

## *Paper and Pixel*

The Web Takes Note of Books, Reference Books Discover the Web

Not long ago, it was common to speak of the “paperless office” and a digital future in which bits and bytes would wholly replace ink on pulp. That future hasn’t materialized. In fact, there is increasing reason to believe that electronic and paper information will flourish side by side in novel ways, thanks to recent news from two estimable institutions of the digital age and two venerable representatives of the printed page.

First, Amazon.com, the Internet retailer, introduced in October a service that allows users to search the full text of 120,000 books. When a visitor to the site searches for a word or phrase, the results will include books that have that word or phrase in the text—not just in the title. What’s more, the user can then look at a picture of the page where the word appears, and even browse ahead or back a few pages. This tool will naturally become

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invaluable to fact-checkers, professors hoping to hunt down plagiarists, and people hoping to settle bets. It will also be extremely useful to researchers—especially college students—who need information in a hurry or who are accustomed to doing all their research online. And if you want to find a particular word, name, or favorite quotation in a book you have already read or bought, you can get an instantaneous answer—especially useful for novels or other books without indexes.

Amazon's new feature is an enormous addition to the amount of information available online; the question is, will it help or hurt book sales? A reader patient enough to put up with the inconvenience can now use the Amazon site to read through or print a sizeable portion of a book for free. But after clicking through twenty percent of a book, the reader is told: "You've reached the page-view limit for this book... Feel free to return to the pages you've previously viewed. If you want to see more of this copyrighted material, you can purchase this book."

Despite the limit on page-views, publishers are worried about piracy and about the effects on sales. They are also uncertain about the legality of the new feature. Just as the Supreme Court has forced newspapers to obtain permission from freelancers before reproducing their works in digital databases, some publishers worry that they have given Amazon rights that aren't theirs to give. *Publishers Weekly* has suggested that it might take a lawsuit to settle the legality of Amazon's new tool. The Authors Guild, in a statement on its website, has raised the same issue: "We've reviewed the contracts of major trade publishers and concluded that these publishers do not have the right to participate in this program without their authors' permis-

sion. We wrote to these publishers after we learned about the program in July. Most argued with our interpretation of their contract (no surprise there), but some have said that they would remove a work from the program if the author insisted."

Although it is possible that Amazon will have to alter its search service to accommodate the authors and publishers, it's unlikely that the service will be shut down altogether. In fact, Google is reportedly thinking of integrating a similar function into its popular search engine. What's more, Google has plans to one-up Amazon—by incorporating information about library books, too. When search results bring up a library book, users will be able to click a link, enter a zip code, and find a library near them that has the book—so users of the most popular Internet search engine can easily find the locations of millions of books at about 12,000 libraries. According to *Information Today*, Google will start incorporating the library database "by mid- to late November."

While Amazon and Google have both found new ways to connect Internet users to the printed word, two producers of major printed reference works have recently shown greater awareness of the importance of the Internet. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, the 150-pound giant that makes all other lexicographical undertakings look like weaklings, has started incorporating quotations found online into the third edition, currently in production. Although only a tiny fraction of the *OED*'s 2.5 million quotations come from online sources, the move symbolizes the scholarly world's growing acceptance of the Internet.

Some of the words the *OED* has chosen to illustrate with online examples make

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sense: words like *blog*, *surf*, and *spammer*, which all have meanings connected to the Internet. But other choices don't make as much sense. When one person wrote online, in June 2001, of a "stone mortle and Pestle," he almost certainly just misspelled "mortar"—and didn't mean to revive a word that the *OED* had no examples of since 1570. When somebody used the word "misintention" online in the year 2000, they probably just mistyped, and didn't know it was a real word that had been unused for three centuries. Even though the *OED* isn't prescriptive—it is intended to serve as a record of how words *have been* used in history, and not how they *should be* used—it's still strange to see such obvious mistakes, shot off by careless scribblers, appearing alongside the *OED*'s 33,300 quotations from Shakespeare and 25,000 quotations from the Bible.

Finally, the latest edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, released in August, includes updates that bring the book into the digital age. The previous version, published a decade ago, predated the explosive growth of the Internet, and the new edi-

tion includes long sections concentrating on recent technological advances. Readers can now find explanations on such matters as how best to cite websites in bibliographies and refer to e-mail addresses in documents. The manual even gives advice on how to handle what some have come to call "camel words"—those words, so common nowadays, that start with a lowercase letter but have a capital in the middle, like eBay: "a name beginning with a lowercase letter should not begin a sentence; if it must, it should be capitalized." With that settled, editors and proofreaders can sleep again at night.

The manual suggests that writers make it clear when their information comes from a digital source, but "at least for the time being, there is no need to indicate 'paper' in a citation to a traditional bound book." Perhaps that will change, if electronic information someday comes to greatly surpass information on paper. For now, though, the Internet and the printed page will go on coexisting comfortably—and reinforcing one another.