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# Pelikan's Antidisambiguation — “VR much?”

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Today I'm venturing to offer a column that comes as close, I think, as highlighting a trend ever gets to being a true “lead pipe cinch” — so much so that you've probably already thought of it, considered it, and are planning for it. Ah well, just in case...

The sensing of trends is not often a “knock you out of your seat” kind of experience. The traces of trend threads are often quite faint, or even more frequently, disjointed from direct connection by a series of sideways lurches. Sometimes, what makes a “thing” a “coming thing” is nothing about the thing itself, but about an unmet need or desire in the population taking up the thing and trying it.

As ever, I'm fascinated by the forms that early emergent technologies and media appear in. Often, the significance latent in a newly emergent form of media is NOT discernable in the outward appearance of the early devices required to access it. No, what's important over time is whatever remains constant over time. What's important is what the technology or medium *enables*.

If what it enables is significant, users will adopt the thing, despite awkward or laughable traits resulting from the early adopted technological expression. I recall a photograph of a Victorian family in their ornate drawing room, gathered around an early wax cylinder player, each holding an India rubber tube to an ear.

What's essential to remember, of course, is that we ourselves live in an equally laughable, backward time. We struggle constantly with early technologies, ill-adapted for their intended purposes, and just like our ancestors, we try to look smooth about it! Our kids and grandkids will look back and laugh at us.

For quite some time there have been breathless accounts in the chattering corners of the tech-Web about Virtual Reality, or VR. Accompanying them have often been photographs of the prototype devices they propose that we strap to our faces. These look something like a cross between a diver's mask and a Waring blender base. Sure — no problem looking smooth sporting one of those!

A little while back, at a conference floor exhibit hosted by a nearby state's university, I had the opportunity to give VR a try. The experience surprised me, for it left with me a dawning impression, one that's grown stronger as time has gone by: Virtual Reality gear, and more importantly, the programs or media that drive it, will become part of our libraries' media collections, and sooner than we might think.

The head gear is really a kind of glorified View-Master rig, with a pair of fairly-high resolution digital eyepieces, one for each eye, mounted in the housing. That housing also contains motion sensors, so the headgear can keep track of what direction it's pointing — and that's the key. The experience places you at the center of a spherical display “space.” Turn your head to the right, and the point of view

follows: you're looking toward your right, and the scene has shifted seamlessly as you move your head. You can look in any direction — hence the swivel seat they put you on.

The first program I got to try employed a “look to navigate” scheme. It placed me in a sometimes realistic, sometimes fantastical environment. Moving from place to place was accomplished by looking in a particular direction fixedly: you moved in the direction you looked. If you wanted to stay still, you could stop and look around, up, down, behind you. The stereo headphones they strapped on also kept pace with the visuals, panning and tilting with your movement.

The graphical quality was equivalent to that of a contemporary video game, with comparable frame rates. In other words, you knew it was a display. It seemed a bit cartoonish.

After asking me how I was doing, the exhibit folks asked me if I wanted to try something more adventurous. Well, I seemed to be doing alright, so, Sure, I said. A moment later I was sitting in a roller coaster that hadn't started moving yet. Uh-oh...

Well. It started up, and after a few preliminary, gentle curves (no problem, I can handle this), it began to climb. I look ahead and up: we were climbing up, up, up an absurdly, impossibly steep, long, high roller coaster climb. It was as impossible as something out of a Warner Brothers cartoon. I knew the thing was a sham, but as we approached the apex, I felt a familiar sense of disquiet, entirely reminiscent of the real thing. The climb slowed way down as we got to the very top, and then there was a momentary pause, what Gandolph may have called the “deep breath before the plunge...”

Ohhhhmigosh! I made it all the way down with white knuckles gripping the arms of the chair, and through about two or three hurtling curves before I indicated to the handlers that it was time to stop. The dissonance between what my inner ears and my eyes were reporting to my poor noggin had resulted in a physical disorientation that almost bordered on nausea. No. That's untrue: it did not border. Had I persisted I'd have lost the lovely canapés I'd indulged in earlier. Note to self: be prudent around virtual reality...

But here's the thing: even as I knew full-well that I was sitting in a swivel chair on a conference display floor, the realism of the experience was sufficient to short-circuit my rational response and plug directly into the primitive brain, which rejected any wise council from my higher-order cognitive processes. No, that primitive, lizard-like bundle of nerves *knew* that I was hurtling through space toward near certain destruction, and it responded with full fight-or-flight instinct!

Afterwards, they wisely advised me sit quietly for a few minutes and look gently around reality to reorient myself. I thought that was a friendly gesture...

But what purpose does this medium serve, and why do I think we'll have VR setups in our libraries?

Because the potential for transporting you is enormous. When combined with true photographic, cinematic media, live action, and professional production values, this medium will enable you to travel to the ocean floor, the Roman Forum, the Great Pyramid of Cholula, or the surface of Mars.

I'm a person who grew up loving maps, atlases, and globes. As an avid amateur astronomer, celestial globes are among my most favored objects — I have several. The trick with a celestial globe is to understand that they depict a sphere around your point of view — you're looking in at a surface depicting what, if you were inside at the center, you'd see if you were looking out. Combine a VR headset with planetarium software (frequently employed on laptop or table computer as a kind of field atlas) and you'd have the starry sky above you, as seen from any point on earth (or any other spot, for that matter), at any point in time you'd wish to visit.

So imagine an adjunct to your media library, somewhere in between or alongside your stereo recordings, your videos, your GIS data sets. Imagine library-durable equipment, ridiculously spendy at first, but becoming more reasonable and accessible over time.

And most of all, imagine a curated collection, selected by subject domain specialists, with all the historical, geographical, and cultural richness and diversity of our existing multimedia collections, growing richer over time, enabling us to go places we'll never be able to visit, or to prepare for places we may in fact someday see.

The content industry must be gearing up for this in a big way. Let's beware the turn-key solutions that will attempt to lure you and lock you in with the Easy button, at a cost. For when it arrives, this technology will be the thing that everyone will have to have, or to nay-say.

“Virtual Reality Arrives” will say the journal covers! Expect papers on “Virtual Reality Reference Services.” Virtual Reality in the library will become the library conference paper fodder for a generation of tenure-seeking aspirants. It will be the magic amulet that is shaken at every existing and perennial library problem. It will be the headache of space planners, the hope of relevance-seeking library advocates who count door traffic, the bane of budgeters.

In short, it will become an integral part of our entire library world, already complex and diverse in its demands as it is, but certain to become more so.

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# Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians — In Vendor/Library Negotiations; Both Sides Should Be Listening to the Same Radio Station - W.I.I.F.M.

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From the Rolling Stones classic album, “Let It Bleed” the iconic lines; **“You Can’t Always Get What You Want, but if you try sometimes... you just might find... you get what you need.”** The song was written by **Mick Jagger** and **Keith Richards** in 1969 and the sentiments described hold true to this day both in our personal and professional lives.

The mythical, yet relevant radio stations’ call letters, W.I.I.F.M. indicate the most basic tenet that both sides of a negotiation need to understand about themselves and the other party, and that is **WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME – WIIFM**.

Clearly, each side will enter every negotiation understanding what it is they want. However, understanding what the other party wants and giving them the ability to achieve that goal to walk away with a deal that is relevant and fair should be the objective of both.

The savvy potential customer will inevitably ask the salesperson, “How will the product or services you’re trying to sell, help me personally and how will it help my organization?” In this example, the “me” took preference over the “organization.” That’s because if the buyer is being perfectly honest, the relevance of every purchase on behalf of their organization will be tied to that person’s professional and personal goals. If the product bought is successful, which in the library’s case means user community acceptance that translates to strong usage, then both the buyer and seller are satisfied. However, if the product bought fails to meet expectation of the user community, then the information professional’s judgment on making relevant purchases in the future for the library may be questioned. Therefore, the question of “what’s in it for me?” takes on increasing importance.

For the buyer with any hopes to achieve a successful outcome

in negotiating, one must always be thinking of how the product under consideration will ultimately look once it has been bought. Before the final sales or any monetary considerations are exchanged between the buyer and the seller, many questions need to be answered.

By purchasing this product, will it save time and money? Will it serve the widest populace of users at the library? Is the price reasonable? And ultimately, will I, as the purchaser, have done my job and as a result satisfy the expectations of the patrons of the library and my boss. Because, the bottom line is that we all work for someone. The supervisor has to be pleased and if that person is happy, then the employee can expect continued employment with the expectation of being possibly promoted in the future within the organization.

To set the stage for WIIFM to work for both parties, the buyer has to be transparent in relating the needs of the library to the seller. For example, the conversation between a buyer and seller of e-content at a University library may be:

“We have a visiting professor here from Argentina. She is well known as an expert in pre-Columbian history and we need better resources than the ones that are currently housed in the library. Given that she is a highly visible expert, we need to make sure our collection meets her requirements. The library director has made the enhancement of this collection a priority.”

The salesperson now knows that providing resources will not only enhance the library’s collection, but also make the buyer a hero in

the eyes of the library director and the professor. If the salesperson’s company has the right resources, then a sale is likely. WIIFM works for both if the seller can produce viable materi-



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I almost forgot: want to give VR a try? Try googling “Google Cardboard.” This will get you to [google.com/get/cardboard](http://google.com/get/cardboard). There, you’ll laugh, and wonder why you or I didn’t think of this...

In the meantime, I just took delivery this week of another celestial globe, my third, if

you don’t count the one we had as kids (and which my older brother grabbed when we were divvying stuff up). That’s one for the office, one for the living room by the shortwave radio, and one to offer on ebay to defray the expense and to enhance domestic placidity. I just still like the format of the globe. It’s comforting, pleasing to the eye, requires no batteries, and has never once made me feel as if I might lose my canapés! 🐦

als at a reasonable price to fit the informational needs of the library on a timely basis.

In this case, the information professional is quite clear as to the most immediate needs that the vendor needs to fill for the library. Clarity of purpose is most essential if WIIFM has any chance of working for both the buyer and seller.

For sales reps, being aware of WIIFM is a major factor toward achieving their sales goals. It really doesn’t matter what product or service is being sold. In the final analysis — no matter the cost, the complexity of the product, or the people in the conversation — every customer wants the same thing: to gain professional success and approval from their supervisors, staff and peers. A successful salesperson understands this concept and does everything possible to make the customer look good within their organization.

Likewise, if the customer determines that the product and price presented meets all the needs of the organization, then the information professional must “coach” the salesperson as to how to navigate though the process of final approval. Because in the end, the salesperson must get that signed order form, purchase order number or whatever it is that makes the sale final. In sales, we say that we pay commission to salespeople when they bring in a “signed” order. We never pay commissions on a “mind” order.

For the buyer, WIIFM means understanding what the purchase means for not only the library, but more so, for the furthering of the purchaser’s career.

For the seller, WIIFM means presenting and selling a product that has benefits for BOTH the purchaser and the purchaser’s organization. 🐦

*Mike is currently the President of Gruenberg Consulting, LLC, a firm he founded in January 2012 after a successful career as a senior sales executive in the information industry. His firm is devoted to provide clients with sales staff analysis, market research, executive coaching, trade show preparedness, product placement and best practices advice for improving negotiation skills for librarians and salespeople. His book, “Buying and Selling Information: A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to Build Mutual Success” is available on Amazon, Information Today in print and eBook, Amazon Kindle, B&N Nook, Kobo, Apple iBooks, OverDrive, 3M Cloud Library, Gale (GVRL), MyiLibrary, ebrary, EBSCO, Blio, and Chegg. [www.gruenbergconsulting.com](http://www.gruenbergconsulting.com)*