

behind the news

In a new breed of bar in New York's Bowery district, Brad Jackson tries to flirt with the other customers without the potential embarrassment of a face-to-face encounter. He's not being strange, everyone's at it. It's dating, Jim, but not as we know it...

Take an old electrical supply outlet, kit it out with over 100 screens, consoles, joysticks, instant messaging facilities – and alcohol of course – and you have the Remote Lounge, a new type of bar that aims to break the ice of first encounters.

This new digital playground is the brainchild of three partners, Kevin Centanni, Leo Fernekcs and Robert Stratton. All of them have backgrounds in multimedia installations and IT, but they were looking for a new challenge in the wake of the dotcom hysteria.

From their console, the happy customer can view the goings-on at other consoles, send messages, order drinks and capture images of the rest of the lounge

Catching your eye

Patrons sit at 'Cocktail Consoles', which comprise a mini-camera (taking monochrome 'action' shots for later viewing), monitor, telephone handset, joystick and message screen. Despite the futuristic approach, the consoles are deliberately retro in feel and appearance, looking very much like a combination of something from an episode of *Thunderbirds* and an old-style arcade game.

From their console, the happy customer can view the goings-on at other consoles, send messages, order drinks and capture images of the rest of the Lounge. One thing that you can't do from the Lounge is surf the internet, as the partners have made it clear that the Remote Lounge is *not* a new variety of internet cafe.

In addition to the consoles, the suspended monitors, projectors and plasma screens around the Lounge display a variety of images, all controlled by a VJ – be it human or electronic – adjusting the



← The Remote Lounge concept could soon become a familiar scene on the high street

↓ The consoles are deliberately retro in style

mood and atmosphere of the Lounge. The Lounge can also be used for digital cross-media exhibitions and installations.

Initial overture

It took 18 months from the planning of the bar to the opening. Now it's already become popular with New York's socialites and the

company is planning to expand the concept to other US cities and, eventually, the world.

If you can't afford a trip to the Big Apple you can still join in the fun by visiting the Virtual Lounge at www.remotelounge.com. Photo galleries, games and chat rooms enable you to interact directly with patrons, regardless of location or time. The website also enables previous customers to relive their Lounge experience through the galleries of images, where you can easily locate your own mugshot and those of your party.

Making a move

Although it is envisaged by the partners that eventually Remote Lounges will open all over the world, here in Europe there is nothing that comes close at the moment – indeed, the

internet cafe is still a (relatively) new-fangled idea. However, there's no doubt that, in the fullness of time, technology will play a major part in all areas of life – and the Remote Lounge could make the embarrassment of first contact a thing of the past. ■



← You can check out the competition on the overhead monitors, before taking the plunge