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@Brunning: People & Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

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At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Oh, Britannica!

Let's get personal. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* in modern times is synonymous with encyclopedia. And the encyclopedia is knowledge. By the rule of equality then, *Britannica* is knowledge. Case closed. You can read about it in *Britannica*.

Unfortunately in these times, it would be a stretch to expect a rush to the local library to read the *EB*; even librarians aren't that energetic. Or if they are and a print edition is still around, it is off somewhere in storage.

Let's face it, Wikipedia and online editions of encyclopedias have won the hearts and minds of infotainment and fact checkers in all of us.

Britannica Online was the first online database we licensed at ASU. We had an online catalog and a **SilverPlatter** ERL client-server CD-ROM network (child librarian, both the old professional in the office next door or Google it, the story of all of this is everywhere on the Internet, which may be a problem in and of itself). We had search, but we had no content. What better content than an online version of the massive *Encyclopedia Britannica*?

At first, use was sporadic then grew because it became a necessity — because we started canceling print subscriptions to all general encyclopedias including *Britannica*. We still called it *Encyclopedia Britannica* even though the official name seemed to be *Britannica Online* or some variation. *BO* had many identities depending on the format. There was *EB* on CD. There was premium *BO* which you paid for and free *BO* which you found on Google and delighted in its encyclopedic information until you ran into paywall.

After a few years of Internet encyclopedias, we canceled our online subscription. We've since renewed it; that's another story. The thinking was there was enough free encyclopedia information including *Britannica's* free version on the Web. Since we parked a print edition somewhere in the stacks, we were good to go.

At this point the data must have been rolling in to *Encyclopedia Britannica* offices, the screw had turned, and the jig was up for a print copy. You can only imagine why they did not change. First, they probably hired library and publishing consultants who did not have a clue but have a clue now as they write up their bios and post them to Wikipedia. Then there is the setting — the **University of Chicago**. Have you ever been there? Visit the Center for Research with its pallets of old newspapers, stroll along the tree-



lined streets at the edge of Lake Michigan, breathe in the air of pure scholarship of Nobel prizewinners — who wouldn't want a publishing presence among the giants?

Of course, the *EB* and all its historic editions will still line important library bookshelves as they will adorn, forever, the mansions of the rich and learned everywhere around the world. You just won't be able to buy it anymore.

Was this just a bean-counter decision or a paradigm move of those whose lineage dates to **Diderot**?

EB announced the halting of the presses in a blog entry schooled in the terse and light rhetoric taken right from the Google blog book. It was clear, concise, but still needs translation. Title: "Change it's okay. Really." They quietly tell us "the end is just another historical data point in the evolution of human knowledge." Yup. But just what data point do they mean? We suspect sells although the anecdotes that follow suggest too slow, too non-green, too structured in a bad way for Internet consumers.

EB claims they have enough premium subscribers to continue high-quality writing, editing, and updating. More cynical owners, who might want the presses to continue — after all, they were dumping several thousand every decade or so on a new set — may feel the ultimate betrayal. The ugly truth is that they could not pay enough for *EB* to continue an awesome knowledge delivery system, decoration, and status symbol — price elasticity had been hit.

Still somehow *EB's* new formula is eluding them. All the search engine and Web 2.0 overlay of reason and purpose do not dispose of the fact that all versions of *Britannica* are not easily searched or used. To really work in this world it's got to be free or so unique that value follows.

It's probably too late to contact the lawyers about all the content permanently checked out from *EB* by the crowd source anonymous intellectual laborers at Wikipedia. There is probably no **Jimmy Wales** of the pay crowd to talk up *Britannica Online* as Wikipedia's wingman in knowledge. How can you compete with a free business, with free information, on all topics — over and over on all topics — and showing up free-of-charge in the top results of the Google engulfed world?

Perhaps the *Encyclopedia Britannica* will enter the collectibles market, sought after by **Pawn Stars** and **American Pickers**. Perhaps libraries should store their copies and create EBAY apps to optimize the market. Use the money and pay for a print run at least for libraries and rich people. Chances are good **Jimmy Wales** is go-

ing to print off the best of Wikipedia. Why not print it forward?

Your Links:

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/03/14/britannica-define-outdated>

Uploads to the Zeitgeist: stuff tossed up that hasn't fallen to earth...

Confusion: Urban lingo inspired word for obfuscating while trying to clarify. In South Park "big bone" is a nice way of saying Cartman is fat. In libraries it's discovery services vendors telling you they pre-index your content for simple search access. "Pre-index?" "Your content?" We got some confusion here...

iPad: ah, the newer one. Apparently there will be no numeral to differentiate models, just enhanced everything. What will Apple do now to identify lineage and sell more of these and just as often? They'll figure something out; they only own the world with their 100 billion in the bank.

Silicon Valley Gazillionaire: new status in that new Disneyland just south of San Francisco. In a Silicon Valley would be a superb idea behind a reality program that features the fairytale lives of a few social media, search, wunderkinds. Unique draw: an on-air, online contest to guess what they actually do and what good it is for anyone....

Information Provider: new appellation for librarian, reflecting our altered reality in these Googley times. Cynics blog, "C'mon, you're just librarians, aren't you?" No, turn over and let me take your temp.

Internet Consumer Provider: some Occupy Wall Street occupiers go "plus radicale" and form cartels of users who demand payment to use the Internet. "Occupy the Web Gear" on sale at Website and at their tent site...

Apple diet: on the pricey side, rich in features, poor in discounts. Those on the diet go thin in wallet and develop long, thin stylus-like fingers — but burst with smug.

Tappist: loosely organized post-religious group known in public for bulk innocent infatuation with tapping the tablet screens and ignoring you in public. Most surely, not Hare Krishna.

Zuckerpunched: just when you're having fun sharing on social media, the social media company resets your privacy and tells you how much you can live with them knowing so much about you, so much...

Emperor's new dudes: Silicon Valley lobbyists who advise lawmakers all things virtual

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especially the SOPA opera. When **Obama** is spotted with official White House **iPhone**, watch out publishers, your copyright law is on the ropes.

Gluejar: What many of us forgot to buy when school supplies were required, a staple product for any scrapbooker, and now a library industry concept. **Eric Hellman**, for several decades a successful library industry programmer-entrepreneur (**OpenCate**, **OCLC's** New Jersey Office — New Jersey!), has conjured an online company that seeks donations to unglue orphan works from their legal bindings. It's a cool, although ultimately conservative, idea that pays tribute to access and copyright in one seamless stroke. Only problem: what if the **Lessigs** of the world want to re-glue a book a different way, like, a **Picasso** print?

CengageBrain.com: we're uploading hoping it will return back, downloaded into meaning. Not a diss — **Cengage** kept alive great library companies like **Gale**, **Information Access Corporation**, kept alive despite **Thomson** "suits" best efforts to extract all value. But what's this brain all about? Can't get the image of **Mel Brook's** Frankenstein out of our collective brain — **Raymond's** Dad, **Frank Barone** (**Peter Boyle**) crooning as only a brainless monster could in "Young Frankenstein..."

ReachMD: satellite channel "167" on Sirius/XM radio, rotates short and long information bits for health care professionals. So much free CME it's hard to fathom the business model. Except for a few health care promotions — a **Sony** Ultrasound workstation for office-bound physicians — that's it. But they do get the ad played ad nauseum. If you like medicine you just have to listen a bit to feel dialed into the profession that touches us — all and everywhere.

ReachMLS: Let's not short the opportunity to find a way for a **ReachMD** for us. **Howard Stern** would never let us near Sirius XM, but the average library IT shop probably has the tools and means to put up an Internet radio channel offering scaled-down versions of what those MDs listen to. Tip: pitch **Gregory Penske**, son of billionaire motorsports, car dealerships, and rental transport **Roger Penske** (the General) who loves books, or drop by **EBSCO** or **Elsevier**. You could fold in those informative soft-voiced pitches used on **ReachMD** with voices that smoothly pitch your **Scopus**, **Mendelay**, or discovery services. We're librarians, we sit at desktops all day long, we need a subliminal moment now and then... Hey, I want an ultrasound in my office....

Your Links:

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=confusion>
<http://www.gluejar.com/>
[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.3261:](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.3261)
<http://www.reachmd.com/>
http://radio.about.com/od/createinternetradio/a/How-to-Create-Your-Own-Internet-Radio-Station_3.htm
www.CengageBrain.com

Alt-Reading: Where Patron-Driven Acquisition May Fear to Tread...

History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet by **Marshall Poe** — The author, by day a professor of Slavic history, views major communication paradigms in modern times to conclude that technology is pulled by users into the forms it takes rather than the other way. Doesn't bode well for the academic library as presently configured, but read it for a good understanding where we are going and what "pulling" we can do.

Digital Barbarism: a Writer's Manifesto by **Mark Helprin** — novelist **Helprin's** book-length reply to blog detractors who excoriated him on a *New York Times* op-ed piece about, well, copyright. As an author whose only income stemmed from royalties, **Helprin** took issue with the **Lesig**-led movement that views copyright as out-of-sync and style with digital culture. Must-read for those who don't want to read the dozens of books penned since 2007 on both sides of this unsolved problem.

When I Was a Child I Read Books: Essays by **Marilynne Robinson** — another book lover pounds us with the beauty and being of books — helps refocus on how writing and reading take priority over how we get books. In hand trumps at hand...

The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court by **Jeffrey Toobin** — the *New York Times* senior writer who follows the court, tells all about the justices who will decide health care and copyright — because it will come down to that. Too bad **Toobin** did not ask them about their preferences for e-readers.

The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains by **Nicholas Carr**

— **Carr's** theme is that we are losing our memory to the Internet and that we are knowledgeable about much too little; when we need depth we just get Facebook.

Art of Memory by **Frances Yates** — older book about mnemonic techniques practiced by premoderns who had to memorize speeches and sermons. Now available in eBook where you can just electronic bookmark how far you've read.

Googlization of Everything by **Siva Vaidhyanathan** — you will need the art of memory to remember the author's name, but when you do, you will cover the width, breadth, and depth of how Google has impacted our consumer, intellectual, and spiritual lives. Writes a great deal about libraries and their problem in these e-times.

Tiger, Head, Snake, Tails: China Today: How It Got There and Where it is Heading by **Jonathan Fenby** — for the nonsinologist, a veteran journalist and China watcher summarizes, analyses, and forecasts what's up with the Fifth Generation of China's leadership. Instrumental for librarians wondering who are these new librarians at our gates (or at **ALA Exhibits**).

Your Links:

all titles available as commercial eBooks except *History of Communications*, which is available only as an academic eBook from our well-known academic vendors. Or direct from **Cambridge University Press**. 🌳

Booklover from page 55

...But who sent the moth, and allowed him and a late-summer thunderstorm, banging and blustering like a high school principal, to stimulate my longing for the tin drum my mother had promised me, and to steadily increase over time both my aptitude and my desire for it?"

Oskar's story unfolds with **Grass** pulsating between first- and third-person like a drummer whose drumsticks strike first the snare and then the cymbal. And even though the story can be at times graphic and somewhat journalistic in its view, the words dance on the page to the rhythm that **Grass** has created and I am captivated.

In the Introduction provided on my **Kindle**, **Grass** entices you with three stories: how the book came to exist in 1959 and how the book came to America in 1962 and

how new versions of book were collectively translated in 2005. This last story is quite fascinating. Ten translators met in Gdańsk early in the summer of 2005 with the goal to create new translations. *The Tin Drum* contains numerous graphic and quite realistic scenes which can be assaulting. **Grass** had worried that the previous versions may have been shortened or softened by the translators to make the novel acceptable to their readers. He prepared himself for this adventure by rereading his novel for the first time since writing it, an experience that both delighted and surprised him. The translators and the author worked for eight days, even taking time to visit sites described in the narrative. I am glad that I am reading this updated version.

Like **Oskar**, I feel that **Kweku** finds solace in his drum. The troubles of the world are daunting for these two boys, fictitious and real, and they create a beat so we pay attention. 🌳