Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Volume 8, Number 10: October 2008 ISSN 1534-0937 Walt Crawford

Trends & Quick Takes

Improving Patents?

There's a problem with patents—several problems, actually. One set of problems has mostly to do with software patents, and one easy solution would be to return to the days when you couldn't patent an algorithm. That's not likely to happen. Short of that, there are at least two overlapping problems:

- Too many software patents and business method patents are issued for things that were either obvious or already in play.
- Too many "companies" have found it profitable to buy up such patents and license them on threat of lawsuit.

I use "companies" in scare quotes deliberately: To my mind, there's something unsavory about a corporation whose only product is "intellectual property" that the corporation didn't create and doesn't use except for lawsuits and licenses.

The August 2008 *PC Magazine* has a half-page commentary on the tech industry's calls for Congress to reform patents. It includes a telling statement from a Cisco spokesperson: From 2005 to 2007, of 30 patent lawsuits Cisco battled in court, only *one* was brought by a company that *makes* anything. The rest were all "patent trolls," to use one name for pure-IP companies.

Unfortunately, *PC Magazine* blows it in the first two sentences:

> One tech gadget can contain several thousand components, all of which must have individual patents. Tech companies count on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) to protect their products.

But it's not just products, and maybe not *primarily* products; many of the patents involved are for software or business methods. And it's most certainly not the case that every component in a computer must have its own patents. Many don't have patents at all—e.g., the patents on most screws ran out a *long* time ago.

Future of the Internet?

I'm two years late getting to this one—Pew Internet & American Life's September 24, 2006 report, *The Future of the Internet II*. (You can reach it from www.pewinternet.org; it's a 104-page PDF.) Why? Several reasons:

- It's **huge**—104 pages of relatively small type. I didn't make time to prepare a coherent commentary.
- I increasingly find that futurism works best in MY BACK PAGES—and this is 14-year-out futurism (predictions for 2020 in 2006), safely removed from real-world consequences. Not that I've ever seen negative consequences for being consistently wrong about short-term projections! It doesn't seem to interfere with the big-ticket speeches and being treated as gurus. Once you're a guru, you're *always* a guru.
- Did I mention the sheer size of the beast?

Inside This Issue

- Early on, this statement appears: "The Pew Internet & American Life Project and Elon University do not advocate policy outcomes related to the internet." I'm sorry, but given the wording of the scenarios, the groups invited to respond and Pew's objectionable naming in other reports, I no longer accept that neutrality claim at face value. Would that it was true, but Pew comes off as an advocate.

I won't attempt a coherent overall commentary. I will note that the survey involved leading questions—e.g., *suggesting* "Luddites will commit acts of violence and terror" (with that lovely word "Luddite," presumably conveying Pew's meaning of "not as committed to technology as we think they should be). It was a survey of "technology thinkers and stakeholders"—550 "select internet leaders" and other members of the

Internet Society, Association for Computing Machinery, World Wide Web Consortium, Working Group on Internet Governance, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Association of Internet Researchers and Internet2. We're informed that the original set of 550 includes "both stakeholders and skeptics"—but I'm guessing there aren't a whole bunch of skeptics among the "internet leaders," and it's fair to assume the membership groups involved tend much more toward stakeholder than skeptic.

I'm only a little surprised to see 58% of the 742 respondents agree that "Some Luddites/Refuseniks will commit terror acts"—and that these "refuseniks" (another wonderful Pew value-neutral term) will "self-segregate from 'modern society.'" Here's a perfect leading suggestion: "Transparency builds a better world, even at the expense of privacy." Oddly, fewer people agreed than disagreed—and nobody had the third option: "We can improve functional transparency without giving up privacy." How's this one for a loaded scenario—remember, a scenario as *offered by Pew*, not put forth by the respondents?

> **Virtual reality is a drain for some**: By the year 2020, virtual reality on the internet will come to allow more productivity from most people in technology-savvy communities than working in the "real world." But the attractive nature of virtual-reality worlds will also lead to serious addiction problems for many, as we lose people to alternate realities.

Let's say you're sure some people will spend way too much time in virtual reality—but you *don't* believe most people will be "more productive" in virtual reality than in the real world? Do you say Yes or No? In this case, 56% agreed—but I'm not sure just what they were agreeing to. And 52% agreed that by 2020, current national boundaries would "completely blur" as they become replaced by "city-states, corporation-based cultural groupings and/or other geographically diverse and reconfigured human organizations tied together by global networks." That one stuns me: **More than half** of these supposedly knowledgeable people believe that nations will become irrelevant by 2020? *Really*? We're doing so well with the mixes of cultures and ethnic groups in Eastern Europe and Africa and elsewhere…

Maybe it's the same level of digital utopianism that results in 56% agreeing that, 12 years from now, "mobile wireless communications will be available to anyone anywhere on the globe at an extremely low cost." "Extremely low cost" to whom? If 56% of those surveyed believe every person in Africa, Asia and the Middle East will be able to afford usable mobile wireless communications by 2020 (which, *presumptively*, means they have enough to eat, clothes to wear, access to medical care and shelter from the storm—unless you believe mobile wireless is more important than food, health and shelter)—well, wouldn't it be loverly? But even with the Gates Foundation's best efforts, I just don't see how it could happen.

On the flip side, I'm a little surprised that 42% agreed with a scenario that, by 2020, intelligent agents and distributed control "will cut direct human input so completely out of some key activities…that technology beyond our control will generate dangers and dependencies that will not be recognized until it is impossible to reverse them." Really? 42%?

Those are the Big Picture scenarios. There are others, several with such odd mixes of stuff within the scenario that it's surprising there were never more than 7% who didn't respond yes/no.

Individual tidbits

Instead of trying to grok the whole thing, I thought I'd mention a few of the comments from within the report. Some I find bizarre, some realistic, some hopeful in a plausible manner, some…well, you judge.

- **Hal Varian**: "Privacy is a thing of the past. Technologically it is obsolete. However, there will be social norms and legal barriers that will dampen out the worst excesses."
- **Michael Dahan**: "Before 2020, every newborn child in industrialized countries will be implanted with an RFID or similar chip. Ostensibly providing important personal and medical data, these may also be used for tracking and surveillance."
- **Douglas Rushkoff**: "Real interoperability [that is, universal low-cost wireless access] will be contingent on replacing our bias for competition with one for collaboration. Until then, economics do not permit universal networking capability."
- **John Quarterman**: "Internet resources will permit some languages to thrive by connecting scattered speakers and by making existing and new materials in those languages available."
- **Bob Metcalfe**: "A lot of 2020 English will sound Mandarinish." (Both of these notes relate to a scenario in which English becomes so indispensable for the internet that it displaces some languages. Only 42% agreed.)
- **Seth Finkelstein** on out-of-control autonomous technology: "This is the AI bogeyman. It's always around 20 years away, whatever the year."
- **Amos Davidowitz:** "The major problem will be from providers and mining software that have malignant intent."

- **Douglas Rushkoff:** (Re out-of-control autonomous technology) "If you look at the way products are currently developed and marketed, you'd have to say we're already there: human beings have been taken out of the equation."
- **Bob Metcalfe on privacy:** "The trick is not to do anything you're ashamed of."
- **Marc Rotenberg:** "The cost of unlimited transparency will not simply be privacy. It will be autonomy, freedom, and individuality. The personal lives of prisoners are transparent. So, too, is the world of the Borg."
- **Barry Wellman:** "The less one is powerful, the more transparent his or her life. The powerful will remain much less transparent."
- **Barry Wellman** on "complete blurring" of national boundaries: "We still have bodies; we, states and organizations still have territorially-based interests (in the political sense of that word)."
- **Fred Baker:** "Gee, I'd love to see world peace, but I don't believe that the internet alone will be able to accomplish it."
- **David Weinberger:** "The world is flat, but it's also lumpy. We cluster together."

There's lots more in the report. Just for fun, I noted the genders of those who chose to identify themselves, where gender was clear. I came up with 180 men, 48 women, and about 10 cases where it wasn't clear. All things considered, I suppose 79% men/21% women could be worse…but it could be a lot better. (Of the handful of people recognizably from "our field"—librarianship and related areas—a *considerably* higher percentage are women.)

Why do I give Pew such a bad time?

I've been mildly critical of Pew—mostly Internet and American Life, but also some of the other projects—from time to time. I've been *very* critical of the Naming Names study, whatever it might have been called, the one that explicitly demeaned those of us who aren't online and multitasking enough to suit Pew. That wasn't a fluke. I've read reports from conference after conference where Pew's folks delight in using their oh-so-clever terminology.

Realistically, I'm wholly ineffective at giving Pew a bad time. Nobody from Pew has ever responded. As far as I know, nobody at Pew is aware that I exist. Certainly nobody from Pew has attempted to defend their terminology.

So why do I give Pew a bad time? Two reasons:

- **Disappointment**: Pew's projects appear to be well funded and clearly employ intelligent people. I believe they could do much more good for our ability to understand ourselves and one another if they acted as investigators and observers rather than advocates—if they tried a lot harder to avoid leading questions and if they dropped the biased terminology in stating results.
- **Irritation**: Is my life going to be damaged by Pew calling me a Lackluster Veteran? Probably not. The people who didn't hire me last year probably wouldn't have anyway. I doubt that library groups are thinking of asking me to speak but shy away because they find out that I'm not as fond of shiny new things as they'd like their keynoters to be. And, of course, nobody required me to come out and label myself as a Lackluster Veteran. It is, nonetheless, irritating—but not quite as irritating as the second- and third-level results that I see in Pew studies, and the results of slanted questions, being presented as more valid than I believe them to be. There's a lot wrapped up in this little paragraph, and it's unlikely I'll unwrap it any time soon. Let's just say that it's always refreshing, if odd, to see *Consumer Reports* reliability charts that effectively say "there are no significant differences here"—with that clearly spelled out. When you have a sample of 2,000, the *first-level* choices are probably reasonably meaningful (if there are few enough of them)—but once you start stating choices of smaller and smaller subsets of that 2,000 sample, the meaningfulness of the results goes down very rapidly.

In short, I give Pew a bad time because the projects could be so much better than they are. Oh, and because people take the results so seriously…

The HD Watch

Just keeping things up to date on Blu-ray and related developments. Some public libraries already buy and circulate these discs; more will in the future. Meanwhile, Sony's turned out two new reasonably priced Blu-ray players that (finally) have Ethernet connections for internet content ($400 and $500)., and another manufacturer is making low-end Blu-ray players that sell for $250 to $299 (and maybe less) under several brands. *Home Theater*, moving away from its HD DVD bias, now comments on the "pundits, bloggers, and drunks who provide color commentary for format wars" and their speculations on what would kill Blu-ray. Downloads are the obvious answer, but HD downloads don't work very well, particularly given the low broadband rates in most of the U.S. At 1.5mbps (that's megabits, not megabytes), how long would it take to download a 30GB movie (that's gigabytes, not gigabits)—when

other people are also trying to download other movies? I come up with a little over 44 hours, assuming the full 1.5mbps channel is uninterrupted and has no overhead.

The June 2008 *Home Theater* has a three-page "In memoriam: HD DVD," fitting given the magazine's clear preference for that format. The writer thinks the format war should have continued and attributes HD DVD's failure to "lousy marketing" and stressing low price over quality.

Another article in that issue looks at download possibilities, focusing on what's available now. It took the reviewer 12 hours to download a high-def movie from iTunes on Apple TV (figure $6 to get a 24-hour viewing period) and 15 hours to download the same movie to an Xbox 360 (similar price). What about video quality? Well, if you're not paying attention, the movies looked about the same—but if you're *serious* about picture quality in a movie, "Blu-ray is the only choice." And, of course, renting via Netflix (which offers Blu-ray for the same price as regular DVDs) is cheaper and doesn't limit you to a 24-hour viewing period.

PC World looks at high-def options in its July 2008 issue. Among Blu-ray players, it gives the Best Buy to Philips' $400 BDP7200/37, beating out the PlayStation 3—and a sidebar covers download options, loaded with "gotchas" and clearly not equal to Blu-ray quality.

The July 2008 *Home Theater* reports the wholly-unsurprising news that Universal was starting to release Blu-ray discs—and, true to form, the writer questioned whether Universal's Blu-rays would be as good as their HD DVDs.

Invisible Gifts

Marylaine Block's August 17, 2007 *ExLibris* offers a nice counterpoint to my grumpy "when did creative work become worthless?" (BIBS & BLATHER, *C&I* 8:7, July 2008). You'll find Block's column at marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib304.html and a followup at marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib305.html.

A little of Block's original column:

> We are endlessly told that "Information wants to be free," and we so take for granted getting our information for free online that that idea actually seems to make sense. We forget that "free to users" doesn't mean it's free, or even inexpensive, for the people who put it there.
>
> Information doesn't put itself online and pay the freight for doing so. Human beings, and the organizations they run, pay the real costs of making information free: the labor, server charges, connections, bulk mail services, and the salaries of tech gurus…
>
> That's why I always recommend training students to ask, of any web site, "Why are the site's creators giving this away for free? What are they getting out of it that's worth the costs of putting it online?"

She offers seven possible answers, including some that are entirely praiseworthy and some that may be less so. Then she considers her own free information, with the note that she spends $3,000 a year on her server and bulk mail. (I spend a *lot* less than that, by the way—by more than an order of magnitude. Did I mention LISHost lately?) Why is it worth it to her?

> Passion for the cause is probably my strongest reason. I'm selling a viewpoint: I want libraries to survive, I believe they have to change and adapt in order for that to happen, and I point librarians to ideas and practices that will help them do that.
>
> And since I am a librarian, giving away free information is simply what I do. When I come across a nifty web site I could have used in my days at the reference desk, I just **have** to share it. When I see libraries doing wonderful things that other libraries could imitate, I **have** to tell you about them.
>
> I do have to survive, though, and the money I live on comes from my writing…and from the presentations I deliver to librarians' organizations..
>
> I have been invited to do both of those things because I built my reputation by giving my ideas away for free online. Writing is how I organize my ideas and understand what I think…

Her list of possible motives for "free" is interesting. Her own take, also.

I'll miss *ExLibris*—which Block stopped writing in April 2008, although the archives are still available.

The Purloined Bibliography

That's the title of Clement Vincent's "first person" piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* Careers section; you'll find it at chronicle.com/jobs/news/2007/07/2007071601c.htm. It's an odd story. Briefly:

- Vincent assembled a bibliography dedicated to a minor figure in early modern studies, some years back, as his first "postdissertation project." He put the bibliography online.
- Over the years he updated the bibliography, with a slowdown when he and his wife took teaching assignments in their university's study-abroad program.
- When he returned, he found that a foreign publisher had brought out a bibliography on the topic and volunteered to review the book. When he got the review copy, he was astonished that they'd found pretty much everything he'd put in his own bibliography.
- And then he realized something was amiss:

> My eyes alighted on a strange entry on page 376 of the book. A few seconds later, my very pregnant wife, propped up with pillows on the couch in our living room, heard me shout excitedly from our study, "I've caught them! I've got 'em! They took from my Web site!"
>
> The entry in the volume that caught my attention identified a particular article as falling on pages "**-70." I had listed that article on my online bibliography in the exact same way. Before writing the entry for my Web site, I had lost the first few pages of the article, so I had used two asterisks as placeholders until I could track down the article again. My idiosyncratic reference had been repeated verbatim in the published bibliography!

So he went looking for other examples—and found them. "Every error, omission, or idiosyncratic entry that appeared on my Web site also appeared in the volume." As did, he realized, editorial material that he'd *added* to the bibliography, material that wasn't from the sources. "My annotations were mistakenly taken to be part of the titles of the works and were presented as such in the volume."

There was more to the book than his bibliography—but he felt that his work had been appropriated, pretty much in its entirety, without credit. There was no footnote or any other acknowledgment of his online bibliography, and he says he would have been pleased with such a footnote.

> I finally wrote a letter to the authors and the publisher asserting the dependency of the book on my Web site and appended a 17-page table of evidence. I requested that the publisher republish the book, or a portion of it, with credit to me as a co-editor. I sent the letter by e-mail message as well as by overseas mail and then waited for a response, half worrying that I would be totally ignored by all parties.
>
> Within two days, however, I received an e-mail message from the publishing house inviting discussion regarding two legal issues. The publisher questioned, first, whether a copyright could be asserted for a Web site; and second, whether a bibliography as such could be copyrighted since, presumably, all bibliographies are compilations of previous bibliographies. The message closed with the promise to contact the authors to hear their responses to my letter…
>
> Two weeks later, I received a second e-mail message from the publisher. One of the authors of the volume had "confirmed his regret for what has happened" and noted that a rush in correcting the proofs had "caused the omission" of any reference to my work. I found the author's explanation to be diplomatic at best, but I was gratified at the admission. The publisher followed with an offer to reprint the last portion of the book with my name stated as co-editor…
>
> What have I learned from the experience? My thoughts on *l'affaire bibliographique* are varied, and I am left with two unresolved worries.
>
> First, I am not sure I can call my experiment in open-access publishing a success. I have been thinking about starting a bibliography on another topic. Should I also put it online? I don't know.
>
> Second, there is the issue of the status of the reprint with my name on it. Will it ever be seen by anyone other than my wife, my son, and me? The reprint is not cataloged in any library, and, as far as I can tell, the publishing house isn't selling it… Sure, I'll be going up for tenure in about a year and a half, so I can include it in my tenure packet, but in the larger scholarly community, my name will probably never be associated with the print version of the bibliography.

Vincent (a pseudonym) wasn't asking for money. He was asking for *attribution*, the most fundamental form of respect for someone else's work. Use without attribution is, in essence, plagiarism. Copyright really shouldn't be the issue here; scholarly integrity should be. And yet, when it came time to write the review, Vincent chose to ignore the whole affair, "listed its strengths and weaknesses, and predicted that the volume would become the standard reference work in the field."

Quicker Takes

Sad, in a way, but predictable: "The Sony Trinitron is no more." The patents expired some time back—after all, the first Trinitron appeared in 1968—and Sony stopped producing Trinitrons in 2006 for Japan, in 2007 for the U.S., and now it's dropped them entirely. Not surprising—these days, what few CRT-based TVs are built are low-end or rear-projection—but still, it's the end of an era. The Trinitron was *by far* the most accurate and best-looking TV for decades. My first TV was one of those little 13" Trinitrons, and our current TV is an 11-year-old 32" Trinitron. It's still got such a great picture that we're late adopters for HDTV…

- I'm usually none too fond of the endless "tips & tricks" articles in PC magazines. They seem like a cheap way to fill space, you're probably not going to clip them for later reference and most of the tips are things you won't use often enough to remember. That said, "501 tips for better computing" in the June 2008 *PC Magazine* may be the best of breed. I was surprised at the range of suggestions, including things I really don't think you'd stumble upon yourself (e.g., Vista will generate a well-organized diagnostic report—and you can improve the chances of making legacy software work with some right-click settings).
- In May 2007, John Miedema considered new technology and how it might change our physical relationship with information. I'd point you to the post, but it seems to have

gone missing. He considers the extent to which digital is better for finding information and books (etc.) are better for sustained reading—and wonders whether new technologies could bridge that gap. But he also notes the desire for fixity: For capturing information statically. Does *displaying* information in a static manner play a role here as well? Maybe so: Maybe, even for those who adopt and love ebook readers, there will still be a place for those books on the shelves. Just as TV and the endless mixable images on the internet haven't destroyed the markets for fine art and printed photographs.

- Also in May 2007, Nicholas Carr considered a move by YouTube to split contributors into two groups: superstars who get paid for their videos…and everybody else. The "select group of content creators" get promoted and get help "monetizing" their content. As Carr says, "so much for the myth of the social collective." He recounts a bet with YochaiBenkler, who argues that social media will bring "a quite basic transformation in the world around us" away from paid, professional labor—where Carr believes that social media has avoided pricing only because there wasn't yet a market. "We weren't yet able to assign a value—in monetary terms—to what these workers were doing; we weren't even able to draw distinctions between what they were contributing. We couldn't see the talent for the crowd. Now, though, the amateurs are being sorted according to their individual skills, calculations as to the monetary value of those skills are starting to be made, and a market appears to be taking shape." Is this happening? Certainly in the blogging field, although it's not clear that talent has much to do with success… And it's certainly the case that YouTube does now have two castes, the paid YouTube Partners and everybody else. The basic question: Is Wikipedia—where, essentially, all effort is unpaid—an exception or a case study? As a writer, my inclination is to believe it's an exception. As a blogger…
- Laura Crossett at *lis.dom* (www.newrambler.net/lisdom/) raised a question in an August 15, 2007 post about attempts to label information, to identify sources as authoritative. She notes traditional labels—"this is fair trade coffee," "this won the National Book Critics Circle Award"—and that there's really no equivalent label for information:

> An algorithm might help you trace an IP address and learn the probably identity of a contributor to a wiki, but you'll still need to know something about who that person or entity is and what their biases are before you can know whether their statements are trustworthy. I won't even get into the profound political implications of slapping an "authoritative" label on information, as I trust you've all read Orwell and school history textbooks and so on. But there are days when I think that's what Google is trying to do–not organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful, but organize and filter and, in doing so, suggest an authority to those first ten search results that they may or may not possess. It's almost as if the purpose of organizing all that information is to prohibit critical thinking, not to promote it.

It's an interesting and somewhat scary notion, particularly given the quality of many Google (and other search engine) results for anything other than proper names. Add that to recent studies suggesting that availability of more sources online may be *narrowing* actual reading and citation, and you get some uncomfortable thoughts…

Interesting & Peculiar Products

Hockey Puck HTPC?

PC Magazine gives it an Editors' Choice, so I'll treat it seriously: Sony's $3,000 VAIO VGX-TP25E. It's designed as an HTPC—home theater PC—that is, something you'd have in your living room driving your HDTV. "Hockey puck"? That's right: The PC itself is a 3.6" tall, 10.6" diameter cylinder—a big black hockey puck. It's *really* designed for HDTV: there's no DVI port, but there are HDMI and VGA ports. It's energy efficient—two watts sleeping, 33 watts idling, 50 watts full power—and it's well equipped: 2.1GHz Core 2 Duo, 4GB RAM, 500GB hard disk, 256MB nVidia graphics card, Blu-ray burner, and two ATI Wonder digital cable tuners. Except that the tuners are in an external tower. It comes with a wireless keyboard (trackpad, no mouse) and remote control.

There are some oddities in the review. "The Blu-ray burner is tricky, as you have to lift your discs on and off a spindle in the pop-out tray, running the risk of scratching them." Huh? At what point did slot-loading drives (which can certainly scratch disks) become ubiquitous? Both notebooks in our house have tray-loading DVD burners; so, I'd venture to say, do the bulk of all desktops and notebooks—and set-top DVD players—sold today. There's also the oddity that the reviewer didn't test the cable tuners, but nonetheless reports that "their functionality is a crap shoot and getting them to work can be tricky"—based on *past experience with tuners in similar models*. I'd

never heard of guilt by association in a PC review, but times change. Let's call this one—product and review both—interesting *and* peculiar. Is a giant hockey puck really more design-compatible with TVs and stereos than a rack-size receiver-like box?

The Eee Grows Up?

Sure, the $400 Asus EeePC is a great traveler (yes, I'd love to have one if I traveled more), with two pounds travel weight, no moving parts, enough Linux power for modest work—but also a cramped keyboard and small screen, the flipside of being small and light.

The EeePC 900 is bigger in every way. That may or may not make it better. It's $550, 2.2lb., has an 8.9", 1024x600 pixel screen, doubles the RAM to 1GB and *quintuples* solid-state storage to 20GB. You can get it with XP if you're not a Linux fan and it has a webcam built in (still, of course, no optical drive or hard disk). Still a somewhat cramped keyboard.

HP has a competitor to the Eee—or does it? I've seen lots of editorial coverage suggesting that ultralight inexpensive notebooks really *mean* something when somebody like HP arrives—but if the First Look at HP's 2133 Mini-Note PC in the July 2008 *PC Magazine* is any indication, I have to wonder whether it's the new attitude that only the biggest companies matter. The 2133 may be "stylish"—but it's also three pounds (actually 3.2, 3.9 pounds travel weight) and $749. Oh, and the tested unit has a hard disk, not a solid-state drive. What it *does* share with the Eee: The keyboard is undersized (although apparently a little better than the Eee—still, touch typists will have trouble with a 92%-size keyboard) and there's no optical drive. Otherwise, it's 50% heavier, close to twice as expensive—but it's from HP. (*PC Magazine* says it has a "spacious and sexy" screen design. Sexy? Really?)

Ultralight—But Not Ultrasmall or Cheap

Then there's the Toshiba Portégé R500 (SSD). Cheap it ain't, at $2,699. Tiny it ain't—it has a full-size keyboard and 12" screen, and it measures 11.2x8.5x0.8". What it is, is *light* for a full-size notebook: 1.7 pounds system weight, 2.4 pounds travel weight (that is, with AC adapter). It's power-efficient enough to earn *PC Magazine*'s GreenTech mark (12 watts idle, 21 watts at full load). It's not super-fast (1.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo), but it's not bad—and it comes with 1GB RAM and 64GB SSD. *PC* gives it 3.5 dots. So far, no machine has received both GreenTech approval and an Editors' Choice.

Really Big Show, Really Small Distance

This *PC Magazine* Editors' Choice seems like a dandy: the $2,500 Hitachi CP-A100 digital projector. It's compact (5.2x15.6x14"), not *too* heavy (12.8lbs.), and it has a bright LCD-driven image for up to a 120" screen. There's decent built-in audio; it doesn't do a great job on video, but it's fine for computer-generated images.

The kicker here, though, is how well this device will work in difficult circumstances—when you need a big screen but don't have a lot of clear real estate. The unit can project a 98" (diagonal) image from only *fifteen inches* away. Think about that…

Big Cheap HDTVs

How low can you go? Remembering how high HDTV prices were just a couple of years ago—and, more recently, how expensive any set with full 1080p operation was—this July 2008 *Home Theater* group review is a little astonishing: Three 42" LCD HDTVs, all full 1080p—and each costs $999. You're most likely to see sets like these at Costco, but other chains may have similar sets by now (at this writing, Best Buy had two 42" 1080p LCD HDTVs, at $800 and $900 respectively, but they weren't these brands).

The sets are from Sceptre, VIZIO and Westinghouse—and be aware that this Westinghouse is no more an old established brand than the other two. The bad news: None of these sets is good enough to compete with the best sets on the market. The good news: They're all decent.

Reasonably-Priced High-End Audio

Since I grumble about the absurdities of much high-end audio pricing in MY BACK PAGES, it's only fair to mention some of the items that appear to qualify as high end *without* such prices. I've mentioned a few in MBP, I'll mention more here as appropriate.

The Abso!ute Sound for August 2008 features the NAD C515 BEE CD Player and C315 BEE Integrated Amplifier, $299 and $349 respectively. That may sound like a lot, but $300 for an audiophile CD player is relatively inexpensive—and $350 for a 40 watt per channel (two channel) integrated amp is on the low side. NAD's a well-known name in the field, with a solid reputation.

Editors' Choices and Group Reviews

The current *PC Magazine* Editors' Choice for a digital SLR is Nikon's $1,800 D300—big LCD display, advanced autofocus, loads of manual settings (it comes with a 421-page user's manual), and of course

Nikon optics. $1,800 gets a body; for $2,540, you can get the body and an 18mm to 200mm lens, "likely to be the only lens you need" with its 11x zoom. It's hefty for a digital camera, but it's an SLR—figure 2.1lb. with battery and memory card.

PC World looks at megazoom cameras in an August 2008 article—in this case, six units with at least 10x optical zoom, costing $350 to $1,000. Unfortunately, Nikon's new model in this category wasn't ready, which means the roundup's missing an important player. Of the six, the Best Buy goes to the Olympus SP-570 UZ, $500—which as an astonishing *20x* optical zoom, offering the 35mm equivalent of 26mm to 520mm. It also has servo-controlled zoom, 23 scene modes, lots of manual settings if you need them, good ergonomics and superior image quality and battery life. It's not light (19.5 ounces), but then ultrazooms can't be all that light—all that lens and casing has to weigh *something*.

For security suites, Norton still gets *PC Magazine*'s nod—Norton 360 Version 2.0 for "a less technical person's computer." It's $80 for a three-PC license.

Feel like your notebook isn't quite fast enough? Want to sneak a little gaming in on the side? *PC Magazine* gives an Editors' Choice to a neat little notebook that might fill the bill—Core 2 Extreme X9000 processor, 4GB RAM, 200GB 7200RPM hard disk, 512MB nVidia GeForce 8800M GTX graphics, 15.4" 1920x1200 screen, and really solid gaming performance. The Alienware Area-51 m15x is a little heavy, at 7.8lb. system, 9.5lb. travel—but there's one other thing that might give you pause: It costs $4,499.

PC World's winners for business notebooks, as listed in the July 2008 issue, are considerably less expensive—and one of them's a little surprising. The $1,199 Micro Express IFL9025 is tagged as best as a desktop replacement and has an 85 PCW rating. The $1,724 Lenovo ThinkPad X61 is the ultraportable choice—and it has an 84 rating. (Their definition of "ultraportable" is apparently four pounds or less.) The odd one is the "all-purpose" unit—Sony's VAIO VGN-SZ791N. It's by far the most expensive ($2,500) and only gets a 71 PCW rating; the specs seem closer to an ultraportable (13.3" screen, 4.0 pounds) with a beefed-up CPU.

Just how cheap can a good inkjet printer be? The Best Buy among inkjet printers (that is, single-function units) in *PC World*'s July 2008 roundup is the Canon Pixma iP3500—and it sells for $80. But two steps down, considerably slower on graphics printing but still speedy for text printing, there's the Canon Pixma iP2600—and it costs $50. Not bad for a Canon. The odd part of this roundup: The final paragraph, which disses multifunction printers as a way of making single-function units look good. The writer seems to think the only things you'd ever do besides printing are "make copies or scan documents to e-mail" (really?) and says people who need to do that "may not mind wrestling with a multifunction printer's scanner or its button-busy control panel." Right. When I'm using it as a scanner or printer, the buttons in use on my Canon total one—the power button. It's really *hard* to find that button, labeled "On/Off" and with the usual icon… And, somehow, I've never had to "wrestle" with the scanner. Open the cover, put the document or photo down, close the cover… So, yeah, I love the Canon Pixma line, but, thanks, I'll pay the extra $30 or $40 and have a color scanner/copier handy as well.

Net Media/Making it Work

Blogging about Liblogging

I'm sure there *are* disciplined bloggers who never engage in metablogging—blogging about blogging. I'm not one of them. A little introspection can be useful. A lot of thinking about what's happening in the liblog community can be fun, interesting and worthwhile. I thought these posts were worth noting and commenting on.

Are ¼ of library bloggers cowards?

Remember that question, posed by Meredith Farkas in a September 17, 2007 post at *Information wants to be free* (meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/)? Farkas responds to an Annoyed Librarian post, the Annoyed One having commented on the "assertion that people who blog anonymously (or pseudonymously) are cowards." (If that's too meta for you: A bunch of people seemed to be attacking AL for being "anonymous" and calling that cowardly—and there were even a few such attacks from people who understand the difference between pseudonymous [which AL is/are] and anonymous.)

It's fair to say Farkas isn't one of those condemning out of hand. Excerpts:

> Considering the number of bloggers who do not identify themselves on their blogs (almost 1/4 of blogging librarians), I am loath to believe that it is all about cowardice. There may be a lot of reasons why people blog anonymously… I'd say people who do not identify themselves on their blog to protect their careers are smart, not cowardly. But that's just my take.
>
> Who among us has wanted to post something but didn't because you knew it could be bad for your career? Are we cowards for not posting it? Nah, I think we're

> smart… I've sometimes thought it would be nice to have an anonymous blog in addition to this, but I really don't have the time or energy to lead a double life. My first life is enough work. ;)
>
> The Annoyed Librarian has made a lot of people think. The Annoyed Librarian has written a lot of things that have stirred up interesting debates or made people say "that's exactly how I feel, though I'd never say it." As the Pragmatic Librarian wrote:
>
> > Contrary to what some have stated, I believe that anonymity and pseudonymity do not automatically negate an opinion. Granted, you might not know the background or the biases of whoever expresses such opinions, but the validity of their claims should become clearer through further discourse. If someone has compelling or interesting arguments, the discussion should focus on those, rather than on the "personalities" involved.
>
> In addition, there's a difference between one who writes offensive things designed only to hurt people anonymously and one who writes criticism anonymously. We often don't distinguish between the two. You can't lump what the Annoyed Librarian writes in with the anonymous comments from some of her readers that are downright nasty.
>
> What I find most interesting is how many people are identifying anonymous or pseudonymously written blogs as their favorites in the three favorite blogs survey. Obviously, many of these are touching a chord. That says something…
>
> There will always be topics that people simply can't write about under their own names because of the nature of the topic or because of the position they are in. It's very easy to be a journal editor or a tenured professor or a former president of ALA or someone else with very little to lose to make bold statements about the things they believe in. It's also easy for someone to make bold statements on topics that are less than taboo these days. It is not so easy for someone who relies on other librarians (who may not agree with him or her) for employment to make bold statements about things that are thought of as sacred cows…
>
> What I love most about the library blogosphere is that we're not judged by our CVs but by the content of our writing. Were that not the case, I'd never have gotten an audience at all. If it didn't matter to people who I was when I first started blogging, why should it matter who the Annoyed Librarian is? If you don't like her writing, don't read it. If you like it, it shouldn't matter all that much who she is.

In the case of the Annoyed Librarian, one comment is especially cogent: "You can't lump what the Annoyed Librarian writes in with the anonymous comments from some of her readers that are downright nasty."

Comments were generally supportive. Dorothea Salo notes flak she's received during job interviews for her blogging and a "brilliant librarian" who lost a promotion because her prospective boss didn't like her blog. I noted my own problem with pseudonymity used as a shield: "The ease with which it can retrospectively disappear; I've seen that happen several times." It won't with AL (I'm confident of that, and I suspect they/he/it/she has/have another, signed, blog), but it's not that unusual. One commenter finds "that anonymity/pseudonymous writing always takes my opinion of the writing down a notch" but recognizes the role of unsigned writing. A couple of pseudonymous or anonymous bloggers gave their reasons, including justifiable fear of physical attack and a simple desire to limit web exposure of their real name. I'm not sure I entirely understand "identity theft" as a basis for blogging anonymously—and when someone says "if I don't know you, I don't want you knowing me," then I wonder why they'd blog at all. I saw *nobody* accusing anonymous or pseudonymous bloggers of cowardice or attacking the notion.

Here's what I find in 607 liblogs I'm looking at:

- 401 have clear authors with first and last names readily identifiable—either right on the home page or an "About" page, in the URL itself, or in a ludicrously transparent form (e.g., a link to the blogger's PowerPoint presentation or announcement of their new book).
- 93 are group blogs, most of them with named bloggers.
- 56 are what I would consider pseudonymous.
- 43 have authors identified only by first name, so could be considered pseudonymous.
- 13 are anonymous by my standards.

Adding those up, I come up with 18% of liblogs (in this large sample) that are pseudonymous or anonymous—and, frankly, I'd guess at least 10% to 15% of those are readily identifiable (e.g., cases where the employer and position are named!).

Does that mean fewer libloggers are cowards? Not really. First, it's not a term I would apply in any case. I can think of no more than two or three blogs where "cowardice" has anything to do with the lack of clear authorship. If I had to judge, I'd guess easily half of the 112 blogs in those three final categories *could* have full author's names without any harm to anybody—but that's the choice these bloggers have made. Second, of course, my sample isn't the same as Farkas' sample.

Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose

Christina Pikas commented on pseudonymous and anonymous blogging in this February 1, 2008 post at *Christina's LIS rant* (christinaslibraryrant.blogspot.com). Portions of this very different take on unsigned blogging:

> Many science bloggers, in particular women scientist bloggers, choose to be either anonymous or pseudonymous. Sometimes they give the reason that they want to be able to speak freely or talk truth to the man… Some have everything to lose if they are discovered, and for some it would be a minor inconvenience because co-workers don't "get it."
>
> Bloggers who have made the choice to provide their real identity sometimes complain that if they were anonymous they could say whatever they wanted without repercussions…
>
> In practice, though…anonymous bloggers do not really have any more freedom and may even have less freedom for several reasons.
>
> First, because they don't want to be a jerk. Or, well, they might be a jerk whether or not they reveal their names, but I don't think it correlates…
>
> Second, the more they say—and everything they say—can be used to try to discover their real identity. If you are the only woman associate professor of physics researching x then talking about your work will out you. What can you say about your work place? Maybe what coast it's on? That it's big or small?...
>
> It takes a lot of work to stay anonymous—carefully selecting words and re-reading posts to make sure nothing slips, and if you are discovered, that the repercussions won't be too bad.
>
> Third, women on the internet are victims of very personal attacks. I don't think that being anonymous does anything for this (may even attract some), but it may be easier to distance yourself and it's harder for a stalker to find you…
>
> So, in conclusion there are some darn good reasons to blog anonymously and this unsystematic look indicates that it does not provide more freedom, rather it chains you a life of walking on your toes. For young women scientists, the freedom of using their real identity is a luxury they can't afford.
>
> Bloggers build trust with their audience over time--isn't it refreshing to judge someone on what she posts rather than her institution, her h-factor, or her recent paper in a big name journal?

A very few unsigned liblogs are that way specifically so the writers can be jerks, or at least can say jerky things about library users, but I'd say the total is less than one percent of liblogs. I'd like to think the third factor isn't major in the library field, but I'm not sure it's nonexistent.

The bloggers among us

This December 15, 2007 *Library Journal* article by Meredith Farkas (www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6510669.html?q=the+bloggers+among+us) covers 839 bloggers based on her 2007 survey. (You'll find survey posts in Farkas' October 2007 archives, including a link to a Google Docs spreadsheet of survey results.)

As with Farkas' posts about the survey results, this article is fascinating and probably valid. There isn't much reason for people to lie, particularly since neither names nor blog names are attached to results.

A few notes:

- More than one-third of bloggers responding are over 40, with more than 20 respondents over 60.
- More than half of bloggers responding have been published elsewhere, including 20% with peer-reviewed publications.
- Nearly 70% of respondents had their current blogs for two years or less. (I might wonder how many of those new blogs are "mandated blogs" that disappear once the library school course or 23-things project is complete—but maybe those ephemeral bloggers wouldn't respond to the survey. I do note that 13% of respondents were in library school. My own study biases against newer blogs to the extent that it won't include any blog less than six months old by June 2008.)
- Surprisingly (OK, it surprised me!), two-thirds of respondents contributed to more than one blog. (But then, I now run *three* of them, so why am I surprised? Blogs are like Tribbles…)
- Roughly one-third of respondents were in academic libraries, another third in public libraries. Technically, that means academic librarians were over-represented.
- Most bloggers (69%) blog to share ideas with others. A lot (40%) believe that blogging helps them keep up with trends—and more than a quarter use blogging as a way to process their own ideas. (Frankly, I'm surprised that final number isn't higher.)
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents read blogs through web-based aggregators such as Bloglines and Google Reader. Farkas finds this unusual; she believes most of "the general population" get their feeds through personalized start pages like MyYahoo!

Farkas mentions a few blogs by name as examples of certain types. She discusses community-building, the future of blogging and emerging challenges. It's all goodm and I particularly liked this comment:

> Blogging can be a great leveler… People are judged more by their ideas than their résumés, so anyone can make a name for him/herself. Also, blogging can build a bridge for those geographically isolated from other (or like-minded) librarians.

ts;db

That arcane title, on a Brett Bonfield post dated January 10, 2008 at *ACRLog* (acrlblog.org), stands for "too short, didn't bother"—Bonfield's rejoinder to "tl;dr" (too long,

didn't read), which Anil Dash calls "one of the great, definitive abbreviations for the social web." (Not that Dash fully supports this—he says the abbreviation "epitomizes the short-attention-span crowd, the willfully idiotic segment of the online population that 1. we all sometimes belong to and that 2. makes for the shittiest experiences on the web.")

Bonfield's commenting on resolutions by several of his favorite writers, who have "resolved to post more frequently in 2008."

> Dear favorite writers: at the risk of sounding ungrateful, would you be terribly offended if I begged you not to follow through on this resolution? The odds are, I like your writing because:
>
> - You publish relatively infrequently. I think you're great, which is why I read your writing, but I don't want to know everything that's on your mind. Generally, somewhere between once a week to once a month is fine by me.
> - Your pieces tend to take me at least five minutes to read, though ideally you'll allow me the privilege of spending 15-50 minutes on ideas that have taken you several hours to put into words.
> - You publish almost nothing that's off-topic, in particular almost nothing that's both off-topic and solely about you. Once or twice a year, at most, going off-topic or writing about yourself is actually endearing. And it can be useful in our post-postmodern world if you acknowledge personal reasons for your opinions. But I'm reading your writing in order to learn about the topic of your blog. Abandon that topic too often and I'll mostly likely unsubscribe from your feed.

As a blogger, I'm probably not one of Bonfield's favorite writers: I publish much too frequently by his standards, I rarely take "several hours" to write a post (I save that for articles) and *Walt at random* is, almost by definition, frequently off-topic. (Actually, it's *never* off-topic—because there is no set topic.)

Bonfield offers an example, a (non-library) blogger who regularly writes true essays and gets complaints about it. The blogger *knows* he writes essays—and thinks that blogs may be the best medium today for essays. (The post Bonfield links to is over 3,000 words—four times the length of a typical newspaper or magazine column, and roughly equivalent to four pages of *Cites & Insights*. Bonfield's own post is 1,412 words long. Apparently, 3,000 words is on the short side for this particular blogger.). Bonfield brings in a discussion of blogging and its relationship to article publishing for professional librarians and a number of semi-related notions. His key points:

> Here's the first point I'm trying to make: good, thoughtful prose is valuable no matter where or how it's published. Grigor Perelman posted his groundbreaking work on the Poincaré Conjecture on the free, web-based arXiv.org in November 2002, March 2003, and July 2003, a repository that at the time was considerably easier to post to than ACRLog is now. Even though it has since introduced an endorsement system, arXiv.org remains close to barrier free—and full of indisputably valuable work… Peer review plays an important role in numerous situations, but there are times it is neither necessary, as with Perelman, nor sufficient, as with Sokal's "Transgressing the Boundaries." At the same time, you may be cheating yourself and your readers if you reserve your best work for peer-reviewed, subscription-only journals. Eventually, people will be rewarded for publishing good work online, and not just with popularity badges.
>
> Here's the second point I'm trying to make: good, thoughtful prose generally takes more than a few minutes a day to write and more than a couple of hundred words to express. I don't think it's a bad thing when people dismiss longer pieces with tl;dr (too long, didn't read). Certainly, when we're writing for undergraduates or Pierre Bayard, we need to take that wholly defensible sensibility into account. But if you're writing for me, and for many other academic librarians, please understand that we're likely to dismiss light, quick, frequent posts with ts;db: "Too short, didn't bother."

There are basically two comments and one response. Steve Lawson kicks things off saying, in part:

> … I have un-subscribed to several popular library blogs simply because they are too noisy.
>
> On the other hand, as I think I may have said in these comments before, let's not get too prescriptive. There is not–despite what Sammy Hagar may have told you–only one way to rock.
>
> The blogs I adore often freely mix the personal and professional with a high degree of the author's voice apparent. I, for one, am happy to hear about Dorothea's cats and Walt's favorite restaurants because their writing has made me care about them as people. So don't save your best stuff for the Journal of Humorless Tenured Librarians, but don't feel like every blog post has to be one peer-review shy of publication either.

An hour later—but about ten minutes after I finished reading the post—I commented:

> Well, damn: There goes Steve again, saying what I was going to say, but better and faster.
>
> I certainly track a few laser-focused-on-topic blogs–but, frankly, I get more out of the many liblogs that are a little bit personal, a little bit professional. With post frequencies and lengths that vary all over the place. (Sez I, who writes posts as short as 100 words, if rarely, and essays as long as 32,000 words–fortunately, also rarely. Not to mention the occasional book…)
>
> I may regard Always-On-Topic X as an expert, but I'm more likely to think of Mixed-Message Y as both an

> interesting writer and a person I wouldn't mind knowing–which is, at least for me, a better deal.

Bonfield responded, in part:

> …I guess it didn't occur to me that anyone would take my posts as prescriptive. Or that anyone would assume I found my favorite writers uninteresting as people. But that's sure how it reads, isn't it?
>
> Here's a point I should have included: one of the many things I admire about Jessamyn West is that she maintains librarian.net for her library observations and jessamyn.com for everything else. Taking that idea a step further, the greatly missed Leslie Harpold seemed to be constantly registering additional domains and creating additional websites, each one dedicated to a different project/audience.
>
> This may seem like a lot of extra work, but if you can maintain one website it's really not much harder to maintain two or more…

I think we agreed to disagree, if only because there were no more direct comments. From my perspective, it *is* a lot of extra work—and I would find *Walt at random* less satisfying to write (and *See also…*, *Caveat lector*, *Information wants to be free*, *Blue skunk blog* and a few dozen more of my favorite liblogs less satisfying to read) if the bloggers "stayed on topic" and made sure they didn't mix the personal and the professional. Even journals have editorials, and I frequently find letter columns and more-personal columnists to be the best parts of "serious" media.

Steve Lawson thought about it and posted "Sensibility" on January 21, 2008 at *See also…* (stevelawson.name/seealso/). Some of Lawson's comments:

> I agree that posting more just for the sake of posting more can easily lead to a noisy blog. If those "additional" posts are just the proverbial cat photos, or brief comments on things I have already seen linked elsewhere, it's going to get very noisy very fast. If it is all your del.icio.us links or your twitter feed, chances are I have already unsubscribed…
>
> [Lawson notes bloggers with "voice" he finds interesting—even when they mostly publish links.]
>
> It's not just voice that makes me stick with a blog. It has something to do with signal-to-noise ratio, and something to do with the flâneur's ability to make the act of just wandering around noticing things into a work of art…
>
> This quality that keeps me reading a blog–I'm going to call it "sensibility" instead of "voice." If you have a better word for it, let me know.
>
> If someone has a sensibility that I find fascinating or sympathetic or usefully irritating, I'd love for them to blog more, assuming that they can keep that sensibility honed. The occasional cat photo or link to something on *BoingBoing* is fine, but if I'm subscribed to your blog, I'm mostly interested in you and the kind of thing that only you would write, or that no one else I follow would point out on the web. As long as you stay attuned to that sensibility, you can't go off topic.

(Yes, I finally looked it up: "a person who walks the city in order to experience it." I know—if I was sufficiently cultured, I wouldn't need to look it up.)

What to say about all this? Some of it I've already said: Don't blog when you don't have something to say (although that "something" can be silly—I've posted cat pictures too), and don't blog out of a sense of obligation. Length only matters at the extreme: Too-short posts can be frustrating, and very long posts need to be well-written and, preferably, organized with subheadings, or you'll lose some of your readers.

As for frequency, I believe it's now fairly clear that the *easiest* way to lose readers is to post too often—and that, with aggregators, relatively infrequent but interesting posts can be compelling and lead to ever-larger readership. What's relatively infrequent? That depends on who you are and how you write.

Just to throw in real-world numbers, consider 115 liblogs I'd consider widely-read. In a three-month period, more than half had at least two posts a week—but 20 had less than one post a week. As for average post length? Of the 95 I could measure, 24 had relatively brief posts (200 words or less, with five under 100 words per post), and most had medium-length posts (200 to 500 words)—but there were eight widely read blogs with posts averaging more than 600 words, including three exceeding 950 words per post. Conclusion? Content matters. Length and frequency, not so much.

Marketing to bloggers

It isn't that Meredith Farkas writes about bloggers so much (well, she does, but…), it's that what she says is frequently worth repeating. Take this February 10, 2008 post at *Information wants to be free*. She notes the power of word-of-blog marketing and that many groups reach out to bloggers to market their products.

> Only most of them do it terribly.
>
> I get bombarded with marketing requests on an almost daily basis. I sometimes even get sent books and other items. There's no way I could possibly read or examine all of the products I'm being asked to look at. And for the most part, I don't look at any of them because their marketing pitches are so bad…

She shows excerpts of one typical pitch, one that clearly represents no awareness of what Farkas' blog is about (the message says she's "focused on children's education"). The message also included the *URL of the blog* in an email to the blogger—and, as Farkas says, "It was so obvious that this was a lame form letter to get bloggers to link to their product… It's insulting to

the intelligence of bloggers. No one likes to be manipulated like this, and I can't imagine that most people who received this email actually wrote about the product." Worse, as she notes, is when marketers try to push products via blog *comments*—in other words, spam.

But Farkas isn't just grousing; that's probably what I'd do (and have probably done), but fortunately I'm a D-list blogger and don't get that many pitches. (Also, I'm very fast with the Delete click.) She offers "tips for marketing to bloggers." Leaving out the details (this is a 1,651-word post: Nothing wrong with a long post that has something to say!), here are her six tips (in bold, with my paraphrased brief notes):

- **Do your homework**. Read the blog posts; make a list of bloggers who are likely to *relate* to your product based on what they write.
- **Do make it personal**. Which, among other things, means not sending out a letter "signed" by a CEO and clearly emailed by a flunky…and, oh yes, not putting the URL of the blog in the post as a form of "personalization."
- **Don't ask them to link to you, write a review about you, or spread the word about you**. Leave it to the blogger to be excited enough to write about it.
- **Do ask their opinion of the product**. "People want to feel like they're wanted for their insights, not for their blog."
- **If you do make a "fan" of a blogger, don't ask too much of them or make them feel they're being taken advantage of**. She gives a detailed example—and, speaking as one sometimes on "the other side," this is awfully easy to do.
- **Do make this sort of marketing just one part of a conversation with your community of users (and potential users)**. There's a lot more to social media than press releases.

Interesting stuff. I don't have a lot of commentary to add, although, wearing my PLN hat, I do wonder about the boundaries and may sometimes step over them—but I think it's only the third bullet that I may have problems with.

Not much of a blogger

Wayne Bivens-Tatum had some fun with one of those "X things you should do" lists in this April 7, 2008 post at *Academic librarian* (blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/), in this case "10 questions every blogger should ask themselves before posting." Before noting some of the questions and portions of Bivens-Tatum's responses, I have to quote a couple of sentences from the authoritative post—on a blog about "copywriting tips for online marketing success," suggesting that it's professionally written with great care (the blogger says we should spend much more time editing than writing):

> To help you in these crucial editing stages, we thought we would lay down some important questions bloggers can ask themselves so they can make an honest, constructive and critical appraisal of their work before posting it up for the world to see. Asking these simple questions could mean the difference between a hastily written blog article that remains obscure and a well-written, influential and accessible blog that courts a loyal audience with ease.

I wouldn't comment on the sheer clunkiness of those sentences if this was an ordinary blog post, where I'd assume they were written on the fly. But given the source and insistence on importance of editing, the lack of agreement in the second sentence (is it an article or a blog?) is problematic—and "lay down some important questions" and "posting it up for the world to see" nearly inexcusable. Copywriting is apparently writing to sell—and at this point, I'm completely unsold.

Anyway, some of the questions—which are supposed to be for "every blogger," not just "every blogger whose primary concern is getting a big audience and Making Big Bucks from Blogging"—with portions of B-T's responses (he responds to all ten):

> "2. Does my blog offer something novel or unexpected?"
>
> That's a tough one. I guess it depends on what you expect. If you expect something concise and topical like Library Stuff, then no… This is just stuff I think about.
>
> "4. Why should my readers trust me?"
>
> I guess "because I say so" doesn't work well as an answer. Because I can write coherent paragraphs? Because I work in a library? Do I care if you trust me? After all, I'm not trying to sell you insurance or anything.
>
> "5. Does my content speak to people on a human level?"
>
> Something tells me the answer to this question is "no," especially since the writer interprets "human" as "emotional."..
>
> "7. Does my content cover what needs to be discussed or answered?"
>
> Probably not, because hardly anything I write about really needs to be discussed or answered.
>
> "10. Am I reaching out for support?"
>
> Not really, but I've always been something of a loner. The exposition continues, "Writing content with their interests in mind, as well as the interests of your readers, can help boost your blogging authority if said experts find your articles useful." I doubt I have much of a blogging authority, though I suppose I'm sort of an authority about something library-related, but probably not any more so than most of my readers, who are, after all, librarians.

> "You should always have an active interest in the social networking community and be willing to express it in your posts—either by explicitly mentioning other blogging/bookmarking talents or by editing your content so that it is more bookmark friendly." I don't do much of that, either, do I, and I'm not sure I could because I cringe when "talent" is used as a noun to describe a person…

B-T notes that he got to the post via my blog (and *American Libraries Direct*). I commented that I *didn't* link to the original post because I didn't think much of it (but wanted to note Rochelle Mazar's comments on it). I also noted, "If you plan to be a professional blogger, you're probably doing it all wrong, but it's pretty clear you're no more planning that than I am." We both talked about "bookmark friendly," and I'll admit that I did change the WordPress settings for *Walt at random* so post URLs now include post titles instead of page numbers. Mark Lindner also noted that some bloggers "do this because we want to and not for any of the reasons assumed" by Jakob Nielsen or in articles like this.

My own post, "Why do you blog?" appeared on March 30, 2008. I linked to Rochelle Mazar's post on the ten questions, which pretty much settles the issue in the first paragraph: "I'd say the first question any blogger should ask is whether he or she wants to take advice from an online marketing blog, but that's not on the list of questions." Mazar has much more to say… My reaction had been "Geez, another list posited on the basis that all blogs are essentially marketing blogs." I dismissed the ten questions almost immediately, and focused on one of Mazar's own suggestions (regarding pseudonymity and anonymity)—and, as she clarified, we were disagreeing because we were talking about different fields.

Blogs as part of librarian workload

That's the title of Laura "Rikhei" Harris' April 25, 2008 post at *Llyfrgellydd* (llyfrgellydd.info), but the post covers more territory. The initial setup deals with a monthly meeting of research and instruction librarians at her place of work:

> A colleague had come across a recent blog post about my presentation at this year's Computers in Libraries, and wanted to discuss whether this kind of feedback is something we should include when considering contract renewal and promotions... The discussion also encompassed whether or not to include blogging in general.
>
> My conclusion, and I think (hope) the conclusion of the larger group, was that blogging as authorship should not be evaluated **unless the person being evaluated asks it to be considered**, and that comments made by other bloggers (or even respondents to a particular entry) not be considered in general. [Emphasis added.]

Harris discusses the need for context in evaluating a blog—and that, to her knowledge, other academic discussions of whether to include blogs in promotion reviews have generally concluded that "blogging…is not of the same caliber as peer-reviewed publications."

When I'm not in a slightly cynical mood (the one that says peer review doesn't determine *whether* an article will be published, only *where* it gets published), I agree—but "not of the same caliber" doesn't mean "not worthy of consideration," or at least shouldn't. Nor does Harris. More of what she says:

> I don't think this means blogging is entirely irrelevant to workload… I liaise with the statistics department at my place of work, and I have a blog to let them know the titles of statistics titles I've purchased, and about other relevant resources I come across. Honestly, it doesn't seem that successful as a blog…but a few faculty members in the department have expressed pleasure at its existence, including the chair of the department. This is something I feel I'd like to share at my own review—not to say, "Look, this is comparable to publication!" but to say, "Hey, look at this way that I reached out to my faculty members."
>
> I also think blogging could be construed as service, like participation on a committee. For example, the Free Government Information blog occasionally asks for guest bloggers. I read this blog to keep up to date on information relevant to (one of) my subfields, and thus, I would say that the people who blog there provide me, and other members of the government documents community, with a service.
>
> I have also been thinking about reading blogs… Nowadays, I probably have more science and government documents blogs than librarian blogs in my feed reader, because I'm using blogs as one tool to familiarize myself with my subject areas. In looking at my workload, I'm more likely to think about blog-reading as "liaison work" than I am to think about it as "technology" (keeping up with, that is)…
>
> Blogging is still a novel means of communication for some people, but I think we need to stop thinking about whether or not it's an effective means of scholarly communication and focus on the fact that it is an effective way of communicating several kinds of information that remain relevant to our workload as academics (or at least as librarians).

T. Scott Plutchak wrote a comment generally agreeing. Among other notes, he says: "I wouldn't support a promotion from Assistant to Associate if someone had nothing to show except their blogs, but as part of a well-rounded portfolio I think they can play an important role."

Three briefs about your web presence

In a very different vein, we have Ryan Deschamps' July 26, 2008 post at *The other librarian* (otherlibrarian.wordpress.com), or rather the first of the three "briefs" (things that Deschamps didn't feel required a full post to describe). The other two are worth reading, but fall into different categories, ones I'm not likely to discuss.

The first, though, is "Are you ready for your blog?" and in it Deschamps says some things people need to hear—things that aren't said often. Here's nearly all of that section:

> One of the things that is overstated about web-based promotion is ROI—the idea that you put little work into a website and return pretty good results nonetheless. With blogs, this idea has become even more apparent since with typical WYSIWYG editors, you literally just have to type into a box to make a web post happen.
>
> [On[the institutional side of things, it's not so easy… When you open a blog for yourself, there is little to no brand associated. You can pretty much use any template and away you go. Institutions need to manage brands, reputation, target markets and quality assurance. If you want your business or institution to be successful, it cannot look like every other blog... Even though web presence has little to do with product/service development, people will associate poor writing on a website with the quality of a product or service. Libraries cannot afford to have their services downgraded because of poor web content. In short, you need to add a whole lot of editing, design and marketing time to the denominator of your ROI.
>
> If you are an institution, you need content before you establish your web presence. A blog that has been doing nothing for a month will look bad. Take a look at what happened to Google when they left their Google Librarian blog to sit for a while. This does not work the same for individual blogs. Go away for a month as an individual and people will just think you are on vacation or something. Those same users will have higher expectations for your library, however. If you want to start a blog, you need to commit 52 pieces of 800 words or better per year. Then you need to manage spam, comments etc. In short, add the costs of content creation and management to the denominator of your ROI equation as well.
>
> In the end, the ROI is still going to look good—just not as good as most people assume. If you do not put some time and money into the denominator of the ROI equation, the numerator will be zero—or worse, it will do damage to your library/company.

In other words, when it comes to official library blogs, "Just do it!" is bad advice. You need to think through the template and its relationship to your institution; you need to be sure the writing is worthy of your library…and you need followthrough.

In comments, Deschamps noted that "800 words" wasn't a strict guidelines (500 words would do as well). He's really saying you need to be prepared to write a fairly steady stream of substantive posts for a library blog to be regarded as worthwhile.

I did a little checking against a spreadsheet representing 232 academic library blogs during March-May 2007 (noting that many of those blogs aren't really designed to be read as standalone blogs). Since I covered one quarter, I looked for blogs with at least 13 posts during the quarter: 133 of the 231. Then I looked at those among this group whose posts averaged 800 words or more. *Zero*. Dropping to 500 words or more, I found three.

Using a more generous measure, I looked for blogs that had at least 13 posts and totaled enough words to constitute 13 800-word posts (since a blog could reasonably mix essays and brief items). I found eight plausible candidates.

Bottom line? Very few visible academic library blogs meet Deschamps' criteria for followthrough. That may be OK, but one does wonder how many library blogs really *have* been started on a "just do it" basis—and whether that's good or bad for the library. I nibble at this a little more in the essay "Blogs and libraries" on the PALINET Leadership Network (pln.palinet.org). Here's a bit of my take on the issue, after a brief discussion of just how easy it really is to "just do it"—particularly since you don't even have to write your posts in the blog software's editing box (for most popular blogging software, you can post directly from Word2007, for example):

> For a personal blog, it may be that simple. Start it, and if you find you really didn't have much to say, you can always delete it or stop posting. If you haven't publicized it, chances are nobody will notice that you've stopped.
>
> For a **library** blog, though, a little more consideration may make sense:
>
> - If you publicize a blog and it goes for long periods with no new items, it makes the library look sloppy or moribund.
> - If you **don't** publicize a blog, nobody will be aware of it and it won't do anybody any good.
>
> That doesn't mean you need an extended multimonth planning process or a blogging task force. It does mean that you should think through a couple of things before you start a blog that's officially part of your library and its web presence:
>
> - **Purpose**: There's nothing wrong with a multipurpose library blog--particularly in a smaller library--but you should define the general purpose of a blog before you start it. That may help guide your choice of name and even look.

- **Followthrough**: You should have clear commitments to prepare entries for the blog, frequently enough to make sense for your community, for long enough to give the blog a fair trial. I'd suggest a commitment for at least six months of posts. Frequency depends on the size of your library and nature of the post, but the blog should be active enough to make your library look as vibrant as it actually is. On the other hand, except for functional blogs such as new materials lists or mirrors of newspaper columns, you probably shouldn't aim for a **fixed** frequency; posts should appear when they're appropriate, not only when it's time.
- **Publicity**: You *do* need to let people know about the blog, unless it's an invisible blog (e.g., an events blog that automatically shows up on your home page). While blogging can increase your web presence in unexpected ways, as web search engines tend to index blog posts, you won't gain a community audience without letting them know the blog's there.
- **Starting small**: Don't overthink library blogs. That can lead to establishing half a dozen different blogs (or many more!) before you've determined that blogs work well within your community. It's not a given...but it is pretty much a given that one lively blog will serve your library better than half a dozen rarely-updated blogs.

It's easy to add more blogs. It's a little more difficult to shut down blogs that don't work, unless a dying blog ends with a link to a new and better blog--or with a post that explains why the blog has ceased and what other service takes its place.

You **should** shut down a blog that isn't working, with an appropriate ending message and, if possible, link. Shutting down a minor blog and adding the content to a more widely-read blog? That's easy: A final post can say what's happening and link users to the retained blog. Ending your blogging experiment entirely? That's a little more difficult...and maybe you should see why the blog isn't working before you give up.

There's more to that post—and a first-rate related article (even if I did write it!), "Blog or wiki—which tool to use?" Go read them, and join PLN if you're not already a member.

Offtopic Perspective

50 Movie Western Classics, Part 2

Disc 7

China 9, Liberty 37, 1978, color. Monte Hellman and Tony Brandt (dirs.), Warren Oates, Fabio Testi, Jenny Agutter, Sam Peckinpah. Original title *Amore, piombo e furore*. 1:38 [1:32].

It's a Spanish-Italian Western: Good production values, good background music, a fair amount of moral ambiguity, some odd accents from some of the actors, and in this case an unhurried plot marked by two or three big gun battles. The sleeve description almost gets it right. A condemned gunfighter Clayton Drumm (Testi), about to be hanged in China (a tiny little Western town, 46 miles from Liberty), is reprieved so that he can shoot down Matthew Sebanek (Oates), a rancher, on behalf of the railroad that wants Matthew's land. Only Clayton doesn't do it, meets Matthew's whole clan (three brothers)—and when he leaves, Matthew's wife Catherine (Agutter) (who knifes Matthew in self-defense and mistakenly thinks she killed him) catches up with him. This is all slow moving: lots of talk and essentially no action.

Then the sleeve goes awry: "an enraged Matthew joins forces with the equally peeved railroad company to hunt the pair down." Not exactly. Matthew and brothers try to gun down Clayton (and fail), and Matthew takes back his wife—but later, the railroad stooges are trying to get rid of *both* Clayton and Matthew, resulting in a 2.5-way gun battle that's interesting and a little above the usual gunplay. Not to provide spoilers, but Clayton and Matthew (and Matthew's wife) all wind up alive, with a fair number of corpses around. In the middle, there are nice little side-plots, including Sam Peckinpah as a dime novelist trying to buy Clayton Drumm's story—or, rather, lies—to sell to the folks back east, and a non-animal circus (acrobats, little people) whose head wants to hire Drumm as a sharpshooter/showman.

If you can get past Clayton's accent (explained by dialogue about him coming over from Europe as a child) and the curious acting of the bride, it's a decent flick if you like a slow, sometimes languid, fairly naturalistic style—which I do. $1.50.

Gone with the West, 1975, color. Bernard Girard (dir.), James Caan, Stefanie Powers, Aldo Ray, Barbara Werle, Robert Walker Jr., Sammy Davis Jr.. 1:32 [1:30].

Great cast. Good filming, decent print, good color, OK sound. Interesting acting. Stefanie Powers as an odd woman of unclear heritage is, well, odd, manic, amusing. Sammie Davis Jr. as Kid Dandy, a fast-draw artist, possibly a Marshal, mostly a pool player, is as subtle and convincing an actor as in Rat Pack outings. Aldo Ray is loud and stupid. James Caan is relatively subdued—but no scenery went unchewed in the making of this flick. Remarkable last ten minutes or so. Lots of barroom brawls—indeed, a barroom that seems to be nothing *but* hysterical brawls and breaking furniture, a nonstop riot spilling out to the streets of a really bad town full of really bad people. Repeated over-the-top operatic singing at barroom funerals, or maybe it's the same footage used several times—there are a *lot* of deaths in this flick. Long catfight. Long "wrestling" match.

Also some of the worst writing and editing I've ever seen in a professional production. For the first three-quarters

of the movie, I couldn't make any sense of the plot. I *think* it comes down to this: James Caan saw his homestead burned out and wife and children killed by the town bad man (Aldo Ray), who also molested Powers' (Native American? riigght!) character. Caan comes back and, with her help (when he's not kicking her in the backside or otherwise showing unspoken affection) does everyone in, little by little. Since the townspeople are caricatures of the worst of the old west, I guess that's OK.

I'm supposed to get from the very start that this is a spoof, a sendup of westerns. That becomes clear when James Caan and Powers are walking back into the mountains and Powers—who up to now has spoken mostly some tongue Caan doesn't know—says in clear English "You killed everybody except the cameraman"—and Caan turns around and shoots the cameraman. It's just not a coherent spoof. It is, to put it bluntly, a mess. An amusing mess, but a mess. Balancing the good, the incredibly bad (one insightful reviewer says it was edited by a Mixmaster) and the empty, I'll give it $0.75, at least when viewed sober.

The Outlaw, 1943, b&w. Howard Hughes (dir.), Jack Buetel, Jane Russell, Walter Huston. 1:56.

Sometimes, they really *are* classics! I'd never seen Howard Hughes' story of Billy the Kid, Doc Holliday, Pat Garrett and Rio McDonald before, and I'm glad I finally did. I expected a spectacular, with lots of action—and got a well-played story of four people's trails and how they cross, mostly a low-key psychological drama. Fine acting, solid production and direction, fine screenwriting. I can't imagine why this movie was considered defiant of the Hayes Code, censored and banned in some countries—unless there's even more somewhere than the 116 minutes on this DVD. (There may be—IMDB mentions a 20-minute scene between Billy and Rio—but what's on the disc is the 116-minute version, not the 95-minute cut version.)

Walter Huston is particularly fine as Doc Holliday, but Jack Buetel (Billy the Kid) also does a first-rate job, and the other major characters aren't half-bad. The music works, making extensive use of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" Symphony (first movement) and "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," although it's sometimes a bit much.

After writing most of this review, I made the mistake of reading IMDB reader reviews. I suppose if you're looking for a shoot-'em-up or hot sex, this would seem pretty awful: the major shooting scenes aren't won by the fastest draws and, at least in this cut, there's very little explicit sex. I'll stick with my original feeling: This is a fine movie, well acted and well filmed. It just isn't a traditional western.

This is definitely one I'll watch again—atypical as a western but first-rate as a movie. Generally a very good to excellent print as well, although the sound is slightly edgy once in a while. That slight flaw is all that keeps this from getting the highest possible rating. As is, it gets $2.25.

Arizona Stagecoach, 1942, b&w. S. Roy Luby (dir.), Ray Corrigan, John King, Max Terhune, Elmer, Nell O'Day. 0:58 [0:52].

On one hand, the print's choppy—you lose lots of syllables and whole words, maybe more than that. On the other, it doesn't much matter: This one's so ludicrous a pristine print wouldn't help much. Where do we begin? How about with a mock lynching—but it's a white guy, so it's OK Turns out it's just the devil-may-care Range Busters forcing one of their own to make good on a bet—to sing a song while upside down, in this case hanging from a tree. We've got three characters, all using their own names—Ray "Crash" Corrigan, John "Dusty" King and Max "Alibi" Terhune—oh, and Elmer, a ventriloquist's dummy who acts as a lookout while the boys are chatting (!) and is later the only occupant of a house, chatting away as they enter.

It's Another Range Busters movie, one in a series (of 20!)—the opening and closing credits leave no doubt about that—and it's bizarre. Some elements are standard: The good guys always wear white (except when they're pretending to be bad guys). The bad guys always wear black, which makes it easy to spot the apparent good guys who are actually bad guys—and naturally one of the prominent citizens is bad-guy-in-chief. Wells Fargo wagons to and from an Arizona town are consistently getting held up: *consistently*, much as though the bad guys knew whenever there was going to be a payload on the stage. So, of course, Wells Fargo doesn't hire security to ride along with the stage, or maybe investigate the local Wells Fargo agent—no, they hire the ~~Three Stooges~~ er, Range Busters—to look into it.

We have an "old west" where people are only too happy to string other people up on the spot—but where these Range Busters (always in spotless dude attire) laugh and joke around as they drink their presumably nonalcoholic drinks in the tamest saloon I've ever seen in a western. The chief bad guy, when he's listening at an open window and realizes the stagecoach driver's spilling the beans (*of course* the holdups are inside jobs—that may be a spoiler, but this one's pretty rotten already), doesn't shoot the driver through the open window. Nope, he rides off to join the other crooks in a hopeless shootout with the good guys, then manages to ride off on his own after his group is mostly shot down. Just awful, even as they ride off, turn around and say "See you next time." I'm being charitable at $0.50.

Disc 8

Blue Steel, 1934, b&w. Robert N. Bradbury (dir.), John Wayne, Eleanor Hunt, George 'Gabby' Hayes, Edward Peil Sr., Yakima Canutt. 0:54.

As one-hour Westerns go, this is better than most. Sure, some elements of the plot are standard. The leader of the bad guys is the most prominent person in town: Check. The cute young woman winds up with the hero—even though, in this case, he hasn't talked to her

except to rescue her once: Check. Despite the quick draw and sure aim of the hero, most fights are fistfights—and they're *incredibly* phony: Check.

But the plot makes more sense than most. A beleaguered town, Yucca City, is in trouble because shipments of supplies (and money) keep getting stolen, and the ranchers are about to give up and move out. At one key plot point, the Big Man offers to buy their homesteads for $100 each—and, of course, there's a sinister reason. Naturally, John Wayne saves the day, with the help of a crusty old—not sidekick this time, but sheriff. Wayne is young, handsome and effective. The long final chase sequence is effectively done; the long, largely silent opening sequence (a hotel in a really noisy rainstorm) is surprisingly effective. Most of the acting is good. The sleeve description *almost* gets the plot right, but messes up one point big time: It has Wayne as "Sheriff Jake" hot on the trail of the man who appeared to rob a payroll. Actually, Wayne is the man who appeared to do the robbing (he's a Marshal). The Sheriff is the crusty old coot (Gabby Hayes), "Old-timer" as Wayne consistently calls him. I'll give it $1.00.

Santa Fe Trail, 1940, b&w. Michael Curtiz (dir.), Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Raymond Massey, Ronald Reagan, Alan Hale, William Lundigan, Van Heflin. 1:50.

Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, a young (29) and devilishly handsome Ronald Reagan. Costars like Van Heflin (in a key role). Historic names including George Custer (Reagan), J.E.B. Stuart (Flynn), John Brown (Massey) and many more. This is a **big** movie—big stars, big historical names, good production values, a major motion picture.

Ostensibly, it's about the Santa Fe Trail, bloody Kansas and building the railroad through to Santa Fe. Really, it's about John Brown and the prelude to the Civil War—where West Point graduates who would later fight each other fought together to bring down Brown's uprising. As a historical film, it's a mess—pro-Southern/slavery, riddled with wild inaccuracies, etc., etc. You may find it unwatchable for that reason.

It's dramatic, generally well acted and well filmed, including the long battle sequence near the end at Harper's Ferry. The print's OK—but the sound is sometimes distorted, bringing this down to $1.25.

McLintock!, 1963, color. Andrew V. McLaglen (dir.), John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Patrick Wayne, Stefanie Powers, Jack Kruschen, Chill Wills, Yvonne De Carlo, Jerry Van Dyke, Edgar Buchanan, Bruce Cabot, Strother Martin. 2:07.

The older John Wayne at his most entertaining in a big, well-made movie that's mostly a hoot. If you don't already know the movie (I didn't), I'm not sure how to describe it. G.W. McLintock is a cattle baron (and miner) in the Mesa Verde of turn-of-the-century Arizona, a territory hoping to become a state. He owns most of the nearby town (named McLintock), treats his employees fairly, drinks a lot, plays chess and has a good time. He's friends with the local tribes (despite an old battle wound) and mostly dislikes the territorial government people he considers incompetent—and, to be sure, homesteaders he thinks are being sold a bill of goods, asked to make a living on 160 acres of 6,000-foot-high land not fit for farming.

That's the setup. His estranged wife (O'Hara) shows up, asking for a divorce but mostly wanting to take her daughter (Powers)—just coming back from college Back East—away with her. McLintock's having none of that. Lots of action ensues, including a rodeo, various romances and much, much more. Big fight scenes, more slapstick than anything else—I don't believe there's a single injury or death in the movie. A combination of comedy, light drama and a little romance, the movie has fine performances by Wayne, O'Hara, Powers, Van Dyke (as an up-to-the-minute college boy with a Letter—in Glee Club), and most everyone involved, all of whom seemed to be having a ball.

I can't figure out how this wound up on a set with mostly public-domain movies, unless the studio figured DVD buyers would want the wide-screen version so they could give the pan-and-scan away. The print's OK—if there's damage, it never gets in the way of the movie. The colors are a little faded, but that may be the way it was shot. Great fun, and at the end of more than two hours I wanted more. I'm sure it would be better in widescreen and with richer colors—but even so, I can't give this one less than $2.25.

Sagebrush Trail, 1933, b&w. Armand Schaefer (dir.), John Wayne, Nancy Shubert, Lane Chandler, Yakima Canutt. 0:54.

The plot's a little different, although as usual shootings only happen from a distance—up close, it's all badly-staged fistfights. A young John Wayne is a convicted killer who's escaped and is on the run (hopping a freight train bound west from Baltimore). He's innocent, of course. He winds up with a gang of outlaws, hoping to find the real killer, which he does…but decides the real killer's not such a bad Joe. Meanwhile, he's trying to be part of the gang while foiling their big robberies, in one case by pre-robbing the stagecoach. All turns out fairly well in the end.

The print's not great. The acting's not great, but no worse than the run of these things. Some excellent stunt work. John Wayne underwater breathing through a reed. What the heck: $1.00.

Disc 9

In Old Caliente, 1939, b&w. Joseph Kane (dir.), Roy Rogers, Trigger, Lynne Roberts/Mary Hart, Gabby Hayes, Jack La Rue, Katherine DeMille, Frank Puglia. 0:57/0:54.

This time, Roy Rogers is the prime cowboy at a huge Alta California ranchero—and the foreman, Sujarto, is betraying the owner, Don Jose, to a band of outlaws stealing the gold received for shipments of cattle to

California miners. Meanwhile, settlers are arriving—a group of wagons with Gabby Hayes in full Gabbitude. Sujarto tries to blame Roy Rogers for gringos holding up his people; Roy Rogers tracks Sujarto to a meet with the rest of the bandits—but Sujarto still manages to place the blame on Rogers and Hayes, who are taken off to be hung in the morning.

It all works out—well, not for Don Jose, but for the rest of them. The plot is pretty solid for a one-hour B western, including a remarkably clever way to trap the outlaws. Rogers contributes several songs, some with a group backing, one with Hayes. There's also a fine dance number at a fandango. The print is in very good shape except for a little dirt near the end; the soundtrack's so-so. Those flaws reduce this to $1.

Rough Riders Round-Up, 1939, b&w. Joseph Kane (dir.), Lynne Roberts/Mary Hart, Raymond Hatton, Eddie Acuff, William Pawley. 0:58/0:54.

Roy and friends arrive after serving in Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders to join the border guard, firmly instructed not to cross over into Mexico without permission. Roy and old codger friend wind up on probation because the third Rough Rider gets shot in a barroom brawl. Add in Arizona Jack and his band of thieves, hiding out in Mexico and raiding across the border—and robberies of an American-owned gold mine in Mexico.

Naturally, a couple of songs, including one under dire circumstances. Nothing terribly wrong here, but nothing terribly right either. Even as short Bs go, this is a little disappointing. Maybe we need Dale Evans. $0.75.

Hell Town, 1937, b&w (originally *Born to the West*). Charles Barton (dir.), John Wayne, Marsha Hunt, John Mack Brown, John Patterson, Monte Blue, Syd Saylor. 0:59 [0:55].

The first five or ten minutes get off to a truly rotten start. The print's dark enough that you can't quite figure out what's going on, there's a song that seems out of place—and there's some kind of riding gun battle involving a herd of cattle, but it's hard to tell who's on what side. Enter a young John Wayne and old-coot friend (Syd Saylor)—who seem totally amoral, ready to join whichever side of the battle appears to be winning. Did I mention that the sound's distorted? At this point, I was about to give up—but didn't. (IMDB may help on the confusion: Apparently, when the flick was reissued as *Hell Town*, the production company "added random stock footage of cattle drives, chases and stampedes to bring the running time to over an hour." Some of it certainly *looks* random!)

It gets better, sort of. Wayne's a cowboy on his way to Montana, who has a wholly undeserved belief that he's the best poker player west of the Mississippi—and is broke as a result. The sidekick tries to sell lightning rods, apparently as a straightforward low-buck con. The battle was apparently an attempt to rustle most of a herd of cattle (from a ranch owned by Wayne's character's cousin) on its way to market—and *of course* one of the higher-ups in the cattle company is involved. Also of course, there's potential romance. Somehow, Wayne turns semi-heroic (although still a compulsive gambler and really bad at it). All ends well, I guess. Given the confused plot (not helped by four missing minutes), poor print and distorted sound, I'm being generous at $0.75.

The Kansan, 1943, b&w. George Archainbaud (dir.), Richard Dix, Jane Wyatt, Albert Dekker, Eugene Pallette, Victor Jory, Willie Best. 1:19.

John Bonniwell, on his way to Oregon, encounters the James Gang as they're planning to rob the bank in Broken Lance. He drives them away but gets shot in the process. As he's recuperating, he finds he's been elected marshal—mostly because of Steve Barat, the banker and town boss, who's counting on him to keep the town in line as Barat milks it for all its worth. Things don't work out that way, as Bonniwell proves to be a man of integrity and honor, not just the law. It doesn't help that Barat's brother Jeff, a gambling man, has a lot more honor than anyone expects. Oh, and the hotelkeeper (Jane Wyatt) is involved in all this—starting with Jeff and ending with John.

It's a strong movie, with a solid plot, some fine acting and some remarkable action scenes. A barroom brawl is about as extensive and wild as I've seen, even though I do believe the same chair crashed through the same huge mirror twice during the sequence. There are two negatives, one related to the print and one, I suspect, a sign of the times. The print's damaged in spots with missing chunks, some dirt and occasional soundtrack problems. And much of the humor in the film has to do with "Bones," a black valet at the hotel, who's portrayed stereotypically. Even with those drawbacks, it's worth $1.25.

Disc 10

White Comanche, 1968, color (original title *Comanche blanco*). José Briz Méndez (dir.), Joseph Cotton, William Shatner (dual role), Rosanna Yanni. 1:33.

Twin brothers, half-Comanche, half-white, shunned by both—but one of them has convinced a bunch of Comanche he's their savior, takes too much peyote, and goes around slaughtering white devils. His twin (Johnny Moon), trying to live as a white, keeps getting in trouble (e.g., nearly hanged) because you can only distinguish him from White Comanche (Notah) by the color of their eyes. Not that Johnny's not pretty good at killing people also (he's a crack shot, and this isn't one of those westerns where everything's settled with fistfights) but he always seems to have a reason.

Johnny tells Notah this must be settled and to come to Rio Honda within four days. During that period, there's a range war in Rio Honda between two factions, with Johnny helping the sheriff maintain some semblance of order. Eventually, of course, the showdown happens. In the meantime, there's much thoughtful standing around and an odd love subplot (involving a woman who first thinks

Johnny is the evil half-Comanche who raped her, but eventually sees the eye-color difference and falls for him).

Good color, acceptable production values, a good job by Joseph Cotton as the sheriff—but the real selling point here is William Shatner as an arrogant sexist tinhorn ruler who **doesn't** happen to be on a starship (and is always half-dressed, and has the body for it). And, for good measure, his twin brother. It's not exactly a spaghetti western (made in Spain, not Italy). It's a curiosity, but a watchable curiosity thanks to Shatner. $1.25.

Mohawk, 1956, color. Kurt Neumann (dir.), Scott Brady, Rita Gam, Neville Brand, Lori Nelson, Allison Hayes, John Hoyt, Rhys Williams. 1:20 [1:18].

There's nothing wrong with cross-genre flicks, but this one seems a bit loopier than most. It's definitely a Western, with something about "A legend of the Iroquois" coming just before or after the main title. It's got the ingredients: A fort with settlers moving in, surrounded by reasonably-friendly natives (Iroquois, with a Mohawk chief heading a confederation of tribes) with some unfriendly factions (Tuscarora)—and a good-for-nothing white who wants to stir up warfare between the settlers and the natives because his family wants the whole valley for itself.

But it's also a romantic comedy of sorts. The lead character (not the title character) is an artist who's come from Boston to paint landscapes to send back, who gets a surprise visit from his fiancée/girlfriend—but he also seems to have a local girlfriend, and it doesn't take long before he's romancing an Iroquois, daughter of the chief. Oh, and there's an astonishing song, "Love played the strings of my banjo," and maybe the song title tells you enough. The plot is a mess.

The print's pretty good (although some of the scenic vistas have suspiciously painted-backdrop looks) but the sound is sometimes distorted. The supposed Iroquois include Rita Gam, Neville Brand, Mae Clarke, Tommy Cook and Ted de Corsia. As far as I can tell, there were no actual Native American actors employed in this particular epic. All told, I'm being generous at $1.

Sheriff of Tombstone, 1941, b&w. Joseph Kane (dir.), Roy Rogers, Gabby Hayes, Elyse Knox, Addison Richards, Sally Payne, Harry Woods, Jay Novello. 0:54.

If you look ahead at my dollar rating, be aware that $1.25 is normally the most I'd give to one of these one-hour wonders, flicks filmed as the B side of a double feature—and that the print isn't wonderful. That said, this movie has lots'o'plot without getting chaotic—I found it engrossing and unusually well-written and well-directed for its genre. Roy Rogers, as Brett Starr, a would-be peace officer, runs lowlife gunslinger Shotgun Cassidy out of Dodge City (and takes his sawed-off shotgun), then goes along with friends who are moving to Tombstone. Gets there, finds general lawlessness, acts to deal with a situation—and, because of the gun, is assumed to be Cassidy. Who, as it happens, is supposed to become the sheriff so he can support the mayor's evil attempt to take away a little old lady's silver mine. (She's 77: That's old, at least in the Old West.)

See, her mine is the head of an extensive silver vein that runs under many other claims—but given the law at the time, that gives her control over all of them. If the mayor can buy her claim at a forced auction, that gives him control and he can twirl his mustache and do his evil deeds. Anyway, Rogers goes along with the mistaken identity, figures out what's happening (the miner's attempts to ship bullion always result in Wells Fargo holdups by some strange coincidence, so she owes a huge tax debt to the territory), goes to unmask the villains—and the real gunslinger shows up.

That's just some of the plot. There's a great little twist involving the Wells Fargo agent John Anderson and Joe Martinez, an apparently Hispanic mine owner who's part of the bad-guy group. You know how it's going to come out. It's a one-hour oater with one of the great singing cowboys as a star. (Yes, he sings—three numbers—and there are a couple of big musical numbers that don't involve him but do involve a saloon singer and a quartet of bartenders.) As always, Roy Rogers is a handsome devil and a pretty good actor—and Gabby Hayes, this time as a judge/lawyer, is always an interesting (and in this case capable, not blundering) sidekick. One of the best one-hour western flicks I've seen, all in all. I'll give it the full $1.25, even with the flawed print.

Judge Priest, 1934, b&w. John Ford (dir.), Will Rogers, Tom Brown, Anita Louise, Henry B. Walthall, David Landau, Berton Churchill, Hattie McDaniel, Stepin Fetchit. 1:20 [1:15].

This one's difficult to review. I nearly gave up on the movie in the first ten minutes, thanks to an appallingly stereotypic performance by Stepin Fetchit. And, despite Will Rogers' presence, I'm not all that fond of pictures that so lovingly depict the post-Civil War South from the perspective applied here (all misty-eyed Gray courage and sentimentality).

But I persisted. The story's simple enough: Judge Priest (Will Rogers), the folksy widowed 25-year judge in an 1890 Kentucky town (this is a western *how?*), upholds the spirit (if not always the letter) of the law while humiliating "the Senator," a blowhard lawyer who's running against him. Meanwhile, Priest's nephew has just graduated from law school and wants to resume romancing Priest's next door neighbor, a lovely young orphan—but she's also being romanced by the jackass town barber and Priest's sister wants her son to marry Proper Folk. A stranger in town who keeps to himself punches out the barber after he makes an appalling comment about the young woman. Later, when the barber and two friends lay in wait to beat up on the stranger (with pool cues, in a bar/pool hall), he comes out on top. Naturally, the barber claims he was attacked without provocation… Well, the case goes on (with Priest stepping down from the bench because he stood

up for the stranger earlier). Eventually, we learn that the stranger is a hero in whatever euphemistic version of the Civil War they're using (War of Northern Aggression, I think) and is also the young woman's father, and all's right with the world.

If you can stomach the stereotypes and "the wrong side won the war" attitude, you might find Will Rogers' portrayal interesting. The print's generally OK. But in the end, I can't assign any value to this one. $0.

Disc 11

Grand Duel, 1972, color (*Il grande duello)*. Giancarlo Santi, dir., Lee Van Cleef, Horst Frank, Peter O'Brien/Alberto Dentice, Marc Mazza, Dominique Darel. 1:38 [1:28].

It's a spaghetti western—and maybe that's all I need to say. Good production values and color: Check. Odd, sometimes interesting background music: Check. Lots of long showdowns but even more shootings and other action scenes: Check. Moral ambiguity throughout—no white hats and black hats here (in this case, the black hat is worn by the presumed hero): Check. Plot, if you can follow it, mostly to tie together showdowns, shootings and action scenes: Double check. Little enough residual value that nobody would have bothered to renew this 1972 flick's copyright: Check.

It boils down to how you feel about Lee Van Cleef and the other "stars"—and how you feel about spaghetti westerns in general. Some remarkable combinations of acrobatics and shooting as the second ("Peter O'Brien") evades capture or death while flying through the air. The print's pretty good (except for the missing ten minutes). For me—well, it could have been a lot worse, it could have been a lot better, leading to a middling $1.

It Can Be Done…Amigo, 1972, color (*Si può fare... amigo*). Maurizio Lucidi (dir.), Bud Spencer, Jack Palance. 1:40 [1:38].

I'm not quite sure *what* to make of this one. Before the title, we get Bud Spencer's and Jack Palance's names, arranged in a circle, rotating. Spencer's character, Coburn, is a huge beefy type who seems gentle enough and somehow keeps getting into trouble—well, he is a sometimes horse thief. He typically deals with trouble by staring, slowly putting on a pair of glasses, and then pounding his opponents into the ground—almost literally. They punch him a few times with no effect, then he either hits two opponents' heads together or hits them over the head and they go down. He's involved with a kid whose uncle is taking him to a western town—but the uncle gets bushwhacked and, when Coburn finds him dying, gives Coburn an envelope to pass along to the kid. The envelope turns out to contain $50 (a lot of money) and the deed to a run-down house just outside town. Meanwhile, there's Palance's character, Sonny Bronston, a fast-shooting eccentric who runs a group of female entertainers (in, apparently, more than one tradition of that word) and who's after Coburn. Why? Seems Coburn sullied the virtue of Bronston's sister (a case of mistaken identity)—and now Coburn needs to marry her so she can be an honorable widow (since he'll get shot as soon as he gets married.

The town's priest is also the sheriff and judge and generally doesn't want Coburn around—and has designs on the kid's house and land, for unclear reasons. There's a strange guy who eats dirt—and who starts paying people $2 a bucket (one bucket per person) for dirt that he tastes. Which pastime leads him to the kid's place. There's lots more plot, and it mostly winds up with a remarkable six-minute free-for-all: No bullets fired (lots of *guns* fired, but all blanks), lots of fists, and mostly Coburn putting people out of action.

It felt as though I was joining a conversation partway through. The odd title refers to one of Coburn's sayings. The plot line between Coburn and Bronston seems to go back quite a ways. It's a spaghetti western, to be sure—but it's also a comedy and pretty decent. It's also a decent print (missing just a minute or two), a fair amount of fun, and with a lot fewer killings and shootings than some—only one, as I remember. I'll give it $1.25.

Abilene Town, 1946, b&w. Edwin L. Marin (dir.), Randolph Scott, Ann Dvorak, Edgar Buchanan, Rhonda Fleming, Lloyd Bridges. 1:29.

Oh, the farmers and the cowmen can be friends… Oops, wrong state, and the songs in this one are dance-hall numbers. Still, it's cowboys on one hand (in this case, the bunch riding herds into Abilene from Texas in 1870) and farmers on the other—in this case, homesteaders wanting to settle down. One side of the main drag in Abilene is full of saloons, dance halls and gambling dens; they're hot for all the money the drunken cowboys spend when they finish a run. The other side is shopkeepers and what there is of an actual town—and they're terrified of the cowboys. In the middle—why, there's the Marshal, who wants the town to survive, and an amiable and wholly corrupt Sheriff (Edgar Buchanan), who just wants to avoid having to *do* anything and seems mostly there for an odd sort of comic relief.

Somehow, it seems a little simplistic. The cowboys are wholly sociopathic, as ready to shoot anyone as to say Hi, given to burning out homesteaders. The homesteaders, of course, are all peaceful types who just want to make a living—although it's noteworthy that the *first* barbed wire they string is directly across the cattle trail. (Ah, but Lloyd Bridges makes a fine young leader for the homesteaders.) The Marshal's enlightened: The day of the big showdown, after he enforces "lights out" in all the saloons and stands by as the frustrated cowboys break down the doors and basically trash the places while getting drunk for free, he's only too happy to see his sort-of-lady's own dance hall destroyed…so he can get her out of those evil dance clothes and into an apron where she belongs.

Were the range wars this black and white? Fortunately, I wasn't there. The print's pretty good, and Randolph

Scott cuts a handsome if inscrutable figure. I'll give it a charitable $1.00.

Tex Rides with the Boy Scouts, 1937, b&w, Ray Taylor (dir.), Tex Ritter, Marjorie Reynolds, Horace Murphy, 'Snub' Pollard, Charles King, Forrest Taylor, Beverly Hill Billies, White Flash. 1:06 [1:02]

Part propaganda film for the Boy Scouts—it begins with a three-minute newsreel-style encomium for the organization—part B western with a twist or two. It starts with Tex Ritter riding along with not one but two sidekicks—Stubby (Murphy) and the oddly white-faced Peewee (Pollard)—and, naturally, singing to the sounds of a hidden orchestra. They stop at a shack with a mining company "Private Property-No Trespassers" sign, which is of course their cue to get off and stand around until someone shoots the hat off Stubby's head as a gentle warning. So they mosey along to a Boy Scout encampment, which they naturally join.

That's just the beginning. The gimmick here is clever in a stupid way: Stage a train robbery, stealing a million dollars in gold bullion, and hide it at a phony gold mine—after all, you can always cash it in as being from the mine once people forget about the robbery. (After all, lots of gold ore is 100% pure and has U.S. Mint stamps, right?)

One subplot involves a stereotypical Chinese laundryman, accent and "no tickee, no washee," who as a sideline buys gold nuggets at very low prices—which is how the gang covers incidental expenses. Another involves the cute older sister of one Boy Scout. She's also the downtown employee of the mining company, but is wholly innocent—and naturally gets involved with Tex. There's even a barn dance. Ritter's acting this time around is passable.

The bad guys here are pretty bad: The leader shoots down a Boy Scout who might have heard something. So maybe it's OK that Tex's posse guns down most of the gang as they're fleeing for the border—except for the leader, who Tex beats up in a fistfight. (Heroes never *shoot* anybody in these flicks.) This might get $0.75 for second-rate silliness—but the print's choppy in the wrong places, damaged in general and the soundtrack's not very good, lowering it to $0.50.

Disc 12

My Pal Trigger, 1946, b&w. Frank McDonald (dir.), Roy Rogers, Trigger, Gabby Hayes, Dale Evans, Jack Holt, Sons of the Pioneers. 1:19.

This odd item purports to tell the story of how Roy Rogers got Trigger, with some voice-over narration and pretty clearly aimed at kids. Gabby Hayes is a rancher and owner of Golden Sovereign, a great golden palomino, and becomes Rogers' enemy. Why? Rogers wants to breed his horse (not Trigger) with Golden Sovereign. Hayes will have nothing to do with it (he only wants to breed Golden Sovereign with his own horses)—but the horses have other ideas, getting together on their own. Through a plot involving a nefarious neighboring rancher and casino owner, a wild stallion and remarkably bad shooting, Golden Sovereign winds up dead, Roy Rogers winds up blamed for shooting him—and Rogers' horse winds up pregnant with Trigger.

Here's where things get a little strange, or maybe I just don't know recent history. First, our hero Roy Rogers, the whitest of all white hats—and playing Roy Rogers—jumps bail, flees the state, breaks into a barn (and fights the owners to stay there, since his horse is foaling) and hides out for more than a year. Second, the movie appears to be set in contemporary times—lots of cars and, oddly, apparently-legal casinos in Colorado (but this was 1946, way before casino gambling was legalized)—and somehow it would never occur to anyone to remove the bullet from Golden Sovereign to determine whether it's a rifle bullet or pistol bullet, which would also have proved Rogers' innocence. Naturally, it all works out in the end. Apparently, this was Roy Rogers' personal favorite of his many movies—and probably the most personal of his movies. It does have fairly subtle acting—and the bad guy isn't pure evil, which is unusual.

Good stuff, despite the oddities. We get Dale Evans (as Gabby's daughter), who suits the movie well. We get the Sons of the Pioneers, although not singing with Rogers. It's a good print most of the time. This is the full-length version, not the 54-minute chop job. It's sort of an odd Western, but I'll give it $1.50.

Cowboy and the Senorita, 1944, b&w. Joseph Kane (dir.), Roy Rogers, Trigger, Mary Lee, Dale Evans, John Hubbard, Guinn 'Big Boy' Williams, Fuzzy Knight, Hal Taliaferro, Jack Kirk, Sons of the Pioneers. 1:18 [0:51]

Roy and companion hear about a kidnapping as they come into a town mostly owned by one affable gent, Craig Allen, and naturally offer to help—but one of the posse spots Roy's companion, "Teddy" Bear (Guinn Williams) playing a slot machine (more legal casinos—my history *must* be faulty) with a slug that turns out to be from the kidnapee's bracelet (which he picked up along the trail into town). So, they assume Roy and friend are the kidnappers, and Roy and friend flee.

They find the "kidnapped" girl—Chip—in the hills. She's fled for reasons that never seem quite clear. That little mess resolved, her older sister—played by Dale Evans—is about to sell their apparently-worthless gold mine to the Allen, who's also her fiancée. (He's supposedly buying it as a favor to the older sister, to pay for the kid's education, and plans to mine for manganese) But Chip's sure her father buried a box in the mine, and it's important to her.

Ture enough, the box *is* important, there's a false wall in the mine, and…well, everything just barely turns out OK, including lots of stunt mine-wagon riding. A fairly typical B Western, but with a good party sequence added including fancy dancing and singing. I saw a

much shorter version than the original, apparently the 51 minute edited version. I'd imagine the other 27 minutes would help! Apparently the first time Dale Evans and Roy Rogers appeared together in a movie. Good print overall. I'll give it $1.00.

Bells of San Angelo, 1947, color. William Witney (dir.), Roy Rogers, Trigger, Dale Evans, Andy Devine, John McGuire, Sons of the Pioneers. 1:18 [1:15].

This time, Roy Rogers is a border investigator on the (Texas?)-Mexico border and friends with the people in San Angelo (on the Mexican side). Something funny's going on—specifically, locals from San Angelo are turning up dead, shot for stealing silver from the U.S.-side silver mine.

In a parallel plot, Western writer Lee Madison's coming to town and Roy's disgusted, saying his novels are trash. When the bus arrives, there's no man named Lee Madison on it—and when the woman on the bus overhears Roy's comments, she comes up with a different name to play along. Shortly thereafter, the stage from the bus station to the lodge is held up by a lone masked gunman who's really out to give Hamilton a scare—and who apologizes to the woman (who notices a Texas Ranger's ring on the gunman's finger).

The twist here is interesting. The silver mine is worthless—but it connects to a long-abandoned Mexican silver mine. That mine's also played out, but silver's a lot cheaper in Mexico than in the U.S. So they're "mining" smuggled silver. As the plot progresses, lots of people get shot, Lee (and by now Rogers knows it's her) gets nabbed by the bad guys, and in a final confrontation, the fact that he finally *read* her book *Murder on the Border* saves the day. (Hamilton is played by Dale Evans—who else?) Andy Devine plays a funny sheriff who turns out to be landed gentry.

Good plot, well played, good music. Some surprisingly realistic fight scenes, leaving the actors bruised. This is the full version, albeit missing a few minutes. Unfortunately, much of the time the focus is soft, suggesting digitizing problems. That and some choppiness in the print prevent this from getting more than $1.25.

Under California Stars, 1948, color. William Witney (dir.), Roy Rogers, Trigger, Jane Frazee, Andy Define, George Lloyd, Wade Crosby, Michael Chapin, Bob Nolan and the Sons of the Pioneers. 1:10 [1:12].

First we get a typical Western fight scene—then the director yells "Cut." The movie's over, and time for Roy to go back to the RR Ranch—where, this time, Andy Devine is Cookie, the cook and general factotum. (The Sons of the Pioneers are ranch hands/cowboys, and Cookie's hired a bunch of relatives as well—including a young woman, a cousin who's the new horse trainer.)

Where do we go from there? Scoundrels are trying to round up wild horses on Roy's range, to sell them to the government for meat and skins. Roy's boys run them off,and we find that the bad guys are working for the town's old horse trader, Pop Jordan—and the lead bad guy has a cute stepson with a thieving dog and a limp. Somehow, the stepson winds up at Rogers' ranch and gets a job of sorts—and the horse trader figures that horsenapping Trigger for a healthy ransom is a faster way to make a buck than rounding up or rustling horses.

Well, in the process of Triggernapping, one of the bad guys shoots another—and the sheriff says Roy can't pay the ransom, since murder's involved. So they try to set a trap for the outlaws. It doesn't go perfectly, but in a fairly complicated final 10 minutes (involving double-crossing among thieves, naturally), it works out. Oh, and Cookie—who has an awful voice—proves himself to be a good songwriter (the title number). So we end with Roy and Cookie—and the kid, who will get the operation he needs to walk properly—on their way back to Hollywood. Naturally, there are several full songs during the process.

It's not great acting, but the plot's pretty good, the scenery's fine, the print's usually good, the sound's good (although occasionally a little hollow) and it's good "metaWestern" fun. I enjoyed it. (The reported run time on IMDB is two minutes less than the actual DVD run time, which makes no sense.) A little on the short side for a full feature, so I'll give it $1.25.

Happy Trails…

What better way to end a set of Western "classics" than with four Roy Rogers movies? I suppose the answer depends on your feelings about the singing cowboys. I don't know whether Rogers was the best actor of the bunch (I suspect not), but he looked good and had a great voice—a voice he kept for a long time (I love the Rogers/Randy Travis duet of "Happy Trails," recorded when Rogers was 79.)

How does the second half stack up? There's a true classic in good shape, *The Outlaw*, and a romp that's so good I also gave it $2.25, *McLintock!* There are some other movies here worth viewing.

It all adds up to $26.50 for the second half, $50.50 for the whole set—or, if you limit it to movies worth at least a buck, $23.25 for the second half and $38.25 for the whole set. Clearly, the second half outdid the first. On the whole, I wasn't disappointed.

Retrospective

Pointing with Pride, Part 6

May 2001: Number 6

The highlight of this issue may have been GETTING PAST THE ARC OF ENTHUSIASM.. But I said I'd provide

the followup to COPYRIGHTS AND WRONGS, together with cases where I've changed my mind since 2001:

Scenarios 1-6

Take one of Roy Tennant's columns in *Library Journal*—since, as he notes, those columns are posted on LJ's Web site for anyone to read or download.

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

  Appropriate and a fine thing to do. Citing someone else's work has always been appropriate; providing an explicit link offers contemporary convenience.

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

  Questionable. Tennant's byline still appears, but by suggesting that it's part of *Libraries 2.0* rather than *LJ Digital* I'm at least partly in the wrong. I wouldn't do this, and quite a few site owners object to being "framed" in this manner.

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

  Clearly unethical. I'm now reusing the material (albeit with byline) in a situation that I don't regard as fair use and without Roy's knowledge or permission. Using one paragraph from an article (with citation) would be ethical and legal; taking the whole piece goes too far.

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

  Appropriate and traditional.

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

  Outrageously unethical and probably illegal. Pure theft, even if the source material is "freely" available on the Web.

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

  Ethically questionable—and a case where I think the law and ethics differ. At worst, this is plagiarism rather than direct theft. You can't copyright facts or ideas (at least not directly), but an ethical writer would *at least* give credit for the inspiration.

Scenarios 7-12

The wonders of digital technology.

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

  If the red light goes on, it should. I regard this as *entirely* ethical behavior—but there's considerable doubt that it's legal, at least as cases stand in the courts. I find that appalling. Once I've purchased a DVD, it should be mine to enjoy as I see fit.

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

  Unethical as far as I'm concerned, even though I agree that the big record companies have acted outrageously in maintaining high prices for CDs even though costs are lower than for LPs. Overpricing does not justify theft.

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

  Slightly more unethical than the previous situation, as it adds distribution of stolen material, albeit distribution without personal gain.

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

  Appropriate. I'm reformatting songs that I've purchased for my own convenience. I don't know of any legal issue, and there's certainly no ethical issue.

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

  Equally appropriate. Note that audio CDs do not contain copy protection, so there's not even a legal issue of circumventing protection.

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

  Oops. Unethical, as far as I'm concerned. There's one conceivable ethical justification—that I'm creating a new work of art by rearranging existing material—but that's a tough sell when you're just choosing a group of complete songs. I don't know of any anthologists who have successfully claimed that they're creating new works of art and therefore don't need permission from the writers anthologized!

  If you disagree on the ethics, I'd be interested in hearing why—but I have little patience for arguments that boil down to "Two wrongs make a right" or "If it's easy, it's ethical."

On the final Tennant scenario, I'd now say I regard that as *unethical*—plagiarism through paraphrase. The same day I'm preparing this, I was writing a piece on blogs and libraries for my "day job" and noted that Meredith Farkas had offered a good list of characteristics of most (but not all) blogs. I used the

names of the characteristics and either paraphrased what Farkas had to say or offered entirely new comments—but I also *explicitly* credited Farkas as the source of the list.

Midwinter 2002: Number 16

This was the issue with my New Year's Resolution: "No more guilty pleasure!" To wit:

> I'm not suggesting that you change your viewing, reading or listening habits unless that suits your own needs. What I'm suggesting is that you shouldn't feel guilty about your pleasures. (Unless it gives you pleasure to feel guilty about them.)

Credit where credit is due: I got the idea from Mick LaSalle, a movie reviewer for the San Francisco *Chronicle*. When each reviewer was asked to admit to and discuss his or her guilty pleasures for the Sunday entertainment section, he refused—on the basis that he didn't feel guilty about liking B movies and other "trash" that suits his fancy. Neither do I; neither should you.

Back in 2002, I was having more fun with predictions—in this case, a 1989 book of forecasts for 2000-2001 and some less futuristic projections. As far as I could determine, about 20% of the 1989 specific predictions were right, which I thought was a pretty good record for eleven-year forecasts. Then there were some of the others, and I'll repeat a few of them:

- We'll have more leisure time, with 32-hour work weeks and half of us working "flextime / flexplace" jobs.
- "Modular plastic housing will allow people to move more easily and frequently. People will simply pack up their houses and ship them to new locales."
- Planes will carry 1,000 passengers (and many of them will be supersonic), the average life of a car will be 22 years, separate lanes for trucks will be enforced.
- "Magazines in the year 2001 will be on floppy disks that allow the reader to interact, play with, and manipulate the information on his or her PC."
- "By 2001 there will be only three major domestic [air] carriers."
- "By 2000, there will be three major corporations making up the computer hardware industry: IBM, Digital, and Apple."

Remember Digital? (You may have known it as DEC.) Compaq acquired what was left of it in 1998. Remember Compaq? (Not the brand name for some HP computers—the company.) Heck, remember when there was an "HP Way" that actually *meant* something?

September 2002: Number 26

It almost makes me dizzy seeing these issues with eight different essays in 20 pages. I'd like to think more recent issues have deeper thought and fuller discussions, but maybe I'm just more verbose. In any case, the longest piece in this issue was COPYRIGHT CURRENTS, with the title "Avast, Ye Maties!" It was about the Berman bill, which would have legalized malicious hacking on the part of Big Media, *overriding* both Federal and state laws to do so.

I made fun of Segway's lobbying to make the powered, 12mph Human Transporter legal anywhere people walk—an effort in which Segway largely succeeded. I suggested that people who spend $3,000 (which turned out to be low) "for a high-tech electric scooter so they don't have to *walk* anywhere are likely to be the same self-absorbed fools who bump into you because they're on their cell phones or grooving to their MP3 players." Fortunately, most of those self-absorbed fools didn't buy Segways. (I'd say they don't want to look like dorks, but they're willing to wear their Borg attachments—er, Bluetooth headpieces—even when they can't use their cell phones, such as on planes, so clearly dorkiness isn't the issue.)

June 2003: Number 36

A May 2003 advertisement in *ComputerShopper* was so bemusing that I did something that might now be called fisking. Here's what I had to say, under the title (for a *16-page ad*) "Why 1 Windows is simply not enough!":

> What the hey? That was my initial reaction to this *sixteen-page* essay-advertisement from HyperOs Systems in the May 2003 *Computer Shopper*. I believe the company is touting HyperOs 2003 (yes, it's a small "s"), a "boot environment redirection system" that lets you mount multiple copies of Windows, in various versions, that can all view the same data files. (The software works by "dropping to DOS," a novel feat under XP or NT/2000, since there is no native DOS in NT-based Windows.)
>
> We learn that Windows 3.0 was "originally designed by 6 people at IBM" and that "the IBM PC has dominated the personal PC market ever since," which will come as a shock to Dell, Compaq/HP, and for that matter IBM. The ad seems to say you can boot today's Windows from a diskette—and that you can't "start your PC without a few Kilobytes of computational code on an ultra slow floppy disk." We learn that "It has been argued that all of the increase in PC performance predicted and achieved by hardware over the last 20 years has been all but wiped out by the increase in complexity and size of the code that it runs." In other words, today's PC doesn't really run programs any faster than a 1983-model PC? Right.

Later, the anonymous but apparently British author (given spellings and word usage) tells us that the "article" was written in Word 6 on Windows 3.1. Why on earth would anyone choose to do that? "Why should you have to throw away decades of computational experience?" Well, if you have "decades" of experience with Windows 3.1 (1992?) or Word 6 (mid-1990s), I guess that's a good argument—but somehow my decades-old word processing experience works a whole lot better in Word XP under Windows XP.

I, for one, was not aware that I had to drop to DOS to do a backup, since I've always done it within Windows, but here I learn better…and that backups always run from a DOS interface and at the slowest disk mode. I'm told that we're now in 2001. It's implied that having more than a few applications on your system *automatically* slows down Windows, including XP, and can make it unstable—even if those applications aren't running. (The "benchmark" was created by loading in all the "cover disk" software that comes with British PC magazines, willy-nilly. Don't *you* just load freebie programs at random to see what will happen?) And we learn that, if you force Windows to run entirely in RAM (with files in a RAM "drive"), surfing with a 56K modem will "feel like…surfing with Broadband. Various windows open and close so fast it is like there is no one else on the Net!" And here you thought dialup speeds had to do with transmission. Apparently, according to HyperOs, delays are because Internet Explorer is spending too much time writing to disk.

I have no idea whether HyperOs is a good product. This endless blather, filled with unlikely and questionable statements, was enough to tell me that I want nothing to do with the company.

Remarkably, the company is still around.

February 2004: Issue 46

The piece that still speaks to me is a 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…including Joi Ito. 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 calls. 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:

- **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…

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.

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…
- 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…

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.

November 2004: Issue 56

This issue includes a bunch of interesting commentaries that might deserve repeating. I'm going to include only the last one—one that's not really about libraries:

Does the Music Matter?

Rogier Van Bakel wrote an odd essay in the New York *Times* on July 17: "Can an MP3 glutton savor a tune?" He notes, "Almost everyone knows hundreds of recordings that are time machines"—songs that resonate within you, bringing back memories at the deepest level. "By virtue of repetition over weeks or months, music can become a soundtrack for a particular time in your life."

He notes that music fans can now "indulge boundless appetites" and—even legally—expand their collections at relatively little cost. "But with so much worthwhile music pouring into my computer and from there into my iPod, none of it seems quite as long-lasting or momentous as the old tunes. I'll come across sets of MP3s I have no recollection of having downloaded just weeks earlier."

When he was a student and money was tight, "virtually every album I bought came to stand for something." After seven or eight years, he had 150 to 200 albums—2,000 songs, more or less. "I own a hundred times that much music these days. Question is, was I somehow getting more out of my tunes when all my albums fit into a duffel bag?"

He believes that's true. He thinks it makes sense to buy two or three CDs (or download a short playlist) and let them sink in before you go on to more.

I see his point, although my situation is a little different. As a student and shortly thereafter, I was a little music-crazy: not only pop, folk and rock, but also even more baroque and 20th century classical. At one point, I owned every album of Stravinsky conducted by Stravinsky except for one TV ballet, "The Flood"… I was buying the Telefunken Bach extravaganza as it came out, pocket scores and all. I think I hit 1,300 albums—all in great shape, and not played all that often even if I did spend *way* too much time just sitting and listening.

Then I got a life. Tastes, desires, and time changed. I sold most of the collection before CDs came along; the rest went when I converted. At this point, we own something like 150 CDs (and a few dozen classical CDs that don't contain "songs")—in other words, we're about where Van Bakel was as a student. I mostly listen to CD-Rs drawn from a subset of the CDs, most of which I've ripped (at high bitrates) to MP3 and reconvert to CD audio when burning. I make up mixes for various reasons, one of them being to approach songs freshly.

> A few dozen songs bring back history. A few hundred are memorable from my past. A surprising number are memorable from more recent times because the music resonates with my feelings. I've thought about the possibility of *really* restoring the old songs I liked—probably roughly doubling our collection—and adding some new ones. And I realize that I'd rather explore the 1,500-odd selected songs, at least for a few months.
>
> Is it possible that having all the music you could ever want means that none of it matters as much? Is this another unintended consequence of technology: Cheapening the emotional impact of music by making it so much more available?
>
> I think Van Bakel may be on to something. I'd like to believe otherwise. The music should matter, just as certain books and certain movies (and maybe even certain TV shows) should touch us more deeply than "Oh, I liked that well enough."

September 2005: Issue 66

The biggie was an investigation of 60 liblogs chosen based primarily on their "reach." I calculated reach using a set of metrics that isn't possible any more, then noted some other items for each blog—starting date, frequency of posts during April, May and June 2005, total and average length of those posts, number of comments and comments per post—and a few odd ones. I listed standouts in most categories and offered brief comments on each of the 60 liblogs.

This exercise started me on a series of liblog investigations, a series that continues to this day. It exposed some blogs to people who weren't aware of them. It was also misinterpreted by quite a few people who insisted on calling it "Walt's Top 50 blogs" or something of the sort.

The next year, I avoided the "top X" issue altogether by looking at 200+ liblogs falling "somewhere in the middle." In 2007, I didn't do this, but *did* include "visibility"—defined very differently largely because web conditions changed—as one element in two book-length studies of library blogs.

I'm in the middle of the largest liblog survey I've ever done. I *did* use visibility as a cutoff, a way to ignore liblogs that operate "under the radar" and whose owners may prefer it that way. I've now decided to eliminate any links between visibility and individual liblogs (although I'll probably do a chapter on the visibility issue).

Spring 2006: Issue 76

The Open Content Alliance/Google Book Search saga continues. (And, in a contemporary digression, may I say how delighted I am that OCA has named a director?) I discussed Angel Rivera's article-length commentary on a *C&RL News* article just full of generation generalizations and Mark Lindner's somewhat shorter and maybe even more emphatic response. A celebratory essay discussed the return of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing* after a 3.5-year hiatus.

Oh, and a *long* NET MEDIA piece had a great title: BLOGS, GOOGLE AND PORN. There's no good way to summarize it. Sorry.

February 2007: Issue 86

Conference speaking. One chapter from *The Balanced Librarian*, before I'd decided to make it a book. And reports on some predictions and scorecards, including *Wired*'s remarkable "Wild predictions for a wired 2007. Those included "HD-DVD wins," which was a dumb prediction even in late 2006, at least as far as I could tell. As I said at the time, "I'm already on record as saying that Blu-ray is the likely 'winner' if there is one." Of course, I don't have the salary or prominence of *Wired*'s experts.

November 2007: Issue 96

I probably made more enemies among copyright aficionados with "Sometimes They're Guilty," an essay on one of the few cases where an RIAA filesharing infringement lawsuit has gone to a jury. (The first time, actually.) By far the biggest section was NET MEDIA: THINKING ABOUT BLOGGING—roughly half on blogging in general, half library-related.

Masthead

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