

Police using Internet to nab pedophiles



MIKE WENDLAND

Instead of a single topic this week, it's time to catch up on the latest trends and happenings involving the Internet and computer world. I've found that so much happens in technology that the only way to keep current is to devote a column from time to time to "tech tidbits." Here's the latest:

PC TALK
The hottest beat in cyberspace - Police agencies across the country are forming elite, undercover units charged with surfing cyberspace to identify and nab sexual predators. The latest arrests came over the past week here in Michigan. Oakland County officials nabbed a 34-year-old married man who showed up at a motel thinking he was going to meet an underage girl for sex. Wayne County deputies busted a 32-year-old man who thought he would be having sex with a 14-year-old girl he met online.

In both cases, the suspects were soliciting and arranging meetings with undercover cops, who were in online chat rooms posing as young girls.

Net growth continues - The Internet is growing at a rate of 36 percent a year and shows no signs of slowing down, according to the latest study by Nielsen media research, the same company that measures TV viewing. Nielsen estimates that 79 million people over the age of 16 are on the Internet in the U.S. and Canada.

Net stocks to surge over holiday excitement? I'm no investment expert or skill for stock picks but I'm betting we're going to see some soaring prices for the big Internet stocks. The reason is a spate of glowing new surveys predicting huge increases in E-Commerce, or online shopping. The latest study comes from Dell Computer (which, by the way, sells \$6 million a day on its Web site). Dell had a study commissioned that indicates 43 percent of all those online (now estimated at 72 million in the U.S.) plan to shop online for holiday gifts this year. That's a whopping 330 percent increase over the 1997 holiday season when only 10 percent bought from Internet sites.

Telecommunications satellites launched - Five new satellites are in orbit this week as part of a \$5 billion telecommunications system called Iridium. Backed largely by Motorola Inc., the project will eventually consist of a fleet of about 70 satellites, each 13 feet long and

weighing about 1,500 pounds. When the network is fully operational, it will allow subscribers to receive wireless digital telephone service virtually anywhere on the planet. The system will eventually allow paging, data and fax services, too.

Preparation shortages - So many people are stocking up on generators, emergency food supplies, water storage tanks and survivalist gear because of fears over the looming Y2K crisis that

businesses that traditionally sell such items are reporting six month backlogs.

Walton Feed, a bulk food company that usually supplied only Mormons, reports a six month backlog in orders. China Diesel Imports, a company that sells heavy duty 8,000-watt generators, says it's also running six months behind because of Y2K. "This isn't fear-mongering," says the Internet's Y2K Newswire, "this is a statement of fact about the preparation industry."

Internet adultery - Call it a cyber affair. Marriage counselors and private investigators say a growing number of marriages are breaking up because bored husbands or wives are moving from a virtual relationship to a physical one. "It's middle-age crazy," says South Carolina private eye Dan Garrett. "They get bored and complacent. They get a computer. They start playing solitaire and then go to chat

rooms. The next thing you know they're meeting someone at the Red Roof Inn." Garrett says 15 percent of his cases involve extramarital affairs that began on the Internet.

Sex does HUGE Internet business - Speaking of sex and the Net, the porn site operator XPIcs Publishing that was a couple of weeks ago because of a dispute involving the way it processed credit card accounts was taking in an estimated \$5 to \$8

million each week, according to one of the leading online credit card processing companies.

The money came from cyberspace voyeurs who paid a \$19.95 monthly fee to have access to XPIcs library of pornographic pictures and videos.

That's it for this week. Mike Wendland's "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday and Sunday afternoons on WXYT-Radio AM1270. His Web site is: <http://www.pcmike.com>

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