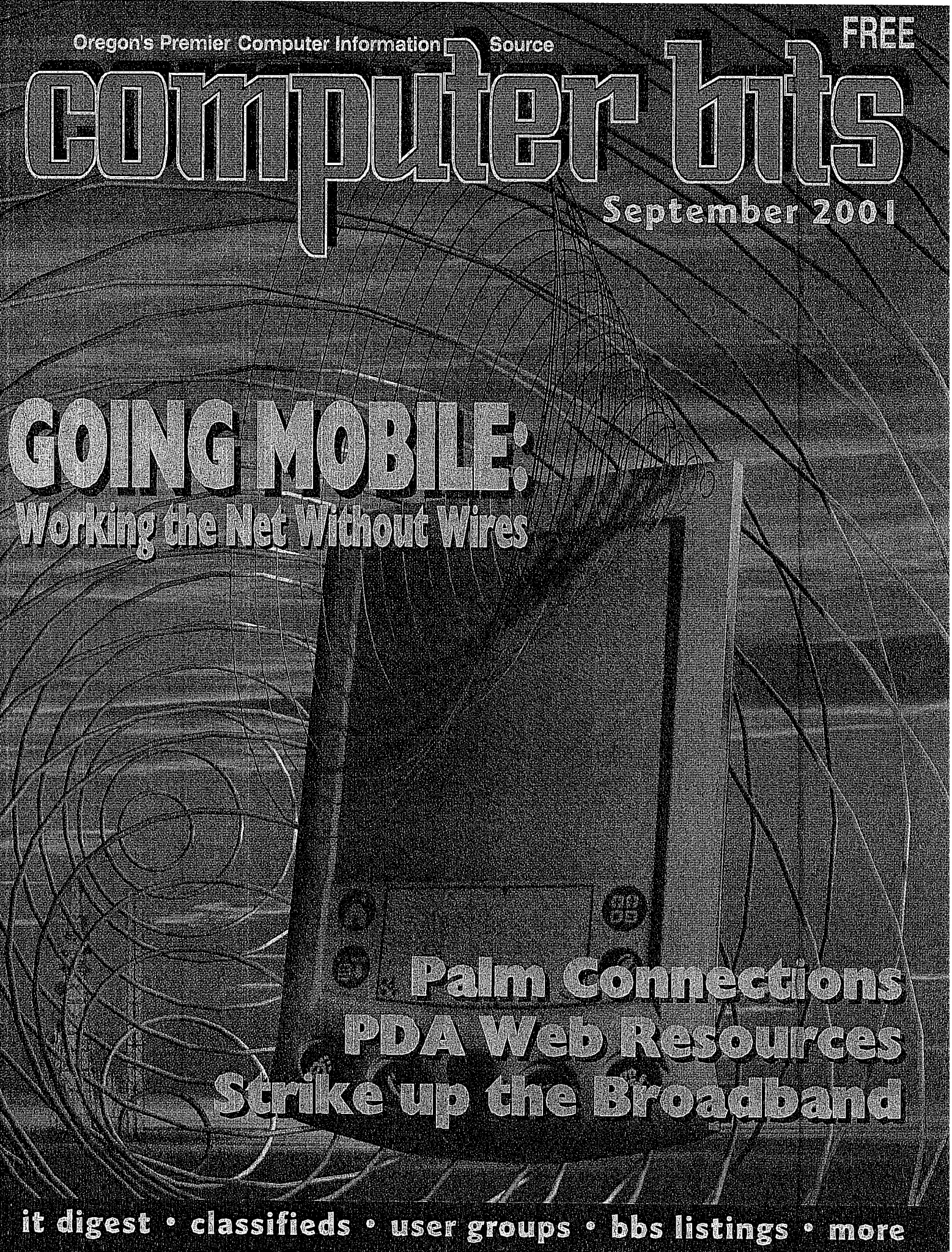
Oregon's Premier Computer Information Source

FREE

computer bits

September 2001

GOING MOBILE:
Working the Net Without Wires



Palm Connections
PDA Web Resources
Strike up the Broadband

it digest • classifieds • user groups • bbs listings • more

Back To E-School

No more pencils, no more books?...by Jim Slaight

Picnic baskets and ice chests are returning to the quietest corners of garages across Oregon and Washington. Lip balm is replacing sunscreen as the skin protection of choice at most stores in town. Daytime is turning to nighttime a little earlier than before, with that extra touch of coolness that says Fall and Winter are on their way.

It's back to school time—chalkboards and notebooks, or not...cafeteria lunches and co-ed sports, or not...parking passes and student unions, or not. You get chalkboards, notebooks, cafeteria lunches, and co-ed sports if you actually go on campus for your learning.

If you decide to learn from home, or wherever your favorite Internet connection resides, you get classmate-centric chat rooms, student teacher instant messaging, and Blackboard 5.5

A Growing Education Trend

According to the most recent study conducted by the National Education Association, the number of colleges offering courses over the Internet (also known as e-learning or distance-learning classes) is on the rise. From 1995 through 1998, the percentage of four-year universities offering distance-learning classes increased from 62% to 79%. Two-year universities offering distance classes grew from 58% to 72% during the same period. Those percentages are surely higher today.

Closer to home, Portland State University (PSU) has gone from a handful of classes in 1998 to more than two hundred full or partial online course offerings in 2001. Today, about six thousand distance and resident PSU students have online course accounts.

"The two primary reasons people take distance learning courses are access and flexibility," says Tom Luba, Director of Distance Learning for PSU. (**http://extended.pdx.edu**). "It is the only realistic choice for people who wish to start or continue their education and are geographically distant from the sources of higher education. For people who need to

NOW OPEN
Budget Computers
TRAINING CENTER

PICK THE PC YOU WANT AND LET US TEACH YOU HOW TO BUILD IT !!
CALL FOR DETAILS AND SIGN UP: 4040 SW 114TH IN BEAVERTON
(503)646-1776 EMAIL: training@budcom.com

Support your local retailers

continue their education, the added flexibility of distance offerings is often very appealing. These people have full-time or part-time jobs, families, busy travel schedules, and the like. Distance courses provide them with a way to further their education without having to drastically change everything else in their life."

Upside, Downside

Vicki Miller is the Director of Operations for a staffing company. She is just setting off on her first journey into the world of distance learning. Miller has always had an interest in library science and recently located an online Masters in Library Science Degree being offered through Emporia State University in Emporia, Kansas. Until now, pursuing her dream meant uprooting to another city where this specialized field of study was available.

"I've been searching for a Master of Library Science degree curriculum for several years," says Vicki Miller. "The one I chose showed up in a Google search about two weeks ago. If it wasn't for Emporia State offering this graduate degree through distance learning technology, I could not fulfill my career dream."

While various studies point to a very similar quality of learning between online and traditional classroom settings, distance learning is not without its own unique set of challenges. Online students must manage study time, maintain their commitment to completing assignments on a timely basis, and be comfortable with something less than the immediate feedback provided in a traditional classroom setting.

"Students who are used to traditional learning may find the lack of immediacy in distance learning disconcerting," says Dale Drigot, a service industry worker in Wisconsin taking courses in Washington State University Vancouver's (WSU-V) well-recognized certified Web development program so he can change careers (**http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/pc/ce/webtech**). "There's not someone looking over your shoulder to answer every little question. I think there is a certain amount of self-reliance involved. Be prepared to wait for answers. Email is quick but not as quick as an instructor standing beside you."

"Attrition tends to be higher in distance courses and programs compared to campus-based courses and programs," says PSU's Luba. "People sometimes don't realize what they are getting themselves into when they try to balance education with work, family and other competing factors. Other students find it very difficult to stay motivated to learn when they are not reporting to a traditional classroom on a regular basis."

Designers of distance learning classes face continuing challenges as well. WSU offers 215 courses as part of the schools Distance Degree Programs. Currently, 12% of all class hours taught at WSU are distance learning class hours. While generating that much online education, WSU curriculum developers have identified most e-learning content challenges.

"One of the mistakes often made by organizations offering distance education materials is to simply duplicate materials that have proven successful in a traditional setting and deliver them in a new format," says Dr. Bryce Campbell, WSU Vancouver Director of WSU/Clark College Web Technologies program. "This is rarely successful for a variety of reasons. When developing online or other distance curricula, one must completely re-think the methods of achieving the goals of each course."

"An online student wants online support from all aspects of the institution," says Carl Keil, PCC Webmaster & Multimedia Producer for Distance Education (**http://www.distance.pcc.edu**). "Everyone from administrators, school services staff to part time faculty need to know about the technology, the time involved, and the differences between distance learning and conventional education in order to provide positive student experiences."

Teachers In Students' Shoes

Quality online education usually comes from well-trained online educators. The Portland chapter of the American Society of Training & Development (ASTD) is turning trainers into distance learning students in an innovative professional development series called iLEARN (**http://www.astdcascadia.org**). In local iLEARN seminars, participants are experiencing learning and training in a variety of settings, including online virtual classrooms.

Internet Services

Web Site Hosting
24.95
Starting At

DSL - Unlimited
19.95
Starting At

Dial-Up - Unlimited
17.95
Starting At

Business & Personal
SpireTech offers Internet access for business and personal use. Please call or visit our Website for a complete listing of services and prices.

In business since 1993, SpireTech is one of the oldest locally owned Internet Providers in the Portland Metro Area. We offer great service for a fair price. No hidden costs, no surprises, just great service.

SPIRETECH
www.spiretech.com
503.222.3086

"The iLearn program is the first regular online learning program for ASTD," says Roni Viles, iLearn committee member and Vancouver-based corporate training consultant (**rviles@earthlink.net**). "We think it is important that training industry professionals gain first hand experience with some of the challenges and transitions learners, trainers and content developers are encountering as they include this growing delivery method into their training strategies."

Plenty of Electives

The menu of distance learning classes available in the Portland metro area is astounding. Here's a snapshot of the newest and most popular e-learning offerings:

PSU is offering the eMBA, a Web-based version of their popular statewide MBA program and a redesigned Masters of Social Work Distance Graduate Education Option. PSU also is reformatting 100 college and high school independent study courses for online delivery and building online distance programs in education and corporate professional development.

In a unique example that demonstrates most of distance learning's major advantages, PSU's Division of Public Administration offers a Tribal Administration program for people interested in gaining the management skills needed to operate reservations throughout Oregon.

At PCC, you can learn about Active Server Pages, Spanish Medical Terminology, and earn an Associate of Applied Science degree in Management and Supervisory Development via distance learning classes. You can also earn all the freshman and sophomore level credits needed to transfer to a 4-year institution.

At WSU Vancouver, you can earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Science, Business Administration, Criminal Justice, Human Development, Education and Engineering Management, mostly from the comfort of your home den or office.

But even in your home den or office there may be one more hurdle to overcome before you can take full advantage of everything distance learning has to offer.

Future librarian Vicki Miller has two domestic shorthair cats, Maggie and Mollie. Maggie is the quick one. Mollie is the chunky one. What do Maggie and Mollie have to do with the wonderful world of distance learning?

"Got to keep your cats off the keyboard," says Miller. ❑

Jim Slaight is a Vancouver-WA based freelance writer intent on figuring out all the bells and whistles associated with this bold new Internet age. You can contact Jim at jslaight1962@aol.com.

Editor's note: There are several local institutions not mentioned in Jim's article that offer distance education. Check out these universities and colleges in addition to those mentioned by Jim.

University of Oregon Continuing Education

Clackamas Community College

University of Phoenix

Mount Hood Community College

Marylhurst University

Hi-Tek Computers

- **Computer Consulting**
- **Network Consulting**
- **PC Sales & Service**
- **Network Design & Maint., NT, '00, ME, NetWare, Win9x, & some Linux**
- **Video Conferencing**
- **Help with DSL & ISDN**
- ***Custom Software* using Visual Basic 6 & MS Access**
- **Web site creation & maint.**
- **Email: hitek1st@xprt.net**
- **Web: www.xprt.net/~hitek1st**

Low, low rates! Cautious & Reliable!

Since 1991

503-663-1330

CLICK TEAM

Creative Tools for a Creative Age!

Discover **Multimedia Fusion**

Create your own games and applications easily with ZERO programming. Only $99. Shipped on two CD ROMS.

Use the discount code CBITS and save 10% through September 30, 2001

Demos and more information at www.clickteam.com
Free online games at the

v-cade!

www.v-cade.com
All games created by the users of Clickteam software.

CLICK TEAM