

Sort the real from the fake on net

PC TALK
The woman on the other end of my telephone was livid. "What kind of a pervert are you, anyway?" she screamed at me. "Sending us to a porn page!"
I had absolutely no idea what she was talking about. She kept yelling anyway.
"My 10-year-old daughter went to that site. You ought to be ashamed!"
It took some doing but finally, I persuaded her to back up and explain herself. It seems she had heard me give out the address of a Website on my radio show and had gone to the computer with her daughter to check it out.

The net address I gave out was for the White House, www.whitehouse.gov, the official Internet home for information about the executive branch and the Clinton administration.
"You can even download RealAudio files of 'Socks,' the nation's First Cat, meowing," I told my radio listeners.

So the woman and her daughter headed to the site. But they typed in the wrong address. I'm not going to give you the exact URL (the Universal Resource Location, or Internet address) my angry caller entered because I don't want to send more traffic to the site. Suffice it to say that the address was very close to the correct one.

But what she and her daughter found when their screen filled with the images from the bogus White House site was a page filled with pornography.

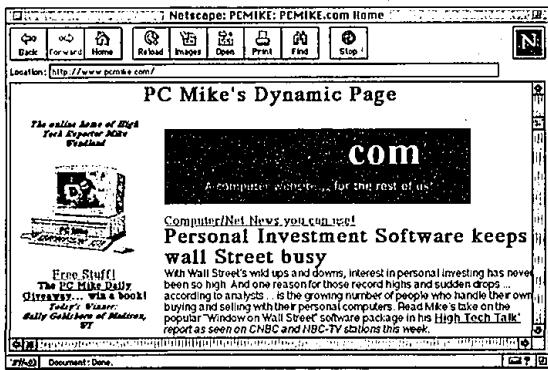
It's not the only such knock-off. The porn pushers have done the same thing with a site run by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The real site, www.nasa.gov, is a treasure-trove of fascinating information and images about space exploration and a favorite of millions of Net surfers. Kids use it to research school projects, space buffs follow the details of shuttle flights, astronomers download photos and the curious find plenty to ponder in the cosmos.

Precisely because the site gets so much traffic, some pervert registered a slightly different URL and posted a porn site.

Such opportunism may be deplorable but it is understandable. Hits on the Web, translate into money and unscrupulous electronic wheeler-dealers will take advantage of the system whenever they can. Indeed, in the case of adult sites and porn pages, there is a proposal that would require all of them to end with domain names of ".xxx" so no one, will mistakenly end up with offensive material my simply mistyping a URL.

But the problem of the knock-off sites illustrates a much more important problem plaguing the Internet these days. Namely, just because it's online doesn't mean it's necessarily so. There is a lot of fake material on the net masquerading as genuine. There's a lot of bad information posing as fact.

Last week, a self-described "anti-censorship" site called "Rotten Dot Com" (www.rotten.com) published a photo purporting to show Princess Diana as she lay dying in the back of a smashed Mercedes. The image was



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

a fake and Rotten Dot Com later admitted that it knew it was a bogus picture before putting it online. But at least one newspaper, France-Soir, did publish the doctored photo and across the Net, people debated it as if it were real.

Last spring, former newsmen Pierre Salinger held a news conference claiming he had uncovered new evidence that TWA Flight 800 had been shot down by a missile. Salinger's "evidence" turned out to be highly dubious postings that had circulated on the Internet among conspiracy buffs for months that he, somehow, accepted as fact.

And last month, a self-styled "online columnist" named Matt Drudge was sued for libel by a high-ranking government official because Drudge... who proudly boasts that he has no journalism training and no editor... wrote a gossip online item in an AOL story that the official had been accused of spousal abuse. It was completely untrue and Drudge later admitted he was snookered by political rivals of the official. But there it was on the Net, in Drudge's column anyway.

If professional journalists and online columnists can so easily be tricked, how does the average Net user recognize the real?

The problem is that on the Internet, many of the traditional "gatekeepers" are gone. On the Internet, anyone with a modicum of computer skills can be a publisher. Some of the slickest sites I've seen are run by scammers. I interviewed a convicted conman a few months back who swore to me that the Web has become his favorite hunting ground.

In the online world, there are few standards for integrity. That will hopefully change as the new media continues to evolve into mass media. But until that happens let me suggest the following five guidelines for evaluating the reliability of online information.

1. Don't believe anything you read online that doesn't clearly identify the person or organization behind the site provide a real address (not a post office box) and telephone number to contact a real person. An E-Mail address is not enough.

2. Beware of putting too much value in the content of any site, no matter how "professional" it may appear, that has an address with a tilde in it. A tilde is the "-" symbol and it indicates a personal page and while it may or may not provide good information, you need to judge that information by the credibility of the person posting it.

3. Don't just accept the facts you find on a website at face value. Make sure they are attributed, that the sources for data are reputable and that the sources are clearly identifiable and that the sources are reliable and reliable.

4. Treat pages with obvious mistakes with skepticism. Not that professionals don't mess up, but poor grammar and words that are misspelled indicate a general sloppiness. An author who is careless with the language is probably careless with the facts.

5. Recognize the difference between opinion and fact in newsgroups. There are 26,000 newsgroups on the Internet and they are a lot of fun to read and handy for exchanging information, tips and suggestions. But the advice and information is no more reliable than what you'd get on a streetcorner from the average man on the street.

There are, of course, many reliable sites from reliable news and information organizations. Websites run by newspapers, TV stations and networks, online news sites like MSNBC (www.msnbc.com) and CNN (www.cnn.com) are as reliable as their parent organizations. So are many commercial and governmental sites.

But as a general rule, if you aren't sure who is telling you something online and how they got the information... check it out.

Mike Wendland covers the Internet for NBC-TV and can be seen locally on WDTN-TV4. Detroit's "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday afternoons on WXYT-Radio AM1270. You can reach him through his website at <http://www.pcmike.com>.

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the Gross National Product and half of the total payroll of the United States. Approximately 90 percent of all American businesses are family owned or controlled, and offer tremendous influence to our national economy.

Frank Cardimen, president of the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce, added that the family unit has become a major business center.

"Generally speaking, in 1957, there were about 57 million jobs in the United States and today, there are about 122 million jobs. As many as 85 percent of them were created by small family businesses," Cardimen said.

Research from OU CFB indicates that because many of these businesses started after World War II, more family enterprises face succession now, with more wealth to be transferred, than at any other time in U.S. history. Yet, less than 30 percent of these companies will successfully make the transition to the second generation and less than half of these will survive to the third generation.

The OU CFB is dedicated to helping more family businesses survive the transition and remain viable.

The Oct. 9 workshop offered by Upton is one of an ongoing quarterly series to support the success of family-owned businesses.

Upton, recognized for her work in entrepreneurship and family business by countless national organizations, teaches courses at Baylor University in the graduate and undergraduate levels in the business school. She also facilitates the family business retreat program.

In 1996, Upton received a Leavey Award for Excellence in Private Enterprise Education and the Southwestern Dean's Achievement Award for Program Innovation in family business.

In 1995, she was recognized as the Entrepreneurship Educator of the Year by the United States Association of Small Businesses.

"The dynamics of the family firm and the family interact through a complex relationship, and of communication styles and decision-making patterns... through the workshop, we will develop a number of tools, or strategies, to help family businesses workers manage these relationships more productively."

Dr. Nancy Upton
Family Business Specialist

and Entrepreneurship. The Kauffman Foundation recognized her contribution to the field of family business by awarding her as Top Ten Finalist Entrepreneurship Educator of the Year.

Upton served as director of the John F. Baugh Center for Entrepreneurship from 1994 to 1997. Under her direction, the center was recognized by Success Magazine as one of the top 25 programs in the United States and by US News and World Report as one of the top five.

Prior to joining the faculty at Baylor, she spent 10 years in business, including eight years in the tourism industry in Hawaii, Spain, Portugal and England.

The "Dynamics of a Family Business" seminar meets 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 9 at the Troy Marriott.

Registration fee is \$50 for members of the OU CFB or the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce and \$75 for the general public.

To register or for more information, call Patricia Kish, associate director for the Oakland University Center for Family Business, at (248) 370-4513.

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Mark Shaevesky of Bloomfield Hills was named in the seventh edition of The Best Lawyers in America. He is a corporate law partner with Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn. He was selected through a peer evaluation process.

Michael Talovich of Orionville has been named senior vice president and brand marketing part-



Talovich

ner for the Firebird and Montana brands at D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles in Detroit. He joined the firm in 1984 and has worked on a number of accounts. He was promoted to senior vice president in 1994.

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