

newstatesman

Special
Supplement

New Media Awards 2003

The judges



Chris Abbott

Chris Abbott is a member of the Centre for Public Policy Research and senior lecturer in the Department of Education and Professional Studies at King's College London. He has led research projects dealing with the use of the internet for inclusion.



Jan Hodge

Jan Hodge was a participant in www.ninelives.tv, Overall Merit winner of the New Media Awards 2002. *Ninelives* is a campaign to promote sustainable lifestyles in Brighton & Hove. She has previously worked with the web designers (now digital risk specialists) www.mi2g.com.



John Kampfner

John Kampfner has been political editor of the *New Statesman* since June 2002. His journalistic career has taken him from Reuters to the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Financial Times* and the *Today* programme. He has made several television and radio documentaries.



Paul Maltby

Paul Maltby is research fellow on public-private partnerships at the Institute for Public Policy Research. He was formally the policy officer responsible for transport, local government, housing, regeneration and the environment in the Labour Party's policy unit.



Spencer Neal

Spencer Neal, publisher of the *New Statesman*, has managed Britain's premier current-affairs weekly since May 1997. He has been responsible for many of the publication's partnerships and is especially interested in projects that challenge social exclusion.



Shireen Shuster

Shireen Shuster is the author of www.spellzone.com, an online spelling course for older students and adults. She taught primary school classes for 15 years. She gradually gained a particular interest in children with literacy difficulties and then specialised in this area.



David Tait

David Tait is currently responsible for Schlumberger's sales and marketing activities in the UK, Netherlands and Ireland, managing a £500m business. Previously, he ran the Schlumberger's public sector business in the UK. He joined Sema Group in 1991.



Amy Vickers

Amy Vickers has been involved in the internet since 1995, primarily working as a journalist, but also doing stints as a research analyst and a website editor. She currently writes a daily internet and technology column in the *Daily Mirror*, called *Amy's i*.

Since the crash of internet stocks in the year 2000, it has become apparent that new media is just like any other business. There are good and bad ideas, ingenious and indifferent applications of technology, entrepreneurs and dodgy dealers. This is particularly important to remember when so many new ideas are hitting the market place. To reflect this rapidly moving world, we introduced a new category to the *New Statesman* New Media Awards 2003: “On the move”. This award seeks to find the best use of mobile phone and wireless communications in the public sector.

Over the past year, there has been an explosion in the use of wireless technology, and a “third generation” of mobile phones has been launched. Yet, as excerpts from our survey show (page vii), many of us are unaware of these developments or fail to see how they would benefit our lives.

Providers should pay heed. It is often promised that the internet, mobile phones and other new technologies will solve a plethora of problems, yet what is sometimes forgotten is that, to be successful, it is vital to choose the right medium for your users. It’s no good having a flashy website, WAP-enabled information or text-messaging if those you are trying to reach do not have the facilities to access the service.

This applies to the government as much as to anyone else. By setting up Online Centres (places where you can use computers and the internet – the IT equivalent of public libraries), the government has tried to improve internet accessibility, but the future funding of these centres already hangs in the balance.

Much of new Labour’s drive to improve the nation’s access to the internet has been based on the presumptions that it is both cost-effective – cutting down administrative expenditure – and that it

offers more convenient ways to access services and benefits. This may be so, but there are alternatives worth considering.

The government of Malta announced recently that most of its services would now be available by using a mobile phone. It has introduced a system based on text-messaging – called “m-government” – which allows citizens to access most public services with ease. The rationale behind this development was that a larger proportion of the Maltese public had a mobile phone than had a computer.

Closer to home, Test Valley Borough Council in Hampshire is also using mobile phone technology to communicate with its constituents (page iv). It has launched a free text-messaging service providing the latest information on a range of topics including special events, the arts, sports and Test Valley council news.

As Deepanshu Bagchee reports (page xv), wireless technologies are being used by some councils to improve efficiency and reduce paperwork for council tradesmen, refuse collectors, parking attendants and so on.

Despite the alternatives offered by these new technologies, the web remains an excellent and flexible means of communication and transaction when used appropriately, able to create a strong sense of community. It has proven to be particularly successful when an online community is combined with a geographical location – take, for example, Netmums, a local information network for parents (page v), and Meetup, the latest resource being used for political campaigning in the United States (page xv).

The aim of the New Media Awards is to encourage innovations such as these, which are both accessible and efficient, and this year has been no exception.

Kathryn Corrick is the New Statesman’s online manager



contents

iv The winners **vii** What do you think of 3G mobile phones? **x Dea Birkett** on the benefits of a webucation **xi David Sharp** on healthcare from a distance **xii Lilian Pizzichini** finds a home for ethical journalism on the net **xiii Will Skidelsky** on foodie websites for all tastes **xiv-xv Observations** with **Naghmeh Nasiritousi**, **Jonn Elledge** and **Deepanshu Bagchee**

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winners on the move



Test Valley Borough Council

www.testvalley.gov.uk

Test Valley Borough Council has made innovative use of text-messaging to highlight community and leisure events in the local area. Residents can register their interests by mobile phone, website or post, and then receive free news, updates and offers via their text-messaging service. Working with other local leisure providers – for example, leisure centres and theatres – this scheme ensures its users are the first to hear of new developments and special offers.

winners safety on the net

Kid Smart

www.kidsmart.org.uk

Kid Smart is a practical internet safety advice website for schools produced by the children's internet charity Childnet. It focuses on five SMART Safety Tips which children need to remember when they use the internet or mobile phone – whether at school or in the home. The site offers access to a whole range of resources, from lesson plans to a specially commissioned drama on the theme of internet safety. It includes a directory of, and links to, websites for children, and also serves as a portal linking to a wide range of internet safety resources.

Commended

Parents Information Network
www.pin.org.uk



winners e-government

Essex Grid for Learning

www.e-gfl.org

Essex Grid for Learning is a curriculum website intended for all who teach and learn in Essex. Launched in November 2000, the site is now used in almost 600 schools and colleges. It was created to meet a demand in Essex for high-quality, online content for all the county's learners and teachers. Additionally, it was felt that parents, carers, school governors and, most importantly, young people should have a vibrant, interactive website to which they could contribute – a real community resource for learning. The site is free and accessible 24 hours a day. A principal aim is for users to be writers of the internet, not merely consumers of it.

Commended

Kikass: South Hams and Teignbridge Drug Implementation Groups www.stonerlemmings.com



winners contribution to civic society

buy.at
the web's leading FREE fundraising solution

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Affiliates: Join the Perfiliate network

Perfiliate is an affiliate network aimed at knowledgeable affiliates.

In addition to all the features you would expect to find, Perfiliate also provides user-friendly affiliate links for use in emails and offline promotion. Perfiliate prides ourself on our fast and reliable servers and reporting.

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buy.at is an innovative fundraising tool for any interest group or cause.

How Does it Work?
buy.at provides your cause with a free, personalised web shop that you can promote to members, parents, friends, and so on. Every purchase made in the shop earns commission for the club, school or charity. Users can shop at a wide range of retailers, knowing that every purchase helps their favourite cause. The site is free to join and requires no technical knowledge.

Your members and supporters, including Marks and Spencer, Blackwell's, with all the good things, helps their favourite cause.

Perfiliate Technologies

users.buy.at

The website buy.at/ is an innovative fundraising tool that offers schools, charities, clubs – in fact, any common interest group or cause – the opportunity to earn substantial income. The site provides groups with a free, personalised web shop that they can promote to members, parents, friends, and so on. Every purchase made in the shop earns commission for the club, school or charity. Users can shop at a wide range of retailers, knowing that every purchase helps their favourite cause. The site is free to join and requires no technical knowledge.

Commended

DisabledGo www.disabledgo.info
 Netmums www.netmums.com
 Manx Telecomputer Bus www.computerbus.com

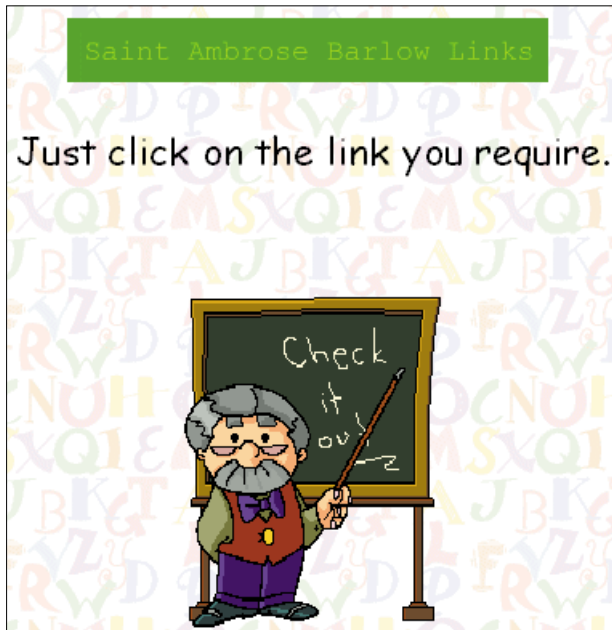
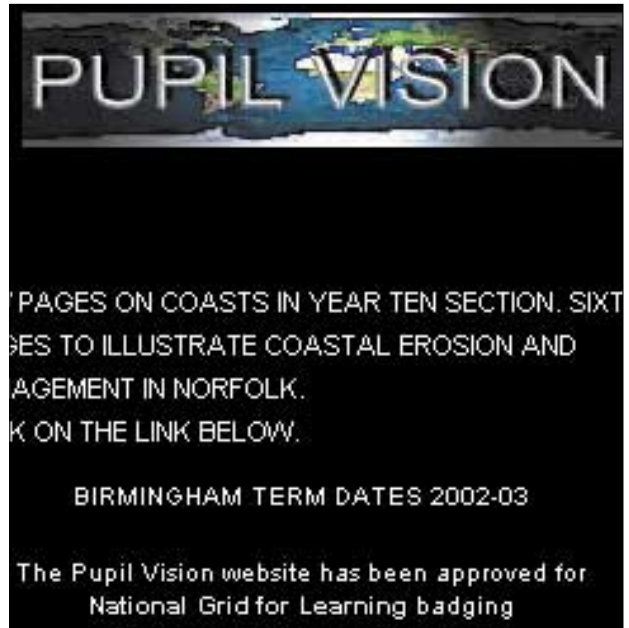
winners best school internet award

SECONDARY SCHOOL WINNER

King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys

www.pupilvision.com

Pupil Vision was created by a teacher and his pupils as an online “factbook” and atlas providing data on 267 countries, with around 150 facts each. The site is housed on a school server using MySQL and php programming to interrogate a database of countries. Summary data is provided for each country, as is full data. A unique feature is the last page, which is titled “compare data”, where up to ten countries and five pieces of data can be immediately compared.



PRIMARY SCHOOL WINNER

Saint Ambrose Barlow School

saintambrosebarlow.wigan.sch.uk

This website contains children’s pages and adults’ pages. The children’s pages include all sorts of activities to help pupils with their work, some of which have been created by the pupils themselves. There are also links to other websites to help children in all areas of the curriculum. The adults’ pages aim to inform parents about the school and its ideals. Users can “meet” members of staff and see pictures of the school and the surrounding area. There are also links to other sites to help parents to help their children. This site has made a big difference to the many children who use it, providing both information and inspiration in many areas of the curriculum.

What do you think of 3G mobile phones?

Claire Rayner, agony aunt



This might sound luddite, but I think 3G mobile phone technology is a deep mystery. I have absolutely no use for gimmicks such

as picture-messaging and e-mail access, but I'm sure the techno-heads will lap it up. I think the technology will eventually catch on, so it might be dangerous to sneer at it now.

Tim Hunter, engineer

Dead against them. I think that even with current technology such as text-messaging, conversations are becoming less common and people are too self-absorbed.

Johann Hari, journalist

I wouldn't buy one because everyone I know who has one is a pratt. They are synonymous with people who have too much money, and they are more cosmetic than practical. It will be a bleak day if they do catch on.

John Peterbrook, stock trader

I have one and find it immensely useful. I can check the price of shares instantly, and there's no hanging around until you get back to the office. Splendid.

Mary Riddell, journalist

I am resistant to new technology and

I'm not sure I'm prepared to overcome the hurdle of learning to use a new phone. I might buy one eventually, but I would be more of a second-generation consumer.

Madeline Hall, graduate

I think they could make people's lives easier, but picture-messaging is particularly dangerous because people can very discreetly take shots of you doing God knows what. It could break up a marriage.



Andy Kershaw, broadcaster

I first got a mobile phone when I worked as a foreign correspondent in Sierra Leone, just after the civil

war ended. For me, the function of a mobile is to make and receive calls, but for other people they are a fashion accessory. I have no use for gimmicks.

Christian Wolmar, writer and broadcaster

I see no purpose in transmitting pictures. Nevertheless, the mobile phone revolution has transformed our lives. But a 3G phone is something I don't really need right now.

Miranda Colchester, actress

I'd buy one if they were priced affordably but, as far as I know, they're

very expensive right now. Perhaps they'll get cheaper when they become more popular. I'm sure the e-mail and internet access would be really useful.



Mark Thomas, comedian

I have never considered buying a 3G phone, and I'm not likely to. I'm quite happy with my current phone

and I've no real use for the new technology.

Marlene Fitzgerald, civil servant

I think you have to be careful about giving them to kids because the picture-messaging facility could be damaging if they get to see pornographic photos, and so on.

Darryl Wearwood, student

I haven't got one, but if I had, I'd use it to watch sports on the internet and check match scores on the move. I think the new technology they offer would come in very useful.

Stella Chapman, graphic designer

I'm not going to buy a 3G phone – at least, not now. I use my ordinary phone a lot to text, and that's enough for me at the moment. But maybe the instant picture-taking facility would boost my inspiration and provide me with more creative ideas.

Compiled by Ben Harrington and Bernard Mallee

The 2003 New Media Awards

Entitlement and enablement for
UK citizens - technology expanding
possibilities

This year's New Media Awards have recognised and rewarded several excellent ideas that bring technological innovation, efficiency and accessibility into the fields of e-government, the internet, net safety, mobile technology and local citizenship. Such a combination of subjects and qualities is particularly apt this year, because it coincides with a major public initiative that potentially gathers them all under a single umbrella – namely, the entitlement card initiative.

The Home Office consultation paper on entitlement cards and identity fraud broaches a set of issues that have been discussed on several occasions since the wartime ID card was dispensed with. The difference now is that the advances in technology which underpin the innovations of the New Media Awards winners have opened up a set of possibilities and options for the implementation of a concept that could offer all citizens convenience while ensuring enhanced security and privacy.

The opportunities opened up would include, for example:

- Secure user access to the internet with the non-repudiation capability that would be important to boost e-commerce;
- More convenient access to central government benefits and municipal services;
- “Location-independent”, mobile access to all kinds of citizen entitlements;
- A more convenient format for presenting critical identification such as a passport or driving licence;
- 24/7 access to government departments to transact departmental business.

Central to this vision of realising the potential of the entitlement card is the idea that each citizen could be provided with a secure electronic “key”, personalised to them through the use of a biometric identifier encoded securely on a smart card's embedded chip. Biometric techniques uniquely associate an individual with a card and, in this way, “padlock” the card to the citizen, preventing an individual using



We acknowledge that the use
of new technology brings with it
both opportunities and threats

multiple identities or stealing an identity for fraudulent purposes.

Such a key would enable the citizen to conduct all kinds of transactions, both in person and over the net, with confidence that their identity could not be stolen and misused.

In brief, we believe that the introduction of a secure personal identifier will open up the productive potential of the digital world in the same way that the introduction of paper money and, later, credit cards have released the economic potential of industrialising societies over the past three centuries.

This is a prize well worth having, especially as the UK aspires to be the best country in the world in which to do e-business.

Schlumberger

WORLDWIDE IT PARTNER



Where does Schlumberger fit in?

Schlumberger, as one of the world's largest producers and integrators of smart card solutions, is deeply interested in the entitlement card initiative. We are actively researching a wide range of potential citizen smart card solutions at local and national government level, in both the UK and overseas.

Many aspects of this work require, like the nominees in this year's contest, innovative lateral thinking and novel approaches to problem-solving. When implemented, the entitlement smart card will complement such winning ideas as texting information about local events, online charity shopping and even online learning by means of secure personal web access, whether by digital signatures, pin/password or use of biometric technology.

Indeed, innovative technology has already played its part in the development of numerous citizen smart card solutions around the world, including in Malaysia, China, Italy, Belgium, Finland, various countries in the Middle East and various cities in Asia, Europe, the US and South America.

These schemes have introduced more efficient delivery of public services and increased citizen access to public information.

The way forward

So far as the UK entitlement card concept is concerned, the technology is no longer the main stumbling block. The technology has been proven to the point where implementation is now mostly a matter of public acceptability, facing up to and dealing with public concerns over privacy and demonstrating the benefits that will accrue to citizens.

Of course, we acknowledge that the use of new technology brings with it both opportunities and threats. Public policy initiatives of this scale and impact need to be examined from both perspectives.

SchlumbergerSema, the information technology business segment of Schlumberger, is very much concerned that issues of major concern – such as misuse of data, “function creep”, excess disclosures, fair processing, privacy and confidentiality – are confronted and satisfactory solutions found. This needs to be done in a way that makes any citizen entitlement card scheme fully compliant with both the Data Protection Act and the Human Rights Act.

There is nothing, we believe, in either of these acts that intrinsically precludes the introduction of an entitlement card scheme in the UK. We in the IT industry are confident that the technology has now matured to such an extent that it can solve potential ethical and political problems surrounding such a scheme. The introduction of a citizen smart card scheme is more a matter of consultation and agreement – diplomacy and politics – than of further technological advances.

Conclusion

SchlumbergerSema looks forward to working closely with interested parties – for example, the information commissioner – to ensure that any scheme is accompanied by the introduction of fully acceptable, safe operating rules and regulations, rigorous checks and balances, together with de-risked processes and protocols.

These “constitutional” issues will not be straightforward to resolve, but we believe that the prize to be gained through the introduction of a scheme justifies the considerable effort that will be required to devise the appropriate framework for implementation and operation.

A good webucation

Children from different backgrounds are using the net to learn from each other, writes **DEA BIRKETT**

Every half-term, we travel from central London to an island off the west coast of Ireland. There are no half-terms in Ireland, so my ten-year-old daughter attends the local village school for a week. The school has two teachers, two rooms and 24 children, nine of whom are my daughter's cousins. It's a one-faith school in a close, remote community. Her own school in central London has 450 children of many backgrounds and faiths. Yet in this one week, among children whose life experiences are so different to her own, my ten-year-old learns more about cultural diversity than any number of books and teachers could teach her. She learns how a small community operates; sees Catholicism as a lived belief; plays a tin whistle instead of a steel drum. She even learns a little of a foreign language, as Irish lessons are compulsory. In turn, the rural pupils learn from her. The first time she was asked to dip her head to pray, she said: "But what would I have to do if I was a Hindu?" To which the other children's response was: "What's a Hindoooooo?"

Soon, children on this remote island could be connected via the internet to inner-city schools such as my daughter's, and they could virtually meet and talk to children of many different backgrounds, who could answer their question. Increasingly, schools are linking up – for instance, through the pioneering "real-time" broadband project that connects 86 village and urban schools around Telford. Using video-conferencing, small village schools become part

of a community larger than their own, and have access to a broader range of cultural experiences. The learning is two-way.

When, in a recent survey, 11- to 16-year-olds were asked to describe farmers, they said they were very rich with big houses, or were simple and wore dungarees and wellies, shouting "Get off my land!" in a Somerset

What emerges is a powerful voice for young people

accent. An earlier survey showed that only a quarter thought sugar beet grew in the UK; it is, in fact, the country's largest crop. Such stereotypes, if unchallenged, can dog debate. With strong country-town divides over issues such as fox-hunting, ramblers' rights and the placement of refugee centres in rural communities, video-linked face-to-face debates can promote understanding from all perspectives. In the Telford experiment, links with an urban school led to furious discussions between pupils about the national media ignoring rural concerns.

What makes this use of new media so radical is that teachers are largely being bypassed. Children are learning directly from one another, rather than from an authority figure. It is far easier for pupils to set the agenda of

discussion over the net than in the classroom. What emerges is a powerful voice for young people, relatively unfiltered by adult concerns. It may give the impetus and opportunity for them to have real input into their education, rather than be the passive recipients of initiatives from above.

According to a recent Demos report by David Hargreaves, a former chief inspector of schools in London, this use of new technology shifts schooling away from central government control and into the hands of individual pupils. Rather than being concerned about this shift, Hargreaves argues that teachers should become "hackers" – pioneering spirits of the internet, freely sharing ideas. Schools, teachers and pupils could link together in what Hargreaves calls "innovation networks", working laterally rather than vertically. Inevitably, when such networks are formed, pressures arise from below for the curriculum to change.

Although such lateral links are already being made between rural and urban schools in the UK, there are very few projects that seek to expand this networking across countries and continents. International initiatives tend to focus on providing distance-learning programmes – webucation – such as e-Universities offering degree courses via the internet, e-mail and bulletin boards. Such courses have often met little enthusiasm: the Open University's American online venture collapsed last year. Nor does the possibility of going to school from their bedrooms, accessing the curriculum from laptops, seem to be what the majority of students desire.

What seems to excite young people is not replacing traditional teaching methods with learning online, but being able to link up with other pupils, in classrooms very different to their own, and learn from them. Just as my daughter does in Ireland.

Is there a mobile in the house?

Practising medicine from a distance is far from the norm, but it is part of the future. By **DAVID SHARP**

The *Lancet* once hosted a debate about the price of hay. In an age when patients expected doctors to visit, the pony-trap was as essential a medical tool as the stethoscope. In 2001, a gallbladder operation carried out by robot in France was directed by surgeons in New York. Practising medicine at a distance is still far from the norm, but applications to facilitate it are increasing rapidly. On the website of the United States National Library of Medicine, the index includes 1,500 papers published on the subject of telemedicine in the past two years alone. The term “telemedicine” covers a mass of different ideas, but this year’s New Media Awards suggests that discussion of one of them – mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and other wireless devices – is timely.

In last year’s *NS* health supplement (24 June), I looked at the pros and cons of patients having ready access to general medical information via the internet. Wireless applications offer the same benefits, but also enable patients to send clinical information on themselves to doctors, who can then provide feedback remotely but quickly, avoiding the potentially long wait for a face-to-face appointment. Such technology also allows doctors to send information to each other: last month, a physician announced that X-ray images could be transmitted using picture-messaging.

In a recent survey of Norwegian cancer patients and their relatives, less than one-third of respondents had surfed the net in search of medical

information, but almost two-thirds suggested that e-mail and wireless technology be used in communications between them and the hospital. But isn’t this just another luxury – an added advantage for those who have access to and are comfortable with the latest technology, but not something to be fully integrated into a national health service? That was certainly my view,

X-ray images can now be transmitted using picture-messaging

until Dr John Pollard of University College London offered a different perspective. The proportion of the population over the age of 60 is projected to be 50 per cent greater by 2025 than it is now. Demographic trends dictate that medical staff and other carers focus even more on those in need. There will be increasing reliance on this technology, Pollard thinks, “in spite of statements to the effect that we are going to use it merely to augment personal intervention”.

Wireless medical applications vary. The many features of PocketDoctor, launched as the world’s first “Doctor in your Pocket”, include a medical encyclopaedia and symptom analyser. Epilepsy Action uses similar technology to offer help in dealing with emergency situations. The company e-San is currently trialling a cellphone-

based system to monitor asthma sufferers. If there are any signs of an impending attack, the details are e-mailed to the patient’s GP, who can then text or e-mail medical advice. This should help lower the risk of a serious attack and, if it proves successful, the firm hopes to extend its technology to monitor other conditions such as diabetes.

In April this year, the Medicines Control Agency and the Medical Devices Agency merged to form the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. This should mean that developments in the medical use of wireless applications are tested with the same rigour that has long been demanded before a drug is approved. Wireless signals can fail through, for instance, external noise from a microwave oven or obstacles between transmitter and receiver, and studies will need to monitor such problems. At the height of the dispute over the safety of mobile phones, there was an argument that even if exposure to them did cause brain damage, the devices could save lives – for example, in a road accident far from a telephone box. The medical role that can be played by mobile phones should be evaluated from the perspective of the bystander accessing good first-aid advice as much as from that of the patient with personal data to share.

In a popular medical textbook, there is a graph illustrating the typical fate of new drugs. A meteoric rise in popularity is followed by a sharp fall as problems with the drug emerge – but, in the end, the drug claws itself back to somewhere between peak and nadir. For wireless and mobile technology, the graph has barely begun, but already medical schools are including the PDA in the curriculum, along with the stethoscope – but not the price of hay.

David Sharp writes for the Lancet

A different world on the web

LILIAN PIZZICHINI suggests that the net may allow more room for ethics than does print journalism

In a survey conducted by Reporting the World (reportingtheworld.org), nearly 60 per cent of journalists from around the world confessed “we are failing to perform our function as part of democracy”. This mass hand-wringing was in the light of scant anti-war coverage in print and on television and radio. But the failing is nothing new. Journalists with unpopular causes have always had to battle to get their stories included. Yet clause three of the International Federation of Journalists’ statement of principles specifies that “journalists must have the right to act according to their conscience in the exercise of journalism”. Clearly, obstacles are getting in the way of journalists and their consciences.

Media is big business, and politicians and press barons enjoy an interdependent relationship. Ethics come way down the list of priorities for most newspaper editors. Making money and pleasing the boss is the bottom dollar. It is difficult for leader writers to say what they really think, and reporters have to resort to entrapment and phone bugs, blackmail and bribery, in the pursuit of the next headline-grabbing scoop.

The case of James Hipwell, the financial journalist who was sacked by the *Mirror* amid allegations that he and a colleague had used their column to push up the prices of shares they owned before selling them, is an example of the flexibility of ethics in journalism. The paper’s editor, Piers Morgan, was censured by the Press Complaints Commission for falling short of the “high professional

standards” demanded by its code. But Hipwell explains: “No one on the *Mirror* had ever read the code, yet I was fired for breaking its rules, invisible though these rules were. That is the problem with self-regulation: nobody in journalism, least of all the proprietors, wants editors to have their wings clipped by statutory regulation, so there is a lot of hand-wringing and

Readers in Britain would not find such articles in their newspapers

faux contrition when a breach occurs.” In other words, ethics only count when someone who has been reading the code makes them count. In the meantime, anything goes.

Hipwell has also worked for the PR consultant Max Clifford, who was behind the exposé that led to Jeffrey Archer’s imprisonment. “You have to bend the rules to get the story,” Hipwell reckons. “But in this case, it was in the public interest.” Hipwell is not alone in compromising his principles. Jake Lynch, a contributor to Reporting the World, comments that “the avalanche of pent-up material about Archer, previously suppressed for fear of libel actions but set loose upon his conviction for perjury in the summer of 2001, testifies to the influence of the state and its laws on the content of news: what can be said, and

when.” In other words, the sin is of omission rather than misrepresentation. And there’s not a lot print journalists can do about it.

So contributors to Reporting the World may have a point when they suggest that the internet is the only place left for an “effective ethical framework for reporting conflicts in the 21st century”. Go to the website now and you’ll find a link to an article from the *New African* that revisits allegations about the west’s role in prolonging the conflict in the Congo; another link takes you to a report on connections between Indonesia’s regional conflicts, the Bali atrocity and the Indonesian military.

Readers in Britain would not find such articles in their newspapers, but on the internet writers have the freedom to make fruitful connections and to explore unknown territories. There are no omissions on the internet. However, this does lead to problems of quality, accuracy and interpretation. For example, in a piece for Reporting the World, Lynch writes that Stanley Baldwin “tarred journalists with a phrase that has stuck in the memory, accusing us of wielding ‘power without responsibility – the prerogative of the harlot through the ages’”. Lynch has got it wrong. Baldwin made the remark during the Empire Free Trade campaign run by Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere, and aimed it at the proprietors. Even so, some would argue that Baldwin got it wrong, saying that power without responsibility is the prerogative of the customer and that the harlots are the politicians who sell themselves to the Hollicks and Murdochs of their day.

Caught between the interests of politicians, the greed of press barons and the dizzying array of opinion on the internet, the ethical punter can only sift through the internet, scan the papers and hope for the best.

Catering for all tastes

Whether you love biscuits or airline meals, there's a home online for you, writes **WILL SKIDELSKY**

One of the great things about the internet is the way it offers people the chance to transform scarcely appreciated hobbies into widely recognised accomplishments. Take, for example, the meteoric rise of nicecupofteaandisitdown.com. Stuart Payne, a web designer from Cambridge, started the site in September 2001 as a means to indulge his liking for biscuits. As he envisaged it, the site would allow him to post occasional reviews of new biscuit products and attract fellow biscuit enthusiasts to its message boards.

What Payne did not foresee was the momentum the site would acquire. Through word of mouth alone, its visitors swelled to several thousand a week. Then, in June this year, it was featured on BBC News Online, and people began logging on to it in droves. By mid-June, it was receiving 4,000 visits a day, and Janet Street-Porter in the *Independent on Sunday* was piously lambasting it as an example of a national obsession with trivia. Rather than discussing “the merits of various combinations of sugar, margarine and flour”, she wrote, we should be talking about the “more unpleasant issues in the uncanny real world outside the tea break”. The site now receives up to 10,000 hits each day, and Payne has become a celebrated critic, sought out by biscuit manufacturers from around the world in the hope of attracting favourable reviews for their products.

The success of Payne's website is not hard to explain. The British are a nation of biscuit lovers. Each day, millions of

people sit down to a biscuit with their mid-morning cup of tea. Questions relating to biscuits – such as whether Rich Tea are preferable to Hobnobs, or whether or not they should be dunked – are topics of national interest. All that was needed was for someone to tap in to this obsession, and success was virtually guaranteed.

Not all foodie websites are so

A characteristic that many foodie websites share is a patriotic bias

fortunate, the reason being that many are too specialised and therefore have a far more limited appeal. One example is [airlinemeals.net](#). As its name suggests, this is a website devoted to the mouthwatering topic of airline cooking. Airline passengers are invited to photograph their in-flight meals and then post them on the website, accompanied by their comments. Visitors to the site have a list of more than a hundred airlines to choose from. Clicking on any one enables them to scroll through all the photos that have been posted of its meals. Basically, the site is a collection of poor-quality photos of thousands of astonishingly unappetising-looking meals. Quite why anyone would want to visit it – let alone go to the bother of posting photographs on it – is beyond me.

I would place [roadfood.com](#) in a

similar category. This, as its home page tells us, is “a site devoted exclusively to finding the most memorable local eateries along the highways and back roads of America”. Once again, the mouth waters. Like its better-known and more upmarket cousins, [chowhound.com](#) and [egullet.com](#), the site is essentially a message board where visitors can post reviews, swap tips or indulge in any discussion relating to roadside food. Judging from the lively debates that have been had on subjects such as “The top ten all-you-can-eat restaurants” and “Removing grease stains”, the site is not without its fans. Once again, it's hard to see why.

A characteristic that many foodie websites share is a patriotic bias. [Nicecupofteaandisitdown.com](#), which makes no bones about catering for a distinctively British obsession, is an obvious example. So is [roadfood.com](#) – it is hard to imagine a similar site existing in, say, France or Italy. Two other examples are [tasteofengland.co.uk](#) and [hungryexpats.com](#). The first is a rather plummy site that allows visitors to source the producers of all manner of traditional British foods. The second is a delivery service for British citizens living overseas who find it hard to cope without regular fixes of Marmite or Jaffa Cakes.

The web is clearly a place where all manner of tastes and peccadilloes can find a home. In the end, it doesn't matter that sites such as [airlinemeals.net](#) and [roadfood.com](#) are never likely to be as popular as [nicecupofteaandisitdown.com](#). It is just good to know that there is a place where those who are fascinated by the way major airlines feed their passengers, or who want to learn about “America's Great Sausage Cities”, can do so without feeling embarrassed or self-conscious.

ns observations

identity cards

Dawn of the Smart Ages

NAGHMEH NASIRITOUSI

The world is catching on to smart cards as a way of easing the growing tension between security issues and civil liberties. The concept is simple. Resembling a telephone card, the smart card contains computer chips that hold and process huge amounts of data.

In Britain, they are already being successfully used by 43,000 people in a scheme led by Cornwall County Council. The Cornish Citizen Card, as this particular smart card is known, has successfully replaced cards for library membership, fare concessions, council employee identification, school meals and car-parking tickets.

But it is the border passage project at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport that is most exciting security specialists. The scheme allows pre-registered passengers to pass through security by scanning their eyes. This biometric security technology identifies the passenger by cross-referencing a real-time eye scan with iris data that has been pre-recorded. To avoid privacy issues, the data is kept on a personal smart card rather than on a computer database.

The project began in 2001 as a service aimed at frequent flyers. It has since grown in scale and, for a fee of £139, is now open to any resident of the European Union, the European Economic Area and Switzerland. There are currently 7,000 users, but



Security the smart way? A specimen copy of Britain's new identity cards for asylum-seekers

this is set to rise with KLM's forthcoming frequent-flyer deal.

The scheme seems faultless. It is user-friendly (glasses, contact lenses and colour lenses can be worn without interfering with the process), and there are no hygiene issues, as identification is contactless. Independent research companies have found the system to be accurate and secure, with a virtually non-existent false acceptance rate. The false rejection rate is only about 1 per cent, caused mostly by inexperience in using the iris scanner. The project has met great approval, not only from passengers and people in the industry, but even from the most ardent of smart-card critics. Roger Bingham of Liberty is concerned only that this legitimate application of the technology will lead to "a national identity scheme slipping in through the back door".

Expense is the biggest hurdle for the expansion of the border passage

project. Only a small number of companies currently manufacture the necessary equipment, and their prices are high. But Harald Bresser, the regional director of Dartagnan biometric solutions, the company that developed the system at Schiphol airport, is undeterred. After the feedback he has received, he is positive about the potential of the project.

The United States Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002 might be the added incentive needed to move people in the right direction. The law requires countries whose citizens enjoy visa-free travel to the US to issue passports with biometric identifiers by 26 October 2004. The EU recently agreed on a plan that could eventually lead to the issuing of passports holding information such as digital fingerprints and eye scans. The Smart Ages may be closer than we think.

web democracy**Online to be president?****JOHN ELLEDGE**

The internet is playing a key role in next year's United States presidential election. Meetup (www.meetup.com), an independent website, has brought together more than 35,000 supporters of the Democrat candidate Howard Dean.

Founded in 2002, Meetup aims to bring people with similar interests face to face in cities around the world. Users select their nearest city and a subject of interest from 561 currently available, and are kept informed of the next "meetup" in their area. The meetings take place in every listed city in the 34 countries included, all on the same day. The upshot is that, one day a month, different groups of people all over the world are sitting in cafés and bars discussing the finer points of witchcraft or arguing in Klingon.

Groups vary in popularity. Unfortunately, there are not enough Druids in Jakarta, Indonesia, to make this month's "meetup". Howard Dean's page, on the other hand, is causing a storm, and is by far the most popular. Recently, thousands of his supporters used Meetup to congregate simultaneously in more than 200 cities across the US. Dennis Goldford, professor of political science at Drake University in Iowa, has said that internet campaigning may be effective in 25 years. Certainly, other presidential candidates use it only as a support to their main campaign programme. But Dean's site refers to

Meetup as "the backbone of the campaign", and his supporters say that it's one thing which sets him apart from other candidates, and that it really reaches out to the public.

Users do not need to pay for the service, but Dean's campaign manager, Joe Trippi, is paying Meetup \$2,500 a month to comply with federal laws on companies that serve presidential campaigns. However, the fee seems negligible in light of the \$400,000 that Dean's supporters have contributed to the campaign through contact with the site. "The largest component spreading the word – both in money and organisation – are the Meetup folks," Trippi confirms. Meetup could be about to do more for democracy online than any number of e-government projects.

local government**Conquering the wire(less)****DEEPANSHU BAGCHEE**

Local government may not be the typical place to go looking for cutting-edge advances in wireless technology. But according to Councillor Ian Wilder, the London Borough of Westminster "will be the most advanced wireless provider in the world within 18 months".

Wilder has overseen the launch of a council project dubbed "Westminster 4G". It is a wireless network that gives parking attendants, refuse collectors and noise-management teams hand-held computers and a

real-time connection to the council's computer system. Because wireless signals are so short, six "smart boxes" installed in the Soho area function as middle men, receiving the signal from the hand-held device and sending it back to the central office.

The council recently spent £2m on 30 new traditional CCTV cameras. With wireless networking, Wilder says, "we could expand our CCTV coverage at a fraction of the cost".

If the system is successful, it will provide high-speed internet access to the public at cheaper rates than private service providers.

However, Nigel Deighton, vice-president of Gartner Research, which provides research and analysis of the information technology industries, is less optimistic. He believes that Wilder's claims are unrealistic. "If the idea behind local government providing wireless internet access to the public is to make money," he explains, "they don't have a cat in hell's chance."

Among other problems, security experts question the safety of using wireless technology for public services, given the problems it has had with hackers. Deighton argues that, "unless you provide a fool-proof security system, there is still considerable risk".

Despite the risks, it seems Britain is now in a rush to catch up with similar technological developments in the US. Cities in California, for example, are linking up security and safety equipment using wireless networking, and are using the technology as a magnet to draw people into leisure and business areas.

Whatever the motivations, the signs are that wireless technology is on the increase in Britain. And as Wilder rightly asks: "Why should we be so far behind everyone else?"

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