Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Volume 4, Number 3: February 2004 ISSN 1534-0937 Walt Crawford

Bibs & Blather

An ALA Question

Here's the question—and I would really appreciate answers, *particularly* before February 16, 2004:

During ALA Midwinter in San Diego, did you attempt to attend any meeting that was not starred in the program (as closed), only to be told that the meeting was in fact closed? If so, please send me email with the name of the group, the date if you remember it, and what they told you. (That is: Did they just say, "Sorry, this meeting is closed" or did they offer a reason?) As usual, the username is "wcc" and the domain is "notes.rlg.org." Just send text; I don't open attachments from people I don't know.

If I get a significant number of responses, I may do a "Crawford Files" on this issue. That's the February 16 deadline: The obvious time for the column would be the June/July *American Libraries*, and other schedule issues require writing that column earlier than usual. If I only get one or two responses, or I get several but they're too late, I'll probably do a followup here. (If I don't get any responses, I will *not* suppose that everything's OK, since I assume 95% of ALA members don't see *Cites & Insights*.)

I ask the question because the issue came up in a Midwinter session and the person who said it happened didn't seem to think it was an aberration. If it is happening, I think it needs to be publicized—not only because it violates ALA rules but also because it endangers the future health of the organization.

ALA follows an open meeting policy for all meetings, with three exceptions:

- Award committees meet in closed sessions
- Personnel issues may be conducted in closed session.
- Ticketed sessions if you don't buy a ticket.

Unless I'm mistaken, those are the only exceptions. Unaffiliated groups (marked as "UNO" in the schedule) may not be bound by ALA rules.

Am I being too dramatic in asserting that improperly closed meetings endanger the future health of the organization? I don't think so. I've always believed and have suggested to others that the best way to become involved in ALA is to try out groups you might be interested in, attending the committee, interest group, discussion group, or other meetings—and that the best *time* to do this is ALA Midwinter, since there's no competition from formal programs. If new ALA members are discouraged from trying out new groups, they will be less likely to become involved, and could even (appropriately) turn away from ALA altogether.

Inside This Issue

I have never experienced the full turnaway—"Sorry, this meeting is closed." I have experienced the explicit cold shoulder, the group that makes it clear (through words or attitude) that your presence is not welcome. On one occasion, the chair of a committee went so far as to say when I walked in that visitors weren't really welcome, but that they couldn't legally exclude me. They made a point of talking around the table in tones that made it nearly impossible to hear what was going on.

All of which suggests two secondary questions—ones that can't serve as scandal fodder, but would provide worthwhile feedback.

- Have you recently attended (or tried to attend) meetings within ALA where you were made to feel unwelcome, explicitly or implicitly? Please send brief email with the name of the group and *how* you were made to feel unwelcome.
- Conversely, did you attend a session during ALA Midwinter in San Diego, one you had not attended previously, where the group went out of its way to make you feel welcome? I'd love to hear about that as well—again, with the name of the group and a sentence or two about how it worked.

I believe and hope that almost all groups within ALA welcome visitors. I'd like to think that very few

groups (other than awards committees) go out of their way to make visitors feel uncomfortable. But I'm naïve and only deal with a tiny slice of ALA. How have things worked for you?

Midwinter Items

These aren't really Midwinter notes. As usual, I didn't take very good notes on the meetings I attended. These are quick comments with a few minor highlights:

- I thought it was a great Midwinter. The weather was good, the arrangements were more convenient than usual, and I sensed positive energy from most people I encountered. Unfortunately, attendance wasn't great. Several exhibitors I talked to were fairly happy with the *nature* of the exhibit traffic. More than one felt that it was "like the old days": People who were specifically interested in products and services rather than thousands of freebie-gatherers clogging up the aisles. Almost every ALA member I talked to enjoyed the conference. Once again, I was able to put faces together with names, including Eli Edwards and several others. (Don't expect me to remember names when there are no badges: I have a terrible memory for names.)
- Your best bet for notes on the LITA Top Technology Trends "trendspotters" discussion will probably be the LITA website. since ALA is remaking addresses as I write, I won't even attempt to provide a specific URL within www.ala.org. misseli has already posted good early notes at "Confessions of a Mad Librarian." I thought it was a good session. The group has bowed to the reality of Midwinter: It's unlikely that it will ever again be six to twelve of us sitting around a table with a few visitors. The room was configured for an informal program, with the trendspotters (eight of us this time) up front and plenty of chairs for the hundred or so who attended. While that made the session a tad more formal than in past years, it was workable—I walked out of the 2.5 hour discussion energized, not drained. I fully intend to be there for the session that's *planned* as a program in Orlando. We attracted some six hundred people in Toronto; what will this summer bring?
- The LITA Emerging Technologies Interest Group is planning a program on RFID for Orlando, and based on one known speaker, it should be interesting and worthwhile. The group talked about possible cooperation with the Top Technology Trends people, using us as a source for programming ideas—and had a slew of possibilities for 2005. The LITA Personal Computer Interest Group seems to be having a little trouble defining who it is and what it wants to do, but that can a healthy situation in the freeform world of LITA interest groups.
- I attended the first half of the open forum on the Information Commons, after some back-and-forth about why that term wasn't in the Glossary Special. Some notes on that appear in this issue's oversize Feedback section. This may be a case where I just don't get the concept, although it's also a case where I'm not sure the concept is fully baked yet. (Yes, I read the discussion paper. No, it didn't convince me. See also "The Library Stuff.") I won't comment on the forum itself; I wrote such a comment, but just deleted it as overly grumpy. I frequently find fault with ALA initiatives, but hey, I'm a loyal ALA member, so I'll back off for now.
- The NMRT Orientation session was great. I only wished more new members had been able to attend. Ignore the 15 minutes I spent blathering about writing and publishing; others at the table provided loads of useful information on how to get involved, how to cope with the conference and the *%#! conference program, what to do in San Diego, and so on. If you're new to ALA, consider the Orlando session. It's not an orientation to the New Members Round Table; it's an orientation for new attendees *by* NMRT. I wish I'd paid attention 28 years ago!
- Two items at the exhibits particularly struck me as interesting. One was actually several devices and services for CD and DVD repair, including a mail-in service for smaller libraries and new generations of high-performance disc repair systems such as RTI's DiscChek Eco-Junior. Both RTI and the mail-in service say that *deeply* damaged DVDs can be repaired five to ten times, with no definite limit on the number of light-scratch repairs. The other was a new tool from Library Dynamics, a Paratext company, that combines machine-readable shelflists with contemporary data-mining techniques. I may do a longer writeup on this later, as I get more details. In some ways, I think of this as "the [RLG] Conspectus on steroids," a way that libraries and consortia can compare holdings without being drowned in details. You can

get some information at www.paratext.com/libdgn.pdf; more should be coming soon.

Trends & Quick Takes

Who Makes the Fastest PC?

Macworld devoted six pages to a December 2003 cover story on this issue: "The race is on," by Jonathan Seff. It starts with an interesting statement, given the claims of Mac owners and Apple itself: "Until a few months ago, a race between a Mac and a PC wasn't much of a race at all. Macs were fast—but PCs were usually faster." Now, there are finally PowerPC CPUs running at 2GHz—and the 64-bit G5, used in a dual-processor model, might give the best desktop Windows systems a run for their money. Steve Jobs introduced the machines by stating flat-out that the Power Mac G5 was the world's fastest personal computer, period.

Is the claim justified? That's the focus of this test report, which involved both *PC World* and *Macworld*. Apple's three top Power Macs were tested against a range of similarly configured Windows systems—but two of the three Windows competitors weren't Intel-based. One was, an Alienware 3.2GHz Pentium 4, but the others were an Alienware 2.2GHz Athlon 64 FX-51 (running AMD's 64-bit Athlon) and a Polywell workstations using two 2GHz AMD Opteron CPUs. Knowledgeable Windows users will note immediately that the comparison uses unusually expensive Windows PCs, while Mac folks will look at the price table and complain that the Windows machines were more expensive than the Macs.

What about the tests? They ran six in all, four using popular applications available for both platforms, two using "comparable" tasks but running different software. For the four same-application tests, the results are fairly straightforward. On Adobe Photoshop, the Polywell was faster than any of the Macs while the two Alienwares came in behind the speediest Mac (oddly, the cheapest of the three Macs did the best on all four same-application tests). With Microsoft Word, there was no contest: all three Windows systems ran substantially faster than any of the Macs, typically taking about half as long to perform tasks. Quake III, measured for frame rates, was odd: The two Alienware systems ran faster than any of the Macs, while the Polywell came in just behind the fastest Mac. Finally, Adobe Premiere looked a lot like Microsoft Word: All three Windows machines ran faster than any of the Macs.

Time to bring in tasks that don't have identical software. They tried encoding CD tracks (already copied to hard disk in uncompressed WAV or AIFF form) to 128K MP3, using MusicMatch Plus on the PCs, iTunes on the Macs. They dropped the single Intel system from this and the final test. The results, noting that MusicMatch doesn't use the second Polywell CPU: 38 seconds (to encode 45 minutes of music!) on the Alienware as compared to 74 seconds on the fastest Mac.

Then they tried MPEG-2 encoding—comparing Apple's Compressor with Adobe Premiere Pro and Pinnacle Studio 8. Lo and behold, the Mac finally won a test: Encoding a 6 minute video took 6:04 on the fastest Mac, 11:14 on the fastest PC.

I have no problem with Jonathan Seff's conclusions—and it's worth noting the first half of his second conclusion, given Steve Job's claim. His first conclusion is that the speed debate frequently comes down to your planned use and that creative professionals do well with Macs. I've always assumed that most full-time graphics/video professionals who use desktop computers at all, as opposed to the fading world of graphics workstations, are more likely to use Macs. Second: "*even if the Power Mac isn't the fastest personal computer in the world*, as Apple boasted this summer, it can certainly hold its own against similar PCs." [Emphasis added.] And Apple "has made great strides in closing the performance gap"—but both camps will be increasing processor speed.

Oddly enough, *PC Magazine*'s more limited comparison shows the Power Mac G5 in a better light, faster than a two-CPU Windows system on three of five tests (and barely slower on a fourth). That may be because the PC comparison used two Intel Xeon 3.06GHz CPUs or because *PC*'s choice of tests was friendlier to the Mac.

Speaking of PCs (and Peripherals)…

PC World published another reliability and service report card in its December 2003 issue, based on two surveys of 32,000 subscribers: One covering desktop and notebook computers, one covering "other popular devices."

PC reliability and service seems to be improving—and, not surprisingly, most peripherals have fewer problems than PCs themselves. The bad news is that *no* PC manufacturer earned an Outstanding overall score for either notebooks or desktops. Dell, EMachines, Gateway, IBM, independent shops, and Sony all earned Good desktop scores; Compaq and HP scored Fair; no other brands garnered enough responses. The Good store for EMachines is a triumph of sorts, given early experience with these low-end systems.

For notebooks, Dell, Gateway, IBM, and Toshiba all earned Good; Sony, Compaq, and HP scored Fair.

Printers show a truly surprising change. Namely, the sole Outstanding rating among printers (for reliability only: there weren't enough service responses to judge peripherals) is Samsung, while Brother, Canon, Epson, and HP all show up as Good. Dell, Lexmark, Minolta earn Fair; Xerox/Tektronix earns an unfortunate Poor score.

Digital cameras also surprised me slightly: Sony is the sole Outstanding score. Most of the usual suspects show up as Good: Canon, Fujifilm, HP, Kodak, Minolta, Nikon, and Olympus. Casio, Panasonic, and Toshiba limp in at Fair, with Logitech and Polaroid earning Poor ratings. (I must admit that I wouldn't think of Logitech or Polaroid as serious digital camera players, although Logitech certainly makes inexpensive webcams.)

Belkin won't be happy with the wireless gateway ratings: It's the only Poor. Netgear is the only Good, with D-Link, Linksys, Microsoft, and SMC all Fair.

Finally, there are no outstanding reliability scores for PDAs—which, if you think of them as subnotebooks, is consistent. Handspring, Palm, and Sony all earn Good; Casio, Compaq, Dell, HP, and Toshiba earn Fair scores.

Quicker Takes

- Here's a curious one: Bill Machrone's October 28, 2003 "Extreme Tech" column in *PC Magazine*. He reports on an acquaintance having problems with her 19" CRT display—it started jittering after she had it for a while. A replacement did the same thing. She knew people at the manufacturer (NEC-Mitsubishi), and when she sent it in to be checked over it was pronounced in perfect working order. So what was going on? Turns out she uses a Northern Light SADelite, a high-intensity fluorescent desk lamp for people with "sunlight-affective disorder." When she sent the lamp to her contact at NEC-Mitsubishi, they discovered that the ballast wasn't approved for indoor use, there was no FCC approval label, the ground terminal on the ballast wasn't connected to anything, and the AC cord wasn't shielded. The NEC tech sent the lamp to Machrone. Before running field emissions tests, he did a simple "test"—turning on the light near radios and TV. "I could hear it all over the AM spectrum; it wiped out channels 2 through 6 on the TV and was audible on half the FM spectrum." Emissions analysis confirmed what informal testing proved—this was one noisy lamp, quite probably capable of causing a nearby CRT to jitter. Any unusual lamps around your PCs?
- Sometimes an article makes me feel old and glad of it. Take "EZ Interaction" by Jay Munro in the December 30, 2003*) PC Magazine*. Please. Here's the subhead: "If UR [you are] SITD [still in the dark] about the odd words and character combinations in today's electronic communications, you need to GWTP [get with the program]. HTH [hope this helps]." With a head that assumes that "today's electronic communications" universally rely on such shorthand, I smelled a We All claim coming up, and wasn't disappointed: "Mixing slang and acronyms, with some text graphics (called *emoticons*) thrown in for good measure, a new kind of communication is now used by *everyone* from kids to grandmas." That new kind is IM and chat rooms—and, by the way, acronyms and emoticons lend your writing "a modicum of cool." Smiley faces are cool: Maybe the sky really is falling. Some acronyms "have crossed over to verbal speech" such as LMAO (la mayo, not el mayo), "though for most of the IM crowd that practice is not considered cool." About the only saving grace of this little gem is the revelation that "Yo" originated around 1420, according to the OED. I wasn't cool in high school, so nothing's changed—and while I may yet start a weblog, you won't see me using emoticons any time soon.
- When you read glowing statements about how many people shop online, it's useful to understand the definitions. *PC Magazine* is forthcoming on this sort of thing, as witness a little box on page 27 of the December 9, 2003 issue, "No stopping the shopping." The graph shows a continuing increase in the number of U.S. "online shoppers" age 14 or older—from 66.9 million in 2000 to 80.4 million in 2001, 93.3 million in 2002, 101.7 million (estimated) in 2003, and 108.4 million (projected) for 2004. I bet those numbers are right, given the final sentence in the writeup: "The survey data includes those who have researched products and services online, even if they made their final purchases off-line." So if you've ever checked epinions, looked for product information, or done *anything* else online that's related to a purchase, you're an online shopper.
- I'm impressed. A *Computer Shopper* (January 2004) "trend" piece has the jazzy title,

"Roll-up video screens are no longer science fiction." It's about Philips' new "electrowetting" process to produce a form of electronic paper that can change fast enough for video. That's not what impressed me—various forms of e-paper have been just around the corner for more than a decade now. But the corner seems to be receding a little. The expert commenting on the technology said this about its imminent appearance in the marketplace: "I feel safe saying that electronic paper will not be widespread before 2010. Flexible displays are too cool for companies not to pursue them…but it's still a significant trek to the store shelves." Will "electronic paper" really become anything like a workable book replacement, or will it be a more profitable video screen replacement? In either case, 6-year time-to-market seems a lot more plausible than most projections.

- Karen Schneider offers "Getting started with RSS: The no-brainer method" at Free Range Librarian (frl.bluehighways.com, look for November 19, 2003 archives). She lays it out in four easy steps, using Bloglines as an aggregator. I haven't tried it (yet), but I know Karen's work. If you want to try out RSS and you're not sure how to start, I've never seen a better (read easier, clearer) writeup. (I'm not recycling it just yet: Maybe RSS is worth an experiment…)
- A Princeton employee published an article in *Syllabus* that was interpreted as meaning that Princeton University opposes and does not support open source software. That caused the Princeton University Office of Information Technology to issue a "Position statement on buy, build, or open source software decisions" that's worth reading. Princeton has been active in the open source movement—and also uses lots of commercial software as well as locally developed programs. The two-paragraph conclusion is particularly worth reading.
- I've worried, here and elsewhere, about Big Media efforts that seem to lead to attempts to outlaw general-purpose personal computing (indirectly). Steven Levy has apparently suggested that the internet itself could be locked down, "where anonymity is outlawed and every penny spent is accounted for," and that such a lockdown might be nearly inevitable. In a December 16, 2003 posting at *Freedom to tinker*, Ed Felten comments on why "it's not gonna happen." I believe his reasoning is sound. I fear a locked-down internet less than I fear locked-down PCs (and, in the latter case, I hope the courts and Congress would balk at such an absurd extension of copy protection).
- Another interesting library model to watch: the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, scheduled to open in 2006. Lafayette, California is in the Bay Area suburbs, with ready BART access to Berkeley and San Francisco. The current library is 40 years old and small (6,700 square feet). The new facility will be almost four times the size (25,000 square feet) and will "shelve more than 90,000 volumes and offer 36 public computer workstations," as the January 7, 2004 Contra Costa *Times* puts it (getting the order right). It will also have 146 "reader stations" and have an attached 1,700-square-foot community room, where the Glenn Seaborg Learning Consortium will hold programs and classes. What makes this particularly interesting is that a dozen education and cultural institutions (from Lawrence Hall of Science through the California Shakespeare Theatre) are partnering with the city to bring outreach programs directly to the city, via the Seaborg Learning Consortium.
- You may want to track NISO's INFO URI scheme. This scheme is "a consistent and reliable way to represent and reference such standard identifiers as Dewey Decimal Classifications on the Web so that these identifiers can be 'read' and understood by Web applications," according to the NISO press release. INFO URI will play a significant role in OpenURL 1.0, as it provides a readily extensible method for adding new identifier forms. A lightweight registration process allows an organization to define a namespace, syntax, and normalization rules for its own identifiers. As Pat Harris notes, "you aren't likely to see the scheme in action on your screen, for example, <info:lccn/2002022641>, because it's an under-the-hood way of communicating the identity of an information asset to a Web application." Go to info-uri.info/registry/docs/misc/faq.html for more information.

Feedback: Your Insights

My apologies to Timothy Gatti (not Gotti) on two counts: First, I misspelled his name in my notes on NCLA (December 2003). Second, I promised that a

correction would run in "the next *Cites & Insights*"—and that was two issues ago. I should have said "the next time I have a Feedback section."

In the January 2004 "Copyright Currents," I cited something from the *ALAWON* 12:98, November 19, 2003. It was actually *ALAWON* 12:99, November 17, 2003—but in this case, the error was in the original. (Thanks to Randal Beier for pointing this out.)

Feedback from December 2003

Roy Tennant on Federated Searching

> I haven't had a chance to read the entire issue yet, but in typical style I ferreted out the portion in which my work was mentioned (natch). I think your overall tone on the metasearching/federated searching/cross-database searching question is too dismissive. While we certainly agree that metasearching (a term that appears to be gaining prominence, as far as I can tell) is no silver bullet, neither is it something to be dismissed out of hand. I realize you never came out with any clear statement of where you were on this issue, but the way in which you unfolded each of the messages on flaws, as well as your final statement, tends to leave the reader with a sense that you don't think much of metasearching. Perhaps that impression is wrong, and if so I would encourage you to nuance your stance in a future issue.
>
> When I speak of metasearching as being the "Holy Grail" of librarianship, it is a conscious reference to a long and involved endeavor that never succeeds—that is, true "one-stop shopping" for all relevant information on a topic is a worthy goal, but one that we must be condemned to forever seek without fulfillment. Rather, metasearch software can and should be used to simplify and unify access to a variety of sources when those sources can be usefully treated as one for the purposes of a particular information need or audience. These kinds of services may never completely replace direct access to databases, nor should they necessarily. They are tools that are appropriate for some situations and not for others.
>
> So I don't think that either blind devotion or overstated opposition will serve us in the long run. What we need to do is to fully understand what these kinds of tools offer us, both now and in the near-term future, and develop some useful criteria for deciding when and in which situations such tools would be effective. That is why you will hear me both singing the praises of such tools *and* pointing out their failings—both in the same talk or article.
>
> Finally, whether we agree on this particular issue or not, I welcome the information/discussion/debate that you encourage and engender.

Here's how I responded in late November 2003:

There's a reason that the metasearch stuff was in the Feedback section, even though it was long enough to make up a separate piece of some sort. That reason is that I don't have a clear statement of where I am on this issue (and, given what I do for a living, any such statement would either appear biased or be professionally suicidal). I believe the group of commentaries was raising questions about a technology that is, indeed, being praised as a silver bullet (and inaccurately so: at the Charleston Conference, two speakers said flatly that "portals" do indeed dedupe all search results and provide overall relevance ranking, without qualification, and both seemed to say that such portals were really the only way anybody should do research).

I agree that neither blind devotion nor overstated opposition is useful in the long or, for that matter, the short run—and I believe my attitude on most library-related issues falls in that middle category. If you read what few personal comments I included in my summaries as overstated opposition or as dismissive, then I edited badly or you misread it—I'll assume the former. I do mistrust the adulation being heaped on Google-like searching in general and on things that librarians assume (wrongly) that distributed search systems do in particular, and I dislike the amount of implicit disdain for carefully-developed "native" interfaces—but I also know that, for many students in many circumstances, some form of metasearch/portal offers a way through the impenetrable lists of databases and less-than-satisfactory subject guides to online resources.

Harry Kriz on various issues (portions)

> **Journal alternatives (November 2003):** On page 3 you resurrect the old argument about universities paying twice for the research they do. Once when they pay for the research done by their faculty and again when they buy back the results in the journals.
>
> I've never understood this argument. In all the journals we buy at Virginia Tech, there is precious little that is published by our faculty. Most of what appears in any journal is written by people in some other organization. So our library is really buying copies of the work done by people at other organizations. As for publication charges, our university is paying publishers for the prestige the university perceives itself as gaining by having an article appear in the publisher's journal.
>
> Now you could argue that all the universities should get together and agree to publish the papers done by their own faculties. They could bypass completely the commercial publishing world.
>
> Of course, the universities once did just that. Our shelves at Virginia Tech contain tens of thousands of articles from agriculture experiment stations and engineering experiment stations that were once distributed free on exchange from other universities. Of course the universities pretty much got out of the publishing business decades ago. I assume they found that it was not a sustainable model.
>
> Or you could argue that scholarly societies could do all the publishing of articles written by their mem-

bers. Of course, that's been tried also, but it seems to be dying out.

I do marvel at those who exuberantly propose that we start a university-based publishing environment today, but not because I think it is necessarily a bad idea. I marvel because it is not apparent that those making such proposals have any understanding of why university publishing failed in the past.

Anne Piternick published "Attempts to find alternatives to the Scientific Journal: A Brief Review" in *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 15, no. 5, pp. 260-266 (1989). Here she did list several reasons for failures of journal alternatives. Ann Okerson did mention the article back in 1991: www.library.yale.edu/~okerson/pacs.html

Those proposing new systems today should be able to explain how their systems will overcome the reasons for failure in the past.

Improving your newsletter: Shorter paragraphs. Improved highlighting. For instance, I scroll rapidly through Good Stuff. It's easy to miss the start of a new section. Something as simple as bold facing the author's name would make each section jump out. The double spacing isn't sufficient for me.

Regarding journal alternatives: Yes, "we're buying back our own research" is simplistic for any given campus and *possibly* for academic as a whole. For the UC system and the Elsevier journals involved, though, it wasn't all that simplistic: 15% of articles in those journals came from UC authors.

Epublication *should* change the economics of the situation substantially. "Should" is a tricky word here. Most people no longer believe there's really a single silver bullet.

Personally, I believe that university-based open-access or "Prosser-model" ejournals may be part of a complex web of "solutions" that might, over time, ameliorate the essentially unworkable situation with journal pricing and proliferation. To be sure, quite a few universities do publish quite a few journals, some of them reasonably priced, just as quite a few societies still publish their own journals in order to move the professions forward more than to make big bucks (ALA divisions represent small but significant examples; there are lots of others). Some of the "failed" models never entirely failed, and new technologies should change some of the financial issues. Maybe. (There was a *lot* more about this in January.)

Suggestions for *C&I*: Thanks. I'll think about those. I know paragraphs get too long (I'm not a great editor, particularly of my own writing). As for citation breaks: One of the minor style changes for *Cites & Insights* 4 is in the citations, now two points larger with more white space.

January and Midwinter (Glossary) Issues

I'm combining these (and the January 2004 "Crawford Files") for my own sanity—and these notes represent a combination of direct feedback and comments in various weblogs.

Open Stacks, December 23

The editor of the dmoz/Open Directory library weblog categories discussed my informal analysis of freshness among library weblogs. He notes that weblogs don't get added to the lists unless they show ongoing activity, which explains the almost total lack of "one-day wonders." He also provides clear reasons why a higher percentage of personal blogs than of topical blogs showed very recent activity.

> General/topical blogs are more likely to be kept in the directory, even if they are not actively updated. Why? Archival interest of the subject matter. Also, topical blogs are more likely to be continued after long absences than are personal blogs. I make that observation empirically, not from supposition…

He also notes that he does very little deleting—justifiably so. Since the lists of weblogs are far from overwhelming and there are very few dead blogs in the lists, I think his "I prefer to add rather than subtract" is right on the money.

Keith Tipton, January 2

Keith noted that I provided an incorrect URL for the ALA store along with the final free chapter from *First Have Something to Say*. The correct address is http://www.alastore.ala.org/

Confessions of a Mad Librarian, January 2

misseli had a lot to say—and I'm just modest enough to not repeat it here. But I can't pass up her four-word summary of my writing: "organized, engaging, skeptical and unpretentious." I hope the last two are always true, and I aim for the first two. misseli *likes* PDF…and, in person at Midwinter, said she did find my OpenURL explanation worthwhile.

Steven J. Bell, January 3

Steven sent a note on my entries on the Two Stevens (Bell and Cohen) and wondered whether there would be a Top Tech Trends summary in *C&I*. My rambling response noted that "I'm trying to decide whether to have an ongoing 'glossary additions' feature as a good way to do smaller standalone essays," and that I almost immediately realized that I left out "analog hole"—which needs a lot more than a brief essay. Steven responded the next day by favoring the addition of new "definitions" from time to time—and pointed me to the *commons-blog* entry noted below. (I check *commons-blog* but not always on a daily basis.) Unfortunately, my response to his response to my response to…well, anyway, I suggested Liz Lane

Lawley's *mamamusings* weblog as the most likely place for a good early summary of Top Tech Trends. Liz missed Midwinter. I believe the committee's notes on the meeting will be up on the LITA website before too long.

Young Librarian, January 4

This entry considers the January 2004 "Crawford Files" on weblogs. This writer suggests, "If you desire to have a successful blog…you have to truly enjoy writing in the first place. If you don't enjoy writing, that comes through and will distance possible readers…" The Young Librarian goes on to talk about "my fiction writing friends and I" and the virtues of a "distinctive, strong, and 'engaging' voice." I suspect I'm distinctive—and I'm a bit jealous of those who can write fiction. I've tried; I lack the observational and literary skills.

commons-blog, January 4 and 7

A long entry notes the Glossary Special and regrets that I don't include an entry for "Information Commons." The discussion that follows is thoughtful (as usual for this weblog), noting, "Those of us who embrace the idea of the information commons need to do a better job of promotion." He also found it clear that I am "a supporter of the commons (though I don't know that he would necessarily embrace the concept of the information commons as such)."

As I responded, I didn't include such an entry because it's not a term I've used in *Cites & Insights*—and, to date, it's not a concept that serves *my* mental models to draw other concepts together. I also wasn't terribly clear on a suitable definition. One definition was offered in this particular commentary; Mary Minow offered another definition; the discussion continues. I attended part of an ALA Midwinter forum on the information commons—and the portion I attended suggested to me that the concept continues to be ill defined.

I'm sure this discussion will continue. Will I become an advocate for the information commons? Not directly, not until the mental model makes sense to me—but that could change at any time.

There was one other comment in the January 4 entry that makes me a little nervous: "It will be an excellent resource for anyone interested in a quick guide to key information and information technology issues facing libraries." The Glossary Special was *very* personal, quixotic, and partial. I believe the actual definitions offered are accurate (and did some research to back them up), but the essays are rife with commentary and I don't claim anything like completeness.

Marlène Delhaye, January 6

Ms. Delhaye thinks I should *not* "jump into the blogosphere" because she appreciates my "hindsightful commentaries." She also asked where the COWLZ stuff was (and was a little nervous about 46 pages of *C&I* in two weeks). I pointed her to cowlz.boisestate.edu, noted that two-issues-in-10-days won't happen very often, and reassured her about one thing, worth repeating here:

If I do start a weblog, it will *not* replace *Cites & Insights*. It will cover items that don't belong in *C&I* or that require immediate commentary. I agree that my essays aren't compatible with the weblog rhythm (as she suggested). My uncertainties about the future of *Cites & Insights* are unrelated to the possible (not probable) weblog.

Seth Finkelstein, January 7

Finkelstein also makes me nervous by calling the Glossary Special a "handbook/reference/scorecard for the players and controversies in these topics." His direct note covered more ground:

- COPA isn't really a predecessor to CIPA; it has a very different history and is a criminal law rather than a funding-based mandate. COPA is a direct successor to CDA, the Communications Decency Act. He's right, of course: I was thinking of it as a predecessor in Congress' ongoing attempts to censor the Internet.
- "Harmful to children" in one definition was simply wrong—"harmful to minors" is the right phrase, and as I've noted at some length, 16-year-olds are not "children" in any meaningful sense. As Finkelstein notes, "Under CIPA, a 16-year-old might be prevented from researching sexual material to the sex he's already having!"
- Finkelstein is dubious about my assertion that the Supreme Court "gutted [CIPA] for adults." "Whatever the justices expect in theory tends to be a world away from practice." That's true, and an important nuance.
- Finkelstein would have liked a stronger statement about the problems in censorware research. I failed to say that the Censorware Project website was hijacked by another participant, but I don't doubt Finkelstein's historical record (readily available at his website). He's right: "Hijacking the Censorware Project website is wrong. It's utterly reprehensible." To the extent that I trivialized that, my apologies. Sometimes I'm too nonconfrontational for my own good, or for the good of those who do important work.

Eric Hellman, January 14

Hellman (Openly Inc.) called my OpenURL writeup "pretty good" but noted one inaccuracy: 1Cate, Openly's resolver, doesn't use rule sets. It uses template sets instead: data-driven presentation templates to build the resolver web pages.

I responded that "rule set" was my logical description for what I believe has to happen in a resolver, and that I could equally well have said "decision matrix." Since I've never looked at the internals of any resolver, I wrote that portion of the OpenURL "definition" based on logical necessity. However it's implemented, a resolver needs some matrix that says which services to offer, in which order, for a given set of conditions within the OpenURL metadata as enhanced and informed by the knowledge base. That matrix can be implemented as a set of rules, a set of templates, or whatever.

Eric noted that "decision matrix" smacks a bit of BizSpeak (not his wording!) and suggested "condition matrix."

I like "condition matrix," and that's what I'll use for the OpenURL presentation I'm doing in Ohio in late May. Substitute "condition matrix" for "rule set" in the OpenURL description; it makes the description more generally true.

…and others

There were other notes and weblog mentions. Most were generous and don't require direct response.

There was also one incredibly lengthy weblog entry—on a January essay—that eventually resulted in an action I hate to take. The short list of zealots who I ignore completely, kept as short as I can possibly keep it, has grown by one. I *hope* that people will disagree with me on some issues. I *expect* snide comments. But I utterly reject and deeply resent the notion that RLG controls what I say, and I have little patience for those who treat everything as an extension of their own crusade. Five people, all men, are currently on my ignore list. I sincerely hope that the list never reaches ten; I'd rather it hadn't reached five. I regard it as a personal weakness that I find it necessary to have such a mental list: Ideally, I should be able to deal rationally with everyone. Those five names do not appear here. I ignore their writing. I trust them to ignore mine.

Perspective
The Way We're Wired

In the *Cites & Insights* Glossary Special entry for "top technology trend," I quoted a couple of paragraphs from a Cory Doctorow posting at the Boing Boing weblog. Doctorow argues that, for the next couple of decades, policy and social norms are more interesting than technological developments—and also argues against certain technology developments. Many people commented on Doctorow's posting (it's one of two Big Deal Weblogs that I occasionally read), including Joi Ito (who I know nothing about). Here's part of what Joi Ito had to say, as quoted by Jenny Levine, the Shifted Librarian:

> I remember when everyone shouted into their cell phones and thought that their batteries drained faster when they made long distance phones. I remember when people (who now have cell phones) swore to me that they'd never have a cell phone. I remember when cell phones looked more like military radios. I think it's fine to gripe about technology, but I would warn those people who swear they'll never use a technology. Technology evolves and so do social norms.
>
> … New technologies disrupt our habits and our norms and what we feel comfortable with. *I am an early adopter type who uses every technology possible and I try to wrap my life around it all.* Some people try the technology and point out the tensions. Some people ignore the technology. Technology evolves along with the social norms. When it works well, we end up with a technology that contributes to society in some way and becomes a seamless part of our social norms. When it doesn't work well it either damages society or does not integrate and is discarded. [Emphasis added.]

Jenny Levine emphasized the last two sentences in the first paragraph—and added: "Think you'll never use IM for reference? Think ebooks will never go mainstream? Think you'll never need a wireless network at home or at work? Do you have a cellphone?" Back to that in a bit, although it's peripheral to this perspective.

A Minor Epiphany

My Aha! moment was the second (quoted) sentence in the second paragraph: The notion of wrapping your life around all the new technologies you adopt. I had never thought about early adopters that way and it helps me realize why I'm unlikely to become an early adopter (although, to a limited extent, I may have been one when I was younger).

Ito describes a range of *appropriate* responses to new technologies, although most of us respond to different technologies in different ways. Ito's groups are, paraphrasing:

- **True early adopters**, people always on the lookout for something new.
- **Inquisitive adopters/skeptics**, those who try out new technologies and point out problems. Some skeptics point out the tensions, and maybe even the advantages, without necessarily trying the technologies. I don't have to test-drive a Hummer2 to tell

you it's ecologically offensive or participate in IM reference to believe it's likely to be a useful tool in many libraries.

- **Late adopters**, those who ignore a technology until it's become so mainstream that they don't think of it as new.

There are other categories. Some people deliberately (or unconsciously) *avoid* new technologies, even when they are both mainstream and beneficial to these people—in essence serving as counterbalances to early adopters. Avoiders also shape their lives around technology, negatively, although I'm sure they would disagree.

These aren't clearcut categories. Most people fall in between. I doubt that Joi Ito actually seizes upon *every* new device or even "every technology possible." Few technology avoiders, including those who avoid technology for religious reasons, avoid *every* new technology. Many (most?) of us have some areas in which we're inclined to buy into a technology relatively early, others in which we're likely to wait a while, and others we just don't care about. For that matter, relatively few people bother to point out problems and benefits with new technologies; they use them or don't.

If I had had more money and time when I was young, I might have "wrapped my life around" some new technologies. Now, I can't imagine it—*for me, for now*. I "wrap my life" around people (particularly my wife), places we go, books and magazines, work, writing, thoughts, TV, music, and the like. When a new technology makes that life better, I'll get around to trying it—sometimes sooner, sometimes later. (As an avid reader and occasional thinker, I "try out" a lot of technologies vicariously, letting reviewers and journalists serve as primary filters.)

I'm not making fun of Joi Ito or other early adopters. But the fact that I can't imagine wrapping my life around new technologies may explain why I have problems communicating with those who do. We're wired so differently that it's hard to talk across the interference. That doesn't make them wrong or me right. It makes us different.

Cites & Insights won't tout each new technology as it arises—that's not the way I'm wired. When I run "Interesting & Peculiar Products," I wonder how many of you find "Interesting" what I find "Peculiar," and vice-versa. I wonder how often you're right—at least for you, and maybe for most people.

The Questions

What about Levine's questions? I commented with an offhand response. Here's a slightly more thoughtful one.

- If I worked in a library and in public services, I would almost certainly try out IM reference. It seems like a useful technology, as long as it's not used to give remote users preference over those standing at the desk—and IM reference shouldn't pose more of a danger in that regard than other remote reference devices such as the telephone.
- I think some forms of digital text distribution will "go mainstream" and some won't. I'm inclined to place dedicated ebook appliances (outside the K12 and higher education markets) in the latter category, at least for a long time to come.
- I don't know whether I'll ever *need* a wireless network at home; I might or might not *want* one at some point—presumably after we go broadband. (At work? We're working on that, as we should be.)
- As for a cellphone, I don't *currently* feel the need to have my own, although there is one in the household (almost always turned off).
- And as Joi Ito notes and I sometimes forget in a fit of sloppy writing, "Never" is indeed a very long time.

Postscript

If you choose to wrap your life around a set of technologies, that's your choice. Problems arise when you attempt to universalize your own choices: When you want the world and the people in it to wrap themselves around your preferred technologies.

I was going to provide an example here—but my example was wrong and did an injustice to the (unnamed) person involved. I moved from grumpy to crotchety in a particular exchange, aided by my dislike for emoticons and tendency to ignore them.

I assumed the person had adopted a monolithic approach to acquiring information because of an old discussion about RSS bigotry and an offhanded comment about this publication not offering topical RSS feeds. As the person in question made clear, they probably use a wider range of sources and *kinds* of sources than I do. The fact that their range of sources doesn't include this odd little self-publication may be the right choice on their part. *Cites & Insights* isn't for everybody. I don't think any zine, weblog, or (for that matter) serious edited publication is. Consider this an extended apology: When I'm wrong, I'm sometimes *very* wrong, and I was wrong this time. Nothing new there!

The problem noted above is a real one, however, even if this blogger doesn't happen to be an example. There are people who've fallen in love with HDTV to the extent that they won't watch TV if it's

not HD—even if their favorite shows are low-rez. There are music "lovers" who disdain classic performances (within genres they love) that aren't stereo. There are people who believe that TV news keeps them adequately informed—and others who disdain newspapers because they're not up-to-the-minute sources. There are far too many people who believe that Google does it all and that if it isn't on the web, it doesn't exist (although Pew and other studies suggest that this attitude is nowhere nearly as widespread among students as some doom-cryers would have us believe).

Make your choices to suit your preferences. But everyone else isn't you. Don't assume they'll modify their preferences or behavior to suit your choices.

PC Progress, July 2003-January 2004

Other than some interesting and peculiar products, this section is about all that's left of my so-called concentration on personal computing—and I wonder whether this serves anyone's needs or interests. Feedback particularly welcome, any time in the next five or six months. Note that I dropped *Macworld* at the end of 2003—but *PC Magazine* regularly reviews key Macintosh products and developments.

Abbreviations: P=*PC Magazine*, W=*PC World*, C=*Computer Shopper*, M=*Macworld*.

Censorware

I dislike censorware in library computers and suspect it's the wrong way for parents to "protect" their children, but censorware on home (and business) computers is both legal and, for many people, appropriate. This annual roundup [P22:12] admits that the programs overblock but doesn't seem concerned about that issue. Thus, unsurprisingly, the Editors' Choice is Cybersitter 2002 ($40) from Solid Oak, a company that sneers at suggestions that it's overblocking and seems good at locking down a computer so tightly that you may never be free of it.

Desktop PCs

Fast and Faster

AMD's fastest 32-bit CPU is the Athlon XP 3200+, with a faster front-side bus, sometimes but not always competitive with the 3GHz Pentium4. Editors' Choice [P22:11]: Falcon Northwest Mach V 3200+, $3,595 with 1GB SDRAM, two 36GB 10K drives (RAID 0) and one 250GB 7200RPM disk, DVD-RW, CD-RW, 128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro. No monitor or speakers.

AMD's 64-bit CPU, the Athlon 64 FX-51, shows up in three early systems [P22:19]. Editors' Choice is the $3,658 Velocity Micro Raptor 64, configured similarly to the Falcon Northwest Mach V above, but with a dual-format DVD+-/RW drive and 256MB on the graphics card.

This three-PC roundup covers "gaming" systems, which typically have the hottest graphics cards, fastest disks, etc.[P22:10]. Editors' Choice [P22:10] went to the specialist, Voodoo PC, for its $3,995 Fury, which uses mild overclocking and other optimizations to speed up gaming. Gateway's $3,499 700XL came in second. The game-oriented Dell Dimension XPS ($4,488) trailed the others and is considerably overpriced for the configuration.

This comparison of four loaded early Pentium4-3.2GHz systems [P22:13] awards Editors' Choice to the $3,623 MPC Millennia 920i Creative Studio—the most expensive, but also fastest on most tests and best-equipped, with 1GB SDRAM, two 160GB 7200RPM hard drives in RAID 0 configuration, multiformat DVD burner *and* CD-RW burner, 19" LCD display, ATI Radeon 9800 Pro graphics with 128MB RAM, good 6.1-channel speakers (and Audigy 2 sound card), and Office XP Small Business along with media software.

A mixed review of high-end PCs [C23:9] doesn't award any Best Buys. The ABS Ultimate X5 ($3,154) gets the best rating. That price buys a fairly loaded system: Pentium4 at 3GHz, 1GB DDR RAM, two 80GB 7200RPM hard disks in RAID 0 configuration, a 4X DVD+RW and DVD-ROM drives, a 21"-viewable CRT, and ATI Radeon 9800 Pro graphics with 128MB RAM, along with Creative's Audigy 2 sound card and Logitech's Z-680 5.1 speaker system. As usual, the "3200+" Athlon systems aren't as fast as 3GHz Pentium4 systems, let alone 3.2GHz.

The Rest

A mixed set of "school" PCs [P22:14] includes desktops and notebooks. Editors' Choice for desktops is the $1,187 HP Compaq Presario S4000T:-Pentium4-2800, 512MB SDRAM, 80GB HD, DVD drive and CD burner, 17" CRT. Among notebooks, the pick is the Gateway 450X: $1,704 for a Pentium M at 1.4GHZ with 512MB SDRAM, 60GB disk, DVD/CD-RW combo, 15" SXGA+ screen; 6.1lb. and remarkable battery life (5:29).

In a review of four Media Center PCs [P22:21], all nicely equipped, most from big names and costing right around $2,000, the Editors' Choice is the $2,050 HP Pavilion m370n for balanced multimedia

strengths, good media port availability, and generally strong test scores.

This roundup of "family" PCs—essentially, midrange desktops priced at $1,500 to $1,650 (or $749 without a monitor) [C23:12] doesn't include any top award. Highest-rated is the HP Pavilion a310e, $1,499: Athlon XP 3000+, 512MB SDRAM, nVidia GeForce FX 5600 Pro graphics (128MB), 80GB disk, DVD+RW and CD-ROM drives, 17" LCD display, Harmon-Kardon speakers, XP—and WordPerfect 10. It doesn't perform all that well, and there's an odd line about "HP's excess of intrusive bloatware." What do you get for $749? The eMachines T2625: Athlon XP 2600+, 512MB SDRAM, S3 Prosavage 32MB graphics, 120GB disk, multiformat DVD burner and a second DVD drive, generic speakers, XP and Works Suite. A 15" LCD display adds $400.

Digital Cameras and Software

Still Cameras

PC Magazine notes that digital still cameras are getting more stylish, with powerful ones coming down in price. A fifteen-camera roundup [P 22:15] includes two Editors' Choices: Pentax Optio 550 ($600) for enthusiasts (5 megapixels, 5x optical zoom, macro focusing down to 1", double exposures, lots more; 8.8oz., 3.9x2.3x1.6") and Kodak EasyShare DX6340 ($329) for point-and-shoot users (3.1 megapixels, 4x optical zoom, 9.4oz., 4.3x2.5x1.5"). A sidebar on user satisfaction rates Canon, Fujifilm, Nikon, Olympus and Sony tops, HP, Kodak, and Toshiba bottom.

Videocams

In this roundup of contemporary single-sensor (consumer) cameras [P22:11], Sony's $1,500 DCR-TRV MiniDV HandyCam earns the top raring: "expensive but you get what you pay for." Superior video, audio, and still image quality.

Another roundup of consumer digital videocameras with a $1,000 cutoff includes eight models [P22:17]. Editors' Choice: Canon Optura 20 ($999), offering the best image quality and lots of useful features (including 16x optical zoom).

Yet another roundup of digital camcorders, this time focusing on units that also take fairly high-resolution still pictures [P22:23]. No Editors' Choice, but the highest rating goes to Canon's $1,699 Optura Xi, which offers good video quality and many advanced features—but only has a 2MP still option. Some go as high as 4MP.

Editing Software

In a four-program roundup of image-editing software costing $130 or less [P22:15], Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0 gets Editors' Choice for the best overall balance of features, power, and ease. Ulead PhotoImpact 8 rates an honorable mention.

This roundup of image-editing software [W22:1] includes nine products selling for $100 or less, rating them based on a set of complex photo manipulation tasks. Editors' Choice is Jasc Paint Shop Pro 8, $95; it handled most tasks nicely, and its One Step Photo Fix was very effective.

Image-management software isn't the same as image-editing software. This roundup [C23:12] covers four managers costing $30 to $50 and awards Editors' Choices to two of them. Adobe Photoshop Album 2.0 (highest rated, $50) grabs all the photos on your hard disk and organizes them by date; you can then add your own organization. JASC Paint Shop Photo Album 4 ($49) offers a clean interface and strong set of image enhancement and effects tools.

Video editing software under $100 now offers "Hollywood-quality special effects and VCD- or DVD-burning capabilities." Editors' Choice [P22:11]: Screenblast Movie Studio 2.0, $69 from Sony Pictures Digital. No storyboard and MPEG-2 requires a $30 add-on.

In another video-editing roundup [P22:17], Editors' Choices go (again) to Sony's Screenblast Movie Studio ($70) and Pinnacle Studio 8 ($100) among midrange products, Adobe Premiere Pro ($700) for high-end uses.

Displays

17" LCD displays are becoming reasonably priced, even if they don't *really* offer "the same viewable area as a 19" CRT" (as writers repeat in every review). Five displays, $450 to $700 [C23:7]—and, as you might expect, Editors' Choice is the $700 Formac Gallery 1740 Platinum.

There continue to be reasons to stick with CRTs, as this article points out [M20:8], along with rating eight 20" and larger displays. Highest-rated, with 4.5 mice each: Apple Cinema Display ($1,299) for Macs with an Apple Display Connector; NEC MultiSync LCD2080UX ($1,699) if you need compatibility with other Macs. The NEC is a 3x4 1600x1200 display, the Apple a widescreen 1680x1050 display; both have 350:1 contrast.

Internet Service Providers

This story combines a set of broadband ISP reviews, based on actual experience in setting up and using an account, and a user satisfaction survey [P22:16]. Readers' Choices for ISPs are BellSouth, Cox, EarthLink, Insightbb.com, and Road Runner among broadband ISPs, AT&T Worldnet and Earthlink for

dialup. The highest grade, A+ overall, goes to Cox and AT&T Worldnet—both of them scoring better than average on every measure. (Lowest scores: DirecWay for broadband, AOL for dialup.)

Mass Storage

Pocket storage devices can use either flash RAM or removable flash media. In this five-unit writeup [W21:8], Best Buy honors go to SanDisk's $85 Cruzer, a 256MB unit that also supports removable media. Note that these units aren't as fast as you might expect.

External hard disks are down to less than $2 per megabyte, as in this five-unit quickie for devices that connect via FireWire or USB 2.0 [W21:8]. Best Buy: Maxtor Personal Storage 5000DV, $300 for 160GB; it provides a one-button backup capability.

MP3 Players and Software

A multisegment cover story [P22:20] covers music downloading systems, ripping/digital jukebox software, flash memory players, and hard drive players (e.g., Apple's iPod). Among download systems, *PC Magazine* liked RealOne Rhapsody 2.1 best (but Napster 2.0 wasn't out yet). The Editors' Choice for ripping is no surprise: MusicMatch Jukebox 8.1 (pay the $20 for the Plus version: you won't regret it). Creative Labs' $150 Nomad MuVo NX gets the Editors' Choice among flash memory players (128MB, 1.5oz., 1.4x2.9x0.6", and very good battery life), along with the $200 Rio Call (256MB, 1.8oz., 2.5x2.6x0.8", even better battery life; it also has an FM tuner and memory slot). No surprise in the standard hard-drive player category: The 40GB Apple iPod may be pricey, but it's still Editors' Choice. The $270 Rio Nitrus gets an Editors' Choice nod as one of the first players based on the teeny-tiny 1.5GB Cornice Storage Element hard disk (half a cubic inch!); at 2.0oz. and 3.0x2.4x0.6", it offers the size and weight of a flash player with more capacity.

Notebook PCs

Centrino notebooks—that is, those using Intel's Pentium M, the Intel 855 chipset, and Intel Wifi—offer excellent performance and battery life, but many companies are using the Pentium M without the other choices (abandoning the "Centrino" label). Editors' Choice in a five-system roundup [C23:6]: Acer TravelMate 803LCi, $2.799: 1.6GHz Pentium M, 512MB DDRAM, 60GB hard disk, DVD/CD-RW drive, ATI Mobility Radeon 9000 64MB graphics, 15" LCD, 6.1lb. Somewhat unusual keyboard, four USB2.0 ports and FireWire, and the unit ran almost five hours on a battery test.

In this roundup of so-called desktop replacements [W21.7], the Best buy goes to Toshiba's $1,899 Satellite 2455-S305: Pentium4-2400, 15.0" display, 512MB RAM, 60GB disk, DVD-R/RW burner, 9.1lb., 3:07 battery life.

Another desktop replacement roundup [C24:1], asserts that these heavyweight notebooks "could send your desktop packing." The five systems cost $2,574 to $3,800, weigh 7.2 to 9.9 pounds (without AC adapter), and have 15" or 17" LCD screens. They're sort of an odd lot: The Eurocom D500P is $1000 more expensive than any other system, has the smallest screen, and comes from an unknown company—but it has a "fantastic feature set." The Dell Inspiron 8600, rated 8.2 and getting one of two Editors' Choices, is two pounds lighter than the other systems and looks an awful lot like a midrange notebook (although, at $2,600, it's pricey); it's the only other one with a 15" screen. Of the three clear "desktop replacement" units, the $2,574 HP Pavilion ZD7000 receives the other Editors' Choice. It comes with a Pentium 4-3200 (not a notebook-class CPU), 512MB SDRAM, a *slow* 60GB disk (4200RPM, where the others are either 5400 or 7200), a DVD+RW burner, nVidia GeForce FX Go5600 128MB graphics, XP, and Works.

Optical Discs (DVD Burners)

Just at a guess, no magazine's going to waste space on CD-RW burners these days. A high-speed burner goes for $30 after rebates, sometimes less, and just isn't sexy—but it will probably burn CD-Rs a *lot* faster than a DVD burner!

This roundup of 4x DVD burners costing less than $300 [C23:8] may have been the last roundup with *no* multiformat (DVD-R/+R/-RW/+RW) units. Editors' Choices were the $299 Pioneer DVD-A05 for DVD-RW, the $300 TDK 420N Indi DVD for DVD+RW.

In a brief review of various optical (and other removable-media) drives [W21:8], the Best Buy went to Sony's DRU-510A for the fastest optical storage (4X DVD+R/RW) and general compatibility.

A big roundup of DVD drives, 23 in all [P22:19]: 10 external units ($240 to $600) and 13 internal drives ($200 to $280). The $600 price is a little misleading: That's the Alera DVD Copy Cruiser Dual, an external disk duplicator—but it had trouble copying CDs. Most external drives run right around $300, and it's fairly remarkable that you can buy a name-brand external DVD burner for $240—Plextor, no less, albeit not dual-format.

Editors' Choice for an external drive is LaCie's d2 DVD+/-RW, $299, which is light, attractive, and perofrms very well, including 4x burning on both

DVD-R and DVD+R. For internal use, Editors' Choice is the $229 Memorex Dual Format DVD Recorder, which also burns at 4x and delivered top speeds at a relatively low price. The tests also included six DVD authoring programs; Editors' Choice here is the $70 Sonic MyDVD 5 for video quality and elegance; for another $30, MyDVD Studio Deluxe 5 includes CD-burning software, archiving/backup software, and a media player.

PDAs and Pocket PCs

Windows for Pocket PCs is now Windows Mobile, with better security, increased messaging support and better multimedia. An early roundup [P22:13] of eight devices with the new OS, $300 to $550, includes one Editors' Choice: HP iPAQ Pocket HC h2210. $400, 400MHz Intel CPU, 64MB SDRAM (56MB usable), 32MB ROM, 3.5" transflective TFT, 5oz., 4.8x2.9x0.6, bluetooth included.

This brief roundup [P22:21] includes four more Windows Mobile Pocket PCs, each with a 3.5" display. Editors' Choice is the $500 HP iPAQ Pocket PC H4350, which is the first PocketPC to feature a thumb keyboard.

A comparison of PDA/phone hybrids finds none of them perfect, one of the two most expensive worth a Best Buy [W21:9]. Sony Ericsson P800, $600, has an odd 208x320-pixel color screen (4096 colors), runs Symbian OS, weighs 5oz. and measures 2.3x4.6x1.1"; it's basically a chubby phone with a decent-size screen included.

Printers

Monochrome lasers aren't dead yet; the newest ones are fast and cheap. This five-unit roundup [C23:9] gives the highest rating to Samsung's $199 ML-1710. That gets you 12.4 tested pages per minute, 600dpi printing, and the highest consumable cost at 2.7 cents per page.

PC Magazine breaks inkjet printers down into "personal" and "photo" categories, although most personal printers do just fine as photo printers. In a test of nine personal and 11 photo units, the $100 HP Deskjet 5150 gets Editors' Choice as a personal unit, Canon's $500 i9100 Photo Printer as a photo printer for enthusiasts, and the $300 HP Photosmart 7960 for photo printing and standalone photo printing (without a computer: it accepts media cards and has a 2.5" LCD to preview images).

Most multifunction printers [P22:21] now offer very good image quality. Key to deciding on an MFP are your major functions: Do you need fax keys, an automatic document feeder, memory card readers? Two out of ten units earn Editors' Choices: the $400 Canon MultiPass MP730 (by far the fastest printer, and with excellent Photoshop output quality) and the $130 Dell A940 (built by Lexmark) for value.

Projectors

This big roundup of inexpensive portable projectors [P22:13] includes units ranging from 2.2 pounds to 7 pounds, $999 to $2,000, all with SVGA (800x600) rather than XGA (1024x768) resolution. Why the lower resolution? Because the projectors are cheaper and you shouldn't need more than 800x600 resolution for PowerPoint—and regular TV or DVD only uses 480 lines of resolution. Editors' Choice: NEC VT460, $1,200, highest tested brightness (and the closest to meeting brightness claims), sharp video quality—but on the heavy side at 6.6lb.

Scanners

"Midrange" scanners offer more performance than ever. This four-unit review [P22:19] includes four scanners with 48bit color, transparency adapters, full-page scanning and USB 2.0 interfaces, at prices between $150 and $200. Two of the four earn Editors' Choices: the $200 Epson Perfection 3170 Photo (larger and heavier than the others, but it produced the best OCR and photo scans) and has a substantial software bundle) and HP's $200 Scanjet 4670, a snazzy transparent device that's cooler than the average scanner.

This small roundup [W22:1] covers three $200-$230 scanners with special photo-restoration features. No Editors' Choice, but a clear point leader: Epson's $199 Perfection 3170 Photo. While all three printers restored faded colors nicely, only the Epson could remove dust from film scans as well as print scans; it also has the highest resolution of the three.

Tablet PCs

Increasingly, real-world tablet PCs are convertible notebooks—they have standard keyboards, but you can turn the display around so that the unit behaves as a touch-screen tablet. That's true of all three designs in this mini-roundup [22:22], from Gateway, Sharp and HP. Editors' Choice here is the HP Compaq TC1100, $2,399: 1.0G Pentium M, 512MB SDRAM, 40GB disk, 10.4" screen, Ethernet and 802.11b/g, Bluetooth. You can actually remove the keyboard, leaving a 3.1lg. tablet PC; as a notebook, it's four pounds (but has a small screen).

Tax Software

Just in time (if, like me, you're a little late purchasing this year's tax program), here's *PC Magazine*'s annual roundup [23:1]. As usual, there's no point changing from TurboTax to TaxCut or vice-versa if you're happy with your current program. This year,

there's a kicker: if you *hated* the TurboTax activation code (and the trivial spyware that accompanied it), be aware that Intuit heard you: There's no activation code for 2004.

TurboTax earns the Editors' Choice this year. The nicest changes (other than the dropped activation nuisance) appear to come in the interview process—one of the most powerful TurboTax features, but also sometimes cumbersome. For repeat users, a "welcome back" interview asks about significant life events that would change your tax patterns and modifies the interview accordingly. For all users, checklists at the beginning of interview sections create required tax completion sections. The combination should reduce the number of screens required to complete a form.

Utility Software

Editors' Choices and five-star ratings from a massive 200-item roundup [P22:10]:

- **Backup**: Stomp's BackUp MyPC 4.85 ($69) and Dantz' Retrospect Professional 6.5 ($129) for traditional use, Connected TLM ($15/month for 4GB) for online backup, Iomega Automatic Backup 1.0.2 ($40) for real-time backup, TrueImage 6.0 ($45) for drive imaging, GoBack 3 Deluxe ($30) for system rollback.
- **Migration**: Desktop DNA Professional 4.5 ($39).
- **Disk tools**: PowerQuest's PartitionMagic 8.0 ($70) for partitioning, Heidi's Eraser (free) for cleanup, Kroll Ontrack's EasyRecovery Lite 6.0 ($89) for data recovery, PKZip for Windows Standard Edition 6.0 ($30) for compression, Executive Software's Diskeeper 7.0 SE Home Edition ($30) for defragmentation, V Communications' SystemSuite 4.0 ($60) as a utility suite.
- **File management**: V's PowerDesk Pro ($40), which I continue to recommend.
- **Internet utilities**: EdenSoft's PopUpCop 2.0.2.31 ($20) to control popups, SpeedBit's Download Accelerator Plus Premium 5.3 ($30) and Headlight's Lightning Download 1.1.1 ($20) to manage downloads, Gaim 0.61 (free) and Trillian 1.0 ($25) as instant messenger add-ons.
- **Networking**: GFI LANguard Network Security Scanner ($249 for 50 IP addresses) for security assessment, Woodstone's Servers Alive (free for 10 hosts, $99 for up to 1,000) for server monitoring, Magneto's MegaPing ($49) as a toolbox.
- **Microsoft Office tools**: Cell Color Assistant ($20) and The Sheet Navigator ($30) as Excel add-ons, LiveWeb (free) for PowerPoint, Corex' CardScan 6.0.4 ($79) for Outlook.
- **System utilities**: RegCleaner (free) for registry cleanup, DisplayMate for Windows ($69) for display tuning.
- **Printing utilities**: FinePrint 4.80 ($40).
- **Screen capture utilities**: TechSmith's SnagIt 6.2 ($40) for screen capture, Rendersoft's CamStudio 2.0 (free) for screen recording.
- **Keyboard and macro**: MJMSoft's KeyText 2000 ($25).

This roundup of antivirus and spyware programs [W21:7] includes unsurprising Best Buys. Antivirus: Norton AntiVirus 2003. Anti-spyware: Lavasoft Adaware Plus 6 and Spybot Search & Destroy 1.2.

This roundup of popup and antispyware programs [C28:8] gives the usual Editors' Choice to Spybot Search & Destroy, and another to Edensoft PopUpCop 2.0 ($20), but only for Internet Explorer.

A roundup of anti-spam tools [P22:20] yields no Editors' Choice for personal use (but Norton AntiSpam 2004 was highest-rated). Brightmail AntiSpam 5.1 and Postini Perimeter Manager share honors as enterprise tools. These corporate tools aren't cheap: Brightmail costs $1,499 per year for up to 49 users; Postini $15 to $20 per user per year.

Another roundup of PC protection tools in several categories [P22:21]: Norton AntiVirus 2004 is the Editors' Choice for antivirus software. Norton Personal Firewall 2004 and ZoneAlarm Pro 4.0 share honors for personal firewalls. Norton Internet Security 2004 is the Editors' Choice as a security suite—not surprisingly, since it combines NAV and Norton Personal Firewall (and adds Norton AntiSpam).

Video and Web Conferencing

Is videoconferenging ready for real-world use? *PC Magazine* seems to think so, with the article title "Videoconferencing: Look again." [P22:22] Two sets of software receive Editors' Choices. SightSpeed Video Messenger ($30 per user per month with no time limits, no charge for 10 minutes a day/100 minutes a month) is recommended for basic videoconferencing. VidiTel costs $35 per month per user and offers a more sophisticated videoconferencing solution. If you just want to see whether those little camcorders and robust access make videoconferencing worthwhile, the article suggests trying one of the IM clients: MSN Messenger or Yahoo! Messenger.

"Take a meeting online" [P22:23] considers web conferencing software (and adds another unfortunate neologism, "webinar" for web seminar). All four

tools reviewed include web-based PowerPoint presentations, document sharing and annotation, application sharing, whiteboarding, and chat. Other features differ, and if you're interested you really should read the article—I think you need to be a would-be user to make sense of all this. Editors' Choice goes to WebEx Meeting Center ($100 per seat per month standard, $200 pro), which already has more than 60 percent of the market.

A Copyright Perspective
Compulsory Licensing

I've discussed compulsory licensing before. It's an idea that won't quite go away. LawMeme has a series of commentaries on aspects of compulsory licensing, including three in early October 2003:

- An October 3 posting raises the novel question, "What is music?" Consider John Cage's "masterpiece, *4'33"*—a stretch of silence lasting just over four and a half minutes. Or Yoko Ono's half-minute toilet flush track on the album *Fly*. Or music created from DNA sequences… Are those all music? Should they, then, be compensated under a compulsory license scheme? In fact, *any* digital file can be rendered as a .wav file, which makes it music of a sort. All it takes is a little program to add a 44-byte header and save the file with a .wav extension. (Yes, there is such a program, "Baudio," with a decoder to remove the 44-byte header and extension.) Any data—software, documents, pornography—could be a piece of music, given that there are no real definitions of what constitutes music and what doesn't. The posting—it's a four-page article—suggests an alternative, particularly for compulsory licensing schemes that factor the length of a composition into compensation: Steganography, where the real digital file (a photo, a program, whatever) is embedded in a "real" piece of music by modifying certain bits in certain bytes. (This is easy to conceptualize. If you wanted to transmit a 100-character text message, for example, you could take a digitized photo and modify the bit patterns so that the last bit of each byte was changed to "0" or "1" to spell out your message—that is, if the receiving program ignored the first seven bits of each byte, it would restore the message. That would only require 800 bytes for 100 characters, a tiny little photograph—and the differences in image rendition would be minor, if not insignificant. In music, the effect would be essentially-inaudible changes in loudness. You could use a fancier scheme, of course.)
- An October 7 discussion continued this discussion, responding to a post by Derek Slater regarding the first one. Slater basically says not to worry: If it's copyrightable, it should be compensated. But compensation also includes "use"—and, given that you really don't know what's being copied, how do you define use? (Much of this discussion has to do with gaming a system: That is, manipulating monitoring systems so that creators get more or less compensation than actual usage would justify.) The discussion goes on—and if you're at all interested in compulsory licensing, it's worth a read. Derek Slater gets into trouble when he tries to distinguish between songs and "sounds," and uses as a "sound" the Windows bootup sound. Except that the Windows 95 sound is a composed piece of music, created by Brian Eno, and more recent Windows bootup sounds are clearly music. (According to comments from Eno quoted in this post, Eno actually created 84 "tiny little jewels" in the process—given that the piece of music had to be 3.25 seconds long, it was an interesting compositional challenge.) So: Should Eno be compensated for all those plays? If not, why not? And how about the theme for the *NBC Nightly News*, written by John Williams in 1985 (on commission)?
- The next post, also October 7, discusses the issue of whether compulsory licensing should move beyond music to all media. Derek Slater believes that other industries would only support compulsory licenses if either the music system worked great or it worked very badly and they thought they could find ways to benefit from those flaws. But the LawMeme writer believes the *public* would push for broader compulsory licensing—and that may raise broader issues. He offers examples of why arguments for compulsory licensing for music also apply to other media.

Ed Felten is uneasy about compulsory licensing for various reasons (explained at Freedom to Tinker). "I've said before that I'm skeptical about their practicality. One reason for my skepticism is a concern about the measurement problem, and especially about the technical details of how measurement would be done." That's from the first paragraph of a December 10 posting. He goes on to note that advocates tell us what they want to measure, but "as far

as I know, nobody has gone into any detail about *how* they would do the measurement." He doesn't believe there's an easy answer and wants a serious proposal with technical details that covers existing, new, and diverse platforms. "The devil is in the details; so show us the details of your plans." Comments on the posting tend to dismiss the problem, either because broadcasters and webcasters are required to keep detailed records, because "you can easely track how many times a song gets purchased or downloaded" (from someone who assumes that all downloading will be from "shops," even though the whole point of compulsory licensing is to compensate for P2P networks), because the PC music player could do it—although none of them do—and you could "simply generalize this to all MP3 players and portable devices," or, well, "who cares?" One person does question the revenue side: Where does that "wonderful pool of money" come from?

Why Should You Care?

Why should librarians care? Either the compulsory licensing revenue pool would come from general taxes or from added internet service fees. In either case, there would be an indirect effect on funds available for other services. And if the concept—which, effectively, is that the government enforces the idea that every use of a piece of music results in compensation to the creator—is accepted for music, it would soon be expanded to books and the like: One way or another, there would be a fee for each circulation. (That's not paranoid; the UK has such a system already.)

I have other problems with compulsory licensing. First, I don't believe such a drastic solution is called for at this point. Apple's iTunes offers some indication that people *will* do the right thing if it's convenient, even though I regard iTunes as overpriced (given that it's offering heavily-compressed music and that, for a full album, you're paying what a physical CD with uncompressed music, artwork, and liner notes *should* cost). If 40% of the minority of home Internet users who were downloading on an infringing basis have stopped, then compulsory licensing means that the honest majority is indirectly subsidizing the dishonest minority: We would all pay heavier Internet fees to account for the actions of a minority.

Jessica Litman's Take

Litman, Jessica, "Sharing and stealing," early draft version (November 24, 2003). 32 p. www.law.wayne.edu/litman/papers/sharing&stealing.pdf

"The purpose of copyright is to encourage the creation and mass dissemination of a wide variety of works." Well, SCO and some of the "copyright industries" would assert that the purpose is to assure maximum profit for corporations, but Litman knows the law and the way it *should* be. She goes on to note that dissemination used to require a significant capital investment—and that digital distribution changes that. "Digital distribution, thus, invites us to reconsider the assumptions underlying the conventional copyright model."

Litman looks at the odd, complex mesh of ways that facts (inherently not coyprightable) now get distributed and wonders what lessons it could hold for music and other creative distribution.

I'm not providing a coherent summary here because I need to read the article again, at leisure and at length (and, of course, in print form), before I really know what to say about it. Meanwhile, I **recommend** that you download, print, and read the article if you're interested in the whole complex of possible alternative models for compensating musicians and other artists. That recommendation is *not* an endorsement of Litman's conclusions (not that my endorsement or denunciation would count for much), at least not yet—but it *is* an assertion that Litman writes well, thinks better, and knows her stuff. You may wind up wildly enthusiastic about her suggestions; you may wind up disagreeing; later drafts of her paper might take different approaches.

The Library Stuff

A small group because time and space conspired against the rest. Sitting in the folder: A trio of interesting articles from *D-Lib* January 2004; a quintet of possibly-interesting items from *Threshold* Winter 2004; a 23-page article, "User misconceptions of information retrieval systems," by Hsinchun Chen and Vasant Dhar; and *Guidelines for Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) Displays* from IFLA, a September 30, 2003 draft. Some will show up in later issues. Some probably won't. For now, here are a few items, all **recommended.**

Block, Marylaine, "For a great read, head to the…gov docs collection? Yep." *Ex Libris* 198. marylaine.com/exlibris/

Here's a gem, particularly if you're one of those who never realized how much good stuff comes from government agencies. It started when Aimee Quinn attended a talk by Nancy Pearl (yes, *that* Nancy Pearl) about *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every*

Mood, Moment and Reason and asked why there weren't any government documents in the book.

> Pearl said it hadn't occurred to her that government documents could be read and enjoyed, and not just consulted for reference. But she said that if Quinn could present her with a list of genuinely interesting, readable government publications, she'd be willing to include some in the next edition of her book.

Quinn, moderator of GOVDOC-L, tossed out the challenge. Block reprints part of the resulting list, with "loving descriptions" eliminated. The boring old government documents include *50 Birds of Town and City* (illustrated), *The Adventure of Echo the Bat*, *America's centenarians. Reports of interviews with social security beneficiaries who have lived to 100*, *The Most Striking of Objects: the Totem Poles of Sitka National Historical Park*…and *lots* more. Great stuff.

Block, Marylaine, "Browsing, yes. Finding, no." *Ex Libris* 201. marylaine.com/exlibris/

This is a gentle rejoinder to "people who claim that it's easier to find what they need at bookstores than in libraries." It's an excellent discussion and matches my own experience (bookstores are great if you're always looking for the same kind of book and planning to keep them; otherwise, give me libraries any day). Block goes on to point out other similarities and differences between bookstores and libraries—and a few pointers that libraries might yet pick up from bookstores. Excellent.

Bowman, Vibiana, "The battle of getting an article published…Notes from the front." January 2004, www.liscareer.com.

Does this five-page article replace *First Have Something to Say*? I hope not (and that's not Bowman's intent), but it's a good list of considerations for "actually getting [your article] into print." Bowman's seven rules begin "Learn to schmooze" and end "Persevere," and include a couple of rules that come *before* you write the article. I could nit-pick. For example, "Write as much as possible" is only a good rule if you treat "as possible" carefully, and I'm not sure that "having to balance your offers and timeframes" is all that "enviable" a position, particularly if you're literally overloaded. True overload leads to missed deadlines which tend to undermine your reputation. But it's a good list, one I would have welcomed 25 years ago and respect now. Bowman points out some things I missed entirely.

Orlowski, Andrew, "A quantum theory of internet value," *The Register,* December 18, 2003.

Why "library stuff"? Because Orlowski, in commenting on why Google now sucks and related topics, concludes that "taxonomies also have been proved to have value" and that Google doesn't (can't) provide the kind of authoritative results that a real library would. "True archivists have a far better sense of meta-data than any computerized system can conjure." The title of the piece refers to a theory that Orlowski admits is fatuous; read it for yourself. In the end, he concludes that the magical internet we thought would come to pass, back a decade ago, never really existed. "What we must value is the information archives we have now. If in doubt—ask a librarian, while you can still find one."

Plotkin, Arthur, "Who loves you like the library?" and "10 cool library maneuvers for writers," *The Writer* November 2003. www.writermag.com.

What can I say? This brief ode to libraries explains why writers need them and what they do that the web can't do (or can't do as well), from reaching into the full human record to using "user-friendly information experts"—librarians. He notes that books "give meaning and order to detail," that many libraries have special collections for deep research on narrow topics ("No one writes credible history, science or social science from the Web"), and concludes: "If the Web were to shut down tomorrow, we would survive as writers. Without libraries…I wouldn't bet on it." The sidebar offers suggestions for going beyond ordinary library services. Admittedly, Arthur Plotnik is not a complete outsider (he served as editor of *American Libraries*, for example), but that doesn't weaken this excellent piece.

Plosker, George R., "The information industry revolution: Implications for librarians," *Online* 16:22 (November/December 2003): 16-22.

I'm immediately skeptical of articles that start like this:

> Ah, the "L" word. The profession has been debating whether or not to use the "L word"—librarian—for quite some time…

And I'm rarely thrilled when special librarians take it upon themselves to decide what matters for libraries in general. Fact is, this article is *mostly* about corporate libraries and special librarians, and mostly reports on a panel of "gurus of the SLA world" at the Special Libraries Association. I've heard one of those "gurus," also labeled an "industry luminary" here, quite recently; it's fair to say that I was underwhelmed. (No, not Gary Price: I respect his work and I've never heard him speak.)

Misgivings aside (and ignoring an unfortunate formatting decision that makes the article tiresome

to read in print), it's a fairly interesting report. But, you know, at least for public and academic librarians, there's a *lot* more to libraries and librarianship than "a world of information compiled and organized by information professionals."

Price, Gary, "What Google teaches us that has nothing to do with searching," *Searcher* November 2003. www.infotoday.com/searcher/nov03/price.shtml

In this "Webmastry" column, Price notes the phenomenon of people who think that they don't need libraries now that they have Google—and what librarians can do about it. Not "fighting Google"—that's not the point, as well as being nearly impossible. Being familiar with the other innovative search engines is one step, but Price is primarily interested in promoting the special values of libraries and librarians. He offers a set of eight starting points that's decidedly worth reading.

"The value of libraries: The mind and the market, part two," *commons-blog* December 15, 2003, and "Libraries and the information commons," December 3, 2003 (white paper prepared for ALA OITP).

Given my grumpy comments about "information commons" and the Midwinter open forum elsewhere in this issue, why am I recommending these (and other *commons-blog* entries)?

Because I suspect I may be wrong in objecting to "information commons" as a formulation. I dislike "information" as a catchall for resources, stories, facts, and the many services that libraries and librarians offer; I think the word itself has been stripped of meaning and that its remaining implications narrow the actual world of librarianship. (That's half of my problem with "information literacy" as well, and I'm equally inclined to suspect I'm wrong there.)

For those less hung up on the term, *commons-blog* and what I expect to be a growing number of documents at related sites are worth reading.

I have more than a dozen red marks on my copy of "Libraries and the information commons." I'm going to ignore them for now. Make up your own mind. If you believe the concept makes sense, join in the process.

Interesting and Peculiar Products

It's Not a PDA, It's a PEO

Would you pay $700 for a "personal entertainment organizer" from Sony? The Clié PEG-UX50 is actually lighter than some other Sony PDAs (6oz.) albeit a little large (4.1x3.4x0.7"), but it's quite a combination: 640x480 onboard camera (built into a hinge between the screen and a thumb keyboard), MP3, 480x320 color screen, and Bluetooth and 802.11b Wi-Fi support. There's 104MB of memory: 16MB for user files and programs, 29MB for multimedia files, 16MB for backup. It's a Palm OS unit, not Pocket PC, and as the four-dot review in *PC Magazine* 22:17 notes, it "looks like a doll-sized laptop."

Plausibly-Priced Big LCD Displays

PC Magazine 22:17 (October 1, 2003) includes first-look reviews of two sizable LCDs at plausible prices. The 19" Dell UltraSharp 1901FP ($749) offers relatively low resolution for its size, 1280x1024; this and some other compromises justify a three-dot rating. For $1,300, you can move up to the 21" Samsung SyncMaster 213T—1600x1200, a wide viewing angle, and a rotating screen with Pivot Pro software. As the four-dot review notes, a 21"-viewable CRT would be huge, bulky, and awkward; this unit is expensive, but it's light and slender.

Super Slurper to the Rescue?

Louise Knapp had a fascinating little story at *Wired News* on September 30: "It sucks, but that's a good thing." "It" is Super Slurper, "a starch-based polymer with a powerful thirst," a powder that can absorb more than 2,000 times its weight in water "instantaneously." The Agricultural Research Service developed it decades ago; it's used in diapers, wound dressings, oil filters, and elsewhere.

Now a company's thought of a new use: Drying waterlogged books. According to Nicholas Yeager of Artifex Equipment, a quarter of a million library books are damaged each year in the U.S. by water from flooding or burst pipes. The current recovery techniques—freeze-drying and air-drying—are slow and expensive. Theoretically, sheets embedded with Super Slurper could offer a fast (10 minute?) and cheap way to handle the problem. It's not ready for market just yet, but it sounds interesting. The piece quotes Jan Merrill-Oldham at Harvard: "If we could apply this technology to lots of books at once—well, you fantasize about these things." This is one that I sincerely hope is as promising as it sounds and works out well—and Merrill-Oldham's cautious enthusiasm is highly encouraging.

Flexplay Redux

Remember Flexplay, the slow version of *Mission: Impossible*'s tape recordings? You buy a DVD in a vacuum-packed closure. Open it, start playing it, and 48 hours later it's gone. Well, the disc is still there,

ready to occupy landfill space, but a resin in the disc has reacted with atmosphere and made the DVD unplayable.

Our friends at Disney (Buena Vista Home Entertainment, the home video distributor for all Disney-related studios) thought this was Neato. "EZ-D" discs went on sale in grocery and convenience stores in Illinois, Texas, South Carolina and Kansas: $7 for such movies as *The Hot Chick* and *Sweet Home Alabama*. Some electronics retailers had them too. The discs went out to the stores. And, apparently, sat there, according to an October 28 *Wired News* story by Katie Dean. One store sold 15 or 20 of them in a month. Wonder why?

Some customers figured out that $2 for a rental DVD is cheaper than $7, even if you're a day late and pay another $2. One clerk suggested that customers might be worried about the quality of the DVD: "Seeing as how it self-destructs, can it really be that good?" A Charleston, South Carolina retailer noted that customers "think it's ridiculous. They won't pay that type of money for something that's going to vaporize." but this guy thinks, "Probably in a yuppie market it would do excellent." I'm guessing there's a good reason Disney isn't testing this in California or New York or some other "yuppie" market…and "not making the test too easy" isn't it. Some of the Charleston market's EZ-Ds have been shoplifted—with the shoplifters tearing the disc out of the package to steal it. Which, of course, starts the deterioration.

Doing MP3 CD Audiobooks Right

A few years ago, I suggested (in an *American Libraries* article) that it would make a lot of sense to do audiobooks in MP3 format on CD-ROMs: You could fit an unabridged book on one CD-ROM, given that voice could be compressed heavily without losing much quality. By the time the article appeared, the first such audiobooks were on the market.

At the time, I noted the missing piece to make the format work really well: Players that could bookmark several discs, so you could pick up where you left off even if you needed to deal with more than one book at a time.

That day has come, according to a piece in *AudioFile* for August/September 2003. (I don't know much more about the magazine: I picked up the sample issue at North Carolina Library Association and ripped the page out to bring home.) Soulmate Audiobooks, in cooperation with Shipstone Group, has released the Audiofy Player and the Soul Player.

The Audiofy Player is software for PCs and Macs to make it easy to play MP3 CD audiobooks (or other MP3 CDs, for that matter), with chapter and page navigation and bookmarking. In some ways, the more interesting device is the Soul Player: A portable CD player "created exclusively with audiobooks in mind." It displays author, title, page numbers, and playback time, recognizes audiobook formats when appropriate CDs are started—and "holds its place on up to 12 different CDs." I don't know the price or other characteristics, but this is a sensible device, one that should serve libraries well.

Packing Your Monitor

Here's one that makes a lot of sense for some purposes: the NEC MultiSync LCD1765. It's a $550 17" LCD display (1280x1024 resolution) designed so you can pack it in a shoulder bag to take with you. The stand folds flat against the back of the unit and a glass sheet protects the panel itself (and reduces glare). A *PC Magazine* review (November 11, 2003) gives it four dots; image testing yielded generally good results. The unit lacks speakers, USB ports, and pivot capabilities—but portability is the key selling point here.

High Resolution, Low Price

Five megapixels for $400: That's the big news in the new Gateway DC-T50 digital camera. (Yes, Gateway's in that market now.) The unit earns three dots in a November 11, 2003 *PC Magazine* review. Strong points: solid metal body, convenient control layout, fast startup time, good LCD screen, fast focusing in bright light, and excellent outdoor results. Weaknesses: Problems with focusing in low light and with some indoor shots. 3X optical zoom, average battery life (some 200 pictures in these tests, with extensive use of the LCD screen).

Or maybe you'd prefer a 6.3 megapixel digital SLR for less than $1,000—also a breakthrough of sorts. The October 28, 2003 *PC Magazine* gives four dots to the Canon EOS Digital Rebel, which accepts all Canon EOS lenses—but also has a mount that could lead to "newer, smaller, and cheaper lenses designed specifically for the Digital Rebel." Unfortunately, the EOS Digital Rebel still uses a sensor that's two-thirds the size of a 35mm frame, favoring telephoto purposes but making wide-angle use more difficult. For an extra $100, the Digital Rebel comes with an 18mm to 55mm lens—which equates to the very popular 28- to 90mm. range in standard terms. That's a good deal for a quality SLR lens.

$10,000 for a Laser Printer?

Yes—and that may be a bargain. The VersaLaser from Universal Laser Systems is a laser printer of sorts, and as far as your computer is concerned it's

just another USB printer. The difference is that the laser is 25 watts, a *lot* stronger than any regular printer—and this unit "prints" on paper, wood, plastic, leather, some metals, and even marble. It's a cutting/engraving/etching system—but because it "looks like" a printer instead of a machine tool, you can use it with everyday software such as CorelDraw or even Word. I'm not sure that many readers would have plausible applications for this device; if you think you might, read Bill Machrone's ExtremeTech column in the November 11, 2003 *PC Magazine* for more information.

3D Notebooks—No Glasses Required

That's the promise of Sharp's new Actius RD3D, a $3,299 notebook with a Pentium 4-2800, 512MB SDRAM, 60GB disk, DVD-RAM drive…and a unique 15" XGA display. The display has *two* LCD panels with a parallax barrier between them. Most of the time, you use the front display, a 1024x768 unit. When software supports 3D, the rear display and barrier come into play. The rear unit is monochrome; the resulting display is 512x768, but with apparent depth. If you're interested, check the December 30, 2003 *PC Magazine* for a full-page four-dot review. It's brutally expensive as a notebook (and it's heavy at 10.2 pounds, 11.8 pounds travel weight), but if you're on the bleeding edge, you should expect to bleed money.

Ripping Without the PC?

Sound & Vision for January 2004 has a two-page test report of TDK's DA-9000 CD/hard disk recorder. This $400 device is a standalone component with a 20GB hard drive, CD burner, portion of the CDDB/Gracenote database installed on the disk, and PC connection (to retrieve other CDDB information or download already-ripped recordings). This is presumably intended to appeal to those millions of people who really want to store all their music on a hard disk and create custom CDs, but don't know how to use a PC or Mac or find iTunes and MusicMatch too complicated.

The devil, as always, is in the details. "Normal" ripping actually consists of recording in uncompressed form: "When the unit is later placed in standby mode, the audio is converted to the selected data format and the interim uncompressed copy is deleted." Why go this roundabout route? Because converting to MP3 is "time consuming" on this device, where straight copying is rapid (they don't say how rapid). Now, I find that MusicMatch 8.0 Plus will rip a 70-minute CD (e.g., one of the "Essentials" discs) to 196K or 320K MP3 in about three minutes on my computer (which by today's standards is entry-level, with a 2.2GHz Pentium 4): Compression is at full CD reading speed. Well, maybe that's because MusicMatch does inferior compression? Nope: Quite the opposite. David Ranada used MusicMatch 8 for comparison. At the more aggressive of the TDK's two compression ratios (128K), the TDK gave "swirly" or "swishy" qualities to most tracks—much more so than MusicMatch. (Those adjectives describe the faults I find in most 128K MP3, which is why I use much higher rates.) Even at 320K, the highest bitrate you'd ever use for MP3, TDK's encoding wasn't up to snuff: "very good but not quite as good as that produced by MusicMatch." And, unsurprisingly, TDK *forces* the two-second gaps between tracks of ripped material, even when recorded back to CD; with MusicMatch, that's a user option (since some CDs, such as operas and rock concerts, don't have such gaps between tracks).

So you're paying $400+ to get a small hard disk, a CD-RW burner of unspecified speed, a box—and software that's nowhere near as fast or effective as MusicMatch Plus. ($20 of hard disk space for non-portable use is worth $20 to $40; a decent CD-RW burner costs $30 to $50 tops; MusicMatch Plus with a lifetime upgrade license goes for $40.) All so you can avoid using a PC, at the expense of sound quality and convenience. Such a bargain.

Speaking of Bargains…

OK, this is sniping; after all, we don't own a $3,000 refrigerator or $2,500 professional stove either. But I was a little stunned by the January 2004 *Sound & Vision* review—a *rave* review—for the iCEBOX FlipScreen kitchen entertainment center from Salton. It's "so cool" because it combines a DVD/CD/MP3/WMA player, FM tuner, TV tuner, and 12" 600x800 touch screen LCD display in a two-foot by one-foot box (less than 4" deep when you're not using the drop-down screen) that mounts under a kitchen cabinet. Oh, and there's a wireless keyboard, since it's also a web browser. Pretty neat, I guess—although the browser is just that (there's no hard disk and the *only* computer functions are browsing and media playback), and you can't use AOL or any other ISP that requires its own software. The price of this goodness? A mere $2,300. "The iCEBOX FlipScreen is one of those products you think you don't need until after you've lived with it—and then don't know how you ever lived without it." (Of course, I wasn't entirely aware that the kitchen is "now the central gathering point in most homes," so maybe it does make sense to spend a small fortune on a little TV with DVD/CD playback and web browsing. Particularly since you can mount it under a cabinet, virtually the definition of cool.)

Fun Travel and Low-Def Video

Computer Shopper just loves the Archos AV320 Video Recorder ($600), giving it 8.3 points and an Editors' Choice mark in a December 2003 review. What you have here is a chunky MP3 player (4.5x3.75x1.25"), and a hefty one at that (12.6oz.), with a 20GB hard disk—and with a 3.8" 64K-color screen covering most of the front. The review doesn't state the resolution of that screen, which should be somewhere between 280x210 pixels and 360x270 pixels, but maybe that's just as well. The device only stores MP4 video, which it can capture directly from TV, DVD, or VHS—and it stores "40 hours of video on its 20GB hard drive." That's 500MB per hour, which is just not going to be high performance under any circumstances. Probably great for viewing on such a tiny screen, though. One interesting point, and a surprising one given the MPAA and others: "The AV320 sidesteps video copy protection, delivering clean duplicates of DVD and VHS movies in MPEG-4 format."

Epson Stylus Photo 900

I wasn't sure whether to note this here or as a Quicker Take. The Epson Stylus Photo 900 costs around $170 and should do a great job on photos. I don't know whether it uses the same DuraBrite inks as my Epson CX5200 (they don't smear and the color inks use pigment, not dye; the colors should last for decades on good paper), since the item I'm working from isn't a full review. What's interesting about the Photo 900, though, is that it has a special carrier for CD-R and DVD-Rs: You can print your label directly on the disc. That's great—but it requires special printable discs, which (according to Steve Bass' January 2004 *PC World* rave for the printer) cost $0.50 more than regular CD-Rs (that is, almost three times as much!), or $4 more for DVDs (again, almost three times as much as a regular DVD-R). Fellowes Neato self-adhesive labels, and several brands of competitor, typically cost around $0.20 per label when you buy 50 sheets (2 labels per sheet), sometimes less on sale. But, sez Bass, the printable CD-Rs mean "there's no paper and glue to peel off the disc and gum up your player."

Which raises the question: How often do properly applied disc labels come off in a player? Is this a real problem, or a way to sell overpriced discs? I've been using Neato labels (and the application device) for more than 18 months now, producing close to a hundred CD-Rs (from my own CDs). I can't see how the labels—which don't *quite* reach to the outer edge of the disc, and leave a wide margin at the hub—could accidentally peel off; I'm not sure that I could peel them off if I tried. (Steve Bass responded by saying that one of his buddies had it happen once, and included a photo. No way of knowing whether the label was properly applied: There are brands that don't include a really good applicator. I've also read that CD label adhesives have improved significantly in the last year or two.)

Friendster and its Foes

The January 20, 2004 *PC Magazine* includes a review of five social-networking services—Friendster, Friendzy, LinkedIn, Ryze, and Tribe.net. There's no Editors' Choice, particularly since all but Ryze are listed as beta versions. Friendster has about 25 times the "membership" of the others put together. Overall, all of the services *except* Friendzy earn four-dot ratings, with highest subratings going to Friendster for population, LinkedIn and Tribe.net for appropriate privacy and Friendzy for user profiles.

There's a lot to be said for networking (speaking as one who was never much good at it). Do digital "six degrees of separation" services actually foster wider networking, or is something else going on? "Friend" and "acquaintance" are very different words, fuzzy as both are. The acquaintance of an acquaintance of my acquaintance could be someone I'd detest—but the possibilities are interesting. I honestly don't know what to make of this whole phenomenon (and I've neither been invited to nor chosen to join any of them). I wonder whether they're tools that really only work if you're wired the right way?

The Details

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, Volume 4, Number 3, Whole Issue 46, ISSN 1534-0937, is written and produced by Walt Crawford, a senior analyst at RLG. Opinions herein do not reflect those of RLG. Comments should be sent to wcc@notes.rlg.org.
Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large is copyright © 2004 by Walt Crawford: Some rights reserved.

Original material in this work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/1.0 or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

URL: cites.boisestate.edu/civ4i3.pdf