e-Postcards
from the
Other Side

by Gordon Prestoungrange

International President: International Management Centres Association
Lately Chairman: Electronic Publishing Division, MCB University Press

Abstract:

Records the sabbatical leave experiences of George, Professor of Marketing, and Margaret, Quality Consultant, in Internetica where electronic publishing and the Information Society are now coolly embraced. Their e-Postcards home demonstrate that some of our current scepticism is well-founded, as illustrated by lower than hoped for active participation rates and the challenge of transitory structures as contributors to learning. But they predominantly capture an emerging maturity amongst all the excitement that is creating the requisite discipline to focus on what can be enduringly achieved over meaningful timescales. Both George and Margaret make up their minds to work on a few specific high value-added applications areas on their return home – most particularly the intelligent capture and deployment of high quality information and the design and sustenance of user communities of interest.

Keywords:

electronic publishing; quality; communities of interest; virtual conferencing; distance learning; business schools

Foreword

George and Margaret had leapt at the opportunity-for-two to take a year's sabbatical leave in Internetica when they saw it advertised on the Net. They were selected from more than 8,000 applicants because their interests were pursuable in the capital, Norbert*. George was Dean and Professor of Marketing at the Business (B) School at Trad University (U) and Margaret a Founding Partner of Relationship Consultancy Inc. They both despaired of the negative obstructionism and contrived delays of colleagues at work, who they characterised as fearful rather than wise. They resented the suggestions that what was on offer would automatically undermine traditional quality standards and values. They pined for a spell amongst believers in the value-added benefits of the Information Society where they could talk and enjoy the electronic leverage they could see blossoming all around them.

Once they had been accepted for Internetica, they were surprised by the alacrity with which colleagues had agreed it would be good for them to get away. Only Fredrick, the immediate past Dean of Business and a family friend of them both, had wryly told George his sabbatical leave proposal had been enthusiastically agreed so that Trad U could be spared the constant reminders that something needed to be done before too long, for at least one year longer. But George's colleagues had been wise enough to ensure he was committed, as was Margaret when her Partners far more reluctantly agreed to her leave, to produce a Considered Report and Personal Action Plan on their return.

And so their journey began …

*Named in honour of Norbert Weiner, the acknowledged founder of Cybernetics as a discipline

Other titles by the author (also as Gordon Wills)

Bradford Exercises in Management
(with Thomas Kempner)

Handbook of Management Technology
(with Ronald Yearsley)

Pricing Strategy (with Bernard Taylor)

Technological Forecasting: the art and its managerial
implications
Technological Forecasting and Corporate Strategy
(with David Ashton and Bernard Taylor)

Sources of U.K. Marketing Information
Marketing Through Research
Marketing Research
(with Joseph Siebert)

Management Thinkers (with Anthony Tillett and
Thomas Kempner)

Organizational Design for Marketing Futures
(with Roy Hayhurst)

New Ideas in Retail Management

Long Range Planning for Marketing and Diversification
(with Bernard Taylor)

Contemporary Marketing
Effective Marketing Management
(with Martin Christopher)

Strategic Issues in Marketing
Lateral Marketing Thoughts
Marketing Reality
Creating and Marketing New Products
(with Roy Hayhurst and David Midgley)

Marketing Logistics and Distribution Planning
(with Martin Christopher)
Effective Distribution Management
(with Martin Christopher and David Walters)

Fashion Marketing (with David Midgley)
Marketing in Fashion Conscious Industries
(with Martin Christopher and David Midgley)

Business School Graffiti
Continuing Studies for Managers
Creating Wealth Through Management Development
Your Enterprise School of Management

The Knowledge Game
The Virtual Learning Organization
(with Eric Sandelands and Richard Teare)

Contents

All Quiet Here, Quieter in fact than Expected

Fredrick, We just arrived safely. First impressions are how very quiet it is. Not a lot of activity. We arrived over the weekend of course so we presume everyone is out of town – but we thought they'd all be cyberactive somehow. Like a Hong Kong or Singapore cellular phone circus in every street and every restaurant and at every meeting.

Very convenient arrangements at the airport. We had a chance to evaluate the intelligent apartment we had booked and the comparative ratings given lately to all at a similar price and promptly changed our minds. You'll be amused we decided to go for a 'technology-withdrawal suite' where all we have is satellite movie access in the lounge and recipes on-line for the kitchen. The proposition that convinced us was it was nice to get away from all the technology in the evenings after being submerged all day. What hope for working from home then in the future?

Reception was impersonal at the apartment nonetheless. No friendly character for a chat about what to do and where to go. All on screen in the apartment! Had to let the robot swipe our smartcard to get in the place at all.

One fascinating thing you'd also like. The lounge is full of books – all outside our areas of interest now but by the end of the year I am sure we'll know them inside out. They're on art history in France and Holland, resistance to new ideas everywhere, and yards of English poetry and literature. There's a logic to the collection which will get through to us soon I am sure. Either it's to relax or reassure.

Must dash and consult the recipes on-line again. We are finding it hard to decide with so much choice. Can't get over the low level humm or is it the absence of real buzz? That's taken us completely by surprise. We will share it with our new colleagues next week and see what explanation they might have.

Ciao — George & Margaret

AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

1

Nothing's Quite Finished Here
– a bit like Taiwan really

Fredrick, Its been a very busy first few weeks. I have settled in well at the Internet Management Centres (IMC) at the University of Norbert (U of N), and Margaret at the International Quality Management Association (IQMA) which is resourced from here. Both operate 100% on the Net.

The biggest resources everyone uses professionally in Norbert are familiar names from Trad U such as EBSCO, Blackwells and Dawson Faxon. They have monstrous e-warehouses where access is available to all and sundry using smartcard referencing. We haven't got a library as such, just access everywhere you look – except mercifully at home where the books are proving a blessing already.

I can hardly recall the names of journals now in the marketing field. I make use of extensive databases covering the world's top titles and search on key words, quality star-ings and document type.

The big resource e-warehouses emphasise that the content they disseminate is no better than the original article published somewhere previously, but little mention is made of those original publishers. I was surprised not to see some of them here with big resource centres, but no. They must be somewhere else doing something else. Margaret thinks they are hooked on archives and databases at the expense of user behaviour patterns. She's normally got a good nose for these things and it certainly fits in with marketing theory of technology and product-driven manufacturing.

Nothing's quite finished though. Rather like our first impressions of Taiwan as we took that taxi ride from the airport to downtown Taipei. Remember? We wondered why all the buildings looked half completed and ill maintained. Here it's the electronic structures that lie unfinished/pages 'not found', or long since last updated. We thought that would have been

AIR MAIL
P A R ✦ A V I O N

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

readily overcome here in a city where we have nothing but Internet believers. But the truth seems to be that those who launched the great e-enterprise are lacking the skills to keep it all shipshape. A different sort of talent is required to ensure week-in week-out quality of e-resources. Takes a different sort of talent to manage the whole thing with priorities too. Sounds familiar?

Best wishes George
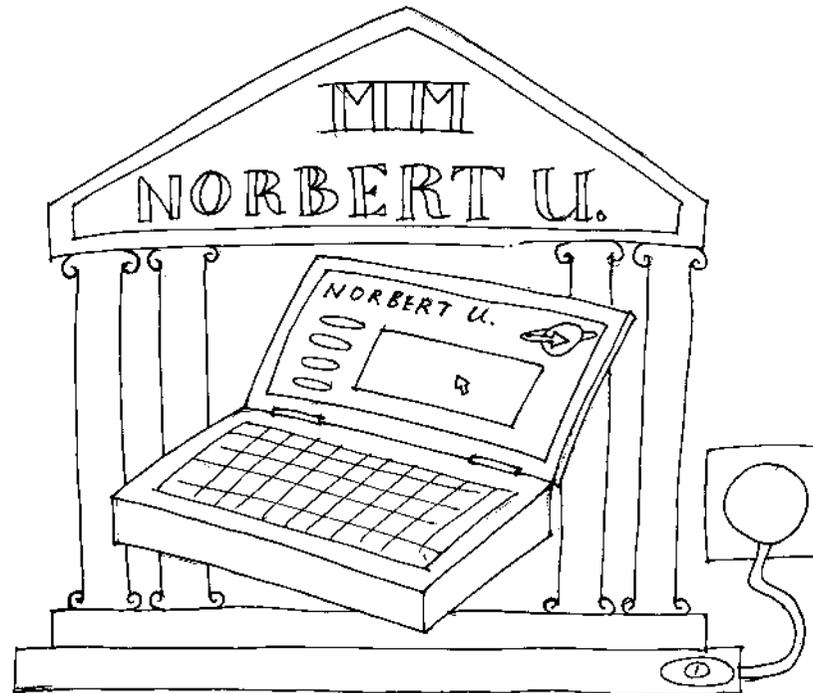
Internet Quality at Last?

Fredrick. Time I wrote, eh? George dropped me off on Day 1 at the International Quality Management Association (IQMA) who have me under their wing for the year. Amazing place. They have 25 000 members already paying $US 100 per annum subscription and provide a flourishing on-line professional educational, recruitment and consultancy service. I have of course been one for a couple of years but had no appreciation of the actual depth and breadth of their activities.

They were very kind Day 1. I thought I put my foot in it by saying how glad I was to see them face-to-face (f2f in Internetica speak) but they quite understood. Said it was common at first, common in the middle and common all the time … Communing with PCs full time they felt was not likely to be a 'total' quality experience and the tactile media needed to get their act together as complementaries rather than dinosaurs. Think they were being polite.

Anyway, they had some comments on George's and my surprise as reflected in e-PCs 1 and 2 on the Quiet and the Unfinished nature of much around. The quiet is truly low participative activity levels; only so many hours in a day and how do you want to spend them? But they do make the point that an awful lot of casual traffic passes by and you do not hear or see it. Sites can have only 10 contributions for 1000 visits and that can be regarded as satisfactory by all concerned. The 10 had their say, and the 990 saw and heard what they wanted. Some lingered; others were in the wrong place and left swiftly.

On the unfinished structures which we cannot help noticing all the while, they are very philosophical, saying that the next and coming wave is from precisely the finishers, concluders, upholders and maintainers. Such folk never go on to the beaches first; they get ashore as soon as possible afterwards and get the place tidied up. There is, to tell the truth, a new division here in IQMA that has just started using ISO 9002 to discipline and structure our own work. Serve us right. We are awash with non-conformances as soon as we set the quality standards but most of the deviations can be put right as routines. The more creative folk who design the

AIR MAIL
P A R ✦ A V I O N

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

resources and then cut and run are surprisingly welcoming this initiative, which makes a change from the derogatory remarks normally heaped on ISO 9000 enthusiasts or even auditors back where you are Fredrick.

I've fallen on my feet here at IQMA anyway. They said if as a consultant I wanted more edge-of-the-seat buzz at a site than elegantly contrived archival access, I had better turn my mind to it quickly. Others it seems are reaching a similar conclusion. The IQMA is seeking to develop more interactive services such as Virtual Conferencing (Heal, 1996) in the hope of getting cost effective linkages and lateral thoughts. But they are not overly optimistic about great results because of the earlier view that a lot of attendees do not want to contribute. They just want to visit and look and maybe learn ... and why not? Nothing new in that at all but we all wonder whether the Internet has got some ingredient that can set a new pattern alight. It's going to require some lateral thinking. The analogy they make here is that an important part of any traditional conference is f2f in the bar, lobby and the like, but we have not seemingly captured that moment for interaction and benefit sharing.

The notion I shall be working on is to use electronics for the before and after stages of good f2f sessions and also to capture views from those who know they cannot come f2f but by targeting or shoulder tapping as it's called over here. This scenario suggests a booming role then for f2f with electronic enhancements. Perhaps that's a worthwhile complementary media pattern, eh? The refreshing thing is how dissatisfied everyone is intellectually with the staggering progress they have made. From a quality perspective, the place is alive with continuous improvement. George's U of N has got several research programmes running on the social-psychological aspects of the Internet itself searching for its limits instead of its boundless opportunities!

To try and get a better understanding I have been joining a lot of Quality Conferences and Discussion/ListServes/Forums. It seems crystal clear that the technology has to improve its speed and that we will have to wait for greater visual and/or aural connectivities, before they really take off. Currently, reading all the contributions at a serious conference is unrealistic for any but those most deeply involved. The best that can be created is a good ongoing argument/debate where responding to the last point made is a worthy participation for most. George I know agrees for open ended discussions but he has already seen at IMC in the B School at U of N what can be accomplished by a small Set of managers and faculty with a precise and deadlined focus to work towards. There archive and f2f and virtual conferencing can all be deployed effectively.

Hopeful now that by the end of the year I shall be smart enough to make something sensible work back at Relationship Consultancy Inc.

As ever Margaret.

This Looks Like Paradise for Faculty Members

Fredrick. Margaret tells me it's my turn to write. She's ankle deep in the ISO 9000 Division's work now at the IQMA. Seems clients are queuing up to get structured and audited and accredited – not for their customers but for their own sanity. That's a refreshingly new angle on ISO 9000 (Peters,1996).

Here at the U of N the Dean turned out to be a lady. Most energetic, good scholar too in logistics information systems. She's currently doing the ISO 9000 thing for the B School (Ainslie, 1997) and using the Charter approach – for the students, the Faculty, the Graduates and whoever else the B School might serve. It's brilliantly simple made possible by the past three year's work putting the entire activity and all its resources on to the Internet site. And the whole is linked to the global research library for managers known as ANBAR Electronic Intelligence.

She was going over the six-monthly literature updating of the Marketing and Logistics core programmes in my first week and asked me to join in. The amazing thing is that by using ANBAR Electronic Intelligence the task can be done in half a day at most. She described the whole process as follows and it must be the future.

First and foremost, all programme structures are located on the Internet. Then each and every module of study is allocated keywords in the literature to describe that module's focus. She was at the time looking at 'database marketing' and that showed 104 abstracts in recent literature, which can of course be sorted by a host of useful classificatory criteria ANBAR has ascribed to each one.

Anyway, the model in use is one that could never be envisioned without such on-line links. At IMC when a student searches the programme structure and views the keywords associated with each module, a hit on the link gives initial access to the most recent Faculty Selection, and then beyond that to the full archive of 104. And those abstracts cover the top 400 + journals in the world and the access is never more than one month lag behind publication.

AIR MAIL
P A R ✹ A V I O N

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

The catch is that in most cases, 320 out of 400 journals, only the abstract and not the full text article as well, is available on line. But the number is rising all the time (Morris, 1995). The B School, IMC, has an inclusive access subscription in its fees for all the abstracts and a modest 25 full text allowance as well, but beyond that smart/credit card payment on access is required. If they are not yet available on-line, then 2 hour fax back is offered or ye olde postal service, despatched within 24 hours both from the British Library.

The Dean here confesses she never now goes to any focused workshop/seminar/lecture/tutorial without a quick search on several relevant keywords just to note where the most recent articles are and what they have to say in abstract form. For a consultancy visit she will normally search under the 'practice implications' high scoring articles within the keywords. She reckons that she retrieves full text for one in five abstracts, making an average of 200 or so each year, which currently costs her just short of $US 3500. She has and uses a U of N smartcard for the first $US 2500 but after that it is normally to her own account.

The great majority of that full text cost goes to pay royalties to the primary publisher and some of them are pushing it upwards. They are scared stiff that the sales of single articles will decimate their big subscription income and surely they are right. But the consensus here, albeit sympathetic to their plight, is that it is madness to push up royalties. Authors will shortly demand a share of them and the true benefit of electronic publishing which can and must be high volume/low price dissemination will be squandered. The unanimous view is that authors should insist that the royalties are kept to an absolute minimum and that through low full text retrieval fees the maximum number of individuals can have access. Provided the publisher can believe in the future of the Information Society, the investment payback will be there beyond doubt if not the fast buck.

I asked the Dean how they dealt with text books for students at U of N, and it appears they have three approaches. Firstly, they did away with them and made the course materials give the structure fleshed out with the latest articles, which is fine for graduate programmes. Secondly, they retained them, noticeably on undergraduate programmes, and simply provided a direct link to the nearest on-line bookstore to ship/deliver to them with smartcard debiting. Thirdly, and this is the growing sector, the U of N is serialising some of the best textbooks, Chapter by Chapter, with smart card payment by each Chapter downloaded. With portable document formatting (pdf) technology and colour printers it works well if still somewhat slowly. It certainly beats ye olde post office in outlying areas or corners of the world.

This whole sequence is one big eye-opener for me and shows what the future can offer for us at Trad U too. Best of all is the talk here about getting back to small Sets of students/managers working f2f as often as possible and as CyberSets too with Web Forums. Just like the good old days; tutors will be able to work with students as individuals as well as moderating effective peer learning and support Sets.

Best wishes George

Doctorates are Getting More Straightforward to Create

Fredrick. Margaret was fascinated to see what I wrote to you on my last card about direct keyword accessing and the imaginative search criteria. She has been promising herself to do a practitioner doctorate or at least a short state-of-the-art book for as long as I can remember. She's been off and registered here at the U of N to do one on the strength of two points really. First, tracking down the literature is now transformed from a chore to straightforward hard work. Second, the U of N offers the opportunity to make use of the wide range of her consultancy assignments and outcomes therefrom as the data together with a linking explication as they call it towards their Doctor of Business Administration (DBA). She is expected by the U of N to create a series of papers for ongoing publication during her studies and, as appropriate, a book on completion. Two birds with one stone eh.

She's already got IQMA and some of its associated journals to convene a virtual conference on her theme which is, of course, on the application of ISO 9000 to electronic publishing and management education.

Fredrick, this is Margaret. I have taken over the pen. Cannot have George telling you all the good news on the DBA and book front. Can you imagine how delighted I was when I discovered that ANBAR Electronic Intelligence classifies all its abstracted papers by document type as well as content type. So I got cracking with 16 out of 800 recent papers being literature reviews of my area immediately to hand and with a wealth of references from earlier years that can be traced back via the British Library as well, albeit more slowly. With this type of resourcing, I can overcome my darkest fear at doctoral level that somewhere out there is an important article I have missed.

My virtual conference has already picked up contributions from New Zealand on how the US has used ISO 9002 in higher education at large, and put me in touch with the Washington based International QA in Education Group.

AIR MAIL
P A R ✦ A V I O N

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

George always said I would never finish my doctorate because at the end of the day I was always essentially practical and did not tolerate knowledge for its own sake. Well, I think this practitioner DBA will be the making of me. It can be wholly focused on what I want and need to do as a consultant and meet the U of N's requirements. Food for thought here for Trad U.

Best wishes from us both, Margaret and George.
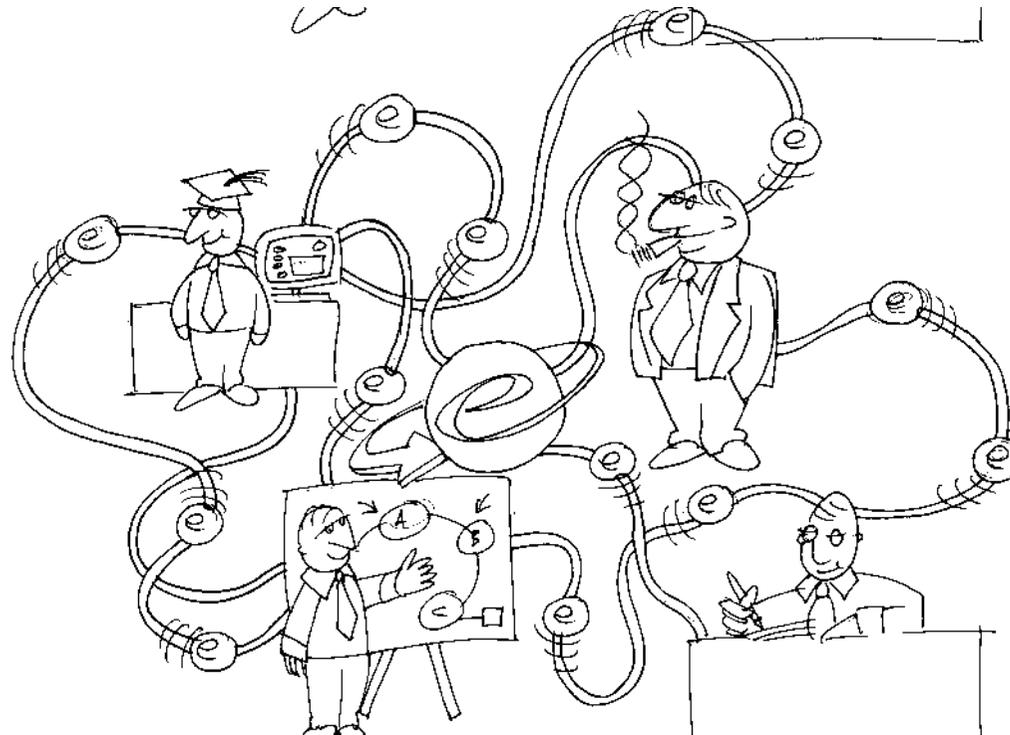
Tradition ablaze by Julian Wills (1988) from *Creating Wealth Through Management Development*

A Nice Consultancy Assignment at Last …

Fredrick. My patience is now rewarded. And it was the doctoral registration that set the folk here at IQMA thinking I was the right person to tackle it. So I am proud of myself. Not drifting away to become a student (again).

We had one of the major academic and professional management publishers at the IQMA last week. They produce, incidentally, a dozen top rated Quality Management journals. It was a f2f brainstorming workshop for starters on how to benchmark and improve the quality of their authors' contributions and their editors' contribution to the process. After a couple of robust hours debate, at which I was impressed with my knowledge of the recent writings on the subject (guess how!) I was volunteered to tackle the immediate benchmarking task. We resolved to let authors and editors generate the quality dimensions themselves by paired comparisons with competitive titles. It turned out I was the only one in the room who was willing to confess I did not know how to describe a high quality academic or professional article/paper.

My reticence was recently learnt from seeing how ANBAR declines to accumulate its star-ings for major dimensions into a composite score. It argues that each individual will at different times want to place different values on the dimensions. Fitness for purpose, of course, but a whole host of purposes for a single article are readily apparent. Are we browsing to stay up to date, preparing a top level lecture or are we, as I so frequently am, about to visit a client with the need to have a professional consultancy assignment done expeditiously?

I also have a stroke of luck. The publisher has long since collected an excellent database of all its authors across the world now amounting to 15 000 + classified by keywords from the articles they have penned, when published and, of course, where they are employed. (Saw you in there with four entries Fredrick). I resolved to use them as my sample frame of authors world-wide to elicit what are the relevant dimensions of a high quality article and beyond that a high quality journal – and as my own unasked for afterthought, a high quality database.

All good wishes, Margaret

AIR MAIL
P A R ✦ A V I O N

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

Getting Ahead of the Moment of Publication & Myself ...

Fredrick. More than half way through this sabbatical; seems impossible. How time has flown. We've only used the on-line recipes at the suite half a dozen times. Wonder what that tells us? And we scarcely watch the satellite movies. Prefer to walk frankly, marvellous air quality and parks here and its only a 35 minutes MTR ride to the countryside. Seems a million miles away from the Information Society out there. And the books are still getting very well thumbed.

Anyway, my work on what constitutes a high quality article journal/database really is progressing well. Responses are flowing in at the speed of light from emails. Now I am getting ahead of myself as well and I have George's enthusiastic support.

All authors begin their articles with some form of rough draft and then maybe a pre-print stage for serious professional comment amongst a small circle or personal network. Once those comments are incorporated the paper goes off for review to a journal. It can and often does take well over a year from submission to publication, and the rejection rate can be as high as 60%. That seems an incredibly wasteful process and certainly, I am informed by George, discourages many from even bothering with it. He says much potential scholarship never gets off the ground because of the inefficiencies of the publishing process, not to mention its controlling/sometimes incestuous editor/author charmed circles.

My idea is to get the publisher to use its much wider canvas of all previous authors on the same keywords, known as their Literati Club, to seek their comments automatically. The draft/pre-print paper can be readily commented on and updated and even 'scored' on whatever the relevant dimensions are by a wide circle of relevant colleagues way beyond any personal network and ignorant of any hierarchies in place. Any pre-print when amended that beats a given score can then be automatically accepted. One added advantage of this, George suggests is that a citation index of articles in progress can be available and searchable as well as the listings of those that have been finalised. Plagiarism can be avoided by this approach too (Wills, 1997).

AIR MAIL
P A R ✶ A V I O N

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

The publisher is over the moon with the idea. It fits wholly into its latest technology of continuous publishing, would you believe, by going back upstream. Did you know that since January this year, every time an article is accepted for one of their journals it is automatically published on their Internet site, long before any paper version bound up into an issue will reach the library or your desk? But, wait for it, there's more to come.

If the librarian has indicated to the publisher the email numbers of the regular users of the journal subscription (as many as they like within reason on the same campus) then as each article is continuously published they will email the abstract of it to all those thus notified, saying if you want it, take password access to the pdf and download the full text. Saves all that walking to the library and indeed honours a lot of promised visits we never make. And it gets better. By providing the author's email address as an on-line link, and increasingly the references lists at the end of each paper, the message of the paper can be debated forthwith and its origination studied more deeply. Rocket science you'll have to agree.

The only muted complaints are from librarians who can be heard wondering what future they might have. George reckoned they had a while yet to survive because they would have relatively little knowledge of whose emails to give to the publisher. Furthermore, since it would sound their death knell, sabotage or gradualism would be the order of the day. Good point I suppose.

I reckon that they cannot beat this particular vision of the future so they had better join it. Not sure how though but hope to get some ideas as the consultancy project continues.

Must go. Best wishes, Margaret

Central Place Theory and Social Physics – Well Fancy That

Fredrick. Margaret is the first to admit that her enthusiasm for what she is now calling PEERNet (her high quality article procurement and continuous improvement process) has given her little time to hear out my concerns as a marketing academic about the Internet. However, last night she gave me airtime and agreed I must write to you at once. They are not going to solve the issue totally and effectively here as far as we can see for some while but I am convinced it will need to be my number one concern when I get back from this study leave.

The issue rejoices under the name of 'communities of interest' (Marshall, 1995) but I prefer to call them forums. But let me start from the beginning.

As we all know at Trad U the Internet is growing like Topsy and like crazy. Everyday more and more pages are added and more servers are connected.

To make sense of it, to get maximum personal benefit from it, takes for ever even with the search engines being built and the new crawler software which takes on your identity and scavenges the web for nourishing information even as you sleep and reports back next morning or sooner if you let it.

The overwhelming conclusion is that what most of us need and want is a one stop shopping mall (Wills & Wills, 1996), a single Internet site address where we can plan a regular visit and which has there access to all we are likely to need or want to know. Just as a good shopping mall can attract us and persuade and convince us it can cater for virtually all our requirements, so too can a well constructed Information Society community of interest or forum. As in retailing, however, the mix of services and merchandise at each mall has to be good/sufficient/even inspiring.

U of N's B School here, IMC as it is known, has now resolved to joint venture with Margaret's publisher to attempt to create sooner rather than later, such a central place for middle/senior managers that is a comprehensive graduate academic cum professional forum. Its offerings will range from:

Next ➡

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

AIR MAIL
P A R ✦ A V I O N

- Current awareness of global issues as they happen
- Ongoing virtual conferences on key issues
- Annual reviews and trends
- Academic and professional qualification award programmes on-line
- Focused/targeted action learning forums and workshops
- Links to accredited Coolsites elsewhere on the Internet (Binns,1996)
- Archival literature access by ANBAR Electronic Intelligence
- Any number of associated professional services via advertising

It will also deliberately have some light hearted goings on, a satirical column or two, professional gamesmanship, competitions and the like – indeed anything and everything to give the forum buzz and make it a convincing and worthy 1st Stop/one stop community of interest destination.

The whole Forum, with its sub-Forums of course, will be sponsored by the publishers' 140 existing journals, by the B School here at U of N, and by the leading abstracting services covering the full breadth of knowledge and information published, not just the single albeit dominant publisher.

Frankly both Margaret and I think we should get Trad U and Relationship Consultancy Inc. to join in as sponsors too, either by being most worthy Coolsites or as co-sponsors although we realise that last suggestion would be a big leap and we would have to do it all ourselves initially after we got back.

Truth to tell it sounds like a gigantic undertaking. Hard to envision but it makes neat and overwhelming sense to me as a benefits not products marketer all my life. Institutionalising and operationalising it will be tough Margaret reminds me!

The need and she believes the want, is for a forum as its name suggests where the casually interested multitude and the keenly interested few, can gather together to discuss, debate, listen within a structured framework that inter alia captures the best of the discussions as they proceed and records it in the literature. It would all be fun surely, but relatively unsatisfactory in the Information Society, if the great debates evaporated and were never distilled as Rapporteurs notes/proceedings/articles and the like. The lack of this is one of the main criticisms heard of the Internet until recently with frequently cited evidence of quoted references simply no longer being available as servers shed them on a timed delete routine. For electronic publishing it seems that several of the 17th and 18th century approaches to the capture of discourse need a thorough rehabilitation. The forums will be able to become global, professional and learned societies.

Anyway, Fredrick, we're both converts here. George

Faxback 1

FaxBack from Trad U:
You're Underestimating Us Back Here

George. I've thoroughly enjoyed all the e-postcards you've been sending. The fact you have no response thus far has not I trust been dispiriting. But e-PC 8 needed a quick response. You left just before a couple of highly relevant publications surfaced here at Trad U and the campus has been chattering about them extensively but without much sense of purpose.

1   The European Union's DG XIII/E reported on "Strategic Developments for the European Publishing Industry Towards the Year 2000" (1996). It was adamant that electronic publishing is the pace setter for quality on the way to the Information Society and that to be sceptical is potentially ruinous. But the democratisation of knowledge and information by electronic publishing offers great scope for broadening brand definition and in particular the building of communities of interest.

    Most of us here dismissed it over coffee as the normal hype to sell more technological kit but your e-postcard did create a stir or I had better say murmur. Got the feeling several felt they were one up on you at last! (You won't forgive me, but I have been passing snippets around to the good and the bad here to seek to trigger any response and to prepare the ground for your re-entry here.)

2   Now Harvard B School Press has published a new book, "Net Gain", authored by a couple of McKinsey managers called John Hagel III and Arthur Armstrong (1997). It's about nothing else but communities of interest/virtual communities.

    Neither the EU nor the McKinsey managers have given convincing illustrations but if what you say from Internetica and the EU and McKinsey here are anywhere near the future in store, it won't be long before we hear the details and feel the impact at Trad U. So all power to your elbow. It rings bells with me and my work behaviours and preferences.

You know how I hate spending more than an hour a day at my PC with emails or whatever. The only way I am ever going to come to terms with the Internet and be an effective participant in the Information Society is along the lines being mooted now. The whole pattern has got to become sensitive to me/intelligent enough to sense and sort my needs and wants. My use of the Internet for generalised and specific knowledge and information will have to be conveniently managed from a single site albeit it with myriad hyperlinks out and back.

If I can then log on two or three times each week for an hour at most, see what's what, pick up the drift and feel confident I am in the know, that's a real boon. It's worth paying a serious subscription for it. And when I need to do some heavy researching or archival browsing, I would hope the same gateway can be used to go off and explore just like I can in the library stack but that much more effectively and indeed speedily.

Currently much of the time I spend on the Internet is frustrating because of technological glitches and poor merchandising/presentational and retailing skills. But that will come right. Then the true premium will be paid by customers (that's me) for focused and convenient resourcing which is supplemented by scope for imaginative and serendipitous linking.

The task of managing such a service seems to be that of a 'meta-librarian' almost. And I would comment that may be the sensible direction for Margaret's perplexed librarians mentioned in e-PC 7. The best of them always did such things anyway for Faculty and to a lesser extent students, as they got to know us all as individuals and our profiled interest areas. They could never hope to serve everyone like that but the new technologies make it a real possibility.

A lot of them here seem to be fighting the whole thing rather than grabbing it like you have. But some are brave and willing to give it a go. So, as you can see, I think you are on to something. I shall try between now and your return to see who we can target to work with you. You may well have found the peg on which to hang it all. No hope of proceeding on all fronts at once. It simply scares us all, me included. If you can have and hold the big picture, let us mortals just do some painting by numbers.

Take care both of you. All the best.

Fredrick

European Union and Net Gain Quite Right

Fredrick. Your FaxBack much appreciated here. In the enthusiasm to move on and upwards here we don't always get the opportunity for much good conceptual and philosophical thinking. I ordered both documents from the On-line Bookshop, and got them in three days.

Margaret was particularly impressed by the notion that 'electronic publishing is the pacesetter for quality on the way to the Information Society'. I have heard her use it three times already. It's given her a direct platform for her routinisation actions on her quality management consultancy project. It had never quite dawned on us that publishing can be defined as the disciplinary/quality assurance process in an open i.e. not censored information industry. Those who own publishing houses are accordingly a force for setting standards and for driving them to continuous improvements.

The fact that with the Internet any and everybody can hang up data or information is not really a great help unless an accepted, non suffocating discipline is present or somehow engineered into the situation.

Once that disciplined framework is in place, the opportunity for evaluation right across the board of the quality of what is written and how it is disseminated is massive. ANBAR Electronic Intelligence is using its individual article star-ings system to assist the searching of the literature to also build rank order profiles of the major journals on a moving average basis. Once this is easily available to Deans, Promotions Committees and Research Funding Agencies all manner of competition will open up to gain the endorsement of what are more objectively perceived as the 'best' journals. None of us anticipates with the arrival of continuous publishing that these 'best' journals will want to stay locked in 100% to paper dissemination. Indeed the more progressive are already beginning to offer multimedia multiple access within the same subscription service.

Thanks again for the FaxBack, best wishes, *George*

AIR MAIL
P A R ✦ A V I O N

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

PEERNet Gets Closer to Home for Authors

Fredrick. I saw George's most recent card to you and wanted to bring you further up to date on how my PEERNet project is progressing. Its brought me very close to the abstractors in the academic and professional literature. I have something quite astonishing to report that builds on but I do not think contradicts what George had to say.

It is the abstractors' growing opinion that the quality of the abstract writing and the consistency of their quality ascription's will be the drivers on the demand side of knowledge markets into the next century. They believe their branding (as with Good Food and Hotel Guides and the like) will be more significant than the individual journal within which the article originally appeared. I would emphasise that I am talking demand not supply side market here. But if they are correct, the journal brand can be expected to disappear as a retail brand but to survive as the accrediting brand for the original author's work. Am I making myself clear on this?

So what am I benchmarking journals for per se? Why not either articles which must each stand on their own feet or the new Intelligence services on offer?

The best Intelligence service for readers will be that which offers the fastest, most intelligent access to the very best articles in the world.

This seems to be where ANBAR Electronic Intelligence has been headed for the past five years, and they appear to have got it right now for managers at large, management academics, computer specialists and civil engineers. And once that is totally networked at Trad U we'll be in business with a vengeance.

As ever, Margaret.

AIR MAIL
PAR ✦ AVION

Dr Fredrick Holder

Act. Dean of Business

TRAD University

TU1 1900

19