

# Helping those working without a 'net

By BRAD REAUME  
The Champion

Newspapers, radio and television have been joined by a younger sibling, the computer web known as the Internet. If a seminar hosted recently by Halton Region is any indication, business is already beginning to understand and harness its power.

Approximately 40 people signed on for an exploration of the Internet hosted by Halton Region's Business Development Centre. They were treated to a lecture by Rudy Bayoumi, who works for Executive On-Line, an Oakville computer company that does projects with Halton Region.

"The hardest part about talking about the Internet is not everyone is at the same level," said Mr. Bayoumi after the seminar. "Half are trying to slow the discussion down and the other half already have their own home page and want more meaty stuff. Eighteen months ago everyone was at the same level."

## Getting on the web

The Internet is a range of computer connections which allow information to flow to your computer from any other similarly connected computer. Probably the most exciting section of the Internet is the World Wide Web, or Web for short, which allows more sophisticated computer links, including sound and graphics. The Web is what most people think of when they talk about the Internet.

Executive On-Line won a tender to put

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Rudy Bayoumi

Halton Region on the Web and to forge links between the Halton Business Directory and the home pages of various businesses throughout Halton.

Part of the seminar was an explanation of the value of constructing that link, for which there will be an annual fee. It is hoped that the business directory home page will serve as a kind of virtual mall for all Halton business.

Mr. Bayoumi said the popular seminars will continue at least until the end of the year. The program will change as the needs of the business public require.

"In future seminars we will confine the beginner's bit to 45 minutes and encourage discussion," Mr. Bayoumi said, adding that changing technology is constantly opening up new ways to use the Web.

He called Halton "a very wired place", adding he knows of no other municipality with the same degree of Web presence as Halton currently enjoys. In addition, several major pilot projects are being conducted in the region.

Mr. Bayoumi walked attendees through the home pages of several companies, explaining how and why they constructed their websites. He compared the relatively

cheap cost of the website to the higher costs of producing printed brochures and other sales matter. He also demonstrated on-line ordering.

One businessman at the seminar, a convert to using the Web as a sales and marketing tool, said that "marketing is a multi-channel thing" adding that home pages on the Web compliment other advertising but do not replace it. He said he had constructed his own website, with about 50 hours invested. The 20-page site costs him about \$50 a month to maintain.

## Change pages

"If I use the Yellow Pages I have the same ad for a year and if there's a mistake I'm stuck with it," he said. "On the Web I can change my page every day if I want."

Mr. Bayoumi explained there are different types of websites. Some function as on-line catalogues, others are order forms, many are like company showrooms, and others exist because companies want to be seen as being on the leading edge.

Mr. Bayoumi used Brant Florist in Burlington as an example. It has an extensive website, with prices, suggestions and order-taking capability. They will deliver anywhere in North America on the same day. According to Mr. Bayoumi the Burlington florist has filled orders from Japan for delivery in Louisiana.

"This is business Brant Florist would never get if it wasn't for their presence on the 'Net," Mr. Bayoumi said. "It's an

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