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Google's (Fair) Use of Copyrighted Work

James Gibson

University of Richmond, jgibson@richmond.edu

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Google's (Fair) Use of Copyrighted Work

Nick Taylor ["... But Not at Writers' Expense," op-ed, Oct. 22] argued that Google Print, the company's digital library initiative, amounts to "socialism" because it shows brief excerpts of books in its search results.

Does he also insist that book reviewers pay royalties to authors for quoting work in a review?

Should Google also pay royalties to the authors of Web sites for showing excerpts of their Web pages in search results? When he quotes other authors in his own writing, does he pay them royalties?

"Fair use" is not an empty catchphrase; it is a crucial and carefully circumscribed part of the delicate balance of copyright law, one that is as essential for individual authors and artists as it is for society as a whole.

PAUL CANTRELL
Minneapolis

Copyright law might not permit Google to create a searchable index of library books without their authors' consent, but Nick Taylor does not make that case. Indeed, if one reads just the first three paragraphs of his op-ed, in which he describes

how hard it is to dig up information for his latest book, one can't tell whether he views Google's proposed service as a bane or boon.

Certainly, Mr. Taylor and other authors deserve a return on the time and resources they devote to research and writing, but projects such as Google's might actually reduce authors' costs by making it easier for them to find obscure information in the first place. Such projects can also bring books to the attention of purchasers who would otherwise not even know they exist.

Yes, the Internet makes it easier to copy and distribute copyrighted materials. But sometimes that benefits authors more than it hurts them.

JAMES GIBSON
Richmond

The writer is director of the Intellectual Property Institute at the University of Richmond School of Law.

Nick Taylor seemed to misunderstand the "core" purpose of copyright law: to "promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts."

The goal is not, as Mr. Taylor implied, to enrich authors and inven-

tors. The limited monopoly granted to authors was intended as a means to an end, not the end itself.

I don't disagree with Mr. Taylor that creative people ought to be compensated appropriately for their endeavors. The question is about how they will be compensated in the digital era.

Mr. Taylor's position seeks to leverage the limited monopoly granted under copyright law to restrict access to creative works. It favors publishers and established authors at the expense of the public good and emerging or unknown artists. Requiring a license from every work indexed in Google is so cumbersome as to be prohibitive.

The irony is that Google Print is the future of publishing. Internet search engines are the modern equivalent of library card catalogues. How will anyone find and read Mr. Taylor's book, if he insists that his index card be removed from the catalogue unless it is paid for? And how exactly does that license promote the progress of science and the useful arts?

BROOKE MAURY
San Francisco