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Op Ed -- Pelikan's Antidisambiguation: "Being Careful What We Wish For..."

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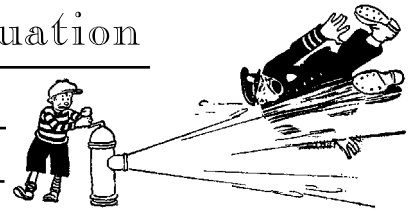
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Op Ed — Pelikan's Antidisambiguation

"Being Careful What We Wish For..."

Column Editor: **Michael P. Pelikan** (Penn State) <mp10@psu.edu>

It's hard not to get caught up in the enthusiasm surrounding the release of the **iPad 3**.

There, I've gone and done it, and in the middle of Lent, too! I have written a Lie.

The truth, in the form of a truthful statement: I have utterly failed to get caught up in the enthusiasm surrounding the release of the **iPad 3**. That's the truth.

Try as I might, I have found little within my reaction to the release of the **iPad 3** beyond a gloomy mix of déjà vu and vague foreboding. We looked in on the breathless live bloggers — several of them simultaneously — on the big screen here at **Emerging Technologies HQ** — and, reminiscent of **Charlie Brown** way back when, all it did was make my stomach hurt.

Have I simply become jaded in the face of so much newness? Have I reached the point where I no longer recognize revolutionary innovation when I see it?

No, it's something else.

Perhaps it's the way **Apple's** announcements are always so wholesome, if that's the right word. The enthusiasm is so staged, the friendly spokespersons are so friendly — one might almost forget that the companies that make these delights coexist with one another in the lethal, cut-throat world of the business jungle, red of tooth and claw.

If one pays any attention to public statements taking place in nearly the same timeframe as **Apple's** announcements, one must be struck by the dissonance, the discordance, the sheer chaos, that is the true characterizing factor in today's technology landscape — either that, or any of us who notice it have simply become what **Apple's** cheerleaders dismiss as "haters."

Let's take a few examples — many of these served up to me by colleagues who, like me, try to stay somewhat on top of this stuff, but who find, like me, that unless we gang up, it's easy to miss things....

From *TeleRead.com*, **Paul Biba**, on March 7, 2012, quotes a *Mercury News* article entitled "Will Apple create the all-iPad Classroom?" **Giga's** article is entitled, "Over six years **iPad** textbook costs three times that of traditional textbook, says *Mercury News*."

From paid *Content.org*, **Seth Godin** has a piece from February 28, 2012 entitled "Who Decides What Gets Sold In The Bookstore?" In it, **Godin** says

that **Apple** is rejecting his self-termed manifesto, "Stop Selling Dreams," refusing to carry it in their store because of — here **Godin** is quoting from **Apple's** note to him — "Multiple links to Amazon (NSDQ: AMZN) store. IE page 35, **David Weinberger** link." In other words, **Godin** says that **Apple** says the reason it won't carry his book is that it contains links to an online bookstore other than its own.

Then there's this little tidbit from *iClarified.com*, March 10, 2012: "Apple News — Google Pays Apple \$1 Billion Per Year to be the Default Search Engine on Safari." Good grief! A billion a year for a default setting anyone can change!!

Meantime, a friend pointed me to a **Michael Crider** article on *android-community.com* from February 27, 2012 entitled "Samsung shows off yet another screen size with Galaxy S WiFi 4.2." **Crider** says, "Samsung, you have a problem. The first step towards healing is admitting that you have too many screen sizes." **Crider** goes on to list them, "3.2, 3.5, 3.7, 4.0, 4.3, 4.5, 4.65, 5.0, 5.3, 7.0, 7.7, 8.9, and 10.1-inch screens..." To which we must add the 4.2-inch screen device motivating **Crider's** remarks.

I can't make this stuff up — not stuff THIS good, anyway! I think the whole group of death-grip-interlocked industries hardware makers, software builders, content buyers & sellers, media outlets, marketers, you-name-it, have all been on laughing gas for way too long. I really think they're all beginning to believe their own press releases. If not, then the whole picture is so grim, so macabre, it makes **Stephen King's** *The Shining* look like a **Disney** flick.

This is *our* money, *our* kids' educations, *our* bloody free will that's being toyed with here. We're being marketed to with such pervasive, immersive intensity that much of the time we scarcely realize it's happening. I remember when an acquaintance of mine commented, back in about November of 1996 or so, "Y'know, I think maybe it's time to take a look at a digital camera. I've been skeptical, but I think they're finally getting good enough for me to decide to consider one seriously..." I didn't have the heart to tell him that in a photo industry trade journal, perhaps a month earlier, I'd seen an article saying that the digital camera and printer makers were looking forward to a breakthrough, record holiday season, one in which several years of slow, careful marketing

of digital photography as a mainstream concept would finally pay off. My poor friend thought that it was through his own discernment that he had adjudged now to be the time to take a good look at digital photography — indeed, that it was evidence of his healthy skepticism to state that perhaps "this really is the year..."

Today film-based cameras that I could never have afforded in their day can be had for less than the price of a new **iPad**. And, not only do they have optical performance that will simply mop up the deck with any of today's primary cameras (the ones in our cell phones), but many of the best of them — like the battleships for which their construction quality is labeled — are made primarily of metal, do not require batteries, and function as well today as they did twenty five or thirty years ago when new, despite many of them never having spent a day in the repair shop! (aside: remember Repair Shops???)

Now, as a comparatively serious photographer, I've certainly got my share of digital equipment in my collection of photographic tools. I spent the better part of four hours on a very cold and stormy Fort Sumter the last time I was in Charleston, in fact, getting lost in composing brick patterns into pleasing arrangements within the frame: a digital body, to be sure, but a very, very fine lens — maybe the finest I've ever owned — and it's strictly analog, at least, the light it gathers still is.

As is the process — I've long commented that the core creative processes involved in the three modes of expressions I've spent more than a passing moment upon, those being audio and music production, photography, and writing — in all of these, what's going on in the midst of the activity may *appear* to have undergone radical change, if one sees no further than the tools and the means to operate them. At the heart of each process, however, there remain core experiences that any serious practitioner from any era of technology, would immediately recognize and relate to.

In music production, there's the rehearsal, the careful attentiveness to every detail of performance leading up to the "take," there's the careful placement of bodies, instruments, and transducers (microphones), there's the producer, the engineer, there's that pause for silence before the "take," there's the moment at which recording begins — utter silence

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and readiness — and then the producer points to the musicians, silently, “Begin.” Each strives for the performance of a lifetime. Then the piece ends and silence falls again. A button is pressed, and recording ceases. Then there is a collective whoosh of breath, “Phew!” Then it’s time to listen, to see if lightning was caught in mid-strike, or another merely correct but perfunctory performance.

Has “How writing happens” really been overthrown by the word processor? “Word Processor.” Kind of sounds like “Food Processor,” doesn’t it? I don’t reckon **Sam Clemens’** writing would come out so very different today. I’ll bet he might even still like to write in his pajamas (and who doesn’t?)...

No, the Traveling Medicine Show is still the Traveling Medicine Show. We’re still being sold dubious treatments for even more dubious ailments. And our true poverties are neglected. We’re starving for nutrition at a feast of junk food. We’re longing for some fresh examples of ingenuity amidst a parade of derivative throwaway junk. We’re aching for a sincere, kind word whilst drowning in an ocean of glad-handing, utterly cynical, tradeshow-floor marketing.

Oh, and don’t forget to take a free pen! Take several! They’re free! Have a breath mint! Don’t forget to drop your business card in the fish bowl! May I swipe your card? (No! A Thousand Times, No!!) You can get a bonus of 500 points by registering today! There’s never been a better time!

So we’ll leave today’s latest things, for now. If I can remember that long, next time perhaps it’ll be time to take a look at that most enduring of seemingly ephemeral digital artifacts, the “Social Identity.” 🐼

it is snowing, (it’s in the 60s in Charleston). I was telling him that I spent time in my salad days (do they still use that term?) cleaning up skeletons next to Winchester Cathedral. **Richard** was telling me that the head of the dig back then, **Martin Biddle**, has just received the **freedom of the city award** from Winchester’s city council. And **Richard** even sent me the link! Isn’t it a small world?

http://www.hampshirechronicle.co.uk/news/5036447.Rare_honour_for_Winchester_archaeologist_Martin_Biddle/

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Don Stave – In Memorium

by **Richard Abel** (Aged Independent Learner) <reabel@q.com>

Don Stave was the fourth member of the band of Argonauts who joined the **Abel Company**. He remained one of the leading members of the “inside” staff which participated in the formulation of the Approval Plan and the related Standing Order system. He was highly instrumental in implementing those systems and in tweaking them over the years to make them increasingly responsive and relevant to the evolving needs of academic and research libraries across the developed world. The widespread employment of these systems to get appropriate books (knowledge parcels) into libraries as cheaply and quickly as possible owes much to the thought and work of **Don**.

Don graduated from the **University of North Carolina** with a degree in library science following his years in the service during WW II and his marriage to **Louise (Lou)** in 1946. **Lou** too trained and practiced as a librarian in the **Multnomah County Library** after their three children were well along.

Don had landed the job of acquisitions librarian in the library of the **Atomic Energy Agency** in Richland, Washington. It was there that the firm first made contact with **Don** as a knowledgeable bookman committed to the building of first-rate libraries. **Don** was prepared to entertain a wide variety of practices which would improve the book-dealer/library relationship. We soon learned that **Don** was contemplating seeking a job elsewhere.

In the meantime it had become clear to the then three of us (**Tom Martin**, **Fred Gullette**, and **Abel**) that the firm needed some professional librarian guidance in-house as the demands on the firm became more extensive and the number of libraries served continued to grow. The timing of these two decisions could not have come together at a better time. So the firm made an offer to **Don**, who, in turn, accepted it.

Not long after **Don** came aboard, the firm arranged with the **Washington State University Library** the primitive pioneer of the Approval Plan. **Don** became the point-man to review all the new incoming books each day and then select those which fit the teaching and research interests as defined by the university catalog. This trial went on for roughly half a year. The university library and faculty were so pleased with what **Don** had accomplished with respect to the rapid availability and the cost savings realized by the library that they wished to continue.

As a consequence, the firm understood that it needed first to put the plan on a sounder basis of subject definition and routinize buying and review of the universe of North American publishing to fully reflect the varied collecting interests of what was hoped to be an expanding universe of libraries employing the Plan. **Don’s** role in these exercises

was manifestly of prime importance. One of the most difficult problems which had to be mastered was that of fitting standing orders for books-in-series into the Plan. So doing involved not only the blurred definition of the term and the consequent malleability in its use by various librarians but the repeated failure of publishers to provide such a designation to some volumes contained in series of their making. Whatever the slipperiness and vagaries involved in trying to bring some rational order to subject definitions and relationships and publishing practices, **Don** was a stout participant in formulating a reasonably sensible system for dealing with such matters.

The firm now had a coherent program which the managers of the regional offices could take out and explain to libraries together with the requisite supporting thesauri and instruction manuals. The Plan was fairly widely adopted — always on a trial basis. As the number of participating libraries grew, the inevitable problems became manifest, requiring tweaking the system. **Don** was in the forefront of this ongoing effort to make a system as flawless as possible, being always dependent on the slipperiness of the language.

From these early days **Don** remained the in-house master of the Approval Plan and the Standing Order systems. This dominant position remained his through the translation of these systems to the computer and through the successive augmentations in two directions. First, the several revisions of the thesauri and the enlargement of the Plan to include all the languages of the major knowledge-producing countries of the world. Second, to lead the subsidiary book profiling centers in New Jersey and London through the difficult process of mastering the the major outlines and fine points of successfully describing books to fit the disparate collecting objectives of many of the world’s major academic and research libraries.

Tom Stave, **Don’s** son and a librarian at the **University of Oregon**, recalled that **Don** believed his continuing involvement in the evolution of the Approval Plan was a greater contribution to his profession of librarianship than would have been his role as a practicing librarian in a conventional research library. It would be a matter of great misunderstanding to deprecate this belief.

The principles and practices developed for getting books into such libraries as quickly and cheaply as possible has remained a continuing professional practice. All the libraries involved in such systems and their librarians owe profound respect and deep regard for **Don**, one of their colleagues who was the shepherd of those systems from their founding to the days of his final service in the **Blackwell** organization. 🐼

