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THE ONLINE WORLD



Today's online world has changed dramatically in the last decade. Back then, *online* to the average user meant a telephone connection directly to either another computer or to an online service, such as CompuServe or AOL. The Internet now dominates all online activity. In popular parlance, the Internet is synonymous with the World Wide Web, although it is much more, as we'll explain in this book.

The Internet can be described generally as a “network” of networks. It is a transportation vehicle for applications. In fact, the visual representations of the Net look like a road map. If lines are drawn between each connection, between larger and larger connections, and between smaller and smaller ones, the end result is a web of connections—a virtual road map.



This book is divided into four rough sections. The first is for beginners. It is to get anyone up to speed quickly with the information needed about the Web. Each chapter has recommended Web sites (to type the address, or Uniform Resource Locator [URL] into your Web browser) to help direct you.

The second section has more detailed information about downloads, email, security, and information on virus protection.

The third part is about how to create a Web site, Web tools, blogging, and what you can add to your Web site (such as streaming media, RSS feeds, and XML, among other things).

The fourth part is by far the densest. It is a collection of more technical information for the Web-savvy. There are chapters about how a modem works, networking, handhelds, remote access, Internet marketing, Web content management, peer to peer, the Web and the law, VoIP, and EIM.

THE NET: THERE, WHEREVER YOU ARE

The significant contribution of the Internet has been its social impact for everyday people. As the connections of the Internet encompassed a wider group of people, the social interactions increased and spread to wider interests. The three Cs of the Internet:

- **Comfort:** The comfort is that you can touch the far reaches of the planet, research arcane and inane subjects, talk to people, spout opinions, argue, laugh, and partake in idle chat—all from the comfort of your home. You can sit in your pajamas at 3:00 in the afternoon, and no one will know (unless you have a video camera enabled). In fact, the Internet is *open 24/7*, 365 days a year, so anytime of the day or night, you can connect, research something that you've always wanted to know about, or just idly wander around.

- **Community:** There are numerous communities of people on the Internet. They cover a diversity of topics from sewing to genealogy, dating, and obscure hobbies. People connect with shared interests and can interact. For millions, the Net has the same appeal as a coffee shop or pub—places where you won't be shushed and where schmoozing is encouraged. Using email and instant messages, you can readily have online conversations with friends, family, and people who share an interest.
- **Chat:** These are electronic conversations that take place at the keyboard, but if you have a microphone and sound card, you can have voice conversations, too.

The Internet is a source of inspiration. From one technology springs an idea to utilize a part of the Internet better or to add to it. The Internet has many connections. Not only does it connect computers, but it also connects people and Web sites. At its most simple, people connect through email, sending notes to each other without worrying whether anyone is around to “answer the phone.”

The online world is exciting because it removes the factor of distance between you and the information you need, and between you and the people you want to reach. Need an Italian dictionary? It's at your fingertips. Need to get the opinion of experts in digital photography? Read a newsgroup, join a mailing list, or visit a photography community. So yes, a wired PC makes distance much less important. But suppose you can't be near your computer?

There are plenty of options to connect to the Web where *you* are, not just where *your PC* is, whether you are at work, on vacation, sitting at someone else's computer, or using a non-PC device. You can't get the entire, highly visual online experience over a wireless phone, of course, but the essentials are there, including email, messaging, shopping, Web searching, and more. When you're not at your own computer, you can access the Internet via:

- Wireless phones with Web services
- Handheld computers, such as a Palm, Handspring, or PocketPC, with a wireless connection. You can also download the Web content from the PC to your handheld before you leave.
- Pagers
- Any PC with an Internet connection at a café, on a ship, or at a friend's house
- Mobile communicators: small, two-way messaging devices with built-in keyboards, made by the makers of the popular Blackberry wireless handheld

BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE NET



The *Net* is shorthand for the Internet, a global network of information and communities. The World Wide Web is a part of the Net—an application—the easiest-to-use and most visual part. Other important parts of the Net include email, discussion groups, and file exchange.

Online content refers to the content available over a network. Online content is usually in the form of words and pictures, sometimes in the form of video, audio, and animation.

An *IP address* is the physical address of a computer on the Internet. For example, instead of 1234 Peach Street, the Internet uses 123.12.12.123—four sets of numbers separated by a period identifying the unique location. Each number can be 0 to 255.

A *link* is a short bit of text or a small picture that you click with your mouse to find more information. To tell whether text or a picture is a link, move your mouse arrow over it. If the mouse arrow turns into a picture of a pointing finger, you can click it. You can find links on almost every Web page.

A *clickable link* is when a Web address or URL is blue and underlined. Instead of typing the address into an Internet window, you put your mouse pointer over the blue underlined address and click your mouse button: The link will connect.

EXPLORING THE NET

What draws tens of millions of new people to the Internet every year? For many, it's the sights, sounds, and pure information of countless online destinations. The World Wide Web combines ease of use and ease of *participation*; anyone can contribute to the Web by creating his or her own Web pages easily, as we will show in this book. The Web has become the most popular way to learn about ancient civilizations or about inkjet technology, kudzu, and Cambodia. (The quickly spreading kudzu plant used to be a popular metaphor for the Net's rapid growth.) It's also the place for the information that you need to manage your life, from weather forecasts to airline schedules.

Electronic mail is the most popular and biggest single use of the Internet, but large amounts of data flow between computers on a daily basis in the form of FTP (File Transfer Protocol). FTP allows a user at one computer to enter the address of another computer virtually anywhere on the Internet and browse through the file directories until a sought-after program or document is located. FTP has opened an immense world of shareware and public domain software to the public's access. Beyond FTP is Usenet. This is a remarkable array of computer conferences that run on tens of thousands of computers around the globe. Usenet has discussion groups on every subject

imaginable, from the risks of computer technology to groups about duck raising and management to child rearing theory. Some of the groups have literally become communities, linking thousands of people who share a common interest. In the Usenet world, some of the groups are an uncontrolled electronic stream of consciousness, whereas others are moderated by one of several members who serves as moderator.

Some of the most fascinating aspects of the Internet are the electronic libraries and commercial online databases. Another is the vast numbers of electronic books (eBooks) available on the Web. Users can purchase an eBook on a disk or CD, but the most popular way is to purchase and download a file from an eBook sales site on the Web. (Some books are sold, some are for a nominal fee, and some are free.) eBooks can be downloaded and read on desktop, laptop, or palm computers. You can use a specialized eBook reader, which will allow you to make notes, highlight passages, and save selected text, but special hardware and software isn't necessary to read. The book's pages are displayed in full color with graphics and photos, and they resemble the printed pages of a book. Generally, an eBook can be downloaded in less than five minutes.

The Internet isn't just about text and information. It's also about people. People meet online in a variety of ways. They meet in chat rooms on Internet Relay Chat (IRC). This is a way for people to drop in on real-time global conversations. By typing on the keyboard, they can exchange some idle chat with someone in New Zealand or Sweden. These conversations go on 24/7. And once they've found friends all over the globe, people can stay in touch with IRC and instant messaging (IM), carry on private conversations, and "see" when their friends are on their computers (see Chapter 7).

People have found a variety of ways to meet. Online dating is a big business. From the comfort and safety of your home, you can view and read about potential mates all around the world. Another way to meet people is with MOGs (massively online games) and MUDs (multiple user dungeons; the name heralds back to the board game Dungeons & Dragons) where you can interact—talk and compete against or simply play—with others online.

Music has become a highlight of the Web, so it's not all about just text or images. Of course, you can read about your favorite band or singer, but you can also download music and convert music from one file format to another. The Web has changed the face of the music industry with Napster, where users traded copyrighted music, causing lots of legal issues and challenges to arise. Plenty of alternatives to Napster abound. If you're uncomfortable with the gray area sites, there are places to find good music that's legal for downloading. Some bands have realized that offering free MP3 files can help them sell more albums. Start with Rolling Stone (www.rollingstone.com/dds/). It offers free downloads of tracks from top artists in various formats. MP3.com

(www.mp3.com) is another hot spot, especially for unknown artists. (MP3.com and MP3 are not the same thing. MP3.com is a library of MP3 files, whereas MP3 is a popular music file type. For more information, Chapter 5 is all about music.)

The World Wide Web Has Much to Offer

This book is a guide to help you get on the Web and direct you to the key features. There are more things on the Web than we could cover in one book, even a thick one. This book tries to guide you to find what you really need and covers what you really need to know. There is so much more out there, though.

The world is ever changing, and the Web changes, as well. Like never before, get instant updates on world news, sports, weather, and politics. The Web is a tool. As you learn more, your tastes will change and evolve. No matter what it is you are looking for, if you know how to look (and this book will give you that knowledge), you can find what you seek.

News

The Internet is a 24-hour news source. And with an online news site—unlike your television or newspaper—you can personalize the news to your preferences. There are plenty of choices to get the news. Television networks such as CNN (www.cnn.com), BBS (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>), MSNBC (www.msnbc.com), and ABCNews (www.abcnews.go.com) offer something for everyone. Newspaper Web sites such as *New York Times* (www.nytimes.com), *LA Times* (www.latimes.com), and *USA Today* (www.usatoday.com) supplement their static newspapers with frequently updated, online versions. There are specialty news sites focusing on a specific topic such as TechWeb for IT news (www.techweb.com), *Sports Illustrated* for sports (<http://sports.illustrated.cnn.com/>), United Nations (www.un.org/News/), National Geographic News for science (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/>), and Zap2it for entertainment (www.zap2it.com/index).

Genealogy

Exploring genealogy is easier with the Internet. Web sites such as Family Search (www.familysearch.org/), state and country government sites, newspapers, and other significant places with archives abound. One such archive is Ellis Island (www.ellislandrecords.org/), which can beat trying to hire some remote researcher to dig through microfiche. As people gather information

and get details on locations, the next step may be to contact a government in another country or a newspaper that lists marriages and deaths. The Internet has enabled us to search our family history without the need to travel. There are specialty sites for those with a specific background, such as JewishGen (www.jewishgen.org), which helps those with a Jewish background, and Italian Genealogy Homepage for those with Italian ancestry (<http://italian.genealogy.tardio.com/>). Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites links to over 175,000 Web sites (www.cyndislist.com).

Travel

Book your airplane reservations and your hotel reservations online. Check competing airlines for the best price. Reserve car rentals, one-way moving trucks, and motor homes. Check the weather, (www.weather.com or www.intellicast.com). Check road conditions or highway construction projects. Check around the Web for restaurant ideas, entertainment, and historical places to visit. If it's a business trip, maybe you can look up other businesses to visit while you're there. Going to another country? No problem; many sites have currency converters and language dictionaries. If you are just exploring ideas, try Travelocity (www.travelocity.com), Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com), and Fodor's (www.fodors.com).

Finance/Investment

The Internet is a gold mine for investors in terms of up-to-date information. View the latest company press releases, news articles, and financial data on the Web. Research companies and read their financial reports—without going to the library or calling the company and asking for its report. Trade, buy, and sell stocks online. Start with Wall Street City (www.wallstreetcity.com).

Food

Going nuts over what to have for dinner tonight? Dining out isn't always an option. Is your cookbook thinner than skim milk? Never fear; all the recipes you'll ever need are sitting on Allrecipes (www.allrecipes.com) and similar sites. You've probably got a cupboard full of unused ingredients; search for meals containing your favorite spice, meat, vegetable, etc. Specially formatted pages are linked so that you can print out any recipe for a 3 × 5 or 4 × 6 note card. It's finger-clicking good.

Classic Books

Name one online (and electronic) resource that has been around for decades? No, we're talking pre-Yahoo!, folks. When you want to "rent" a book, you probably go to your public library. When you want to buy a book, you might think of heading to Amazon.com. But over at Project Guttenberg (<http://promo.net/pg/>), you will find a group that has been making classic books available to the world in a common "text" format. There's nothing terribly recent (because of copyright laws), but here you'll find the complete works of Shakespeare, Aesop's fables, and Plato's philosophies. You can leave your library card at home this time; eBooks have already arrived, and you can start grabbing them without dropping a dime.

Interpretation

What does it mean when you dream of being chased by giant mirrors? I'm almost afraid to look! Wake up to a world of internalized subliminal processes with sites such as Dreamdoctor.com. Share your sleep-time experiences on a discussion board and look up meanings in the dream symbols dictionary. Do your dreams share a common thread with other dreamers? Love to learn about other people's dreams? I suppose that fiction is stranger than truth.

Home Improvement

Did you know that a screwdriver can double as a hammer? Did you know a butter knife can double as a screwdriver? Or that a nail file can double as a butter knife? Well, they can in *our* world. If you have a computer question, we're your guys. When it comes to home improvement, you may have to inquire elsewhere. Want some real tips for improving your home or tackling that next big project? Ask someone such as Tim Carter from Ask the Builder (<http://askthebuilder.com>). He knows so much, in fact, that his columns are nationally syndicated and he has own radio show in Ohio. The station, for whatever it's worth, isn't WKRP. "Baby, if you've ever wondered; wondered whatever became of my skill saw . . ." (Venus Flytrap was never much of a home builder, you know.)

Career Advice

Show me the money! No, really . . . show me the money! No, I'm serious . . . I need money. Well, who doesn't need money? Money, after all, is how we attain certain necessities: clothes, food, shelter, and digital cameras. The

problem is, you have to work for money. What's up with that!? What and where are the best jobs? And more importantly, could you make more doing the same job in a different state? Before sending out those resumes, check here. Head to a site such as salary.com, and you'll see the average pay rate of an occupation, depending on its state (snow plow operators may find higher pay in Iowa than in Arizona). This destination also includes articles and advice for staying on top of the business world. Now get back to work. You need money.

Unit Conversion

There's an old story, which may or may not be true, about a dispatch taking place in the middle of the ocean: "Change your course to avoid a collision." "How?" "Turn forty degrees starboard." "Um . . . we're a lighthouse." Insane, I tell you. It's too bad that those shipmates didn't have access to this site; carrying over 8,000 units, they could have converted anything to anything. At a site such as OnlineConversion.com, specific categories have been designated for the various measurements. And thanks to the cooking section, everything's as easy as pie (with two and a half cups of flour). This URL should be etched in your memory. Whether two feet from shore or 20,000 leagues under the sea, knowing how many "Xs" are in a "Y" just might save your life.

Maps

"The entire Internet is now on a map of Antarctica." Well, I guess someone had to do it. That may sound a little strange, but oddly enough—it appears to work. Click on any one of the 17 map categories at Visual Net (<http://map.net>), and you can start exploring the Internet. The more you click, the narrower your search becomes. It's perfect for someone who doesn't know exactly what they're looking for and wants to see everything that's available. If map clicking isn't your cup of Java, there's always the plain ole text search. Hey, Lockergnome's there!

Consumer Protection

It seems as though everyone has either been sued or is getting sued these days, doesn't it? Well, there are plenty of frivolous lawsuits floating around, but let's not forget that there are some legitimate charges being made by consumers who just want to get what they paid for. If you think you're a little

fish in a giant corporate pond, swim on over to a site such as Big Class Action (<http://bigclassaction.com>). Join a group of people seeking a class action or register your own complaint.

Technology

Different people tend to ask similar questions. So instead of wasting man hours and resources on answering the frequently asked questions, people put together FAQs (which, oddly enough, stands for Frequently Asked Questions). You'll find that most heavily traveled Web sites have FAQs that newcomers may read to make themselves familiar with the "rules" of that particular group. Internet FAQ Archives (www.faqs.org/faqs) is a great place to start.

Email has been around forever (as far as this e-world is concerned). For some users, it makes sense to have a Web-accessible account. For those who stay in one spot, not so much. So which service is the best one? Depends on who you are and what you need. There are all kinds of companies willing to give you a mailbox; they're now just a click away. Doesn't matter where you're from or what language you hablas. A great free guide is at Free Email Providers Guide (<http://fepg.net>).

Who really understands what goes on after you click on a link? Sure, with any luck, a new Web page pops up. But how does that really happen? Don't immerse yourself in technojargon—download this beautifully illustrated movie. Don't you know how data flows in a networked environment? Are packets good or bad? Who's this "Lan" guy, and why is he setting walls on fire? Young grasshopper: Sit back, watch, and learn through Warriors of the Net (www.warriorsofthe.net).

Ever notice those three little letters after the dot in a file name? For instance, the file extension for the Word document "ilovelockergnome.doc" would be "DOC." Hopefully, you're aware of the most common file extensions; sometimes a strange one will spring up. What the heck is an SCR? Or LST? Or CAB? Or . . . well, you get the idea. Filext.com is the site for you if a file extension has you flabbergasted. Just enter it into this search engine (sans dot) and extsearch.com will tell you what the extension possibly stands for (as well as its respective file type). You would have gone MAD without it, although you probably wouldn't have any idea what it meant.

You need graphics. No, I'm telling you: You need graphics. You might be designing a Web page, working on invitations, or any number of things, and this site is there to satisfy all of your graphical needs. The best part is that it's free at Flamingtext.com. Need some cool text effects? Just select the font size, the color, the style, the shadow, the bevel . . . you get the picture. There are

also cool links to clip art, buttons, wallpaper, and tools—all of those things that make your fancy Web world even fancier.

You've probably seen those commercials on television featuring state-of-the-art refill systems for your inkjet. That's all fine and dandy, but different cartridges require different methods of refilling. A site such as Refill-FAQ (www.refill-faq.de) should answer any questions still lingering—if you choose to refill your cartridges (as opposed to just buying new ones when the old ones run dry). They walk you through the basics of refilling while addressing problems associated with this “money-saving” technique. Ah, I went laser four years ago and haven't looked back.

Sports

The Internet is a paradise for sports lovers. Find statistics on favorite teams and athletes. Get news and sports updates. Interact with other sports fans. Buy merchandise, and a lot more. ESPN (www.espn.com), CBS Sportsline (www.cbs.sportsline.com), and The Sports Network (www.sportsnetwork.com) offer coverage on all sports. Their updates reflect the latest seasonal sports and any hot news, such as draft picks. Sports sites categorize their pages for easy reference with the hot news on the front page. Diehard fans of specific sports can find pages dedicated to one sport. Soccer (or football to countries outside of the United States) fans can go to Federation Internationale de Football Association (www.fifa.com) and FA (www.thefa.com) for everything soccer. All professional and amateur sports organizations have their own Web sites, such as National Hockey League (www.nhl.com), Major League Baseball (www.majorleaguebaseball.com), National Basketball Association (www.nba.com), and NCAA for college sports (www.ncaa.org). Annual or recurring events have their own Web sites, such as the Olympics (www.olympic.org), Super Bowl (www.superbowl.com), and World Cup Soccer (fifaworldcup.yahoo.com). We haven't even covered teams' or players' Web sites. Colleges, professionals, and amateur team sports and players offer sites for their teams. Do a Web search for your favorite team or player, and you should be able to get there in no time. (For information on Web searches, go to Chapter 4.)

Autos

Whether you prefer to buy a new vehicle online or locally, start your research online. Kelly Blue Book (www.kbb.com), a car buyer's guide, has a Web site where you can calculate the price and trade-in value of used vehicles. Automakers have information about every car they make and sell on

DVORAK'S PERSONAL PORTAL AND HOMEPAGE



www.dvorak.org

This is John C. Dvorak's homepage. The Personal Portal is a collection of links that the author has carefully selected for efficiency and reliability. Point your Web browser to <http://www.dvorak.org/home.htm/>.

their Web sites. They feature vehicle comparison charts, loan calculators, model guides, and all the information you need to know before dealing with a local dealer. Web sites such as MSN Autos (<http://autos.msn.com/>) and cars.com (www.cars.com) are a good place to start when you don't have anything specific in mind.

Replacement Parts

Need an updated driver? A resolution to a software problem? Information about a favorite board game? Try the Internet first before calling and waiting on hold for hours for tech support. It might be faster to search for the answer than to call tech support or every game store in town. When I upgraded to a new operating system, I needed updated drivers and got them all online. My mom had a small set of old and useful cocktail forks. I went on eBay and found more of the same brand to increase her set. When a gadget still in fine working order has a broken or missing part, go look on the Internet for

CHRIS PIRILLO'S VARIOUS WEB SITES



There's no stopping this guy. He seems to create a new Web site every week.

<http://www.pirillo.com/> is where you will find advice on how to be a better Internet entrepreneur.

<http://www.lockergnome.com/> is where you will find fresh technology help.

<http://tutorials.lockergnome.com/> is where you can download his helpful guides.

<http://ask.pirillo.com/> is where you can ask Chris a technical question.

<http://chris.pirillo.com/> is his personal Web page.

<http://www.rentmychest.com/> is where you can . . . rent his chest.

<http://www.gnomedex.com/> is where you can learn more about his annual tech conference.

See? Told ya!

replacements. It may be cheaper than replacing the gadget. Did another china plate break? Even if your china is no longer in production, try Replacements, Ltd. (www.replacements.com/), which stores sets that are no longer produced.

SUMMARY

So the Internet and today's online world is rich, indeed. Most people who begin using the Internet seldom scratch the surface, even after years of use. The only reason for this is that the Net has actually evolved over decades into this patchwork quilt of interesting and useful applications. We want to make sure you take full advantage of all the Net has to offer. It will enrich your life and contribute to your personal success. And it's fun. Use this book as your guide.

7

MEETING PEOPLE: THE PERSONAL SIDE OF THE INTERNET



The Internet is the modern-day Tower of Babel. People from all over the world regularly communicate with people of all ages, sexes, walks of life, and from different ends of the globe. People *meet* in chatrooms. They communicate in forums. They place and answer classified ads. These are just a few of the opportunities to connect with other people.

CHATROOMS

On the Internet, you can talk to other people who are also online by using your keyboard and any number of services (with specific software). This “chatting” is through an exchange of typed messages to a central site to be read and commented on by others. Anyone, anywhere on the Internet can take part in these conversations. Most of these conversations focus on a particular topic. You can also “listen” to a lecture from an expert or interact with a famous person (such as a movie star or super model) in a cyber convention hall. Distance learning uses chat to create an online classroom experience and to allow students to interact with each other and with the instructor.

A Web site chatroom is a place for online communities of users with common interests to communicate. Forums and discussion groups, by comparison, are more like bulletin boards (as they were called some years back) where people post messages for others to read and reply by posting subsequent comments. Many chatrooms need special software. You need an account on AOL, Yahoo!, or MSN to join the main chats, and other systems, such as the IRC (Internet Relay Chat), require you download some simple software to use it.



“On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.”

FIGURE 7.1

THIS WAS PROBABLY THE FIRST POIGNANT CARTOON TO APPEAR IN THE *NEW YORKER* ABOUT THE INTERNET.

© The New Yorker Collection, 1993, Peter Steiner from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

With Web-based chatrooms, you simply go to a Web site, register, and choose a name (screen name, or nickname) and password. Then you go to a room of your choice. To talk to the other users (chat), you type a message into a text box. The message is posted immediately into a larger window and viewed by all in the room. Other users respond (Figures 7.2 and 7.3).

Internet chat is, for some, a very enjoyable diversion. It is a way to meet people from all over the world without leaving your house. A chatroom is part of an online service (such as America Online) or a Web site where people can communicate in a group setting. In an online simulated or virtual reality game, people use avatars (personal representation/game pieces) that can move around and interact with others.

Chatrooms usually limit the number of people for sanity's sake. Too many and it is hard to follow the conversations (unless you are a speed reader). Too few and often the conversation lags without much said, like a bad cocktail party. On IRC, there can be some mega rooms with hundreds of people. These are meeting places. People who've previously met agree to "meet" in a mega room; then they can go off into individual conversations.

In a chatroom, there can be many conversations concurrently. At first, this can seem confusing, but after a while, you learn to follow a specific message thread. A *thread* is a single conversation. It's a subject, followed by a series of replies to the original statement or question. The term originally came about from a forum or a discussion group. With those, you'd have to

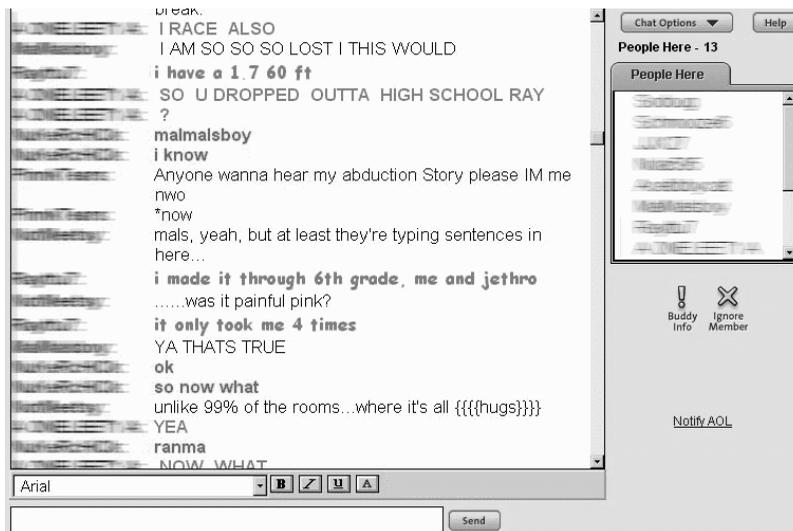


FIGURE 7.2

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF AN AOL CHATROOM.

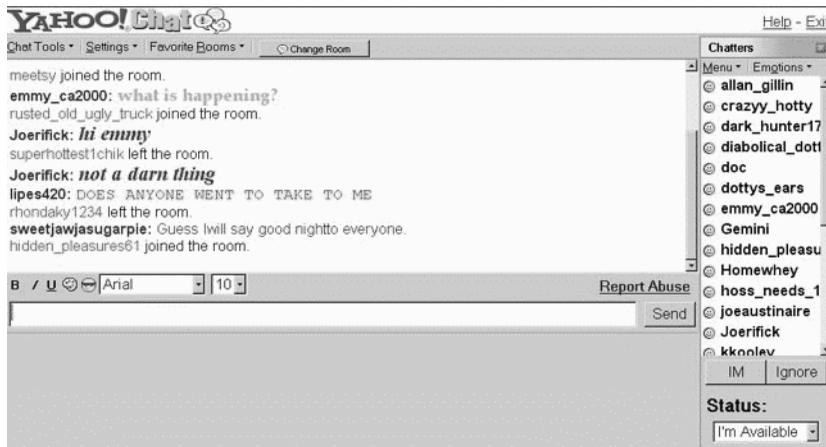


FIGURE 7.3 AN EXAMPLE OF A YAHOO! CHATROOM.

follow the “thread” of the conversation from beginning to end (or often, from the most recent back to the original post).

For that reason, most chatrooms are specific to a community of users (e.g., hobbies, interests, locations, dating, religion, politics, sports, travel, etc.). In comparison, forums and discussion groups don’t have interactive messaging.

Typically, a chat has a screen with postings identified by the online handle (also known as a *screen name* or *nickname*) with automated updates of who has entered a room and left a room. To talk, users type messages into a text box, hit <Enter>, and the message is posted on the chatroom screen. The message is usually immediately visible for other users to respond. It’s not a requirement to participate. When people sit and simply read the posts without commenting, they are known as *lurkers*.

TEXT TALK



Dr. John Suler is a professor of psychology at Rider University. He offers a unique perspective on what he calls *TextTalk* (see “Psychological Dynamics of Online Synchronous Conversations in Text-Driven Chat Environments,” *Psychology of Cyberspace*, October 1997). He has an online book on the psychology of cyberspace at www.rider.edu/~suler/psyber/psyber.html. It is highly recommended if you want a fresh, entertaining perspective on the culture of the Net.

In his article, he describes his view and insight of chat:

TextTalk in online chat environments has evolved into a fascinating style of communication. In some ways, it is strikingly similar to face-to-face (ftf) dialogue. In other ways, it is quite unique. Many of its unique qualities revolve around the fact that it is an austere mode of communication. There are no changes in voice, no facial expressions, no body language, no (or very little) visual/spatial environment as a context of meaning. There's just typed words. Some people find that experience too sparse. They feel disoriented, disembodied, adrift in that screen of silently scrolling dialogue. Other people love the minimalist style of TextTalk. They love to see how people creatively express themselves despite the limitations. They love to immerse themselves in the quiet flow of words that feels like a more direct, intimate connection between one's mind and the minds of others. Almost as if the other is inside one's head. Almost as if you are talking with a part of yourself. Without the distracting sights and sounds of the ftf world, TextTalk feels like a more pure communication of ideas and experiences. For some users (like many interested in cybersex), the bare quality of typed text allows for a greater flight of imagination and fantasy.

Chat room banter can seem quite chaotic, especially when there are many people talking, or you have just entered a room and immediately dive into the ongoing flow of overlapping conversations. There are no visual cues indicating what pairs or groups of people are huddled together in conversation, so the lines of scrolling dialogue seem disjointed. You have to sit back and follow the flow of the text to decipher the themes of conversation and who is talking with whom. In almost all types of chat environments, you consciously and unconsciously set up mental filters and points of focus that help you screen out "noise" and zoom in your concentration on particular people or topics of discussion. Often, you become immersed in one or two strings of dialogue and filter out the others. With experience, you develop an eye for efficiently reading TextTalk. Some people may be better at this specific cognitive-perceptual task than others.

Dr. Suler's article can be accessed at <http://www.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/texttalk.html>.

Lurking

It's not as bad as the name suggests. Unlike a cocktail party where lurkers tend to pace in the shadows, online lurkers aren't social misfits. It's just a name for people who sit back and observe the conversations going on. Lurking is a good way to assess the chatroom before you decide to join the conversation. In many cases, it's considered less rude to sit back before joining in the discussion, anyway. Not all chatrooms are the same. As strange as it might sound to someone who has never been in a chatroom, there are rules of behavior, emotional outbursts (complete with shouting), joking, light-hearted chatter, small talk, and serious discussions. Collections of people

communicating do have moods. The truth is that some rooms are friendly when you enter them; others are outright hostile. Without sitting back for a moment, you'll never know if a serious debate is going on or whether it's a room full of boorish jerks.

BOTS



Short for roBOT, this is a collection of scripted commands running in a program that appears to be a regular user (it has screen name and appears to engage in conversation) but cannot respond or react outside of its prewritten script. As a very general example, the bot will say, "Hello, how are you." And you respond, "The weather is nice." It will reply, "I am well, thank you for asking." Chatrooms are full of these, usually trying to get you to go to their Web sites or to call expensive 900 numbers for dubious reasons.

Etiquette, Netiquette

The term *netiquette* is used to describe how to act in all forms of online communication: emails, forums, and chat. The rules for chatting came about through trial and error. Online groups are fundamentally a society. When people gather, in all cultures and historically, they have created rules of conduct to keep things civil.

The basic rules:

- Don't type in all CAPS (it's interpreted as yelling)
- Don't flame or bait (flaming means derogatory comments, cursing, etc.)
- No scrolling or flooding (typing the same thing, usually nonsense, over and over)
- Be polite (probably the most important thing to remember)

Follow the normal social rules and common sense in a chatroom. Few people would burst into a party—yelling, shouting, babbling inane things, and shouting obscenities—and expect to be accepted by the crowd. It's the same in a chatroom. It's best to enter, see what's going on, then add to the conversation.

Tone of Voice

Text is text. It is without body language, facial expression, or vocal tone inflection that can convey a feeling or an attitude. In the beginning, it was

easy to write something and have everyone take it the wrong way and offend without intention. Humor was all but impossible. The answer to this was the *emoticon* and the acronym.

Emoticons

Emoticons (emotional icons) are ways to compensate for the missing information of text. To view the “faces” that the basic American/European emoticons represent, rotate your head 90 degrees counter-clockwise.

- :)—happiness, sarcasm, or jesting
- : (—unhappy
- ;)—winking
- : o—surprise
- : O—shock, surprise
- : D—big grin



There are lots of emoticons to be found online. For the most part, people use a basic few. :)

www.mueller-godschalk.com/emoticon.html

www.chatlist.com/faces.html

www.computeruser.com/resources/dictionary/emoticons.html

www.worldstart.com/guides/emoticon.htm

Acronyms

Acronyms came about because common phrases in conversation take time to type out. It’s a shortcut of sorts to be able to say more with fewer key-strokes. At first, it seems like some code people are talking in, until you get the hang of it. One of the most popular is LOL, for “laughing out loud.” It’s so much easier than typing out “hahahahaha” or “I am laughing.” Although it’s used much too much and often right after someone has said something that could be taken as insulting, the LOL is to let you know that they’re trying to joke or be sarcastic.

A/S/L—age/sex/location (a basic query to find out who’s in the room with you)

AAMOF—as a matter of fact

BBFN—bye bye for now

BBIAF—be back in a flash
BRB—be right back
BBL—be back later
BTW—by the way
EOL—end of lecture
FAQ—frequently asked question
FITB—fill in the blank
FYI—for your information
HTH—hope this helps
IMO—in my opinion
IMHO—in my humble opinion
IMNSHO—in my not-so-humble opinion
IOW—in other words
LOL—laughing out loud
NP—no problem
OIC—oh, I see
OTOH—on the other hand
ROFL—rolling on the floor laughing
ROFLSUML—rolling on the floor laughing spitting up my lunch
RSN—real soon now
TIA—thanks in advance
TIC—tongue in cheek
TTFN—ta ta for now
TTYL—talk to you later
TY—thank you (or the Aussie version, TA)
TYVM—thank you very much
WB—welcome back
WTF—what the frick?

Chat Shorthand

Let's face it, typing to talk can get tiring. People have found ways to shorten words, especially those that are difficult to spell. The most popular of these is *prolly*, meaning *probably*. Of course, there is always the shorthand of emotions. These are usually enclosed in angle brackets.

<G>—grinning
<J>—joking
<L>—laughing
<S>—smiling
<Y>—yawning

Another common chatroom sign is actually a description of a physical action. These include: poking, hugging, kissing, tapping foot, etc. They are usually [bracketed] or {braced}, or several sets of colons may be used.

::poke:: {{{{poke}}}} [poke]
::hug:: {{{{hug}}}} [hug]
::tapping foot:: {{{{tapping foot}}}} [tapping foot]

These get really old, very fast, so use them sparingly. If you use them too often, everyone will assume that you are a prepubescent girl without a very large vocabulary.

Haxor or h4x0r

Definitions of this vary, but if you are online, you will undoubtedly come across words with peculiar, almost unreadable spellings. These often include numbers and keyboard symbols, as well as letters. There may be random uppercase mixed with lowercase, creating what looks like the stereotypical ransom note. It's very popular among the younger users, and it takes a little time to adjust your eyes (brain?) to read it.

Probably the original use was as a code (like the pig Latin in WWII POW camps and grammar school) to avoid having certain words detected by someone monitoring a conversation, such as a system administrator or chatroom moderator. It's generally referred to as *Haxor*, depending on who is defining it and in what context.

Haxor is the kiddie script word for *hacker* or *to hack*. (Kiddie script, or script kiddie is a would-be hacker who doesn't have the technical skills or knowledge needed for traditional hacking methods. In other words, usually kids.) When used in a sentence (or fraction thereof) it means to win, to conquer. It is often spelled *h4x0r*. It's slang. The most common word that often accompanies haxor is the other slang word *elite*, spelled *leet*, *1337*, or *31337*. The 3s are substitute Es, the 1 is an L, and the 7 is a T. It is a cry of victory, as in *133333337*, to announce superiority over others.



A typical haxor sentence might look something like this:

4 7ypic41 h4x0r s3n73nc3 migh7 100k lik3 7his

The As are substituted with 4s, the Ts with 7s, the Es with 3s, and the Os with zeros.

There are variations. The same sentence might look this way:

4 7yp1c41 h4><0r 53N83Nlc3 M1gh7 100k 11k3 7h15

In this case, the X is replaced with ><, the Ss with 5s, the Ns with N, and the M with M.

Or even this way:

@ tYpIcAl H@X0R 53n73Nc3 MiGh7 100K 50m37HiNg lik3 7h15.

Another thing you will often see is the use of caps, the @ sign, and numbers in sentences. In this case, all the As are replaced with @, and caps and lowercase are used interchangeably throughout the sentence.

You find Haxor used often in strange screen names on AOL or nicks on IRC. It's common to see odd combinations, such as FrE@kY N1GhTmar3 (spelling out *freaky nightmare*) or B1g f1R3 (*big fire*). It isn't necessary to learn how to type this way, but if you come across it, you'll know what it is, essentially (it's changing all the time).

There are many words used to avoid detection. Curse words, long banned by most systems, have evolved and have multiple variations on the often used "f" word, which include feck, feek, fark, foik, pha-Q, etc. Conversation might also include typed approximations of noises such as *ARGGH*, *Grrrrr*, *waaawaaa*, *sheesh*, and *boing*. These are often used as a mild exclamation of upset or dissatisfaction.

JAPANESE EMOTICONS



Japanese emoticons have more variation than the Western ones. They are read vertically instead of tilting your head and getting a crick in your neck. One reason these are so different is that Western letters are one byte, while Japanese are 2 bytes, so there are more characters to choose from. Japanese sentences also contain Chinese characters called *phonograms*. These allow a greater number of characters to play with. A typical Japanese emoticon face is (^_^) instead of the Western-style :) .

The popularity of Manga, the Japanese comic books, has also influenced the emoticons, in that many of the emoticons use the same ways of expressing feelings and situations (similar to how we copy the comics, with @#%\$@# !!! com-

ing to represent cursing and ZZZzzzzZzZzzz meaning sleeping). The following graphics illustrate several emoticons.

\(◎o◎)/

“Gyaaa!” To be surprised with eyes wide open.

(·_·?)

“I don’t understand.”

\(^o\)(/o^)/

“Lets dance.”

(-.-) /-≡≡≡≡卍卍

Throwing Shuri-kens, a weapon that Ninjas use.

(^人^)

Asking for a favor (hands together in front of face).

φ(. .)めもめも

Writing a memo.

(^ 3 ^)-☆Chu!!

Sending out a loud kiss (chu!!).

o(^_-)O

Gentle punching as a sign of encouragement

●~*

A bomb.

≡(° θ°)≡

A blowfish (fugu fish).

U · ㄣ · U

A dog.

(= ^ . ^ =)

A cat.

C:!≡

An octopus.

Φ(° °)/ㄣツㄣ/ㄣツㄣ-

“Nokotta Nokotta!” is phrase used during a sumo match. This is a sumo referee. He has a fan in his hand.

Some of the Japanese emoticons are possible with our keyset:

(;_;)/~~~~ Saying a tearful goodbye

(^.^)/~~~~~ Waving goodbye with a handkerchief

(^_-) db(-_^) Making a promise by linking little fingers with each other.

(^_-) Wink

W(^0`)W Roaring with anger

(@_@) Drunk, or giddy and dizzy

((((((^_^;)) Try to leave secretly, sweating and uncomfortable.

(>_<) (>_<) Shaking head strongly in denial

(*_*) (*_*) Asking “what are you looking for?”

The Downside

Chatrooms are spontaneous, and what you type is visible to all in the room. The spontaneous and visible posts also allow the potential for problems and abuse. Because of people being people, there are terms of service (TOS) and guidelines for appropriate behavior. Many rooms also have a moderator to make sure the room’s rules are adhered to. Many systems have a way to report abusive and disruptive users. There are many examples of disruptive users. Some would include dominating the conversation (really fast typists), chattering, typing nonsense, repeatedly typing the same word or phrase into the conversation (known as *scrolling* or *flooding*), flammers (posting insulting, often obscenity-laced attacks on other people).

On AOL, there are spambots, with the sole purpose of collecting screen names (which on AOL are also email accounts) to increase the amount of spam in your email box and other autogenerated messaging systems. Some of these bots will post in the chat windows links to Web sites (usually pornography, occasionally other advertising) or will directly message you (using instant messaging, IM) and try to sound very much like a real human. These are actually programs scripted to sound human. The better chat systems have found ways to block these, but they persist because they find ways around the barriers.

A Word to Parents About Chatrooms

Adolescents love chatrooms. It seems to be an extension of the age's proclivity to talk on the phone for hours, hang out together, and pass notes in class. We hear a lot from the media about kids meeting weirdos in chatrooms, then meeting in person, with horrifying results. These stories are overplayed. The media hysteria overlooks the obvious for every one horror story, there are millions of teenagers in chatrooms, playing online games, and posting to their blogs without any horrid end. Statistically, online chat is safer than hanging out in a mall or on a street corner. Still, there are things to keep in mind that must be discussed with your child (and that you should remember, too, when meeting anyone online).

First, never give out your password, personal details, home address, where you work, your school, what you do, or your name if you've just met online. Don't download files that someone offers you—for any reason—in a chatroom.

Often, online relationships take on a sort of confessional, where people divulge things that they normally would hold back when dealing with people face to face. The anonymity that allows all of us to feel more at ease in telling a total stranger things you haven't told your closest friends also obscures who it is you are telling these secrets to. This creates an aura of intimacy where you feel that you know them better than anyone else.

The problem with the obscured person on the other distant keyboard is that with the limited information we have in online chat and the fact that humans fill in the blanks as part of our nature, it's common to attribute more altruism to the other party than he or she might deserve. (This is especially true when one is new to online chat.)

Freud used the term *projection* to mean an involuntary process motivated by emotions wherein a person imposes a subjective feeling or thought on another person or situation. The tendency is to impose subjective feelings or thoughts that fill our needs. We tend to don "rosy glasses" when we talk with others online. If we have no ill will or evil intent, we assume that the other party harbors none, either. This may or may not be the reality.

Let's face it, this is no different than in ordinary life. We make mistakes about people we've known for years. Look at when the neighbors are talking about the serial murderer next door: "He seemed like such a nice man," "Real quiet, you'd never have suspected." We don't tend to assume that people are out to harm us. This extends to online, as well.

It never hurts to remember the old warning to beware of strangers. Indeed, be aware of strangers online, just as you would on the street because they may be just as strange. Talk to your kids about this aspect of online chatting. It's more important to talk about this than to try to ban it or lecture

about it because it is a learning experience. With time, your kids will become naturally wary of online advances and will spot pervs and creeps. Kids talk with other kids, and they eventually put it all in perspective.

The tendency is for adolescents to become too caught up and project that what they've found is something bigger and deeper (highly romanticized). The teenage years are difficult. There is a lot of soul searching, feeling inadequate, and being lonely. Connecting with someone online is often mistaken for real love when it's only an illusion. Parents have a tendency to overreact. The worst thing to do is to declare online communications off limits. That can create a *Romeo and Juliet* romanticism about the whole thing and fan the flames. Overreacting throws the whole thing into the dark realm of secrets and lies, hidden in the shadows and obscured. You want to keep it out in the open and talk about it.

You need to reinforce the rules about not telling too much about real life or, worse, giving out an address. The point is to be aware, not reactive. You need to ask and know whether this person is planning a visit or if your child is being pushed to meet somewhere. Talk about what your children really know about this person. Find out as much as you can.

If your child has met someone online and wants to go further and meet in person, it's time to get active. Start by talking about what is safe. Ask questions; find out what they know and what they don't. Insist on calling parents, arranging logistics, being present, or inviting the person to a safe group event. If everything is truthful and honest, there won't be a problem. If the other person isn't 17 but 25 or 40, you'll hear excuses as to why that won't work. When people have nothing to hide, they don't have a million reasons and excuses.

The Reality Isn't the Same as the Illusion

Few of the amazing, incredible people online are people who look or act like the person of imagination and dreams. The guy who's perfect in every way online won't be in person. It's a simple fact of life. The people who seem so enthralling online often aren't remotely attractive to you in person. The truth of it is, attraction is more than connecting mentally. It's something ethereal that doesn't translate through the computer modem. And even if the reality and the hopes coincide and the person is perfect, distance is another obstacle. Let's face the raw truth: Most long-distance relationships don't work. They fade. Boredom sets in, and things calm down to an occasional online "hello." The point is, long-distance romances rarely work for adults and never work for adolescents. If your teen suddenly declares that they've found the greatest person in the world online, halfway around the world or across the country, nod and smile. Hey, it's fun while it lasts.

ONLINE ADVICE FROM A 17-YEAR-OLD MALE:

- 
1. Assume that everyone is lying.
 2. Until proven different, everyone is male.
 3. Never download anything.

Online chat can take up huge chunks of time. If your teen is using it as a sole means of socialization to the point of ignoring schoolwork, you need to step in and limit the hours (just as you would with television or any other diversion). There are some advantages to online chat as opposed to idly watching stale sitcoms and inane cartoons on television. Online communication means one needs to type, a great skill in itself. More important is that it involves reading. The faster the chat, the faster one must read. You'll find that a reluctant reader can sit and read the screen for hours at a time. Poor spelling improves, as does coherent sentence structure. The benefits of online communication shouldn't be overlooked.

INSTANT MESSAGING



Instant messaging is like chat, except to a specific person. It's a private conversation. There are four major messaging mediums in popular use, with others on the market. Two systems dominate the market: AIM and ICQ.

ICQ (www.icq.com)

ICQ means "I seek you." It was developed independently of AOL's IM but was later purchased by AOL and is very similar to AIM. ICQ is an Internet tool to let you know who's online at any time and to let you talk directly via messaging. It's not unlike a telephone call, except that instead of you summoning people directly (by calling them), you talk to them when the program lets you know they are available. ICQ searches for them for you and alerts you when they log on.

AIM/Instant Messaging (www.aim.com)

AIM Express from AOL lets you send IMs from a Web browser, such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer, to anyone who has registered for AIM or who uses the America Online service. AIM is free to download and use. You download the software, follow the step-through directions, create a screen name, and list the people you'd like to contact online in a *buddylist*. When they are online and you are too, they'll show up on your buddylist, and you'll show up on theirs.

MSN Messenger for Windows (www.msn.com)

This service is for MSN users to connect with others on their contact list, share files, or conduct video-based IM sessions. You can chat with friends individually or up to 14 in the same conversation window.

Yahoo! Messenger (www.yahoo.com)

This is a free service, from Yahoo. All you need to do is download their messenger file, and you can connect with any other Yahoo! Messenger user.

Jabber (www.jabber.org)

Jabber is an open XML protocol for the real-time exchange of messages between any two points on the Internet. This is an IM network that offers functionality similar to AIM, ICQ, MSN, and Yahoo!. The difference is that the Jabber protocol is not associated with any large Internet company and is open source. It still hasn't caught on in a huge way.

INSTANT MESSAGE AGGREGATORS



These are actually called *multiprotocol instant messenger clients*. These allow you to connect to all the various IM networks but just have one open window on the screen (instead of a screen full). This is a relatively new type of software, and there are more on the horizon.

Odigo (www.odigo.org)

This is both an IM network and an IM aggregator. It will allow you to hook up with over 100 million users across several networks. Besides the Odigo network, you can connect with friends on AOL Instant Messenger, ICQ, or MSN Messenger.

Miranda (<http://miranda-im.org>)

This is an IM aggregator. It uses very little memory, requires no installation, and is flexible. The basic features are built in, but there are more than 130 plug-ins available to customize it for your needs. By using Miranda, you have one window open on your desktop but communicate with all the other IM networks.

Trillian (www.trillian.cc)

Cerulean Studios has an aggregator called *Trillian Pro*, a shareware program (the \$25.00 fee entitles you to a year's worth of frequent updates and member benefits). With Trillian, you can have one desktop window to show the four major IM networks. Cerulean Studios also offers Trillian .74, which is totally free (no limits, no spyware, no ads). This program has been downloaded more than 8 million times, so it's the most well known of the aggregators.

Places to Chat Online

Online chatting has been around for a long time. Commercial services such as The Source, Portal, and CompuServe were the early people chat connections. AOL absorbed two of these operations to create the chatroom part of its

service still in use today. There are two main flavors of chatrooms: AOL (and AOL-like chatrooms) and IRC-based chatrooms.

America Online

AOL was an early innovator in online chat. It offered a unique service that had it all. It was the one-stop shopping destination with online news, sports, Internet connections, email, and chat. Many people's introduction to online chat was through the AOL People Connection. This is a collection of chatrooms, each limited in size (36 maximum) and sorted roughly by interest. AOL has what it calls "features" of adding color and different fonts to your chat. These can make it very difficult to read.

AOL was once a well-controlled environment. Now, with its size (the free disks everywhere) and the budget cutbacks, the chat controls have been loosened too far. If you happen into the wrong room, the AOL chat experience will be an unpleasant one. It may be a chaotic mess with lunatics running amok, any etiquette ignored, and the TOS rules forgotten. You will witness the worst of the online experience called *chat*. To be fair, a few rooms are still rather civilized, although which ones changes hourly.



AOL's TOS state quite clearly that it frowns on all of the following: explicit sexual language; obscene and abusive language; disruptive behavior; blatant advertising; and uncontrolled solicitations. No matter, you'll find all of those items and more with a visit to the People Connection rooms. Even flagrant violators of the TOS are not booted. You can report them, but no immediate or obvious action is taken.

The most annoying things about AOL chat are the IM bots. These are automated programs that pop up on your screen to see whether you want to IM. Most of them are from outside AOL through its AIM Instant Messenger service. They seem to gather names of who to bother by going to the chat list of who's in the room. These are (99% of the time) pornographic. You get a message: *Izzysxyhottie* wants to communicate with you. If you click OK, you end up with an automated message with a hot link to a Web site (a hot link is a link that's active, indicated with blue letters and an underline). If you click your mouse button while your cursor is anywhere near it, you'll be connected with that Web page. Some of the links are to malicious Web sites or Trojan viruses. The problem in AOL has escalated to the point that in a 5-minute period, you may get as many as 15 of these attacks by IM bots. Then there are spam bots that collect screen names and send email, mainly pornographic, to your email account on AOL.



To be called an AOLer is actually a derogatory term for someone who's not too smart or "net-savvy." AOL was the first to offer cheap and simple access and the first to release a huge number of newbies (newcomers) to the Internet. It's used as a catchall term for people who don't know much about technology.

Yahoo!

Yahoo! chat is part of the *community* section. The biggest problem with Yahoo! chat is it's graphically challenged. The screen has a tendency to jerk around because of the ads along the bottom border. The next difficulty is in finding someone's profile information. Yahoo! is slow and opens a new window over the chatroom, which obscures the ongoing chat. For the most part, the rooms are full of ex-AOL chatters. There are some spambots lurking, but Yahoo! is taking an active stance with abuse.

One of the more active features of Yahoo! is the Ignore button to block people you don't want to deal with. This is the best thing to do in the case of bots or if someone is just being rude and difficult to deal with. Use Ignore whenever someone is harassing you or saying something you'd rather not see. If the person is disruptive to the group, it's very effective to ignore the person as a group. As well, Yahoo! has a way to report abuse (http://add.yahoo.com/fast/help/chat/cgi_abuse).

Yahoo! also has two tools: Language Filter and Ignore Invitations. The language filter gives you control over what you see and don't see in the chatrooms. To strengthen or weaken your language filter, click on the Preferences button near the bottom of the screen and pick your setting. Click Save to put the new settings into effect. If you are getting too many invitations to join a room (this can become an annoyance), you can turn off the option.

For other features, go to <http://help.yahoo.com/>.

Yabberchat

Another, much smaller chat system is Yabberchat (www.yabberchat.com), a community chat site based in Australia. The word *yabber* is an Australian slang term for idle chat. It's a word that comes from the very foreign-sounding language of *Wuywuring*, an Aboriginal language of southeast Australia. *Yaba* means to talk. This chat system enforces its lengthy list (by American standards) of rules with room *sysops*, the chat police. In other words, the rooms are very simple, very tame, and a bit on the dull side. However, for a quick look of how a chatroom works, it's pretty simple. There are no bots, no one offers files to download, and it couldn't be much calmer.

MSN RUMORED TO HAVE CHATROOMS



MSN claims the site is a general-purpose site designed for noncommercial members 13 years and older. However, the whole system is difficult if not impossible to navigate. It's not instantly apparent how or where to download the MSN Chat software, and it's impossible to figure out what you are doing wrong or why it's not working. The Help isn't as helpful as it should be, and instead of prompting you when you are actually doing something wrong, the system just keeps returning you to the page you were just on. It is frustrating. The troubleshooting guide is a joke. After an hour and a half of fussing with it, the only choice is to walk away, without ever entering any chatroom. It's a mystery how anyone does it or why.

INTERNET RELAY CHAT

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) provides a way for people from all over the world to communicate *real time* (in the moment, without delay). IRC is a collective term to mean a type of software that follows a prescribed IRC protocol.

The concepts can be confusing at first. However, we'll use the analogy of going to college. To say that you go on IRC is like saying you go to a college. But just because you go to a college doesn't mean that you know Fred's sister's kid, Jenny, who goes to Berkeley. Even if you go to Cal Berkeley, you may not know Jenny. There are many programs of study, and there are many different buildings that those subjects are sorted into, and in any one building there are many classrooms. To go to a specific classroom, you enter a building. On IRC, there are server entry points (doors to a building) and channels (rooms). The Cal campus has many buildings, but no matter how many of them you enter, you won't end up at Stanford. With IRC, if you connect with EFnet, you will not be able to be in the same channel with a friend at DALnet. The system, although similar, is made up of a totally different network of servers.

IRC is the overlying noun to describe the type of service offered on the Internet. There are many separate networks of IRC. The largest are EFnet (the original, often having more than 32,000 people online at once), Undernet, IRCnet, and DALnet. There are dozens of medium-sized and small networks.

IRC was an early improvement to the UNIX operating system "talk" program. At the time, it was limited to two users at a time. IRC allowed many people to log into the same network and chat *real time* with anyone else logged on. People started gathering in *rooms*. As rooms became too crowded, new rooms for specific interests were created. These rooms are called *channels* on IRC.



One place to find IRC help is www.irchelp.org.

To use IRC, you need the right software. This software is a client/server program (this topic is discussed throughout the book). There are various client programs for different IRC server systems and for different computers. You will need to download the right IRC client; they're available on the Internet from a variety of locations.

Some IRC Clients

- UNIX/shell—ircII
- WINDOWS—mIRC or PIRCH
- Macintosh—Ircle



Talk City (www.talkcity.com) offers an IRC client applet that it downloads for you as part of its home page, so you can start chatting immediately. (An *applet* is a small program that can be sent along with a Web page to your computer.) It is specific to Talk City's system, so you won't be able to use it to talk to other IRC systems.

Once connected to an IRC server on an IRC network, you will join one or more channels to chat. On EFnet, there are more than 12,000 channels, each devoted to a different topic. Conversations may be public (where everyone in the channel can see what you type) or private (messages between two or more people who may or may not be on the same channel).

IRC Names

IRC channel names usually begin with a pound sign (#), as in #irchelp. There are also channels with names beginning with an ampersand (&) instead of #. The same channels are shared among all IRC servers on the same net. In other words, you can be on one network server while your friend on the other side of the country can be logged onto another of the network's servers. You do not have to be on the same IRC server as your friend, just the same network.

Each user is known on IRC by a *nick*, such as *Wingding211* or *CattyPattyX99*. To avoid conflicts with other users, it's best to use a nick that is not too common (for instance, John or Betty would be poor choices).

On some nets, nicks do not belong to anyone, nor do the channels. So if you like the name Loogie, you may find that upon arriving on a server, there

is already someone using Loogie. If this doesn't sit well, you may prefer networks with "services" such as Undernet, DALnet, or other smaller networks that offer nick registration and a password so that only you will have your specific nick. One thing to remember is that your nick isn't your only identifying item. Your machine's IP address will also appear, so the likelihood of confusion by seasoned users is small.

IRC NEWBIE TIP



If you have recently moved from AOL chatrooms to IRC, don't greet the channel with a "hello room" (as you would in a chatroom). If you do, you will probably be greeted with a barrage of taunts and flames, including the infamous "AOLamer!" and/or "AOLoser."

Ops and IRC Admins

Channel operators are called *ops*. They are the cops of the channel and decide who may join (or who to *ban* from joining), who must leave (*kick* them out), and who may speak (if the channel is moderated). They have complete control over their channels. In essence, they are benign dictators. In the event that you get banned from a channel, the best idea is to send a message to the ops and ask politely to be readmitted. If you are ignored, go somewhere else. These channels are a sort of club, and you don't want to be where you aren't welcome.

IRC servers are run by IRC administrators (IRC admins) and by IRC operators (IRC ops). IRC ops manage the servers themselves and on many networks do not get involved in any personal disputes, channel takeovers, restoring lost ops, etc.

IRC {SPEAK}



The best explanation of the spelling and words found in an IRC chat appears in an article on the Web site of the Institute for Journalism, Media and Communication at Stockholm University, Sweden by Sacha Ott: (www.jmk.su.se/global99/sacha/language/lang4.html)

In the article, Sacha looks at the world of IRC slang:

Most frequently found in IRC, there is a special kind of jargon developed by hackers and other online communication "addicts." In jargon the words of the language are not only truncated or spelled in an unusual

orthography due to the writing context but a huge amount of new vocabulary is created that does not show up in dictionaries. The writers make use of the language just like they need to fit it to their aims. If a word only exists as an adjective but is needed as a noun, a new word is composed. In that way “obvious” is a characteristic of an “obviousity” or a phenomenon that seems to be “mysterious” becomes a “mysteriosity.” Other classes of nouns are composed with the endings “-iness” or “-itude” such as “lameitude.”

Another way around, a verb can be created out of almost every kind of noun, or to say it in jargon: All nouns can be “verbed.” Especially terms related to computer technology are often put into new contexts. The users “mouse something up” for someone, “clipboard it over” or are just “greeting for files.” In addition to the grammatical changes, terms describing hardware and software face several kinds of anthropomorphization. Programs or networks get confused, want something or even die. The complex behavior of the technical devices seems to give them the characteristics of a natural being.

It’s not that the IRC fosters bad spelling or grammar, the misuse of words, or the bastardization of meanings—it’s a human communication form. Slang is used by all cultures. It’s a nonstandard vocabulary composed of coined, arbitrarily changed, and facetious words, designed to faze and befog the stranger. The ploy is to distort the language and play with it. In the process, terms are created that better express what is meant.

It’s how you tell the insiders from the outsiders, or in this case, the *newbies* from the *leet*.

Dark Side of the IRC

The larger nets can be enjoyable if you are aware of the pitfalls. These “places” are just like real life. It’s the big city compared with a small farm town. Each offers different experiences. A small town has comfort, community, more security, and less going on. In contrast, the city has excitement, entertainment, culture, and an abundance of everything. Crime is higher, as are things that lurk in the shadows that one must be aware of. Online mimics real life. The bigger the net, the greater the *dark side* of the IRC: illegal file trading, ad spams, pornography, Trojan/virus infections, denial of service attacks, etc. You can find just about anything you are looking for and a lot more that you may not want to see. If you are new to the IRC—be careful.

Many experienced users prefer smaller nets that still have lots of people but fewer problems or nets devoted to specific subjects, geographical areas,

or languages. For beginners, it's probably best to start out on a smaller service and move up.

Illegal file trading is the exchanging of files in violation of the International Copyright Act. On the IRC, it's referred to as *warez*. For some, the only reason to be on the IRC is to exchange files. Since the demise of Napster, more people have turned to the IRC to trade music files. In addition, people trade porn, videos, and software files, among other things. Think of it as the stereotypical street corner guy whispering, "Psssst, want to buy a watch?" Don't naively ask if it's legal, or whether you get a warranty. Most likely, it's not and you won't.

Other problems on larger systems are *lags* and *splits*. A lag is when the connection is in a traffic jam and your side of the communication is delayed. If you are sitting wondering why the other person hasn't responded, lag may be the problem. They can often last more than one minute per message. Splits are when the network server suddenly has a problem. Half the room may not be able to communicate with others in the room. This is usually because connections between the servers have had a temporary glitch. Larger services with many users are more prone to these problems than are smaller ones.



Smaller IRC networks have less than 1,000 maximum users. Because of the smaller size, these can have stricter controls over the conversation rules. This makes them more family-oriented. Some are very family-oriented.

Beyond IRC—www.beyondirc.net

Starlink—www.starlink.org

StarlinkIRC—www.starlink-irc.org

Xworld—www.xworld.org

SorceryNet—www.sorcery.net

SuperChat—www.superchat.org

Valhall.net—www.valhall.net

Warped—www.warped.net/irc/

FEFnet—www.fef.net

KnightNet—www.knightnet.net

AfterNET—www.afternet.org

Othernet—www.othernet.org

Starchat—www.starchat.net

SandNet—www.sandnet.net

Xnet—www.xnet.org

Be Wary of this IRC Slang

Pron, prOn, pr0n

Slang for pornography. They are often seen on the IRC as requests or offers for porn files. “I want prOn.” “Want some kewl prOn?”

Grepping, Grep

The larger rooms have a lot of people *grepping around*. Grep is a UNIX command for searching files containing a specific pattern but has become a slang expression to search for files. On the IRC, there are people looking for files, offering to give files, and asking for files.

Warez

These are for the most part illegal and pirated copies of software. Any IRC channels that have the words *warez*, *appz*, *krackz*, and *haxkz* or variations on the theme should be avoided. They’re the dark world of file trading. Unless you have a good firewall, a recently updated virus protection program, and a good lawyer (given the low tolerance climate regarding file trading), we recommend that you steer clear of these rooms.

IRC Basic Commands

Let’s say you’ve signed on and you have chosen the handle *BettyBoo123999*. Your basic commands and text are typed in the same place. By default, commands begin with the slash character (/).

First you would begin by looking to see what channels are available on the topic you are interested in. Let’s say you want to find a channel about cooking.

`/list *cooking*`—You find out what channels are listed that are about cooking.

`/join #cookinglite`—You join the channel cooking lite.

`/who #cookinglite`—This gives some information on other users in the channel.

Hello Everyone—You greet everyone in the channel. They see `<BettyBoo12399> Hello Everyone.`

You don't need to type in your own nick; it will appear automatically so people know who is talking in the room.

The best places to start are the channels designed for people new to IRC. These channels are on many networks: #new2irc, #newuser, #newbies, #chat-back. Others that may have a little more going on include #chat and #ircbar.

 Other basic commands include:

/who is (someone's nick)—to see information about them
/nick (a new nick)—to change your nick to a new one (in unregistered IRC)
/msg (someone's nick)—to send a message to someone
/ping #(channel name)—to get information on the round trip delay between you and everyone else on the same channel
/ping (someone's nick)—to get information on the delay between you and them
/dcc chat (someone's nick)—to send a specific person a request for a dcc (“direct computer to computer”) chat session
/help—to get help; works on most systems
/quit—to quit
/quit Bye All—to quit and leave a parting comment

IRC Networks

There are several large IRC networks. The biggest and oldest are: Undernet, EFnet, and DALnet.

Undernet

The Undernet claims to be the largest IRC network on the Internet. It interconnects users in almost 40 countries through about 45 servers on three continents. It serves over a million people weekly in several hundred channels. Undernet is divided into regional nets, including a group of European servers and a group of American servers. Undernet offers more than 40,000 channels. It began at the end of 1992 and is seen as a rather friendly network.

The Undernet Channel Service Committee (CSC) was created in 1995 to provide channel stability and help prevent channel takeovers. This involves the use of a network bot—a computer program that appears to the system to be a person—that helps to maintain registered channels' userlists and banlists.

There are three basic steps to joining the network. The first is to locate and download an IRC chat client, configure the client, and log onto the

server. Before you log on, it's best to check the most recently updated server list to connect to the closest server. That way, you'll have the fastest and best connection available.

DALnet

Founded in 1994, DALnet pioneered nickname and channel registration services, allowing users to maintain their chatroom names and identities even after logging out. In December 2000, DALnet became the first to hold over 80,000 concurrent chats, which led them to claim that they were the largest IRC network in the world. (However, most people agree that it's smaller than Undernet.) Today, the network handles over two million daily connections and supports a user base of more than 500,000 registered users. DALnet was started by a group of *Star Trek* junkies to get away from the anarchy of EFnet. DALnet strives to provide a safe, friendly place to IRC. The popularity has taken its toll; net splits and lags are common, and the network administrators aren't quite as responsive as they were in the past.

EFnet

Eris Free Network has been around since 1990. It's a large network and has well over 125,000 users and 45,000 channels. The size of it tends to make for odd politics and little cooperation between the servers. Net splits and lags are a problem. This network doesn't offer many services, so anyone can use your nickname or have your channel. It tends to be oriented toward advanced users. The general impression is that it's the wild side of the IRC. Some claim that EFnet users look down on users of other networks, and it is known as a hangout for people who fancy themselves to be *crackers* and *hackers*.

CHANNEL TAKEOVER—DEFINITION FROM VALINOR



(www.valinor.sorcery.net/glossary/channel-takeover.html)

After a net split, sometimes you will be the only person in a particular channel, and if you leave the channel and rejoin, you'll be an operator. When the net joins up again, you can try to kick and ban everyone else, and now you "own" the channel. Unfortunately for you, if the channel has been properly registered, the real channel operators will quickly end your reign of terror. On networks such as EFnet, there is no recourse if you lose a channel this way.

Forums are another way to connect with people but not directly. For that reason, forums are discussed in Chapter 4.

ONLINE DATING

In the early 1990s, it was far more likely to meet someone with similar interests and goals online, because the only people online were fellow geeks. In fact, the first online dates resembled a game of Dungeons & Dragons, the entire date taking place in cyberspace with characters created by users.

As computers began to fill more and more households and the price of Internet access went down, the likelihood of meeting someone living nearby increased. New technology made it possible to send pictures. Internet connections became quicker than ever.

Still, online dating was considered strange, especially by women, who saw it as the depths of desperation (although random interviews reveal few who would admit they've even tried). Many say they know a friend or a relative who did. This seems odd if you look at the statistics.

The Numbers

In a study released by the Online Publishers Association the online personals industry generated \$53.1 million in revenue, in the first three months of 2002, alone. (Compared to the \$8.2 million, for the same quarter in 2001.) The leading service, by many accounts, is Match.com, a division of Ticketmaster. An episode about online dating on Oprah quoted a figure of 3.2 million visitors to Match.com (in 2002). It is estimated that at least 15 million Americans used online personals in 2002. (The numbers for 2003 have not been released. However, the number of online dating sites has increased, so it is expected the count of current users would be significantly higher.) This is in an industry where satisfied customers cancel their accounts (who needs a matchmaker after you find someone?). There is intense competition among the sites for the Census Bureau's estimated 85 million single people in the United States.

Monthly membership for personals sites ranges from \$24.95 to as low as \$6.95. The average is around \$19.00. Some sites require you to buy blocks of credits, the best of which offers a block of 30 credits for \$30.00, each contact costing one credit. The time of the free site devoted strictly to personals may soon be over. Some free sites can be located, but the number of members is usually low.

There are, by conservative estimates, several hundred online personal ad Web sites. Sites specialize in ethnic groups, religion, region, sexual orientation, and other criteria, such as white women and black men, hefty-sized dates, sports partners, birth dates, star signs, country singles, date a doctor, advanced degrees, vegetarian, and vegan. You can even match up with a prison inmate.

A SURVEY OF WHAT'S OUT THERE



Dating services—International, penpals, free dating sites, marriage and matchmaking services, friends-only, common interests, activity partners, specific religious/racial dating services, chatrooms, and video dating.

Adult Personals—Meaning “sex ads.” Most of these are people looking for very specific sexual fetish interests and activities. These may also be people looking for or who are, escorts, sensual massage and other *temporary partners* to swing with.

Russian brides and other “mail orders”—Overseas marriage agencies for women looking to meet, marry, and relocate.

Regional dating—Local dating services, personals, and the like.

Why Online Personals?

Teens and young adults have ample social situations, such as high school and college, that teem with people of the same age having similar lifestyles and interests. Once at the legal age to go to nightclubs, bars, and other adult venues, there are even more opportunities to find love. As time goes by, people get busy with career and family. Then divorces happen or spouses die. A full life of friends, career, kids, pets, laundry, and all the little time-consuming hassles of life leave a person with precious little time to fulfill the urge or dream of locating a new partner to grow old with. For this reason, the majority of personals are targeted at the 30 years and older crowd. (Young people seem to find each other, thus having no real need for matchmakers.)

What it comes down to is that you can't rely on friends and relatives to match you up anymore. Co-workers are often off limits because of corporate policies. Meeting people in the laundromat or grocery store is a quaint concept but works best in movie scripts, not in real life. Everyone is too busy, too hard-pressed for time, and living quiet, solitary lives.

But where can an *older* single go? Scattered in and among the fresh-faced twenty-somethings will be the odd character showing the ravages of early middle age, trying out tired lines and timeworn techniques. It's a kid's game. Few past their twenties care to compete or have the stamina to try. By comparison, \$20 or so to meet people is a steal. And if you can do it from the comfort of your home, all the better.

The Hype

The grain of salt: Most of the information on the Web about personals sites is generated by the sites themselves. In the first quarter of 2002, consumers shelled out nearly \$70.5 million for online business content for financial

advice and articles (to sites such as TheStreet.com and The Wall Street Journal). These were the only Web sites to generate more revenue than pornography and personals Web sites.

Matchmaking sites have one purpose—to make money. Men are far more likely to spend money on online dating services. It should be no surprise that there are abundant articles touting online dating in men's magazines. But like an entertaining first-person experience in a men's magazine, the actual results may be a little different from the written version published. Upon closer examination of the article about online dating, it shouldn't be a shock to discover that the author also pens an advice column for a personals Web site. No doubt about it, when there is hope and desire, there is also pitch and hype.

Test Subjects

We decided to do some unbiased research. So we chose a 37-year-old single male college graduate with average looks, proportionate height and weight, and modest income. He first went to a few photo-rating Web sites where you post a picture of yourself to have it rated by visitors from all over the world, usually the opposite sex (www.hotornot.com, www.amihot.com, and www.facethejury.com). The 37-year-old was slightly above average (on a scale of 1 to 10) at 7.3 to 7.5. Not a face only a mother could love, but not *GQ* either. It's an effective, albeit masochistic, way to get an opinion of your external beauty, or lack thereof.

Our female subject was a 34-year old single female, also proportionate with height and weight. She holds a master's degree in business and has a respectable income and career. (She refused to post her picture to be rated.) By all accounts, she was sweet, average to slightly above average.

They each paid for a month on the top five sites. One drawback instantly noted were the incredibly detailed profiles to be filled out. Granted, the logic says that to match better, one must lay more cards on the table. No matter, it was time-consuming. They also took advantage of 20 different free trial memberships (usually lasting a week). They awaited the responses.

The Results

The first obvious problem with the big sites: The male/female ratio was not equal. (The male subject estimated 70% men to 30% women, a far cry from the hoped-for 60/40% split.) After months of trial and error, the two test subjects decided that the big money machine Web sites were not the best way to meet people.

THE PROBLEM WITH FREE TRIALS



The free trials were about as effective as expected in a kangaroo court. No responses were received, oddly enough, until the day after the free trial membership expired. (And they weren't local; the replies were from oddball places, such as Ethiopia and Myanmar.)

He Found

There were an abundant number of responses from the Ukraine (mail-order brides). It made filling out the profile pages seem pointless—because his criterion was strictly for women living in a 10- to 20-mile range of his zip code. In fact, most of the responses were pretty obviously spam. The giveaway was that they sounded only a bit girlish: “Hi. This is going to sound strange, but I had the biggest crush on you, so I asked a friend for your e-mail address. You used to come into the store where I worked every once in awhile, and I always wanted to say something, but I never had the nerve to . . .”

Then the email would end with a link to a personal Web site. Of course, this wasn't legitimate. It was either a link to a string of pop-up porn ads or a porn site. It was disheartening.

Both subjects did get some convincing e-mails (with photos from highly attractive individuals) that had flattering details on what prompted the response and how they really wanted to meet. Of course, on closer inspection, none of these emails really referred to anything actually said in the ad; they were just some copy person's attempt at being coy and flattering. Both test subjects caught on to the ploy when they answered the email. The next correspondence directed them to a Web site with explicit instructions. To continue further contact, it was time to *upgrade to membership status*. In other words, it was a tease!

However, he did get a few genuine responses. He exchanged emails, spoke on the telephone, and had a few casual dates. What he complained about was that once it was apparent that he did not own a villa or private jet and had no stacks of cash stuffed in his mattress, the women didn't continue the connection. He felt that many of the women would delete him as soon as they found someone better looking or with more money. Another problem was that there were a number of the women who would email and speak on the phone but would not actually meet him. They would promise to but wouldn't show up or would cancel at the last minute with an implausible excuse. He considered this a considerable waste of time. He found it difficult to figure out who was honest and who was not. In email, all the women seemed sincere, including incredibly emotional outpourings and promises of romance to come. It

seemed that the more demonstrative the women were online or in telephone conversations, the more likely he was never to hear from them again. It was perplexing.

She Found

First, it was odd, but she didn't get any spam. There were no listings for mail-order husbands or email from Tibet or Ghana. Sifting through the abundant emails, she saw nearly 200 emails per week, which proved to be very time-consuming.

Men lied about all sort of things. The number one lie was about income. After a few email exchanges and telephone conversations, it became clear that many of these men had barely the brains to mop up at Taco Bell, much less pull down a salary of \$150K per year. Her biggest complaint was that the men tended to lie about their appearance, height, weight, age, and marital status. They often sent pictures from their college days or whenever it was that they last had hair. She found it distasteful that many of them went quickly right to the subject of sex and even sent unsolicited pictures (not always clothed, or suitable to show her mother). It was frustrating as well to find that most men in her age group sought much younger women.

Internet Dating Options

Online chatrooms are another way to meet people online. If you have a lot of time on your hands, you can join one. The problem is that people in chatrooms sometimes have their own language. It takes a while to get to know it, defeating the purpose of saving time in the matchmaking process. You can find a chatroom discussing nearly any subject you can imagine. Although it is possible to meet people for romance this way, it's probably not a good way.

WWW.CRAIGSLIST.ORG



The main site is a San Francisco-based online community. It is a good place to post personals, without charge. The San Francisco site is the oldest, and most populated. It's not uncommon to post an online personals ad and get a response within a few minutes. Sites such as these are by far a good, effective way to meet someone in your local area. It is easy to navigate and, it is free (except for help wanted postings). There are no immediate plans to charge for personals postings. There are similar craigslist sites in every major city in the country, and some have appeared in Canada and Europe.

The services that offer free online personal ads are probably the best choice. You can post an ad and see a response in as little as 10 minutes.

Dos and Don'ts of Personals

The best advice is to not to lie but not to tell too much, either. Don't post your home phone number, where you work, or where you live. The Internet is a big place. But aside from that, post as much about yourself as possible—your likes, dislikes, wants, desires—but the shorter you can say all this, the better. People don't want to read a novelette online. Poetry is never a good idea, nor is typing in verse and rhyme. Photos are important.

Scanned photos are a big selling point. Make them tasteful. Don't pose bare-chested with an assault rifle if you are a guy. If you are a woman, don't post the photo of you at the last costume party wearing a maid outfit. And for both, don't use the pictures of your wedding with the ex cropped out (leaving only the arm and part of the head). Men, for some reason, love to post photos of themselves with other women. This is also not a good idea. Photos that are blurry or shots of the scenery with a dark blob of a figure over to one side aren't very good, either.

What does work? Playing with your dogs, leaning up against your treasured car, engaged in a favorite sport, or petting your cat are all good. Professional-looking glamour shots also seem to be popular. It's not hard to find a friend with a digital camera, or you can scan in a photo with a scanner to convert shots to digital. There are also many services that will scan a photo of you for a few dollars. If you are really cheap, you can go to one of the big computer/electronics retailers and have a salesperson take a shot of you using one of the digital display models and email it to yourself.

First impressions include the email address. It's a good idea to set up a separate email account for your dating responses. (Work addresses are never a good idea.) A tame-sounding email address such as debra3242 is less scary than psychogrrrrl10. Remember, you want to limit the amount of negatives.

Be lavish with the details as to why you are posting on the Internet seeking a mate. You should point out why you posted a profile, such as "very busy professional, have no time to go to bars," "I am new in town," or whatever else is the reason. Heck, even curious is better than nothing.

When writing what you are looking for in a potential mate, don't get too specific. Unless a color of hair or a very certain type of person is exactly all you want, be as general as possible. It's a bad idea for men to mention weight. It's a touchy subject with all women, because it's so subjective. (Even those who might appear extremely slender are sensitive to that issue.)

Likewise, women will do best treading lightly on both hair loss and seeking gobs of money.

Try not to brag. Tell the truth. Remember, you may actually end up meeting this person. It might be difficult to explain why you are really 260 pounds instead of the svelte 125 you claimed. People don't shrink three inches, either. Stock trader may sound more glamorous than video store clerk, and even if it's grounded in fact, 10 shares of Microsoft do not make a trader. Fashion model sounds better than part-time fitting model, but the differences are many.

The rules are different from the conventional means of meeting people.

- Return emails promptly. Nothing shows lack of interest more than infrequent communication. Online communication is not like regular, face-to-face dealings.
- Playing *hard to get* doesn't work because they can find someone who seems more motivated. A few emails are easily forgotten.
- Trying to juggle too many people is a bad idea. When there are too many emails flying about, it's easy to make a mistake and confuse one person with another.
- One week is an acceptable time period to wait before a first date.

Things to Watch Out For

You meet people faster on the Internet. Because you meet more people, you also find bad apples more frequently. Use caution and common sense. This holds true especially for women. A sincere person will not object to you taking precautions or asking questions.

Men are often targets of swindlers. Recently, the Russian police arrested an operation where two young men posed as potential Russian brides (they used photos of real women) and emailed their love and devotion, promises and intent to marry, netting more than \$50,000 from American men. It's well known that many match sites are plagued with prostitutes, despite efforts to keep them out. There are also the nice-enough-sounding people who tug at heartstrings with very sad stories, asking for some help. A few dollars here or there aren't really going to go far, but some of these people make a good income off the thousands of people they convince to send small sums.

For the most part, women who are too eager to send you naked photos tend to be looking for more than love and romance. Don't go to their Web sites. Don't give them a credit card number. Don't send money. Don't buy anything. Many people have been cajoled into buying plane tickets, bus tickets, and clothing to "prove" their affection for people who are inventions of

people intending to defraud. Don't believe anything unless you can verify it. Keep your wallet closed. It's best to stay in your geographic area and insist on meeting, getting to know someone's name, address, and phone number before you get too involved in the stories. The Internet is a great place for the nefarious to hide.

Be wary in giving out information about yourself too early on. Not everyone is playing with a full deck. There are lots of stories about how some ill-tempered person posted someone's home number along with a nasty ad offering sexual services for free, and the victim of the prank was inundated with calls for weeks. Be wary of hostile-sounding people and of people who move too fast and want too much too soon (such as moving in together after a few emails and perhaps a single daytime meeting). Always use your best judgment. As much as we'd like to think that it's love across a crowded Internet, take it slow. Pay attention to inconsistencies.

Women should never meet a man anywhere, except in a public place. Daytime is best for a first date. Don't give out your phone number to just anyone, especially if your phone number is listed in the telephone directory. (Reverse telephone/address directories are online, so it's not too difficult for someone to find your home address from your telephone number.) Don't send suggestive or nude photos until you've gotten to know the person. There are men (and men posing as women) who collect photos to post on the Internet.

SUMMARY

We should always remember that the risks of meeting people in the online world are not much different than in the "real" world. Face-to-face you might have more clues (visual, verbal, dress, appearance, habits, etc.) to come to conclusions about the character of a person, but you can never really know what is in the heart or mind of another person. Online people may reveal more about themselves, their real intentions, and aspirations because of the protective screen of anonymity.

This anonymity is the real difference. People often play-act roles which they cannot play in public. Predators can hide in the shadows. Everyone is outstanding in appearance, if they do say so themselves. People will tell you their darkest secrets and aspirations with the shield in place, from the comfort of their homes and offices. (Because, online you can always disconnect and pretty much disappear without a trace.)

What it takes to make any online experience work is to understand the scene completely. Hopefully this chapter will give you the confidence to do the right thing under all circumstances.