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Bet You Missed It-Internet Taxes and Internet Addicts

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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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NET AND TAXES

by **Sandra Beehler** (Old Dominion University)

Groups supporting both sides of the debate over taxing internet commerce spent over \$14 million on lobbying efforts and another \$3 million on campaign contributions in 1999 to try to influence Congress. A study panel, the Advisory Commission on Electronic Commerce, which was delegated to make a recommendation to Congress, failed to achieve consensus. Major commercial Internet players are hoping at least for a long delay in resolving this question. The current ban on Net taxes expires in October 2001. It seems most likely that in the long run state and local governments will impose taxes rather than the

federal government. The stakes in the Net tax debate are high, with online retail sales expected to climb from \$38.8 billion in 2000 to an estimated \$184.5 billion by 2004.

See — “Costly Tax Show-down,” *Internet World Digest*, April 15, 2000.

PROFIT MAKES PERFECT

by **Sandra Beehler** (Old Dominion University)

An estimated \$250 billion of the \$1.1 trillion spent annually on health care in the U.S. is lost to administrative waste. Health care organizations as well as commercial interests hope to use the power of the Internet to reduce such costs and distribute health information more efficiently. Obstacles to overcome include incompatible information systems and an understandable mistrust of new, unproven

players in the life-and-death business of health management. However new regulations from the HFCA are forcing physicians and hos-

pitals to meet strict standards in automating health information. Physicians and health care managers alike see a major role for the Internet in improving exchange of health and patient information, keeping better track of patients with chronic illnesses, reducing administrative costs and preventing deaths from medication errors. Enough potential profit is involved to attract the minds and the money to solve the ongoing health care crises in the U.S.

See — “Healing the Health Care Business: Why the Internet is not a Magic Pill,” *Internet World Digest*, May 15, 2000.

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of agreements and resolve some of the issues in advance for the library customers.

In approaching mergers, suppliers are naturally concerned about how they should roll out the information to current and perspective customers and when announcements should occur. Often libraries become aware only after the fact and lack detailed knowledge of merger agreements or the potential effects on agreements between the vendor and its customers. Those detailed announcements of the mergers to customers are carefully crafted and choreographed to diminish customer concerns. Nevertheless, they are not always successful.

Announcement of mergers should include or attach a financial statement of the new company. A bank reference to key customers also would help. In addition, mergers often translate into streamlining of services. There may be a slippage in quality and standard turnaround times or improvements. Assuming good customer services from the former company, libraries need to know that the company representatives, who are providing current customer support, will remain at the very least for a transition period, since building new relationships can be time consuming.

Libraries understand good customer support and services and are positioned to pro-

vide useful feedback. A wise move on the part of the newly formed vendor might be to send customers a simple but short survey, giving librarians a chance to provide feedback on their issues with regard to the potential effects of the merger. On the whole, library supplier services are generally quite good and often excellent, but the changing face of a business affects those support operations. Libraries know quickly when customer support workloads become too heavy. In the work world today, although many of us enjoy our work, there is inevitably too much of it. When library customers let suppliers know that their requirements are not being met (e.g. expected response times and quality of response), librarians and company representatives need to seek quick solutions together. For example, delivery systems between vendors and libraries are probably one of the most difficult areas to perfect. With online vendors ready to pick up the slack, both organizations need to assure minimal or no delays in delivery.

Advice to Libraries

The plethora of mergers brings fewer companies and, thus, fewer choices. This could result in increased charges, reduced service, and loss of discounts. The first question librarians should ask about is the newly merged company's financial stability. If a library decides to stay with the new company or lacks a choice in the matter, it is important to take a wait and watch approach, carefully examining the bottom line on costs and services.

Libraries must hope for the supplier's need to maintain the customer base and the related desire to serve customers well.

When mergers occur, involved suppliers often provide repeated reassurances that they are giving us one “swell deal.” However, the “proof is in the pudding.” Certainly each library customer will need to decide if the newly formed company meets its needs and to act accordingly, taking steps to re-establishing the relationships or to move on. Librarians should not overlook the important fact that often there are new services to be gained (e.g., Web-based services, EDI, etc.).³ Many smaller suppliers have sold out to larger companies to gain access to new technologies. Libraries should examine them carefully and take advantage of them whenever possible. Because of local requirements for doing business, there will be instances where select libraries will be forced to initiate a new RFP process or restart one in the works.

With regard to mergers of publishers and producers of information, librarians need to be very watchful of potential mergers that could affect the general marketplace. In addition, librarians should also be attentive and respond to court and federal and state legislative activities that affect the libraries' ability to acquire materials, providing support to professional associations who are advocating in behalf of libraries.⁴

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Conclusion

Library suppliers and libraries need to remain mindful of each other's needs. Change is a constant and will never go away. All organizations must remain flexible and open to change but mindful of the bottom line and driven by the dollars available. Generally, libraries are publicly supported and cannot rapidly enhance their budgets. Companies continually strive to improve their profits and have a need to move in fast-paced time frames. Producers, suppliers and distributors in the information chain, including libraries, must continually seek best practices and good relationship across their organizations to benefit library users everywhere.

Endnotes

- 1 Wilkinson, France C. and Connie Capers Thorson, *The RFP Process: Effective Management of the Acquisition of Library Materials*. Englewood, NJ: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1998.
- 2 McCabe, Mark J. "The Impact of Publisher Mergers on Journal Prices: an update," *Against the Grain* v.11, no.4 (September 1999): 58-61.
- 3 Luther, Judy. "A Year of Consolidations, Mergers and New Entrants to the Market," *Against the Grain* v.10, no.1 (February 1998): 30-33.
- 4 "What Do Mergers Do For Libraries?" *Against the Grain* v.10, no.1 (February 1998): 31.

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PUBLISH, PERISH, OR PERSIST?

by Pamela M. Rose (SUNY at Buffalo)

Will scientists abandon traditional journals and share their research directly on the Internet? Although PubMed Central's ambitious plans have been scaled back due to technical problems, other companies like Current Science Group are undeterred in their efforts to offer free online research papers. Meanwhile, CrossRef, a publisher-initiated

fee-based alternative to PubMed, was launched in June, and traditional publishers continue to dismiss free publication schemes as utopian.

See — Eliot Marshall, "Publish and Perish in the Internet World" in *Science*, p223-4., Jul. 14, 2000.

WE NEED A BIGGER GARAGE!

by Sandra Beehler (Old Dominion University)

A business opportunity is developing, as IT managers look for solutions to the problem of providing storage and access to huge amounts of data. The amount of storage space needed has jumped over the last five years from gigabytes to terabytes and soon to petabytes. Vendors are betting on Storage Area Networks (SANs) as a long-term solution. The article describes SANs as "collections of Fiber Channel drive arrays, linked with hubs and

SCSI-based tape drivers." SAN technology is still in its early stages, and standardization is needed for optimal efficiency. Access tools (e.g., gateway buses for servers) also must be perfected. For those unable to afford the expensive infrastructure for data storage, future options may include leasing SAN space.

See — "Cleaning Out the Files," *Internet World Digest*, May 2, 2000.

ONE-STOP TITHING

by Sandra Beehler (Old Dominion University)

This article briefly profiles a company called govWorks, which aims to make the interface between government and the public smooth and instantaneous through the Web. It offers 24-hr response on questions about government, as well as allowing citi-

zens to pay taxes or settle parking tickets online. So far, govWorks has established partnerships with 780 localities around the U.S.

See — "Company to Watch: govWorks.com," *Internet World Digest*, May 15, 2000.

TO PROTECT AND CONTROL

by Sandra Beehler (Old Dominion University)

The connection between a new digital rights management company called ContentGuard Inc. and Microsoft could spell the end of free content on the Web. Microsoft, which owns an interest in the new company, intends to embed this digital rights management technology into its existing software—Windows, MediaPlayer, Explorer—as well as its upcoming e-book reader, Microsoft Reader. ContentGuard is an offshoot of Xerox Corporation, and its technology employs Extensible rights Markup Lan-

guage (XrML), which it hopes will become an international standard for the digital rights industry. The technology "enables authors, artists, songwriters, and programmers to protect and control the way in which their intellectual property on the Internet is used, copied, distributed, and purchased."

See — "Two Giants Team Up on Digital Rights Management," *Internet World Digest*, June 1, 2000.

CAPTAIN EARTH DECODER RING

by Sandra Beehler (Old Dominion University)

This brief mention in *Wired* of the 10,000-year library effort led me to the Web site for the Long Now Foundation (www.longnow.org). Long Now and Stanford University Libraries held a symposium on June 30-July 2, 2000 whose purpose was "to deliberate on the permanence of information and [the] need for long-term thinking about it" and to initiate plans for a 10,000 year library. The Founda-

tion is also involved in the design of a "Rosetta Disk" a two-inch nickel disk engraved with analog text and images of microscopic size in all known languages to be used at some far future time to reconstruct the "narrative of civilization." The disk is meant to have at least a 2,000-year lifespan.

See — "Long Term Memory", *Wired* 8.07 (July 2000), p. 94.

DO NOTHING AND DIE

by Phil Dankert (Cornell)

The British government has commissioned a business plan for a major international "e-university." This brief article notes that consortia of institutions will be invited to bid to create it. Online instruction up to the bachelor's-degree level, as well as a new two-year degree, will be offered. "The e-university will focus solely on teaching and will carry out no research." In a speech announcing it Education Secretary David Blunkett "warned universities that they had no

choice but to immerse themselves in online activities...The 'do nothing' universities will not survive..."

See — David Walker, "Britain Plans a Major E-University, With Goal of Competing Globally," *Chronicle Of Higher Education*, May 19, 2000, p. A57.

Does Internet addiction exist? In this very interesting article

two professors at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute urge caution in using pathological labels for what may be someone's passing immersion in the Internet. Much of it is devoted to brief descriptions of research that has been conducted on the topic. They make it quite clear that in the next round of Internet studies more solid questions must be included. For instance, the nature of people's activities on the Internet must be considered rather than simply the extent of their use of it. Researchers need to do a better job of collecting and analyzing data about Internet use. In closing, it is noted that "we mustn't forget that the Net has actually improved the lives of many people."

See — Joseph B. Walther and Larry D. Reid, "Understanding the Allure of the Internet," *Chronicle Of Higher Education*, February 4, 2000, p. B4-B5.

Adventures in Librarianship: Final Report by the Task Force for Committee Review

by Ned Kraft (Order Librarian, Ralph J. Bunche Library) <Kraftno@state.gov>

Objective

Pursuant to the directive issued by the Vice-Director for Informational Information, and further clarified by the Assistant VDII (as mentioned by the Vice-Assistant VDII in her memo of 12 June), this task force was formed for the express purpose of reviewing library committee and task force formation, proliferation, and inflammation with special attention paid to the cumulative results (speculation) of committees and task forces and to the possible disbursement of task force and committee members (rehabilitation).

Methodology

To pursue its objective, the Task Force for Committee Review met as a committee to discuss the pertinent issues, plan refreshments, channel former (deceased) committee members, and reach agreement as to how it could proceed as, in fact, a task force rather than a committee. With its infrastructure thereby clarified and delineated, and after coffee had been served, the task force devised a survey vehicle that would allow it to analyze the pertinent issues which it had previously been unable to analyze (as pertinent).

The survey was sent to a random sampling of all professional staff (roughly 100%). Although the immediate response rate was low (no survey was returned before the deadline), the Vice-Director was able to improve the response

rate (to roughly 100%) by issuing a carefully crafted email (some respondents characterized the reminder as a "threat").

Surveys were then independently tallied by an outside agent (the Vice-Director's son-in-law).

Survey Results

Although the survey was "anonymous" careful handwriting analysis revealed a relationship between tenure and cynicism toward the committee/task force process. Among respondents, as the years in service rose, so did the dissatisfaction. This measurement has a low margin of error (roughly 0.0%).

The survey also found that task force recommendations are rarely followed (some respondents used the word "never") when they conflict with the opinion of the Vice-Director. Again, there was near unanimity on this question, and the conclusion agrees with the historical record.

Recommendation

The Task Force for Committee Review recommends the following two options:

The Vice-Director could consider mandating that no professional ever reach more than three consecutive years of service with the organization. The survey results suggest that maintaining a professional staff with an average length of employment of 2.6 years or less will ensure enthusiasm for the Vice-Director's programs by tapping into what has been called the "rose-colored glasses" effect.

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