



Analog vs Digital

We hear a lot these days about problems in the music business. The fact that recorded music can be easily digitized, combined with the existence of the internet - which is at heart a gigantic system for transferring digital information around the world - has resulted in a situation where music has become pretty much a 'free' commodity. No sooner does a popular musician release a new CD than it is instantly 'ripped', uploaded to a host on the internet, and passed around to everybody who wants to share it.

Music publishers are desperately trying to stop this, but their actions are pretty much futile. Old-timers like myself, who grew up paying for their music, will perhaps continue to do so to some degree, but the young people growing up with this 'free' system in place will never do so.

Until recently, book authors have been safe from this kind of problem, due to the difficulty of copying a physical book, but now that eBooks are becoming common, they too are having to face the same situation. Movies too of course, are available for download as soon as they are released, sometimes even before.

And it doesn't stop there. These days most newspapers have a website, as do most magazines, and many people get their news from those sites - free - without any thought of actually having to purchase a physical copy of the publication. Music, books, movies, newspapers, magazines ... once the product is available in a digital format, it becomes very difficult for the creators to receive compensation from those who 'consume' it.

Doomsayers are predicting that without a system for properly compensating creators, we will soon be in a situation where they stop producing things, and we will be left with nothing but amateur work. Others are not so pessimistic, but it does remain far from clear how the situation can be resolved.

So how does this all affect me? Woodblock prints can easily be scanned and digitized, so am I doomed too?

Some printmakers, including a friend of mine here in Japan, try to make it difficult for people to obtain images of their prints. If they have a website, they upload only very small images, perhaps even with a 'watermark' or copyright notice embedded, to make them less attractive for people to download.

I do it differently. I opened my own internet website nearly 13 years ago, and right from the beginning made it a policy to include clear, large size images of my prints. Now once an image is on a website, it means that people can easily keep a copy for themselves, and actually, I make it easy for them to do so with a special 'Free Downloads' page, where they can select the images they want and download high resolution versions. This is all free, as I make no attempt at all to charge for these things.

How can I do this? Aren't I shooting myself in the foot? If people can get such beautiful images from my website at no cost, surely they will never buy the prints.

This is not what is happening. Yes of course, thousands of people download the images and most of them do not order prints from me, but among those thousands, there *are* some who understand that - in the case of woodblock prints - there is a very big difference between the digital and analog versions. The digital version will let you see the 'image'; the analog version will bring you the print as an 'object', a truly three-

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>

dimensional thing, with texture and beauty over and above what is visible on a computer monitor or a print-out.

I can't pretend that I planned it this way, but I have ended up with one of the few jobs that is 'safe' from digital reproduction. In fact, the more that people download the images from my website, the happier I am, because these people have taken the first step towards understanding the beauty of woodblock prints. They start with the 'Free Downloads!' page of my site and then later on, some of them at least, end up on the 'Order Form' page.

"A digital version? Please help yourself ... The analog version? Yes, I'll be happy to send you some ..."

David Bull
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