Bet You Missed It

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Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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Spam Still Tastes Bad!
by Jane H. Tuten (USC Aiken Library)

The author, who is information security coordinator at Northwestern University, offers six simple ways to avoid the junk mail of the Internet by filtering. In addition to suggestions on mail folders and the running of filters on mail, Safian includes rules on how to mask your email address, so that you do not become a target for "harvesting" addresses from the Net. Surely a must read article as the incidence of spamming increases. See — Roger Safian, “Damming Spam” in Educom Review, Jan/Feb 1999, pp. 25-27.

From Resistance to Assistance
by Jane H. Tuten (USC Aiken Library)

A summary of correspondence with several recipients of the EduCOM Medal is a clear acknowledgment of the changing approach that many faculty are taking towards technology—from fear to acceptance and integration into their classrooms—and the differences in support that many institutions offer. The nature of the resistance to technology on many campuses might have much to do with the rapid nature of the changes, rather than the idea of change itself. Technology offers a means of cooperative learning for students but one person is quoted as advising peers to be wary of involvement until a commitment to support IT is made by the administration. See — Wendy Rickard, “Technology, Higher Education and the Changing Nature of Resistance” in Educom Review, Jan/Feb 1999, pp. 42-45.

Children's Culture is More Than Toys
by Twyla Racz (Eastern Michigan University)

Although the demand for multicultural books for children is growing and large publishers are producing more, the books are not culturally conscious. Culturally conscious titles are written by members of that particular ethnic group. The author investigated the production and distribution system and has suggestions for correcting the flaws she uncovered. See — Twyla J. Hill, “Multicultural Children’s Books: An American Fairy Tale,” Publishing Research Quarterly, vol. 14 (1) (Spring 1998), p. 36-45.

The Future is Just Over the Horizon
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Motorola and Cisco Systems have joined forces to create the world's largest wireless Internet system. They have earmarked $1 billion for a system to transmit "voice, data and video over existing cellular telephone stations directly to wireless telephones, laptop computers and other devices." Their plan is for an open industry standard that could be used by competing products. See — David Barboza, “Joint Venture Aims to Help The Internet Go Wireless,” The New York Times, p.C1, Feb. 8, 1999.

American Library Association? D-u-u-u-u-u-u-d.
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

The band Widespread Panic has never had a music video on MTV or cracked the Billboard Top 200. But they have become a major success through grassroots marketing and the rise of the Internet on college campuses. On tour they gross more than Sheryl Crow and Smashing Pumpkins. Their Internet-linked fans are compared to the Deadheads who just invented themselves and began trailing the Grateful Dead around. Born in that cradle of rock, Athens, Ga., they struggled until they hit on a fan-friendly formula of handing out tickets and social privileges to college kids who would help with promotion. The

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com> 73
What? No Web Site?
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Borders Group is the most profitable bookseller in America with annual earnings twice that of Barnes & Noble. So why is the stock so low rated? They're weak no. 3 in Internet sales ($5 million to Amazon.com's $610 million). And even though Borders continues to open massive superstores at a frantic pace, the appeal is dying. Borders used to enjoy 15% annual growth. It pioneered music sales along with books, espresso bars, and testing of salespeople on knowledge of authors and music.

Booktown On the Plains
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Famed author Larry McMurtry has returned to the desperate and dying little Texas town he made famous in The Last Picture Show. And he's opened an old style book store—with the books right there on shelves. Curiously, he's run used and antiquarian book stores throughout his writing career in a variety of cities. And McMurtry is right on the scene handling stock and delighting in his affinity for books and being surrounded by books. He's placed the dismal little Archer City in what is called the International Book Town Movement—a tourist attraction for book addicts in which a variety of quaint towns around the world are declared Book Towns, hold literary festivals, and cluster book stores. But right across the street is an Amazon.com retail outlet with merely a clerk and a computer terminal with five million books in their inventory. Uh-oh. See — Bruce Watson, "Racing to Round Up Readers," Smithsonian, March 1999, p.78.

Quoting Your Way to Fame and Fortune
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Criswell Freeman is a "quotholic" who sold 330,000 books last year but remains an unknown author. He publishes quote books through his own company Walnut Grove Press with titles like The Golfer's Book of Wisdom and Mothers Are Forever. 85% are sold outside of bookstores. He calls them "bathroom books" and says he doesn't mind not being on a bestseller list. He's happy to be "on someone's toilet lid." See — Rodney Ho, "A Little Empire of Quotes," Wall Street Journal, Feb. 19, 1999, p.B1.

Feel Good Murdoch
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

As CEO of HarperCollins, Anthea Disney was called the Death Angel because she canceled 100 book contracts. Harper had a book return rate of 40% which she reduced to 25% by publishing fewer titles and focusing on the types of books they did best. She scoffs at the idea that she destroyed a sacred bond between author and editor and insists that her actions were the only logical response and were common in the industry. HarperCollins contributes only nickels and dimes to Rupert Murdoch's fortune, but Disney says he actually reads books and owning a publishing company "makes him feel good." See — Dyan Machan, "Death Angel's Endearing Side," Forbes, p.70, March 8, 1999.

Battle of the Titans
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

With Amazon.com holding a big lead in the market, Barnes & Noble has agreed to weave together on-line products and services with Microsoft. But, a stock analyst notes: "This isn't a zerosum game. The market is growing so quickly that Barnes & Noble's gain isn't necessarily Amazon's loss. See — The New York Times. Tues., Dec. 8, 1998.

Copyright: Whose Ox is Gored?
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

The Copyright Term Extension Act extended existing copyrights for twenty years, allegedly to square our law with the EU. Disney led the lobbying for this and retains rights in Mickey, Goofy et al and thus billions in revenues. Epstein, a law prof at the U of Chicago argues that this is a taking of property by government, that public domain rights have been taken from Americans without compensation as required by the Constitution. Along with this, restaurants, shops and bars have been exempted from paying fees for the right to broadcast copyrighted music. See — Richard Epstein, "Congress's Copyright Giveaway," The Wall Street Journal, Dec. 21, 1998.

Currency Up or Down?
by Twyla Racz (Eastern Michigan University)


And Battle is Joined
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Under fire for admitting it would accept publisher money to endorse books, Amazon announced it would reveal all listings written by publishers. Amazon saw the money as a way to reduce book prices, but critics charged it would undermine their reputation as champions of small books. And, Amazon has expanded its refund policy. It will accept returns "even if you ripped out the pages because you thought the book was so bad." See — George Anders, "Amazon.com Inc. To Tell Customers Of Publisher Fees," Wall Street Journal, p.B8, Feb. 10, 1999.

Head to Head
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Jonathan Bulkeley, who started AOL's British operation, is now squaring off against Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com. Bulkeley was hired by Bertelsmann after it bought 50% of Barnesand-noble.com. Bulkeley says he has a million more titles than Amazon and better access to out-of-print books. Most amusing, Bulkeley recalls when he was working for AOL in 1994 in Virginia. They phoned Barnes & Noble to offer to set up an on-line bookstore. The call was never returned. The same year, Amazon was up and running. See — Elisabeth Bumiller, "On-Line Booksellers: A Tale of Two CEOs", The New York Times, Dec. 9, 1998
Guest Editor Craze
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Bill Blass was guest editor of one issue of Civilization magazine. Susan Sarandon and Gwyneth Paltrow at Marie Claire. The magazines pay them nothing and get big publicity. The editors promote their own celebrity. French Vogue pioneered this from 1969 to 1993 with guest editors ranging from Salvador Dali to David Hockney. Now the craze is widespread. And it raises the issue of blurring the line between editorial work and promotion. See — Wendy Bounds, “Top mag. seeks editor, no exper. needed,” Wall Street Journal, p.B1, Feb. 22, 1999.

Internet Shell Game
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Convicted swindler David Korem swears he rules a country called Melchizedek, named after an unjustly accused king in the Bible. It’s two islands in the Pacific although he has never visited them and many dispute their existence. He has given diplomatic recognition to Kosovo and declared war on France. Korem lives in California where he might just be one more bank. Except he’s been granting charters to banks to operate in his utterly unregulated kingdom. What will happen next has fraud investigators interested. See — Bruce Knecht, “A Nation in Cyberspace Draws Fire From Authorities,” Wall Street Journal, p.B1, Feb. 9, 1999.

When Men Wore Real Hats
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

For a truly fine history of the New York tabloid press, AIG gives its highest recommendation to this mix of journalism history and social analysis. Of particular note is the author’s account of going as a young boy to the Newspaper Division of the NY Public Library, an entire floor of an industrial loft building. There he spent afternoons of history gazing among the yellowing pages of fat bound volumes. This world was thrown away in 1961 along with the paper and replaced by the soulless microfilm. “But the jolt they gave me—the electric connection to a grittier, more tumultuous, jazzier world than mine, a world where people stay up late, wear snap-brim hats, and heard the sound of sirens—hasn’t altogether disappeared. I still feel a tinge of it every morning when I get my hands on the newspapers. Especially the tabloids, whose todays are eternal.” Wow. See — Hendrik Hertzberg, “Topless Tabloids of Gotham,” The New Yorker, p.121, Feb. 22 & March 1, 1999.

Blown Smoke Causes Hearing Loss — Not!
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Hudson Institute fellow Michael Fumento lights into JAMA: Science, the New England Journal of Medicine and Nature for publishing politically tainted medical studies. He cites cases of recall bias, data ignored because inconvenient and studies with bizarre methodology that could never be replicated. He’s particularly exercised over studies that provoke expensive EPA regulations — the study is debunked but the regulations remain. See — Michael Fumento, “Medical Journals Give New Meaning to ‘Political Science’”, The Wall Street Journal, p. A18, Jan. 21, 1999.

The Ghost of Smoot-Hawley Gibbers & Groans
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

The world’s biggest traders - the U.S. and Canada with a $1 billion swap in goods daily - are on the edge of a trade war. A bill is before the Canadian Parliament designed to protect Canadian publishing and TV from having their advertising dollars sucked away by foreign publications. It would prohibit foreign publishers selling advertising to Canadian concerns that were aimed primarily at the Canadian market. The U.S. has threatened a tariff war. See — John Urquhart, “U.S. Threatens Canada Trade Sanctions In Bid to Stop Magazine-Advertising Bill,” Wall Street Journal, p.B8, Feb. 10, 1999.

When a Reading Room Was A Reading Room
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

The Beaux Arts Main Reading Room of the NY Public Library has been updated with technology, but the grandeur remains. Vast, Monumental. Sumptuous. A cathedral without dogma. See — Robert Polidori, “Room to Think”, The New Yorker, p. 68, Oct. 5, 1998.

Those Little Thingummies That Shake Up the World
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

In 1973, the Universal Product Code — now known as the bar code — was born in San Francisco. In a time of high-inflation, supermarket net margins were being badly squeezed by the simple labor cost check-out and bagging. The answer was a laser scannable icon to automate the process.

In truth it was born in 1948 when Norman Woodland had the idea while doodling in the sand on a beach and thinking about Morse code. With fat and thin lines, you could do the same thing. He originally designed it as a circle so it could be read from any direction. Like most over-night successes, it didn’t become operational until 1972, and then as a rectangle which could be greatly reduced to take up less “real estate” on product items and still be read omnidirectionally. 1973 was the year the Uniform Code Council, a nonprofit corporation began assigning all those familiar five-digit sequences to individual manufacturers. And finally in 1974, the first pack of chewing gum went past the register.

Initial consumer reaction was blah until Phil Donahue whipped an audience into an outrage that prices were being concealed from them. This led to national protests countered by heavy supermarket industry lobbying with Congress. Like most American frenzies, it died of boredom and production marched on.

Automated check-out began in its turn pay-at-the-pump gas, ATM machines and Internet billings, all picking up the pace of commerce in our mass retail climate. See — Ed Leibowitz, “Bar Codes: Reading between the lines,” Smithsonian, p. 130, Feb. 1999.

Medical Spell-Check
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

The new field of pharmacogenetics is linking genetics to patient response to drugs. The one-size-fits-all approach leads to millions of bad reactions and over a hundred thousand deaths a year. Genes are strings of molecules in varying combinations of letters. Get a different genetic spelling and the drug effect is sometimes fatally different. Although the medical industry is slow to change, fear of malpractice litigation will soon change that. A test that predicts the patient’s reaction will become necessary defensive medicine. See — Sharon Bagley, “Screening for Genes,” Newsweek, p. 66, Feb. 8, 1999.

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