

New technology spawns opportunities for many new and unusual companies!

By Bruce A. Love

Personal computers are capable of many amazing things. Some uses are truly out of this world. Others come under the heading: "Yes, a PC can do that, but what's the point?!"

Computers can function as phones, faxes, radios, CD players, televisions, and even VCRs. Personally, I prefer to keep my technologies separated. I suppose this is a precautionary measure that stems from adolescent years spent watching sci-fi movies in which computers invariably decided they no longer needed humans. Of course, if TV on my PC enables me to cancel services from the extortionists running Cable TV, and only pay for the stations I want to watch, you can count on me to join the march in favor of TV/PC marriage rights, and risk the end of civilization as we know it!

Have you ever thought your emails are not as interesting as they could be? One company is developing a device that adds aromas to e-mails. The plug-in unit holds 60 distinct smells that can be selectively emitted upon opening e-mail. Considering some of the spam I receive, I think I will pass on any opportunity to smell them!

If you believe in aliens "in a galaxy far, far away," you might want to contribute computational time to SETI (the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence project). These people need all the help they can get! We live in a big universe, and it's very hard to find aliens unless they are making crop circles, or crossing US borders. To assist in the effort to find ETs, go to setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu, and download the program seti@home. The project uses the computational power of thousands of personal computers (like yours) to analyze data received from radio telescopes aimed into space. After loading the program, your computer will be directed to process data received from SETI any time your screen saver would normally launch (when you are not using your computer). By doing so, you can join the hunt for intelligent life, broadcasting beyond our own solar system. On the down side, Atlantic Broadband will probably increase the cost of cable after they add the new "Television for Aliens" channel!

If you prefer hunting closer to home, try Internet hunting. This is exactly as the name implies. "Sports enthusiasts" sitting in the comfort of their homes or offices, can go to a web site, and remotely aim and fire a hunting rifle at targets half a world away. Some sites even offer an opportunity to shoot live game! Of course, there is a hunting privilege fee, and additional fees if your efforts require taxidermy, butchering, or shipping of your kill. Some new ideas really "blow me away." This is one such concept! However, the image of Yul Brenner in "West World" comes to mind and makes me just a bit uneasy with the whole idea. If the thought of Internet hunting gives you an itchy trigger finger, you can give it a shot at www.live-shot.com. I wonder if the CIA has considered using "Live-Shot" on the Syrian-Iraqi boarder?

As a father of a teen about ready to drive and date, I find the next product very appealing. I suppose I have to accept that my nearly 18-year-old daughter should be allowed to start doing both soon, but as a father, I appreciate the science behind any device designed to keep my kids safe. The Road Safety Teen Driver Audio Monitor supervises the driving habits of teens. The manufacturer of this device claims, "significant improvement in driving will be seen almost immediately after activating the unit!" The Audio Monitor (available at alltrackusa.com/audio.html) lists for just \$280. Parents upload data from the car-mounted unit to their PCs, and can view reports detailing speed, acceleration, seatbelt usage, and other safety considerations. Other manufacturers offer real-time monitoring using GPS tracking, but those units are more expensive. The only thing that would improve on this concept would be to add one of the new remote Internet surveillance cameras (available from x10.com) to cars equipped with the teen auto monitoring equipment! That way, my daughter could feel really secure with the knowledge that her loving and caring parents could monitor every move she makes! I guess "Live-Shot" for problematic dates would be a bit over the top. Maybe just an Internet-controlled Super Soaker?

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