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People Profile: George Howard Burrows

Editor

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cash distribution, and returns on effort and risk to encourage knowledge growth and assure that knowledge reaches all members of society?

First, before we mandate open access to all scholarly work, perhaps we should ask existing funding sources to study the possible advantages of a free market for software, science, and other creative work. To get a vision of the scale of changes that might be supported by new information technology, consider this: to best serve people in their quest to satisfy their unique needs, interests, and abilities, just providing access is not enough. We need to promote choices aggressively. Individuals need to become aware of and properly appreciate and understand their options. For this to happen, the information industry will need to conduct market analyses and actively “sell” the options that any given individual should be considering. Such sales cost money.

How much would such promotion cost? Consider **Coca Cola**. Its 2005 annual report documents spending \$8.7 billion on “selling, general and administrative expenses” (http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/investors/pdfs/10-K_2005/Coca-Cola_10-K_Item_06.pdf). Note that this is about twice the entire budget for the **National Science Foundation** for that year. How much interest, use, and additional funding might we generate if we could spend that amount to sell users on the potential of our next scholarly project?

Innovation is the sine qua non for new industry to emerge to drive the growth of the economy. Our greatest innovations, the paradigm shifts, come from basic research, yet basic research also has the greatest risk. We need to restructure the market for scholarly and scientific work to promote investment in intrinsically risky pursuits. Could we mitigate risk in such investments by packaging high-risk, high-payoff endeavors with those considered to have lower risk and lower payoff — a mutual fund for research?

A Role For Libraries and Others

Such investments depend on information about information itself to reveal investment opportunities. Could the indexes and catalogs already created by the library industry be used to generate this sort of information? Librarians already assess the “market” for acquisitions. Reference librarians and catalogers already study how best to “advertise” library holdings in response to patrons’ interests.

But how do we transform current library activities so they contribute to market structure itself? Citation analysis may not be quite enough to fairly allocate research cash returns down the service chain. We may need more emphasis on the dependencies between texts and especially on the causal relations between the concepts that they contain. Especially during the transition period, we will need to segment users. Perhaps in all cases users should be paid when they make the effort to take in the latest and greatest information. And who should pay them? The parties who benefit from an

against the grain people profile

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George Howard Burrows

BORN & LIVED: Born 10-4-49 in El Paso, Texas. Lived in Ithaca, NY; Oberlin, OH; Dallas, TX; Washington, DC; but mostly since first grade in Durham, NH.

EARLY LIFE: In Ithaca while my dad did PhD in Wildlife Conservation, I spent most of my time in a big pile of sand named “Montezuma” after the wildlife refuge my dad was studying.

FAMILY: Two children **Tom** and **Lizzie** both serious trouble from day one. Wife of 27 years **Deborah** who I’m pretty sure is the root of all the trouble. Very large extended family in Vermont, Texas, Nova Scotia, New York, Georgia...

EDUCATION: **Chrambach’s** lab at **NIH**, **Marshall Nirenberg**, **Lou Sokoloff**. Prepped with **Edie Hendley** at **UVM** medical school and **John Porter** at **UTHSCD Park Lawn Hospital** in Dallas.

FIRST JOB: Zoology summer job at **UNH** studying baby oysters in Great Bay, NH.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I worked professionally on **NASA/NSF** contracts for nearly five years as part of a small company named **STX (Science and Technology eXcellence)** during which time it was purchased by **Hughes Aircraft** and then sold to **Raytheon**.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read widely, program in Python, hike, play soccer, and now ski.

FAVORITE BOOKS: “*Ulysses*” (the new one by **Joyce**), winds of time series by **Robert Jordan**, “*Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*” by **George Lakoff**.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Open access, highly paid administrators.

PHILOSOPHY: “Shut up and do your work!”

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Health coverage.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Hope to build an “exchange” to support scholarly work.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Things seem to be aligning pretty well: I see good things for librarians and publishers. There will be a consortia for knowledge industry research similar to MCC for computer industry research. Academia, publishing houses, and libraries will combine efforts to develop and promote new economies and economics for knowledge growth and use. 🌱



informed information customer. In many cases, the users themselves will earn money from what they learned. Monitoring and charging for this may entail additional scholarly work to understand and allocate value across all the elements leading to monetary gain. New roles for copyright and patent legislation may become appropriate. Alternatively, we may want to extend the way we charge users for not learning the best options, suggesting possible new roles for malpractice lawyers.

Current government funding agencies, publishing houses, and academic institutions will still be necessary in an open market. Clearer attention to information costs and benefits to these institutions will naturally bring them into the new economy, likely playing roles very similar to those they now play. The hope

is, however, that those institutions’ roles will command a much smaller share of the market as people move into lifelong learning across the spectrum of life activities. It is also likely that additional legislation and government monitoring will be required to combat unfair trade practices in an open market for information and scholarly work.

Everyone benefits when people learn something that allows them to make a more informed decision, but people benefit disproportionately. A final question to reflect upon is, How might a new information economy take that fact into account, charge those who gain financial benefit fairly, and use the monies raised to spur increased growth of knowledge and increased use of the best of what is new? 🌱