

Even cyberspace observes Christmas



PC
MIKE
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The spirit of Christmas is very much alive in cyberspace. I first started writing about the Internet and Christmas Web sites back in 1994 when the net was in its infancy. Back then, connection speeds were agonizingly slow — 28.8 bps if you were lucky. But one of my observations then was that "the optimism of Christmas is exactly the sort of stuff that permeates cyberspace, where dreams really can come true."

I wasn't thinking of e-commerce and this incredible boom in online shopping that we're now seeing. I only wish I was that perceptive. No, I was just waxing about that mystical way the net can turn the emotional and exciting into virtual reality. For the net is a place for dreamers and anticipation. So is Christmas. And as the net has grown since those early days, so have Christmas Web sites. Last year the AltaVista search site returned links to a little more than 229,000 webpages mentioning Christmas and Santa Claus.

This year the number of pages is 690,229.

So what follows is far from an exhaustive study. To come up with my recommendations, I've only been able to check out maybe a hundred of them.

My hope in doing this is that parents will sit down at the computer with their children and spend some quality time together dreaming and anticipating as they visit my selections for this year.

But be patient. Some of these sites are getting more than a half a million visitors a day and making the connection during peak traffic times can be a bit tricky.

Here then, are my Christmas Web site recommendations for 1999:

Santa Net (<http://www.santa.net>) - Year after year, the Santa Net Web site just gets bigger and more fun. There are all sorts of interactive things to do. Decorate a tree. Find Santa's sleigh. Send him an e-mail.

North Pole for Kids (<http://www.northpole4kids.com/>) - Like several other sites, this one claims to be Santa's "official" site. But the depth of mate-

rial offered here is substantial. Creativity and fun are the themes for the many family-oriented activities games, letters and from Santa, pictures and artwork kids can scan in and send to the site for posting and lots of other wonderful Christmas stuff.

Radio Santa Claus (<http://www.netradio.fi/test/santa/eng/eng.html>) - You have to visit this Web site, which is based in Finland. Be sure to listen to the RealAudio story from Santa, in a thick Finnish accent.

Christmas Around the World (<http://christmas.com/world-view/>) - Part of a larger site, this feature offers a clickable tour of some 200 different nations and regions of the world and how different cultures celebrate Christmas.

Santa Tracking sites - There are many sites which will "track" Santa's delivery on Christmas Eve. Most won't be fully operational until midnight, but you can watch Santa's progress around the world. Some are quite involved with colorful graphics and interactivity and require free little Java programs you download right to your PC. The three I like the best are the Norad tracking page (<http://www.noradsanta.org/>), Santa Tracking.com (<http://www.santatracker.com/>), and Claus.com (<http://www.claus.com/>).

Religious Christmas (http://www.execcp.com/tmuth/st_john/xmas/main.htm) - You need to be sure to check out this site, just to have the proper perspective. This is a Web site where you can read the original Christmas story from Luke's Gospel, and get lyrics to Christmas hymns, read Christmas dramas and look at a collection of photos from the little town where it all started 2,000 years ago — from where it all began.

Here's a few more of the Net's more creative Santa sites:

"North Pole.Com" (<http://www.the-north-pole.com/>)
"Mr. Claus.Com" (<http://mrclaus.com/>)

"Santa.Com" (<http://www.santa.com/>)
"Yes, Virginia, there IS a Santa Claus." (<http://www.barricksinsurance.com/virginia.html>)

Mike Wendland reports about computers and the Internet for NBC-television stations coast-to-coast. His radio show is heard every weekend on **TeaRadio 1270, WXYT**. You can reach Mike through his Web site at www.pcmike.com

Storytelling used in business setting

Project Innovations, a Farmington Hills-based meeting facilitation company, is using the ancient art of storytelling to help businesses implement change, improve processes, solve problems and develop trust. The company has explored the hidden relationship between business and the arts and is working with clients to incorporate the two into their strategies.

Project Innovations recommends the use of "strategic storytelling" throughout communications to help employees see

and understand an event or expectation. Employees are encouraged to clearly and dramatically share a story that describes a core value that is critical to the success of the company, such as leadership, integrity or service. As employees share their personal stories, values take on visual living descriptions; and vital bonds are formed.

"Used strategically, storytelling is an essential tool for bridging the gap between people of different authority levels and

personalities," said Michelle Napier-Dunnings, senior facilitator for Project Innovations. "The process is particularly important when planning a company's future direction, developing long-term strategies and forming new teams."

As more and more corporations site creativity and innovation as requirements in this fast-paced business environment, it seems that some of these child-like employee characteristics would be in high demand. Napier-Dunnings is convinced that

activities such as storytelling, creating collages and putting thoughts into pictures are a few of the keys to effective corporate communications.

Project Innovations is a meeting facilitation company formed in 1992 with offices in Farmington Hills and Lansing. The company specializes in training and leadership development for organizations throughout the United States. Visit www.projectinnovations.com or call (248) 478-7577.

BUSINESS MARKETPLACE

New 7-Eleven

7-Eleven recently celebrated the grand opening of a new store in Westland with ribbon cutting ceremonies featuring Scott Veldhuis, Economic Development Director of Westland.

Boost to business

Papa Romano's, a Farmington Hills-based pizza business, in cooperation with McIlhenny Company, the maker of Tabasco Sauce, is echoing the highly-successful "Who Wants to Be a

Millionaire," television show in their radio and TV advertisements. In radio spots running through December, a Regis Philbin sound-alike asks a contestant the million-dollar question.

"Other than traditional toppings, what is the number-one condiment Americans put on their pizza?" The answer is Tabasco Sauce. Franchisees are reporting to be receiving positive feedback from customers who receive a free two-liter of Pepsi

and an 1/8 oz. bottle of Tabasco Sauce with their pizza order.

Money raised

Hundreds of employees at nine operating units of the Brooks Family of Companies, including Ekstrom Industries, Inc. of Farmington Hills, raised \$25,000 for needy neighborhood elementary schools. As estimated 5,000 school children are benefiting from this "Adopt-a-School" program, a corporate giving program that celebrated the Brooks

Company's 124th anniversary in 1998.

Supporting safe driving

American Speedy Printing Centers in southeast Michigan area teaming up with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) to sponsor the 13th annual "One On For Safety — Red Ribbon Campaign." The campaign officially runs from Thanksgiving to New Years Day.

HAND Warmers

Sample up to 100% off the regular price. This offer is available while supplies last. See store for details. *Excludes alcohol, tobacco, and other restricted items. *Not valid on already discounted items. *See store for details. *Offer valid on the following items: *Excludes alcohol, tobacco, and other restricted items. *Not valid on already discounted items. *See store for details.

Kohl's

Registered trademark, US Patent #5,784,720 and other patents pending. Worldwide Licensees. MGI Limited 310-641-0000 ext. 228

That's more like it.

BUSINESS CALENDAR

Items from the Observerland area for the Business Calendar can be sent to: Observer Newspaper, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, MI 48150 attention: Business Calendar.

WED, DEC. 15

AAR INVESTOR MEETING

The AAR Eastern Michigan Chapter will host J. Michael Lipper who will give an overview on mutual fund analysis. Registration will begin at 6:30 p.m. and the program starts at 7 p.m. at the Bloomfield Township Library (Lone Pine Road and Telegraph). Cost is \$15 for members; \$20, non-members. Contact Cookie Corej at (248) 646-9509.

BUSINESS NETWORK INT'L

Business Network International's regular meeting is from 7:30 a.m. The Laurel Park Chapter gathers at Archie's Restaurant, 30471 Plymouth Road in Livonia. The Metro Livonia chapter meets at St. Maurice Catholic Church, 32801 Lyndon in Livonia. For additional information call BNI at (610) 323-3800.

THUR, DEC. 16

BUSINESS PLAN WORKSHOP

Preparing a business plan, business plan workbook, sources of help and example of a business plan will be offered. Class runs from 8:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. Cost is \$40 per person at the McNamara Federal Building, 477 Michigan Avenue, Room 895 in Detroit. Call SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) to register (313) 226-7947.

FRI, DEC. 17

BUSINESS NETWORK INT'L

Business Network International's regular meetings is from 7:30 a.m. The Livonia chapter meets at Senate Koney Island on Plymouth Road near Stark. Call the BNI office at (810) 323-3800 for information.

TUE, DEC. 21

PRE BUSINESS WORKSHOP

Basic business requirements for starting and operating a business will be discussed in addition to money management, business planning and sources of information. Class runs from 8:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. Cost is \$40 per person at Detroit Edison Headquarters Complex, 2000 Second Ave. off Bagley in Detroit Room 508 W.C.B. Call SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) to register (313) 226-7947.

JAN. 10, 2000

CANTON BPW

The Canton Business & Professional Women is part of a national organization promoting equity for all women in the workplace to achieve goals through advocacy, education and information. Locally we meet the second Monday of every month at the Roman Forum on Ford Road in Canton. Our business meeting is from 5:30-6:10 p.m., speaker/dinner from 6:15-7:30 p.m. Call Clarice Killian at (734) 981-2572 for information. The guest speaker is Vicki Bonner, career technician at Plymouth-Salem High School, who will discuss mentoring and career shadowing.