

BACKCHANNEL

THE INTERACTIVITY NEWSLETTER OF THE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ADVERTISING AGENCIES

"I don't know how to speak to everybody," said Howard Luck Gossage. "Only to somebody." Gossage's work for Eagle Shirtmakers, Quantas Airlines, Irish Whiskey Distillers, and the Sierra Club put him in the Copywriter's Hall of Fame. He spoke to a lot of somebodies very well. But there is a huge difference between his time, during advertising's Creative Revolution in the 1960s, and what is beginning to happen. The somebodies can, and do, speak back instantly, with ease. They speak back on the backchannel. And they demand response.

If people couldn't talk back, if they couldn't talk to each other and compare notes, if there were no backchannel, then there would be no need for advertising to be much different than it has been.

The backchannel is what makes interactivity possible, and interactivity is what makes this new medium unique. It is what this newsletter is devoted to covering. It is acknowledging that consumers have a major voice in this new media. It is declaring that advertising, which is vital

H O M E P A G E

People will not be content with pushing remote devices to order movies and products. One critical driver in the growth of online communications — just as it was with the telephone — has been the rediscovery that people like to talk with other people. Early videotex products died, and Prodigy's initial business plan flopped, because they were insufficiently two-way.

Interactivity — beyond turning on or off a TV or radio; buying or not buying a publication; or cueing up a particular movie or videogame — is what separates the new media from the traditional media. The traditional media are, essentially, one to many. The new media are many to many.

to the growth of affordable media, embraces this change and will explore ways to create effective dialogue between its clients and their customers.

"We're going to have to develop ways to bring the consumer to us," said Procter & Gamble chairman Edwin L. Artzt at the Coalition for Advertising Supported Information and Entertainment (CASIE) task force's "Report to the Industry" in New York earlier this month. "The whole process is going to change." Artzt later added at a press conference: "I think this is going to explode rather quickly."

In a message to an online discussion group that tracks new-media developments, a writer recently quoted someone who had quoted someone who had quoted Wayne Gretsky, the hockey player.

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Pointers

 Voyager Company, which has been publishing CD-ROMs, laserdiscs, books on floppies, and multimedia development tools for 10 years, maintains an innovative Web site at <http://www.voyagerco.com/treetest.html>. Two Voyager CD-ROM titles of interest to multimedia designers and marketers are Donald A. Norman's "Defending Human Attributes in the Age of the Machine" and Rick Prelinger's "Ephemeral Films: 1931 - 1960," a multimedia collection of company-sponsored shorts that the author calls "advertisements for a lifestyle." See also the transcript of "Don't Fence Us In," a speech Prelinger delivered on intellectual property rights at <http://bliss.berkeley.edu/impact/speakers/prelinger/prelinger-talk.html>.

 Check out the Fidelity Investments financial-services site at <http://www.fid-inv.com/>. Although there's more planned, there's plenty there now — and the site doesn't have an annoying "under construction" feeling to it. Take the "Guess the Dow" quiz. It's nicely constructed and you may snatch the prize, a NEC triple-speed CD-ROM, right out of our hands. Compare it to the Fidelity area on Prodigy, **jump: fidelity**, and the Merrill Lynch Business Center at Time Magazine Online on America Online, **keyword: time**.

 Upcoming events: The A.A.A.A. and Adweek are sponsors of "Vista West: Branding Through Interactive Media," a one-day workshop with four programs at the Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco, on May 8. The cost is \$445 for A.A.A.A. members after April 1; \$495 for others. Call 1-800-676-3387. . . Jay Chiat and Martin Nisenholtz will be keynote speakers at Jupiter Communication's two-day "Online Marketplace '95" at the Sheraton Chicago April 18 - 19. The cost is \$1050. Call 1-800-488-4345. . . Mecklermedia's "Spring Internet

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webvertising

Marathon's Short Run on Group Cortex's Netweb

When the official Marathon World Wide Web site went live last December with College Pro Painters as a sponsor, it looked like a perfect combination of content, advertiser, and medium. Marathon, a 3-D shooter game for Macintosh that was drawing great word-of-mouth reviews on Internet newsgroups for its demo version, would no doubt attract the attention of college-aged males.

That's precisely the target that College Pro, which franchises house-painting territories to college students on summer break, was looking to reach. An explicit hotlink ("Please visit our sponsor," it said) to College Pro's testimonial-type advertising (<http://www.netweb.com/mall/collegepro/>)

was spread across the bottom of the Marathon home page. By late February, however, users saw the following message from Marathon marketer Bungie Software when they typed the home page URL: "Bungie

Software has decided that maintaining a World Wide Web site is not an appropriate investment of scarce marketing resources."

What went wrong?

"There are still a lot of people who are very scared and nervous about the Internet," says Brent Halliburton, director of business operations for Group Cortex (<http://www.netweb.com/cortex/>), which is the Internet presence developer and consulting service in Philadelphia that developed the Web sites for both College Pro and

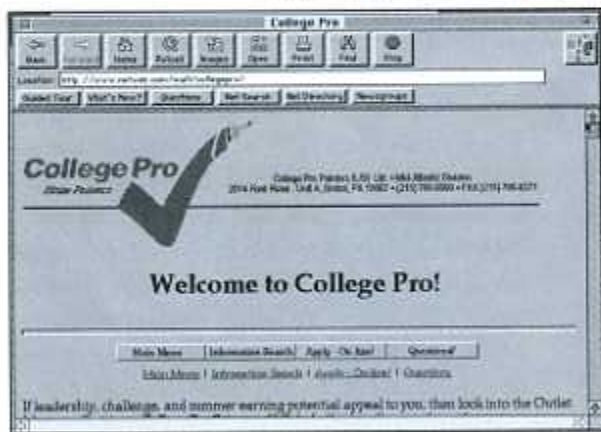
Marathon. "They're not sure if they're reaching their target market, and Marathon was one of those companies. They didn't want to spend money on this."

Group Cortex constructed the site for Marathon on spec after one of its part-time programmers told Halliburton that a pre-release demo version of the game was proving popular with his fellow students. The demo strategy is to give away a fully-functioning but truncated version of a game (e.g. four levels of a 40-level program) to whet users' appetites. For example, five-million copies of the demo version of Doom, a 3-D shooter game for the PC, were reportedly downloaded from the Net. Hundreds of thousands of complete versions were later sold.

Besides offering a demo download, the Marathon site offered breaking news about Marathon ("scooping the world by eight hours on its official release date"), contained information on strategy, content, and storyline, and provided hotlinks to related information. Halliburton says that the Marathon site was a hit, but that Bungie bowed out when he proposed upgrading the site with features for which Group Cortex wanted to charge less than \$1,000 a month.

Web commerce must evolve

Bungie CEO Alexander Seropian says that from the beginning he was "skeptical" about using a Web site as a marketing vehicle. First, Marathon's core audience already knew about the product before its mid-December release because of the "enviable" word of mouth generated on Internet newsgroups like comp.sys.mac.games, alt.games.marathon, and alt.mac.games.marathon. Second, people are still reluctant to order products over the Internet, Seropian says, primarily because of the fear of credit-card fraud. "I've read very few success stories, and a lot of tragic



stories, about people making large investments in Web sites and nobody places orders." But Seropian also says the experience showed him the value of the Web for exchanging information, and that Bungie will bring back a Marathon site under its own control.

As "cool" as the Web is, though, it's not quite ready for prime-time commerce, he feels. "I think there's another step to take," he says. "A little more structure, organization. A few more rules. With that kind of evolution, I think it can become a very powerful sales tool."

What Group Cortex wanted to do for Marathon

Halliburton says his parting with Bungie was amiable. He says that he wanted to upgrade the site to keep

it technologically ahead of "unofficial" sites that enthused gamers have established (<http://www.amug.org/marathon/index.html>). Group Cortex proposed creating an online ordering mechanism, as well as some cutting-edge interactive features, such as a Web discussion group, that would require greater bandwidth. "We wanted to invest a lot more time to upgrade the site and re-do a lot of the graphics. We thought that it seemed silly to have an 'official' Web site that might not be as good as something else," Halliburton says.

This illustrates an interesting phenomenon: In the many-to-many environment of the Web, you may not only have to keep up with your competition, but also with your customers. The day we talked to Halliburton, in fact, he had been up until 5 a.m. writing code and brainstorming ideas to take advantage of new interactive features offered in a just-released beta-version upgrade of the Netscape browser.

Tips, techniques, and the future

Like many Internet presence developers, Halliburton (brent@cccc.com or 215-854-0646) is working with agencies to develop sites for a variety of clients. "When we got

started there were five or six companies in the country doing this sort of thing," says Halliburton, who co-founded Group Cortex in December 1993 while attending the Wharton School of Business. "Now there are more than 200 businesses providing similar services." Halliburton suggests that marketers:

- Create awareness for the site. Contribute on-topic information to appropriate newsgroups and make references

to your home-page address, for example.

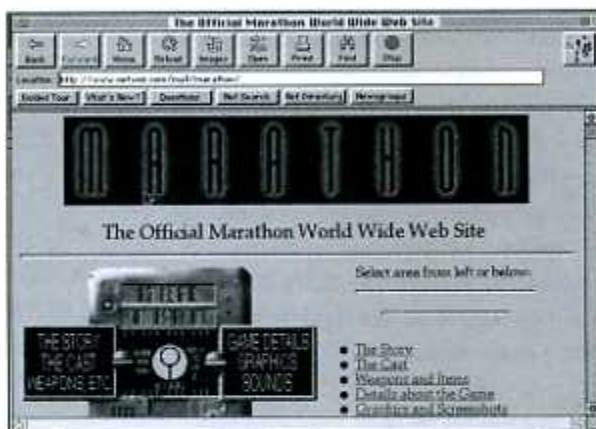
- To draw people back, offer extraordinary content and services that are always changing.

- Stay on top of the technology as it develops, particularly to take advantage of interactive features. With the new Netscape release, Halliburton says, pages can be updated

even as the user is looking at them. "Now we can virtually take control of the user's machine," he says, changing content on the fly.

- Use the multimedia and interactive capabilities of the medium to their fullest. "Content may be king, but it's a lot better to have exciting, compelling, interactive content than dead content," he says. The inevitable shakeout of Internet winners and losers, he feels, will revolve around this distinction as bandwidth and security issues are resolved. [Remember, however, that college students not only are technologically savvy, but also often use communication lines that are much faster than the ones normal consumers can currently access. —TF]

- Security standards still need to be developed so that customers feel secure making transactions. But Halliburton points out that Prodigy, CompuServe and AOL users are "very used to spending money online," and feels that they will bring a new enthusiasm for online commerce when all the commercial services offer gateways to the Web. ■





INTERACTIVE VIEW

Mary E.S. Morris's "HTML for Fun & Profit" (\$35.95), will be published by SunSoft Press in mid-April. The book/CD-ROM package shows how to write hypermedia documents for the World Wide Web, and contains programs and utilities needed to create a Web server for the UNIX, Mac, or Windows NT environments. "It's written for the person who has no idea where to start," Morris says.

Morris is a self-declared generalist who has worked in various MIS positions for 13 years. She left Sun Microsystems last June to start the consulting firm Finesse Liveware, which provides evaluations of business opportunities and feasibility analyses of new technology for the emerging Internet commercial community.

"The skill that has set me apart from others isn't technical, nor is it creative," she says. "It is my business perspective." Getting inside your client's head and talking about what a Web site will do for business, she maintains, is critical. "Most creative things tend to yield a high-graphics, slow-as-molasses-on-14.4k site that contributes little content," Morris says.

Morris's email address is marym@Finesse.COM; her phone is 415-967-6338. For additional information about her book point to <http://www.sun.com/smi/ssoftpress/books/Morris/Morris.html>



Significant differences in Web advertising:

The Web is passive advertising. The Web is usually content heavy. Designing for the Web is critical — copying stuff directly over from other media isn't always a good idea. The Web is not WYSIWYG [What You See Is What You Get].

How to draw people in:

The most important thing to remember about using the Web is that it is a passive advertising medium, and it needs to be used in conjunction with some sort of active process to bring people in. There are several alternatives available for bringing the foot traffic to the ad itself, such as registering the Web site with worms and search tools, announcing it in What's New areas, using an Internet evangelist to bring attention, adding the Web site to your email and newsgroup signature, and referencing the online site in conventional media.

The best example of referencing:

Look at Wired magazine. They routinely have around 20 ads per issue that have Web-page pointers in them. Take a look at the ad for my book on page 88 of the March issue. The ad agency had no idea how important the URL was so they made it infinitely small. Regardless of the size font they put the URL in, it has generated considerable traffic, and I have received several emails about my book, including one gentleman emphatically stating that he had a credit card, where could he call to get it Fed Ex'ed to him?

What a Web page should contain:

A lot of information, such as answering the questions a person would ask if they were considering buying the product in a store or via an 800 line. It is important to remember that a Web

