

Friday, February 11, 2000

www.new-experiment.com/isabadidea

One man's mission for online publicity underlines troubles with society, sets a bad example

Mitch Maddox, 26, was a mild-mannered computer systems manager until last fall, when he had an idea. He would spend the year 2000 confined to a Dallas townhouse, without ever setting foot outside the front door or backyard.



CALEB MCDANIEL

He wanted to move into the place with only a laptop computer and the clothes on his back, buying everything else he needed — furniture, food and fun — over the Internet. On January 1, 2000, Maddox became DotComGuy.

No, really — DotComGuy is his name. He had it legally changed. The world can read all about it on his official Website, as well as watch live shots from 26 cameras scattered throughout his home.

DotComGuy talks about his eccentric experiment with romantic zeal. Lofty nuggets of wisdom such as "explore the possibilities" and "come along for the ride" litter the official Website. He seems to style himself as one of the last true crusaders — sacrificing himself to help others free their Internet imaginations from the shackles of brick-and-mortar shopping.

But the real reasons for the site's existence are decidedly more banal — they have to do with the bottom line. DotComGuy is being supplied with sponsorships by nearly every "dot com" under the sun, and it is clear they are in it for the advertising potential.

Literally everything about DotComGuy's world is infused with marketing ploys. Online companies are moving heaven and earth (not to mention chunks of cash) to claim DotComGuy as a customer. His daily journal is a carefully woven web of links to e-tailers. The ads — which are never more than an eye twitch away — gleefully capitalize on DotComGuy's celebrity.

The media windfall over the DotComGuy project has been even more massive than the commercial circus. Despite all press to the contrary, DotComGuy does not live an ordinary life, normal in every way except for the places where he shops. His daily schedule consists almost exclusively of ordering

groceries online or conducting interviews with media representatives. Journalists have not been slow to exploit the ready-made headlines in DotComGuy's story.

In reality, DotComGuy's idealism is tarnished by two negative consequences of his life on the Web.

First of all, the last thing the world needs is another invitation to unrestrained shopping. DotComGuy is a monument to consumerism, and there is little doubt that much of the appeal of his story is in the idea of moving into a house and having nothing to do but fill it with "things." The DotComGuy manifesto is that everything money can buy is right at his fingertips, and this motto is not far from saying that everything at his fingertips should be bought.

However, unbridled spending can do far-reaching social damage, although Internet retailers are certainly not the only ones to blame for shoving the need to "buy, buy, buy" deep into the American subconscious. But DotComGuy proves that the Internet is quickly becoming an altar to easy gratification of every material want.

"One-click" impulse buying is all the rage, and the world is quickly becoming cluttered with things it does not need.

The amount of money spent by "dot com" companies on Super Bowl commercials shows just how misplaced consumer values have become. Think about how many people who have never even seen a computer could have been fed with the several million dollars spent on a 30-second ad for Petopia.com.

DotComGuy's vision is also unsettling for a second reason. His success would only confirm the fear that as technological capabilities become more wide open, households might become more closed.

"E-commerce can provide anything you could ever ask for, and you'd never have to leave home," DotComGuy claims on his Website. But the question of whether such a life should be considered desirable is ignored.

The truth is that a life lived entirely online would be nowhere as glamorous as DotComGuy's limelight existence. If an admirer tried to even partially re-create his experiment,

there would be no cameras. There would be no interviews with National Public Radio. There would be no sponsorships. There would only be a very lonely person.

DotComGuy's faceless followers show that some people in the world may not be far from this bleak seclusion. The celebrity receives thousands of email messages every day, and there are people following his movements on the Web cameras almost around the clock.

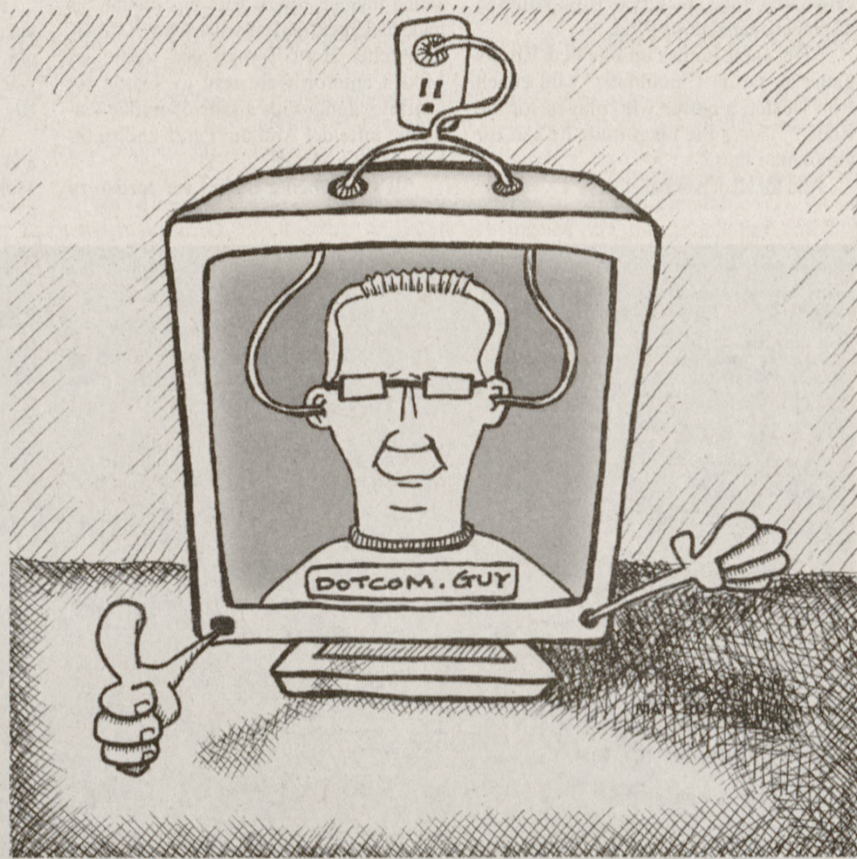
Chat rooms devoted to talking to and about DotComGuy are rarely empty. But how exciting is the prospect of a society where people sit in their rooms all day chatting to strangers about some guy who does nothing but sit in his room all day?

However, these observations should not leave people with the impression that the Internet is a Pandora's box of evils. Unrestrained consumerism is not the inexorable result of electronic commerce, and innovation does not have to cause isolation.

But if DotComGuy is to be believed, the ability to spend a year alone with the Internet would be a pinnacle of human

achievement. Whether e-commerce really is such an unqualified triumph, however, does not seem as clear.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.



MATT ROY/THE BATTALION

Underground walkway serves the wrong people

One would believe that as an academic institution, the primary concern of Texas A&M would be to facilitate the education of its students. But a recent plan to construct an underground pedestrian passageway linking main and West campus seems to focus more on getting people to their cars than to class.



ELIZABETH KOHL

one arrives at at Kyle Field, a structure that stands empty, except for several weekends in the fall. On the other side of Wellborn, the walkway would open to a large, cement parking garage surrounded by lots that are vacated by students during football games. And for a few days out of the year an abundance of alumni would pass through the tunnel, glad to avoid the busy street and Union Pacific railroad tracks students face regularly.

A Joe Routh passageway will do exactly what the administration claims — get students to their cars. But students trying to attend classes are still left in a life-sized game of Frogger.

The four lanes of traffic and the railroad tracks would not be so intrusive except that long trains do pass through campus, and train cars have been known to stop on the tracks. Because of these obstacles students may actually be late to classes on both West and main campus.

West campus is expanding too rapidly for the administration to ignore the need for a passageway which would facilitate students. Classes and entire departments have relocated to West campus, and the main artery between those classes and others is Old Main Road. Traveling from Kleberg Center or the Wehner College of Business Building to the Academic Building, the straightest route would cross Wellborn at Old Main, not Joe Routh.

More buildings will be constructed on West campus and a greater number of students will cross Wellborn Road to get to and from their classes. A&M needs to reevaluate the placement of the pedestrian passageway in order to accommodate student's academic needs — looking toward the future, not just the next athletic event.

Elizabeth Kohl is a junior accounting major.

Judging by the location of the walkway, it seems the designers are ignoring the needs of students trying to get to class.

A pedestrian passageway running under Wellborn Road and the Union Pacific railroad tracks has been suggested as a convenient and expedient way to travel back and forth between the two campuses.

Original plans for the passageway called for two tunnels to be built: one running parallel to Joe Routh Boulevard connecting the Kyle Field Plaza and the new parking garage (which will be located across from the Student Recreation Center) and another tunnel closer to Old Main Road. However, due to financial constraints, only the passageway along Joe Routh will be constructed next fall. Judging by the location of the walkway, it seems the designers are ignoring the need of students trying to get to class.

Though the administration views the Joe Routh placement as beneficial to students, the passageway would be positioned much closer to athletic complexes than academic buildings. Linking main campus to Kyle Field, Olsen Baseball Field, Reed Arena and at least four other athletic complexes, the passageway would be an ideal transit system for athletic functions. Exiting from the Northern end of the tunnel,

Texas hospitals lose by winning lawsuit

Start looking for new ad campaigns sponsored by the Texas Health Department encouraging teens to smoke. It is not likely that television networks will be running these ads anytime soon, but a decline in tobacco sales will have hospital systems all over the state looking for ways to generate funds. Texas local hospital districts will lose more than \$60 million this year because of a reduction in tobacco sales. It seems that in the fight against smoking, hospitals may have fought too hard.



SUMMER HICKS

As part of the state settlement with tobacco companies, local hospital districts were to receive \$2.25 billion of the \$17 billion arrangement. However, because of the decline in tobacco sales, companies demanded an 11 percent return on the overpayment. According to Harvey Rice of the *Houston Chronicle*, the hospitals may be the unfortunate "victims of their own success."

This situation points to the strange relationship that exists between those who indirectly destroy public health and those who try to restore it. The tobacco industry and the states are destined to ride this merry-go-round until it stops, if it ever does. Companies such as Philip Morris U.S.A. market products the public demands, but the government monetarily punishes them. Forced to pay reparations to the states for health care, the tobacco industry is, in a sense, shooting itself in the foot. Evidently, wounds heal quickly because it can expect to get some of its settlement money back.

This illogical arrangement resembles a parent attempting to resolve a conflict between two children. The tobacco companies want to sell their wares despite proven health risks, but state and local officials are trying to prevent their adversaries' success. Suddenly, in steps the judicial system to solve the squabble.

Philip Morris and others are forced to pay the states to compensate for the damages done to citizens by tobacco products. However, the states were overpaid because tobacco profits were down this year, and companies want their money back. This is problematic because many hospitals have already budgeted the expected payment and will struggle to handle the cut.

Hospitals are put in a complicated position because if they succeed in lowering the number of smokers, they lose funding.

The fact stands that, in a bizarre way, hospitals need people to smoke. They need the money they are given by tobacco companies to survive. So while the tobacco industry is punished for its advertising and marketing success, the health care system is punished when less people smoke — the true aim of public health reform. The absurdity of this entire situation resides in the fact that smokers buy tobacco products of their own free will.

The settlement represents good intentions in the attempt to improve public health, but this seems to be an inconsequential drop in the bucket. The tobacco companies could be the first in a long line of targets for generating revenue for public and private hospitals and health care centers.

If the U.S. Department of Health was so inclined, it could opt to attack almost any industry. Fast food chains could find themselves in the first in a long line of targets for generating revenue for public and private hospitals and health care centers. If the U.S. Department of Health was so inclined, it could opt to attack almost any industry. Fast food chains could find themselves in the first in a long line of targets for generating revenue for public and private hospitals and health care centers.

If smoking is legal, then the tobacco companies should not be penalized for supplying what customers demand. Why should the industry be to blame for smokers' informed decision to ruin their health? This creates a gray area for businesses if they can potentially be held liable for the effects on customers who purchase products knowing full well the risks entailed. Hospitals are put in a complicated position because if they succeed in lowering the number of smokers, they lose funding. The government is creating a difficult situation by charging fault to tobacco companies and sentencing them to pay for the damages their products cause to the public. If this settlement proves to be advantageous for health care systems, other companies may soon be heading to court to defend themselves. McDonald's — you are next.

Summer Hicks is a senior English major.

MAIL CALL

DUI violations not enforced equally

In response to Brady Creel's Feb. 9 article.

The Athletic Department claims that it takes disciplinary actions on students who violate NCAA and student rules, however it would appear that the Athletic Department does not make good on this promise. Ja'Mar Toombs is a great football player and I would not like to see anything jeopardize his career, but I do think he deserves to be punished for his actions.

His recent DUI and previous hemp convictions seemed to be overlooked by the Athletic Department. I think, as do most people, those who are in the public eye should face the same punishment as everyone else. I know that if I had been pulled over with a .1 BAC instead of Ja'Mar, I would not have been lucky enough to receive a DUI. But with a less recognizable name, I would

Bryan Odum
Class of '00

Racist intentions found in diversity

In response to Stuart Hutson's Feb. 9 article.

The *Battalion* and other advocates of multiculturalism have continuously searched for excuses as to why the perceived lack of diversity at Texas A&M is a threat to our prestige as a university. Saying that the Bonfire tragedy is symbolic of our ethnic troubles is not only wrong, it is utterly tasteless. Proponents of diversity fail to see that their obsession with race and ethnicity is the true problem and that only by looking beyond skin color can people be deemed truly intelligent.

In this logic, any person who says A&M needs more members of a certain race at Texas A&M must be judged for what he or she truly is — a racist.

To be a world-class University (which we already are) A&M does not need to embrace "multiculturalism" and "diversity"; we need to embrace people as individuals, knowing that our community is judged not by its ethnic breakdown, but by the intelligence of its individuals.

Micah Belden
Class of '02

The *Battalion* encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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