

A gamble or a sure thing?

There's a little story unfolding in the US, and it's going to have lots of bloggers watching very carefully from the sidelines - or at least they hope they'll only be on the sidelines. There's a good summary of the situation at Groklaw (<http://www.groklaw.net/article.php?story=20100922113406655>) but in essence it involves an aggressive US law firm (yes, Virginia, there is such a beast) that's been pursuing bloggers who've lifted copy from a Las Vegas newspaper and republished it. The lawyers' strategy appears to take a shotgun approach (they currently have 132 cases listed) by serving papers on bloggers located in other states and relying on their preference to settle out of court. It seems though that through an administrative error, one of the bloggers has been able to call their bluff and a Federal judge is starting to pay some serious attention to the issue, including a reference to an article that begins by saying that, "existing copyright law is not well-suited to handle the transmission of copyrighted works over the Internet." Now, alert readers will have seen that I have mixed feelings about copyright on Internet content, but some certainty as a result of judicial rulings will be a good thing, won't it?

Coming soon to a store near you

... or at least I hope so. Siftables (<http://sifteo.com/>) appeared at a Ted talk last year, and I'm delighted to see that a company is developing the product. They're tiny computers that look like little tiles that relate to each other and can be used in spelling or arithmetic or even in mixing colours. My grandchildren are going to love them, but of course I'll have to do some testing first, to make sure that they're safe for the tots.

It's the way you reply

Never underestimate the power of words ... and the capability of humans to put their own interpretation to them. Consider two responses:

"Message rejected because of over-capacity"
and

"Thanks for getting in touch with us. There's a system problem at the moment but we'll get back to you as soon as we can"

Which would you prefer to receive?

There's a not-so-subtle change going on in the online world of user relations. It's much easier now to send a message to someone (a restaurant where you had a good meal, the website of a musical group whose concert you've just attended, or perhaps a politician) and we're doing this in greater numbers than ever. Just imagine that you were trying to contact the restaurant to tell them how great their food is, and you're told that your message has been rejected. Some of the warm feeling dissolves.

Then consider a message to the politician telling him that you've admired his bearing in tough times. A polite auto-reply comes back saying that they can't answer each message personally, but thanking you for writing. And if that's followed up a couple of weeks later with a personal message responding exactly to what you wrote, well that's polite. It's also smart.

Laws old and new

I hadn't taken the time to see the new improved UK Legislation site (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>) until quite recently. It's

very impressive. Anyone with an interest in history will be pleased to see the detail of Acts of the various parliaments going way, way back.

Who does own your brand?

I was at a presentation in October where the main topic was social media marketing, and various experts told us all about who owned our brand (hint: they say it's people who get a kick out of following other people online) and they made a pretty good case for being careful what we did in the social media world - which wasn't surprising, because the people sponsoring the function either provided consulting or monitoring services for social media. The ruckus about the new logo for Gap (see the whole story at <http://mashable.com/2010/10/11/gap-logo/>) hadn't quite broken at that time, otherwise I'm sure the boosterism would have reached new heights.

I was discussing this with a couple of workmates who aren't into Twitter and Facebook, but they couldn't see what the fuss was about. And this caused me to stop for a bit and process what had gone on. I don't know how many people had protested about how Gap management had handled the whole affair - I'd guess it was somewhere between 100 and 100,000 - but I suppose it's all about taking notice of squeaky wheels rather than the ones that are running smoothly. Most of us are more inclined to tell our friends about bad experiences than good ones, and I think that's what happened here. The bosses at Gap knew that for every complainant there were many customers who liked the new logo or even didn't give a hoot. But they backtracked.

But is that where we are now? So worried about adverse comment that we'll reverse good business decisions. I think the answer is yes - until the inevitable backlash.

Phones ain't just phones

I wrote a while ago about a blind person's experience with the iPad. Then along came another post at <http://behindthecurtain.us/2010/06/12/my-first-week-with-the-iphone/> showing what's possible with the humble iPhone. I was particularly taken with the use of the camera to detect colours, and thereby allow some limited form of vision - even down to the humble pumpkin.

e-books - the facts at last

I've written a few posts about e-books and how I felt they weren't for me. Well, courtesy of a generous family I'm now the owner of a Kobo. They gave me a choice of which reader I wanted, and I reckoned that this was the one that best met my needs at this time. Ask me in a few months and the answer may be a different one. You can expect a proper report after I give it a good workout over the holiday period. But here are a couple of early observations: there are lots of e-books that you can only buy from inside the US, and a big supplier in the UK shows many of its e-book titles "out of stock". What?

More on my blog

<http://www.alia.org.au/webbsblog>



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