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# Bet You Missed It -- Press Clippings -- In the News -- Carefully Selected by Your Crack Team of News Sleuths

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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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## If Stephen King Sells Poorly, Fire the Editor by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

In a move that stunned the publishing world, **Ann Godoff** — president, publisher and ed-in-chief of **Random House Trade Group** — was given the boot. “The industry is in total shock,” said **Suzanne Gluck** of **William Morris**. **Peter Olson**, CEO of **Random House** says she was falling short of profit targets. “There’s no contradiction between literary quality and financial results.”

See — **Jeffrey Trachtenberg**, “Random House Shows the Door To a Top Editor,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 17, 2003, p. B1.

## Losing Other Peoples’ Money by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

**Industry Standard**, the “Newsmagazine of the Internet Economy” made \$200 million in the fat year of 1999 but still failed spectacularly. **IDG**, owner of **MacWorld**, **InfoWorld** and the “Dummies” yellow paperback series launched a trade magazine about the Internet business in 1997. They hired **John Battelle**, first managing editor of **Wired** and a cast of supporting hipsters who predictably clashed with the conservative Boston-based IDG managers. Tens of millions got squandered, and Battelle seemed most interested in an IPO and the big money that could be made from ramping up the stock in those frenzied times. But the real end came with the crash of the Internet economy in 2000 and the mass flight of advertisers.

See — **Leah Nathans Spiro**, “Giga flop,” a review of James Ledbetter, *Starving to Death on \$200 Million a Year*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 10, 2003, p. W1.

## The Synergy That Wasn’t by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

In Jan. 2000, CEO **Gerald Levin** sold **Time Warner** to **AOL** in a monster-hyped quest for synergy. At the time he said he sold because he couldn’t figure out how to harness the Internet. Then he was put in charge of it all. No one noticed the irony. And of course it’s been a total disaster. Among other non-synergistic aspects, its high speed Internet access strips money out of **Warner Brothers** music because customers download music for free. And **Time Warner** execs loathe techies and spend their time on corporate jets and in limos heading to the Four Seasons. Now the investment bankers will get paid huge fees a second time to tear it all apart.

See — **John Ellis**, “Case Closed,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 15, 2003, p.A10.

## Talk of the Trade from page 80

ments and masses of other primary sources, **Bellesiles** showed that few Americans, even on the frontier, had working guns. The book was hailed for its originality and its importance to the anti-gun movement, and in 2001 **Bellesiles** was given **Columbia University’s** prestigious **Bancroft Prize** for historical writing.

There were only two problems with **Bellesiles’** argument: one was that it made no sense, it was counterintuitive, and two, his research was, to be kind, flawed. The first problem, the absurdity of believing that few Americans owned guns, even though they were vulnerable to Indian attacks and killed game for a large part of their diet, propelled a number of scholars to try to replicate **Bellesiles’** research. It emerged that the San Francisco probate records that **Bellesiles** quoted were all

## Hypermass = Dumber Squared by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Taste arbiter **Pope Julius II** gave us **Michelangelo** and **Raphael**. Today’s culture magnates at **Vivendi** and **Bertelsmann** give us **Christina Aguilera** and **Eminem**. And the decline of civilization is only going to get worse. **Jean-Marie Messier** designed “cross-market synergy” so you could have **Britney Spears** first as a pop star and then as a Bobblehead. **Pierce Brosnan** shamelessly touts Omega watches and BMWs in the midst of a **James Bond** movie. “Star Trek: Nemesis” is an awful movie but it “extends the Star Trek ‘franchise’” for selling other products. Yes, you live in a world of “cross-market Hypermass” where the formula is “target the lowest common denominator — then think lower.” “Reality TV” gives us **Joe Millionaire** “which makes the original ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire’ look like Masterpiece Theatre.” But the technology that makes cross-platform selling possible also provides an escape route. That desired youth demographic is downloading music with Kazaa and mixing their own CDs. And when the undesired folks above 35 wise up, they can live on their own culture islands too.

See — **Daniel Henninger**, “Modern Culture Creates Its Own Escape Routes,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 17, P.A10.

## Going While the Getting’s Good by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

**Tommy Mottola** was a huge success back when the music industry was simple. Promote a few superstars and give the customer a lousy deal. Now it’s all Napsterized, the execs are furious over the social injustice of them no longer getting rich, and Tommy is bailing out. Of course the industry’s madly lobbying Congress to “do something,” but there’s no way to stop the piracy. All digital signals have to be turned into analog signals before the human ear can hear them. And the technology to turn it back into digital is simple. And a **KPMG** study — one of those high-priced consultancies you read about — says the industry should quit fuming over piracy and develop the Internet’s potential to deliver quality products. But that would require pricing at a level that makes it not worth the trouble to steal. “A prediction: By the time Hollywood figures this out, Mr. Case will be back in charge of AOL.”

See — **Holman Jenkins**, “The Music Stops, Again,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 15, 2003.



destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. Primary sources in Vermont and Rhode Island did not match **Bellesiles’** charts, and when he set up a Website to confront his critics, the facts he mounted on the site did not check out either. **Emory University**, **Bellesiles’** employer, set up a blue ribbon panel of historians to decide the award winning professor’s fate. The committee reported that “it is almost impossible to tell where **Bellesiles** got his information...and he is guilty of unprofessional and misleading work.” **Bellesiles** is still defiant, but has resigned from **Emory**. It is unclear whether he will return the **Bancroft Prize**, or if **Columbia** will demand its return. One thing seems certain: early Americans used guns to hunt and protect themselves, and had they not, they would have been as foolish as those who awarded the **Bancroft Prize** to **Bellesiles**. 🐻



## Code Hill

by **Sandra Beehler** (Lewis & Clark College)

This article addresses the issue of preservation of computer code. When computer startup companies go bankrupt, what happens to the thousands of lines of code produced by their programmers? Early on, the idea of reusing code was popular, but in fact it did not prove cost-effective, partly because the code without the people who wrote it is not very useful. Thus only a small portion of it is ever rescued and reborn. Among the small portion saved was voice recognition software marketed as **NaturallySpeaking**, developed by a small company called **Dragon Systems** and sold to the Belgian company **Lernout & Hauspie** just months before that company went flaming into bankruptcy court. **NaturallySpeaking** was the world's first continuous-speech dictation software and a prime example of irreproducible "deep" code. Luckily its value was recognized and it was quickly bought by another company and put back on the market.

See — "Immortal Code" by **Martha Baer**, *Wired* 11.02, February 2003, p. 84.

## All of Them Happy Some of the Time

by **Sandra Beehler** (Lewis & Clark College)

This is a fascinating article on the ethical problems faced by one of the world's most popular search engines, **Google.com**. The internet behemoth has faced challenges from companies unhappy with their ranking in search results, from Scientology advocates seeking to eliminate opposition pages, and from a Chinese government desirous of blocking access to certain forbidden subjects like "falun gong." **Google's** response to these challenges is determined by President **Sergey Brin**, who has the unenviable job of steering a path through the legal minefield while at the same time holding the company's own against fierce competition. **Google** has so far managed on the simple rule of "do no evil." But the reality of competition and growth may force **Brin** to make more difficult ethical choices in the future, especially if stockholders come into the picture after an IPO.

See — "Google Sells Its Soul," *Wired* 11.01 (January 2003)

## Publish or Profit?

by **Pamela M. Rose** (University at Buffalo)

A group of prominent scientists led by **Dr. Harold Varmus** have announced a new publishing venture, **Public Library of Science**, as a challenge to the established academic publishers who are more concerned with profits than freedom of scientific information. **PLS** will begin with two peer-reviewed online journals on biology and medicine with the goal of cornering the best scientific papers and immediately depositing them in the public domain, a move which the founders hope will ultimately transform science itself. Success will "depend largely on whether leading scholars are willing to forsake the certain status of publishing in the established journals to support the principle of science as a public resource. In a profession where publishing in a top journal is often crucial to success and grant money, that may be a difficult task."

See — "New Premise in Science: Get the Word Out Quickly, Online" by **Amy Harmon**, [www.nytimes.com/2002/12/17/science/17JOUR.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/17/science/17JOUR.html).

## We've Come a Long Way Since Alidades

by **Pamela M. Rose** (University at Buffalo)

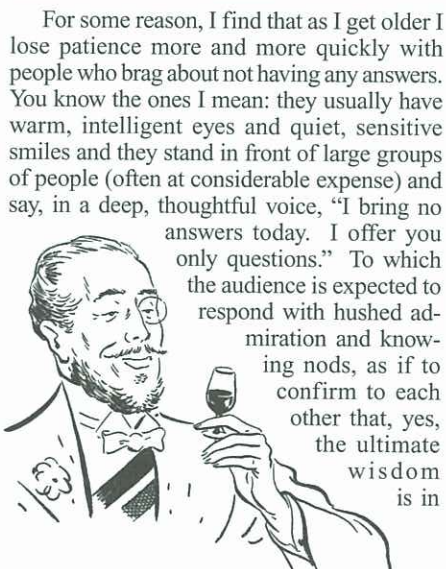
Online, continuously updated, instantly accessible. That's the goal of an ambitious project being undertaken by the **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)** which has launched eight pilot projects in its **National Map Program** to develop a real-time online digital national map with high-quality topographical data. Such a map would replace sorely outdated topographical maps which have long suffered from lack of funds to maintain a robust revision program. Some question the ability to maintain such a vast store of knowledge, but **USGS** hopes to partner with federal, state and local agencies. Pilot projects, such as the one in Lake Tahoe, expected to have a ready core of data from local communities who maintain current **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**, but are finding a mixed bag of either poor **GIS** measures or complicated software that needs to be standardized and integrated. However, some regional digital maps are already providing useful information.

See — "Mapping the Future" by **Kathryn Brown**, in *Science*, Dec. 6, 2002, pp.1874-5.

# IMHBCO (In My Humble But Correct Opinion)

## Aid Workers or Bass Pros? Struggling with the Fundamentals of Librarianship

by **Rick Anderson** (Director of Resource Acquisition, The University Libraries, University of Nevada, Reno, 1664 No. Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89557; Phone: 775-784-6500 x.273; Fax: 775-784-1328) <[rickand@unr.edu](mailto:rickand@unr.edu)>



For some reason, I find that as I get older I lose patience more and more quickly with people who brag about not having any answers. You know the ones I mean: they usually have warm, intelligent eyes and quiet, sensitive smiles and they stand in front of large groups of people (often at considerable expense) and say, in a deep, thoughtful voice, "I bring no answers today. I offer you only questions." To which the audience is expected to respond with hushed admiration and knowing nods, as if to confirm to each other that, yes, the ultimate wisdom is in

open-mindedness, and the best that can be expected of us in this crazy old world is that we all remain open to a constant questioning.

The problem is that while asking questions may require great courage, an unwillingness to take the next step — that of arriving at conclusions and taking the steps that logically follow from them — is often an expression of just the opposite trait. Open-mindedness is good and praiseworthy, but surely the ultimate value of asking questions is that in doing so we can eventually arrive at, you know... answers. As a librarian, I don't feel like I have a lot of time to spend sitting around reserving judgment and congratulating myself on my open-mindedness. I need to be getting things done.

I offer the above as sort of an apology for what is going to come next, because this month I bring no answers, only a vexing question. But I do want to arrive at a good answer to it, and I

hope some readers will respond to me with their thoughts so that we can revisit it later and maybe come to some conclusions. The question is, I believe, an urgent one — one on which the future of our profession may hang, and believe me, if I thought I had the answer to it I wouldn't hesitate to say so. But I'm genuinely conflicted on this issue and hope others will speak up and help me work through it.

Here's the question: **As librarians, is it our fundamental function to distribute information to people, or to teach people how to find information for themselves?** I find myself struggling, in my mind, between two competing models of library service. On the one hand, we can be sort of like foreign-aid workers: we're here to serve people who may or may not know how to help themselves very well, and we stand on the back of the information truck as they mill

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