

**Can an Online Alias  
 Protect You From  
 Identity Theft?**

*Hiding Who You Really Are  
 in an Effort to Stay Safe  
 in Cyberspace*

By Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

Identity theft is a subject that has “enjoyed” a great deal of attention since the advent of the Internet, for the simple reason that the Internet mechanism has made it much easier to steal the identity of another. There are a number of things you can do to lower your risk of becoming a victim, and they all have to do with being smart and conscientious about just how you conduct yourself in cyberspace altogether. With that in mind, some have wondered about the usefulness of “hiding in plain sight” on the Internet from behind the mask of an online alias. We wanted to take this opportunity to address the usefulness, as well as the limitations, of going online with a made-up identity.

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**Big-Event Safety**

*The Boston Marathon Bombing Serves as  
 Another Reminder of Public Dangers*

By James L. Paris & Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

Whenever an event like the Boston Marathon bombing occurs, it prompts us to again consider terrorist attacks inside of our own borders, with an eye to better preparing ourselves from a tactical standpoint. What is meant by tactical, in this case? In military parlance, tactical considerations have to do with the actual decisions that are made, and things that are done, when disaster is unfolding right before one’s eyes. Philosophical notions, theories, and higher-level ideas about why what is taking place do not matter in those moments – all that *does* matter is staying alive.

That said, let’s talk about one element of this that is more philosophical in nature: life in the United States has changed forever. There is now, what many call, a new normal in America. The United States is dealing with a climate from which it had been largely insulated up until a relative few years ago, but to which it must now reconcile itself. This is an important point, because the first step to making the right moves tactically is to recognize the heightened threat environment that now exists.

One of the first “rules” of survival is to avoid large crowds or high-profile places, but, while there is little

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## Big-Event Safety (Cont. from page 1)

doubt that doing so will greatly minimize your chances of being caught up in a terrorist attack or other public violent outburst, it's not an entirely realistic approach. Over the course of your life, you will find yourself in many circumstances that might be attractive to a deranged or otherwise highly-motivated, violent perpetrator. You can't realistically avoid them all unless you choose to proceed in your life with a great deal of paranoia.

Look at the marathon bombings. They did not even take place at what would be necessarily considered the highest-profile moments; the bombs went off two hours after the winner crossed the finish line, and, beyond that, the area of the explosions had been swept for bombs by the police twice that day...the second time only one hour before the detonations.

Ultimately, unless you have both a mindset and lifestyle that is terribly unique, there is no way to guarantee that tragedy, in the form of public violence, will not befall you. So, what's the answer? The answer is to remain vigilant, to be aware, to be on the lookout for the kinds of sights and sounds that should pique your curiosity as you're moving about in public places, but to recognize that, really, that is all you can do and still participate in society as a functional member of it. As for events like the marathon, there are a few things to keep in mind that can be of some help.

**Stay close to exit routes.** When possible, it is advisable to situate yourself in an area of the

public event that allows for immediate access to escape routes. Often, it is possible to enjoy whatever is taking place without being so much in "the middle of the action" that if trouble begins to unfold rapidly, you find yourself a hostage to your surroundings.

**Take cover.** If it is not possible to escape, your next-best option is to find some type of structure that can act as a secure barrier between you and the trouble.

**Assume secondary attacks or explosions.** The attack on the World Trade Center did not end with the first plane; another one followed into the South tower, as we know all too well. At the Marathon, there was a second explosion that followed the first. It is important to cultivate the presence of mind that any such attacks may be comprised of multiple shootings, explosions, or other violent outbursts, and to react accordingly.

Regarding the previous point, this needs to be said: when the first bomb went off at the Marathon, many ran *toward* the trouble in an effort to help those injured, not knowing, or not caring, that another explosion might follow. Those people are heroes, and they should enjoy our highest admiration. If you are the kind of person who is truly willing to forsake thoughts of your own safety to help others, God bless you. Still, even if your first thought is for the others around you, it is in the best interests of everyone that you react to these incidents in real time in a way that ensures, as much as possible, that you will not become a casualty yourself.

*The James L. Paris Report* is published monthly by Premier Financial Communications, Inc. Known office of publication is 138 Palm Coast Pkwy NE, # 223, Palm Coast, FL 32137. Periodicals postage paid at Sanford, FL and other mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **The James L. Paris Report**, 138 Palm Coast Pkwy NE, # 223, Palm Coast, FL 32137.

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## Can an Online Alias Protect You From Identity Theft?

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First, let's address the moral implications of an online alias; to some, making up an identity is simply dishonest, and there are plenty of Christians who despise dishonesty in any form. While that is certainly to be admired, and each person has to make his own decisions about the appropriateness of that sort of dishonesty, most people would likely agree that there are *two kinds* of dishonesty – one kind that is rooted in some type of selfishness, while another that is designed to protect yourself or others without doing harm to anyone in the process. Ultimately, you will have to decide if creating an online alias violates your *own* sense of morality.

In order to create an online alias that is going to be useful, you have to think beyond the mere contrivance of a screen name. A functional online alias is one that is complete, and reflects a birthday, an address, perhaps even a phone number that is something other than your own. Why address and phone number? Remember that an online alias is not simply about online activities; rather, it's about having an identity that can help you even when using the Internet on behalf of *offline* endeavors, as well.

As for address and phone number, if you want to try to use your online alias as much as possible, it's not too big a step to rent a PO box and even have a separate, cheap phone number to use in place of your own address and phone number.

Additionally, you will want an email that is separate from your *actual* email, and one that exists exclusively on behalf of your online identity. That's easy enough to create. If you choose one on your own, be sure to select something that clearly has no connection to your real identity, and if you need some help

to that end, free resources like *online-generator.com* and *namator.com* can be useful.

Another good measure is to use your online identity exclusively on a device dedicated to that purpose. If you use one device for both your actual identity *and* false identity purposes, then you still risk exposure of your real information. It should be noted that if you do not opt to go as far as using a dedicated device on behalf of your online alias, the online alias can still be very helpful to you, but to provide superior protection for yourself, it is a great idea to select one device and use only that for your alias Internet activities.

It should be noted that there are some very practical limitations to the effectiveness of this approach. For example, unless you are interested in taking this all the way, and trying to create a completely duplicate identity, many uses of the Internet will exclude your ability to utilize an online alias. The most obvious has to do with *purchasing* something on the Internet; generally, you will need a credit card to transact business, and if you have a credit card, then you have to indicate the real name and address that's associated with the card, or the transaction will not complete.

Still, this is about is doing some smart things to help keep you safe, without overly inconveniencing yourself. Just what qualifies as "overly inconvenienced" will be entirely up to each person, and some may indeed want to take this as far as possible in order to provide for themselves maximum protection, but the overriding point is that there can be some value to an online alias in which you're willing to invest a little time and trouble.

## Utilizing Graphics at Your Site

*Graphics are Notoriously SEO-Unfriendly, but It Doesn't Have to Be Entirely That Way*

By James L. Paris

If you go to Internet marketing conferences and otherwise put yourself into the mainstream of Internet marketing discussions, the topic of graphics, and the influence that graphics have in the realm of search engine optimization, invariably comes up. Anyone who is involved with website development at any level has had to address this; historically, one of the disadvantages of websites that are graphics-heavy is that graphics are not “read” very well by the search engines, for the simple reason that what search engines look for is *text*. Now, graphics-heavy websites are fine for people or businesses that fit a unique niche – namely, they are so popular as individual entities that anyone searching for them on the Internet will do so by using their proper names. For example, if motion picture star and champion martial artist Chuck Norris were to have a website that was heavy on graphics, it probably wouldn't hurt him very much from an SEO standpoint, because the vast majority of people who are ending up at his site are doing so because they are searching using the keywords “Chuck Norris;” in other words, they are looking for him, specifically, so it is not nearly as important that his website be search engine-friendly. Take Ford Motor Company, as another example. People who end up at Ford's site are generally doing so because they are specifically searching for Ford cars or trucks, and not because they are doing a generic search for vehicles. As a result, Ford has more freedom to use a lot of flash video and other “hyper” sorts of graphics to make a strong visual impression to site visitors.

However...unless you *are* Chuck Norris, or Ford Motor Company, or anyone/anything else that is similarly unique and popular, you fall into that great, big category of people

and businesses that must rely on a website that is built in such a way so as to ferret out those random searchers of your topic out in cyberspace and bring them to your site. If you are John Smith, and your website theme is auto repair, it is most unlikely that anyone interested in auto repair is arriving at your site because they searched specifically for “John Smith.” This means, by and large, that the site should be text-oriented. That said, when people arrive at your website, there is some not-insignificant value to the website *looking nice*, to being aesthetically pleasing; while there needs to be a lot of textual content, the emphasis on textual content should also be reconciled in such a way that the website, as a whole is very appealing from a visual standpoint. This means that even when you're trying to remain text-heavy and cut back on the use of graphics, you do still need to use a fair amount of them in order to keep the site looking sharp. The challenge, then, is finding that balance between the use of text, which is absolutely necessary, and properly utilizing the graphics that, while not as search engine-friendly, are still important to keeping those visitors interested.

The most important thing you want to know is this: Ultimately, for SEO purposes, text-rich websites are going to be superior to graphically-rich websites. That is, web pages that have a lot of text are going to be easier for the search engines to evaluate, and they have a much better chance of being ranked more highly *in* the search engines; that's just the reality of things, so we go into this with a sort of bias, and the bias is that we want to have a lot more text than we have graphics. Given that we also need the graphics, however, the challenge becomes implementing those graphics in a way that the search en-

## Utilizing Graphics at Your Site (Cont. from page 4)

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gines see what they are. It must always be remembered that a search engine cannot “see” graphics; search engines, as the technology stands today, cannot come to your website and see a picture of a hamburger, and realize that it is a hamburger – they simply do not process in that way. One day, that may be the case – there’s talk that, eventually, we will have the ability to take a picture of someone, load that picture into the search engine, and that picture would then find that person by their face. We are *not*, however, at a point where the search engines can look at a graphic and know what that is. So, we want to talk about how to put graphics on your site in a way that not only do they not hurt your search engine optimization, but they can actually *help* you in that department.

When you put your cursor on a given graphic and then right-click, a menu comes up that will include the option “View Image Information.” When you click on *that*, you will see several different pieces of information, including the *file name*; anytime you put an image on your website, it is actually a file with a file name, so when the search engine is going through a web page, it’s seeing file names, it’s seeing text (what it’s really seeing is the hyper-complex source coding *behind* the file name). When we use the browser to visit a web page, the browser makes all of that source code into a pretty, understandable, easy-to-process visual representation. Now...when you’re looking under “View Image Information,” there will be something called “Associated Text” which is basically the description of what the image is. What this means is that when you an upload an image to your site, you should be using the “alt tag,” or alternative text tag, to be able to tell the search engines what the image is.

Whenever you upload an image, you’re taken to a page where you are asked to complete some information on behalf of your new upload. Basically what is asked for is “Title,” “Alternate Text,” “Caption,” and “Description,” and note that depending on what website-building software you use, there may be some variations to this. Usually, the only required box to complete is “Title,” but note that the “Alternate Text” box is very important as far as SEO is concerned. The reason for that is that when the search engines index that page and they see the graphic, the fact that the graphic has alternative text that is comprised of the keywords that represent the graphic will boost that graphic’s optimization. Now, as important as the “Alternative Text” box is, by all means, put the odds even more in your favor by putting some useful text in the “Caption” and “Description” boxes, as well. Going further, you can derive some additional benefit from making sure the file name itself is reflective of the appropriate keywords; this would mean that when you initially upload the image into your computer, and are presented with an opportunity to name the primary file, think at that time about a name for it that is itself SEO-appropriate.

While the importance of performing these tasks in the interest of optimizing your graphics is debated in IM circles, there can really be *no* debate that doing it... particularly the alternate text tagging... delivers much greater value to your site’s SEO than if you don’t do it. While we can count on search engine algorithms getting better, over time, at reading the graphics themselves, the bottom line is that if added graphics are a winner for you *now*, be sure you’re doing everything you can to keep them as SEO-friendly as possible.

## **When You Are Wrongfully Issued a Speeding Ticket**

*Some Tips to Help You Fight Back When the Law is NOT On Your Side*

By James L. Paris & Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

Do you believe that you have ever been wrongfully ticketed for speeding? When it happens, the vast majority of people choose to pay the citation rather than deal with the hassle that goes with contesting it. If you feel that you have been wrongfully ticketed for speeding in the past, and want to be prepared to fight in case it happens *again*, you might find the following information helpful.

***Do not say more than you must when you are pulled over.*** When you are stopped by a police officer, he may ask you questions or otherwise try to engage you in a conversation that invites you to admit you were breaking the law, when the truth may well be that you were not. You do not have to participate; let him tell you why you were stopped, and give you the ticket - the ticket will say right on it that the fact you're signing for it is *not* an admission of guilt, but just an acknowledgment that you received it.

***If you decide to challenge the ticket, appear in court on the appointed date and plead "Not Guilty."*** If you decide to challenge the ticket, you have to appear in court on the date indicated and make your plea. Nothing else happens during that visit besides you making that appearance, so you don't have to be concerned about having a defense prepared; that comes next.

***Simply by asking for a trial, you may well emerge with a reduced penalty, or none whatsoever.*** You may have heard that if you fight a ticket in court, a no-show police officer means you will automatically win. It's true. Even if the officer *does* show, a well-prepared defense (see below) can go a long way to seeing you found "not guilty," or having the penalty greatly reduced.

***Request the manual for the model of the actual device used by the police.*** Once you have made your plea of "not guilty," it is time to build your case. First, get a copy of the device manual. This is important, because the manual will cite conditions and circumstances when the device may be inaccurate in its measurements. Even if just one of those might have applied when you were stopped, that can be enough to create reasonable doubt as to whether you were actually speeding. If you find the information in the manual to be deficient, contact the manufacturer for a more complete accounting...in writing...of all of the ways in which the device may deliver false readings. It is important that your information about possible device failure comes from the manufacturer; in addition to the likelihood that the arresting authority's position will simply be that the device is "never wrong," the manufacturer must always be concerned about liability with respect to giving out false information regarding the accuracy of their devices.

You may wish to consider joining an effective advocacy group that can be of assistance in the matter of contesting speeding tickets. One such organization is the National Motorists Association. The NMA is a one-stop shop for all things related to fighting speeding tickets. For the cost (currently \$35 annually) of a "Supporting Membership," members receive a variety of benefits, including one-on-one phone and email support from NMA staff members regarding their ticket situations, and even a ticket reimbursement feature wherein up to \$300 in traffic tickets will be paid by the NMA for you each year if you plead not guilty to the ticket but are eventually declared guilty in a court trial. Remain prepared!

## **Why You Are the Best Candidate for Self-Publishing**

By Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

Many budding writers of both hard-copy books as well as ebooks continue to struggle with the issue of whether they should really go the self-publishing route; after all, it's traditionally-published books that take up all the shelf space in the bookstores (those that remain) and enjoy the greatest popularity, overall, is it not? While true, it's a deceiving picture, particularly so for the writer who is likely plying his craft for a smaller audience. It's important to understand why the niche writer, called a mid-list author, is now, more than ever, tailor-made for self-publishing.

For starters, the matter of royalty differences between traditional publishing and self-publishing is very significant. Traditional publishers generally pay royalties between 5% and 25%, with 10-15% pretty standard. Self-publishing can see royalties of over 50% on hard-copy books, and up to 70% on ebooks. These are royalty rates that were entirely unheard of in publishing before the advent of modern self-publishing.

There are several reasons why traditional publishers have paid low royalties to their authors, but one of the biggest is the expense of marketing and promotion that has been a staple of traditional publishing; the responsibility for promoting authors' books has historically been the publisher's. Book publishers would pay for author book tours, pay to have authors' books occupy premium shelf space in bookstores, and otherwise spend large sums to encourage purchase of the book. Now? Unless you are a huge revenue generator, little will be spent on promotion of your book, but the royalty paid will remain the same lousy deal.

The problems are particularly acute for the *mid-list* author. While their audiences may be

loyal and devoted, they are just too small for a publisher to prioritize in its bottom-line decision-making. Even if a mid-list author has a manuscript accepted by a traditional publisher, there's an excellent chance that essentially zero effort and dollars will go into the promotion of the book. Publishers now will often make a "bargain" with mid-listers, telling them that, "OK, we like your manuscript enough to publish your book, but know now that you will be responsible for really all of your own promotion...and we're still paying you just a 10% royalty." In many cases, the publishers will now go a step further, and pressure authors under consideration to agree to purchase a substantial number of copies of the new book at a discounted price, and make that purchase a contract stipulation. Will you at least get an advance? Probably, but there's a good chance that it will be a few thousand dollars, at most, and remember how an advance works – if you receive a \$2,000 advance, you will receive nothing more until your royalty payments due exceed \$2,000, which, if the publisher is doing nothing to promote the book, may take a while.

If you are now expected to do your own promotion, why go through a traditional author? Self-publish, enjoy the much higher royalty percentages, and maximize all available social media outlets to promote your new book.

The disinclination of traditional publishers to expend much energy or money on most mid-list authors, something that has worsened as a result of falling margins in the publishing and retail book industry, essentially destroys any reason you might have to continue (or begin) to publish through one. Focus your efforts on self-publishing, whether it's on behalf of your hard-copy book or your ebook, and you'll be way ahead of the game.

# **The Jim Paris Perspective**

## ***Notes and Thoughts on the Realization of Bible Prophecy in the Current Day***

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### ***Gold Crash - A Conspiracy?***

Gold fell more than 13% in just two days this month, signaling the worst two days for the commodity since 1983. Many people are asking what the real reason could be for such a massive drop in the price of gold. A couple of things should be noted before I opine about any gold conspiracy. First, commodities are volatile. If you invest in gold, silver, or oil, you can expect a great deal of volatility. Plain and simple, it just goes with the territory. What makes this sort of volatility even more "legitimate" is the fact that gold has been on a tear for many years and was again approaching historically high price levels. Let's set aside this mainstream view for a moment and ask the question, could there be a manipulation of the price of gold?

In recent years I have become convinced that there really is no such thing as free market trading. Whether it is large institutions or governmental powers, the financial markets are easy to manipulate. Take, for example, the Federal Reserve's quantitative easing policy. By pumping 40+ billion dollars monthly into the economy, there is no doubt that they are "juicing" the stock market. Why would institutions or governmental powers want to crash the price of gold? High gold prices are an embarrassment to central banks. Every uptick in the price of gold is a lack of confidence vote in monetary policy. We also know that there is a large amount of "paper gold" being traded. Exchange traded funds like symbol GLD are supposed to be backed by physical gold that is kept in storage in London. Many economists have questioned whether this ETF and others actually have the amount of gold required to back up the shares they have issued. Others point to the large amount of speculation in gold futures contracts. There is additional conjecture about such things as whether the US Government really has gold in Fort Knox, and whether gold that it is holding for other countries can be legitimately accounted for. While nothing would surprise me, I think there is more than enough here for the conspiracy crowd to hang their hat on. At this point, I don't have enough evidence to draw a conclusion one way or the other. I will continue to suggest that gold is a great hedge against an economic downturn. Regardless of how you buy gold, you need to carefully consider the amount that you invest and how willing you are to accept very significant volatility. Although the price of gold has recovered in recent days, I truly believe that the volatility will be with us for the foreseeable future.

### ***Gold Bugs Bash Bitcoin***

I posted a YouTube video last week with some excerpts from Alex Jones on the topic of Bitcoin. The audio demonstrates a radical change in his opinion, from positive to negative, about the concept of Bitcoin. Alex Jones' network, Genesis Communications, is owned by Ted Anderson, who also owns one of the nation's largest precious metals dealers, Midas Resources. The audio excerpted and presented on the YouTube video seems to show a connection between a change of opinion on Bitcoin after Alex Jones concludes that rising Bitcoin prices seem to be at least partly responsible for lower gold prices. While we don't know that there is a precise re-

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verse correlation between Bitcoin and gold, it does appear that many people are looking at Bitcoin as digital gold. This is an argument that will not be settled here. Suffice it to say that times are changing and gold has a lot of competition these days. Promoters of gold have recently seemed to move in lockstep with their Bitcoin bashing.

Bitcoin had a recent drop of its own far worse than that of gold. The digital currency has recovered from its dramatic drop earlier this month it is now trading at around \$160. I initially started buying Bitcoin in October 2012 when the price was just \$12. We recently created a three hour training program for those that want to get an in-depth education on Bitcoin. The training program covers how to get started with as little as \$20, how to earn free Bitcoins through Bitcoin mining, trading strategies, and much more. We are also offering a copy of my new book 'Bitcoin Millionaire' which will be released in June. For more information, and to purchase this online video training, go to [www.jameslparisbookstore.com](http://www.jameslparisbookstore.com)

### ***Bitcoin and the Mark of the Beast***

Since we've recently been spending a lot of time covering the topic of Bitcoin, we are getting a great deal of inquiries about how this digital currency may relate to the Mark of the Beast. While it is clear that the book of Revelation predicts a coming cashless society, we don't believe that Bitcoin could be implemented as part of the Mark of the Beast. Since Bitcoin is decentralized and anonymous, there would be no way to use a currency configured such as this to exert control over the masses. In fact, I have speculated on numerous occasions that a digital currency configured in this manner could actually be a means of *thwarting* the Mark of the Beast. Some Christians I have spoken to recently believe that Bitcoin could serve as an end-times currency that could be used by those that refuse to take the Mark.

We believe that digital currencies are here to stay, and there is more on the concept of digital, or *crypto*, currencies in this issue contributed by my co-editor Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

### ***Another Red Line Crossed in Syria***

There is now mounting evidence that the Syrian government has been using chemical weapons in its fight against the rebel forces in its own country. The U.S. has issued repeated warnings to Syria about not crossing this so-called red line. Although it is widely believed that Syria has used chemical weapons, there is no clarity at this time as to whether or not the U.S. Government will intervene. We continue to closely monitor of events in Syria due to their significance in Bible prophecy and the predicted destruction of Damascus (Isaiah 17).

### ***Cybernetic Immortality***

“All of the life extension possibilities discussed to this point involve attempting to live longer by better maintaining the human body and replacing damaged or worn-out parts with like-for-

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## The Jim Paris Perspective (Cont. from page 9)

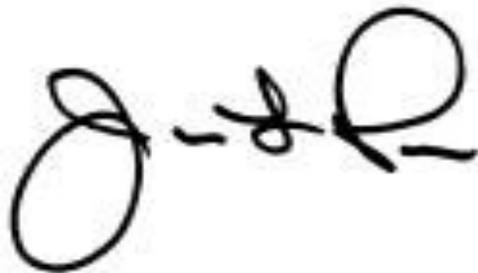
like biological spares. However, it is also already not difficult to imagine an alternative approach to life extension where we cease attempting to maintain a "human" body at all, and instead focus on replacing the body in whole or part with a quite different technological alternative that need not attempt to mirror internal human biology. Such thinking leads us into the realm of the "cyborg" and the notion of some people surviving beyond their "natural" biological life span by merging with artificial technology.” (Source: [Explaining The Future.com](http://ExplainingTheFuture.com))

The idea of transferring the memory from our brain to a computer and allowing "us" to live on in immortality is now more than just fodder for a science-fiction movie. I am hearing more discussion of this concept, and other bizarre methods of extending human life, such as growing synthetic organs, implanting computer components inside the human body to replace organs, and the creation of a so-called cyborg race (computers combined with humans). This concept alongside the growing investment into artificial intelligence can sure get your imagination running wild. The scary thing is that these technologies could be in place within the next 20 years, maybe sooner. As Christians, we will all likely struggle to determine where the line is that should not be crossed in all of this. At what point does medical technology simply go too far in begin to play the role of God?

Each person will have to make medical technology decisions for themselves and their own family. This really does raise the question: what is life? Are we to consider a person living if their brain has been replaced by a computer? How many vital organs can be replaced with synthetic ones before the real "you" is no longer here anymore? Although medical technologists seem to have no boundaries on how far they will go, none seem to address the issue of the soul. Can a physical body be kept functioning even after the soul has left it? Yes, these are very strange questions to raise, and this may be the first time as a Christian you have even learned of any of this. I have believed for years that the Mark of the Beast will function as a sort of onboard computer system implanted inside our bodies. Some say it will be merely a computer chip, but I think it may be far more advanced than that and more sinister. This is one topic I will continue to follow extremely closely over the coming months.

### *Prayers for Boston Marathon Bombing victims*

Finally this month, we want to offer our heartfelt prayers to all who were affected by the recent



*James L. Paris  
Editor-In-Chief*

terrorist attack in the city of Boston. In addition to all of the professional first responders who did such a magnificent job during the crisis, it is important, we think, to accord special recognition to the "average citizens" who were anything but, racing *toward* the victims just after the first explosion, and not knowing or caring that other explosions may follow. Seeing this instinctive, public reaction proves, one again, that the good people far outnumber the bad, and, for that, we should all be very grateful. May God bless them all.

## The Tough Call of Long-Term Care Insurance

By Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

It takes honesty and courage to look at oneself in the mirror and imagine one day living with hardship caused by the inability to care for oneself. To that end, long-term care insurance exists to help deal with the anticipated end-stage of life that represents the period when we are in a final, physical decline. Overall, LTC insurance can be a smart purchase, especially if you have limited financial resources of your own to cover daily care costs, but you have to make some other decisions beyond simply that to buy a policy.

**Stability of the insurance company.** In addition to financial soundness, which can be determined at the websites of rating agencies like A.M. Best ([www.ambest.com](http://www.ambest.com)) and Moody's ([www.moody.com](http://www.moody.com)), pay attention to how long a carrier has been issuing LTC policies; managing LTC policies, with their unpredictable costs, can be a challenge for providers, so those that have been doing this for a while should go to the top of your list.

**Opt for good inflation protection.** Health care costs have been rising at the rate of about 3 to 5 percent per year, so it's imperative that you retain good inflation protection in the policy. You will have different options from which to choose, and will want to get as much as you can afford (5 percent has become a standard).

**Lower your costs with a lengthy elimination period.** In insurance parlance, the elimination period is the amount of time from the occurrence of the insured event to the time benefits are paid; the longer the elimination pe-

riod, the lower your premiums. This is a "guess-timate" that you have to make, not unlike the idea of purchasing a LTC policy in the first place. You can generally choose elimination periods of 30, 90, or 180 days, but remember that your care costs are on your dime *during* the elimination period.

**Consider the "benefit factor" carefully.** The benefit factor corresponds to the number of years the policy will pay for coverage. For example, with some companies, you can choose a benefit factor of either 3 or 5 years, and, of course, the higher benefit factor will result in a more expensive policy. Something to keep in mind: Over 90% of LTC cases ultimately need roughly three years of coverage, so if you opt for something appreciably longer, do so after careful consideration.

**Purchase through an independent agent.** One of the challenges of buying LTC policies is that their features can vary widely, and although some standardization is now more common, there can still be significant differences from carrier to carrier. One effective way to deal with that is by shopping through an independent agent who represents a number of different carriers.

It's tough to know if you will ever need LTC insurance, but if you do and do not have the coverage, it can result in a financial catastrophe. The smartest way to approach anything like this is to make a careful evaluation of all aspects, including considering a policy that seems to be, for you, the best blend of economy and usefulness, and decide accordingly.

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## Is Digital Currency Here to Stay?

By Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

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All of the attention being paid to the Bitcoin has served to put the highest-profile example of digital currency into the center of an argument that is raging throughout society right now – is Bitcoin really something of value, or is it little more than Monopoly money? More generally, the question that’s beckoned is this: Is digital currency here to stay?

The advent of the Internet age has brought fundamental change to the way we live and work. Perhaps the most significant development, however, will prove to be the development of digital currency. Digital currency, by its inherent nature, is really the first opportunity people have had in the modern era to create and utilize a decentralized currency wherein the money is exchanged directly between individuals, with no role served by banks or governments. What is less interesting, actually, is Bitcoin itself; *more* intriguing is how the activity related to the popular Bitcoin has created a buzz on behalf of other crypto-currencies that have also been lingering out there for some time. It is this almost synergistic effect on crypto-currencies, in general, that will actually enhance the likelihood that these remain a part of the global economic landscape, going forward.

In fact, some of the lesser well-known currencies actually have some demonstrated advantages to Bitcoin at the present time. For example, with Litecoin, confirmations that transactions are legitimate can take just a few minutes, while they can often take about ten minutes with Bitcoin presently. Also, both Litecoin and the presently third-most popular digital currency, PPCoin, aspire to maintain

less prohibitive ways of coin *production*. Bitcoin mining is expected to become the sole province of a relative few with access to expensive mining “rigs,” which are computers specially designed to mine Bitcoins. Litecoin’s mathematical puzzle does not inordinately favor the best-equipped or best-capitalized miners, so more miners can participate. As for PPCoin, the current generation system does away with mining altogether, and instead works on the basis of a kind of lottery, wherein those with the most PPCoins have the best chance of earning *more* coins. As for total valuations, there are currently about \$1 billion in Bitcoins in circulation, about \$40 million in Litecoins, and about \$4 million in PPCoins at this writing.

One of the concerns that *Bitcoin*-centered crypto-currency fans have is that the flourishing of numerous, other forms of digital currency will diminish the chances that any one crypto-currency will take hold, but that’s not considered a reasonable concern by economists who take an interest in all of this; the thinking is that, instead, several different crypto-currencies essentially competing for market share will actually increase the chances of crypto-currency becoming unquestionably successful at some point. Additionally, there really is no reason why more than one such currency could not have a place in the global economy, and that’s really the most exciting element to this - that numerous forms of currency would be in circulation, and some of it in the decentralized, peer-to-peer realm that more and more people are coming to prize so highly. Digital currency indeed appears here to stay.