

REAR VIEW

Computers will turn us all into recluses, the technology gurus once predicted. They thought we'd soon be locked in our private cubicles furiously shopping online and wearing virtual reality helmets and teledildonic appliances.

Wrong again.

Instead of being locked away with computers, the computers are following us around. Everywhere you go, the Web seems to have got there before you.

Net access is given away free on discs on the front of magazines. It's advertised on the side of buses. It's written about in newspapers. It's talked about on TV. Ads have Web site addresses.

Just how far is this Web thing going to spread?

There are plenty of companies who would like to see it spread even further. You can have the Web on your TV, courtesy of a set-top box, which means

there's something to do during the commercial break other than make another cup of coffee.

Museums and libraries are being equipped with access terminals. Hotels, restaurants, railway stations, cinema foyers and shopping malls are next. Confession by Internet is old hat and my local Baptist church already has a Web site.

Soon there'll be an Internet access terminal wherever you go. You won't be able to use the chat-up line 'Hello, beautiful. D'you want to come back to my place and see my Java scripting?' There'll be a handy public terminal nearby.

You won't stay locked in your spare room surfing any more. Surfing will become a social activity. People will throw Net parties (and some twerp will come dressed as a fisherman) at which guests will vie with each other to find the most obscure and useless site.

Kids will buy a six-pack of alcopops and 10 Roffmans and go surfing in shopping malls. Net-bullies will hang around access terminals in seaside towns showing off the size of their ActiveX controls.

It won't be long before there will be no place you can hide from the Web. Voice recognition will enable us to surf when our hands are otherwise occupied. Look out for the Web-enabled public toilet with a voice-activated access terminal on the door. Mind you, the voice recognition will have to be finely tuned to eliminate extraneous noises.

Eventually, only the dead will be Web-disabled. But expect to see the Webbed-up coffin. E-mail is great for telling the world you've been accidentally buried alive.

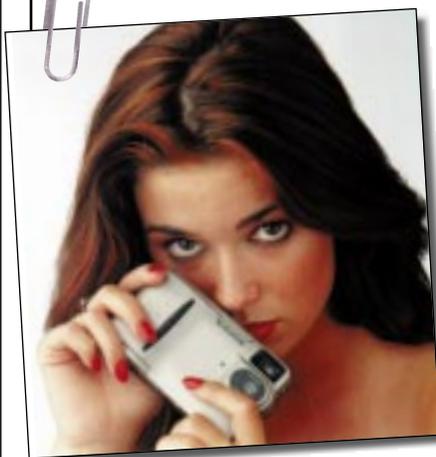
— by Andrew Charlesworth —

People will throw Net parties at which guests will vie with each other to find the most useless site

Caption competition

Congratulations to Adey Crabtree of Doncaster for 'This ain't fair. The Intel mob get flashy purple suits and what do we get?'

This month's picture is courtesy of Fuji, showing its new DX-5 digital camera. As you can see, the camera smells particularly nice but the adhesive coating makes taking a quick sniff a risky business. A copy of Kai's Photo Soap goes to the reader who sends us the funniest caption to the usual postal address (see page 4) by 5 January please.



WINNING CAPTION

Rumour has it that a mischievous McDonnell Douglas employee recently added a warranty registration page to the company Web site. Apparently, no-one laughed and the page was removed but we can reveal these extracts:

'Thank you for purchasing a McDonnell Douglas military aircraft. In order to protect your new investment, please take a few moments to fill out the warranty registration card below.

Which model aircraft did you purchase?

F-14 Tomcat F-15 Eagle F-16 Falcon F-19A Stealth.

Please check where this product was purchased:

Received as gift/aid package catalog showroom sleazy arms broker discount store government surplus.

Please tell us how you became aware of the McDonnell Douglas product you have just purchased:

Heard loud noise and looked up store display espionage was attacked by one.

How would you describe yourself or your organization?

Communist socialist terrorist crazed (Islamic) crazed (other) neutral democratic dictatorship corrupt (Latin American) corrupt (other).



Thanks for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Your answers will be used in market studies that will help McDonnell Douglas serve you better in the future.'

Next month

Essential add-ons

Everything you need for a complete system.

Personal lasers

Top printers compared.

Anti-virus software

Affordable colour notebooks

(Contents subject to change)

On sale 2nd January