

Overload: The WWW keeps growing

PC TALK
MIKE WENDLAND
I don't know about you, but I'm getting tired. The information overload on the Internet has become simply unmanageable. I spend two hours a day online just keeping track of new sites. And every night when I log off, there are still a couple dozen more that I don't have the time to click.

Another survey came out this past week that reported the number of Web sites on the Internet is continuing to double every six months. Terrific. But I did come across one site this past week that offers relief and convenience. It's called Alexa (www.alexa.com) and it's named after the fabled and long lost library of Alexandria in ancient Egypt. The first and last attempt to archive and catalogue the collected wisdom of the world. In that same spirit the free, downloadable program you can pick up at the Alexa site tries to do the same thing on the World Wide Web.

For more than a year, the people at Alexa have been copying every Website they come across. As of last month, they had more than seven terabytes of information on more than 500,000 separate Websites. A terabyte is a million megabytes.

Know how big that is? Consider that all of the books in the average branch of a public library contain about three terabytes of data.

That massive Internet archive they've collected is used by the Alexa program to provide relevant recommendations on where to go next on the Web. They call it "intelligent navigation."

The download installs with just a mouseclick and thereafter, it lies at the bottom of your screen whenever you're on the Web. The Alexa toolbar is ready to tell you who owns the site you're visiting, other similar sites you may want to check out, and how popular the site is... or how many hits it receives.

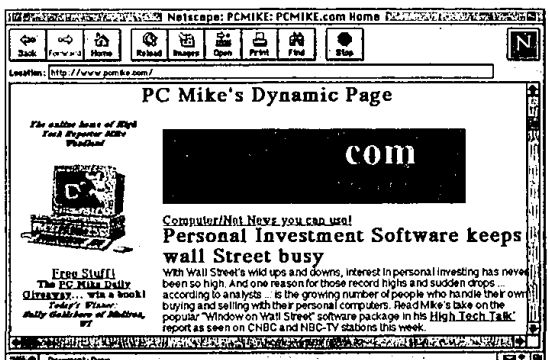
There's also an instant messaging system that allows users to communicate with other Alexa people, similar to America Online's Buddy notification system or ICQ from Mirabilis (www.mirabilis.com).

My favorite Alexa feature is an instantly accessible link to Encyclopædia Britannica (www.eb.com) reference tools, like the dictionary and thesaurus. You can also get to the online edition of the encyclopedia but... warning... they charge for total access, though Alexa users are offered a free trial subscription.

Alexa only works with Windows 95, Macintosh and Win 3.1 versions won't be available until mid-1998.

Let's surf the Net...

Have you seen Sidewalk? There isn't a Detroit-version yet but the giant Microsoft Corp. is betting millions that there's a big market for online local infor-



PCMike: You can check out Wendland's Web site at www.pcmike.com.

mation and entertainment Websites. There's about a dozen sites for various cities online right now (www.sidewalk.com) and they all look remarkably similar. The emphasis is on trendy eateries, art exhibits, movies and culture. Microsoft expects to lose money on the sites for several years. But it has the deep pockets to stake out its cyberspace turf till the people come clicking.

My sense, though, is that Sidewalk is focused a bit too narrowly. My experience is that people want to go to a site, get what they need and then move on, not to sit at the screen and read long takes on the culture.

People will go online to get news. We see a doubling of the hourly hits on the WDIV site (www.wdiv.com) whenever there's a major breaking story. And when a severe storm is forecast, we'll get thousands of extra hits an hour as people check out our Doppler 4 radar.

I like what I see with Sidewalk but if Microsoft wants it to really catch on, they've got to have more that interests a wide audience, including up-to-the-minute news, traffic, weather and information briefs that instantly let people know what's happening in their community without having to go to a TV or radio.

Check out Live Cameras. It amazes me how many people will log on to look at a live camera. Makes no difference how boring the picture is, I guess there's something reassuring in knowing the sun really is shining somewhere. Probably the most famous is the Fish Cam from Netscape (<http://www1.netscape.com/fishcam/fishcam.html>) which gets 90,000 hits a day.

Since then, people have put cameras in their offices, on the office coffee/coffee.html) and even in the bedroom of an enterprising woman (www.jennileam.org).

Any search engine looking for "live cameras" will bring you plenty of hits but if you want the largest set of links to live video cameras I've found, check out Tommy's List of Live Cameras (<http://chill.r168.com/ozone/cam.htm>) kept by an avid Net enthusiast named Tommy Rene. His site, by the way, has racked up over a million hits.

How about Live Audio? This fascination with using the net to eavesdrop is also seen in the use of audio. There's now a site that broadcasts live police calls from four different cities (www.policecam.com), live conversations between air traffic controllers and pilots at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (<http://www.audionet.com/simulife/>) and live radio and TV news headlines, updated throughout the day (<http://www.dailybriefing.com/>).

The best site I've found to keep track of live audio is called AudioNet (www.audionet.com). They broadcast live baseball games, press conferences, even speeches from trade shows. Like I said at the start of this column, there's a lot out there. Stay in touch...

Mike Wendland covers the Internet for NBC-TV NewsChannel stations across the country and can be seen locally on WDIV-TV 4 Detroit.

His "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday afternoons on WXYT-Radio AM1270 and he is the author of a series of Internet books (call 888-222-1866). You can reach him through his website at <http://www.pcmike.com>

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Heather Medical. The company has grown from Schellig's kitchen table, to an office in Rochester with an art staff capable of producing 1,000 units per month.

Schellig displayed her new line of canes, which are also available with velvet, lace and denim coverings, last week at the Med-trade '97 show in New Orleans.

Healthcare publishing executive Paisley Lynne Stevens, was so impressed with Schellig's product that she offered to show the canes in her booth at the show.

"This is the most exciting and promising ambulatory aid to enter the market this year," Stevens said. "It's the first time Stevens Publications has endorsed a new product."

Schellig's products banish the institutional gray and aluminum look with brass derby and faux ivory handles, cane coverings and colorful patterns from dusty rose to plum toast to basic black. They cost just a few dollars more than the institutional variety, Schellig said.

The company also offers quad-base canes, adult and youth stationary walkers, forearm crutches, bedside commodes, walker and wheel chair organizers and an ambulatory harness.

All products feature an artistic flare, such as flowers, photographic images, sports, pets and holiday designs, coupled with a newly-developed powder coating technique that prevents chipping.

In her career as nurse, nurse educator and senior administrator at Mt. Clemens General Hospital, Schellig said she strived toward bringing dignity and self-esteem to the disabled. And, she hopes her new canes will help



A decorated cane

provide that for people, like they did for her, when she went out in public with a decorated cane, she felt better about herself.

"Not only did people respond to me more positively, but the canes actually created a bridge between them that put each person at ease," Schellig said adding that the canes broke the shroud of "handicap" and made her more approachable.

And she hopes to kids will soon feel the same when a bridge between her line of children's canes, crutches and walkers.

"Being the center of attention because you have something really cool is a new experience for many disabled kids," she said.

Further information on the Heather Medical line is available at (248) 608-1934, or by mail at: 1128 N. Main St., Rochester, MI 48307.

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five years, most recently serving as Sales Manager.

George Sepety of Farmington Hills joined Troy-based Ford & Earl Associates as vice president and director of graphic consulting. Sepety is the former president of the Comark Group, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Franco Public Relations Group of Detroit.

Kelle Smith of Royal Oak was promoted to associate media director from media supervisor at D'Arcy Masius Benton &

Bowles/Detroit. Smith joined the agency in 1995 as a media supervisor and was placed in a dual role as an account supervisor earlier this year.

David Trott of Bingham Farms, president and managing attorney of Bingham Farms-based Trott & Trott, P.C., was selected to Crain's "Detroit Business" 1997 "40 Under 40" list. The winners, all under age 40, were chosen based on their initiative, drive, scope of achievement and community involvement.

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