

Web sites can spread a lot of misinformation

People have always had great imaginations, coming up with amazing stories to explain things. They created mythic animals with great names like centaur, or Cyclops, or Pegasus.

If there were a creature that snuck into homes, spewing lies and half truths, stealing the attention of all the inhabitants, they would have called it something like Infogaukus, or The Infidion.

We call it the Internet. The Internet will go down as one of the great inventions the earth has ever seen.

The whole world is linked, and as such we can become closer than ever, as a worldwide community. (We can pretty much see how that's going.)

Also, we can shop easier than ever. With just a click of a few hundred buttons, you can purchase a shirt and have it in just a few days, when in the past you would have handed a clerk a card and taken the shirt home immediately, while helping the local economy.

Of course, the Internet is still in its very beginnings...what TV was in its Milton Berle stage. It should improve.

Just like TV did. (Uh oh!)

WATCH FOR MISINFORMATION

The problem I have with the Internet would be the serious levels of misleading, half true, or incorrect information people stumble across.

Just about everyone who deals with the public has dealt with a person who's an expert after reading a Web site or two.

I'll bet every physician hears from patients who claim they have malaria, because they have fever, and that's one of the symptoms.

Or that the drug they were given is dangerous because some guy who was taking it wrote on-line that his hair fell out.

Vets deal with much the same thing. Too many times I've had a client tell me they looked online, and saw a Web site that suggested that something like feeding your dog boiled carrots is better than dog food.

Hey, if someone wrote it down, it must be so.

That concept's not true, of course. Just ask the New York Times.

Remember, there are more clowns with Web sites than with red noses. Be careful what you believe.

I break down the misinformation people find on the Internet into four groups: Misinformation, Misunderstanding, Anecdotal mis-information, and Hokus.

A client came into my clinic and told me I was killing his dog, because I had put his greyhound on a certain heartworm pill.

He had read on a Web site that that pill killed greyhounds. This could be an example of one of the first two types, either misinformation or misunderstanding. Turns out it was misinformation, by an owner whose dog threw up when taking the heartworm pill.

This misinformation may stop someone from getting the all-important protection of heartworm preventive, then we'll have to treat for heartworm disease, which is quite dangerous.

Food ingredients make for great misunderstandings. Trying to compare the levels of nutrients of one diet to another can make less sense to me than firing your basketball coach after two 50-win seasons. Still, lay people can look at the contents and know one food is better, often with diarrhea, vomiting or worse as a result.

Anecdotal misinformation can be related to seat belts. How many times have you heard from someone that they don't wear their seat belt because their Uncle Fred was thrown from this car in an accident, and landed safely on a pile of hay?

The person who does better without a seat belt is the insolent incident.

Seat belts save lives. A certain pain killer helps make pets feel better when they are hurting. A favorite of mine was a Web site once that said that this drug "killed my 17-year-old Labrador." No, sir, being 17 killed your 17-year-old Labrador. Remember, if it's a story, you should take it with a grain of salt.

Dr. Brad Davis is the medical director for the ICA of Garden City, 2055 River Road, Garden City, MI 49335. Feel free to write him there with questions and comments. He is also one of the hosts of the nationally syndicated radio show Animal Talk. Visit the web site at www.AnimalTalkRadio.com. You can send E-mail questions or comments to Questions@animaltalkradio.com.

GARDEN

FROM PAGE C1

Rhea Bertelsen said of the impatiens.

(Plant double impatiens where it is easy to pick up their fallen petals, she said.)

The limestone edging, which the Bertelsens installed, gives a lift to the bed.

Among the plantings around the deck are pink roses, gray-blue Russian sage, yellow heliopsis (false sunflowers), pink phlox and columbine. The phlox was a housewarming gift from a friend. The columbine was started from a plant obtained at a Troy garden exchange several years ago.

A tall trumpet vine, entwined around an iron frame in a barrel, adds a nice vertical touch to the scene.

OTHER DELIGHTS

A variety of delights and sur-



Two blue hostas sit among various plants just off the front porch. Rhea Bertelsen says this space is one of favorite "combination" garden areas.

prises can be found throughout the grounds.

In the shade of a white flowering crab apple tree, an Oregon grape holly evergreen presents bright orange flowers in the spring and bluish berries in the fall. Barren strawberry, "Lip Stick" shows tiny rose-red flowers under a densely rooted weeping cherry tree.

Green and white euonymus

"Gaiety" drapes around outdoor meters and sprinklers, forming a decorative cover over such mechanisms.

Combinations of gold and blue — in honor of the University of Michigan, which both Bertelsen children are attending — are placed around the garden.

Favorite annuals include salvia, "Crystal Palace" and

"Cambridge Blue" lobelia, alysium and dusty miller. Lavender, primroses, sedum, baby's breath, coral-bells, poppies, balloon flowers and strawberries are among other features.

Bertelsen, who attributes her interest in gardening to her French-Canadian heritage (her family had farms in Windsor in 1760), doesn't do meticulous, formal planning for the garden.


"If it works, fine; if it doesn't, dig it up, put it in a different spot," she said.

The Bertelsens use compost from Troy's recycling center, and cocoa mulch.

Rhea Bertelsen often buys a particular plant in groups of three, putting them in three different spots to see where the plant grows the best.


"I don't mind a little maintenance work," she said. "Be willing to go out and replant. We have such great garden stores, so many nice choices."

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