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SoftQuad's XMetaL uses a word processor model for XML markup. 51

Help yourself: *How to turn employee self-service tools into a boon instead of a bane.* 93



WORLD

Defining Technology for Business

I-commerce impact sends shock waves through ERP world

Web-enabled or not, companies are picking up the pace to respond to accelerating demands from the marketplace. Although enterprise resource planning (ERP) giant SAP may have been caught off guard by the onset of Internet commerce, the company is quickly shifting into high gear. *See article, page 14.*

Meanwhile, manufacturers are optimizing their existing ERP infrastructures to handle the growing need for speed. *See Special News Report, page 34.*

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From bricks to clicks

■ GM leads wave of next-generation I-commerce initiatives

By Dana Gardner
TO DOT-COM or not to dot-com? With the potential cost savings and expanded reach of Internet commerce too great to ignore, even a global corporate behemoth such as General Motors is now fully designing its long-term business strategy around the Internet.

A new e-GM division, launched

last week, is one of the early examples of the wave of traditional brick-and-mortar companies, such as Wal-Mart and Williams-Sonoma, that is pursuing major initiatives based on Web services.

"The early Internet economy we have now is only a small vibration of the changes we will see," said George Colony, founder and CEO

of Forrester Research, in Cambridge, Mass. "It will be General Electric, GM, and Wal-Mart that will harmonize their channels and create a single experience for the customer. This is where the action is going to happen. This e-GM is the Manhattan Project of [Internet commerce]."

▶ GM page 32

Payment systems

Credit cards become virtual with eCharge

By Matthew Nelson

PAYMENT COMPANY eCharge plans to do to Internet credit card systems what the Internet itself did to brick-and-mortar stores.

Officials at eCharge will announce this week a completely Internet-based credit and payment system to facilitate purchasing between buyers and eCharge-enabled merchants.

However, eCharge will offer merchants a discount from what they are charged by traditional credit cards such as Visa and MasterCard.

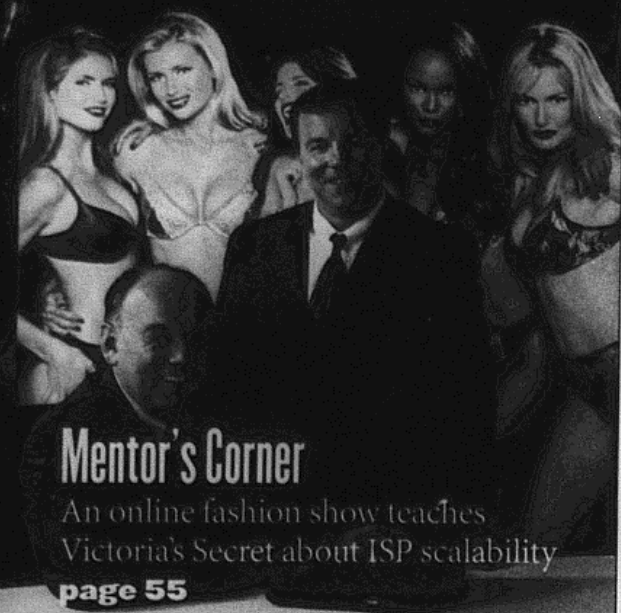
With a less-expensive option available, those traditional cards may be in big trouble.

"The current pricing structure is going to collapse. There is no question about it," said Albert Pang, an electronic-commerce software analyst at International Data Corp., in Mountain View, Calif. "It will change the rules of the game with

TEST CENTER COMPARISON **Midlevel customer relationship management tools provide a fast and efficient way to keep up**

Speeding up sales

Now that quick reaction has become essential to a company's survival, you may not have time to deploy a full-scale customer relationship management tool. That's where midtier tools come in.



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- 60** *Review*: Corel's latest version of Paradox is easier to use, but with its array of design flaws, the product still needs work.

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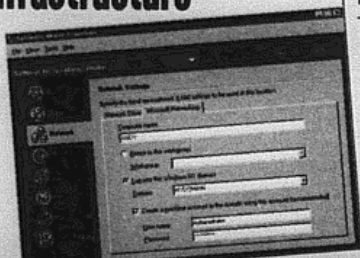
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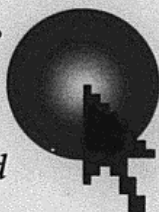
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Symantec's latest tools help you support your mobile workforce **page 39**



ONLINE THIS WEEK

Go online for all the latest news, discussion forums, interviews, and Test Center product reviews.



FORUMS

- **Maggie Biggs**: Have you taken a vacation this summer? If so, did you check e-mail or voice mail while you were away? Why do you think some people have trouble disconnecting?
- **Test Center**: What do you think about the promise of customer relationship management tools? Are these products too much work for the return, or are you willing to take the plunge to suit your business needs?
- **Bob Lewis**: Do exercises that try to instill an appreciation for the perspective of various identifiable groups work, or do they just make the problem worse by emphasizing the groups' characteristics to the detriment of the individuals'?



► **Nicholas Petreley**: We are willing accomplices to the negligent software publishers because we tolerate inferior software. Do you see a bright future for software, or will everyone take bugs and security holes for granted?

OPINIONS

► **Dan Briody**: Why did Intel blame PC makers for the delay of its own Mobile Pentium III chip? And who should we believe, Intel or the OEMs?

INTERVIEW

► **Steve Kiely**: In the age of Web site outages, the CEO of Stratus Computer talks about why such mission-critical systems will increasingly depend upon a solid server infrastructure of fault-tolerant systems.

Newsletters

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- *From the Ether*, by Bob Metcalfe
- *Notes from the Field*, by Robert X. Cringely
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- *The Linux Report*

NET PROPHET · DYLAN TWENEY

The 'e's have it: learning to spell the new economy

STOP THE INSANITY. I'm drowning in a sea of "e"s.

It all started innocently enough. "E-commerce" was an understandable, pronounceable abbreviation for "electronic commerce."

But then people started adding the "e" prefix to one damn thing after another. IBM

started talking about e-business.

Hewlett-Packard helped Microsoft launch eChristmas.com and then went on to offer e-Services. Then came an avalanche of e-terms, both literal and poetic: eToys, eBay, E-Loan, eConcert, eMachines, and even eEye.

This e-mania has reached its apex of



ridiculousness in the term e-conomy. You can almost hear the pundits patting themselves on the back for coining that one.

And yet — hello? — this isn't even a new word. Someone just dropped a hyphen into a perfectly good English word — one that already began with "e," in case you hadn't noticed.

I, for one, have had e-nough.

Yet, as a pundit myself, I have a professional obligation to coin terms. Besides, I want to help shore up the embattled forces behind the "I" prefix, short for "Internet," of course. (*InfoWorld*, bucking the trend, has long preferred "I-commerce" to "e-commerce.")

Thus, in the spirit of rampant neologisms, I propose that we call the next-generation Internet the I-netnet.

The term I-netnet, of course, refers to the fact that now even the Internet itself isn't immune to the disruptive, decentralizing forces of the Internet.

Three recent battles over Net technologies — the DNS, instant messaging, and Web page annotations — illustrate the point.

The Internet's DNS, the key to readable Net addresses, has long been administered by a single government contractor, Network Solutions Inc. (NSI). The U.S. government proposed a more open, decentralized system, to be organized by the nonprofit Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Yet ICANN is proving itself incapable of creating a workable alternative, and NSI meanwhile remains firmly in control.

In other words, the entire I-netnet, which ostensibly empowers small companies to compete with the biggest ones, is being held hostage by a single government contractor.

Another I-netnet attraction is the topsy-turvy farce of Microsoft lashing out at America Online for refusing to make its chat client, AOL Instant Messenger, interoperable with Microsoft's chat client, MSN Messenger.

Microsoft, the champion of openness? Give me a break. At no point has Microsoft offered to open its own chat client to AOL or anyone else — openness only goes one way here.

On the I-netnet, "openness" may be nothing more than a verbal cudgel wielded by the public relations groups in big corporations.

And yet, once in awhile something comes along that really does open things up a bit. One such technology is Third Voice (www.thirdvoice.com), a browser add-on that lets anyone stick virtual Post-it Notes on any Web page, for the whole world to see.

Third Voice has provoked strong reactions. The company and its proponents call the plug-in a powerful tool for free speech. Yet Web publishers are aghast that their Web sites are getting "tagged" by Third Voice graffiti.

Nowadays, when everything starts with an "e," the Web itself almost seems passé. That's why I'm glad there are still new technologies capable of provoking outrage and debate.

Does the I-netnet really have revolutionary potential left in it, or is it e-business as usual? Write to me at dylan@infoworld.com.

Dylan Tweney is the content development

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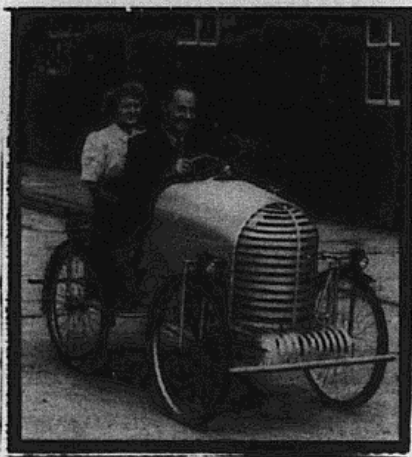
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