


The Broadband Phone Company



Get Vonage phone service and a virtual number.
 Rate plans start at **\$14.99/mo.**
 Virtual numbers \$4.99/month. [It's simple >>](#)




NWclassifieds | NWsource | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#)

Jump to >> [Weather](#) | [Traffic](#) | [Webtowns](#) | [Mariners](#) | [Seahawks](#) | [Sonics](#) | [Forums](#)

seattlepi.com

Nation/World

 search 

Wednesday, December 8, 2004

- Local
- Neighborhoods
- Sports
- Nation/World

- U.S.
- Washington, D.C.
- Africa
- Asia
- Australia
- Canada
- Europe
- Latin America
- Middle East
- Elections
- Health/Science
- Joel Connelly

- Business
- A&E
- Lifestyle
- NW Outdoors
- Photos
- Special Reports

- Opinion
- Columnists
- Letters
- David Horsey
- Saturday Spin
- Forums

- Comics & Games
- Horoscope
- TV Listings

- FIND IT!**
- NWclassifieds
 - [Jobs](#)
 - [Autos](#)
 - [Real Estate](#)
 - [Rentals](#)
 - NWsource
 - [Shopping](#)
 - [Personals](#)
 - [Yellow pages](#)
 - [Maps/directions](#)

Always Online: When information access is so easy, truth can be elusive

By ANICK JESDANUN
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

EDITOR'S NOTE -- This is the fourth installment in a five-part series looking at a generation of young people who've grown up with the Internet, how they use it and how it has influenced them.

NEW YORK -- Go to Google, search and scroll results, click and copy.

When students do research online these days, many educators worry, those are often about the only steps they take. If they can avoid a trip to the library at all, many students gladly will.

Young people may know that just because information is plentiful online doesn't mean it's reliable, yet their perceptions of what's trustworthy frequently differ from their elders' -- sparking a larger debate about what constitutes truth in the Internet age.

Georgia Tech professor Amy Bruckman tried to force students to leave their computers by requiring at least one book for a September class project.

She wasn't prepared for the response: "Someone raised their hand and asked, "Excuse me, where would I get a book?""

While the answer might just have been a smart aleck's bid for laughs, Bruckman and other educators grapple daily with the challenge of ensuring their students have good skills for discerning the truth. Professors and librarians say many come to college without any such skills, and quite a few leave without having acquired them.

Alex Halavais, professor of informatics at the University at Buffalo, said students are so accustomed to instant information that "the idea of spending an hour or two to find that good source is foreign to them."

TOOLS

-  Print this
-  E-mail this
- Most printed & e-mailed

NWsource

shop newspaper ads

By category 

[Go](#) 



Always Online

A look at the new Internet generation

PART FOUR OF FIVE

ADVERTISING

\$160,000

Mortgage

\$735 for Under

Click Your State & Refinance Now



Newspaper ads
 P-I Archives
 Photo Reprints
 Obituaries

E-mail Newsletters
 News Alerts
 PDA
 Cell Phones
 RSS Feeds

ADVERTISING

SEC	ROW	SEAT
1	NN	13

TICKET EXCHANGE
 Buy tickets to local theater, concert & sports events.
 powered by **razorgator**
NWsource
 We find it. You do it.

OUR AFFILIATES

In a study on research habits, Wellesley College researchers Panagiotis Metaxas and Leah Graham found that fewer than 2 percent of students in one Wellesley computer science class bothered to use non-Internet sources to answer six test questions.



Amy Bruckman, who teaches a class called "Computers, Society and Professionalism," poses in her office at Georgia Tech University in Atlanta. (AP Photo/John Amis)

And many students failed to check out multiple sources. For instance, 63 percent of students asked to list Microsoft Corp.'s top innovations only visited the company's Web site in search of the answer.

It's a paradox to some that so many young Americans can be so accepting of online information whose origin is unclear.

"Skepticism ... is part of their lives, yet they tend to believe things fairly

readily because it appears on the Internet," said Roger Casey, who studies youths and pop culture at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla.

One concern is commercial influence online; some search engines run ads and accept payments to include sites in their indexes, with varying degree of disclosure.

"If I'm going to go to the library, chances are somebody hasn't paid a librarian 100 bucks to point me to a particular book," said Beau Brendler, director of the Consumer Reports WebWatch.

Another potential minefield is the growing phenomenon of collaborative information assembly. The credentials of the people authoring grassroots Web journals and a committee-written encyclopedia called Wikipedia are often unclear. Nevertheless, some Internet users believe that such resources can collectively portray events more accurately than any single gatekeeper.

In many ways, the greater diversity of information is healthy.

Paul Duguid, co-author of "The Social Life of Information," points out that no longer, in most of the United States, can school textbooks get away with one-sided views.

Even South Texas College of Law professor Tracy McGaugh finds her curriculum challenged as students can quickly discover how other professors teach the same material.

But as students come to trust resources that may be correct only part of the time, the extent of the downside is not yet fully known.

Some believe the challenge of determining whom and what to believe amid the information flood is bound to influence the political views, medical decisions, financial investments and other key aspects of this

Bad Credit OK
LowerMyBills.com
 Easy Comparisons.
 More Choices. Bigger Savings.
 © 2004 LowerMyBills, Inc.

AP WIRE

- U.S.
- Washington
- Africa
- Asia
- Australia
- Canada
- Latin America
- Middle East

HEADLINES

Pentagon debates using information as weapon

Other questions surface about Kerik's past

Elusive Subcommander Marcos adds a title: Novelist

Pacific Currents: Mexicans in U.S. want to vote -- in Mexico

Stealth navigation device promises fewer surgical complications

The hunt for bin Laden leads to Pakistan

Inauguration security will be tightest yet

budding generation's life.

Accuracy can be crucial when lives and property are at stake -- and older generations certainly don't have any particular claim to it.

In 2000, a prescribed burn calculated using incorrect information online spread to a wildfire that left more than 400 families homeless in Los Alamos, N.M.

Adults who should know better get duped, too.



zoom

AP

Sarah Kimmerle, 21, from Allentown, uses the Internet as a tool for study and research at her family home in Allentown. Kimmerle, a senior at Juniata College, holds some skepticism about the truth behind the information from the Internet.

Georgia Tech professor Colin Potts said he recently received by e-mail a photograph said to be a 1954 projection of what a home computer would look like in 2004. Instead of the small boxes we know of today, the image shows a giant contraption that resembles an airplane cockpit with a large steering wheel.

"I thought this was hilarious and filed it away in a scrapbook for my lecture next semester on the perils of technology forecasting," Potts said. "I also forwarded it to several people. Unfortunately, as another colleague informed me by e-mail a few minutes later, it's a hoax."

Peter Grunwald, president of Grunwald Associates, said many older Internet users, familiar with the editorial review that books and newspapers go through, may assume incorrectly that Web sites also undergo such reviews.

Youths, many of whom have created Web sites themselves, tend to know better.

In the end, it's just a matter of adjusting to how information gets around now that the Internet has revolutionized communication.

Every new medium has its challenges, said Paul Saffo, a director at the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto, Calif., yet society adapts.

Referring to the 1903 Western "The Great Train Robbery," Saffo said audience members "actually ducked when the train came out on the screen. Today you won't even raise an eyebrow."

PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS

- [Part One: The Internet shapes, drives young lives](#)
- [Part Two: The life and times of an online gamer](#)
- [Part Three: When three days without a word is an eternity](#)

 [Printer-friendly version](#)

 [E-mail this story](#)

 [Get e-mail news updates](#)

 [Subscribe to the P-I](#)

[Home](#) | [Site Map](#) | [About the P-I](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [P-I Jobs](#) | [Home Delivery](#)

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

101 Elliott Ave. W.
Seattle, WA 98119
(206) 448-8000

Home Delivery: (206) 464-2121 or (800) 542-0820

Send comments to newmedia@seattlepi.com

©1996-2004 Seattle Post-Intelligencer
[Terms of Service/Privacy Policy](#)