

Some take Web sites too seriously

Mittra from page B4



MIKE WENDLAND

Everybody has a Webpage these days. It's almost a status symbol with some people. And every company, big and small, now seemingly has an online presence. But a whole lot of the sites are nothing but self-serving puffery.

Have you noticed? So... wanna have some fun with those who take their Web sites much too seriously?

A reader named Linda Burns sent along a great way to have fun and play a harmless online prank.

It involves a site that turns any Webpage into a Valley Girl spoof.

When you go to the Valley Girl site, it will have a box that says, "Enter the URL here."

Type in the URL, or Internet address of some site you're familiar with, like, say, your employer's if you want to get some office giggles going. Or, if you want, try www.pcmike.com, as Linda did.

Then watch what happens. This page changes it to a site filled with Valley Girl-isms. When my site was processed through the Valley Girl translator, it changed from "the online home of High Tech Reporter Mike Wendland" to "the on-dweebnet home of High Tech

Stud Puppy Wendland."

Hmmm. Try it with your own site, you'll see what I mean. Don't worry, it's just temporary. It doesn't really change anything on the server. It just looks like it does.

You can even e-mail a copy of the site off to friends.

First, go to the valley girl-type site. The address is: <http://www.computerinment/Vall-yURL/>. Then, type in any URL you choose.

"I typed in some real stuffy ones," says Linda, "and suddenly those stuffy sites become very humorous. You'll have to try it to appreciate how funny it is."

Other fun sites

Here are some other fun sites readers, radio listeners and TV viewers sent along this week:

• **Coupon savings** - (www.supermarkets.com). This is a great way to save at the supermarket. Just like the coupons you get at the newspaper, these online versions can be printed out and then clipped. The version I checked had \$35 in coupon savings for every day products.

Besides national discounts, just type in your zipcode and you'll get a list of local supermarkets offering even more savings.

• **Online stories** - (<http://www.digitalstoryteller.com/YITL/>) - If you're into photojournalism, this is a site you'll

come back to many times. It's maintained by the National Press Photographers Association and besides their often stunning pictures and stories, they share insights and feelings in diary-form as they carry out their projects.

• **Online bookmarks** - (<http://bookmarks.com>) - If you use a lot of different computers, you can save all your favorite sites in one place.

• **CyberFair** - (www.org.computerinment/Vall-yURL/) - This site is run by the Global Schoolnet Foundation and you'll be absolutely amazed at how kids and schools are using the World Wide Web. Playing off the traditional science fair, Global Schoolnet hold a cyberfair for schools around the world. They made up Webpages and community service uses for the Net. This site displays the winners.

• **Thesis and term paper templates** - (<http://www.microsoft.com/word/theses/theses/wdthesis.asp>) - The government may be mad at

Microsoft but for a lot of harried students right now, this site is a godsend.

These Microsoft Word 97 research templates save students time by providing widely accepted formats for title pages, bibliographies, abstracts, and other kinds of supporting pages necessary in formal academic writing.

So, if you or the student in your family would rather concentrate on developing ideas than stressing out about the mechanics of presentation, be sure to take advantage of this free download.

• **DOJ vs Microsoft** - (<http://www.usdoj.gov/atr/cases/3/micros/1763.htm>) - On the other hand, if you stay awake nights worrying about the evil Microsoft empire, this site will add fuel to your fears. It contains the complete 52-page text of the Department of Justice antitrust complaint against the software giant.

Mike Wendland covers the Internet for NBC-TV's Newshour and has been locally on WDIV-TV4, Detroit. His "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday and Sunday afternoons on WXYT-Radio AM1270. His latest book "The Complete No Geek Speak Guide to the Internet" is available in book stores or through his website at <http://www.pcmike.com>

By the way, it might interest you to know how a father of standard deviation Abraham de Moivre started an experiment that eventually led to the calculation of standard deviation. This information is presented in the accompanying box.

Since 1970, Standard & Poor's 500 index has recorded a standard deviation of 16.9, meaning that 95 percent of the time, its annual return should fall within two times the standard deviation of 16.3 percent above and below the mean annual return of 14.2 percent, or from -18.4 percent to 46.8 percent. Put differently, assuming a normal distribution of S&P results, in about five years per cent the annual return should be more than 46.8 percent or less than -18.4 percent. Of course, past performance is not a guarantee of future results.

As a potential investor, you must ask yourself if this is the kind of variability, or risk, that you can stomach and survive. If you can, then stick around, enjoy the wild ride, and hope to get the average return as a reward.

But should you despair if you can't handle this much volatility? Not necessarily. You can always find a fund with a lower standard deviation. It would give you a smoother ride, but you would also

settle for a lower return as part of the less risky packet.

It should be pointed out here that it's not hard to find standard deviation's shortcomings. A fund operating in a stable sector can have a low standard deviation for years. However, if that sector's conditions suddenly tank, the fund can follow. That happened in 1994, when interest rates leveled and low-risk mortgage funds collapsed. Still, standard deviation offers a sound way to compare funds that operate in the same sector and to evaluate funds across different sectors.

Let us now turn to an appealing alternative. Over the long haul, some tortoiseshells have been skilful enough to keep pace with the hare. Such a result is achieved by using what has widely come to be known as the Asset Allocation Strategy. By diversifying between stocks, bonds, and money market instruments, in the long run, comparable returns can be expected to be achieved by lowering the portfolio's standard deviation.

Is that important to you? It is, if you don't like volatility and believe, as most investors do, that we have already entered a new era of more short-term volatility. And that is the compelling reason to pay close attention to standard deviation.

'Jobzilla' from page B4

putting more people to work than at any time in our history. As the Governor said this morning, Michigan is Jobzilla."

For the 37th consecutive month, Michigan's unemployment rate was below the national rate. April's national rate was 4.3 percent. "Our unemployment rate has been lower than the national rate for more than three years," Rothwell noted, "a record that indicates we are not riding the wave of the economy,

but helping create it."

Michigan's expanding economy has generated a high demand for construction workers, even during the normally slow winter months.

April, which usually is a strong construction month, again showed a surge in construction jobs, leading the state's overall climb in industry jobs. The state's seasonally adjusted industry jobs totaled 4,518,000 in April.

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Cowboy from page B4

team hits the sack tucking themselves into sleeping bags laid out under the stars.

Day two dawned with a hearty breakfast and a trip to the corral where the teams are introduced to their horses. They spend the morning learning to saddle and bridle their horse and taking short rides in the yard. After lunch they saddle up and head out for a two hour ride across the ranch in preparation for day three's journey.

The assignment the next day is to move 50 to 100 cattle across 12 miles. Saddling up with food and supplies following in a covered wagon the team begins their cattle run.

The herd moves at about two miles an hour and they do eight miles that first day," Cummins said. "Then they are fed. We supply all the meals and do the cooking."

That evening the team trainer can do an assessment of the team and the events of the day pointing out what he has observed in management styles.

The main idea is for the group to go out and become a real team. The guy that's the boss in the office may not be able to be the leader of this cattle drive, Cummins said. Another guy that sits in a lower level in the office may just know how to handle the cattle and the trainer will explain to the team that it's a good thing.

"The beauty of this is that it's totally foreign to anything that they do in the office and yet from the team aspects of it this is exactly what they do in corporations. They have to work together or it will fall apart," Cummins said.

The team has to know how to get the herd moving, keep them together, push from the back but manage to keep the cows in the middle of the trail. All of that takes cooperation from every person on the equid.

"It's basically like the movie 'City Slickers' they had to pull together as a team or they would have lost the herd," Cummins said.

and I think that bonds these groups together because the trip is something they will always remember."

The cost of the unique team building venture is \$24,150 for a group of 10 and that includes a trainer. The tab is \$18,100 for a group of 10 people without the trainer.

Cummins said private organizations making the trip for pleasure aren't apt to be interested in booking the trainer. He expects his first corporate client to leave within the next 30 days for their adventure out west.

This is such an expensive program and there's so much involved with travel and training that I felt that when a group is

spending this kind of money we needed a strong team building company behind us and that's where John came in," Cummins said.

Currently devoting much of his time to the Chisholm Trail project, Cummins anticipates the adventure costing \$1.7 million.

If the Chisholm ride is successful, Cummins plans to hit the Western Trail in the year 2000. It runs from Fort Worth, Texas to Ogallala, Nebraska.

"Doing all this isn't work to me," he said. "It's like living a dream."

For information about The Great American Cowboy Company outings call (248)879-3093.

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