

Talking Blowfish to Enliven the Internet: Software Firm to Offer Colorful Imagery for User Chats
JARED SANDBERG Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
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TECHNOLOGY

Talking Blowfish to Enliven the Internet

Software Firm to Offer Colorful Imagery for User Chats

By JARED SANDBERG

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
NEW YORK—Virtual worlds, as on-line computer buffs call them, may be the next part of the Internet to get mighty crowded.

Software concern Knowledge Adventure Worlds Inc. is expected to roll out an on-line virtual "environment" this week, hoping hordes of Internet users who now interact via bland text messages will want to gab and roam in a setting of mountains, spaceships and convention centers in simulated three dimensions.

Already, users from around the world meet in cyberspace to swap real-time text messages, discussing everything from sports cars to Chinese politics. But such meetings are visually limited to type on a computer screen.

To enhance the experience, a host of companies are working to render on-line hangouts—with a cover charge. They hope to add "3-D" imagery and characters to the Internet, which boasts thousands of bulletin boards, hundreds of role-playing games and live typing discussions.

Knowledge Adventures will offer a colorful cyber-hangout, dubbed Worlds Chat. Users can chat while wandering through the "space station," which resembles a textbook diagram of a water molecule. Inside, they can stroll hallways that look

like those aboard the Starship Enterprise, meander through wood-paneled rooms and head outdoors to an open plaza. Users can select 3-D characters to represent them, picking from a palette of images that includes random people, chess pieces and a blowfish. Aside from the prospect of a talking blowfish, the images are photo-realistic.

"We're doing this to change the way people communicate with each other," said Greg Beasley, general manager at Knowledge Adventure Worlds. "I see this as stealing half an hour away from watching TV reruns."

Elsewhere in cyberspace, Fujitsu Ltd.'s Cultural Technologies unit recently unveiled its upcoming Worlds Away service. While it won't allow photo-realistic 3-D wandering, it will let CompuServe users select their own animated characters, whose typed messages are accompanied by shrugs and smiles.

Last month, software company Ublque Ltd. rolled out a service where photos of "chatters" appear on screen as they type messages on the World Wide Web, the multimedia portion of the Internet. Separately, Community Co. is spearheading development of 3-D rendering software for widespread use on the Internet, known as the Virtual Reality Modeling Language, which will eventually include chat capabil-

ities.

"All of these things presage the new telecommunications medium that is going to replace the telephone touch-tone keypad," said Jerry Michalski, editor of EDventure Holdings Inc.'s technology newsletter Release 1.0. Such chatting in virtual worlds, he predicts, could become "the backdrop" for on-line business meetings.

Indeed, Knowledge Adventure Worlds has set sights on business. Next October it plans to launch an on-line Worlds Fair (and owns rights to that name), which will feature business-sponsored pavilions. By year end, the company plans a Worlds Trade Center where companies can display their wares.

The efforts have drawn the interest of advertisers. The new service "gives you the sense of being in the environment in a way that you haven't had on the Internet," said Andrew Frank, a partner at WPP Group's Ogilvy & Mather Direct. That company and two other ad shops are developing interactive "billboard space" for clients whose pitches will appear in the 3-D worlds that users visit.

Knowledge Adventure Worlds, a spinoff of closely held Knowledge Adventure Inc., a CD-ROM software maker, is giving away its new "world" software over the Internet, hoping to hook "millions" of consumers, said the company's Mr. Beasley. But only high-power users who have special "SLIP" software will be able to use it. Eventually the company plans to charge customers an hourly fee like an on-line service.

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Down the Drain
European Union's Aid
To Its Poor Nations
Is Wasting Billions

Fraud, Bungling Are Blamed;
Plan to Dam Greek River
Sparks an Angry Debate

Italy's Missing Olive Trees

By Kyle Pope

STAFF REPORTER OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
MISSECOGON, Greece — In Great Greece, few places are more sacred than the Achelous River. Honored called it the father of the world's waters.

Now, Greeks want to drain it. Convinced by Athens that the water could be better used elsewhere, the European Union has agreed to help pay for the river and divert water to cotton and tobacco fields on the Thessaly Plain.

Forget that the EU is paying the same Greek farmers to cut production because cotton and tobacco markets are glutted. Forget that planned hydroelectric dams on the Achelous will produce less electricity than they would otherwise. And forget that the EU is now closing dry up a protected bird wetland partly funded by it—this is right—the EU.

The Risk in the Future

Greece is going ahead anyway, and why not? So far, most of the \$200 billion project has been financed by the EU as part of its aid to poor regions in Western Europe. If the money isn't spent, Greece could well face a steeper EU funding the next time around.

There is something very dirty and suspicious about the way it is being handled, concedes Stephanos Manos, Greece's former prime minister. In Greece, he adds, "much of the EU's money has been misappropriated, misused or not very cleverly spent."

Of \$10 billion doled out by the EU last year to 15 member nations — for everything from agricultural subsidies to training programs to highways in needy regions — the EU's own agencies estimate that a staggering \$10 billion was wasted because of mismanagement and fraud.

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What's News

Business and Finance World-Wide

BASEBALL OWNERS AGREED to begin the season with their regular players. Major League owners agreed to start the season on April 8 with regular players. The owners could have locked out the players, who offered to halt their strike after a favorable court ruling. But that course would have risked huge potential damages to cover players' lost pay. "I think everybody left me relieved," Acting Commissioner Bud Selig said. "We're back playing baseball and now we have to solve our other problems." (Article on Page A2)

The players head back to spring-training camps this week and a 141-game schedule is set for each team. That is 18 games fewer than a normal season.

Tax cuts could be contingent on a balanced budget, Gingrich said. The House speaker, who is hoping to solidify GOP support for the tax bill this week, said he is willing to make tax cuts dependent on the enactment of spending legislation to balance the federal budget by the year 2002. (Article on Page A4)

Anti-Iran sanctions could be toughened by the U.S. government soon. Senior Clinton administration officials plan to meet this week to weigh possible new punitive actions, including a measure passed by Secretary of State Christopher that would prohibit U.S. companies from purchasing Iranian oil. (Article on Page A6)

Defense Secretary Perry declared that American efforts to help convert Russian defense industries shouldn't be hindered by disagreements over Russia's planned sale of nuclear reactors to Iran. Perry is in Moscow for talks with defense chief Grachev and other top Russian officials.

A Japanese sect had requested some sophisticated microchip design software from two U.S. firms last year. It is now being used to develop a nerve-gas attack kit for Tokyo's subway system. The Aum Shinri Kyō sect, which is unofficially suspected in the attack, which killed 12 and sickened thousands, but set off officials' denial of involvement. (Article on Page A10)

An explosion in Gaza City ripped through an apartment, killing at least six people, including a Hamas guerrilla leader, wounded by the PLO and Israeli. Palestinian police said the explosion occurred in a building of tents were preparing bombs. Hamas vowed revenge, calling the blast an Israeli-PLO effort to kill guerrilla Kamal Kahlil.

Gingrich has helped friends over the years by using his position to intercede, and he is now doing so in a communications with the executive branch. The typical speaker denies links between his official actions and contributions or favors. Yet the timing suggests at least some extraordinary coincidences. (Article on Page A16)

South Korea and the U.S. are concerned about Japan's decision to ban direct talks with North Korea, which has been under pressure to curb its nuclear program. A U.S. diplomat in Seoul said the ban was under pressure to curb its nuclear program. A U.S. diplomat in Seoul said the ban was under pressure to curb its nuclear program.

Home-computer competition is growing even sharper. Hewlett-Packard is launching a low-priced PC line and Compaq will unveil powerful new models. Meanwhile, Apple is signaling that price cuts may be on the way. (Article on Page B1)

Morrison Knudsen named as chairman Robert Miller, a key player in Chrysler's turnaround in the 1980s. (Article on Page B3)

Ameritech has support from the Justice Department for its plan to enter the long-distance market, moving it one step closer to becoming the first Baby Bell to enter the industry. (Article on Page B4)

Maurice Saatchi's new ad agency is expected to announce today an alliance with a unit of France's Publicis. (Article on Page B10)

Horizon Healthcare agreed to acquire Continental Medical Systems in a stock swap valued at \$502.1 million. (Article on Page B4)

Workers struck plants at Chrysler and GM. Chrysler quickly came to a tentative pact, but the strike at GM plant continued over the weekend. (Article on Page B4)

Markets — Stocks: Volume 352,947,370 shares. Dow Jones Industrials 4187.69, up 14.87; transportation 1633.74, up 13.33; utilities 187.05, up 0.86.

Commodities: Oil \$19.17 a barrel, up 2 cents. One June futures index 150.27, up 0.41; spot index 119.26, up 1.05. Dollar: 86.55 yen, up 1.05; 1.3722 marks, up 0.0363.

HEARD ON THE STREET: Tupperware maker's shares draw fans. Page C2.

MANAGEMENT: Keeping a valued, but passed-over, executive. B1.

CABLE: Industry argues new rivals must regulate unnecessary. B1.

LAW: Companies move to crush out with cigarette makers. B1.

TECHNOLOGY: Software firm to offer virtual hangouts for user chats. B2.

LAW: Wider civil-justice overhaul is sought in the Senate. B10.

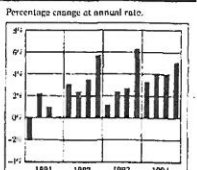
ADVERTISING: Saab breaks the rules with unconventional campaign. B12.

INTERNATIONAL: The battle to sway east European business, A16.

REVIEW & OUTLOOK: Congress turns its sights on tax policy. A14.

OPINION: The Pope reaffirms the Gospel of life. A11.

Real GDP



REAL GDP was revised upward to reflect growth of 5.1% in the fourth quarter, the Commerce Department reports. (Article on page A2.)

Drawing a Walk: Cincinnati Will Hold Traditional Parade

Though Baseball Players Stay Off the Field, Reds Fans Plan to Hit City's Streets

By JOHN HELYAR
STAFF REPORTER OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
CINCINNATI — At 11 a.m. today, Cincinnati's traditional baseball opening-day parade will begin, snaking through streets lined with red-die people, featuring entries as commercial as the Amherst-Burich Clydesdales and as homespun as nursing-home buses packed with college marian Red fans. It will pass the Washington Park Stadium, where children will play hockey en masse, and it will finish in downtown Fountain Square where crowds will pack the sidewalks—and bars.

Just one thing: There is no opening day baseball.

Traditional View
But that hasn't deterred the parade's organizers, a group of vendors from the city's Findlay Market. The group, which has staged this extravaganza the past 75 years, met Saturday night, set to cancel the parade in view of the cancellation of the Reds' opener against the Chicago Cubs. (see article on page A2). But the group just kept talking until they emerged with the revised decision. The owners and players would still play baseball, but they couldn't kick the parade.

"Life doesn't revolve around baseball," said Jeff Gibbs, the "chief organizer." "This is the city's tradition."

Indeed it is. Like the Mummers Parade in Philadelphia and Mardi Gras festivals in New Orleans, Cincinnati's parade stems

from the city's roots. Cincinnati has a long history of professional baseball. The Cincinnati Red Stockings were founded in 1859 and opening day parades were first held in the 1880s. The first Findlay Market Parade was in 1890, to celebrate the Reds' 1910 championship.

The market brings together 23 meat, poultry and deli businesses, jammed into stalls in a long, narrow building dating back to the 1850s. The smells are reminiscent of the days this city was called "Porkopolis."

And the parade has always been a great promotion for the market and a great time for all — as much an organized pub crawl, for years, as a parade. As recently as 1982, one float's driver was sufficiently in his cups to mistle the exit from the Riverfront Stadium and into the outfield wall. City police strongly advised floats to sober up, and they have more or less done so since.

Perhaps partly for that reason it has steadily gotten bigger and better. Last year there were 180 entries, more than

Planes Turn to Page A6, Column 1

The Outlook

Plans for Big Tax Cuts Are Fast Losing Favor

WASHINGTON
Three months ago, the worry in Washington was that Republicans and Democrats would get into a tax-cut bidding war. That bidding war is under way. But tax cuts aren't being bid up; they are being bid down.

The latest entrant in this contest is House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, who last week unveiled his third tax proposal in as many months. This one is a model of stringency, cutting revenues by only \$25 billion over the next five years — far less than the \$50 billion cut proposed by President Clinton and the \$18 billion cut proposed by House Republicans.

Meanwhile, House GOP leaders face two rebellions from within. More than 100 GOP members are asking the leader to deny high-income families the children's tax cut.

A smaller but fiercer bipartisan group, including as many as 30 Republicans, is demanding that the president's proposal be taken off-budget unless specific measures to balance the budget by 2002 are enacted.

And that's just the House. An even greater threat to tax cuts lies in the Senate, where some senior Republicans would rather skip them altogether.

"If you have the deficit, you have it in this country and you have \$1.8 trillion in debt, you can't just cut taxes and not balance the budget," says Rep. Michael Castle, a Delaware Democrat. He says his constituents favor deficit reduction over tax cuts.

They aren't the only ones. Opinion polls show public support for tax cuts is low and declining. The public still believes that you cannot balance the budget and get a tax cut," Mr. Luntz says. "In a sense, people are longer believe the Reagan argument that a tax cut will pay for itself."

Within the GOP, the supply-side tax-cut notions of the Reagan years, still cherished by Speaker Gingrich, seem to have lost their luster. "The savings from growth estimates that many of us feared in the '80s are important to the Republican Party, but there are people in the party who don't understand them or subscribe to them," California Republican David Drot says.

With Jack Kemp out of the picture, the Democrats seem the only faction of the Republican Party that doesn't have a strong candidate in the presidential sweepstakes. The GOP front-runner, Sen. Bob Dole, once touted a business of supply-siders driving off a bridge. The punch line: "The bad news is there were three seals empty."

Lamar Alexander is a philosophical descendant of Tennessee Sen. Howard Baker, who called supply-side tax cuts a "riverboat gambler." Even Texas Sen. Phil Gramm, who had said he would let tax cuts sink if they were not supported by supply-siders, is an advocate of "root-caut" economics who favors spending cuts over tax cuts.

Sen. Pete Wilson of California is perhaps the most troublesome to true believers from the Reagan revolution. As a governor, he demonstrated his fiscal conservatism when he arrived in a wheelchair, with intravenous tubes still stuck in his arms, to cast the deciding vote in 1993 to reduce the deficit by freezing Social Security cost-of-living adjustments for one year and cutting veterans' benefits and Small Business Administration loans.

The deterioration of the supply-side camp was evident in a newsletter sent out last week by its high priest, Jude Wanniski. Mr. Wanniski is the tax-cut adviser to the magazine of Forbes magazine, to run for president.

Mr. Forbes declines the honor. "I don't believe in the supply-side theory of government," he says. "I believe in a balanced budget, and I believe in a balanced budget."

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Bad Fit

Lands' End Kicks Out Modern New Managers, Rejecting a Makeover

Employees, Founder Prefer The Old-Fashioned Way, But Is 'Cozy' Outdated?

Mr. End Sudden Ends

By GUYON A. PATTERSON
STAFF REPORTER OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
DODDGEVILLE, Wis. — Carions of khaki pants, raglan sweaters, oxford shirts and leather loafers — millions of dollars worth of merchandise in all — fill a huge warehouse at Lands' End Inc. headquarters here. Yet at the employee entrance, there are no gates, or even guards. "We call it the trust system," says Robert Jelle, an 11-year employee.

Are there time clocks or ID badges for the catalog retailer's 5,000 employees. Drug tests and pre-employment exams are for new hires. Yet at the employee entrance, there are no gates, or even guards. "We call it the trust system," says Robert Jelle, an 11-year employee.

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