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RRRGGGHHHHH!

That's the best description I can give you for my feeling about the recent trend by high-powered advertising, public relations firms and corporations that have decided to include a "URL" in every bit of advertising produced. The Internet has become the next advertising medium; if you don't believe me, look at the number of firms creating "New Media" departments to figure out how to make a buck off one of computing's oldest institutions.

Now, before the complaints start rolling in, please don't read into the statement above that I'm against the Internet. No way, no day. I use, abuse and love the bandwidth of the 'Net as much or more than anyone else. In fact, I have been known to spend in excess of 14 straight hours staring at my 17" monitor, as my IP address streaks across time zones, continents and language barriers doing things that a few years ago would have either been impossible or so expensive that I couldn't think of getting that cool Unix app from New Zealand.

Nope, I really do love the Internet. What I don't love is how corporate America (and worldwide for that matter) has decided that the 'Net is the way to reach the masses. Remember, if you will, it is these same companies that five years ago would have shunned this type of indirect marketing who are now clamoring to have the flashiest sites and the most prominent announcement of their 'Net presence.

Think about it for a moment. When was the last time you saw either a TV or magazine ad without "http://your.company.here.com" emblazoned across the bottom. Why, I've even heard radio announcers hyping their clients' sites on air.

That's my beef with the web—it's not the 'Net I have a problem with but companies trying to cash in on this trend without thinking of the impact they're making on the community.

Take Apple Computer as a prime example. Up until sometime around the first of May, the Macintosh farmers had a very nice web site. Chock full of great Macintosh information, easy to navigate and visually cool, this was the starting point of most of my web adventures.

Until, that is, someone in marketing decided to overhaul the site. What was once classic and useful is now trendy, complex and a little awkward. Although it's still pleasing to the eye, I tend to think www.apple.com is too crowded for its own good.

Apple has learned something, though. Take the recent release of the movie Mission: Impossible. Unless you've been in the mountains of Tibet, or somewhere else where there is no television and very few magazines, you've probably noticed that Apple's hyping its role in the Tom Cruise remake of the 1960s TV show. Being very stylish and featuring PowerBook technology, Apple is cashing in on its otherwise bit part in this flick.

Apple, apparently, is so happy with its role that it brought up a new site (www.mission.apple.com) and is co-sponsoring a massive giveaway of Apple/Mission: Impossible stuff. But this is not Apple's first appearance in a major motion picture. Featured in such blockbusters as Jurassic Park (Quadra 700s) and The Net (everything Macintosh) you'd think that these films warranted a site all their own. But the 'Net wasn't hot when these movies were under construction and the deals had to be signed.

Apple is not the only company that has taken the concept of the web and ran with it. Other heavy hitters include Toyota, Ford, Sony, Coca-Cola and just about everyone in Standard & Poor's company registry. Along the way, these companies have given rise to a new industry and helped thousands of graphic designers and computer geeks by giving them jobs designing and running web sites.

Trouble is, this so-called "information revolution" reminds me of the "DTP revolution" of the mid-1980s. Remember the newsletters with 87 typefaces and 23 columns of type on an 8.5x11 sheet of paper? Just because you can do something doesn't always mean you should.

Which brings me back to my thoughts about the 'Net and advertising. Just because companies can advertise their presence on the World Wide Web doesn't mean they should. In my bizarre way of thinking, most major computer and software companies need to let customers know about their sites. I can't tell you the number of times an FTP or Web server have come in real handy when I needed a patch or updater and just couldn't wait until the next day.

And, without a doubt, the world wide web is the greatest place in the world for individuals, libraries and universities wanting to make research as well as goofy information public. But should every company tell the world about its web site? Don't you think that those interested are going to find the site via one of the search engines?

All of this is based on a conversation with my parents not long ago. While they're not the most technologically savvy people, they're not dumb either. My mother wondered how much more the consumer was paying for products just to support web sites and pay the salaries of the folks designing them. And then there's the group of people who do not enjoy surfing the web and playing with computers. They're going to feel awfully left out when they have no idea what <http://> stands for. Sometime ago I wrote about our society becoming a group of techno haves and techno have nots. Think about kids in school talking about the coolest

Coke web site and poor John who doesn't have a computer and can't see the thing. That kid may grow up hating the technology that could have helped him.

Where will all this end? Who knows. email addresses are standard on business cards now and some of the more astute corporations are allowing their employees to have work-related web pages on the company's Web server. Perhaps the combination of email and http:// addresses may replace telephone numbers on business cards in a few years.

Remember, stranger things have happened. Coca-Cola introduced New Coke and Ishtar was supposed to be a good movie.

It could happen.

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[Jim Hines explores the darker side of the Macintosh and PC culture in 'Blue Sunshine' Write to Jim at \[jhines@iglou.com\]\(mailto:jhines@iglou.com\), or simply 'Jim Hines' on America Online.](#)

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