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AND THE SEARCH FOR SOUL | ON A FLORIDA LAKE | TO MAKE POLLUTION PAY

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Competitive analysis on the infobahn? Here's the scoop from

seasoned road warriors on smart intelligence-gathering online

'Spying' in Cyberspace

by Douglas Dominic

The World Wide Web is one of Rob Howe's "secret" weapons. "I do like to use the Web for finding out what the other guys are doing," says the veteran road warrior and vice president for worldwide PC marketing for AT&T Global Information Solutions. "You find out quite a bit about what your competition is going to be doing just by snooping."

On business trips from South Carolina to Switzerland, developing marketing programs and strategies around the world, Howe simply plugs into this colorful subset of the Internet to quickly gather market data: "When you're thinking about attacking a market — and you don't have time to wait for a [research] service to compile a competitive snapshot for you — you can go out there and

kind of hack around and get a gut feel for where the market is at any time. You can do that on those Web pages."

The Web is the largely commercial, consumer-oriented part of the Internet that has grown more than 1,000% in the past year (from 1,265 Web sites in June 1994 to 12,000 in June '95, according to Web researcher/technologist Matthew Gray of net.Genesis in Cambridge,

Cool Tools

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Here are our latest product picks for savvy road warriors. Descriptions may be brief, but where possible we've provided telephone numbers that you can call during many flights for more complete information.

✗ **Casio IP800 Pocket Organizer/Pager:** This ingenious device lives up to its firm's billing as "The Road Warrior's Ultimate Weapon." Writing in *Mobile Office* magazine, Daniel Rosenbaum dubbed it the "Swiss Army Knife" of pagers: ideal for those mobile executives who could use alternatives to booting their bulky laptops, as well as those who consider a portable digital assistant (PDA) to be overkill. Along with a full keyboard, it sports a six-line, 32-character display — double the size of a typical pager — that can show stock quotes, news or several messages on a single screen. Users can search for data contained in pages and look up names, addresses and other associated information. Personal information manager (PIM) features include a phone directory and schedule/memo keeper (212/878-0914).

✗ **SkyTel Two-Way Paging:** SkyTel is likely to be the first company to introduce send-and-receive paging in 300 U.S. markets this quarter. This new system, interconnecting compact pagers for the first time with faxes, computers, e-mail and voice mail, also is expected to include "smart" message services like acknowledgment paging, "guaranteed" delivery, intelligent forwarding and customizable responses; service providers also are expected to supply stock quotes and headline news. Another interesting feature of the new network is its ability to search coverage areas nationwide, radiating from the recipient's previous location, until message delivery happens (800/395-3518).

✗ **RadioMail:** Subscribers at firms like Sun Microsystems raved to us about this two-way messaging service. *Without wires*, it allows users to communicate with anyone with an e-mail address. RadioMail turns most portable computers and PDAs like Apple's Newton into wireless communicators, and enables access from places without data ports (like airport gates), not to mention cabs, limos and commuter trains. It helps transform brief intervals of otherwise unproductive time into inspired bursts of executive action (800/951-1590).

✗ **Brother Super PowerNote PN-8500MDS:** Thanks to Brother, *(continued)*

Mosaic or Netscape; and a connection, either via a commercial online service like CompuServe, America Online or Prodigy, or a direct connection through a North American Internet Service Provider (ISP) such as CRL, PSI or UUNET. Users in rural areas or outside the United States might first need to connect through networks like Sprint-Net to access the online service or ISP.

What does all this deliver? At first glance, home pages on the World Wide Web. Take the home page of Menlo Park, Calif.-based Cisco Systems, Inc., for example. Like many firms with an Internet presence, Cisco uses its home

The high level of accessibility turns some corporate Web sites into virtual candy stores for analysts.
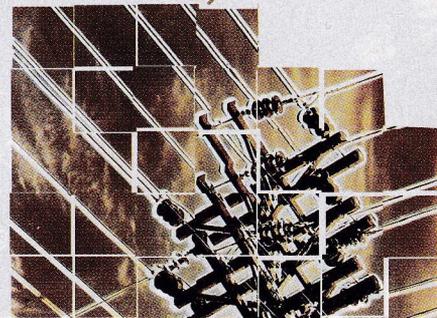
page (http://www.cisco.com) to communicate with the public. The home page is like a table of contents, an electronic storefront or first look at what a company wants to say about itself. From there a "visitor" can click on headings that link (or "hyperlink") him or her to other parts of a corporate Web site — everything from product information to the annual report to Cisco's latest press releases, or to related information elsewhere on the Web.

That accessibility makes some corporate Web sites virtual candy stores for analysts, according to Dave Lecheminant, director of marketing communications with Salt Lake City-based Megahertz

Mass.). The number of commercial sites (companies', as opposed to personal home pages) is growing by at least 200 a week, reports *PC* magazine.

Howe feels strongly about what this medium offers: "If you're not availing yourself of this enormous richness of information, this enormous tapestry of understanding that's out there for the taking," he says, "then you're really leaving yourself out there at a competitive

disadvantage. If you think there's a connection between awareness and understanding and profits, then you ought to be out there increasing your awareness and understanding, using this enormous and incredibly powerful tool."

So how does one get started?

The basic components are a multimedia computer; a modem (preferably 14.4 kpbs or higher); browser software, such as the University of Illinois's NCSA

Corp., which makes card modems for notebook computers (http://www.xmission.com/~mhz).

"If a company has a real commitment to its customer base, providing [customers] with accurate information, then it's really going to keep its Web site spiffed up and up to date," Lecheminant says. "Technology companies do that, so that gives us an enormous edge. We can go into our competitors' Web sites and check out new-product releases sometimes before they're really publicly known. We can go into their support areas and see what questions are being asked about [our competitors'] products. We can go into second-tier competitors' [sites] and get a feel for how they're positioning their products — all things that are very valuable to marketers, right? I take my notebook [computer] with me wherever I go."

John Lynch, an assistant vice president at AT&T Global Information Solutions who is responsible for business in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, favors a two-pronged approach: the Web plus commercial online services.

"CompuServe's Executive News Service can pull articles for you, and I keep a search out for key words, such as my competitors — Hewlett-Packard, IBM or others," says Lynch, who recently logged trips to nine countries in six months. "I just log on, and it tells me what articles have been printed with those key words in the last 24 hours. I can see what announcements have been made and keep up to speed on what my competitors are doing. Then I'll use the Web to pull in further information."

Lynch even uses Web sites compiled by espionage experts. "Frequently I use the market demographics that come from the CIA home page. For example, it's useful to know that three-quarters of the population in Saudi Arabia are in Riyadh and Jedda. That helps us know where to target the recruiting of resellers and advertising campaigns. In most of Western Europe, you're in pretty good shape. But if you want to look at Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Russia, most of the Middle East and Africa, there

mobile executive guide

price no longer needs to mount a barrier to those who arguably would benefit most from portable computers: entrepreneurs and salespeople who haven't previously enjoyed the benefits of mobile technology. Providing a DOS-compatible notebook computer alternative for under $300 is a significant service. This system makes an ideal desktop computer partner for anyone needing portable word-processing, data management, communications and PIM (address book and scheduler) features in a single unit with comprehensive import/export capabilities. Software also includes a speller and thesaurus and nearly 200 preformatted business-letter templates. We think this wide-ranging set of benefits amounts to significant value (908/356-8880).

✗ **Proxima Desktop Projectors:** Those of us who are tired of using computer and video projection equipment that displays grainy and dim images, even with the room lights out, will love Proxima's new choices. The firm's new desktop projectors put vibrant, 640 x 480 dot VGA computer and NTSC/PAL/SECAM & S-VHS video images on screens in even the most brightly lighted rooms. For example, Proxima's flagship Desktop Projector 2900 unit — the industry's brightest — projects images at 500 ANSI lumens, three to five times as bright as many other products. Yet it also incorporates Macintosh and Windows plug-and-play portability into a lightweight case that is compact enough to fit into an overhead compartment. Other Proxima multimedia projectors and panels provide solutions adapted to a range of applications and budgets (800/447-7694).

✗ **American Express *SkyGuide*:** This publication is a timesaving companion product for mobile executives booking flights through new World Wide Web reservation services such as PC Travel (http://www.pctravel.com). American Express blends a concise, 300-page monthly pocket-sized guide to the best direct airline flights with a colorful magazine loaded with feature articles, news briefs, maps and charts geared to mobile executives. For example, a recent issue contained stories comparing airlines' approaches to upgrading inflight communications systems, along with a report on three hotel chains' attempts to keep pace with executive travelers' changing preferences. Comparisons of frequent-flyer programs, airline meal budgets and hub facilities rounded out the issue. Compact, yet chock-full of information, *SkyGuide* is well worth its modest subscription fee of $65 a year (800/678-6738).

— D.D.

aren't good, reliable market research reports that can be purchased. The CIA data is sometimes pretty useful."

For Marcos Sanchez, an account executive with South San Francisco-based Niehaus Ryan Haller Public Relations, the Web is now integral to his business at computer industry trade shows.

"At a trade show, my morning starts out by ordering French toast and coffee and turning on my Macintosh Power-Book," Sanchez says. "I can usually find out what's going on long before the show even begins. I have a couple of hot Web sites I check on a pretty regular basis. Quote.com [http://www.quote.com] is one of them, because they carry all the wire services. Traditionally, at any trade show, you'll see press releases go on the wire for whatever industry that

show is involved in. I just click on Quote.com's computer industry section, and it shows me everything that's gone over the PR Newswire and Business Wire. So I look for competitors who have been making announcements or bigger trends that relate to the industry as a whole." In addition to Quote.com, Sanchez uses CMP Publications (http://techweb.cmp.com), which has many trade publications (including *Interactive Age* and *Information Week*), and two or three of the search engines — Yahoo (http://www.yahoo.com), Global Network Navigator (http://gnn.com) and EINet (http://galaxy.einet.net).

Other mobile executives have found that the Web is great on the road. Before boarding aircraft, Magdalena Yesil, a marketing vice president with electronic transaction provider CyberCash, Inc. (http://www.cybercash.com), fills up her PowerBook's disk with updates to her firm's marketing discussion groups and calendars, as well as feeds from ClariNet, an Internet news service.

"The Internet is really a conduit extending our local area network [LAN]," says Yesil. "It's an incredible productivity enhancer. I've been commuting between Reston, Va., and Redwood Shores, Calif., and that 11-hour round trip becomes an extremely productive opportunity when you can download current information and read it in flight. Besides, you carry much less paper." Yesil also looks at her competitors' Web sites. "You don't have to wait for next morning's news to find out what your competitors are doing," she adds.

Ease of connectivity on the road received a huge boost when the major online services added Internet and Web access this year. AT&T's Lynch says, "I've used the Spy Mosaic/CompuServe product to get into the Web, and that's turned out to be a fairly reliable access

point. It also allows me to file the information in my CompuServe 'file cabinet,' which I find useful as well."

According to Dan Lemke, whom Cupertino, Calif.-based Tandem Computers (http://www.tandem.com) pays to surf the Web as part of his job managing market strategy and new business development, many users not plugged into corporate networks find that these hybrid arrangements "can be a good way of marrying online services with Internet access anywhere in the world. Later, if you find you need more [Web] access, or if cost is an issue, you might want to consider going directly to an Internet service provider."

Despite the presence of 'reciprocal surfing,' the benefits of maintaining a Web site far outweigh the competitive costs.
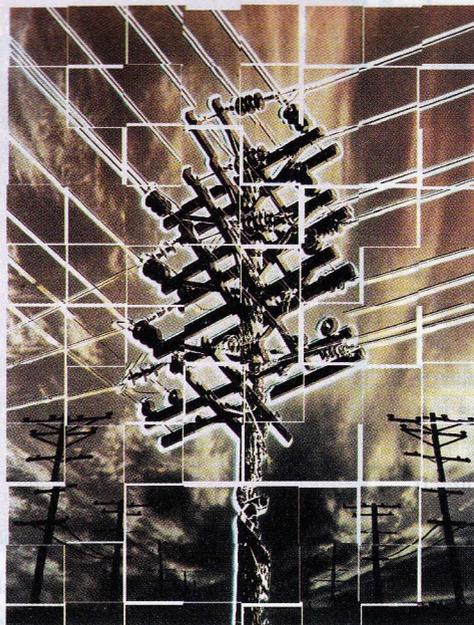
The marriage is clearly a happy one for Atari founder Nolan Bushnell. In fact, the man who two decades ago created an entire industry based on the idea of using computers for entertainment is now a pro at using them for business. "I always like to know as much

as I can before I make a presentation or go into a company," Bushnell says. "So doing a quick search on that company and pulling down the latest financial information or their annual report, you know, it just takes a minute."

News is another story. "The most powerful newspaper I have right now is the America Online entertainment-industry area. That is absolutely where I keep track of what's going on in my industry. You'd be surprised how many things slip by you if you're just reading the standard media." For business services, he prefers CompuServe. You can go in and pull down everything: personal bios [of executives and directors], 10Ks [Securities and Exchange Commission filings], just a lot of stuff. AOL's coming along, but when I want hard business data...," he logs on to CompuServe.

Is "reciprocal surfing" ever a concern — knowing that competitors are out there checking out your own Web site? Marcos Sanchez believes that the benefits of maintaining a presence on the Web definitely outweigh the competitive costs. "You have to realize, sure, your [competitors] might be out there looking in, but at the same time your potential clients are looking in, too."

But Sanchez does say corporations need to think about the implications of working in a medium that offers real-time communications. "When we deal with editors, a lot of what we do is based on timing. You've got to make sure if you're talking to a weekly magazine that they're not going to be able to post the story [on their Web site] before or at the same time as [a daily] you've cut an exclusive with. I think the whole core of the issue is that the Web changes life's timing. And timing is everything." □

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Travel Savvy

There are some useful new Web services that will send even the most jaded business traveler scurrying to commandeer the nearest laptop.

Corporate Travel Coordinators of America, Inc., which publishes the Corporate Rate Hotel Directory of 2,000 hotels worldwide, has put its entire list up on the Web (http://www.ios.com/corp_hotels).

And speaking of hotels, according to *USA Today*, 14 hotel chains (currently 300 hotels, with a projected 15,000 by the end of the year) have signed on to TravelWeb (http://www.travelweb.com), a Web site that includes photos of guest rooms, restaurants, meeting rooms, golf courses and other amenities. Would-be guests can key in information and get a list of options that fit their criteria.

GNN (Global Network Navigator) Traveler's Resource Center (http://nearnet.gnn.com/gnn/meta/travel/index.html) is a Web "magazine" crammed with resources like currency converters; city, hotel and restaurant guides; and weather reports. The site is produced by O'Reilly & Associates, pioneer publisher on the Web.

A brand-new site called Go Explore (http://www.goexplore.com) is specifically targeting frequent travelers, enabling them to make or change travel plans while en route or to create personalized itineraries.

Road Warrior International's Road Warrior Outpost (http://www.warrior.com) is a first stop for visitors to any of 28 cities. Featured are phone numbers for Internet service providers and lists of computer stores that are open late, repair technicians and 24-hour Kinko's Copy Centers.

City.Net (http://www.city.net) offers a diverse international collection of community information, with as many as 10 guides per metro area. From it, travelers can access other bellwether Web sites such as CalTrans' Real-Time (L.A.) Traffic Report (http://www.scubed.com).

Visa (http://www.visa.com) and MasterCard (http://www.mastercard.com) are, somewhat predictably, putting ATM locator guides up on the Web.

American Express offers ExpressNet on America Online. Individuals and small businesses can review their American Express accounts, make travel reservations and find special deals for travel and accommodations.
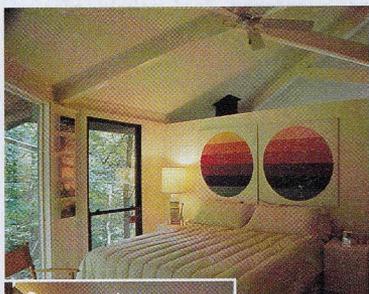
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