

Pamela LiCalzi O'Connell

Bumpy Ride

Among the thousands of e-mail based discussion groups, many are private and clublike, while others are public and raucous. But there's nothing else quite like BumpList (www.bumplist.net).

BumpList, a discussion forum with no defined topic, allows just six subscribers at a time. When a new person joins, a subscriber is bumped off to make room. To re-join you must resubscribe, bumping someone else, and so on.

To stay on the list for any significant time requires numerous resubscriptions — the list calls itself “an e-mail community for the determined.” So far, more than 1,700 people have joined at least once and there have been 1,300 resubscriptions. (I lasted just 10 hours and 25 minutes before my first bump.)

BumpList is a sort of art project as behavioral experiment. “I want to get people to think about the culture and process of these lists,” said Jonah Brucker-Cohen, the site's creator and a researcher in the Human Connectedness Group at Media Lab Europe, an institute in Dublin. For example, the structure of BumpList prevents cliques from forming, making it more “democratic” than most lists, he said.

But that structure also makes it difficult to keep a conversation going, and a dialogue is, after all, the point of a discussion list. “Theoretically, it is possible to have a serious, sustained conversation on BumpList,” said Michael Paulukonis, a technology professional in Scranton, Pa., who is a BumpList member, by e-mail. “Practically speaking, I don't think it has hap-

pened — unless you consider the dialogue the resubscribers have with the medium itself.”

Mr. Paulukonis has resubscribed to BumpList 148 times since it started up in June.

Indeed, the experience has been so frustrating that devotees of BumpList have started a separate Yahoo group to talk about it (groups.yahoo.com/group/bumplistgroup) since the list itself “militates against discussion,” as the group's home page puts it.

Faiths United

As with discussion groups, there seem to be search engines for just about every topic — so why not the “word of God”?

A new site called Word (atomicsoftware.com/word), combines major Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Hindu texts — the Koran, the Tanakh, the New Testament, and 11 of the Upanishads — in a single database. You can search all four texts simultaneously for any keyword or phrase. The site's graphic design deliberately echoes that of Google to emphasize Word's scope and to encourage people not to look at passages in isolation, according to the site's founder, Adam Young, a software engineer based in New York and London.

“In the last couple of years there has been a lot of discussion about the different religions and what they mean,” Mr. Young said. “But few people have actually read the texts of the major religions and compared them side by side.”

The site also provides a list of recent search terms people have used (“wealth,” “devotion” and “monster” are a few) and maintains a “rank” for every scripture passage

based on how often it matches users' queries. That evolving rank is used to generate a page with the top 25 most-viewed passages.

Last year Mr. Young created a similar site about the words of another authoritative figure: Shakespeare. At Atomic Shakespeare (atomicshakespeare.com), visitors can search all 37 plays, and the site keeps track of words and passages readers have clicked and saved. The reader develops an individual collage of Shakespearean words that become part of a larger picture. The site's ambition is rather postmodern: to create a new text out of the “found object” of Shakespeare's oeuvre.

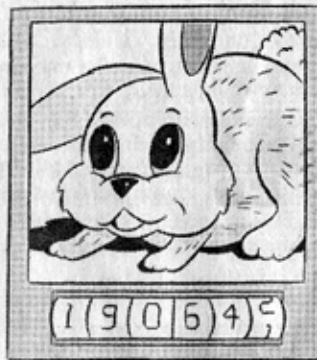
You Write the Caption

Something about the Most Viewed and Most E-Mailed sections of Yahoo News (news.yahoo.com) inspires a cultish devotion.

For those yet to be drawn in, these sections reveal which news articles and photos at the site were viewed and forwarded the most over the last day or even the last hour. They let you peer over the shoulders of Net users and exclaim, “So that's what people are interested in!” (Largely, it seems, cute animals and natural disasters.)

Sections like these are now widespread at information-based sites — including The New York Times on the Web — but Yahoo's photo features appear to inspire a special loyalty. Third-party sites have sprung up to provide easier access to Yahoo's photo selections or to deliver them by syndicated feed.

A new site adds a whimsical element: the Most E-Mailed Photos site (www.mostemailed.com) strings together the three most for-



Chris Gash

warded photos from Yahoo each day and invents captions for them to create a comic-book type sequence or story. At first, the site's founder, Mort Hillier, provided the often-humorous captions. Recently he began inviting visitors to write their own and to comment on his.

Mr. Hillier said in a message that he had long been a fan of Yahoo's photo feature “for a while, mainly from a sociological standpoint.”

“Of course, I also like cute pictures of cats and baby monkeys,” he added.

On the Radar

Pasta lovers will savor the World Directory of Pasta Shapes and Names (click on a link at www.professionalpasta.it/menu.htm). Mangia! ... Amazon World (www.amazonworld.blogspot.com) highlights some of the more interesting — make that bizarre — reader reviews found at Amazon.com. ... Wise Guide (www.loc.gov/wiseguide) is a monthly Web magazine from the Library of Congress that introduces readers to the the library's extensive online materials.