

Internet 101: Test-Driving the Web, Part I of V

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For many people, the concept of surfing the World Wide Web and connecting with millions of people may be a little disconcerting. Aside from the financial obligations attached to purchasing a computer, many questions immediately spring to mind: Who do I ask for help getting started? How hard is it to get on the Internet? And what do I do once I'm connected? This article will try to answer those questions and help calm any anxieties you may have.

Ask a Friend

A computer store is not the best place to try out the Internet. Most stores do not have an Internet connection; besides, they're more concerned with selling a product than giving a free demonstration. The best suggestion would be to talk to a friend, patient, or colleague who is familiar with the Internet and ask if you can try some things out on their computer. You'll be surprised how many people are already on the World Wide Web. Most people will be glad to help out; in addition to helping educate someone, it also gives them a chance to brag about their Internet prowess and show you some of the interesting things they've found on the Web. Set up a time that's convenient for both of you, and make sure to bring a notepad for any questions you may have.

There are several advantages to this personal approach. For one, there is a built-in level of familiarity and trust that you can't get with a salesperson; after all, if you're working with a close colleague, why would they want to steer you in the wrong direction? And the chance to work in a relaxed environment for extended periods of time is much less stressful than in a busy office or computer class.

You may be worried about intruding on someone else's time and finances by using their computer. Connecting to the Internet actually takes only a few seconds; getting your first taste of the World Wide Web can be accomplished in a matter of minutes. As for the financial aspects, most people on the Internet have an account that charges a monthly flat fee for unlimited use. Whether you spend 30 minutes or 10 hours on the computer, the cost is still the same. And connections to the Internet are made through a local call, so you don't have to worry about paying outrageous telephone charges.

Your First Time

If this is your first time accessing the Net, make sure to ask your friend to go through the entire set of steps they use to get connected. If you don't understand how one step leads to another, ask your friend to go through this short procedure again. They shouldn't mind.

After you've seen how to connect to the Internet, ask if you can try making a connection yourself. Most connections require typing in the person's e-mail address and a simple password. Don't be afraid of making a mistake. The computer won't blow up if you hit the wrong key or click on a different icon. You'll be surprised how easy it is and how quickly you can get connected.

Just Browsing

Once you've connected to the Internet, you'll want to activate your friend's web browser. A browser is a program that lets you see and hear all the information that's contained on the World Wide Web. The two most popular web browsers are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer; chances are you'll be using one of these browsers to navigate the web. Follow the same steps for activating the browser as you did for connecting to the Internet: let your friend do it first, then try it out for yourself.

About an inch or so from the top of the web browser's screen, you should see a thin white horizontal box running nearly the length of the screen. This screen is used to enter world wide web addresses. When you type in a given web page address (for example, [url=http://www.nfl.com]http://www.nfl.com[/url]) and hit the Enter or Return key, the browser will take you to the web page you specified. Your friend should be able to give you basic information on how to set up a browser and also show you how to access some of their favorite web pages.

Navigating in Chiroweb

To get you personally involved with web pages and how to navigate them, take a brief tour of the DC Chiroweb site. Type in [url=http://www.chiroweb.com]http://www.chiroweb.com[/url] on the web browser and hit the Enter or Return key. This will take you to the front page of DC Chiroweb. If the screen doesn't appear instantly, don't get discouraged. Chiroweb's page uses a number of graphical images. The more graphics a web page has, the longer it takes to load in.

At the top of the page, you should see a banner with the Dynamic Chiropractic logo on the left-hand side (Figure 1). Below that is a welcome message, followed by six options to choose from, e.g., the Chiro Locator and the Feel Better Store. You will see that some of the text is written in a larger font, in a different color and underlined. Move the mouse cursor over one of those groups of words.

Notice how your pointer changes shape, from an arrow to a hand that's pointing? When that happens, it means that you can click on those words, and you'll be brought to a different web page. For the purpose of this test, move the cursor over to the words "Chiro Locator" and press the mouse button.

You should have arrived at the Chiro Locator front page (Figure 2). To begin a Chiro Locator search, you first choose which country you want to do a search in. Right below the welcome message, you should see a small box with the word "USA" in it; to the right of that should be a smaller gray box with the word "Locate!" inside. Click on the gray box once.

The second page of the Chiro Locator should now appear. Here, you can refine your search geographically, choosing to locate a chiropractor either by city and state, by zip code, or by area code. For this test, type in your area code, then click on the gray "PhoneSearch" button. Having narrowed down your search, ChiroWeb will now present you with a listing of all chiropractors in your area code.

Notice that the first few listings for your area code will consist of large, rectangular display boxes of chiropractors or chiropractic clinics; some of them contain office hours, areas of specialty, or other information. These displays are larger and are shown first because chiropractors have paid for this advertising space. By being shown first and appearing in a larger format, these offices and chiropractors are the most likely to be contacted by prospective patients.

Below the paid chiropractor displays will be a listing of all other chiropractors in your area (including yourself). If you're wondering why they aren't in alphabetical order, don't panic; the listings are

archived randomly so that one chiropractor doesn't get an alphabetical advantage over another. With a little searching, you should be able to find your name and address on the Chiroweb site.

After you've located yourself on Chiroweb, you may want to explore some of the site's paid chiropractic displays. Many of them include an e-mail address, so you can send a message to the chiropractor. Some displays offer an e-mail coupon where patients can receive discounts on consultations and office visits just by submitting their name and e-mail address. Other chiropractors have their own home page, some of which include pictures and maps to their offices.

Wrapping it up: Sending E-mail

After you've explored the Chiroweb page, you'll want to try out e-mail, one of the most popular and useful features of the Internet. Most of the traffic on the Internet consists of people sending e-mail messages to one another.

Nearly everyone who has access to the Internet uses some type of e-mail program. There are too many such programs to go into detail here, as each program has its own features and settings, but one thing all of these programs have in common is that they need an e-mail address to function.

When you sign up with a service provider to access the Internet, that service provider will help you choose an e-mail address to your liking. E-mail addresses consist of three parts: a user name (personal nickname), an @ symbol (signifies a location), and a domain name (name of your service provider).

Sending an e-mail message to someone is almost as simple as getting connected to the Internet. Let your friend activate the e-mail program and send a message, then ask if you can send an e-mail. One suggestion would be to contact Dynamic Chiropractic and give us your opinion of Chiroweb; our e-mail address is Editorial@DCMedia.com. We'll be sure to respond as soon as possible. (Note: E-mail addresses are not case sensitive, i.e., you could type all uppercase letters or all lower case and it would still work. Website addresses however are case sensitive).

A Few Words of Advice

If you don't have a computer or Internet access, there are a few options you should consider. First, you should think about taking a training class. Many of the larger computer chain stores like CompUSA or Computer City offer beginning, intermediate and advanced-level classes on topics like getting on the Internet, operating Windows 95, and word processing software. Although the price of a class can be high, some stores offer rebates or credit on store products for attending a class. And the few hours you spend in a class could easily make up for days of frustration and stress.

You should also consult the amount of resources available to you. Aside from friendly advice, there are dozens of publications that give reviews of software, hardware, and Internet access providers. Another handy source is a nightly program on the MSNBC network called The Site. The show can be a bit off-beat at times, but it provides valuable information on Internet technology in a way that you can actually understand and use.

Above all else, ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask, no matter how mundane or insignificant you may think the question is. And don't be afraid to ask the same question more than once if you didn't understand an answer the first time.

Questions and Answers

If you've just experienced the Internet for the first time and are thinking of buying a computer, you're bound to have several questions. What type of computer should I buy? What's the difference between an e-mail address and a web address? Where do I search for information? How much did this program cost? Why do I use the left mouse button for one command and the right mouse button for other commands? How do I download files? And what does download mean? These questions will be answered in future parts of "Internet 101."

These are just a few steps for helping you get started on the Internet. I hope some of your fears may have been soothed by reading this article and trying out the World Wide Web for yourself. In our next issue, we'll cover what it takes to get connected to the Internet and give some recommendations for the hardware and software you'll need to get yourself going. As always, we welcome your comments. If you have any questions or suggestions, or if you had trouble with the steps using Chiroweb or getting connected, please contact me.

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