

Online Journeys

by Daniel Tobias

Link To Us, and See Us In Court!

In a case of interest to the whole Internet community, Ticketmaster has recently sued Microsoft over the latter's use of links to the former's web site without permission. Microsoft operates a site with local information about Seattle (seattle.sidewalk.com), which includes listings of events such as concerts, sports events, etc. Since tickets to many of these events are available from Ticketmaster, the site provides links from the page on Microsoft's site describing the event to the page on Ticketmaster's site (www.ticketmaster.com) allowing online purchase of the event's tickets. This is really not much different from standard practice in newspaper and magazine event listings which give Ticketmaster's phone number for ticket ordering, only it's done in the new medium of the web. Such links help both parties -- they add to the usefulness of Microsoft's local information site, while leading potential ticket buyers to Ticketmaster for a sale. In most cases, vendors actively seek to be linked in this manner. But in this case, Ticketmaster doesn't like it because the link to pages within their site causes browsers to bypass Ticketmaster's main page with all its banner ads for which they gain revenue.

This case may actually be more of a family feud than a battle over principles, since Ticketmaster's principal owner is Paul Allen (www.paulallen.com), who co-founded Microsoft along with Bill Gates. Allen may just be trying to find a venue in which to gain one-upsmanship over Gates, but this case is one that will have enormously important precedent value no matter which way it's decided. The web has always been built on the concept of unrestricted linkage; that's the whole concept behind hypertext as envisioned decades ago by Ted Nelson in his Xanadu project (www.xanadu.net). By freeing all participants to build linkages of their own design, without requiring lots of permissions and red tape, you allow all sorts of synergies to develop that wouldn't happen in a more tightly controlled environment. Services like AOL and Prodigy followed the latter paradigm, with content and linkages determined by corporate marketing deals, until the rise of the Internet forced even them to become more free-flowing. One of the interesting things about surfing the web is the links you can find -- often, politically-motivated sites will include a link to directly opposing sites in the spirit of "know thy enemy." Maybe a fundamentalist Christian group doesn't like it when they find they're linked to by a secular humanist homepage (or vice versa), but up to now they have had no choice. If this case goes against Microsoft, though, everyone will have to start worrying about possible lawsuits for each of their links, and this may lead some sites to demand signed permission sheets, with lengthy legalese drafted by their lawyers, for each link they make. This will cause the web to drown in a sea of bureaucracy. So even some strident Microsoft-haters are siding with Gates on this one.

Incidentally, if Bill Gates thinks he's got an original idea in creating a site with information about his hometown, we've been doing the same thing for *our* hometown, Shreveport, for over two years! Check out our local info site at www.shreveport.net.

Domain Pains

I've written before about the plan to add more domain endings, **.store**, **.firm**, **.arts**, **.rec**, **.nom**, **.web**, and **.info**, to the Internet. It appears to be moving forward, though there's still some opposition. I've been following some of the online discussions on the subject, which unfortunately exemplify the worst aspects of both the old academic computer-geek Internet and the modern corporate commercialized 'Net -- like in the Net of old, massive heated flame-wars develop over every minor point of disagreement -- and in keeping with the new, big-money Net, some of the participants in such arguments threaten to sue the others if they don't get their way. There's already been one such suit, with a company claiming to own rights to the **.web** extension suing to block the new plan which would open that extension to registration by many competing registrars. A judge in California refused to issue an injunction to stop the new domain plan (expressing doubt that a state judge even had jurisdiction over the international Internet), and the plaintiff then dropped the case, but he's still making noises about possibly creating more legal trouble,

and there are others rattling sabres as well, including AlterNic (www.alternic.net), which is promoting a competing system of namespace extension. Meanwhile, InterNic (www.internic.net), which handles registrations in the existing **.com**, **.org**, **.net**, and **.edu** domains, has claimed that the databases for these domains are their intellectual property and they won't give them up even on next year's expiration of their contract with the National Science Foundation that gave them management of these domains. This contrasts with the new International Ad-Hoc Committee (www.iahc.org) proposal which calls for these domains to be brought into the new competitive-registrar system next year along with the new domains. On top of all this, there has even been talk of having the Federal Communications Commission (www.fcc.gov) step in and regulate the domain system, a move which wouldn't sit too well with non-American Internet users.

So there's still a lot of disagreement over domain policies, and some possible litigation ahead, making it impossible to tell for sure just what will happen. Supposedly, the new domains will be opened up later this year, though it's still undefined exactly how they'll start up the new registrations. If it's done on the normal first-come, first-served basis, the demand on the first day from people trying to get all the "good names" is likely to completely overwhelm any servers that are dedicated to the registration task. Right now there are some companies claiming to be taking pre-registrations for the new domains, but none of these have any sort of official status. The best they can actually do is try to get your registration in first once the actual registration process opens, but they might be beat out by somebody else who jumps in at exactly the right time.

To bolster support for the new domain proposal, a meeting was recently held in Geneva at which various companies and organizations signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" supporting the new domains. You can read more details of this at www.iahc.org and www.itu.int.

How About A Nice Game Of Chess?

OK, computers have finally done it... one of them beat the world chess champion, Garry Kasparov, in a match sponsored by IBM. You can read all about it at www.chess.ibm.com. Much has been written about whether humans are now "inferior creatures." However, it's a testament to the greatness of the human mind that it managed to hold out this long against the increasing brute force of computers. A computer such as IBM's Deep Blue can examine billions of possible chess moves in the time it takes a human grandmaster to examine a few dozen. But until now, humans still had the edge because of the creative way they can analyze the few moves they do look at, in contrast to the mechanical way computers do their work. Deep Blue doesn't use any form of "artificial intelligence"; its approach is a strict mathematical one of position analysis. Computers do this very well; where they're still lacking is in the ability to think of novel possibilities and connections not apparent by simply adding things up mechanically. So maybe this computer got the edge this time, but don't count Kasparov out if he should have a rematch with Deep Blue next year.

Chess nuts (roasting on an open fire?) can find much of interest on the web:

United States Chess Federation -- www.uschess.org

Federation Internationale des Échecs -- www.fide.org

ChessPlanet -- www.chessweb.com

Caissa's Web Chess Server - <http://caissa.com/>

Some chess-related products in our download stores:

Knight Life Chess: <http://softdisk.downloadstore.com/products/d30033.html>

Champion Chess: <http://softdisk.downloadstore.com/products/d90395.html>

Cyberchess: <http://softdisk.downloadstore.com/products/d30227.html>

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