but it does make me feel a little bit disappointed. I still think that there are still unexplored ways for librarians and Google to "work together to help people find useful, relevant information."

One commenter notes that Google's still working with many libraries (and librarians). About the same time Google also restarted the newsletter —and noted that they'd said they were taking a break.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* had a brief "wired campus" item notable mostly for the comments. You should be able to find it online.

Number of Google Library partners who agreed they were "used": **Zero**. And, sigh, unlike Microsoft, number of Google book-related services that were abruptly turned off: **Zero**, unless you count the blog as a service.

There's nothing here to see. I should apologize for spending 900 words when one would do.

Perspective

On Conferences in a Time of Limits

Have we entered a time of limits? I believe we have—and it's probably a good thing, if disconcerting for many of us. One big aspect of *this* time of limits is travel costs. They've gone up and they're likely to keep doing so for a while. Higher travel costs and recognition of limits in general—including natural limits—may affect future conferences in a number of ways.

A Time of Limits

Let's be realistic. Most people around the world never *left* a time of limits—they never had the idea that money was always available to do whatever they wanted, that adding incremental ongoing expenses could keep on indefinitely.

In recent decades, it sure seems as though a lot of Americans (and people in a few other nations) behaved as though limits didn't exist. Saving for the future? Let the future take care of itself. You can always get a better job. You can always suck money out of your house's skyrocketing value. I devoted a PERSPECTIVE to this in January 2008 (A TIME OF LIMITS?, *Cites & Insights* 8:1), noting some of the "drops in the bucket" we were "all" assumed to be spending—you know, the $17 Netflix subscription, the $65+ cell phone plan (and, of course, a newer, shinier cell phone every 18 months), the $95 cable TV subscription, $10+ (times some number) for subscription music services, $50+ truly high-speed broadband. Plus, of course the $4-a-day Starbucks habit and all that bottled water. Each one a drop in the bucket; together, quite possibly the difference between having substantial savings and having none. It's the "latte factor" writ large—the inability to see a series of small expenditures and commitments as adding up to anything. (Do you have six months of expenses—plus

your employer's share of your health care costs—available as an emergency reserve?)

Meanwhile, the overall savings rate hovers right around zero. Most people apparently aren't willing to save enough for retirement even to earn their employers' matching funds. Most people carry balances on their credit cards at ridiculous interest rates. Too many people believe they should live upper-middle-class lives even though they lack upper-middle-class incomes. And somehow people believe they need 3,600 square foot houses and oversize SUVs, without thinking about energy issues or resource limitations.

Times are changing. Reality is intruding its head into the fantasy tent. The housing mess is part of that reality. Fuel prices are another part: the shock of paying for gas as though it wasn't infinitely available seems striking, even though many Europeans have been paying much more for gas for some time. Oh, fuel prices might come down for a while—but in the long run, they *have* to be fairly high. Which also means that air travel *must* get more expensive unless airlines are taken over by government and subsidized even more heavily than air travel already is.

You can see all of this as doom and gloom, or you can see it as a set of opportunities—a time to rethink. As librarians, you can certainly see a time of limits as a time in which libraries will be more appreciated for what they've always done well—sharing the stories of humanity on a cost-effective basis.

Before considering conferences, here's part of the last section of that January essay:

> Are there limits? If so, will more of us come to recognize them? To bring in another long-time theme, will we seek lives in balance?
>
> I hope so. I'd like to think so. I'm not arguing for budgeting (unless your spending really is out of control). For many of us, that's a needless annoyance. I'm *not* telling you to change your ways—unless your ways are causing you to lose sleep or worry about your ability to sustain your lifestyle.
>
> People who live within limits are more likely to make good use of shared assets, I suspect. They're more likely to appreciate parks, to take walks…and to use their public libraries. I'm hoping more people will recognize the need for limits without having that need forced upon them through foreclosure or bankruptcy or an inability to retire…ever.

Incidentally—as a somewhat humorous aside—Angel Rivera has a lovely post about the extreme side of "no limits" in "Not so good when you are rich?" posted July 23, 2008 at *The itinerant librarian* (itinerantlibrarian.blogspot.com). Rivera notes a New York *Times* article "It's not so easy being less rich," how some

Manhattanites are fretting because their incomes have shrunk "say, to $2 million a year from $8 million." How can you get *by* on only $2 million a year? Will your wife (or your husband) leave you if your net worth collapses from nine figures to eight? What if your kids don't get invited to the right birthday parties? As Rivera says, "Folks, this is clearly tragic. The rich are becoming America's new disenfranchised…"

I'm trying not to be snarky. Heck, we live in a high-cost area—maybe not as high-cost as Manhattan, but Mountain View isn't exactly bargain central. The *legitimate* cost of living around here may strike some people as astonishingly high—but there's still a huge gap between the cost of living a full, rewarding life and the "no limits" lifestyle too many people seemed determined to have over the last couple of decades.

The conference complex

I'm not going to discuss coping with conferences, conference-speaker arrangements or any of that stuff. If you want to read about that, I refer you to the (so far) longest issue ever of *Cites & Insights*, the Mid-June 2007 "Cites on a Plane 2: This Time It's for Keeps" (the lucky number 7:7—issue seven of volume 7). You might also read the followup in the September 2007 issue (*Cites & Insights* 7:10, pp. 14-15).

Questions that come to mind here are threefold:

➢ What kind of animal *is* a given conference—and will that change in a time of limits?
➢ Why do we go to a given conference—and will those reasons change in a time of limits?
➢ Should we be thinking about new kinds of conferences to cope with rising travel costs and other limits?

I'm no prophet or futurist. I'll offer a few opinions on what I think *might* or even *should* happen—but I have no special knowledge to give those opinions heft. I've been to a lot of "megaconferences" and association conferences, a few other kinds of conferences—and no virtual conferences or unconferences, at least so far.

The Nature of the Beast

Association conferences—ALA Annual, TxLA, what have you—are probably the most complex in terms of what happens, which also makes them complex in terms of why you might go.

Here's my current list of what ALA or TxLA or ASIST Annual is *about*, with quick annotations on how each aspect might or might not make sense in terms of travel costs and other limits.

➢ **Trade show**. That's what some vendors think of ALA as being, or what they'd like it to be: A place to show your wares, entice potential cus-

tomers, pitch your message and maybe even do a little real education. With any luck, this aspect is profitable for the association. In a time of limits, smaller vendors may need to give up face-to-face marketing. Larger ones may pull back on the number of conferences and the expansiveness of their exhibit size and staffing—and, of course, receptions, dinners and other freebies.

➢ **Business meeting**. Unique to association conferences—the time when committees and boards hold face-to-face meetings and make decisions. This function seems to be *least* sensible in a time of limits—after all, most work leading up to decision-making needs to be done ahead of time anyway. Why not take care of business over the internet, with chat rooms in cases where you need live discussion? So far, sunshine laws (in many associations) get in the way. With few exceptions, business meetings are supposed to be open, so moving to "virtual" meetings would require bylaws changes and robust open notification systems. It's worth noting that business sessions may be the biggest reason ALA Midwinter and Annual fit in so few cities—there are a *lot* of business meetings in ALA and its divisions and roundtables.

➢ **Continuing education venue**. Speakers and panelists enlighten attendees on topics of interest, presumably increasing the knowledge and awareness of the attendees. Some argue that "sage on the stage" presentations are no longer useful. I know that, *for my learning style*, they never have been very useful. But others *do* seem to get messages best, or only, when they're presented in this form. Personally, I can't imagine traveling cross-country to hear someone (*anyone*) speak when I could presumably read their article or book or watch their PowerPoint presentation at home—but that's me. Apparently, a lot of people feel differently…enough that I still do one or two speeches a year, and some people appear to do dozens. With high travel costs, does it really make sense to have the same speaker and speech touring around the country and world? I can't answer that question. (On the other hand, many programs at such conferences feature local speakers, where travel's less of an issue and you're probably not hearing a warmed-over speech.)

➢ **Shared learning and discussion venue**. The other side of continuing education, carried out in many forms. Interest group and discussion group meetings where people offer their own insights, ideas and experiences on a predefined topic (or choose a topic on the spot)—no ex-

pert, just a bunch of peers and people who will become peers. Poster sessions where people add face-to-face answers to content that could otherwise be delivered more cheaply and faster over the web. I'm sure there are others—even "unconferences within conferences," using the broader gathering to enable a self-defining miniconference.

➢ **Reunion and social event**. The chance to get together with people you only see at such conferences and to meet people in the flesh who you've only known via blogs, chatrooms and other virtual means. The chance to party, to drink, to chat face-to-face. There's something very real here that's essentially impossible to duplicate on the web, as worthwhile as virtual networking can be. A typical conference will have several organized social events, any number of vendor-sponsored events for those who get invited—and innumerable informal gatherings and chance meetings.

➢ **Time away from the office**. Conferences aren't vacations, but association and other megaconferences typically involve *vacating*—leaving town for a few days. That's a real value, more so for some people than for others. And it may be one of the two toughest values to replicate through other means (reunions and social events being the other). Just flew in to ALA on Saturday morning and back out again on Sunday night? Then *you weren't at ALA*—or at least you didn't get the full benefit of taking a few days away. Many state conferences make this clearer: They're held over weekdays, not over the weekend, so you're *obligated* to take some time away from the office.

That list may not be complete—and it's a list that only applies in full to association conferences. Most topical and privately sponsored conferences don't have business meetings. ALA Midwinter theoretically isn't a continuing education venue. Many topical conferences aren't trade shows at all. Preconferences tend to be pure continuing education with a social event or two thrown in.

Which of these activities can be done equally well or better without travel? That depends on who you ask and who you are. I would take issue with anyone who says that any of these are ripe for **total** replacement with distance or virtual equivalents. People's needs, learning styles, and socialization styles differ—a lot.

Why We Go

Why you or I go to a specific conference or you go to a specific conference may be some combination of the

six bullets above—and it may include one or two others. Before enumerating those, a few comments from others. (I refer you back to the followup in *Cites & Insights* 7:10 for Dorothea Salo's take in 2007.)

What we are bringing back

Steve Lawson discusses what people "bring back" from a conference in this April 24, 2008 post at *See also…* (stevelawson.name/seealso/). Excerpts:

> Is it ethical to spend your library's money and time on attending national conferences when the two main purposes of those conferences–learning new things and creating and maintaining a professional network–can be done online all the time at virtually no cost? And what does it mean to "bring something back" from a conference these days?
>
> Let's get another question out of the way first: [Was it right to have so much fun at Computers in Libraries?] Yes. It was right. Information Today did not invent fun. I'm sure Cutter and Dui and all those dudes had fun back in the day when they got together to talk about libraries…
>
> The fun also gets to the question of "what am I bringing back?" There is one thing you are sure to bring back from every conference: yourself. Did the conference make you more excited, more engaged with the problems of your library, more ready to tackle the next project or challenge? Then I'd say that you brought something valuable back…
>
> I still think there is a value in meeting people face-to-face. Yes, I get most of my professional networking done on Twitter and in the Library Society of the World chatroom these days… But getting in a room with those people deepens the bonds you form online and expands the network…
>
> …Many librarians don't do this keeping current and networking thing every day. Many librarians go to the conference and get their learn on once or twice a year, and we are doing something important for the profession (if, admittedly, not for our "home" libraries) when we put together good presentations and deliver them in person at these conferences.

Lawson links to posts by Rikhei Harris (*Llyfrgellydd*, llyfrgellydd.info/) and Ryan Deschamps (*The other librarian*, otherlibrarian.wordpress.com). Some of what Harris has to say in a April 23, 2008 post, relating to a commercial conference, Computers in Libraries:

> In the past, I held the opinion that conferences have two purposes: learning and networking. The emphasis, I thought, should be on the learning… [Employers who pay for conferences] expect you to "bring something back."
>
> I think that we need to expand our conception of "something."
>
> I think the typical meaning of "something" in this context is "something that another library is doing, that we might be able to do here."… But…the best conference sessions left me questions, or at least things to consider.

Another idea of "something" is that it can be an informal measurement. One reason I think I didn't learn more at this conference is because my workplace is already doing many of the things that were talked about—so "something" I brought back was the observation that we're doing pretty well in terms of integrating emerging technologies into our services…

> "Something" can also be "raising awareness of one's institution and what they're doing."… If you present, it's a way for you to draw attention to your library, business, or organization, and the neat things it's doing… If you're an academic librarian and presenting at a conference, you may even be fulfilling job responsibilities.
>
> Is it ethical to attend a conference if your main motivation for attending is to see the faces of the people you network with online? Is it ethical to do so on your employer's dime?
>
> What does an employer get out of it when you socialize with colleagues? What do we, as employees, get out of it? For my part, I feel closer (emotionally) to many of my colleagues. I feel refreshed and inspired… I like to think that I'll be a better employee because of the socializing I did at the conference. How do you quantify inspiration?
>
> Socializing is a good reason to attend conferences…but I don't think a person is being a good steward of their library's funds if that's the *only* reason an employee has for attending a conference. I'll quantify inspiration enough to say that I think it is a luxury.

Deschamps wrote "The ethics of conference attendance in a networked world" much earlier—November 2, 2007—following Internet Librarian, which he did *not* attend. Excerpts:

> There's an element in me that wonders if going to such conferences in the future would be useful to my employer. If they pay to send me to the conference, they probably want me bringing something back — that's totally fair and the way things should work.
>
> The problem is that in a networked world, I can easily converse with any number of qualified professionals on the subjects most relevant to my world. I can usually get it "on demand" and with a few added questions to go with it…I also do not have to go to a presentation that is meaningless to me because there is nothing in a particular time-slot important to me…
>
> So, my main motivation for attending conferences is to see the faces of the people who I have IM'd before. It's a social networking game, or rather, a continuation of the social networking game, because I already social network with these folks. I am not sure if this is a fair motivation for my employer to send me to the conference…
>
> [T]hen there is the broader question—why should I lose out on great conference fun just because I know how to use the technology to keep up with my learning?...
>
> What are your purposes for going to a conference, and is it really an organization-improving activity in the end, with all the advantages to be gained from social network-

ing? What can I gain from an in-person conference that I cannot gain by through technology-mediated tools?

Conferences: it's a personal thing?

Rikhei Harris returned to this question in this July 18, 2008 post. Discussions in Harris's workplace about workloads have also involved professional development opportunities—and Harris started thinking again about the "something" we bring back from a conference. Excerpts:

> In retrospect, I still think my definition of "something" is too narrow in scope—I seem too focused on what the library gets "directly" from their employees' conference attendance.
>
> I think that all we really need to "bring back" from the conferences we attend is the potential to become better at what we do.
>
> Conference attendance is, in my mind, a personal matter. We do not—or at least, we should not—attend conferences thinking that we are sponges sent to absorb information and then squeeze it out upon our return. We attend them to do our jobs better.
>
> I plan to attend two very different conferences this year. One is not actually a conference, but a seminar - it's the Interagency Depository Seminar, which is a week-long "boot camp" for government documents librarians. I daresay that most of my coworkers would not choose to attend this seminar, and would not get very much out of the notes I plan to take.
>
> The other conference I plan to attend is ACRL. I go with two aims—one, to present (if my proposal is accepted, that is), and two, to meet network with science librarians from the Science and Technology Section. Although I imagine several of my colleagues also plan to attend, they'll go for different reasons, and will not get the same things out of it that I will.
>
> What I'm trying to get at is that whether a conference has a very specific focus, or a more general one, one's motivations for attending can (and should, I think) be very personal…
>
> And I think we should bring those reasons back… Let's talk about why we choose to attend particular conferences in the first place; let's talk about what we hoped to get out of them, and whether we did. Let's talk about how these conferences fit into our work responsibilities, or our professional aspirations.

T. Scott Plutchak offered a comment from a library director's viewpoint, saying (among other things):

> If you bring back a specific idea that helps a particular project that's great, and we do a lot of formal and informal sharing of our conference experiences, but it's the immersion in your professional networks that is the number one reason I'm willing to spend as much money as I do on making sure as many people in my library get to conferences as possible… Coming back from a conference with a great idea to share is wonderful; but com-

ing back one intangible step closer to being the most brilliant librarian you can be is priceless.

Benefits of attendance

Excerpts from Wayne Bivens-Tatum's January 9, 2008 post at *Academic librarian* (blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/), *before* going to ALA Midwinter—one of the clearest comments in favor of megaconferences, specifically the biggest of them all:

> I'm typically on the maximum three committees at any given time, and yet ALA is so huge that my maximum active involvement is such a tiny part of the picture…
>
> It took me a while to find something useful to do. I was on a couple of committees early on with people I really liked, but we didn't seem very busy. I had a great time going to meetings and chatting with people, but not much came of it. Since then, I've tried to work only on committees that get things done, and I've felt much better about it… Part of the satisfaction I get from ALA attendance is the actual work produced.
>
> One of the greatest professional benefits I get is definitely psychological. I feel better getting away from my own library for a few days and talking shop with other people from around the country… Nowadays I can get a feel for what others are doing from reading library blogs, but until very recently conference attendance was one of the only ways to get a more immediate feel for what other libraries were doing than the traditional library literature offered. It also helps me get a perspective on my own library and job…
>
> There's also the socializing, which is sometime personal and sometimes professional… Usually when people get together who have little in common except being librarians, the discussion turns to libraries and librarianship, and I learn something new that's useful in a way hard to quantify.
>
> I know a lot of people attend the programs, but I've never gotten much out of them. My learning style is to sit in a room alone reading or playing with software or something, preferably with some good music playing in the background. Usually whatever people are speaking about I've already learned. The discussion groups, on the other hand, are often engaging.
>
> …It seems to me that some newer librarians wonder why they might attend ALA at all, especially since there are other conferences they might go to. Smaller conferences certainly have their appeal, especially because you can focus on smaller topics and talk more about relevant subjects. But the gigantic nature of ALA has its appeal as well, because so much is going on that you can satisfy almost any librarian urge.

Enumerating the reasons

Here's my short list of reasons you might attend a particular conference. The set of reasons will be different for each of you and for each conference. As you think about these reasons and how they apply to various

conferences, ask yourself: Which of these can you justify in a time of limits—and which of these could be fulfilled as well or better by different kinds of conference experiences?

➤ **Resumé building**—by working on committees *you wouldn't otherwise bother with* or by doing presentations *you wouldn't otherwise do*. (Otherwise, you're not *just* building your resumé.)

➤ **Professional and personal networking**—putting faces with names, meeting new people, getting back in touch with people in your field.

➤ **Association business**—working on committees, etc., because it's stuff you (or your library) *care* about.

➤ **Seeing and learning about products and services**—the attendee side of the trade show.

➤ **Learning from those who know more**—attending "sage on the stage" presentations.

➤ **Teaching what you know**—presenting.

➤ **Sharing information and ideas**—the less formal, more shared part of continuing education.

➤ **Getting away for perspective and recreation**—the fundamental virtue of leaving town for a while.

➤ **Having fun**. What? Is there something wrong with fun?

What have I missed? What set of those justifies attending a particular conference? Will that set—and the needed justification—change if it costs 30% more to go? 50% more?

I don't think there's any simple set of answers. You can make the questions tougher if you consider conferences you pay your own way for—and what else you could do with that money.

Changing Conferences?

It would be presumptuous of me to try to list all alternatives to today's conferences, particularly since today's conferences *include* most of these alternatives. I think a good roundup of alternatives—and how they actually do and don't fill various needs—would be worthwhile. There's not space to do that here, and I lack the background to do a good job.

How will limits change existing conferences? Dorothea Salo has her own guess, as set forth in "Tight budgets and conference attendance," a July 17, 2008 post at *Caveat lector*. Others have been thinking about this and suggesting alternatives, and I may gather some of that material for a possible future essay.

A few semi-educated guesses:

➤ I'd be surprised if ALA Midwinter and ALA Annual don't shrink somewhat, although ALA Annual attendance varies so widely that

"shrink" may be hard to measure. I would *also* be surprised if either conference shrank so much that it ceased to be viable or profitable. Personally, I'd love to see Midwinter at 5,000 people or so (and *most* committee meetings taking place in open internet-mediated virtual sessions)—but I'd be astonished if it got down to anything like that number. 10,000? Maybe. As for Annual—well, even though DC handled it well, 27,000 is too damn many people. Would it be a better conference with one-quarter the business meetings, a lot more discussions, and maybe 15,000 people total?

➤ The big state and provincial conferences and the well-organized small state conferences aren't going away, and I doubt they'll even shrink. I anticipate that AkLA and TxLA will continue to be premiere events of very different sorts (more or less the two ends of the spectrum, with around 220 and around 7,000 participants respectively)—and that we'll continue to see reshuffling, combining and other tactics for troubled state conferences to work better. Sometimes, it makes sense to go biennial. Sometimes, it makes sense to get school library/media center people on board at the same time (as many states do). Sometimes, a regional conference may make more sense for all concerned—or a two-state combo (e.g., Oregon and Washington this year). Go away entirely? It seems unlikely.

➤ Dorothea Salo thinks there's only going to be room for one "niche" conference in each niche. I think she may be right, at least in terms of face-to-face, hotel-based conferences. I wonder whether some of the commercial and tightly focused topical conferences will either merge, become more "virtual" or disappear entirely?

➤ I think—I hope—we'll see more information sharing, birds of a feather, spur of the moment and "unconference" sessions, more sessions featuring local experience and somewhat fewer lectures featuring the same Big Names over and over. But that's me, and I'm probably wrong. Dorothea Salo and others are discussing the "middle ground" of technology training, one that may not be well served by any of today's methods. I believe that people like Salo are more likely to find new solutions than people like me, although I'll certainly be following the conversations.

➤ I do believe we'll see lots of innovation. I also believe there are some things that online just can't do as well as face-to-face—and that the gap will continue to be large enough to bring

some of us cross-state, cross-region or cross-country once or twice a year.

➢ When it comes to innovative conferences (on-line, unconferences/camps, etc.), price may be an issue in an unusual way. To wit, will librarians pay as much attention and gain as much value if it's free, or will a fee increase the apparent importance—and thus the effectiveness?

Here's the odd thing: In some cases, travel costs may save conferences from themselves. I've heard rumblings that one conference was unwieldy when it passed 2,000 attendees. I know that another conference was a much better experience with 600 people than it was with 750—and it's now hitting a thousand or more. Larger isn't always better, particularly when it comes to participatory conferences.

We learn in different ways. We refresh ourselves and our networks in different ways. Those ways may need to change for most of us. I don't see drastic short-term changes—but change there will be.

Old Media/New Media

It's been more than a year since the last Old Media/New Media roundup. While some of these items may seem a little dated, I think they're still relevant. For the first few, you can make up your own narrative.

Does the "news and information revolution" make us better informed?

Yet another Pew—this time the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press—studied that question in a 2007 survey, comparing responses to a similar study in 1989. As the summary points out, we've seen the emergence of 24-hour cable "news" as a dominant news source (I added the scare quotes) and the "explosive growth of the internet" should give us all better access to news and current affairs.

You can probably guess the results: "On average, today's citizens are about as able to name their leaders, and are about as aware of major events, as was the public nearly 20 years ago." Specifically? A *lower* percentage could name the current vice president, their state's governor or the president of Russia. People do much better naming the speaker of the house and a little better knowing which party controls the House—but, astonishingly, only 68% knew that America has a trade deficit (down from 81% in 1989). (How's this: 69% knew our VP's name and only 66% knew who their governor was. Only 37% could identify the Chief Justice as being conservative, but that's up from 30%.

Unfortunately, the survey also "provides further evidence that changing news formats are not having a great deal of impact on how much the public knows about national and international affairs." You may already have heard this one: Looking at news sources, two groups tied as having the highest percentage of knowledgeable people. One group views major newspaper websites. The other watches *The Daily Show* or the *Colbert Report*. Nearly tied for least knowledgeable: Those who get their news from network morning shows, local TV news—and Fox News.

Dying or not

There are always items about the (inevitable) death of this medium or that as it's inexorably replaced by digital equivalents. Annalee Newitz writes "the future of paper" at *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online* starting with this simple statement: "Twenty years from now, paper will no longer be a tool for mass communication." There it is: By 2028, all the large-circulation magazines will be gone, all the newspapers will have died, there will be no best-selling print books. Gone, all gone. This columnist reads a press release from a Finnish paper company looking for new uses for paper and concludes, "Print communication is dying out, and with it goes the paper industry." And she's unhappy—*not* because print is in a "fast decline" (clearly, she thinks that's great *and* inevitable and doesn't need facts about that so-called fast decline) but because journalists will disappear with print journalism.

Given the inevitable fast decline of all print media, it might be worth noting a recent National Newspaper Network study, as reported July 22, 2008 at *Media Life* (www.medialifemagazine.com): "Newspaper readership is up for the second straight year, rising 2.5 percent this spring over last, to 80.5 million readers." One reason is that newspapers are emphasizing *local* news—and that's something they simply do better than anybody else. (Most newspapers aren't big metro dailies, and the big metro dailies have suffered most of the declining circulation. Truly local papers have, by and large, been doing just fine all along.)

A March 3, 2008 piece by Gene Ely in *Media Life* gets it right—"They're back, the snake oil sales folks." He understands how new media work:

> The internet is not going to kill magazines or radio or the local daily newspaper. In so many ways, they are thriving now, despite all the grim talk, and they will continue to thrive alongside the internet even as this sorting out process continues. If anything, the internet serves to enhance what they do well.
>
> None of these media is as vulnerable as the doomsters would have us believe.

People still listen to the radio while driving… People still like to read print newspapers. They will not go away.

The same for magazines. Some are closing, made redundant by the internet, but many are thriving. Magazines do for readers what no other medium can, and likewise for advertisers. As a newer competitor, the internet is forcing magazines to reinvent themselves, which is all for the good….

When evaluating all the new hype over the internet, it's important to keep several things in minds, and one is that through history newer media have not killed off older media.

TV didn't kill off radio, radio did not kill off newspapers and magazines and neither of those killed off out-of-home advertising. As it turned out, in fact, the newer media simply increased the size of the pie. They increased consumer engagement with all media, and they gave advertisers more ways to reach those consumers.

Steven Chabot posted "The myth of the digital sublime" on May 8, 2008 at *Subject/Object* (subjectobject.net). He cites some quotes from Vincent Mosco's book *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* in which any number of earlier new technologies were hailed as changing everything—with "the exact same language that we use to describe the internet." So, for example, the telegraph transformed our whole human existence, removed causes of misunderstanding and promoted peace and harmony throughout the world. The telephone was the harbinger of a new social order. Radio was "a means for general and perpetual peace on earth." Television was "a torch of hope in a troubled world" that "will usher in a new era of friendly intercourse between the nations of the earth." Remember that, in the 1930s, TV was expected to be a great democratic and educational tool. .Will the internet decline from "something sacred" to "purely profane" as the younger generation understands that it's just another medium? Could be.

Finally, an *Ars Technica* report dated July 14, 2008. Despite all the talk that downloading dooms DVDs and Blu-ray and that P2P undermines commercial sales, spending on DVDs and Blu-ray during the first half of 2008 *increased* over the first half of 2007—and spending on rentals rose even more. Neither increase was all that significant, but any increase may seem surprising. (The numbers? For the first half of 2008, U.S. only, I believe: $6.87 billion in DVD & Blu-ray sales, $3.9 billion in rentals.)

Trolling the Tail

Just how thick is that supposed long tail, as opposed to the thick head of truly mass media, best sellers and A-list bloggers? A few notes:

The deep niche

That's the title of Michael Jensen's article in the Spring 2007 *Journal of Electronic Publishing* (www.journalofelectronicpublishing.org). Jensen is at National Academies Press and says that 17% of NAP's income is pretty "long tail-y": roughly one-third of the items (print books and PDFs) available for sale in 2006 were purchased fewer than 10 times in the year.

The press makes all of its recent publications available for page-by-page browsing. That's opened up an "incredibly huge audience"—the NAP site gets more than 1.5 million visitors per month. How many of those visitors buy anything? Two in a thousand: 0.2%. Here's the thing about the true long tail, and how you have to think about it:

This vanishingly small conversion rate (of visitor-to-buyer) seems pitiful. But with that tiny fraction of a percentage, we are still able to sell enough publications online to be essentially self-sustaining, because the raw audience is so huge.

Jensen talks about the "deep niche": "people who, on any given day, because of a passing fancy, or a new career, or a new experience, are interested in (and potentially willing to pay for) affordable high-quality content." And he projects what that "deep niche" could mean "when every adult person is online"—which is quite a ways from where we are today:

On any given Wednesday, if 0.001%—one in a hundred thousand—of the English-speaking Web includes people who are newly interested in Elizabethan costumery, that's still 10,000 people poking around online that day. Perhaps 0.2% of them—or 20—might be willing to purchase a high-value scholarly publication (with illustrations) on that topic.

Even if only 0.01% of them actually make a purchase—one in ten thousand—that's still one sale per Wednesday, and one sale a day, while not a bestseller, is still enough to be a business. If it were two or three a day, for most publications and publishers, life would be good.

There it is: You need to be able to make a business out of *one sale a day*—and that's when *everyone*'s on the web. That's the reality of the long tail. It means keeping items available forever, so they're there when someone suddenly shows an interest. Remember, though: For NAP, what's actually happening, in many cases, is ten sales in a *year*—or maybe only one (more than 1,100 of the 15,000 items sold only once in 2006). With PoD and downloads, it may be feasible to keep items available with one-a-year sales.

Jensen's "current favorite example" of a book for which the "deep niche" works is a 1997 report, *Toxicologic Assessment of the Army's Zinc Cadmium Sulfide Dispersion Tests*. In 2006, 11,500 people visited it on-

line—and six of them (0.05%) decided to lay out $37.50 for the PDF version or $45 for the print book. (Oh, look: NAP believes it's reasonable to charge for downloads!)

An interesting report—and a challenge of sorts for people and publishers who can't make six sales a year, or even one sale a day, work in terms of supporting the effort to produce a book.

1000 true fans

That's part of the title of a March 18, 2008 post at *Novelr* (www.novelr.com), but I'm also noting a February 8, 2008 post, "Applying the long tail to online fiction." Maybe it's a good time to state the "concept" of the long tail: "In a market with near infinite supply…a demand will exist for even the most obscure products." And, thanks to some sloppy analysis early on, some people came to believe there were examples of total sales for that long tail exceeding sales for the "thick head"—the small number of big sellers. That isn't the case, at least not so far, and there's a tricky question that needs to be asked of "a demand":

> **Is that demand likely to be enough that it can justify creation and continued provision of the product?**

The Jensen article above says yes—if one sale a day (or six a year) is "enough." I know I'd be reasonably happy if *total* sales for the books I've done through Lulu and CreateSpace averaged one a day—and that I can't justify doing any more if they're closer to six a year. But everybody's different.

The blog in question is about online fiction and blooks. The February post sees two ways that the long tail concept counts. The first one's fairly obvious: Traditional book publishing filters out most submissions, including some that aren't complete rubbish—where PoD and online publishing eliminate most distribution costs. (The blogger says it also "costs you virtually nothing" to market your work; that's open to question.) The second: With appropriate collaborative filtering, people who are willing to read online fiction can plow through all the crap out there to find the good stuff. (In a way, that's a circular argument: People who *aren't* willing to plow through all the crap may not be a target audience for online fiction unless it has a brand.) Ah, but the blogger makes the classic .com mistake, one Jensen doesn't make:

> Our target audience shouldn't have to be just people who are willing to sort through the dross: if that's the case online writing will forever be in the dark, pushed into the corners of the web by other bigger, better, more instantly gratifying web distractions. If, say 1% of web surfers are actively finding/reading online fiction, the ideal solution shouldn't be just to find that 1%, but to

expand upon it. In other words, we should not find a target audience—we have to create one, so the 1% becomes 5%, or more.

"If we can only get 5%…" That's propounded by another problem—one that's characteristic in this blog. Namely, the writer *assumes* traditional media are dying. "Newspapers are dying out, losing to online news sources…"—and in an unrelated post, "We know that the traditional publishing industry is upon dark times." Ah, but never mind. We learn that "collaborative filters" are what we need to make online fiction more accessible for others—but, and it's a big but, you have to get people to look at those filters before they're of any use. The writer mentions a website, Pages Unbound, that can provide the collaborative filtering. I visited briefly. Wow. Ugly white sans text on a dark-gray background, making it hard to read. A front page that seems more manifesto than invitation—and the claim that readers may need mental adjustment to read web novels. Let's just say that, as one who *might* be willing to read online fiction, I'm decidedly not bookmarking this site.

There doesn't seem to be a ready solution for the collaborative filtering gotcha: Without the thick head, people don't come to the filter. Andersen claims (incorrectly, I believe) that that's what killed the original MP3.com (I believe it was mostly the costs of the copyright infringement settlement over My.MP3.com—paying out $200 million will kill off almost any small business). It may be bad history, but it's still true that most people don't go to a collaborative filtering system that *only* includes obscure material.

The second post, "1000 true fans: Making money off your blook," works off Kevin Kelly's latest concept/gimmick: the idea that a creative artist "needs to acquire only 1,000 True Fans to make a living." Yes, it works for some people—and the post seems to assert that it can work for writers. All you need to do is write something brilliant…and *find* those 1,000 true fans. Easy, right? As one commenter notes, a true niche can work for a musician who knocks out a song a week—but how many authors can write that much? "At best they would offer a book a year, and 1000 people at $8 a pop—well, that isn't enough to feed the cat, really." (Our cats obviously don't dine as well as this commenter's!)

Chasing our long tails

This is a *very* different perspective on "the long tail," and in this case it's the nearly infinite tail of lesser-known web resources. Barbara Fister posted this on July 18, 2008 at *ACRLog* (acrlog.org)—and begins with a *Science*-published report that researchers are actually

citing a *smaller* range of sources despite access to a much broader range of sources. In other words, in science, the thick head may be getting thicker.

Fister is more interested in undergrads because that's who she teaches. She considers some of the real problems undergrads have in doing research, most of which have very little to do with technology. It's a long, interesting, carefully thought out post that you really should read in the original; I'm only touching on aspects of it. First, we have Anita Elberse (Harvard Business School) who says that the digital environment actually *amplifies* the dominance of blockbusters:

> She also says that crowds, in their wisdom, gravitate toward blockbusters because they find them more satisfying than less-well-known items, and manufacturers and retailers should therefore put their money on known winners, not on promoting a longer tail. Naturally, there has been much debate about her methodology and conclusions, but it's all very thought-provoking.

Then Fister considers undergrads struggling with resources in an information-rich environment:

> Perhaps their experience with Wikipedia has been that it's easy and it works better than more obscure alternatives. They have less trouble finding and deciphering the meaning of Wikipedia articles than they do making choices among thousands of scholarly articles and then having to figure out what an article means when it's written for experts, which they are not. The blockbuster works. Except they don't learn how to do the hard stuff or interpretation and building new meaning, which is why we torture them in the first place.

> But what scaffolding helps them succeed at the hard stuff? And how, amidst the enormously long tail of information that students could use, do they find good sources - the kinds that can be used to build an original and compelling understanding of whatever it is they're researching? We pay a lot of attention to exposing students to the abundance; not so much with the much harder job of making good choices. Wherever you fall on the Elberse / Anderson debate, we're making a false assumption when we say more is always better.

I'm leaving out a *lot* here—trust me, you really need to **read the post** (it's just over 1,100 words—not much more than a third of this essay so far)—but here's the conclusion:

> Relying on blockbusters—Wikipedia or Google or USA Today or the book / movie / person everyone is talking about—won't cut it. But neither will simply assuming they'll find it in the long tail. We need to think hard about not just increasing our resources and our training on how to use them, but helping faculty help students develop the ability to get to the good stuff. And not just to complete that paper, but to complete themselves as free and thoughtful human beings.

In-House PoD?

Technically, this topic isn't really old media/new media: It's new technology in support of old media. In this case, the new technology is the Espresso Book Machine, not the only self-contained book production system that's been announced but certainly the one with the most hype surrounding it.

I would have sworn I'd written about this before—and when I look back, I have (at least indirectly): *six years ago*, in May 2002. At the time, Jason Epstein was making a future wager with Vint Cerf—one I'll bet they *both* lose. Epstein, who was apparently already working on the idea behind Espresso, wagered that "By 2010, more than 50 percent of books sold worldwide will be printed on demand at the point of sale in the form of library-quality paperbacks." Cerf's take? "By 2010, 50 percent of books will be delivered electronically." Of course, Cerf can gin up definitions of "books" and "delivered" that might make this true—but in any *real* sense (that is, 50% of the book market being ebooks), it's as sure a loser as point-of-sale PoD being half the industry two years from now.

But the Espresso Book Machine *does* exist—in eleven sites (according to OnDemandBook's website as of July 30, 2008). Those aren't all "point of sale"— one's at the Internet Archive, one's at Bibliotheca Alexandrina—but it's a start. How much does it cost? An August 17, 2007 *Library Journal* article said that the prototypes cost $200,000 but that 2008 models would run around $20,000. The site doesn't mention prices, but one recent news story suggests $50,000 as an actual price, while another says the machine will be leased rather than sold. "A penny per page" is the typical print cost—and I do believe this is per page, not per sheet. So it's not there to produce buck-a-copy paperbacks unless they're very short or sold at a loss.

According to a June 20, 2008 story, Blackwell will be installing Espresso Book Machines in its 60 UK bookstores—and they should be able to print not only the 200,000 public-domain titles previously available, but also around 600,000 in-copyright titles through a partnership with Lightning Source.

The *idea* of moving short-run book production directly into the bookstore (or even a library) makes sense. Will it scale? We shall see. Will it represent half of the book market in 2010? I can't imagine how.

Ebooks and Ebook Readers

The last time I wrote about ebooks and ebook readers (THINKING ABOUT KINDLE AND EBOOKS, *C&I* 8:4, April

2008), the commentary was long and more disjointed than usual. One *excuse* for that was that I hadn't dealt with ebooks and ebook readers since October 2006. But there's also a *reason*: Commentaries on Kindle and other ebook readers also tended to be commentaries on reading itself, aided considerably by Steven Levy's silly *Newsweek* article, "The future of reading."

This time around, I'm going to focus on items primarily concerned with ebook readers (primarily Amazon's Kindle but also the Sony Reader). I'm saving items that use the Kindle as a springboard to discuss reading itself and combining them with other stuff—e.g., reactions to 2007's NEA alarmism about reading, the Slow Reading non-movement, and stuff happening at the New York *Times*. In the fullness of time, expect a PERSPECTIVE with a title like "Writing about Reading." There's plenty of source material already, but it could use more time to ferment…

And for a change I'll keep this *very* short by using each item as a bullet rather than a subsection and avoiding lengthy quotations. Here, then, a few notes along the way:

➢ Evan Schnittman wrote "Looks like a million to me" on June 9, 2008 at the OUP Blog (blog.oup.com). He believes the Kindle and Sony Reader will sell *one million units* in 2008—and, while he calls the prediction "pretty outlandish" he also believes it's substantiated—because Prime View International, the maker of the e-ink screens both devices use, says it expects module shipments to reach 120,000 units per month in the second half of 2008 (and that it's currently shipping 60,000 to 80,000 units per month). The source article also says 60% of those units go to Amazon and 40% to Sony. Oh, and Schnittman also believes that 10 million ebooks will be purchased for the two devices this year. (That estimate depends on a calculation just riddled with stated assumptions.) Of course, he also quotes a music industry executive as saying that more than half their revenues now come from digital music—which, if true, must be a very unusual company, since overall music is still at least 80% CDs.

➢ Roy Tennant predicted "The Kindle goes down in FLAMES" in a Digital Libraries blog post that same day, partly commenting on the OUP piece in a calm, reflective manner: "All I have to say about this is: 'are you on drugs?'" It's fair to say Tennant sees a future for ebooks—probably read on multipurpose devices like iPods and smart phones—but not for the Kindle (and, like me, can't *imagine* why Amazon won't release sales figures if it's a hit). Some commenters agreed, some disagreed (sometimes vehemently).

➢ Jason Griffey tried to comment on Tennant's post, but his comment was too long for *Library Journal*'s comment system (I was going to add "clunky," but that's the whole LJ blog system, not just the comments). So he posted it on June 12, 2008 at *Pattern recognition* (www.jasongriffey.net/wp/), and by then Griffey's very own Kindle had arrived. He's pro-Kindle and makes an analogy with the early iPod. He thinks the Kindle is "great for reading" and gains a lot by coming from Amazon. Steve Lawson makes an excellent point in the comments: Even if the first Kindle isn't doing great business (*nobody knows* since Amazon has a Google-like secrecy on the subject), that doesn't mean the Kindle will *never* work well.

➢ There *will* apparently be new Kindles in October 2008, even as Amazon cut the current model's price. A *CrunchGear* post with rumors of new models also mentions a May 2008 analyst estimate that some 10,000 to 30,000 Kindles had sold by then—along with an estimate that Amazon would sell $400 to $750 million of them by 2010. A different analyst projected that global *ebook* sales at Amazon could reach $2.5 billion by 2012—but that's based on a growth pattern matching digital music, which may be a bizarre assumption.

➢ Sony hasn't given up on the Reader. It's released a firmware upgrade that allows the current Sony Reader PRS-505 to "reflow" PDFs and use the ePub format without DRM. A Sony spokesperson called the Reader "an open device."

What does it all mean? I have no idea. The *least* plausible projection I see is the idea that ebooks will succeed along the same path as digital music. (Incidentally, downloaded songs and mobile-phone ringtones—the *real* money in digital music—still represent less than 20% of global music sales in 2007.) Could the two big ebook readers sell a million units through the end of this year? I don't see why not—and I'll almost guarantee that if Sony ever sells half a million Sony Readers, we'll hear about it!

Retrospective
Pointing with Pride, Part 5

Two of these issues were "anniversary" issues, so there's a little less novel material than usual. I misnumbered three issues in 2002 (in each case with the whole number one lower than it should have been), correcting the problem in the Silver Edition. Such is life.

April 2001: Number 5

"Go away!" That's what I urged people to do in the lead PERSPECTIVE—and, by the way, did you take a vacation this summer? A *real* vacation—one that involves ignoring email (and blogs and…) and probably leaving town? I got a little snarky about those who don't *do* vacations:

> A message to those of you who really are too *busy busy busy* to take this seriously. Don't just skip the rest of this essay. Do yourself a favor: stop reading *Cites & Insights* altogether. If you're that important, I'm too far below your level to be worth reading. I don't understand how deadly serious life is and the importance of every waking moment to the furtherance of your career. I haven't even been willing to reformat *Cites & Insights* as a single-column text so that you can zip through it on the screen or, better yet, in plain HTML so you can dump it onto your PDA. I *just don't get it*, and it's not likely that I'll start. You're reading the wrong publication. Sorry. I would say I'll miss you, but since I don't know who reads this (other than the 200+ on the CI:CAL Alert list), I won't know you're gone. My loss, I know. Goodbye. I hope your seriousness and intensity don't cause an early heart attack (although the odds aren't good).

I do provide HTML versions of most essays now. I'm still not entirely convinced it's a good idea. (There were more than 400 on the Alert list—before Topica made it impossible for me to post to it.) The essay also suggested shorter breaks and contemplation. I still suspect that spending half an hour a week on pure contemplation is "the toughest step of all." How am I doing? The walks to and from lunch—no music, no nothing—take at least half an hour a day, but I'm not sure those count as contemplation.

THE CONVERGENCE CHRONICLES focused on another one of those great "percentage growth" stories, one that seemed to show that video-on-demand would be more important than "home video" (mostly rentals back then, heavily sales now)—because it was projected to grow 25% a year from 2001 through 2005 while "home video" growth would slow to a mere 5% a year. Translated into actual numbers, however, the projection meant that video on demand (and pay per view and direct-broadcast satellite) would, if the projections were right, have amounted to something like 8% of home video revenues in 2005. But that's not nearly as interesting. (I have no idea what actually happened. I can guess that Netflix and the rise in "sell-through" for DVDs—the fact that they're heavily purchased rather than rented—combined to mess up those neat projections quite a bit. Video on demand as a major segment of the video marketplace? Not so much.)

Then there was a piece on copyright and ethics, related to a Web4Lib discussion and one of Tennant's Tenets, when he declared "**Copyright is dead**" in a Computers in Libraries speech. I offered a dozen scenarios. Here they are for your consideration:

> I thought I'd set out a handful of scenarios involving intellectual property. I leave it to you to consider the ethics of each situation. For the first few, let's take one of Roy Tennant's columns in *Library Journal*—since, as he notes, those columns are posted on *LJ*'s Web site for anyone to read or download.

> ➢ I find one of the columns so magnificent that I extol its virtues on my own Web site and provide a link to it.

> ➢ As part of my new *Libraries 2.0* commercial Web site, I link to the column—but bring it up within my own frame, so that it appears to be material prepared for *Libraries 2.0*.

> ➢ Rather than linking to it, I download it and include it—in full, including Roy's byline—in the next *Cites & Insights*.

> ➢ I think it's a wonderful article, so I mention it in "Press Watch 1" with a brief description, a pointer, and some commentary.

> ➢ I realize that I really wish I had said it first—so I download it, strip off the byline, and include it in *Cites & Insights*—or, better yet, send it off to another publication under my own name.

> ➢ For an article in *Libraries 2.0*, I use each of the facts and interpretations in Roy's article, but I revise the sentences so that it's not a word-for-word copy. I run it under my own byline.

> Which of those cases raises ethical issues? Which raise legal issues?

> Consider a few other examples

> ➢ I buy a DVD and take it home to play on my Linux PC. Oops: there's no DVD software for Linux. So I download DeCSS, which indirectly makes it possible for me to enjoy the DVD.

> ➢ I think CDs cost too much, so I find the songs I want using Gnutella or other peer-to-peer technology. I'm deaf enough to think that 128K MP3 is high fidelity, so I'm happy.

> ➢ I burn those Gnutella-acquired MP3s onto CDs and give them to my friends.

> ➢ I encode my own favorite songs, from CDs that I've purchased, in high-rate MP3 (256K), then create my own custom CDs to use with my portable MP3/CD player.

> ➢ I copy my own favorite songs in .WAV form (essentially audio CD format) and burn them onto audio CDs for my own use.

> ➢ My mix of songs is so great that friends offer to buy copies, which I sell to them for a reasonable price—say, $6 for an 80-minute mix CD.

That's an even dozen scenarios. In at least two cases, I believe that the legal situation and ethical situation are at odds. In a future edition, I'll offer my own opinion as to the ethical issues. Since I'm not a lawyer, I won't attempt to assess the legalities (although there are only one or two questionable cases).

Discuss among yourselves. I'll reprint my own opinion next time around, along with cases where I've changed my mind.

January 2002: Number 15

I tried holding a "semiannual *Cites & Insights* gathering" during Midwinter. It was not, shall we say, a howling success. A quadrennial version may be more plausible (the session in San Antonio more recently was fun)… That issue also had a diatribe about "self-promoting library internet thought leaders"—but it wasn't about any of the usual suspects. (Oh, go read BIBS & BLATHER.)

Remember iPublish? I didn't think so. It was an initiative from Time Warner "not only [to] sell original ebooks but to discover talent and introduce new authors via ebooks to the reading community." The operation ran clever ads and had an interesting concept: Manuscripts would all be read (an "open-door policy" for manuscripts), the best ones would become ebooks, and good-selling ebooks would be published in print. In practice, it didn't work. The division burned through $13 million over two years, peaked at 29 employees, and during the six months of its open-door policy only managed to find *nine authors* deemed worth publishing in ebook and print-on-demand form. Turns out it cost much more to find new books through the open-door policy than through traditional agents. Time Warner shut it down.

I covered that in an EBOOK WATCH that was sadder than some, at least for me. MightyWords had a wonderful idea for its time: provide edistribution for "midrange" nonfiction (shorter than a book, longer than an article), charge authors $1 a month for storage and let authors set prices for downloads and keep half the proceeds. The wide-open approach foundered and MightyWords focused on business-to-business documents. But it never really grew and was shut down. In this case, to be sure, later developments make the whole thing moot: Lulu provides "edistribution" (that is, an online store) for *no* dollars a month and takes 20% (not 50%) of the author-set prices for PDF downloads. I'd been contemplating MightyWords for a paid version of *Cites & Insights*. I'm glad that didn't happen—among other things, I'm not

sure I could justify paying $107 a month (growing by $1 a month) just to keep back issues of *C&I* available!

There was the Franklin eBookman, which was being advertised but (as I noted) with ads always showing PDA-like menus on the screens, never ebooklike text. It didn't do terribly well: In the second quarter of 2001, Franklin paid out more for returned devices than it took in for newly-sold ones. Shutdown was a year away at that point.

Aha! "It" finally emerged—and, of course, I greeted It with a Huey Lewis title: "So this is It?" The hype for what turned out to be the Segway Human Transporter was wildly overblown; the reality underwhelming. I noted how easy it was to go 12 miles an hour on a $300 bicycle that never needs charging (as opposed to what I assumed was a $3,000 price for the Segway) and wouldn't be limited to 11 miles travel between charges (the original figure for the Segway, now 15-25 miles). Others noted that the Segway seemed designed to *discourage* walking at a time when we could use a lot more calorie-burning exercise. The company expected to sell 50,000 to 100,000 units in the first 13 months (by January 2003). Actual sales: 6,000 in 2003 and a *total* of 23,500 through September 2006.

Getting it wrong: Reporting on a premature projection of LCD monitors affecting CRT sales, I said this in January 2002:

> I believe traditional CRTs will eventually fade to niche status in the display market (although it's not clear that LCDs will be the eventual winner)—but that's still going to take a while. Larger monitors are gaining favor (20% of CRT sales were 18"-viewable), and larger LCDs are still brutally expensive.

"A while" is vague, but I'm guessing I thought it would take six years or more—in which case, I was wrong. Prices for large LCDs came down fairly rapidly; their other advantages remained strong and improved. I'm not sure at what point CRTs finally did start fading to niche status, but it was probably no later than 2006.

Silver Edition (Mid-August 2002): Number 25

Oddly enough, the Silver Edition was not an excuse to reuse old material. Instead, it was a convenient hook for an extra issue catching up on original essays and long-term perspectives. At the time, I said I planned to do similar things at other 25-issue marks—and that was probably a good idea, given the "success" of the 75th issue (see below).

On the other hand, I had no idea in August 2002 whether *C&I* would even reach the half-century mark. I was "more-or-less committed" to 41 issues, the number needed to make an even hundred when combined with "Trailing Edge Notes" and "Crawford's Corner."

What's in this issue, other than a commentary on the first 24 issues?

➢ Thinking about the Major Themes—a summary of where I stood on filtering (censorware), imbalanced copyright and ebooks/etext. (Yes, the themes *have* changed over time.)

➢ Who's out there—a readership profile based on CICAL Alert, the now-defunct mailing list.

➢ A historical perspective on the first seven years of DVD. Not that DVD had been around seven years (it hadn't), but proposals for 12cm "video CDs" started in 1995 or earlier. DVD showed up for real in 1997, mattered in 1998, and became a mass medium in 1999. At that point, "forecasters no longer spoke of VHS being swept away by DVD"—but it happened, if later than originally anticipated.

➢ Finding the ways that work: My thoughts on what I'd now call pragmatic opportunities.

➢ Hits and misses in the early days of *Cites & Insights*.

➢ And an updated version of my credo, my core set of beliefs about libraries. That nine-part credo's worth reprinting here, and I'll stand by it six years later:

Good public and academic libraries are both physical institutions and sets of services. They serve a variety of purposes within real communities and colleges, and some of those purposes can only be served effectively through physical libraries.

We will continue to see revolutionary predictions based on oversimplification, bad economics, infatuation with technology and failure to appreciate people. Librarians who fall prey to such predictions will suffer, as will their users. Librarians and library supporters must be ready to challenge unlikely projections, analyze faulty economics and assert the need for choice and the importance of history and the present.

Technology and media will continue to interact in unexpected ways, but ways that will lead to more rather than fewer media. Different media serve different kinds of stories well, and new media should enable new kinds of stories—but the kinds of stories that books serve continue to be critically important for libraries.

Print books will survive, and will continue to be at the core of all good public libraries and the humanities and social science portions of good academic libraries.

All libraries and librarians need to deal with increasing complexity, not as "transitional" issues but as the reality of today and tomorrow.

Libraries must serve users—all users, not just today's primary users. There's a difference between being user-oriented and pandering, and it's a difference librarians should understand.

Libraries matter and librarians should build from strength. There are many fine public libraries and many more that do remarkable work with inadequate resources. The goal should be to improve and diversify from what libraries do well, not to abandon existing services and collections in search of some monolithic futures, whether all-digital or otherwise.

Libraries will change, just as they have been changing for decades. Good libraries will maintain live mission statements—and the missions won't change rapidly.

Effective libraries build communities, and the need and desire for real communities will continue to grow. Libraries that work with their communities should prosper; those that ignore their communities will shrivel.

May 2003: Number 35

I recalled going to Alaska Library Association and Washington Library Association a month apart—and pondered what ALA Annual would look like if ALA got anything like AkLA's turnout (90% of AkLA members were at the conference). The AkLA conference included four plenary sessions, 41 other programs, 20+ roundtables and business meetings, six preconferences, three receptions and a banquet, 70 presenters…all for a group of 225 librarians.

I couldn't help poking fun at ALA's website, offering a sample "new URL" for the issue of *Cites & Insights:* Cowlz.BoiseState.Edu/COWLZ/Consortium_of_Web-based_Library_Zines_and_Newsletters/Content/ Navigation_frame/Navigation/Members/Founding_Members/ CICAL/Cites_&_Insights/Cites_&_Insights:_Crawford_at _Large/Home/Issues/Issues_List/Chronological/Volume_3/Issue_6/Cites_and_insights_Volume_3_Issue_6/civ3i6.pdf

Was I overstating the problem? Maybe. I wasn't the only one a bit unhappy about the ALA redesign. Another redesign is on the way. This time for sure?

I was astonished by one industry observer who called multiformat DVD burners "a cop out" and "tough luck for the consumer"—because these burners, which could (and can) write to DVD+R/RW and DVD-R/RW would "curb the healthy and essential forces that work to rationalize products in the marketplace." Huh? Yep. If people buy products that make a format war meaningless (because they can't get hurt either way), they make it less likely that the war will have a winner—instead, it ceases to matter. Whereas all of you who purchased HD DVD players can be *happy* in the knowledge that you didn't cop out

on the format war and buy something for which you can still buy new movies, like a universal player.

Midwinter 2004: Issue 45

Best. Issue. Ever. Not the biggest. Not the most widely read. Just the best.

A IS FOR AAC: A DISCURSIVE GLOSSARY.

Twenty pages. Seventeen items I thought deserved highlighting and 85 (I think) other items. A mix of factual definition and personal commentary. I thought I'd do it again—but so far I haven't. Hmm. 2009 would be five years later. Maybe?

Good stuff, most of it still applicable. **Go read the issue**: citesandinsights.info/civ4i2.pdf

October 2004: Issue 55

The best essays in this issue are two PERSPECTIVES: WIKIPEDIA AND WORTH and IICA: INDUCING TO INFRINGE. I've repeated most of the first one recently enough. The second—in addition to a lengthy COPYRIGHT CURRENTS section—discussed Orrin Hatch's nasty little proposal that would have made it illegal even to *counsel* someone who might be doing something that infringes copyright. That's right: It would amend copyright so that anyone who "induces" infringement is also guilty of infringement—and "induces" was defined as "intentionally aids, abets, **counsels**, or procures." Heck, even a journalist who posted information on where infringement tools could be found might be guilty of copyright infringement. In introducing the act, Hatch managed to use "children" seven times in one paragraph—even though the revised act said nothing about children.

July/August 2005: Issue 65

The lead essay was on MGM v. Grokster—and, to my considerable surprise, it was a case where the Supremes (a) reached a unanimous decision and (b) managed to strike a pretty fair balance among content-owner interests, technology issues and citizen rights. I won't attempt to summarize a seven-page essay, but key was the finding that *actively* promoting the use of a device for copyright infringement leads to liability—without weakening the Sony/Betamax doctrine (that the maker of a device is not liable simply because the device *is* used for infringement). Susan Crawford's reaction: "I was afraid that Sony would be undermined—and it wasn't. The content guys were afraid they wouldn't be able to go after bad guys—and they've been given ammunition. What we've got is an opinion that is balanced and middle-of-the-road." In

times when it seems there's little hope for balance, it's nice to be able to look back at an outcome like this.

I was justifiably grumpy about another Pew Internet report—or how it was reported. *PC Magazine* headlined "Podcasting hits the mainstream" over a May 24, 2005 item with the key statement that 29% of the 22 million Americans (at the time) who own iPods or MP3 players have downloaded podcasts—in other words, more than six million Americans. The basis for that? You needed a magnifying glass: The qualifying info was in either five-point or four-point type. The claim was based on 2,201 interviews *including 208 player owners*. In other words, Pew interviewed *sixty people* who had downloaded podcasts. From sixty to six million: Quite a leap!

The second-longest essay was PREDICTING THE FUTURE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES. The piece was partly about the perils of futurism, partly about my odd speaking "career," and a bunch of other stuff. But I did offer four bland paragraphs on "desirable and probable" futures for academic libraries:

> Every good academic library serving the humanities and social sciences will still have a substantial and growing print collection, even as the balance of digital and print, particularly in science, technology, and medicine, seems likely to keep shifting toward digital.

> Every good college and university will have libraries that serve as *places*—perhaps not in the vital "third place" role of public libraries, but certainly serving place-related functions. Simultaneously, and with no conflict, every good academic library will continue to offer place-independent services, probably more than they now do.

> Academic librarians and the vendors and others that support them will develop different tools for different users, more differentiated in the future than in the past and present. "One size fits all" never really worked very well. When the "one size" is AltaGoogleYahooMSN, which may be appropriate for undergrads and survey courses, it becomes particularly important to provide richer tools for those with more sophisticated needs and abilities.

> Academic libraries will continue to benefit from and, I hope, support cataloging and professional indexing and abstracting. Whatever the power of folksonomy and full-text retrieval, there's still a place for professional organization and taxonomy.

April 2006: Issue 75

The Diamond Anniversary issue, composed entirely of SEVENTYFIVE FACETS. That is, 75 brief essays, most new to the issue, *none* from previous *C&I* issues.

The issue seemed to have been neglected, although overall numbers aren't terrible. I reused the 40 new pieces in "Cites on a Plane," the non-issue you

can only get by buying the trade paperback version of *Cites & Insights* 6:2007.

January 2007: Issue 85

Remember the *Google Librarian Newsletter*? It didn't last long—and I commented on some of its few issues as part of an Open Content Alliance/Google Book Search update. It's a little sad looking back at a time when Microsoft was making good on its plans to do a lot of scanning and make it available in a quality interface. The interface is gone, but the scanned material lives on, presumably at OCA.

FINDING A BALANCE: PATRONS AND THE LIBRARY appeared as an unannounced (at the time) preview of part of *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change*. I was skeptical about claims that discs were dying; I still am. One piece of journalism was particularly silly in its assertion that "In a few years, you'll buy every episode of *The West Wing* on a drive the size of a deck of cards rather than on 45 DVDs in a box the size of your microwave oven." The idea that hard drives would replace pressed discs as a mass distribution medium struck me then (and does now) as unusually bizarre—and, of course, those 45 DVDs could fit nicely in a 6x5x5" box, or, on Blu-ray discs, become no more than nine DVDs fitting in a tiny little package. My conclusions about the "celestial jukebox" and the death of discs:

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

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

being more expensive for most people, for lower quality, than physical media.

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

October 2007: Issue 95

I thought of the issue as a series of "incidents and sideshows"—a copyright incident and three sideshows. PRISM, the Partnership for Research Integrity in Science & Medicine, was (is?) distinctly a sideshow, "another clumsy attempt by publishers to keep pounding on the old discredited arguments against open access in full knowledge that too many people will believe those arguments." The site's still there, it's still nonsense—and it's so significant that it's not even one of the choices on Wikipedia's Prism disambiguation page.

The incident? DMCA takedown notices from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America sent to Scribd, instructing it to take down files that either weren't infringing or were the work of authors who hadn't authorized such action on their behalf. Possibly because Cory Doctorow is a science fiction writer but also an A-list blogger heavily involved with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, this screwup got a lot of attention—maybe more than it deserved. It's an interesting story "where no one can claim the white hat," better read in my original telling.

The final sideshow was the continuing HD DVD vs. Blu-ray battle, and my conclusions were too cautious: I thought the war would continue in 2008 with no clear winner, even though "I'd still bet on Blu-ray for fairly obvious reasons." Right bet, wrong timing.

Masthead

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ8i9.pdf