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ATG Interviews George Machovec

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and Managing Editor, *The Charleston Advisor*

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Close Encounters with the Droid

Column Editor's Note: *George Machovec is Associate Director, Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries and Managing Editor, The Charleston Advisor (george@coalliance.org). George has followed library technology for nearly 30 years. You want to know something, you ask George. Who better to ask about this foray into the future of the smart phone? — DB*

ATG: *We heard you're a new droid customer. How did that happen?*

George Machovec: My five year old **Motorola RAZR** phone died on a Friday so I needed to get a new device ASAP. As a **Verizon** customer I was hoping that the **iPhone** would be released for that carrier but I had to get a new device immediately. I had been watching the **Blackberry Storm 2** but the new **Google OS** looked intriguing and I liked the idea of getting a user interface that would be available across several carriers if I ever decided to change. Also, it seemed like the **Google OS** was targeting both business as well as personal/recreational use, something which I really wanted.

ATG: *Which one did you buy?*

GM: I got the **Motorola Droid** with the latest **Google 2.0 OS**.

ATG: *What was your first reaction?*

GM: Of course, I had been drooling over the **iPhone** for some time so I was hoping my purchase of the **Droid** would not let me down. I have to admit I was happily blown away with the **Droid** functionality and really enjoyed its simplicity and power.

ATG: *How is it as a work phone?*

GM: The phone functionality has been great. This was the main reason that I had not gone to **AT&T** for an **iPhone**. I live in Denver and do a lot of car travelling in the Rocky Mountains and southwest — some very rural areas once I get out of the Denver metro area. **Verizon** has great coverage and I did not want to lose the broad network that **Verizon** offers.

The **Droid** phone functionality is much nicer than my old **RAZR**. Since I sync with a **Microsoft Exchange** server at work I was immediately able to import my 500 or so contacts as well as calendar and email. This was a crucial requirement for me in the purchase of a new phone. I used to have a **Dell PDA** for syncing with **Exchange** but I stopped us-

ing it about a year ago because it was such a burden to use.

ATG: *I'm sure you aren't underwhelmed with features and apps. Overwhelmed?*

GM: **Droid** currently has about 10,000 apps in their Market — some are free and some cost. This is about a tenth of what is now available for the **Apple iPhone**. But 10,000 is still a huge number and my guess is that there will be a large growth in available apps over the next year or so. I don't feel app deprived and have found lots of very cool things. The only "killer" app that is missing is **iTunes/iPod** which, of course, is exclusive to **Apple** and gives them a huge edge. I guess I'll just keep using my **Nano** for the foreseeable future.

I'm a news junkie so apps for **BBC**, the *New York Times* and **CNN** are among my favorite. But I've also downloaded apps for a free dictionary, **Pandora** (streaming music), **The Weather Channel**, **WikiMobile**, a PDF viewer, **OpenTable** (to make restaurant reservations) and a few others. One of the really cool apps I've downloaded allows me to take pictures with the five megapixel camera and turn the photo into a PDF. This is quite useful for old-school library work as well as other ways to share documents without faxing or photocopying.

One of the very powerful apps that is pre-installed with the **Google 2.0 OS** is a very powerful map function. Aside from getting **Google Maps** with its various layers it also has a built-in **GPS** (with built-in **GPS** satellite connectivity) with written as well as voice instructions when driving. A person no longer needs a dedicated **GPS** device. **Google Latitude** is also included which will pinpoint my position on a map and allow me to share it with my set of pre-approved friends. Maybe I'm getting old but this seems a bit creepy, almost stalker like. But I'm trying it out anyway.

One thing I'm trying to avoid is the "CrackBerry" syndrome with the mobile device controlling my personal and professional time. To avoid this problem, I've made the email notification on my **Droid** silent so that I only get notified for phone calls and text messages. I get dozens of emails every day (sometimes over a hundred) so I don't want the phone buzzing every few minutes. I still like getting the emails in my **Droid** but I only use that device for emails on rare occasions. I would rather use my laptop where I can be more efficient.

I've only touched the surface of available apps but as I spend more time over the next few months I'm looking to find more.

ATG: *Is the network up to the droid?*

GM: The **Verizon 3G** network in Denver seems very robust and I've had no slowness or connectivity problems. But the **Motorola droid** also has built-in Wi-Fi so when I'm at home I sometimes use my home DSL Wi-Fi connection as it's even faster.

ATG: *How would it work, you think, doing IM reference?*

GM: I think doing IM reference would be difficult unless one had short simple answers. Although there is both a screen keyboard as well as a small physical keyboard on the **Motorola Droid**, I would find it difficult to create long messages. Screen pushing would also be very difficult with the small form factor of the device. But I could see using a larger computer at the reference desk or in an office and then using a portable phone if one had to go elsewhere in the library for a quick follow-up.

ATG: *Are your iPhone friends envious?*

GM: I've had several of my **iPhone** friends comment on some of the cool features in the **Droid**, especially the **GPS** and **Google**-specific optimized functions. But I think once you get invested in an **iPhone**, **Blackberry**, **Palm Pre** or **Google OS** device there is a large incentive (in addition to the two-year required contract) to stay in an existing environment because of the investment (intellectual as well as financial) one makes in the apps.

ATG: *What will you buy in two years — after your contract runs course?*

GM: So far I'm very happy with my **Droid** phone. But it's really hard to know where the main competitors will be in two years. I'll decide then.

ATG: *Any eBook experience with your device?*

GM: I think the **Google OS** for portable devices will be a major player for not only **Android** phones but also other venues such as with the **Nook** who recently disclosed that **Google** was behind the scenes in their new reader. Interestingly, the **Barnes and Noble eBook** app is currently only available for **iPhone**, **BlackBerry** and **PC/Windows**. I assume that they will release a **Google OS** version of their eBook reader for **droid** phones in the near future, but it isn't available as of December 1, 2009 as far as I can tell. **Microsoft** appears to be the major loser with the new **Google OS** and other leading smart phones. They seem to have fumbled in the portable market. 🐻