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THE MAGAZINE FOR MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT

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THE CASE FOR SINGLE-COPY SURVIVAL

WILL YOUR NEW-MAGAZINE IDEA FLY?

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far out

Global Network Navigator is at the leading edge of the cyber frontier, pioneering an approach that may well represent the future for magazine publishers.

By Thomas Forbes

It's called the World Wide Web, or WWW, or W3, or just the Web. It's *the* place to be on the Internet right now, and it has extraordinary implications for magazine publishers looking for markets in electronic media. Web usage grew at an astounding annual rate of 341,634 percent last year, according to The Internet Index, and use of the Internet itself is growing rapidly. The Web—which is really a method of organizing information on the Internet—is also *the* place to be seen: *Wired* linked up to the Web this year, and *Mother Jones* is there, too. A hot zine out of Great Britain called *3W* is not only on it, but also covers the territory. You can also skim through the more than 100 magazines displayed in the online racks of The Electronic Newsstand (see FOLIO, September 15, 1993, page



17, and December 1, 1993, page 64) through the Web, and every day, it seems, another daily newspaper puts up a home page—from Raleigh, North Carolina, to Casper, Wyoming, to San Francisco.

The most intriguing magazine published on the Web, however, is *Global Network Navigator*—a totally electronic venture launched last October by O'Reilly & Associates, a technical-book publisher based in Sebastopol, Cal-

ifornia. *GNN* calls itself "a news service, an online magazine, The Online Whole Internet Catalog, and a global marketplace containing information about products and services." Its editorial personality is savvy but friendly, and it contains features you won't find elsewhere. It's also a value-added front-end to all of the vast resources of the Internet. More remarkable, in a world that until recently was free of overt commercialism,

***Global Network Navigator* is throwing out old models for print-based magazines and looking instead for partners to explore online publishing, says publisher Dale Dougherty.**

GNN intends to support itself through advertising revenue.

Glimpse of the future?

For other magazine publishers, *GNN* may be an illuminating glimpse of the near future, when online magazines will be a blend of various media and when readers will be able, for instance, to click on a word in a news-magazine's coverage of a Presidential speech and immediately pull up a video clip of it—or click on an image of an advertiser's automobile to see how it takes a curve before pulling down comparative data and prices.

GNN is produced specifically, but not exclusively, for a multimedia Web "browser" called Mosaic—which at present is the most enticing way to travel through cyberspace, and is representative of programs that may truly revolutionize the Internet as a vehicle for electronic publishing. Developed by the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois, Mosaic can bring text, video, still graphics and sound through the modem and into your office or home computer. There are versions for the Macintosh, DOS and UNIX operating systems. Mosaic supports audio and video—and there are many examples of both on the Web—but most of *GNN*'s links don't contain either because they take so much time to transmit through the phone wires and modems that most people now use.

GNN does, however, take complete advantage of Mosaic's hypertext capabilities, which point users to related ideas in other online documents, whether they reside in a computer around the corner or across the world. Users can read an interview with a

personal-finance expert at the University of Texas, for instance, and then jump seamlessly to the databases that the expert refers to.

GNN is not a kitchen-table operation. Dale Dougherty, *GNN*'s publisher, says that start-up costs have been in the seven figures, with a staff of about 20 people including editors, designers, salespeople, programmers and customer service reps. He hopes *GNN* will be breaking even in three years.

Among *GNN*'s features, the Home Page touts the magazine's hottest editorial offerings and leads to the *GNN* Directory, which provides several new options such as The Whole Internet Catalog. The Catalog offers hypertext links to dozens of other intriguing areas on the net. There are further links to literally millions of documents and data within those headings, but—like a good tour guide—the Mosaic browser highlights attractions and lets the travelers backtrack to familiar territory if they're lost.

Another area the directory screen leads to is *GNN*'s index of advertisers. In June, nine months after *GNN*'s launch, about 40 active advertisers were paying from \$500 to \$5,000 monthly for various levels of participation. They included such familiar brands as Nordic Track, Digital Equipment Company, Delphi and Lens Express. Other advertisers included Merrimack College, a small Catholic liberal arts college in Massachusetts, and Bolt Beranek and Newman Inc., a company that builds network products and undersea systems.

This type of online advertising is entirely different from what you see on Prodigy, for example, or what was at-

Getting connected to the World Wide Web

Getting directly connected to the Internet and the Web is as exciting—and exasperating—as buying an automobile was 80 years ago. If you wanted to drive anywhere adventurous, you had to have a decent idea of how the "devil's own machine" worked, because its components often broke down. And the rutted roads made for pitifully slow travel. But don't despair. Automobiles became simpler to use even as they grew more complex, prices came down as they became more plentiful, and vehicle speed increased as the roads were paved.

Products like Internet in a Box (800-777-9638), a joint venture of O'Reilly & Associates and Spry, Inc., that includes all the Internet software necessary for Windows users to run Mosaic, are hitting the market to make connecting simpler. Competing commercial Internet service providers are springing up, and several have friendly graphical user interfaces that allow you to get a feel for the Net. Finally, if you don't think the dirt roads are going to be paved, think again. Fiber. ISDN. Compression. Wireless. Whatever the technological answers to the bandwidth question are—and they may emerge from the ether next week, next year or beyond—full-motion video will ultimately come to a computer near you.

But right now, unless you have a touch of the hacker's soul and a day or two to fiddle away, you won't want to try to hook up applications such as TCP/IP and NCSA Mosaic and Sound Machine yourself. Call in your system administrator or a consultant. But if you do have a passion for persevering, Adam Engst's Internet Starter Kit (Hayden, \$29.95, in Mac and PC versions) comes packed with valuable software and useful information, as does Michael Fraase's Internet Tour Guide (Ventana Press, \$24.95, in Mac and PC versions). Susan Estrada's Connecting to the Internet (O'Reilly & Associates, \$15.95) is an excellent guide to the different types of Internet accesses you can purchase. It will leave you yearning for the open road (a 56Kbps or better connection on a dedicated line) even if you're on a dirt-road budget (a 14.4Kbps modem).

In order to run NCSA's Mosaic, which is freeware that supports graphics and sound and currently comes in Macintosh, Windows and UNIX versions, you should have at least a 14.4Kbps modem and SLIP or PPP connection to the Internet. That means setting up an account with an Internet service provider, which will cost upwards of \$30 a month or have hefty (\$2 to \$4 hourly) charges. Service providers regularly advertise in *Internet World* (203-226-6967) and *Boardwatch* (800-933-6038). Shop around, and be sure to take into consideration the cost of the telephone calls you'll have to make to the service provider's location.

You can't use Mosaic through any of the commercial online services, but you can get a text-only taste of *GNN* through Delphi, where Internet access costs \$23 for 20 hours of night-use a month.—T.F.



tempted by the immigration lawyers who junk e-mailed (or "spammed") the Internet, inciting a torrent of incensed reactions (or "flames"). You see a *GNN* advertiser's message only if you want to, although the logos of some advertisers, with active hypertext links that users can click

on for more information, appear discreetly on the index pages of selected features. "If you view the Internet as a city with a lot of different buildings, what we've done is set up a building and said 'This is commercial space,'" says Dougherty. "When you come

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GLOBAL NETWORK NAVIGATOR

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in here, you expect to see these things."

Online advertisers aim to make their messages informative, nonintrusive and, ultimately, interactive. This type of advertising is not only acceptable on the Internet, but welcomed by many users.

"When a lot of people convey their negative impressions of advertising, they're largely talking about TV, where they're shouting at you," says Dougherty. "But particularly with the demographic we're reaching, buying a product these days is based on how much information you receive."

Is this really the answer?

Not everybody, however, is sold on the effectiveness of graphical interfaces like Mosaic as a practical way to publish in cyberspace. Rob Raisch, president of The Internet Co. and co-founder of The Electronic Newsstand, says he takes a "pragmatic" stance. "I have been on this hobbyhorse ever since I worked for O'Reilly and helped to create *GNN*," he recently wrote to an Internet discussion mailing list. "And frankly I am sick to death of reading how Mosaic is the 'Lotus 123 of the Internet.'"

At present, Raisch says, "less than 1/10th of 1 percent of the 25 million denizens of the global Internet have access to the pipes [bandwidth] required to run Mosaic." Quite simply, the numbers aren't there for serious advertisers. And sufficient bandwidth to run graphical Internet browsers like Mosaic at a price that most people can afford, he claims, is just a dream that will eventually turn off Fortune 1,000 marketers to the Internet as a whole. "Anyone remember videotext?" Raisch asks.

Raisch's posts in early August were hotly debated—and probably still will be—when you read this article (for information about the Internet Marketing discussion mailing list, send the command INFO INET-MARKETING to LISTPROC@EUNET.NET).

GNN has a registered circulation of 38,000 readers, although Dougherty claims that many of the 100,000 to 200,000 net surfers who look at it regularly fail to fill out the online subscription form (which is itself a tricky maneuver for the average user). About 150,000 documents are accessed a week—a figure that includes everything from the opening screen to proprietary editorial features to advertisers' messages. Whether or not users are registered, *GNN* is free to anyone with Web access to the Internet, although even the most rudimentary direct Internet connection costs upwards of \$20 a month (see sidebar). The demographic information that

Dougherty collects from *GNN*'s online subscription form, though, is critical. "Too many people are coming online and saying 'there are 30 million users on the Internet.' Well, what kind of information are they giving you about their audience?" Dougherty asks. "People [at agencies] really want the numbers, and that's legitimate."

GNN's server technology records when articles are retrieved, and when an advertiser's screens are perused. "We can publish a report that says that 61 people came into your center this week, and two of them went to this document," says Dougherty.

Some of the advertising sections are themselves hybrids of editorial and advertising that is a step beyond print advertorials. For example, readers might be interested in the travel books offered by *GNN* advertiser Lonely Planet Publications, and then segue to the completely noncommercial essays being

'We can put you in a space where you can learn a lot,' GNN publisher Dale Dougherty tells potential partners.

written by company founders Tony and Maureen Wheeler, an Australian couple touring the United States with their two kids in a 1959 Cadillac Coupe de Ville. Totally unrelated to Lonely Planet, but easily accessible to *GNN* readers, is a digital relief map of the United States that resides on a computer at the Applied Physics Laboratory of Johns Hopkins University.

Several major hurdles

GNN is never seen on paper unless a reader decides to print it out. Several drawbacks must be overcome, however, before online magazines like *GNN* become mainstream.

First, getting hooked up to the Web is very difficult. "That problem has to be solved in order for us to get any numbers in terms of total circulation," Dougherty admits. "We've got to do it right and we've got to make it easy."

Second, the full promise of Mosaic and similar applications will be only a tantalizing tease until high-speed links and better compression algorithms allow sound and video to travel to the average user's computer in real time and at reasonable cost.

Third, interactivity on Mosaic is limited. It currently has limited e-mail or chat capabilities, so the interaction of readers among themselves and with editors or advertisers—a function that many feel is a key component of electronic magazines—is not as

facile as it should be. But this will no doubt change; and in the meantime, Dougherty is exploring ways to get readers involved.

In May, *GNN* introduced a moderated discussion group that revolved around an article by two Intel Corp. executives describing how their company devised a policy for employee use of the Internet. Dougherty himself was the gatekeeper through which messages to the whole group passed. For two weeks, dozens of readers offered their opinions, and more than 800 readers used their dedicated e-mail applications to receive the daily batch of posts debating the issue.

Dougherty is not only looking for print publishing partners to participate in *GNN*, he also encourages competition on the Internet. "We're all out here to learn. Tim O'Reilly has a great line," Dougherty says, referring to his boss and the company founder: "Magazines weren't invented so that there would be only one magazine, and online publishing technology wasn't invented so that there would be only one form. There are a lot of different audiences out there."

Dougherty says that attracting advertising has been a struggle, but points out that it would have been a struggle with a new print publication as well. Down the road, but not soon, he says, *GNN* may make the transition from controlled to paid circulation. The pricing model, however, would probably be based on the magazine's yearly subscription fees rather than the online services' model of cost based on usage.

If you think your title might be a good fit for *GNN*, you can reach Dougherty at dale@ora.com or 800-998-9838. Passive participation, such as simply posting articles on the Web, would cost in the range of \$20,000 to \$50,000 annually. But Dougherty is looking for strategic publishing partners who might manage entire categories that match their editorial. These partners should be prepared to budget—"invest" is a word Dougherty prefers—from \$100,000 to \$500,000, which includes staffing.

Learn or lose

"We can probably save a lot of people's time in getting online and thinking about these issues," Dougherty says. "Our package won't make you immediately successful necessarily, but we can put you in a space where you can learn a lot. And if *you* don't learn it," he concludes with the conviction of a preacher, "someone else will." ■

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