

WWW — What?

—By Blair Dewan

Unless you're on-line, it's hard not to feel you've been thrown onto the unpaved shoulder of the "information superhighway" while the rest of the world speeds past you in their shiny digital Porsches. It's like "the net" is one big on-line beer commercial where everything appears to be more exciting, beautiful, alive and interesting. In short, if you're not "surfing the net" you're nowhere.

But who understands cyberspace, bandwidth, on-line, the world wide web, netiquette, flaming and spamming anyway? And who cares? You should. The Internet has changed the way the world communicates and offers you limitless promotional pos-

sibilities. You could ignore this technology and be the poor fool who said the telephone would never catch on, or you can get on-line and take a proactive approach to promoting your work through the world's fastest growing technology.

In his keynote address to Vancouver's MusicWest '95 conference, self-styled cognitive dissident John Perry Barlow brought the Internet's promotional potential to the forefront. "On-line," he said, "it will be possible to distribute your work to every member of the human race at zero cost to yourself." Imagine your work with a potential reach of five billion. Even one percent of that reach is more people than you'll access selling CD's from the trunk of your car.

Barlow admits his view is Utopian and a few years from being technologically viable but emphasizes the Internet will invert current methods of artist promotion. "The artifact (CD) will become valueless, a simple promotional tool." Barlow urged artists to, "give away the artifact and charge for interactive proximity to what you do." [a concert]

As a songwriter for hippie-rock band The Grateful Dead, Barlow witnessed the success of this strategy first-hand. "When we started out, we were a really marginal band. We fought hard to prevent our audience from bootlegging our concerts and selling the tapes, but when we stepped back from the situation, we realized that those tapes were far more valuable as promotional tools in

the hands of our fans. The only one losing money on those pirated tapes was our record company." Barlow said due largely to those bootleg tapes, the Grateful Dead is one of the top grossing touring bands in the world.

Brent Marcus, another MusicWest panelist and owner of Cyberspace Promotions, agrees with Barlow on the Internet's promotional potential. Marcus' company actively promotes independent bands on the Internet's flashy offspring—the World Wide Web (WWW). "For a monthly fee, we'll build a web page for an artist detailing information they want and record a short sound sample of their work." Then they will put this "page" on their web sight, virtual radio (www.microserve.net/vradio/vr.html). Web browsers can "download" information regarding bands, send e-mail to artists, even order CDs and T-shirts. On-line bands from Vancouver could discover they have pockets of support in Sweden and Singapore, or just sell a few T-shirts to some kids in Los Angeles.

While the promotional possibilities are exciting and potentially limitless, Barlow realizes the demographics of net users won't make most marketers rub their hands in glee. "Current users represent a limited and distorted percentage of the population. They're mostly white guys with high math SAT's who can't dance."

But don't dismiss Internet promotion because of its current limitations. Since December 1994, the number of sites on the WWW has grown from 30,000 to 5 million. That's 19 sites every minute. Your audience may not be on-line now. It will be soon.

So, get on-line and be there when your audience arrives. As one MusicWest conference delegate summed up Internet promotion, "The beauty of the Internet is that you just never know what you might get. It's a lot like this conference. You come looking for a manager but you find a lover or vice versa. You never know who's out there and who's looking. The more you get yourself out there, and the more risk you take, the more success you will have." Amen. ☺



Glossary: with definitions provided by The Big Dummie's Guide to the Internet:

Domain: The last part of an Internet address, such as "wimsey.com"

Dot: Impress the net vet's you meet and say "dot" instead of period as in, "wimsey dot com"

Download: Copying a file from a host system to your computer

E-mail: electronic mail

Flame: On-line yelling and/or ranting directed at someone else

Host System: A public-access site; provides Net access to people outside research or government

Internet: A worldwide system for linking smaller computer networks together.

Netiquette: A set of common-sense guidelines of not annoying other users

Newbie: Somebody new to the net

On-line: When your computer is connected to an on-line service, bulletin-board system or public-access site

Server: A computer that distributes files in response to specifically worded e-mail requests

Snail Mail: Mail that comes through the slot in your door

User name: On most host systems, when you connect you are asked to supply a one-word user-name