

Feature article in *The Los Angeles Times*

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The Los Angeles Times

March 2, 1994, Wednesday

SECTION: **Business**; Part D; Page 1; **Lead Story**

LENGTH: 1576 words

HEADLINE: PAPER-LESS PUBLISHER;
COMPUTERS: IRVINE 'INFOMANIAC'S' 'E-MAGAZINE' EXISTS ONLY IN
CYBERSPACE.

BYLINE: By DEAN TAKAHASHI, TIMES STAFF WRITER

DATELINE: IRVINE

BODY:

David Scott Lewis calls himself an "infomaniac." (Attached Photo)

In 1975, when he was 17, he built a personal computer from the first available Altair kits. He became a "hacker" and served as a consultant to "WarGames," a 1983 film about a teen-age computer nerd who nearly triggers a nuclear war. Today, the 35-year-old Lewis cruises the Internet, the global electronic supernetwork known simply as "the Net" that links 20,000 computer networks and boasts 20 million users. He spends an hour or more a day perusing more than 200 groups of on-line information. He even acquired an Internet address -- a sort of ID number -- for his 19-week-old daughter on the day she was born.

So naturally, this walking encyclopedia and information junkie is a fitting editor and publisher of an Internet magazine, Hot Off The Tree, which summarizes more than 100 printed publications and explores our technological world. His "publication" circulates electronically -- only in cyberspace -- and is a sign of the coming grass-roots explosion in the electronic publishing world.

"I think the Internet may be as important to publishing as the Gutenberg printing press," he said. "It means that anybody can be a publisher, as long as they understand the Internet. I haven't spent a nickel and I'm putting out an international magazine and rounding up tens of thousands of subscribers."

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Lewis got the urge to start a free electronic magazine to track the hottest and the worst technologies after reading a 1992 NASA-Pentagon report that suggested techies might prefer reading on-line. "Ted Turner and Rupert Murdoch, watch out," Lewis jokes. Susan Jurist, a visual arts librarian at UC San Diego, published Hot Off The Tree for about a year before it became too much of a burden. She had 2,000 subscribers when

she halted publication last fall. In December, Lewis asked if he could take it over, and she agreed. UCSD officials agreed to maintain the mailing list in the beginning for his first few issues, which will not carry advertising. Lewis intends to publish and edit HOTT about 10 times a year in his spare time from his home in Irvine.

Lewis has taken steps to dramatically boost HOTT's circulation. He sent a mass solicitation to various Internet user groups in January and included the text of the speech by AT&T executive Robert Kavner at the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. A direct mailing on paper could have cost him at least \$45,000, but providing the same information on the Internet cost nothing. After less than two months, more than 31,000 people sent Lewis messages saying they wanted to subscribe to HOTT, which he calls the "first periodical for the global citizenry in cyberspace."

Lewis' electronic magazine venture is expected to cost him less than \$5,000. Loading the magazine onto the Internet costs nothing more than getting an Internet address, which he has for free thanks to his work over the past seven years as an editor of a quarterly journal for the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

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Once Lewis completes an issue, he sends it to an Internet host computer in San Jose, which transmits it to a computer system at UC San Diego, where the mailing list is kept. Then the university transmits it worldwide to everyone on the list. "I could do this from a ski slope in Wyoming as long as I had access to a computer and modem," he said. Kathryn McCabe, editor-in-chief of Online Access, a printed magazine that covers electronic bulletin boards, said her journal keeps track of 150 electronic magazines. Most electronic journals, ranging from Computer Underground Digest to AIDS Treatment News, hit a focused readership and compete only with printed trade journals of limited circulation. "If he has 31,000 people, that is successful," said McCabe, "These things have taken off on the Internet because the economics are so much better when you don't have to print on paper."

Lewis' magazine should also draw additional readers because it will be posted for viewing on a variety of computer networks within the Internet, including an Air Force network and numerous overseas networks. Lewis has received hundreds of electronic letters asking for subscriptions, from a Russian scientist working at the University of Sains in Malaysia to academics in Beijing. Not bad for an electronic magazine that will resume publishing later this month.

It's difficult to determine how many people actually read an on-line magazine and even to define what one is, said Daniel Dern, author of the Internet Guide for New Users and outgoing editor of Internet World magazine in Newton Center, Mass. "What Mr. Lewis is doing with HOTT is exciting in itself and also as a demonstration of how to reach a large audience on-line," said Dern. "It really is experimental."

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The timing for these "e-zines" couldn't be better. With the growing popularity of the information superhighway, the general media have published more than 2,000 articles on the 'Net. How-to books for Internet novices proliferate. Lewis believes his magazine will become must reading among the 2.5 million serious 'Net users like himself. "We've hit upon a publishing phenomenon," said Rosalind Resnick, a Hollywood, Fla., resident who monitors electronic newspapers and magazines and started her own Internet publication, the Interactive Publishing Alert, this month. "After sending out e-mail, I got my first paying subscriber in seven hours."

Lewis said he will keep his full-time job while working as editor, publisher and sole employee of HOTT. Since January, he has been president of Cellsys, Inc., a start-up Van Nuys company that is creating wireless communications products, such as radio-controlled home appliances. Previously, he worked for eight years as a marketing executive for a factory automation firm in Irvine, Noubas. His bookshelf includes "fun" titles such as "Neurocomputing," "Virtual Reality Systems," "Silicon Valley Fever," "Numerical Analysis," and "Technological Forecasting for Decision Making."

"If anyone can pull this off, David can," said Ira Moskatel, a high-tech attorney in Century City who has known Lewis for nine years. "He's a walking encyclopedia." Larry Lasker, who co-wrote the screenplay for "WarGames," said Lewis has a talent for making technological subjects understandable to novices. "As a hacker, you could tell he knew his way around," Lasker said. "He was an incredibly fast reader. He was always motivated to find information if he didn't have it." Edward Roberts, a professor of management information at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said Lewis clearly has the energy to be successful with HOTT. "He has a craze for scanning information and cramming it into his head and putting it together into tidbits."

Lewis boils down newspaper articles from about 100 newspapers and trade journals into summaries because most busy users don't want the entire story as long as they know where to find the full text. Summaries can be useful because the Internet is more like an ocean of information, where it is difficult to find things, than a highway. Lewis said he doesn't have to pay royalties to publications as long as he gives proper credit.

Because of its combination academic and "cyberpunk" outlaw roots, commercial advertising on the Internet often draws the wrath of users fond of "flaming." Because messages on the 'Net go uncensored, users often unload curses and vitriol on the advertising sponsor. But Lewis believes users will accept tasteful ads in the form of promotional stories known as "advertorials," which in HOTT will take the form of perspectives from computer company chief executives, helpful hints, or new product announcements. "The market will speak," said Dern. "It's hard to know what the reaction will be and it depends on how it's done."

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Lewis says HOTT will have eight times as much news in it as ads. Once the circulation hits 50,000, Lewis said he will seek sponsors who would be charged somewhere between \$2,000 and \$3,500 per screen of advertorial. A few sponsors have already approached him. Since HOTT is targeting the heaviest users of the Internet, Lewis believes advertisers will pay dearly to reach them. "I hope to make good money as the circulation goes up," Lewis said. "Although I'm not sure if it's more of an adventure or a venture."

Hot Off The Tree (HOTT) at a Glance

* Founded: January, 1994

* Headquarters: Irvine

* How to subscribe: Send an electronic mail request to:

listserv@ucsd.edu.

Leave the "subject" line blank and in the body of the message type

SUBSCRIBE

HOTT-LIST.

* Editor and publisher: David Scott Lewis, 35

* Format: Technology magazine published and distributed via Internet

* Estimated subscribers: 31,000 worldwide

Source: Hot Off The Tree; Researched by JANICE L. JONES / Los Angeles Times

Navigating the Internet

Here are some of the publications selected by David Scott Lewis that are targeted toward both novice and experienced online explorers:

The Internet Complete Reference

* Authors: Harley Hahn and Rick Stout

* Publisher: Osborne McGraw-Hill

The Internet Directory

* Author: Eric Braun

* Publisher: Fawcett Columbine

The Online User's Encyclopedia: Bulletin Boards and Beyond

* Author: Bernard Aboda

* Publisher: Addison-Wesley

A User's Introduction to Unix

* Author and Publisher: Berkeley / Decision Systems

Source: Various publications; Researched by DEAN TAKAHASHI / Los Angeles Times

GRAPHIC: Photo, COLOR, David Scott Lewis compares Internet to the Gutenberg printing press. ; Photo, The paperless Irvine-based publisher of Hot Off The Tree calls himself an "infomaniac." MARK BOSTER / Los Angeles Times

FOOTNOTES: Ed Roberts is the David Sarnoff Professor of Management of Technology at MIT, not simply an IT professor. Noubas was really Nouvas (and is now Biodot), and Cellsys was developing wireless peripherals for Personal Area Networks (in essence, a Bluetooth/WiFi hybrid solution). Upon leaving The Los Angeles Times, Dean Takahashi spent a few years with The Wall Street Journal; Dean is now a reporter for Silicon Valley's newspaper, The San Jose Mercury News. HOTT reached a peak circulation of 51,000 in June 1994, which was surpassed only in late 1997 by TipWorld.