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Oregon Trails — The Value of Paper

by **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (985 Lewis Ave, Apt. 9 Eugene, OR 97402-4293) <twleonhardt@earthlink.net>

"Had the computer come first -- and paper second -- no one would raise an eyebrow at the flight strips cluttering our air-traffic-control centers." So ends the essay, *"The Social Life of Paper: Looking for method in the mess,"* by **Malcolm Gladwell** in the current issue of *The New Yorker* (Mar. 25, 2002, pp. 92-96).

In his essay, **Gladwell** reviews two new books, *The Myth of the Paperless Office* (M.I.T., \$25.95) and *Scrolling Forward: Making Sense of Documents in the Digital Age* (Arcade, \$25.95). I won't attempt to review a review, although **Mr. Gladwell's** review is more of a thoughtful essay, but I do hope that you will find the essay's final sentence intriguing enough to have you read the whole thing.

There were several things that I found appealing in this *New Yorker* piece and as I write this sentence it occurs to me that if I

were exiled on a desert island but with mail delivery, and if I had to choose a single magazine to subscribe to, it would have to be *The New Yorker*. There are issues where I find nothing worthwhile but the cartoons and even the briefly noted books are flat and unappealing. But it is rare when I don't

find at least one long article that brings me pleasure in learning something new about something that I didn't even know I was interested in. And without *The New Yorker*,

I would not have discovered **Joseph**

Mitchell's perfect, hypnotizing prose that brings to life people and places re-

moved in time by many years and making me wish that I had been born in another place and another time. But I digress.

In **Gladwell's** essay, I find vindication for some of my own messy habits, indeed, I recognize myself in descriptions of piles of pa-

pers and files, notebooks, magazines, books, and office paraphernalia. I don't pretend to recognize myself when he describes the scholars, scientists, and thinkers whose work habits **Gladwell** describes, but I have learned why it is that piles on my desk serve me better than files in a cabinet.

And speaking of filing cabinets, **Gladwell** gives us a bit of their history and traces their popularity back to **Melvil Dewey**. As it happens, out of sight is out of mind so filing cabinets don't serve active projects very well. I am always amused, when watching *Law and Order* or some other crime story, how an office worker pulls open a filing cabinet within arm's reach and immediately pulls out the pertinent document and does it faster than you could pull up a similar document on your computer's hard drive. Amazing and unbelievable.

I am also not one of those people who can reach into a pile on my desk and pull out just what I am looking for unless I have color-coded the folder and that color has no competition at that moment. But I know that what I want is on my desk or credenza

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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Encompassing Cornell

by **Bob Nardini** (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229; Phone: 800-258-3774 x.3251; Fax: 603-746-5628) <nardini@ybp.com>

Encompassing Cornell

Libraries and their vendors have always known one another as buyer and seller, where the daily business can certainly get complicated, but where roles have remained distinct, and boundaries clear. But roles shift, boundaries wash out, and something more than the usual currency is exchanged in new product development, today a most interesting part of library-vendor relations.

This column is based upon an interview with participants in one of today's most interesting library-vendor enterprises, members of the **Cornell University Library ENCompass Team**. The team formed some two years ago, when **Cornell** agreed to work with **Endeavor Information Systems** to design and test **ENCompass**, **Endeavor's** digital library management system, on a test hardware platform provided by **Sun Microsystems**.

Team members currently include **Karen Calhoun**, Assistant University Librarian for Technical Services, who leads the team; **Tom Turner**, Metadata Librarian, Mann Library; **Meryl Brodsky**, Public Services Librarian, Mann Library; **George Kozak**, Digital Library Specialist; **Marty Kurth**, Head, Metadata Services, Central Technical Services; **Fred Muratori**, Reference Librarian,

Olin Library; **David Ruddy**, Electronic Publication Specialist; and **Sarah Young**, Technical Services and Reference Librarian, Catherwood Library.

Cornell librarians have been very successful in assembling the staff, getting the funding, and organizing the other resources needed to digitize large collections. But these digitization projects, which began at different times, at different sites among the nineteen libraries on campus, were launched with little overall coordination. Users must find out about the collections, actually locate them, and then navigate a medley of separate interfaces and searching protocols. Too often, the wealth of material brought online remains buried treasure at **Cornell**.

"Digital library" projects are not hard to find today. Most of them, however, set out to create access to some discrete body of content. The **Cornell ENCompass** team, much more ambitiously, wants to knit together not only the various local digital collections, but also **Cornell's** collection of online licensed commercial resources, such as reference ma-

terials and journals, and also the **OPAC**, which would then represent one **Cornell** collection, among many others. Under the vision guiding the team, users could easily and adequately search all of these resources, at once, through a single interface.

Many smaller successes will need to precede that goal, of course. The team is presently engaged in creating a digital project of its own, as a road-test, a way to learn, and to stretch the **ENCompass** system. The project will scan a collection of anti-slavery pamphlets and run everything through an optical character recognition program. A hierarchical system of metadata will then put within the reach of users knowledge of the collection itself, description of every pamphlet within it, and access to every word on every page of these 10,000 pamphlets. One day, a perfected **ENCompass** would at the same time retrieve other material pertinent to the user's search on the anti-slavery movement, whether a book, an article, a Website, a database, or another digital collection.

That at least is the vision, and necessarily the team brings to it a considerable depth of talent, and a variety of experience gained at **Cornell** and elsewhere. Backgrounds in programming, systems administration and analysis, public services, technical services, and project management all can be found on the team. Some members focus on "back-end" content manipulation, using experience in data conversion, in **MARC** and **AACR2** standards, and in newer data structures like **Dublin Core**, **EAD**, and **XML**. Other team members come mainly from public services. "We're used to seeing what the public sees," says **Fred Muratori**, who describes a special challenge in **ENCompass**, "since it's not what we're used to. There are certain features and vocabularies, such as objects, and parents, and children, and containers, and repositories, that we'll need to translate into language people would understand." He and other team members, sifting through what they've learned from years of work with **OPACs**, Websites, and intranets, now try to figure out what will apply, and what won't, within a new context, the "digital library."

Staying organized, quite apart from the project's technical side, is itself a challenge.

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among a jumble of other documents and folders. I have learned by hard experience that the surest way to lose track of projects is to get organized beyond moving some piles to the floor, just to get some breathing room. I visited a university a couple of years ago where there were regular piles on office floors and the custodial staff had a standing order never to throw anything away unless it was in the trash can. I can verify that piles I have left on floors in several institutions have not even been moved by custodians, probably trained by years of seeing messages on blackboards saying, in capital letters and exclamation points DO NOT ERASE!

Gladwell's article provides some insights as to why paper works so well, not just for economists at the **International Monetary Fund** (one group that was studied) or air-traffic controllers, but for most of us who work in offices and deal with

paper documents on a daily basis, never mind that those documents were created on a computer. I won't attempt to tell you more because **Gladwell** and the authors of the books he reviews do so most thoroughly and eloquently. What is not talked about is the printed book and journal, another topic altogether but the article did get me to thinking that old habits die hard sometimes, not necessarily or entirely because they are habits but why they are habits. They are habits because they work so well and until something comes along that works demonstrably better and with no special effort, we will stick with what works best. Many analogies have been made between the hand-written (copied) codices and printed books with printed books and electronic books. Like most analogies, this one is hard to sustain with just a little close analysis. We could have had video telephones forty years ago but chose not to and still don't want them. We could do everything electronically now, or so some would have us believe, but could we do it as well?