

tech watch

RACING TO CONVERT BOOKS TO BYTES

■ Although skepticism remains as to whether readers will embrace digital books, interest in the electronic format is growing, with young people leading the trend. The University of Texas at Austin plans to spend \$1 million to increase its current collection of 6,000 electronic books. Students are checking out the university's digital books at astonishing rates, says librarian Dennis Dillon. "Usually a book has a one-third



chance of being checked out," Dillon says. "So to have some title checked out twenty-five times in two months—that's shocking." Companies such as Microsoft are preparing for a wave of digital reading, predicting that electronic books will overtake print books within ten years. Meanwhile, traditional publishers such as Random House are skeptical about the new format but are still moving to digitize all of their titles. Startups such as netLibrary, which sells electronic books to libraries, are working to draw readers by offering a large selection of titles. However, in order to get publishers to sell titles, these companies need to prove that sufficient demand exists for the digital format. (*New York Times*)

HARVARD SEEKS RIGHTS TO OWN NAME IN CYBER SUIT

Harvard University is suing under the just-signed cyber-piracy law to gain Internet rights, now held by Michael Rhys and his company Web-Pro, to Web site addresses that relate to the university. Rhys had bought sixty-five domain names involving Harvard and Radcliffe and offered to sell them back to Harvard for about \$325,000 before trying to sell them in an online auction. Harvard says it is suing to defend its trademark and is using the new cybersquatting bill to back up its claim. The bill allows trademark holders to seek damages from anyone who registers a name that infringes on a trademark and then tries to sell it back to the trademark holder. Harvard says it does not want money from Rhys but simply wants him to stop. The new cybersquatting bill, signed on November 29, 1999, was heavily backed by businesses and celebrities, which have often had to pay large sums to gain the rights to Web site addresses that bear their names. (*Boston Globe*)

UNIVERSITIES ENFORCE COPYRIGHT LAW ON AUDIO FILES

University administrators are struggling to decide how to respond to the rampant distribution of illegal MP3 files on campuses, as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) continues its campaign to end copyright infringement. Recently Carnegie Mellon, after receiving a complaint from the RIAA, disciplined 71 students for distributing MP3 files on the campus network. In an unannounced investigation, Carnegie Mellon looked in the public folders of 250 student computers linked to the campus network, and discovered a number of illegal MP3 files. Students caught making the files available to the rest of the school's network had the Internet connections in their rooms revoked for the rest of the semester. Carnegie Mellon representatives said that the university does not seek out illegal activity on its network and that the search was triggered by a number of complaints. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act requires online service providers such as universities to respond to complaints from copyright holders. The act restricts the liability of providers that turn off access to illegal content and alert the user who posted the material. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*)



COLLEGES ATTACK MARKET IN NOTES

An increasing number of companies are paying students to make class notes available on the Web, causing controversy at universities and colleges. The University of California campuses at Berkeley and Los Angeles have informed some of these companies that students selling class notes are breaking school policies as well as copyright laws. Many professors and school administrators believe that copyright laws apply to class notes, just as they apply to lectures and handouts. In addition, schools argue that note services encourage students to skip classes. In response, note-taking companies say their services aim to help students make up a missed day of class, not to serve as a substitute for attending class. Study 24-7 cofounder Craig Green says publishing a student's class notes does not violate copyright laws because the notes are a student's "interpretation" of the professor's lecture. Green's view on copyright laws is upheld by a 1996 ruling in a University of Florida lawsuit, in which the court held that a professor or university owns lectures and handouts but that students own their class notes. (*San Jose Mercury News Online*)

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