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[Gambits & Gadgets in the World of Technology]

For Whom the Bells Toll

At noon one day about 5,000 years from now, in a cave carved from limestone cliffs near Nevada's Great Basin National Park, a visitor might hear the ringing of bells that sound something like a cut from Brian Eno's latest compact disc. Mr. Eno, the English musician, is on the board of the Long Now Foundation, a San Francisco-based collection of long-term thinkers that is building a clock intended to last 10,000 years, and that already has bought the 183-acre mountain where it will be housed. He got to thinking about what the clock might sound like.

"Bells are an obvious candidate. They're built to last," Mr. Eno says. He created 10 virtual bells in his synthesizer, taking some liberties with physics, and is researching methods for casting the bells he has designed. He asked computer pioneer Danny Hillis, the clock's designer, for an algorithm that would generate a different sequence each day for 10,000 years. The sequence that would play at about the midpoint is included on his CD, "January 07003" (the five-digit date convention is needed to avoid the dreaded Y10K problem).

Ringling the bells and displaying the time will require human power, though the clock itself is designed to keep time without interruption or electricity. "This will be part of the payoff for climbing up that mountain and visiting the clock," Mr. Hillis says. "If you appear in January 7003, it will show the time the last time somebody was there. That might be yesterday or it might be 2,000 years ago. Then when you wind it, it catches up to the current time and plays the music for that day."

One goal of the project is to spur thinking about human institutions that can span millennia. "You want something that requires people to be responsible for it," Mr. Eno says. "You want the thing to keep reminding people to look after it."

Barbecue, Wired

At Texacan Beef & Pork Co. in Ashburn, Va., owner Blake Barker knows just how the sausage is made. There's no mystery about his baby back ribs, pulled pork or barbecued beef either, because Mr. Barker has outfitted his barbecue business with wireless technology that tracks every temperature fluctuation of each slab of meat.

"We could almost name the meat Fred if we wanted to because we know it so well," says Mr. Barker, 51 years old, who opened Texacan this year and sells his barbecued meat products to restaurants and catering services, in addition to operating a small takeout business.

The company uses long metal probes that measure meat temperature every 30 seconds and send the data to the plant's servers through small wireless transmitters. The instruments can withstand both the carousel convection ovens, which can cook as many as 3,000 pounds of meat at 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and the walk-in freezers, whose temperatures drop to negative 10 degrees. If the equipment goes out of the specified temperature range, the transmitters send employees an e-mail and a voice message.

Mr. Barker, a fourth-generation Texan who took culinary classes at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris shortly before opening Texacan, has worked in telecommunications and Internet firms for the past 20 years. He is as mum on sales figures as he is about the recipe for his dry rubs. But Mr. Barker says business is brisk, especially since the wireless technology makes his operation more efficient and cuts down on human error.

## Near-Instant Replay

When a Continental Airlines employee tried to blame a late bus for his tardiness, the company didn't just take his word for it. The carrier turned to a videotape. Well, not tape, exactly -- digital clip is more like it.

A new wireless surveillance system at New Jersey's Newark Liberty International Airport is raising questions about unintended consequences of the new technology. In addition to cutting costs, Ed Danberry, president of a closely held concern that manages the parking lots, says the digital equipment, designed by Vanguard Managed Solutions LLC, has had many secondary benefits: helping cut back on vandalism reports and false insurance claims for banged-up cars. Mr. Danberry says the digital monitoring equipment provides nearly instant access to videoclips that would have taken as long as a day to find on clunky old analog tapes.

A Continental official says the jury is still out on the new technology's effectiveness, but he also says workers are no longer so quick to blame the bus service for their delays. "That excuse has gone away as word gets around," he says.

Continental says its equipment isn't being used to check up on employees. In the one case involving the late worker, the airline did try to consult the clip as part of a disciplinary proceeding, but the company says it did so only at the employee's own suggestion and says nothing came of it because the images had expired. "The video security system serves no other purpose than to ensure the safety of our employees by giving guards a good view of activity in the lot," a Continental spokesman says in an e-mail.

## Taking Turns as Tux

Computer Associates International Inc. Chief Executive Sanjay Kumar says he "wholeheartedly" endorses and supports Linux. Customers, he says, are ardently demanding software and hardware that works with the free, open-source operating system.

Which is why Sam Greenblatt, a Computer Associates senior vice president, wore a giant penguin suit at the software maker's recent annual confab in Las Vegas. "Anything I can do to get the user groups interested," says Mr. Greenblatt, who greeted attendees with waving flippers. The suit wasn't just any dime-store Halloween penguin costume, but custom-made for Computer Associates, Mr. Greenblatt says. The flippers were oddly disproportionate, and its body rounder and, well, dumpier than one might expect a real penguin's to be.

Computer Associates' embrace of Tux the penguin, the mascot and symbol of Linux, was a small measure of the swelling influence of the operating system in business computing. International Business Machines Corp., a software rival and the perennial target of arrows from Computer Associates' quiver, is Linux's most fervent and prominent corporate backer.

So, as Linux has expanded, Computer Associates is taking pains to stake out its own Linux territory. The company invited Linus Torvalds, the software engineer who created Linux, to Las Vegas to receive a "Humanitarian Software Innovator Award."

The Las Vegas conference wasn't Mr. Greenblatt's first turn as Tux. Some months ago, Mr. Kumar interviewed him, talk-show style, for an internal employee video as klieg lights poured heat onto a studio set. "I sat there with a straight face for 20 minutes," Mr. Kumar says. "I did not crack up." Nor, he adds, did he let Mr. Greenblatt take off the penguin head.

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Digits was compiled by Ann Grimes with contributions from David Bank, Wailin Wong, James Bandler and Charles Forelle.

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