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Technology Left Behind -- An Ode to the Typewriter

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Colliding Technologies from page 78

Panasonic plans to release a **Blu-ray** player at the same time as its new 103-inch flat screen TV. **Panasonic** expects the set to cost several times more than its 65-inch Plasma TV priced at \$10,000.

Converting to **HD** video is currently an expensive proposition. Unless you're an early adopter who has to be the first one in your neighborhood to have the latest technology, you may want to wait until the consumer market settles on a format.

HD video players also face stiff competition from other kinds of consumer recording and display devices. These include

hard-drive recorders such as **Tivo**, video delivered on demand over broadband and cellular networks to PCs and TVs, portable chip-based storage cards, and, eventually, **Internet Protocol Television (IPTV)**.

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Technology Left Behind — An Ode to the Typewriter

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A few weeks ago, flipping through a copy of *Martha Stewart Weddings*, I came across an article listing creative ideas for wedding guestbooks. One of the brainstorms touted as an alternative to the traditional guestbook was the use of an older, manual typewriter, upon which guests could type their well-wishes to the bride and groom. The typed pages could later be assembled into an album of sorts. (To see the typewriter guestbook in action, visit: <http://www.marthastewart.com/page.jhtml?type=content&id=channel2650087&site=weddings>) A few days after stumbling across the typewriter guestbook, I turned on the television and was greeted by an Acura car commercial. The scene opens up in a café with people in business suits sipping coffee and working on their laptops. In the background, you hear the tap-tap-tap of keys, oddly punctuated by the ding of the return of a typewriter. The camera shifts to focus on a young man with a large, bulky typewriter, circa 1982, and the announcer's voice says, "Isn't it time to upgrade?"

In the examples above the typewriter is depicted as a novelty or an obsolete piece of technology that has been superseded by computers. However, for many years the typewriter served businesses and organizations, libraries included, as a reliable, relatively inexpensive tool for neatly and quickly printing text. This column discusses the early history and evolution of the typewriter, touching briefly on the use of type-

writers in libraries and the place for typewriters in today's information technology world.

In the Beginning

While there are arguments to be made that other people developed typing machines first, it is commonly accepted that the first modern typewriter was invented in 1867 by **Christopher Latham Sholes**. **Sholes**, a newspaper editor by trade, and his partners, **James Densmore** and **Carlos Glidden**, were granted a patent for the TypeWriter on June 23, 1868.¹ In this first model, the ribbon had to be hand-linked, and it wrote in capital letters only. Several more years of development and another patent later, **Densmore** arranged for **E. Remington and Sons**, the gun manufacturer, to produce the **Sholes-Glidden TypeWriter**, which was released on the market in 1874.²

The machine did not immediately catch on. Many people were interested and gathered to see the typewriter demonstrated, but few actually purchased one. One notable exception is **Mark Twain**, who bought a **Remington no. 1** in 1874, after seeing a sales clerk type a remarkable 57 words a minute. **Twain** later learned that the typist was able to achieve such an impressive rate only by typing the same phrase over and over.³

For the next several years, the typewriter was largely considered a novelty item. They car-

continued on page 80

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ried a hefty price tag for the times, around \$125, and few people knew how to use them with any level of efficiency. Further hindering the acceptance of the typewriter were the conventions of nineteenth century society. Letter writing served as the primary method of communication between individuals, and it was customary for letters to be written out in longhand.⁴ "The first recipients of typewritten letters generally assumed that the sender had enlisted the aid of a printing press... Far from being regarded as a compliment, the printed letter suggested either that the sender thought the receiver was incapable of deciphering handwriting or that the letter was really an advertising circular."⁵

As more typewriter models came on the market in the 1880s, typing schools began producing trained typists, mostly women, to use the machines, and typewriter sales and usage began to boom. "To be considered an 'expert' or 'trained' typist at this time required little more than a rudimentary knowledge of the mechanism and the ability to pick out the letters with a reasonable readiness."⁶ Most typists used the "hunt and peck" method, using only the first two fingers on each hand to type. However, towards the end of the 1880s, "some typists were arguing that students should be taught to use all ten fingers at the keyboard and to keep their eyes steadily on the copy."⁷ From the very start, touch typing, as the ten-finger technique came to be called, was adapted to the QWERTY keyboard.⁸

QWERTY

The QWERTY keyboard, so named for the first six letters in the upper left corner of the keyboard, is a lasting monument to inefficiency. In *Sholes'* first patented version of the typewriter, the keys were arranged alphabetically. In this arrangement the keys of the most commonly used letters had a tendency to jam together when the typist was typing. To prevent jamming in the next version of the typewriter, patented in 1873, the keys were rearranged so that the most commonly used letters were separated further apart. When *Densmore* sold the manufacturing rights to *Remington*, *Remington's* own mechanics made a few final modifications to the keyboard rearranging the keys so that "assembled into one row [were] all the letters which a salesman would need to impress customers, by rapidly pecking out the brand name: TYPEWRITER."⁹

While the design of the QWERTY keyboard prevented keys from jamming together, it did so at a cost, speed. An alternative keyboard arrangement, the *Dvorak Simplified Keyboard (DSK)*, patented in 1932 by *August Dvorak* and *W. L. Dealey*, proved to be more efficiently laid out. To *Dvorak's* great frustration, his keyboard never caught on despite the fact that users of the *DSK* hold most of the world records in speed typing. By the time the *Dvorak Simplified Keyboard* came along, the QWERTY keyboard was firmly entrenched as the "Universal" keyboard of the U.S. typewriter industry.¹⁰

Card Catalogs and Typewriters in Libraries

The rise and fall of the typewriter in the library somewhat followed that of the card catalog, and because of that parity it is helpful to take a brief look at the card catalog when discussing typewriters in libraries.

Before the advent of the card catalog, "the printed book catalog was clearly the preferred method of documenting a collection until the last quarter of the nineteenth century."¹¹ Printed book catalogs had several advantages. They did not require the large space commitment that card catalogs did, and they were portable. Libraries could obtain or create multiple copies of a book catalog, providing added accessibility and security. Despite these benefits, the book catalog had a distinct disadvantage, a lack of currency, which was ultimately its downfall. As the publishing industry grew, it became impossible to list all of the books being published in a single book catalog, and a book catalog was no sooner completed than it was immediately out-of-date. As a result, card catalogs became the favored means for tracking and organizing a library's book holdings.¹²

Maintenance of the card catalogs was labor intensive and time-consuming. Before the typewriter gained acceptance in the library industry, cards were completed in "library hand," a rigid form of writing. Many librarians were loathe to abandon "library hand," citing reasons such as typewriting errors, quality and longevity of the typed cards, and a lack of the necessary keys on early typewriters. Even into the early twentieth century, library schools were teaching and advocating the use of "library hand."¹³

However, typewriters eventually became the preferred method for creating cards for the card catalog. Ultimately, the acceptance of the typewriter led to changes in procedures and librarians' roles in the library. For example, it was noted by *Merri Beth Lavagnino* in an article describing the evolution of the systems library position that the movement towards the use of the typewriter meant that "people within the organization were analyzing work flow and the effect the new machines would have on it, determining whether they would be a cost-effective alternative to manual work, selecting and ordering them, installing them and arranging for maintenance, and training staff in how to use them."¹⁴ *Lavagnino* characterizes these tasks as the precursor to the job duties of the systems librarian.

As card catalogs were replaced with online public access catalogs and integrated library systems, the typewriter began to disappear from the library. In many libraries, only one or two typewriters remain to be found, fulfilling very specialized purposes, such as typing labels or filling out forms.

Not Dead Yet

While the typewriter industry isn't necessarily thriving in comparison to the computer market, it is not yet in its death throes. In 2004, *Technology Review* compiled a list of technologies that have survived both obsolescence and the odds, and the typewriter was

Endnotes

1. **Ben Ikenson**, *Patents: Ingenious Inventions and How they Work* (New York, NY: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2004), 58.
2. **Jake Page**, "Writing got a lot easier when the old 'Manual' was new," *Smithsonian* 21, no. 9 (December 1990): 54 (8+). Academic Search Premier Database, EbscoHost (April 2006); **Paul A. David**, "Clio and the Economics of QWERTY," *The American Economic Review* 75, no. 2. Papers and Proceedings of the Ninety-Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association. (May 1985): 333. JSTOR (April 2006).
3. **Don Roberts**, "The American Typewriter in Retrospect," *The Journal of Business Education* (January 1973): 15.
4. **Cynthia Monaco**, "The Difficult Birth of the Typewriter," *Invention & Technology* 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1988): 17.
5. *Ibid.*, 17.
6. **Christopher Keep**, "Blinded by the Type: Gender and Information Technology at the Turn of the Century," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 23 (2001): 149. JSTOR (April 2006).
7. *Ibid.*, 149.
8. **David**, "Clio and the Economics of QWERTY," 334.
9. *Ibid.*, 333.
10. *Ibid.*, 332-334.
11. **Michael Stuart Freeman**, "Pen, Ink, Keys, and Cards: Some reflections on Library Technology," *College and Research Libraries* (July 1991): 330.
12. *Ibid.*, 330-331.
13. *Ibid.*, 332-333.
14. **Merri Beth Lavagnino**, "Networking and the Role of the Academic Systems Librarian: an Evolutionary Perspective," *College & Research Libraries* 58, no. 3 (May 1997): 218.
15. **Eric Scigliano**, "Technologies that refuse to die," *Technology Review* (February 2004): 68.
16. *Ibid.*, 68.
17. **Page**, "Writing got a lot easier," 54 (8+).
18. **Lily James**, "Think Typewriter," *Youth-by-youth Monitor. Youth Studies Australia* 24, no. 4 (2005): 8.
19. **Page**, "Writing got a lot easier," 54 (8+).

one of the technologies highlighted. The *TR* article mentions that according to the **Consumer Electronics Association**, in 2002, Americans purchased 434,000 electronic typewriters and word processors.¹⁵

Highlighting the selling points of the typewriter, *Technology Review* points out, "Consider the advantages: no viruses to catch, no hard drives or software to get corrupted, no batteries to run down."¹⁶ It is because of this technological simplicity that in the early 1990s typewriters enjoyed a resurgence in countries outside of the United States. Used typewriter brokers capitalized on the need for typing machines in foreign countries, buying used machines in the United States and selling them overseas. Typewriters, often sold to countries in South America and Southeast Asia, offered a reliable alternative to the computer in places where labor was cheap and there often was no electricity.¹⁷

continued on page 81

I Hear the Train A Comin' — An Interview with Sally Morris

Column Editor: **Greg Tananbaum** <greg.tananbaum@aya.yale.edu>

debates about whether that volume will be an eBook, open access, etc., are an entirely different column), one of the key characters will no doubt be **Sally Morris**. Sally serves as the Chief Executive of the **Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP)**, the international trade association for nonprofit publishers and those who work with them. Since Sally took office in August 1998 the **Association's** membership has nearly tripled — it now has some 340 members in 36 countries — and its activities have grown substantially. In many ways, **ALPSP** has emerged the chief strategy group for scholarly publishers.

Before joining **ALPSP**, Sally spent a quarter century as a “real” publisher, including 11 years running a program of 50 medical journals, and several years in charge of copyright and licensing. Sally's career has had stops at many of the world's leading publishers, including **Oxford University Press** and **Wiley**. With Sally concluding her tenure at **ALPSP** this fall, it seems an appropriate time to look both backward and forward with one of the industry's leading minds.

What is ALPSP's mission? How has it changed in your eight years on the job?

SM: When I joined in 1998, **ALPSP** primarily represented learned society publishers.

Early on — inspired by our then Chair — our governing council held a groundbreaking “strategic planning” session at which we determined that our mission should actually be to represent all nonprofit publishers — not just

societies, but also university presses, research institutes, inter-governmental organizations and so forth. The Council also clarified that associate membership should be open to anyone else active in the scholarly/professional communication chain. We also determined that our key objectives were:

Advocacy — representation of the interests of the nonprofit scholarly and professional publishing sector in particular, and publishing more generally, both formally to governments, legislators, funders, and informally to the other communities with which we interact such as libraries and academics. Wherever possible, we try to back up our advocacy positions with facts, and to that end we carry out a great deal of research.

Education — not just training (though we now provide 24 courses a year in the UK, and are planning to extend this to the USA, China and hopefully other parts of the world in future) but also seminars, workshops and other types of events. Our aim here is to fit both young and more experienced publishers for the challenges ahead.

Information — providing information not just for our own members (though there is a wealth of that on the members-only part of our Website), but also to the industry at large and, indeed, to the wider community. We have a quarterly print and electronic journal, **Learned Publishing**, now published in association with the Society for Scholarly Publishing; a monthly e-newsletter, **ALPSP Alert**; various listservs and a “Future Watch” blog; and a whole lot of information on the Website (www.alp.org).

Outreach — we felt that growth of the organization would likely follow from the successful pursuit of the first three, and indeed it has — when I joined we had about 120 mainly UK member organizations. The 340 members we have now collectively publish nearly 10,000 journals, more than 40% of the world output.

A couple of years later, we added a few more strategic objectives:

Good practice — the promotion of sound practices in a range of areas of publishing. We've issued a number of guideline documents, all under the general Principles of Scholarship-Friendly Publishing outlined on our Website (see <http://www.alp.org/SFPubpress.htm>).

Collaboration — we developed, with **Swets**, the innovative **ALPSP Learned Journals Collection**, bringing together 557 journals from 46 different publishers. The **Collection** is sold as a single package or as subject-specific subsets to libraries and consortia. The idea was to overcome the problem, which troubled librarians as well as publishers, that “big deals” from large publishers were taking up so much of librarians' negotiating time and money that they squeezed out the important journals from small publishers. We're now looking at whether there is a need for something similar for eBooks.

Internationalization — as our membership became increasingly international, we felt it was important to ensure that membership benefits became equally international. We could not expect members to travel to the UK for every event! So we've set up a North American Chapter that is beginning to plan its own activities, and another will follow very shortly for Australia and New Zealand. We're also collaborating with other organizations to provide events in the USA, China and mainland Europe. While our primary aim was to make membership more rewarding for existing members, this does seem to be bringing in new members as well, which is great news — the more publishers we represent, the stronger our voice!

Assuming your successor runs a term of similar length, what are the most critical issues he/she will face within academic publishing?

SM: First and foremost, I think that over the next decade publishers will have to get to grips with the way that their customers are actually working in their different disciplines. We need to understand the role of things like massive collaborative computing (e.g., e-science,

continued on page 82

Technology Left Behind from page 80

The Typewriter for Typewriter's Sake

The typewriter may be entering yet another Renaissance. It was recently noted in *Youth Studies Australia*, a publication focused on the issues affecting Australians from early adolescence to young adulthood (<http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ysa/>), that 20- and 30-somethings of today in some cases prefer typewriters over computers. “Having grown up around the fastest, smallest, quietest gadgets they find the blank screen and blinking cursor of a monitor less intimate than a typewriter with its clunky keys and visible inner workings.”¹⁸ In agreement with this attitude, **Robert Graves**, English author and poet, once wrote, “A vet-

eran typewriter of which you have grown fond seems to reciprocate your own feelings, and even to encourage the flow of thought.”¹⁹

People take comfort in the nostalgia and derive inspiration from the use of a typewriter. While there is definitely more advanced technology out there, when sitting down to a typewriter you are in some sense stepping into another time and world, and your task, whatever it may be, is made more interesting by the equipment you are using.

So, if you are frustrated with your computer, stymied over where to start on your next article, or just interested in a purely un-electronic writing experience, try a typewriter. **Olivetti** still makes a classic manual typewriter, the **Linea 198** (<http://www.olivetti.com/site/public/product.asp?sid=&cid=261&iid=74>). Used models of all shapes, sizes, and capabilities can be bought on **eBay** for very reasonable prices. 🐾