

Love or Loath Him, Gates Is a Web-Wide Obsession

Steve Ditlea | January 7, 1997

When it comes to an executive presence on the World Wide Web, Microsoft's Bill Gates is in a class by himself. No other chief executive can boast several official pages, two unofficial pages, a few Yahoo! categories all his own, and dozens of satires, rants and shrines.

The fact that he's one of the richest men in the Whole Wide World has a lot to do with his impact on the Web's collective consciousness. That his wealth is based on technology that makes it possible (in one way or another) for most readers of these words to access the Internet broadens his psychic footprint.

Even so, a casual browser would never guess how fascinating the Web finds Gates by landing on the Microsoft Corporation's Bill Gates page. This is the sole CEO page of a major corporation that is maintained by a public relations department — and it shows. Under the rubric "Microsoft Corporate Information — Bill Gates," the page is a mundane public relations catalog of captions and links under headings like "What's New With Bill?" and "About Bill."

Greg Shaw, a manager in Microsoft's P.R. department, said that the company's Gates materials on the Web "try to convey the news of what Bill is doing, because the strategy announcements he makes are of importance to other companies and to personal computer users." Gates's pages, Shaw says, "are aimed at the general public and PC users, as well as corporate MIS people."



From The Gates Mandala

Microsoft's site is not the only home of an "official" Gates page. The New York Times Syndicate, which distributes Gates's column to more than 120 newspapers, also maintains The New York Times Syndicate's Bill Gates page. And Viking, the publisher of his recent best-selling book, maintains a brief biography and an audio clip explaining why he wrote it, along with chapter excerpts from *The Road Ahead: Bill Gates*.

Richard Petersen, a San Francisco-based online publisher, created The Unofficial Bill Gates page earlier this year, about the same time he posted unofficial Web sites for the Pope and Bill Clinton.

"Like them, Bill Gates represents an icon," proclaimed Peterson, the chief executive of Z Publishing, who collected links to more than 50 Gates-specific pages, factual and fanciful, before the clutter forced him to start a second unofficial site devoted to William H. Gates III.

For all the adulation Microsoft's chairman gets from the business press and investors, "there's a lot of hostility to Bill Gates," Petersen observed. "A lot of men see themselves compared to him and



From zpub's The 'Unofficial' Bill Gates Web Page.

wonder: how can that young guy be so rich?" After surveying all the Gates pros and cons on the Web, this unofficial webmaster concluded: "He got where he is with hard work. I think he's a very smart person; I would hate to be his competitor."

On the Yahoo! search service, Bill Gates holds the distinction of being the only chief executive of any corporation to have subject categories of his own, in the form of sites listed under both Business and Economy:Companies:Computers:Software:Microsoft Corporation:People:Gates, Bill and Entertainment:Humor,Jokes and Fun:Computer Humor:Microsoft Humor:Bill Gates.

Informational sites on the Web about Gates are remarkably programming- or labor-intensive. For instance, there's the Bill Gates Personal Wealth Clock, which is constantly updated and at last viewing showed that \$72.767 was "Your Personal Contribution" to Gates's nearly \$20 billion (actually, his paper value in Microsoft stock). For the envious or the just plain curious, the Seattle-based public relations firm of Morse McFadden has been posting Walls'96 and Walls '97?, online photos of Gates's \$50 million mansion going up along the shore of Lake Washington.

Gates also evokes wit ranging from the nerdy to the Python-esque. The Bill Gates Jokepage is a good place to start for the former. ("Q: How many Bill Gateses does it take to change a light bulb? A: One. He puts the bulb in and lets the world revolve around him.") For sharp satire, click on The Secret Diary of Bill Gates, Aged 40*, which raised enough hackles at Microsoft to merit a threatening letter from Gates's lawyers to the page's anonymous creator. Or was the company rattled by this site's perfect parody of a Microsoft press release, dated April 1, 1996, declaring Bill Gates to run for President?



Parody press releases about Gates and Microsoft are a staple on the Web. Take a look at MICROSOFT Bids to Acquire Catholic Church or Gates & Slate vs. Media Clutter, purporting that "The U.S. Justice Department has cleared the way for the eventual merger of Microsoft with Time-Warner, The New York Times Company, the Times-Mirror Company, the Washington Post Company, the Tribune Company, the News Corporation, Gannett, Newhouse, Knight-Ridder. . . . The new company will be known as MicroPostTimes3D or M3D for short."

It's Must C:\ TV!



Gates-inspired visual parodies are also striking in their painstaking craftsmanship. "Imagine, if you will, the NBC lineup, when Bill Gates, the network's new ruler, takes over programming duties" urges the Bill Gates @NBC-It's Must C: TV! page, with its exclusive photos of the new casts of "Friends of Bill" and "Frazier & Gates." Especially awe-inspiring in its detail is The Gates Mandala, a colorful synthesis of U.S. technology and Hindu mythology – suitable for framing.

Surely the most unnerving Gates site is www.Teamgates.com, which reads like a bizarre parody, with links to pages titled "Why Bill is so cool!" and "Why you should like Microsoft!" It's when you find out that the site is the work of Jacob Munk-Stander, a 15-year-old Gates fan in Copenhagen, Denmark, that you realize this is no spoof. To make sure you take it seriously, there's even a quiz about Bill Gates before you leave the site.

On the anti-Gates side of the Web, browsers will find a plethora of sites, including the Why I hate Bill #1 . . . 19 page. (Reason #19: The program title "Microsoft Money says it all."), Stopgates (tm) ("Before he stops you!"), and The coming of the 4.0th Reich is Win95!, which portrays Gates in a Nazi officer's uniform with a swastika-style Windows95 armband.



Even more extreme are a pair of sites equating Bill Gates with Beelzebub. Adding together the

ASCII numerical values of the letters in Gates's name and coming up with a demonic total of 666, one site offers Proof that Bill Gates is the Devil himself! while another simply proclaims Satan is Behind Bill Gates's Success!.

O.K., so if Gates is indeed the Prince of Darkness (or merely the Evil One's pawn), this reporter has a Web project Microsoft might want to finance in exchange for, say, his immortal soul. . . .