
"SURFS UP"

Things to see and do on the Internet

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By Miroslav STANIC <splatt@netspace.net.au>

Welcome to the Internet folk. Call it what you like, whether it be Al Gore's "*Information Super Highway*", William Gibson's "*Cyberspace/Matrix*", or just plain and simply, "*The Net*", its here, and its here to stay.

At the last count, there were between 25 and 35 million people connected to the net, and in Australia, according to Peter Saalmans (General Manager of AARNet), the growth rate is around **150% per annum**. That means, Australia's Net population is doubling every 8 to 9 months. And if the figures keep going the way they are, every Australian will be on the net by the year 2000. If your not on the Net you may find that hard to believebut that's what the figures of today point to.

And with the sudden explosion of people and sites on the net, its getting harder and harder to find what your looking for. So in this, and the articles to follow, I'm going to introduce you to the things on the net that have caught not only my attention, but also the attention of other Net Surfing Virtual Reality fans as well. Mostly we will be looking at sites that have to do with Virtual Reality, but of course in our travels we will come upon many things that are just to interesting or amusing not to mention.

In this, the first edition we cover -

- [The Virtual Paper Stand](#) - Mecklerweb.
- [Pizza Dude....](#) - Pizza Huts Pizza Server on the Net
- [VRML](#) - The 3D future of the Web
- [FAQ's](#) - Frequently Asked Question's list
- [Here Comes the Mail Man](#) - VR related Mail List's list.

So grab your board, wax up and lets hit the waves....

"The Virtual Paper Stand"

<http://www.mecklerweb.com>

Mecklermedia's W.W.W. homepage

Is it a World Wide Web homepage or is it the new breed of magazine???

Welcome to "Mecklerweb", the virtual paper stand, were you can read it on line before its even left the editors desk. And what better reading material to have than Mecklermedia's [and "Internet World"](#), two magazines that are doing a good job of helping us to keep in touch with the ever

changing world of technology.

At this unique homepage, not only is it possible to view complete previous editions (at least upto Nov/Dec '94), but also the current edition AS it is being put together. That's right, tune in one day and read, tune in the next day and read freshly finished articles that weren't there the last time you net surfed. They probably just arrived, fresh from the editors desk.

The issue currently being put together is March/April '95. That means you can read parts of it at least two months before it even arrives at your local newsagent, that's IF he even stocks it. And since its only the cost of a hookup to your internet account, think of the money you can save, as in the stores I've seen it sell for as high \$15.95. With the cost of computer magazines and books these days, I just can't wait for more publishers to offer World Wide Web sites.

Here are just some of the articles contained in March/April's edition of Mecklermedia's "[Virtual Reality World](#)":

- Shock the Monkey: Peter Gabriel's Grand VR Plans
- How to Select the Right HMD
- NASA VR Projects: Part 1 - R&D at Ames and Goddard
- VR News incl: Virtuality/Atari produce Immersive VR game system & Stereographics - 3D power for the PC
- Product review of the Logitech 3D Mouse
- VR People profile
- VR Games U.S.S. Starship Interactive

While your at the Mecklerweb site, why don't you also check out the other interesting things available. Like the "Internet World" magazine, the "Learning Center" (for tips on getting the most out of the internet), "The Internet Mall" (a directory of over 500 commercial services available via the net), and more. And best of all, its free.



"Pizza.....dude???"

<http://www.pizzahut.com>

Forget about the virtual paper stand people, what we have here is something really important. The Virtual Pizza Shop.

What do you REALLY need on those cold winter nights when you have just come back to the real world from your VR session, or while your tapping away at your computer terminal, surfing the net ???? What else but a nice warm, hunger stopping "PIZZA". And now there's no need to go off line to order it, if you live in Santa Cruz (California) that is.

Pizza Hut, along with SCO (Santa Cruz Corporation), have started a WWW site for pizza loving dudes and dudetes of the online community. The idea was first struck upon by Pizza Hut & SCO employees, Jon Payne and Doug Michels. It is currently operating of a 486/66MHz computer, running SCO software, with a 56Kbps link to the internet at the Pizza Hut world HQ in Witchita, Kansas.

There first pizza was delivered on Friday the 12th of August 1994, and so far they have delivered around 100+ pizzas, and have also had large quantities of E-mail wishing them all the best for there great idea. If you want to voice your support of the idea, and to mention that us folx down here can't wait for it to start in OZ, send a message to them at "webmaster@pizzahut.com". So keep your

fingers crossed fellow pizza loving net surfers, because if all goes well I know what I'll be ordering....

"One large pizza with the lot, one garlic bread and some cola thanx." **Cowabunga dudes!!**



"VRML - Virtual Reality Modeling Language"

<http://www.wired.com/vrml>

VRML is the beginning of what we all imagine the internet to be like eventually. The Virtual Reality/Cyberspace of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Neal Stephanson and every other Cyber Punk writer we have ever read. This is what we have been dreaming about, since Gibson's description of it in his first Cyberpunk novel, "Neuromancer", as being:

"Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts...A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding..."

Well.....not exactly like that, but we can always hope. VRML will basically be an add on to the World Wide Web. When its completed, it will allow you take the point and click of todays Web browsers one step further, and give you a visual representation of doorways and the like leading from one URL site to another. And with the addition of HMD's, well..., I'll let your imagination deal with that idea.

But before i go any further, let the people involved in developing it tell you what it is to them. (These excerpts are taken from the VRML World Wide Web homepage.)

What is VRML?

"Virtual Reality Markup Language or VRML is an evolving specification for a platform-independent definition of 3-dimensional spaces within the World Wide Web. It is designed to combine the best features of virtual reality, networked visualization, and the global hypermedia environment of the WorldWideWeb."

Extending WWW to support Platform Independent Virtual Reality
by Dave Raggett.

"This is a proposal to allow VR environments to be incorporated into the World Wide Web, thereby allowing users to "walk" around and push through doors to follow hyperlinks to other parts of the Web. VRML is proposed as a logical markup format for non-proprietary platform independent VR. The format describes VR environments as compositions of logical elements. Additional details are specified using a universal resource naming scheme supporting retrieval of shared resources over the network."

Now, back to the story. Below I have summarized the history of VRML, as well as quoting directly from the "VRML Version 1.0 Specification (draft)"

The History of VRML

VRML was thought up at the 1st of the annual World Wide Web conferences in Geneva, Switzerland, in the spring of 1994. The initiative was taken by two gentlemen named, Tim Berners-Lee and Dave Raggett, when they got together a group of people who were already investigating the notion of a VR/Graphical interface to the Web. They decided that the best way to keep discussions on the idea flowing, was to start there own mailing list, and so within a few weeks the list had over a thousand people subscribed to it. And 5 months later, at the fall WWW conference, the mailing list had already come to agreements on many things.

And from the Version 1.0 draft.

"The search for existing technologies turned up a several worthwhile candidates. After much deliberation the list came to a consensus: the Open Inventor ASCII File Format from Silicon Graphics, Inc. The Inventor File Format supports complete descriptions of 3D scenes with polygonally rendered objects, lighting, materials, ambient properties and realism effects. A subset of the Inventor File Format, with extensions to support networking, forms the basis of VRML. Gavin Bell of Silicon Graphics has adapted the Inventor File Format for VRML, with design input from the mailing list. SGI has publicly stated that the file format is available for use in the open market, and have contributed a file format parser into the public domain to bootstrap VRML viewer development."

So there you have it, one day in the not to distant future, VRML will be a reality. Timelines have already been set by the developers for a basic release, and there not to far away. In the next issue of the VRA newsletter I'll keep you up to date with what's been achieved. But if you want to find out for yourself, why not join the mailing list (details given below), or fire up your Web browser and hop over to the VRML homepage yourself.



"FAQ's"

Frequently Asked Questions

It always happens. You've got a really simple question to ask, so you either post it to the relevant newsgroup or you ask some one on IRC. Eight out of ten times the answer will be, "Look in the FAQ!". Which always leads to one more so called newbie (some one new to the net) question, "Okay..... but were can i find the FAQ?" If the person you were asking was Homer Simpson, his answer would probably be, "DOH!!!!"

Well, look like a newbie no more folx...here it is. My definitive guide to Virtual Reality FAQ's.

- Homebrew VR Mailing List FAQ:
<http://www.acm.uiuc.edu:80/homebrew/faq.html>
- VR META FAQ:
<file://ftp.u.washington.edu/public/virtual-worlds/Meta-FAQ>
- Sci.virtual-worlds Meta-FAQ:
<http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/hypertext/faq/usenet/virtual-worlds/meta-faq/faq.html>
- The BattleTech VR FAQ:
<http://aleph0.clarku.edu/~joker/home.html>

- Eric Thompson's Power Glove FAQ:
<http://wiretap.spies.com/jet/vr.html>
- Power Glove Serial Interface FAQ:
<http://www.acm.uiuc.edu:80/sigarch/pgsi/pgsifaq.html>
- SGI FAQ:
<http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/hypertext/faq/usenet/sgi/faq/top.html>
- MUD FAQ
<ftp://ftp.tcp.com/pub/mud> or Anonymous FTP to "ftp.tcp.com" and go to the directory /pub/mud/.

And of course who could forget the Grand daddy of Internet VR sites, were else but the good old, <ftp://ftp.u.washington.edu/public/virtual-worlds/faq> or anonymous ftp to "ftp.u.washington.edu" and when you get there, change to the following directory and you will have enough FAQ's to keep you reading for years, "/public/virtual-worlds/faq".

And if all else fails, try FTP'ing to the site that's known as the FAQ archive site, "rtfm.mit.edu".



"Here comes the Mail man"

In these days of ever changing technology, its always difficult to keep in the know about what's going on. Well, one way to solve that is to become a member of a Mailing List.

The best way to describe a Mailing List is to explain it as an automated mail forwarding machine. If you wish to add something to the next days list, just mail it to a specific address (each list has its own), and tomorrow it will be mailed out to possibly hundreds of like minded individuals who have signed up to receive the list just like you. Better than scanning the News Groups for information, or having to ftp to a site everytime you need to know something on a particular subject.

Here are a few VR related Mailing Lists you can subscribe to:

- Homebrew VR : e-mail "homebrew-vr-request@acm.uiuc.edu"
In the body of the message write "subscribe" followed by your internet address.
- Virtual Worlds List : e-mail "listserv@vmd.cso.uiuc.edu"
In the body of the message write "subscribe virtu-l" followed by your full name.
- Amiga VR : e-mail "listserv@kumiss.cmhnet.org"
In the body of the msg write "subscribe amigavr-list" followed by your full name.
- Glove List: e-mail "listserv@boxer.nas.nasa.gov"
In the body of the msg write "subscribe glove-list" followed by your full name.
- Iris online : The Silicon Graphics monthly magazine
e-mail "list-manager@sgi.com" In the body of the msg write "subscribe nyn-emag"
- Rend 386 : e-mail "majordomo@sunee.uwaterloo.ca"
Has two mailing lists, one for discussion send one for announcements.
"subscribe rend386-announce"

"subscribe rend386-discuss"

- VRML mailing list : e-mail "majordomo@wired.com"
In the body of the msg write "subscribe www-vrml" followed by your e-mail address.

I'm a member of some of the above groups, and i can promise one thing, your mail box will never be empty again. Some of the groups mail daily and some weekly, and they can either be sent as individual messages or as a digest. So if you go on holidays or are just absent for a few days, it would be worth your while removing yourself from a list for that period of time, as it can very quickly fill up the quota on your account (if you have one). And that's one quick way to annoy your sys-op. (Details on how to unsubscribe to a list are usually e-mailed to you when you join.)

A list and description of most known mailing lists is available from, "<http://www.ii.uib.no/cgi-bin/paml>".(90K big)



Next edition we will continue our look at VRML, have a quick look at MUD's,MOO's & MUSE's etc..., review some more interesting sites, and also supply you with a list of Australian Virtual Reality sites and company E-mail addresses.

If you have a site you would like to share with everybody else out there, drop me a note at splatt@netspace.net.au and I'll check it out. Also, if you have any questions regarding the Internet, just send me a message and hopefully either myself, or my other net surfing friends can help you out.

So don't let the Information Superhighway pass you bye. Get on the net along with 25+ million other people, and get your information before everyone else, and remember, "*Information wants to be free*".

*l8r ppl
later people
:-)*

PS. The first Australian magazine devoted to the Internet is now available. "Internet Australasia", and its second issue should be available at your local newsagent for \$4.95. If not try McGills in Melbourne. Happy surfing...



Splatt's Home Page

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This page created by *Miroslav STANIC* from "*MiroVision Design*".
splatt@netspace.net.au