Intelligent Ubiquity

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I want to draw readers’ attention to a fine e-publication edited by my friends John Gehl and Suzanne Douglas. Quoting from its Web site, “Ubiquity is a Web-based publication of the Association for Computing Machinery, dedicated to fostering critical analysis and in-depth commentary on issues relating to the nature, constitution, structure, science, engineering, technology, practices and paradigms of the IT profession. John Gehl and Suzanne Douglas are the editors of Ubiquity, and Peter J. Denning is chair of its editorial advisory group.

“The publication seeks to provide a forum for community discussions among a wide variety of professionals in the IT arena by focusing on shared interests in: applying computing to enhance various professional disciplines; using the computer as a primary tool for advancing professional learning; and promoting the IT profession.”

Now, I’m extremely biased about _Ubiquity_ because John and Suzanne have very kindly published several articles of mine there. Nonetheless, I think readers of this newsletter will particularly enjoy a recent article published in _Ubiquity_, Volume 4, Issue 46 (Jan. 21 - 27, 2004). Stephen Downes is a Senior Researcher for the National Research Council of Canada. He has written a thought-provoking essay entitled “2004: The Turning Point” in which, among many other issues, he discusses several topics that concern network managers and anyone interested in Internet security.

First, Dr Downes suggests that the overwhelming rise of spam in the past year will lead to widespread demands for strong identification and authentication (I&A) of all e-mail messages – or, failing that, at least non-repudiable source addressing. “Kill one spam message and all subsequent email from that sender will be blocked.” The downside of such an approach is that any failure of the I&A methods and we’ll have even more widespread denial of service to innocent victims of address hijackers.

Secondly, Downes, writes, “It will become apparent that the legislation passed has been, in essence, the legalization of spam. Based on this, it will not be surprising to see marketing agencies take to the courts to block the deployment of authenticated email, on the grounds that it makes their now legal mass mailings unprofitable.”

Another interesting idea is that simulation will become a hot medium because ordinary intellectual property is no longer controllable. “Smart people have realized by now that the future of commercial content lies in higher end production that cannot be emulated by a 16-year-old with a computer and an attitude. This is why the music industry has turned to music videos as its salvation, the commercial audio track being almost a thing of the past, and this is why the people who consult for the industry have been embracing simulations in a big way. . . . They provide a compelling alternative to traditional content delivery because they engage the learner. A simulation is not just some scripted presentation of instructional material; it is a representation of that material in a manner that places the learner within a context in which the learning would be used. Simulations, therefore, will be hyped like crazy for the next couple of years . . . .”
As someone involved in online security education, I was particularly struck by this idea, and it has gotten me thinking about how to incorporate more exciting content and media into our MSIA program at Norwich University. While I’m talking about online education, I recommend that anyone with similar interests visit Dr Downes’ Web site, which is chock-full of fascinating articles on the subject.

It’s too bad we can’t hope for ubiquitous intelligence, but at least we have intelligent Ubiquity. I hope you enjoy it.

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For further reading:

About Ubiquity < http://www.acm.org/ubiquity/about.html >


Downes’ Web site < http://www.downes.ca/ >


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