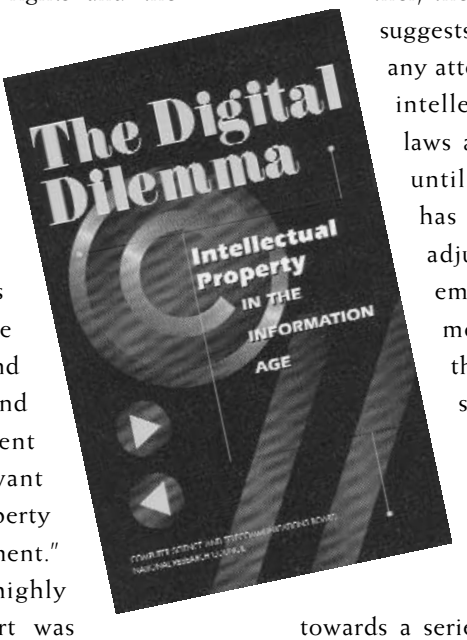
The Digital Dilemma: Intellectual Property in the Information Age

Committee on Intellectual Property Rights in the Emerging Information Infrastructure
National Research Council, 2000,
$42.95, 364 pages
ISBN 0-309-06499-6

In the late 1990s the Computer Science and Telecommunications Board (CSTB) of the National Research Council assembled a study committee on intellectual property rights and the emerging information infrastructure. According to the committee's published report, *The Digital Dilemma: Intellectual Property in the Information Age*, it was charged to "assess the state of the art and trends in network and document or content technologies relevant to intellectual property rights and management." This timely and highly recommended report was produced by a group of experts from industry, academe, and the library and information science community with expertise in networking, computer security, digital libraries, economics, public policy, public and academic libraries, intellectual property law, publishing, and the entertainment, software, and telecommunications industries.



The overarching and strong message throughout this monograph is that novel business models and new technologies to protect intellectual property, and thus academe in its use of copyrighted resources, will probably be more effective mechanisms than any contemplated attempts at legislation to protect electronic information. In other words, such business models and technologies should be considered complementary to the copyright code for producers and distributors of digital information because of their positive effect on access to and public use of digital intellectual property. Further, the study committee suggests legislators delay any attempts to overhaul intellectual property laws and public policy until the market has made sufficient adjustments to the emerging business models and until this broad area of study has been sufficiently informed through a record of research.

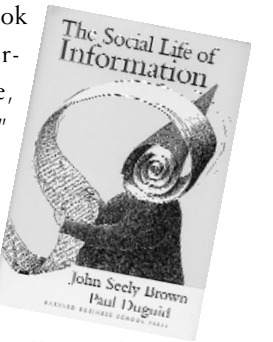
This report winds its way towards a series of broad guiding principles that are designed to assist lawmakers in formulating or revising public policy on this topic. It offers advice about the need for a broad framework through which to address all aspects of public and private interests related to digital information distribution and use. Likewise, it states that technology must not be viewed as the driving force for new public policy; instead, the focus should be on the underlying issues that drive market behavior.

This thoughtful and balanced report concludes with a section that offers "guidance on and principles for the formulation of law and public policy." It is recommended reading in its entirety for industry, academe, and the library and information services community.

Reviewed by James F. Williams II (james.williams@colorado.edu), dean of libraries at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

The Social Life of Information

John Seeley Brown and Paul Duguid
Harvard Business School Press, 2000,
$25.95, 336 pages
ISBN 0-87584-762-5



The cogently argued theme of this book is "information, information everywhere, but not a bit to think." Information may be the raw material of knowledge, but it does not become knowledge automatically without cognitive effort and social learning, which are intensely human activities. The forges of knowledge are interpersonal conversations, the frisson inherent in social structures, and cultural presuppositions working in a human cognitive context. In short, these are elements of an information and intellectual ecology that transcend bandwidth and the movement of information.

The authors decry the hype surrounding the Internet and the Web. They show the simplistic notions of "demassification, decentralization, denationalization, despatialization, disintermediation, and

disaggregation," which they dub the "six Ds," are unlikely to lead directly and linearly to radical changes in society. If in fact the causal relationships among the quantity and immediacy of information and social organizations were simple and straightforward, then we would face the ultimate Durkheimian nightmare of anomie everywhere and deep social connections nowhere.

Their argument is compelling as they place modifiers on each of the six Ds. Learning involves more than an isolated individual and a screen full of information. The clustering of industries, such as the .coms in Silicon Valley and the specialty fabric mills of northern Italy, do not support a wholesale death of distance; home offices and hot-desks, each with its disconnection from colleagues and customers, seem not to work as well as one predicted they might.

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Following Jerome Bruner and Gilbert Ryle, respectively, they stress the differences between "learning about" and "learning to be," " knowing that" and "knowing how." Disembodied information may serve the first term in each pair, but social learning must be implicated in the second.

Richard Bach, aviator and author, was asked by a fan of his writings what he might do to support the author. Bach responded that the fan could buy a few extra copies of his books and give them to friends who might enjoy them but who might not buy them. *The Social Life of Information* is the book I am buying and giving this month.

Reviewed by Christopher S. Peebles (peebles@indiana.edu), associate vice president and dean for information technology and professor of anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington.