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Little Red Herrings-Ten Reasons Revisited Part 3
Conclusions

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Little Red Herrings — Ten Reasons Revisited
Part 3 Conclusions

by Mark Y. Herring  (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

If you are interested in leading a discussion, acting as a moderator, coordinating a lively lunch, or would like to make sure we discuss a particular topic, please let us know. The Charleston Conference prides itself on creativity, innovation, flexibility, and informality. If there is something you are interested in doing, please try it out on us. We’ll probably love it...

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Send ideas by July 31, 2012, to any of the Conference Directors listed above.

Or to: Katina Strauch, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409 • 843-723-3536 (voice) • 843-805-7918 (fax) 843-509-2848 (cell) • <kstrauch@comcast.net> • http://www.katina.info/conference.

In parts one and two I reexamined my “10 Reasons Why the Internet Is No Substitute for a Library” (http://bit.ly/30InO6) in an effort to see where I went wrong, or right, as the case may be. On balance, critics notwithstanding, the article holds up well against the empirical data, less so against what one hopes the Internet will be (but isn’t yet). Herewith, are some concluding remarks about this brave new, digital world.

Conclusions

While I still believe the Internet is no substitute for a library, I understand that I am in the minority in that belief. But believing that doesn’t make me, or anyone else for that matter, a Luddite. Unless one is a makebate who holds to an other-or-view of things, one can see the Internet for what it is, and still see libraries as, for now anyway, infinitely better as a full-service shop for research and resources. As the dean of a medium-size academic library, I cannot ignore the rise of the Web and the digitization of everything. For this reason, we have ebrary, loan iPads, Kindles, Sonys, and laptops. With rare exception, nearly all our article information is digital. At the height of print, we subscribed to some 3,000 titles. Today, that number is less than 600, but our students have access to more than 30,000 titles. Additions like multispectral imaging (http://econ.st/slx5fl) that delve more deeply into manuscripts to solve mysteries that heretofore remained unknown add up to positives on the Web side of the ledger, and make it a more robust tool for the future.

But none of these things are free. No individual could subscribe to the resources a library does all by herself. Meanwhile, library budgets remain static at best. I hoped that my article then, and its reassessment now, would make the case that print books are not the enemy, and large libraries are not the devil in disguise. Sure, they are costly and yes, there are ways we can make them ever less so. But let’s not throw the cake out with the cake box. If we do, we’ll likely never get libraries back. Moreover we’ll have nothing that is a viable ersatz. My objections to the Internet are valid ones against a change that is not, not yet, the panacea for everything.

Print reading hangs on only because most serious readers are over forty and are not yet sold on the eBook reading experience as the exclusive alternative. Even young people half that age are not entirely sold on it for scholarly reading. More than this, however, is the fact that print publishing, the cash-cow of many publishers, will fade only when another equally-profitable model replaces it. Until then, expect digital delays. (And please, don’t ask again for Congress to fix the copyright problem. That’s part of this problem even now.) Let me remind you that eBooks have been around now nearly three decades. We should be within eyesight of the paperless horizon, but we have yet to reach its border. And now news comes that eBooks are on the way out in five years (http://bit.ly/N86JSu).

Even granting the rapid rise of eBooks, my 2000 text stands up better than my critics are continued on page 10
will the printed book endure? I do not see how it can. It will persist
because there are still too many people like me who will work to keep them alive a bit longer.

But le livre reste, will the printed book endure? I can’t imagine that we will. When Gutenberg
invented his press, we not only lost the painstaking
care of wonderfully-made books, but we also lost
something of the love of them as tangible, almost sacred objects of knowledge. We gave
that up for ubiquity and convenience. While it’s still possible to get a sense of book-making
quality from the Folio Society folks (http://www.foliosociety.com/),
the reverence for reading, for knowledge elegantly encased in
something wonderful to hold, is already gone. And don’t tell me that’s just being old. The
late Steve Jobs obsessed over the look of his tools as much as he did anything. Appearance
does matter.

As we lose what we have known to what rising generations will never come to know,
we have to weigh that loss. Is the substitution better for everyone? When books were scarce
a thousand years ago, those who had them knew them by heart, literally. Today, books are every-
where, but reading skills decline and illiteracy abounds. We know that young people cannot
read on screens as well as they read in print. We also know that while Google may not be making
us stupid (http://bit.ly/cXNeCu), it isn’t exactly increasing our collective intelligence either. Are
these things—declining reading skills, weakening concentration, digital distractions—merely
phenomena of change and transition, or are they indicative of something more sinister about the
digital environment? We don’t know now, but we are going to find out, for better or for worse.

Is it a good idea to cast off the last life preserver, the last life boat for something we are sure is
must be—invincible? For those too young to remember, the last time we did that had a rather
titanic and terrifying outcome.

Will the Internet successfully replace libraries? Not yet, but eventually.

Meanwhile we rush headlong to replace what has worked wonderfully well for millennia for
what has yet to work as we had hoped for even
half a decade.

Frankly, I’m perfectly willing for the two to exist side-by-side until we know for certain what
future we really want, and the one we must have to
close this solutions to our problems to be sure
those are the ones we want, not the ones we’re
setting for.

But BIG BROTHER’S WATCHING AND HE
FEELS VIOLATED
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

ABC is about to air the reality show “Life in a Glass House,” which CBS says
is a total rip-off of “Big Brother” including “plot, themes, mood, setting, pace,
characters, and sequence of events.” And CBS is suing.

But isn’t taking cues from previous shows what everyone does? Is there much
difference between “American Idol” and “The Voice”? 

An added twist has 19 former staff including producers of “Big Brother” working on “Glass House.” And there
seems to be nondisclosure agreements involved.


NYC UNDERBELLY
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Five book picks if you’re into old-time gangs of New York:
(1) James D. McCabe, Lights and Shadows of New York Life (1872); (2) Tyler Anbinder, Five Points (2001); (3)
Timothy J. Gilfoyle, A Pickpocket’s Tale (2006); (4) Kevin Baker, Paradise Alley (2002) (Vol. 2 of “City of Fire” trilogy

Street swindler Ferdinand Ward with Knopf.)