

A trio of tricks for staying in touch



SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

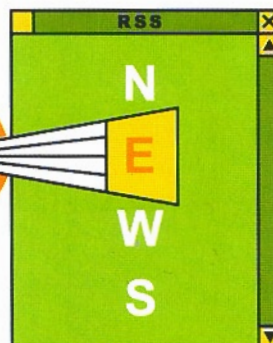
It's a widely-held belief that you can go from one person to another on the planet by jumping through six mutual acquaintances.

Social networks on the internet, such as Friendster and Orkut, replicate this process electronically. Someone invites you to join their network and you are able to make connections to other people in their social circle, and through them to people you don't know.

Now LinkedIn has done the same for professional and business contacts. Think of it as business networking without the ghastly canapés and cheap wine. Recipients are also more likely to pay attention to a LinkedIn introduction because it comes from someone they both know and trust.

There's only one drawback. You have to be invited to join by someone who is already in the system. The good news though is that there are already one million members, so you're more than likely to know someone who has already joined.

Tools like LinkedIn can be very useful. They protect your privacy and time, and are an effective way to see how the internet is evolving.



NEWS YOU CHOOSE

How do you get the information you need without wasting time on irrelevance?

The answer is to use Really Simple Syndication (RSS).

The difference between using an RSS newsreader and a web browser to get the latest news is rather like the contrast between reading a newspaper and getting a live Reuters newsfeed to your desk. Unlike browsing, say, the CNN website, a newsreader goes to CNN and grabs the latest updates on a regular basis. The same newsreader can also pull down newsfeeds from thousands of different sources and present them using the same interface.

Depending on the program you use, it's easy to organise different feeds into groups and folders. Best of all, RSS is free.

There are a number of different kinds of RSS newsreaders, just as there are different Web browsers. Some, such as NewsGator, work within Microsoft Outlook, while others, like Pluck, work within Internet Explorer. There are also a number of standalone programs, such as FeedDemon and Awasu.

Another source of breaking news

is Google's news alerts. These will email you when a search term, such as the name of your company, appears in Google's news page, which itself is compiled automatically from hundreds of news sources worldwide. It's quick, easy and potentially invaluable.

INSTANT COMMUNICATION

Instant messaging (IM) combines the immediacy of a telephone call with the ignorability, for want of a better word, of email. Rather than type an email, send it and wait for the recipient to read it and reply, with IM you type a message, press send and it instantly appears on the recipient's computer like a mobile phone text message. Of course, if the recipient is not there or if

they're busy, they won't read it.

But if they are there, they can respond in the same way.

Tools such as AOL instant messaging, Microsoft's Windows Messenger and ICQ have been around for

several years, but they have tended to be used in the home and for social activity. But instant messaging is coming to the office. Ferris Research predicts that by 2007, there will be 182 million business IM users. It's easy to test IM. Microsoft Windows has messenger built-in, so all you need to do is sign up. AOL users have access to AIM as part their subscription and you can download ICQ from www.icq.com.

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