

Excerpt from the Newsletter of the State, Court, and County Law Libraries Special Interest Section of the American Association of Law Libraries, v. 26, #2, Spring 2000:

Charley's Corner:
Technology Gripes

by Charles R. Dyer, Director of Libraries, San Diego County Public Law Library
Nothing in this column represents the view of my Library or its Board of Trustees. These are just my personal opinions.

Lisa's theme for this issue is "technology." Technology is a great theme for a curmudgeon's column. Some short thoughts.

✓Have any of you tried to install a DSL line at home or use your cable company as your ISP? Yes, the horror stories are legion. My wife, who works at home, found out it took several days, and not just waiting, but actually doing things to her computer with help-desk people on her speaker phone, to get her DSL line up and running. Mostly, the help-desk people don't know what they are doing.

My wife had dutifully ordered an Ethernet card for her rather new Gateway computer. The guy from Gateway would not listen when my wife explained that this was the first Ethernet card to go into the computer. His instructions (and those that came with the card) presumed that the card was to be used as a replacement card. She spent an hour convincing him it wasn't.

The guy from the ISP's sub-contractor who actually came out to the house to set up the modem worked for several ISP's and did not have a clue how to go about getting the ISP actually tied into our new DSL. The help desk guy at the ISP had evidently been hired the previous afternoon, as my wife knew more than he did. Finally, she brought in the local computer guru she has used for several years, who still gives her the reduced rate of \$50 an hour, so he could talk the ISP "help desk" guy through it.

At breakfast the following weekend at our favorite local eatery, the Big Kitchen (often visited by foreigners who find out about it on the Web), we traded stories with friends who had similar experiences with both the local phone company's DSL service and the local cable company's service.

✓I also remember when I wanted to post a job notice on the California Library Association hotline, but I couldn't because my Netscape had not been upgraded from Navigator to Communicator. And we were actually one of the first local law libraries to complete the upgrade. Now, we at SDCPLL are a very small special district government, which means that I am actually the "top" governmental official, and I get the most modern things as soon as reasonably possible. I wonder how the library that is part of a much larger and slower government could possibly post its positions.

✓We get our phone service through the County government, which operates as its own

phone company. Whenever a new area code is created, its computers must be adjusted to allow someone to call the new area code. I am utterly convinced that, out of the 17,000 employees working for San Diego County, I am the only one who bothers to report the need to access the new codes. I guess the others use pay phones or their personal cell phones. I think I am averaging a new area code about once every two months.

✓And speaking of things like area code abuse, how are you liking the nine-digit Zip codes? When the Postal Service put that project in motion to save itself money with all that automating, it neglected to inform us that those last four digits actually represent the route number at the local postal zone. Guess what. The Postal Service does annual route examinations and adjusts the routes. So your four-digit extension will change every so often. And your stationery and business cards become outdated immediately. No warning, no appeal.

When the Postal Service changed SDCPLL's Main Library Zip to 92101-3904, I started getting letters with the new code. Since my phone number is (619) 531-3904, I thought the senders were confusing my phone number and address. I was rather embarrassed when I mentioned this to one of my trustees, who said he made the change because *he* had gotten a notice from the Postal Service.

✓Have you heard the latest oxymoron? "Long range technology plan."

Here's my plan: Figure that, as a governmental entity, wherein we always have to put a little CYA in our planning, never jump on the newest technology because there will be bugs. So as a director, buy your spouse the most current thing for home use so that you can converse with the information systems staff even when your office equipment is last-year's thing. (Digital video is this year's thing, by the way.) Nevertheless, plan on continual upgrades of your computers, peripherals, and LANs. I used to think we needed a three-year replacement cycle. Now I believe a two-year replacement cycle is closer to the truth. A two-year cycle also requires more staff, and more complaint forms. Lastly, get yourself some of those personalized thank-you notes and send something to anyone on your staff who actually does something neat with new technology.

✓To finish on a high note, I thought I'd tell a good technology story, sort of. My wife and I are planning a trip to New York City, and she remembered an open-mike piano bar in the Village we had visited long ago. So she went to the Web to see if she could find it. Well, she hunted and hunted and finally came up with it: "The Oaks." I asked how she did it, and she said it is all a matter of coming up with the right terms. The one that worked for her was "gay friendly," which makes sense to anyone who frequents piano bars.

You know, jargon terms abound in every endeavor. (Would you have been able to read this column ten years ago?) They're gonna need librarians forever.

(Word Perfect gave me 11 synonyms to the word "Gripes" in the title to this column. Nice technology, but I stayed with "Gripes." If I just used "Gripe," it gave me an additional one, "crab." Why? Word Perfect assumed I meant "gripes" as a verb, although some of the words could work both ways. Still looking for a better title, but I'm too lazy to get up and go over to the

dictionary.)