

Web Watcher



By Glenn Fleishman

Phase change

In Dallas, New York, and San Francisco in June and July of this year, people gathered at a series of Adobe Internet Conferences, and, frankly, we learned a lot about them while they learned about the Internet.

This not-quite-representative slice of Internet professionals—mostly readers of this magazine—were wrestling with the same issues that affect the commercial creative community with every wave of new technology. Since we've seen the same phenomenon with typesetting, pagination, photography, and now print, the phases are pretty clear:

Early rejecters vs. early adopters. While some are out proclaiming the way and the truth of the latest technology, others—often the majority—are pre-announcing that the new stuff will never be as good as the old. The latter opinion is typically conveyed via a sentence like “This new digital thing will never be as high-resolution, as sharp, as well done as our old analog solution.” In terms of the Web, it’s “You’ll never be able to design something as effectively for the Internet as for print.”

General acceptance vs. overwhelming fear. Once the new technology reaches a level of sophistication that puts it on the playing field with older solutions, adoption becomes widespread—especially when the new technology offers price or time advantages over the old. Those professionals who still don’t know how to use the technology fear that their careers are over; members of the advance guard worry about losing their edge by teaching others what they know.

The print/graphic-design community is in this stage now; for the most part budgets for print aren’t growing, but Web-site spending is skyrocketing. Without effective cross-selling inside a design company—selling Web clients print services and vice versa, for example—some firms are seeing clients take their traditional

print work to a house that can handle the whole spectrum of design.

Total hegemony vs. boutique art. The new technology entirely replaces, or becomes a seamless part of, the existing industry. This happened to typesetting, which has been entirely subsumed into electronic production and imagesetting. The few people who identify themselves as typesetters these days usually do only extremely refined work or set type by hand in metal.

A friend of mine was a music copyist—a person who would take rough scores from a composer and create, by hand, the various parts for the groups or orchestras the piece was intended for. In the late 1980s, though, software began appearing that allowed composers to do this work themselves on a computer and make

changes at will or at the last minute. The profession of music copyist disappeared almost overnight.

The fear of being made obsolete is growing among the non-digerati, the way it did when electronic publishing first became serious. Although there are plenty of activities that continue to exist alongside their digital counterparts (darkroom photography and the U.S. mail are just two examples), the lesson of the music copyist can’t be ignored out of hand. ▀

Contributing Editor Glenn Fleishman, a principal at Point of Presence Company, can be reached at glenn@popco.com. His column “Web Watcher” appears in each issue of Adobe Magazine, and he also contributes to adobe.mag (www.adobemag.com).

Version acceleration. Back in the old days, I remember waiting for two years to get a version increment on popular software, like Microsoft Word or Adobe PageMaker. Internet applications have all that time to catch up on, though, so Netscape has gone from version 1 of its Navigator browser software, which was issued in November 1994, to version 3, issued in August 1996. Version 4 is due by year’s end, with 5 not far behind. Microsoft, starting a little later, has released versions 1, 2, and 3 of Internet Explorer between August 1995 and August 1996, with similarly accelerated plans for future versions.

Think globally, click locally? Despite the fervor with which proponents of the Internet describe its ability to disseminate information, sell products, and gather demographics internationally, new divisions at companies with a stake in the Net are pushing for regionalized services. America Online has its Digital Cities; excite bought CityNet; Microsoft has Cityscape; and Yahoo just launched, at this writing, Yahoo San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Canada.

What’s the buzz? As budgets for advertising on the Net grow, delivering ads to regional markets will become ever more important, though that pie is awfully small right now. The real motivation may be to drive up visits by creating sites that are more relevant to a person’s location, and thus promote loyalty for other services the company might offer.

Hits and counters. After last issue’s column on hits, visitors, and visits, several readers wrote asking how counters count, since a single page can generate multiple hits. You’ve seen counters on many pages; they usually look like little odometers that say, “You’re the 000000th person to visit this page!” Counters are a special kind of item—a combination of an image and a program.

In that column, I noted that when you go to a home page, each image and the page itself count as separate hits—they’re separate retrievals from the Web server that contains the site. The counter itself is treated like an image (the IMG SRC tag is used), but it’s actually an application that runs on the server.

When a user’s browser requests the counter, the remote server runs the program. The latter simply increments the counter by one and then feeds out an image of the new count back to the browser (usually by assembling separate GIFs of the digits and feeding them back as a single, seamless image of a counter).

The counter is separate from the Web log. The log is generally a text file that records all transfers of any kind; the counter is more of a hack that adds to itself only when a browser requests that it be displayed.