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The year 2000: dreams and nightmares

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Our Dreams:

1. As a result of the involvement of the telephone, hardware, software, cable, and entertainment industries, the technical issues of bandwidth, connectivity, format, standards, and display are solved. Everyone has convenient, fast, well-guided connections to the full range of information providers, for nominal costs, and can comfortably view full online multimedia presentations of the highest quality.
2. Some logical economic structure replaces copyright, ensuring that everyone who adds value is properly and fairly compensated for the value they add, while also enabling the unconstrained use of information. This new system operates consistently world-wide.
3. Information professionals become the "DJs" and "VJs" of the new world, and are both highly revered and highly paid. That is, our collective profession finally resolves its identity and inferiority crises, and gets on with the considerable and exciting work at hand.

Our Nightmares:

1. More standards and regulatory committees are formed, and their activities are monitored and controlled by government and academe.
2. No functional replacement is found for the quality control sometimes provided by traditional publishers. As a consequence, users have tremendous access to more and more garbage.
3. Nobody cares. We create a super-powerful, flexible information infrastructure, and nobody uses it. Instead, 500 new shopping Networks emerge, and every half-baked special interest group of two or more floods the networks.

Carol Tenopir

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My dreams at night are very vivid--full of detail, dialogue, and complex plots. Often when I wake up, the dreams linger with me all day as if they were real. My dreams and nightmares for the information world of 2000 are the same in mind--detailed and real. 2000 is too soon for most of them, but by then we may be well on our way to some of these, for better or for worse.

Dreams

1. I am sitting next to a well-dressed businessman on an airplane. He asks what I do for a living and I say "librarian." My seatmate doesn't say "Oh, how nice. I liked to read books when I was a kid" before burying himself in his airline magazine. Instead, he says "Great! This is my lucky day. I just heard about this new online database and wonder what you think about it. I'm going to ask one of my company's librarians if we should get it and how to make the best use of it." (I suppose this one could be a nightmare as well. I did want to read that new interactive mystery on the flight, but instead I talk information the whole way.)
2. I walk in the door, sit in my easy chair, and ask my house information system to tell me next week's weather predictions for a visit

to London. It remembers I want temperatures in Fahrenheit, and, since it made my airline reservations, my scheduled travel days. Then I ask my house for any incoming research articles that match my interest profile. I listen to abstracts and decide to order two or three on paper later--full-text delivery, of course, including all graphics. Some days I opt for interactive versions; today I prefer paper. Usually I like to hear news summaries next, but I'm too tired tonight, so I start with sports. Better make that only college volleyball, thank you, and show me the highlights of Western regional games. Later tonight I might replay the University of Hawaii-UCLA game, virtually inserting myself as middle blocker. Yes, I have to pay for all this, but the monthly information utility bill is less than the electriciv bill and just as vital.

3. My 15 year-old son comes home ffrom school and proudly announces he got an "A" on his information retrieval project. His group helped a database producer in Moscow improve the quality of their database to a .00001 error rate by designing a new error detection and correction algorithm. "It's really great, Mom. Five publis,ers contacted us electronically asking for our ideas. They all want their databases as high quality as possible." We also just got notified that he is the running for an "Information Achiever" scholarship to Standford. (I told you my dreams are vivid!)

And Now to the Nightmares...

1. I get to my office, log on to the first of my 52 different e-mail systems, to find over 1,000 new, unfiltered messages awaiting me. This, like most days, is going to be a day with six to seven hours spent going through e-mail. Some of my colleagues have just given up. There is a movement on campus to un-plug computers. Vandalism of telecommunications lines is running rampant. "We're confused as hell and we aren't going to read it anymore!" is the cry heard round the e-mail community.

2. I no longer teach at a school of library and information studies, because all of the professions my students used to enter have been phased out. No more librarians, indexers, database quality control specialists, scholarly publishers, database producers, etc. Instead, everyone sends all their writings back and forth, unrefereed, unedited, and without added value over the large telecommunications systems. There is still an infomation industry, but it is tightly restricted, expensive, and run by hardware, software, and telephone companies. Most development efforts these days go into pornographic virtual reality video games.

3. My son comes home from his public school with a dog-eared 20-year-old textbook and a homework assignment to spend five minutes reading. The school librarian was fired in 1994 for lack of funds and the "library" has been run by colunteers ever since. They don't have any funds for new purchases, but are vigilant at removing anything that may offend anyone. The school computer lab is trying to make do with some old 1995 Macs without modems and the printers are long since broken. The fancy private school across town has fully-equipped information classrooms with individualized desktop access to a wide range of online multimedia information products. Their tuition is over \$25,000 a year, though, and admissions are highly selective. We can't even affor the initiation fee into our local "public library.

That's it--dreams and nightmares. At times I fear we could go either way.

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