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30 Years After Toffler's
Startling Prophecy

Future Shock

25 Visions of What's Next

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Data of the People, by the People, for the People

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BY PAMELA THOMAS-GRAHAM

The Internet has become many things: a way to communicate, a way to buy and sell, a way to get an education, and a way to be entertained. But underlying all of these activities lies a deeper promise—as yet unfilled—a promise that accounts for the Internet's rapid adoption by the broad population and one that may ultimately lead to one of the most profound advances in history.

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It promises to democratize information finally and completely, making all knowledge and data instantly accessible to everyone everywhere. Since knowledge is power, the

Internet may bring us all onto something close to a level playing field for the first time. Not since Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press has so much power been made available to so many. Not since the social movements of the 1960s has America had the opportunity to truly create a meritocracy free from the painful legacies of class, gender, and racial barriers. If everyone had the right information and the right tools, as a society we would have a genuine opportunity to help everyone realize their full potential.

This is not an abstract concept at CNBC.com. We are in the business of democratizing information. In a very concrete sense, this is our product. Every day, we identify new kinds of information—data,

KENNETH RENDELL

(kenr@kwrendell.com) loves pulp. Since 1959, his galleries in Natick, Mass., and New York, have accumulated some of the grandest archives of historical letters, manuscripts, and rare books in existence. One of the leading debunkers of both the Hitler and Jack the Ripper hoax diaries, he also is the author of *History Comes To Life: Collecting Historical Documents* (University of Oklahoma Press), considered the standard reference book in the field.

BY KENNETH RENDELL

One-to-one Libraries

THE MAJOR LIBRARIES OF the future are being formed right now, and the Internet in particular and technology in general are important ingredients. These libraries are different from those of past generations because of the psychology of their creators, principally individual collectors, who happen to be leaders in technology. They don't collect to impress people, to create an image, or to reassure themselves of their erudition. They are not impressed that something is rare, or that others have deemed it desirable. They don't need to buy culture.

Few of these libraries are even slightly known to the public. Most are as private as they are individual. People with the means and ideas to collect what really interests them, rather than form a library that represents the ideas of others and what their concepts of a library should be, could not be formed without the Internet. While the sources of historical letters and manuscripts have always been relatively few, and collectors of original writings have been more individual in their approach, collecting books has always been greatly

influenced by the supply system. If you were interested in people or subjects out of the mainstream, and there was no dealer specializing in the area, you would have a very difficult time collecting. Dealers wouldn't buy non-mainstream books for their stocks and certainly couldn't afford to risk catalog space on books of unproven interest.

The Internet has revolutionized this. The books that you want to put together on a particular subject may be scattered among several hundred dealers throughout the world, and they may not be expensive enough to appear in printed catalogs, but by using the Net, you can find them in the most efficient way.

Collectors' abilities to fully utilize and appreciate their libraries and collections also have been greatly enhanced by computerized inventories that can be readily searched for cross-references or other subjects that may be contained in the letters, manuscripts, and books. Technology also has made available most standard reference sets of books online, eliminating the need to take up large amounts of linear feet of shelf space in modern libraries.

Many dealers and librarians are surprised when I say that after 40 years in the business, I am enjoying it more than ever. I believe it is the new and future collectors, with their attitudes of genuine interest and excitement and their unique take on life, that keep me going forth to more interesting journeys into the past. ■

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