
^Z
Ctrl-ZINE
"the only way to win, is not to play"
Issue 4 - Volume 1
June 2023

Hello and hi! Welcome to ^Z! This is the fourth installment of the zine, which has seen nice success in it’s four month tenure (so far), and we (the ^C community, and the Smol Web at-large) will continue the energy and effort to keep things informative, fun, real, and really informative and fun!

I am your zinester/compiler, ~loghead, and these are the stories and entries of those who love the Web. Big, small (or “Smol”), medium-to-even-sized Web, and all manner of measurement in between. We want “what’s best” for *us*. The Netizens at-large. Be it a digital native, a mobile-first upbringing, oldcore BBS’ers from the last century, or those who will get help with their homework from AI. It (the Web) is BY and FOR us - let’s do our damnedest to have it serve us well!

Enjoy the issue!

INDEX:

Authentic Indifference is my AI by *~loghead*

AI. Beautiful. I see examples of people having conversations with ChatGPT - some love the software, some hate it, some have already folded its responses into the fabric of their day-to-day lives.

I haven't. I have nothing against AI, but I will not be delving into it with reckless abandon (or at all) like I did w/ the WWW in the mid-90s. A lot of headache (for me, my life) could have been head off if I had not gone down The Rabbithole.

The Web is great. It's also so elementary in "concept" (or was, now it's a reality) that it's hard to imagine civilization became so enamored with it.

A server talks to another server. The messages can be, and are, fast. Fairly quicker than the postal service, and those messages can be sent back and forth continuously and instantaneously, should one choose.

Cool. What about the rest? What do we need (most of) it for? A blog, a social media account, a Tumblr site paying tribute to parmesan cheese - why?

I'm here to say this, though (and hey, thanx, Web, for the platform to say it! Sacrifice: warranted!) - my late-Father and many of his age range (some older, some younger) saved themselves a lot of headache, ridiculousness by not "going online". I don't mean they weren't active on Facebook, I mean they never as much as sent an e-mail or had a laptop in their hands. They didn't care. Why would they?

Granted, people much older than them, can be (and usually are, by now) quite well-versed in Internet jargon. The WWW knows no age boundaries, which is something quite nice about it. But the

Average Person probably could have “got by” without the Web, and all it’s pros/cons it brings with it, and carry on fine without *too* much sacrifice in day-to-day life.

So, if I were to learn a lesson from "The Olds", it would be to not drink the Electric Kool-Aid of AI, or/and the (surely well-meaning) co's behind it. It's a segment of Computer Science that is A) very fascinating, B) full of potential, C) will effect everyone, everywhere - including me. And D) totally on auto-hype in terms of civilization (and everyone, everywhere) either drawing X amount of joy/amusement from it, or X amount of distress and headache because of it. *I* don't need to chase it like it's the best thing since sliced bread (man, what a turning point that was!) ;)

Small communities are the best communities by *Manuel Moreale*

The web is pretty big. Putting a precise number on how big it is is probably impossible, but we can safely assume there are more than 1 billion websites out there. The world population is around 8 billion and close to 5 have an internet connection. That's a lot of people.

How many friends do you have? How many relatives? How many acquaintances? I'd hazard a guess and say that fewer than 100 people are actually part of your life in a meaningful way.

Let's say you'll live 80 years and let's also say that adult life starts at 18 years old. That leaves us with 62 years or 543120 hours. Some studies estimated that it takes between 40 to 60 hours to form a casual friendship with someone. 543120 hours divided by 60 is just a bit more than 9000. That is 9000 people you could potentially form casual relationships with in your adult life. Now, that number assumes you spend 100% of your time doing nothing but relationship building which is problematic to say the least, because there are other things you might want to do such as, I don't know, eating, drinking, and sleeping just to name a few. So let's just cut that number in half.

4500 people are a lot. But also, not really. In the digital world, 4500 followers are nothing. With 4500 followers on Instagram, you're a nobody, 4500 visitors on your site are really not that impressive. And yet, if you were to take the time to actually know those people it would probably take all your life.

The web loves big numbers. Marketers use those numbers to impress, to validate. But when it comes to communities, to human

beings, bigger is not always better. In fact, the opposite is often true. It’s in small groups that we have chances to discuss things that are important to us. It’s in small groups that we have time and space to debate and grow. Deeper conversations can only occur in the right context and big communities don’t allow for that. Because big communities move fast. And individuals become less and less important the bigger a community grows.

We should treasure small online communities because small communities are the best communities. Blogs with a handful of dedicated readers, forums with fewer than fifty users, group chats with a dozen participants. Those are success stories. Not becoming huge can and should be seen as a good thing.

We don’t need a million followers. And maybe we don’t need a thousand true fans. But we probably could use ten good internet friends to make our digital lives better.

Wholesomedonut's Decision Evoking Requisition Polygon *by ~wholesomedonut*

Because Venn Diagrams are passe, Punnett Squares are evocative of the genetics of garden peas, and D.E.R.P. is a fun acronym.

Author's note

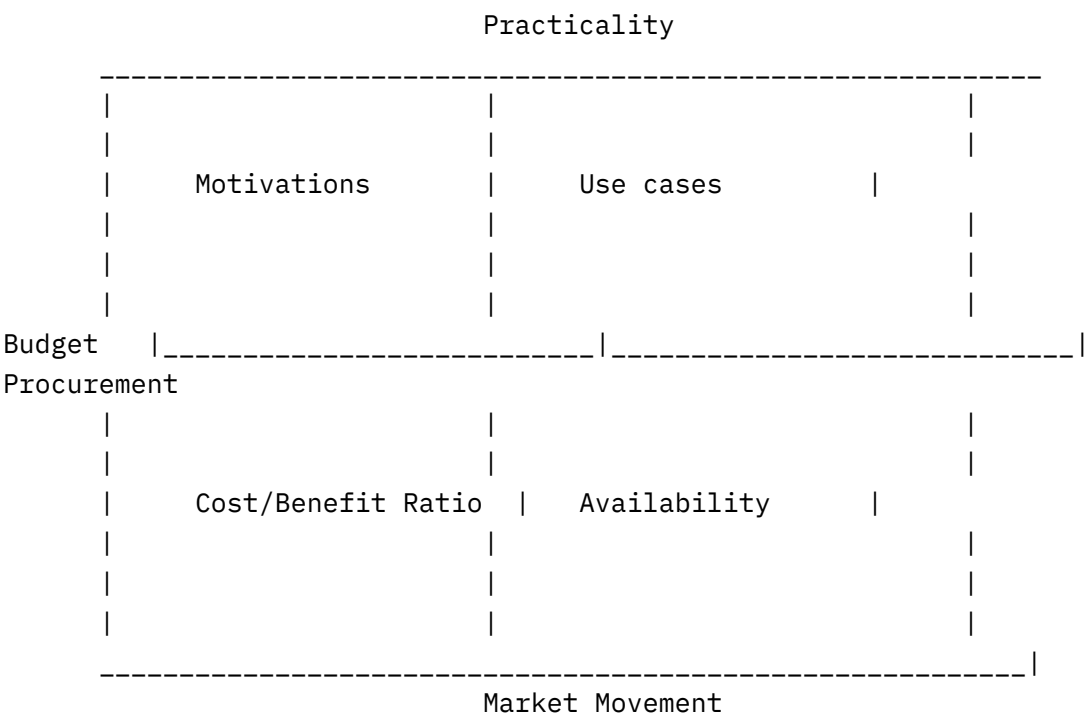
As far as I am aware in my brain, this logical relationship is of my own making. This chart and the stuff that's in it, I claim as my own synthesis and iteration of time-tested market ideas, economic concepts, and life advice. I didn't invent the wheel, but I _did_ make this one in my style as far as I'm aware. If you find out that this whole square thing in its specific configuration and conceptual presentation was posted somewhere else eons ago and Donut is just a blithering plagiarist and an idiot... cool. Lemme know and I'll suck less as a human being next time. ;)

What do you mean by D.E.R.P.?

Well, I've realized that given a little bit of thought I can probably sum up the Motivations, Use Cases, Cost/Benefit Ratio, and Availability of any given tech purchase. And from there use it as a way to understand what the actual niche is that I'm trying to fill by purchasing or upgrading a piece of technology. So, this Polygon will help Evoke Decisions about your Requisitions. It's a blob of pixels that might give good advice about buying tech stuff, or stuff in general.

The concepts here are pretty universal, and you can probably use this as a good bellwether of your understanding about why a certain thing should or should not be purchased in general. This can be done by further segmenting this table along the edges with a concept related to the two core concepts inside the chart's quadrants.

Forgive my crappy ASCII scribblings.



Donut, pls explain

Basically, this system - come to think of it, and I just did as I'm writing this - is founded on the idea that if a piece of technology (or anything really) can't reasonably have an explanation given for each of the four quadrants, chances are you're just a victim of "artifical desire/marketing-induced desire" for a given thing, and you don't patently _need_ it. I practice what I preach in this regard, and if I can't fill in these 4 squares the chances of me buying it are pretty low.

Practicality

The top edge of the chart addresses how Practical the purchase would be, by forcing you to answer: what are your _use cases_ for the device? I emphasize the plural, because one-shot tools, in my view, should be rare. If you're putting money and time into getting it, you might as well get good use out of it for

more than one occasional task if at all possible. Also, what are your actual motivations for purchasing the thing? Why do you **think** you want it? If you can't even explain to yourself or somebody else why you want it, bingo. You've been duped. Or at least, you haven't thought long enough about this piece of technology and what it could do for you to really articulate any of your desires for it. Maybe you don't even have any. I've always found that "sleeping on it" for another night, even after my research is otherwise done, helps me make purchase decisions I approve of more often than not.

Budget

The left side addresses the conditional and situational constraint of reality known as "being broke." How much does it cost and is that worth it to you? This dovetails in with Motivations, because you should be able to justify the expense in a way that proves you Really Want The Thing. Furthermore, you should be able to weigh the balance of how much you want it against how much good it's actually going to do you in your life as it now is. We all _want_ a brand-new car that actually works, has good features, and is safe. But chances are that 2009 Dodge Nitro will do just fine to putt-putt you across town and occasionally take the kid to soccer practice. Not to mention you won't be in debt for that one in 2030 if you put some elbow grease into paying it off.

Another note: See how Cost/Benefit Ratio is directly across from Use Cases? That's intentional. Because how much value you're going to get out of the thing will be directly informed by what you intend to do with it; conversely, what you intend to do with it and how important It Is will determine whether or not the cost of the item is worth the benefit. These concepts all intertwine, and knowing how they do so makes justifying and understanding the needfulness of any technology much easier.

Procurement

On the right side of the chart we have Procurement. As in, the practical process of getting ahold of the device. What's the use case? Is this a thing you need to do right now? Is this a tool for something you even currently plan to do, or is it just something that sounds good to have? If you can't answer that, chances are you either don't understand the situation you're in well enough, or you don't _have_ a current need for the thing.

Naturally, it follows that whether or not you can get ahold of that item in the first place will directly influence both the Cost/Benefit Ratio (is the item hard to find? Exclusive? Restricted?), as well as the Use Cases (are the things you're trying to do unique to a specific problem you face, or is this a commonplace tool/item/thing that you're looking for?). If the thing you're trying to do requires a unique, specific tool that only was made by a few vendors in the 1970's, then chances are your Motivations and Cost/Benefit Ratio better be sky high, cuz this won't be cheap (in time spent searching, or money, or both) OR easy to find. Conversely, if Procurement is nothing huge for the item you're pursuing, you'll be spending minimal extra time considering it.

Market Movement

I think you get the point by now. In order for the Budget, Practicality and Procurement of any given tech item to matter you have to understand Market Movement. Not in a big, financial, businessman sense. I don't think anybody reading this cares about a given stock ticker's ups and downs. But around here we DO nerd out about, say, Lenovo Thinkpads from over a decade ago.

To carry that example a bit further, the Market Movement of such a thing should be understood as gradually spinning down. Those old bento-box style Thinkpads aren't really made anymore, and there's only so many for people to professionally refurbish. The old ones are more repairable, the old ones are generally better known from a software and firmware perspective. etc. etc. And

for the sake of this example that means simply moving on to the latest Thinkpad models is totally against the point of why you want one in the first place.

But that leads to problems, because these machines are old. For sure we have battery availability issues on the horizon as soon as whatever companies in China still make them (or hoard them from the old days when they did) decide to move on to greener technological pastures. Those chassis don't heal themselves, and every cracked, chipped, damaged Thinkpad body is another strike on the wall against anybody in the future being able to use the device in the future to its fulness. Same with screens, keyboards, DVD drives.

So, understanding that Market Movement is crucial, because it helps you weigh whether or not such a thing is worth purchasing even if you _can_ explain why you want it, what it'll do for you, and how you'll benefit despite the cost.

Oppositely, you could say that - while it is small by comparison to the rest of the consumer market - the market for small-production Linux laptops in general is in a growth phase. Starlabs, Tuxedo Computers, System76, MNT, Framework, on and on. This means that, chances are, you're early enough in the adoption curve (cuz like it or not, capitalism begets resource scarcity and computer parts are no exception) to fulfill all 4 quadrants of the square for at least a couple of years on a given purchase.

Closing Thoughts

I have put so much emphasis on Market Movement intentionally. If you're reading this post you have some kind of modern technology. And, depending on where and what you're reading this on (or indeed it's printed), you've had your own experiences with the constant, unending ups and downs of the economy's

interests and focuses. It's really hard to truly make the best decision for yourself and your project if you aren't aware of how your work is affected by the lumbering beast that constantly sheds money and stock fluctuations, which in turn drive fluctuations in supply and demand of the stuff you want and need.

I probably spend the most time on the square thinking between Market Movement and Practicality. Because the top of this chart is like the top of Maslow's Hierarchy: have I fulfilled my other basic needs and requirements for a given thing first? If not, why on earth is this piece of technology being considered? It shouldn't be!

And for Market Movement: this is the bottom line, the bedrock, of the commitment I make when I purchase something. Am I adopting something early, despite its warts? Am I willingly getting something that's used, or a bit older in general, because it's cheaper or has a feature that I need or desire more than the most current? How about regulations and current best practices for the hobby or industry? All of these things are connected to whether or not the thing I'm looking to buy is on its way out the door (Rest in peace Firewire, DVI monitors, floppy disks, and non-capacitive touch screens).

So, next time you see an ad for the new shiny thing (like my post literally a day ago about the MNT Pocket Reform), remember: D.E.R.P. long and hard about that purchase. Is it in your Budget? Is it Practical? Is Procurement possible? Is the Market Movement positive so it's not obsolete and difficult to maintain a year or five from now?

Hopefully this little scribble can help you find your own balance and be more mindful, in your own way and need, about the stuff you buy and why.

Cheers,

wholesomedonut

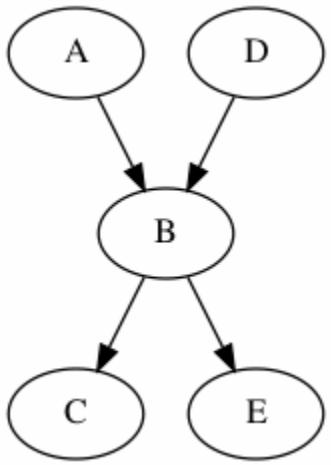
wholesomedonut at ctrl-c dot club

Notes on diagramming languages by *~nttp*

I'm a text-oriented person, but sometimes a picture really is worth a thousand words. Problem is, diagramming software is often slow and clumsy. And it's more precise to generate diagrams from a textual description anyway. Talk about coming full circle.

GraphViz

GraphViz is an old, established tool for automatically drawing diagrams with fairly complex layout from a textual description. In other words to make this:



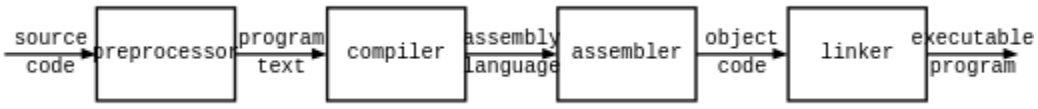
out of this:

```
digraph {
    A -> B -> C
    D -> B -> E
}
```

It supports half a dozen or more layout engines, dozens of output formats and numerous formatting options, including various shapes, fonts and colors, as well as hyperlinks.

Pikchr

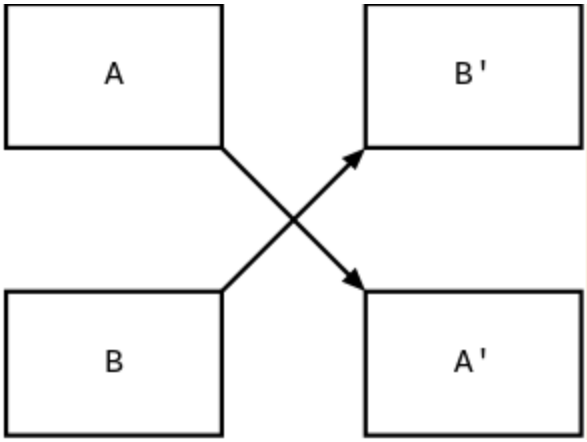
A much newer tool, Pikchr is the latest take on a mature concept. Also much simpler, it's optimized for diagrams like this one:



Which can be obtained from the description below:

```
arrow "source" "code"
box "preprocessor"
arrow "program" "text"
box "compiler"
arrow "assembly" "language"
box "assembler"
arrow "object" "code"
box "linker"
arrow "executable" "program"
```

Pikchr doesn't do auto-layout, but has some tricks up its sleeve anyway. For a more complex layout, you can first place the boxes, then draw the arrows:



Which can be written in a surprisingly natural style:

```
A: box "A"; move; B1: box "B'"
down; move; A1: box "A'"
left; move; B: box "B"
arrow from A.se to A1.nw
arrow from B.ne to B1.sw
```

Pikchr can only output SVG, but is very small, fast and portable. Otherwise it also supports fonts, colors and the like, along with a rich language for manual layout.

Zinnia

A more specialized language, but otherwise surprisingly similar, is Zinnia, by David Welbourn. It works on a spreadsheet-like principle, and has a number of unique features. On the other hand version 3 only renders to an HTML5 canvas, via JS.

And that, folks, is Issue 4 of ^Z! :) We hope you enjoyed reading, we thank you for downloading/sharing. We thank you for your interest, and we thank you for you! Me and the members of Ctrl-c.club love working on it, adding to it, compiling it, distributing it, singing it's high praises, and we love that others take interest in it.

Housekeeping: Soon, ^Z will be applying to get an ISSN (International Standardized Serial Number), and progress has been made there, but it may be *after* the next issue that one starts being utilized with ^Z. It helps with distributors, categorization, archiving, etc., and it will not be a big deal, invasive. Still 100% commitment to no ads, no sponsors, no alarms and no surprises.

Until the next issue, your compiler,

~loghead