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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- 100 Chefs

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Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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Column Editor’s Note: Hey, are you reading this? Your esteemed column editor would like to know what you think! Zip off a quick email to <pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu>. Does BYMI fill your needs? Do you have any suggestions for changes? I’m listening! — PR

MAY AS WELL SWITCH IF YOU’RE LOSING THE FIGHT
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

When the big city Wi-Fi craze began to build momentum, large telecom and cable companies nearly had a cow. What they were charging $40 a month for was now being slashed to $15 or even free if you were in St. Cloud, Florida. Instinctively they tried to stop it through regulatory legislation shoved through state governments. But they lost at every turn.

So now that AT&T, Cox Communications, and Time Warner are seeing markets lost to Google and EarthLink they want to jump on the bandwagon.

YES, HUMANS CARRY MORE PARASITES AND PATHOGENS THAN DOGS
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

How do you cook alligator? Just how long can you keep sushi before serving? And can a document shrinker be used to tear up tortillas, egg rolls and wonton skins for shredded tortillas et al. on dishes?

These and other vital health questions for restaurants may now get a rapid response on www.foodsafetyweb.info. There an elite lineup of microbiologists, chefs, restaurateurs and regulators from thirty countries are standing by to grapple with the complex world of food and disease.

Editor’s Note: Some Bet You Missed its had to be cut from this issue. Watch for more Bet You Missed its in June! — KS

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — 100 Chefs

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Among the various types of Google envy, some are a lot more prevalent than others. You can Google that term, in fact. (“Google” as our newly-made cliché has it, is verb as well as noun, and for all I know adverb, adjective, preposition, and every other part of speech.) If you do, you will see that the term mainly applies to businesses — direct competitors — who suffer Google envy because they wish they had thought of some of the things that Google thought of first. This is a relatively small group of people, of course.

Then there are those of us, such as librarians and library vendors, who develop and maintain online databases and interfaces, like Google does, and who envy the search engine company’s resources because we are always being compared to Google. Why aren’t your searches as fast as Google’s? Why isn’t your interface as nice as Google’s? How come Google can bring out something new so quickly? Sometimes we see figures on the number of servers Google has — around 10,000, I think it is — or the number of software engineers employed by Google — 1,000 or 2,000, maybe, but really, past a certain point, who’s counting? If we had just a fraction of Google’s resources, we grumble, we’d show them then. But we don’t, and while it often feels as if we’re competing with Google, we’re really spectator-competitors, with a good seat to watch the show, but as if watching movies, with no chance to match up in real life with the amazingly beautiful actors and actresses on screen who might as well

continued on page 79

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inhabit a different planet than ours. And although we can envy with anyone out there, we’re not a large group either.

To locate truly widespread Google envy, the thing to do is to count everyone who wants to work at Google. Now we’re talking really big numbers, Google-scale numbers. How many millions of us who work somewhere beyond Mountain View, California think we’re smart enough, hope we’re cool enough, and wish we were young enough — Google’s booth at the recent American Library Association annual conference in San Antonio appeared to be staffed mainly by bright junior high interns — to have our own crack at those perks offered employees at Google headquarters, the yoga classes, the ping pong, the pool tables, the massages, the gym, the lava lamps?

More than all of these things put together, though, we envy the food, the famous free food served for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks at Google’s three main cafés and 25 “micro kitchens.” It’s high-end food, beyond delicious, fresh, hip, fashioned, artful gourmet cuisine prepared in great variety and endless quantity, ordered up to keep everyone close to home base, and work, for as much of the day and night as possible, to fuel the long hours of technical development and business planning — not to mention roller hockey games — necessary for Google to go about the workaday routines of changing the world.

This food aspect of Google was described in an article last November 14 in the Wall Street Journal, whose lucky reporter visited the Google campus on a day when one of several entire offerings was pork loin stuffed with a mixture of sausage, Swiss chard, garlic, white onions, red bell peppers, carrots, oregano, parsley, rosemary, olive oil, white wine, bread crumbs, and herb salt. One vegetarian choice was comprised of eggplant, tomato, onion, and couscous. The day’s menu also featured glazed game hens, grilled sea bass, a ground turkey dish, stuffed squid, wild mushroom and caramelized onion bread pudding, pickled asparagus, several designer pizzas, a number of salads and vegetable choices, lobster ravioli, four soups, none of them bringing Campbell’s to mind, and desserts like key lime mascarpone cannoli. Medieval feasts nothing on this.

Beyond all the food, though, there was one remarkable detail in the Journal article, something that says more than any menu can, or any headcount of software engineers could say about the size, the resources, and the audacity of Google. It’s this: Google employs 100 chefs.

Can you imagine, 100 chefs? Picture them streaming in at break of day toward the kitchen’s food preparation islands, outfitted in jaunty hats and crisp whites, flashing specially engineered knives, spoons, spatulas, ladles. Of course they’re probably never onsite all at the same time, but what an image. Restaurateurs must envy Google too.

Charlie Ayers, chef for a wealthy Silicon Valley family when hired away in 1999 to create the Google kitchen, got the job in part, according to the Journal, by whipping up a test meal of curried roast pumpkin with Chinese five-spice tofu for founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin.

Page and Brin are of course the geniuses who got it all started with their better idea for a search engine. As everyone knows by now, they met in 1995 at Stanford, where they decided to organize all the world’s information, incorporated Google to that purpose in 1998, turned a nice profit by 2001, and in 2004 raised $1.7 billion through a public offering that was also a public spectacle. Ever since they’ve been busy spending that money by building new ways for Google to make yet more money.

Among librarians Google Scholar, a continued on page 80
search engine for scholarly literature, and especially Google Book Search, a service based on the digitization of millions of books obtained from publishers and five research libraries, have drawn the most attention. But just a little clicking here and there around the Google Website reveals an incredible lineup of projects and services underway, some familiar, some unfamiliar, many, like Scholar and Book Search, still in a beta or somewhat experimental mode. There’s blog searching, image searching, map searching, satellite searching, video searching, catalog searching, searching of university Websites. There’s Google toolbar, Google desktop, Google messaging, Google shopping, Google blogging, Google software, Google news, Google mail, and more, everything designed to extend the reach and potential profitability of the company.

New services are one way to grow. Another is to create new Google users in all parts of the world. Today in the search engine business, or any business for that matter, this means China, whose ungreed embrace of capitalism and population of 1.3 billion will at some point, everyone figures, make it the world’s largest market for practically anything. While China has well over 100 million Internet users today, Internet use is even so considered early stage, meaning that, for Google, there’s a lot more to this country than special tofu.

Google’s difficulties in China are well known. In 2000 the company launched a Chinese-language version of Google.com, but government-mandated filtering of search results by Chinese Internet Service Providers made the service slow, unreliable, and at times entirely unavailable, frustrating users. Google stood fast, rejecting self-censorship. Meanwhile, though, competitors unhampered by the Google value system began to work with the Chinese government. Google watched as its share of the search market in China plunged, while the market share of Baidu, Google’s principal competitor in China, rose from 2.5 to 46 percent. This in a market expected to more than double by 2010.

So Google changed course. Earlier this year the company launched Google.cn, a version that Google itself, like the China-based ISPs, will filter according to Chinese law. Has Google done evil here? The company has carefully explained its decision. The Internet is transforming China, for the better. But Chinese Internet users were even so underserved. More information, for them, would be better than less information. Unfiltered, imperfect access to Google.com will remain. Google.cn will tell users when results have been filtered. Google will protect user privacy by not hosting mail and blogging services in China.

It all sounds more reasonable than evil, Google’s “calibrated” approach to the China problem, as one company official put it in testimony before a U.S. congressional committee. Of course, calibration, as Google does not deny, includes business measurements as well as ethical judgments. Google noted in its China testimony that more than 350 million mobile phones are in use today in that country. A different Google official, in a different setting, recently noted the company’s single biggest business opportunity right now was cell phone advertising.

That setting was a meeting of key investment analysts. Investors, Google has them now. They’re the people who handed over that $1.7 billion. At last year’s meeting for this group, according to the New York Times of March 3, 2006, the analysts were put off because the principal speaker was none other than Charlie Ayers, the chef, who delivered a presentation on the day’s lunch menu. This year, with the Google stock price down 20 percent from an earlier high, the centerpiece presentation was delivered by Google’s chief financial officer, who gave the analysts a “detailed and sober” look at the state of the company. He assured analysts that Google’s growth opportunities remain boundless.

Was there really any other choice in China than the one Google made? Surely most of us don’t consider that decision an “evil” one. And just as surely, as Google looks for ways to please investors and maintain growth, it won’t be the least tough decision the company will face. Next economic slump, what happens? What about all those neat new beta services? In particular, what about the ones concerning libraries? Google investors will understand how important they are. Won’t they? They’d lay off a few of those chefs first wouldn’t they?

“Investors have been successful,” said one of the investment analysts, “in communicating with the management they can’t be this funny renegade company.” How long, one might ask, can Google remain Google? Think of all the industries that revolutionized the world through someone’s invention or new idea. Working backwards in rough chronological order, think of computer software, fast food, computer hardware, television networks, airlines, processed food, motion pictures, telephone companies, electric utilities, automobiles, department stores, railroads.

That puts us back in the mid-nineteenth century, meaning that this is getting to be an old story, businesses that start with a burst of excitement and utopian promise but in time become merely backdrop to our lives. At best, these companies are invisible pieces of necessary infrastructure, like sidewalks or banks; at worst, they are objects of ridicule or even contempt. These companies grew, they made choices, they became businesses like any other.

“Don’t be evil” is the famous Google motto. Nobody I know of thinks of Larry Page and Sergey Brin as evil men. But these are two smart guys, after all. Early on, they must have known that one day, they’d need the reminder.

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International Dateline — The Importance of Metadata and Interoperability

by Dr. Peter T. Shepherd (Project Director, COUNTER) <pt_shepherd@hotmail.com>

In one of the more famously precious exchanges in Oscar Wilde’s “Importance of Being Earnest,” Cecily declares her passion for plain speaking with the cliché “When I see a spade I call it a spade,” only to be put down by Gwendoline’s cutting reply “I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.” Thus has it been for many of us in the publishing and library world. We all rely on metadata (data about data), we all use metadata, as a tool it is as indispensable as the spade; but it is something that, on the whole, we assume is taken care of by someone else. We have moved in widely different social spheres.

Such can no longer be the case. The rapid advance of electronic publishing has created a growing need for an expanding range of reliable metadata to support the publishing and management of information resources. In addition to descriptive metadata to characterise content, we need technical metadata for technical processes, rights metadata for rights resolution and preservation metadata for digital archiving. Occurrences of metadata vary tremendously in richness. The strategic decision to continue on page 81

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