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At Brunning: People and 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** (Director, The Design School Library, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Where the Wild Things Are — Who's Going Rogue?

I don't about you, but I'm looking around my collections for any intellectual property that's mine. I've got my spine; I've got my orange crush. And I got a few cheap scanners, flash drives, and open software. I'm scanning. Aren't you?

Let's be real, the Supreme Court isn't going to take any copyright cases soon or ever. The eBook distributors and publishers have their game down. Academic eBooks are what they are.

Of course, I'm not scanning books coming into the library. There are so few of them, and when they do slip through, we've no place to put them until we round up a few more useless books and haul them directly to storage.

I should just scan them like Google did.

Recently I hung out among top archivists in Arizona, and the interest is keen and enthusiasms great for corporate archives. Those whose business is storing stuff in boxes are doing a booming business. Companies are waking up to a need for archiving materials as they realize much corporate memory and intellectual property are digital. And there is always the risk management angle where the paper trail is encrypted in digital darkness. Good for defense lawyers, bad for prosecutors. For librarians it may be a career move.

The rogue librarian would digitize all primary material. Do what's on your real or virtual desk, and then go wild on others. Add to your linked-in profile your skills and expertise at digital archives. Seduce big shots with a self-published book based upon a machine parse of memos, contracts, and brochures. Every book a reader, and now every company the digital vault.

Annals of Search: Google's Shift to the Right

PageRank is no more. This may be news to most of us, but astute SEO experts knew early that it stood for a formula the search giant uses to limit outsiders' gaming results. Google still talks about a 10-point system the value of which propels your site up or down in search results. At debut, Google boasted a fifty criteria-defined PageRank. Today the hive estimates a million variables are measured by Google. Google isn't saying; they do what they do.

A constant in press releases and blog posts was the idea that links from high PageRank sites pointing to another site lifted all sites in the thread. This crowd-sourced popularity was a grassroots-type poll and a key to Google's high-precision retrieval.

Unfortunately, PageRank was easily gamed. Google's search engineers figure out one filter for spammers only for them to use a workaround. Since fake ad clicks risked data integrity, Google had problems. To encourage buying keywords for its advertising program, AdWords, some of behind-the-curtains PageRank programming was revealed. Plus, as we know, information wants to be free. The data exhaust that Google can't control is a gossip system and a network of vast revelation to all who were motivated to know it.

Google's use of filters was essential to its ability to sell advertising, which in turn gave Google value. Google learned much in the walk-up to 2004, the IPO, and Web hegemony. For example, Gmail taught Google how its users behaved online. More than the billions of searches rolling in, Gmail coupled keywords with a known person even if Google simply recorded that person's IP address

It was Gmail more than PageRank that defined an online world Google could monetize. It was Gmail that taught Google how to keep it as clean and free of pedophiles and spammers. As ever, email was gold to Google, no matter how much the social media companies claim a better understanding of you.

Recently, Google fixed its algorithms once more. Where site popularity was once measured by inbound links, Google now feels "rightness" is the answer. Recently Google introduced the Knowledge Graph. Search for a person, place, or thing. Google has crawled and indexed Websites filtering out information considered low-quality, error-prone, or wrong.

Search on **John Coltrane**, and you will retrieve links to Wikipedia, association, government sites — any source recognized by Google as credible. This credibility follows Google's link voting method as used in PageRank. But now Google wants credibility rather than popularity to surface useful information.

Google feels they now answer questions rather than return pointers to answers. And in a world that uses tiny smartphone screens to search, Google conveniently adapts its user display in a packaged box, with images, bullet points, and other visual cues.

The Knowledge Graph promises to become a genuine reference source. And if Websites generally are judged by the facts or scholarly credentials, Google steps ever further across that lunar surface that now is the wild west of information. How **Amazon** can be ranked higher than **Barnes and Noble** or **TrueCar** from **Carfax** — that's a good question, certainly one that Google should answer. In the old days, Google ranked itself mainly at a 10. Can they humbly grade themselves in Rightrank so grandly?

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A bigger question: does the crowd as evaluated by Google have it right? So far the graph seems to consolidate Wikipedia information and those sites in the image of the Wiki masters.

Too much knowledge will not be good for ad placement, but we can be sure the search engineers have an acceptable design. Some trade-off.

Browser Wars 2015 Catch-Up:

Web metrics are everything and nothing. Facebook counts over one billion users, one-seventh of the known world population. This means a NASDAQ valuation of 80.00 a share. Twitter is as pervasive as Facebook but with only 300 million registered users can't get the same love from investors.

Of course, it is more complex and subtle than this, but numbers count when they do and don't when they don't. The honest investment brokers admit no one knows potential of users; there is just use and these numbers are closely held.

ZDNET's **Ed Bott** argues persuasively that government numbers are solid and tell us much about browser use. Governments measure ev-

everything; the bigger the government, the more bureaucratic and automatic numbers collecting becomes. No bureaucrat is concerned with number spin — enough to go on CNBC and talk expertly.

The federal government collects incoming use and gathers all the usual data suspects — IP, time of day, other stuff. Part of the other stuff is browser version. **Bott** writes about browser versioning of the Web and comes up with some nontrivial findings.

We find out that Internet Explorer and Chrome for Windows dominate the browsers accessing government sites.

IE translates to Windows desktops and laptops.

Chrome's use is anyone's guess; I'm betting it's all the Firefox users who fought the good fight with Google's support only to have its user base gutted by Chrome's debut in 2007. Until then, Google subsidized Firefox in exchange for Firefox's default use of Google Search in its toolbar.

So it's a Windows 7 (or Wintel) world as far as browsers accessing federal government sites. Chrome and Safari dominate mobile browsers — Android and IOS the likely reasons.

It's good and necessary to know this and balance it against the real and hyped takeover of computing by hand computers.

I'd like to think it means that government data is sensitive and valuable enough to require appropriate tools. These are still the traditional operating systems. It may explain the slow take-up of mobile devices by students and faculty. In an odd and ironic way, desktops are the equivalent or evolutionary extension of pencil, paper, and textbook. Where's the teacher? Checking travel bookings on an iPhone probably.

So it's just government data and services. And yes, it's difficult to identify the real browser.

And it may be moot, fatuous, and lame to conclude any-

thing from this. But no more than the numbers game (or war?) of the big guys.

Take away: the desktop we've known and used is still the tool we use and expect to use. It may be a significant disservice to library users to assume and act otherwise. 🐾



Oregon Trails — Anatomy of a Collection

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Once you have three of something, you have a collection, and the compulsion begins. By failing to re-cycle (re-sell not destroy) the reading copies of a couple of **C. S. Forester's** Hornblower books, my collection of seafaring books had begun; I just didn't know it at the time.

When I was in high school, the few books that I bought I found on the book racks in the Post Exchange or occasionally in Kiosks outside the Frankfurt/Main main train station. Until I started college, I had no idea that there were stores that sold only books, so I relied on Post and school libraries for most of my reading. I owned *The Portable Steinbeck*, *The Portable Poe*, and a few **Signet Classics** from the PX, a small assortment at best. My family moved so often that books usually got left behind at an Army post thrift shop. But the idea of collecting books had occurred to me. When interviewed for the high school newspaper during my senior year, I was quoted as saying that I wanted a library of my own and at the only high school reunion I have ever attended or want to attend, several former classmates, when told that I was a librarian, commented that I finally got a library of my own. Little did they know what I had really meant or what I ended up with.

For the longest time, my collecting was haphazard but gradually and slowly, as finances improved, several collections began to take

shape — **Wright Morris** and **Christopher Morley** in particular. It wasn't until fairly recently that I felt the urge (an itch must be scratched) to fill in the missing titles from the ten Hornblower novels. In browsing for those books I discovered **Forester's** *The Hornblower Companion: An Atlas and Personal Commentary on the Writing of the Hornblower Saga, with Illustrations and Maps* by **Samuel Bryant** and **C. Northcote Parkinson's** *The Life and Times of Horatio Hornblower*, a biography that some people point to as proof that the Hornblower of fiction was an actual person and member of the Royal Navy.

An unintended consequence of my utilitarian gathering of Hornblower books was a growing curiosity about what the ships looked like during the era of **Admiral Nelson** and the Napoleonic wars of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Was I beginning a new collection or merely expanding my Hornblower collection? The answer is a bit of both as the following titles suggest: *Hornblower's Ships: Their History & Their Models*, by **Martin Saville**; *Men-of-War: Life in Nelson's Navy*, by **Patrick O'Brian**; *The Frigates*, by **James Henderson**; *The History of Ships*, by **Peter Kemp**; *The 50-Gun Ship:*

A Complete History, by **Rif Winfield**; *Ships: Visual Encyclopedia*, by **David Ross**; and *The Visual Dictionary of Ships and Sailing*, a **Doring Kindersley** book.

Sailors have their own language, too, and I was delighted to find a dictionary, *A Sea of Words: A Lexicon and Companion to the Complete Seafaring Tales of Patrick O'Brian*, by **Dean King** that works equally well with the Hornblower novels and others of that ilk, for example the Ramage novels of **Dudley**

Pope (I have a dozen paperbacks waiting to be read), and the **Richard Delancey** seafaring tales by **C. Northcote Parkinson**. It is instructive to compare **King's**

definitions with those found in the volume next to it on one of my bookshelves: *The Sailor's Lexicon: the Classic Source for More Than 15,000 Nautical Terms* by **Admiral W. H. Smyth**. A side bar for this book states that it is "Acknowledged Lexicon for Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin Sea Stories." Still, it is good to have **King's** version with its charts and maps that come in handy when reading *Master and Commander*, *Treason's Harbour*, or any of the other 18 **O'Brian** titles on my

