

# The Internet future is here

I realized with a shock the other day that the future that I read about as a child is here.

I live quite literally, in an electronic cottage. Each week, I sit in my 170 year-old farm house and write this column at my computer. When I'm done, I simply dump it electronically into the news room computer at the other end. In most cases, I've never even met my editors.

When we do communicate, it's via e-mail or over the telephone.

Anyone who has read futurist Alvin Toffler's work will know that this concept was one of his pet projections: a global community of independent and geographically separate individuals, vitally linked through various media.

What this electronic community does is give life to the concept made popular by former U.S. president George Bush. An otherwise unremarkable leader, he will long be remembered for his speech about 'a thousand points of light.'

Today thanks to the Internet, those thousand points now measure in the hundreds of millions, and that's growing at an astounding rate every day.

It's ironic that Bush's famous speech illuminates a concept that will ultimately bring about the end of politics as we know it.

While government and corporate leaders still vainly attempt to maintain central control in the dying days of the 20th century, the electronic family of man is already alive and well and living in the next millennium.

It is information, not money, that's the source of power in this new age.

The impact that this shift toward an information society will have on the environmental community is already being felt.

Until recently, financial considerations made it difficult for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to compete with governments and corporations in getting



## Your Earth

Suzanne Elston

their messages out.

By using the Internet, NGOs can virtually eliminate printing and postage costs, while vastly improving distribution of data. It's now possible to disseminate information freely, immediately and globally.

What this means for environmental advocates is a level playing field.

Local issues become global when they are distributed electronically. And, that distribution of information is two-way. Small community groups that once felt isolated and alone in their tasks now receive vital support, information and contacts from around the globe.

The real threat that this poses to the corporate dinosaurs is that this instantaneous transfer of information has no financial value. Fast, free flowing infor-

mation, unrestricted and available to all, has replaced financial futures without so much as a blip in the economic markets.

As a result, the financial hold that existing powers have had will become redundant when that commodity no longer has any perceived value.

Ironically, it was the U.S. military that first set up the Internet as a way to communicate in the event of a nuclear war.

Today, that net has grown to encompass the planet. And although global in scope, each individual connection to the network, each telephone line, each modem, is independent of all others.

The idea of 'connected intelligence' is a truly breathing concept. The capacity to link every soul on this planet, to empower and to inform, without political restriction or financial control, is amazing.

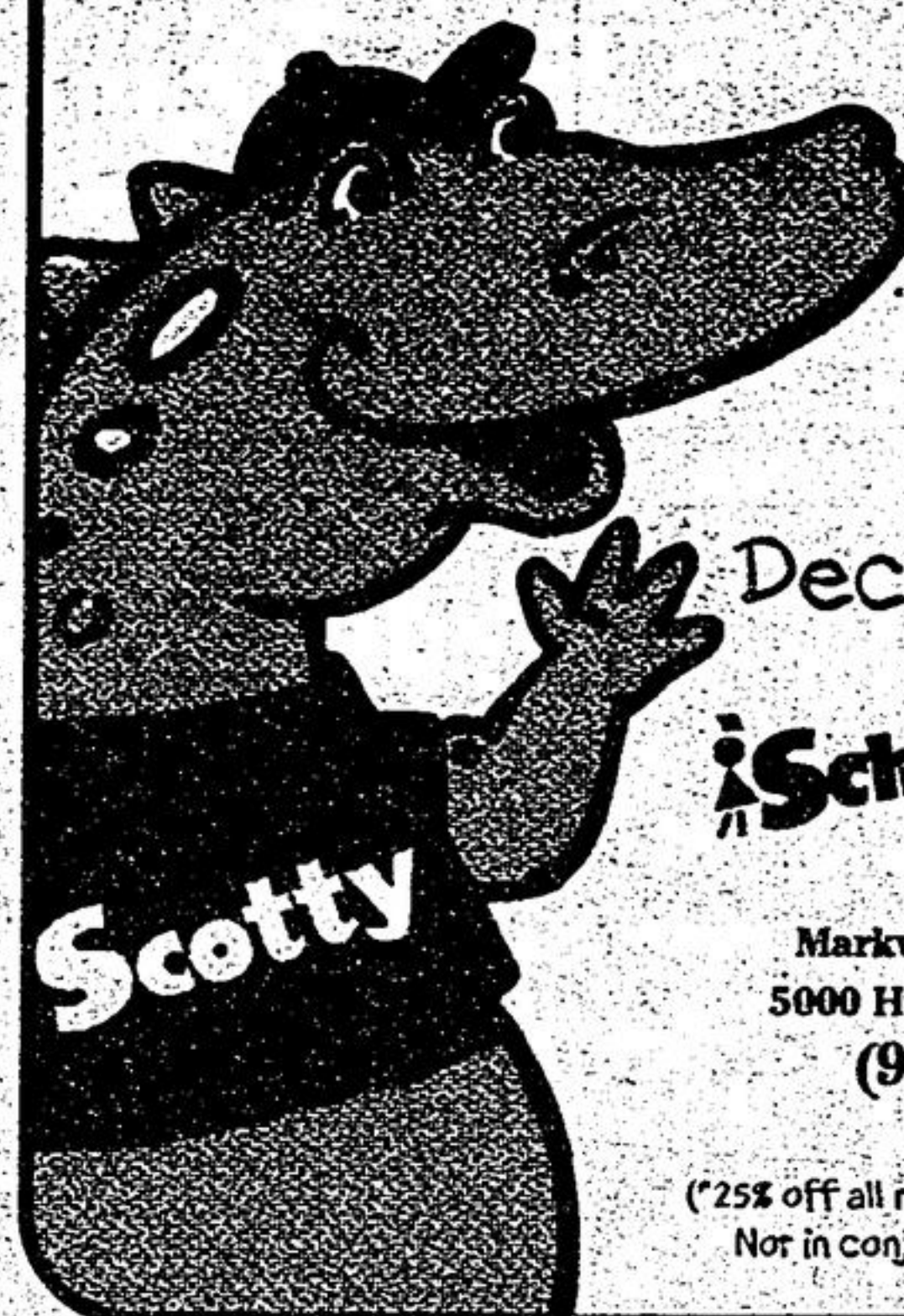
There are many political analysts who credit the uncontrolled electronic distribution of the media for the demise of the Soviet Union.

Imagine the impact that the world wide web is having right now on the global family of humanity. The future is here.

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