Editorial: Bottom Tech Trends
John Webb

As I sit here on Memorial Day weekend laboring over this editorial that one or two of you (assuming that my wife is not my only reader) will read shortly after Labor Day (note to readers outside the U.S.: Memorial Day and Labor Day are U.S. holidays, the former late in May and the latter in early September), I reflect upon recent polls that show that journalists and the press have slipped to all-time lows in the opinion of the U.S. public—lower even than government, lower than Congress. Maybe not yet lower than the legal profession, but pretty darn low.

It occurs to me that this editorial as well as those in *Nature, Science, NEJM,* and the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* is just journalism. They and all such editorials are well apart from the contents of the scholarly and professional journals in which they are published. Yes, even those in the journals named above.

I am not so arrogant as to nominate myself a peer of the editors of those more esteemed publications except that when we write editorials, we are practicing, however badly, journalism. I admit I need more practice than most.

In about a month, I shall attend LITA's Top Tech Trends program at the American Library Association's Annual Conference in Chicago. The anticipation has led me to attempt to uphold the low regard in which even we amateur print journalists are held. I could start a blog to make my views more reputable, but as editor of an ALA journal, I feel an obligation to remain loyal to the ALA leadership, if not to its readership.

Therefore, in this editorial I shall set forth what I think are the *bottom* tech trends as they apply to libraries today and in the near future. If I am successful in upholding the miserable standard supposedly being set by today's journalists, I anticipate one or more of several outcomes:

1. *ITAL* will collapse;
2. *ITAL* will survive, its reputation in shreds;
3. LITA's board will come to its senses and replace the editor; or
4. irate readers will overwhelm me (or the new editor) with high-quality manuscripts disproving my obviously harebrained, suspect, liberal—or conservative—biases.

Therefore, in the spirit of the Top Tech Trends (i.e., in no particular order), I offer my choices for our Bottom Tech Trends.

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I rarely have met a piece of information technology that doesn't immediately set my curiosity on fire, but I admit I just don't see a library need for a Wiki. (If you're taking aim, I'm the one hiding under his desk.) A Wiki is a wonderful collaborative tool. If I wanted to ask any of you to help write the next editorial, we could Wiki it out in no time flat. But we could do that if this were a plumbing journal or a church newsletter. If I'm working on a collaborative project within my library or university, I have access to a set of collaborative tools that are more feature-rich as well as secure. But I'm puzzled by what a Wiki can do for the library *qua* library. I write this even though I hope to publish an article on Wikis in the next issue of *ITAL*.

I don't see how radio frequency identification (RFID) technology can have a significant library impact in the foreseeable future. I'm not particularly concerned about the privacy problems. But if Wal-Mart had to retreat from forcing its top one hundred vendors to convert to RFID technology by January 1, 2004, because of the costs and complications of conversion, can libraries be far behind? Wal-Mart will make the conversion, but not as quickly as it had announced. Libraries that are able to include the costs in capital projects can convert, and I know that the downstream savings are demonstrable. But for our library, which just updated its security gates, a conversion to RFID was way too expensive even with a generous vendor pricing inducement. I know we aren't unique. Public libraries, whose users circulate materials in quantities that would overwhelm academic libraries, will, I opine, be earlier adopters than academics. But for now, to paraphrase Chief Gillespie (Rod Steiger) in the film *In the Heat of the Night,* we have the motive, which is (not enough) money and the body (of existing technology), which is (not yet) dead.

The integrated library system (ILS) is a concept whose time has come no more. Google has demonstrated beyond all doubt the inadequacies of the OPAC interface, as if we needed any proof. The development by ILS vendors of link resolvers, metasearch tools, and electronic resource management systems that can, more or less easily, interface with other ILS vendors' systems is a further sign. But the OPAC interface is especially vulnerable. Vendors and librarians are beginning to develop alternative discovery tools that can provide most users with better search output for most searches than the OPAC. The OPAC will still be needed for some kinds of searches and by many librarians, who, after all, led the vendors to develop it in its current forms. But it will be subsumed in (if possible) or bypassed by newer discovery tools. Think RedLightGreen, to give just one example.

This, my favorite bottom tech trend, deserves fuller treatment, maybe in a subsequent editorial by this poorly practicing amateur editor/journalist.