



Internet applications, sites, trends and happenings

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In this column I am going to tell you about several interesting Web sites which I have come across, as well as keep you up-to-date with news and views which might appeal to you.

Web Sites

1. Help! Help!

In my last column I mentioned the Hunger Site (<http://www.thehungersite.com>) where people could do their bit to help ease the plight of others merely by visiting the Web site and clicking on the Donate Free Food button. Since then several other sites have appeared that work in the same way with site sponsors (who vary over time) paying for the donations. Have a look at Save the Rain Forest (<http://rainforest.care2.com/>) where you can generate a donation to protect rain forests through The Nature Conservancy. Sponsors pay for your donation and so it is 100% free to you. It's worth doing on a daily basis because over the last decade 113 million rain forest acres have been destroyed and of the 3 000 plants that have anti-cancer properties, 70% grow in rain forests. One click saves 12.4 square feet of land – not a lot, but if many people do it then every little helps. There is also another rain forest site (<http://www.therainforestsites.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/RainforestSite>) also supported by the nature conservancy where a similar click donates land. And if you want to help save endangered species then you can choose between the snow leopard, the tiger and the jaguar at <http://bigcats.care2.com/>. Sponsored donations help support the big cat programmes of the Wildlife Conservation Society.

2. Internet demographics

This is mainly intended for those living in the UK, but others might be interested in the UK Internet Survey (<http://www.internetsurvey.co.uk>) which provides some 35 graphs relating to the sex, age, marital status, number of cars, annual income, hours spent online per week and so on of people using the Internet. Visitors to the site are encouraged to complete the survey and tell colleagues about it. The survey is dynamic which means that every time a results page is chosen, the resulting graph is drawn on the fly from the database. The site provides a link to other surveys and marketing resources on the Web.

3. Happy hunting ground for Web pages

Concerned about what will happen to your Web site when you die? Worried that your

personal reminisces or wonderful Web page designs will just disappear after a transient life. Then don't fret – simply get them archived for posterity! The story is told in USA Today (<http://www.usatoday.com/life/cyber/tech/net006.htm>) of septuagenarian Irv Thomas who spent decades hiking across the USA and who details his life experiences on his Web site. A friend wondered what would happen to the site when Irv died and so created AfterLife – a non-profit organization that seeks to archive the personal sites of page owners who've passed on. Server space has been donated and the Web site is being developed (<http://afterlife.org>).

Web News

I've been invited to Cuba a couple of times and was impressed by its vast array of databases and connections to online hosts in other countries. The country is now bringing itself even more up-to-date with the Internet following a 1997 decree which permits wiring the entire country. The first Web site was Cubaweb which was stationed offshore (in Toronto!) since Cuba lacked hosting facilities and the telecommunications infrastructure couldn't handle incoming traffic. Initial success with hotel chains was followed by the weekly organ of the Cuban Communist Party and other news. From there it went to tourism and e-commerce and thence to money transfer. Following Cubaweb's success, the Cubans opened a single gateway in 1997 and the government has since launched four industry-related Internet service providers and a couple of portals. Although a British entrepreneur is investing in Cuban Web developments, and Spanish, German and Canadian companies are free to invest, the continuing US embargo is stifling much investment activity, though there are signs that the stance is easing. Read the Cubaweb story at <http://cnn.com/2000/TECH/computing/04/11/cuba.online.idg/index.html> and visit the English-language version of Cubaweb at http://www.cubaweb.cu/Cub_ing/index.asp.

According to a report in the Daily Telegraph for 4 July 2000 nearly one in five people in Britain uses the Internet from home. The number of people online is over 10 million – up by 2.5 million in the past eight months and more than double the number in France and higher than in Germany, Australia and Sweden (and many other countries too). An average of five hours online is spent per month with the most popular sites being the Internet provider Freeserve and the official site for the BBC. Nearly 12% of users who used the Internet to chat to friends were aged under 14 years and more than half were men who favoured sites relating to computer retailers, investment and entertainment. Women, who made up almost 37% of users, preferred sites relating to health, education, banking and shopping. The research, by MMXI Europe, an Internet monitoring group, which analysed trends in eight countries, showed that the US had the greatest number of Internet users with some 76 million people logging on from both home and work. Japan had over 16 million home users, Canada 12 million, Germany nearly 9 million, Australia 5.5 million, and France and Sweden 4 million.

Distance learning has been around for quite some years – but a new twist is online, interactive piano lessons over the Net (<http://www.cnn.com/2000/SHOWBIZ/Music/07/10/online.piano.reut/index.html>). A Canadian company, OnlineConservatory.com, has been offering instruction over the Internet since January 2000 with a formal launch set for September in such areas as classical, blues, jazz and country. The company plans to target nontraditional piano students at all skills levels and aims to capture 3% of the North American \$2bn annual market for music lessons within two years. The online lessons require a Musical Instruments Digital Interface-compatible piano or keyboard, a PC with sound card, a microphone and speakers, and Internet access. The company's free Melodus software turns the keyboard data into Netspeak and during lessons the image of a piano keyboard is shown with each note struck being highlighted on both the student's and the instructor's screen. Although other sites do

offer piano lessons over the Internet, they lack the benefit of a live teacher (<http://onlineconservatory.com>).

Running out of room on your hard disk and don't want to invest in an upgrade? Want to have automatic backups of your data? Well, a new Internet service aims to solve these problems with a virtual hard disk which offers online file storage. The way it works is that an Internet company sets aside portions of huge hard disks and rents that space to users. The company provides a Web site (or software) which enables the user to transfer files from his own pc to the virtual store and vice versa. Some companies offer limited storage free of charge in the hope that the user will get hooked and want to buy additional space – in the region of \$60 to 300 per year. Apart from the obvious advantages, one is that the user can download the files or data to any PC anywhere with the help of a password. A problem could be security: although normal password mechanisms are applied, the data is not usually encrypted, thus confidential or sensitive data is probably best not stored on such services. There is also no guarantee that the data might not be lost or corrupted – so you may need to back-up your files to several such services to be certain of retrieving a copy when you need it! An overview of these virtual hard disk services together with Web sites, prices and more pros and cons can be found at <http://ptech.wsj.com/archive/report-200005.html>.

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