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## What Gives? Altruism In Cyberspace

Corporate entities have flocked to the Internet to greet a new wave of consumers. “Come shop at our Web page,” they say. “Send us your credit card number,” they implore. Let’s face it, the prospect of making a buck in the virtual world is going to attract crowds.

But what about the original concept of the Internet—the idea that information and services can be shared for no reason other than good will? Fear not, amidst all of the hoopla, the commerce, and the bargain hunting, the virtual world still holds sacred the concept of free information, shared resources, and community service. For an example of this benevolent philosophy, let’s visit a handful of non-profit and community awareness organizations that are making cyberspace a better place for all of us to spend our days.

### \*No Place Like Home\*

How many times have you been approached on the streets by a homeless person? What’s the proper response? Should you just keep on walking? Give cash? Find some other alternative? To help answer these questions and as a service to the online community, the author of the book “54 Ways You Can Help The Homeless” has placed the entirety of his text on the Web for public viewing (<http://ecosys.drdr.virginia.edu/ways/54.html>). Learn what you can do when approached by a homeless person (e.g. hand out fast food certificates); what children can do to help (e.g. play with other kids in a shelter); how you can make a real commitment (e.g. help someone on the streets apply for aid); and more.

### \*Buyer Beware\*

What do a 1995 Camry, a Sharp microwave oven, and a Norelco razor have in common? They are all reviewed and rated by “Consumer Reports,” the magazine that purchasers have relied upon for years to help them make better buying decisions. Prodigy users can access these reports, as well as hundreds of others, by loading up the CR Library (jump Consumer Reports) and selecting product categories such as automobiles, cameras, kitchen appliances, and TV/audio/video equipment. Within each category, individual products and manufacturers are rated for performance, workmanship, features, and safety. Both current and past reports are available online, as is product recall information. “Consumer Reports” is published by Consumer’s Union, a nonprofit organization.

### \*Have You Seen This Child?\*

The National Center For Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and Child Quest International, Inc. (CQI) are two nonprofit organizations using the Internet to help bring home the nation’s missing children. At the NCMEC Web site (<http://www.missingkids.org/>) you can view photos of runaways and abducted youngsters, plus download safety tips to share with your kids. For more photo images of missing children, as well as depictions of their alleged abductors, head for CQI’s home page (<http://www.kids.org/>). If you recognize any of the faces or descriptions

provided, complete CQI's online sighting form and forward it by e-mail to the organization. Also available are intake forms for those who have a missing child and wish to register for help.

**\*Over Fifty And Feelin' Nifty\***

Paging all cyber-seniors: you're invited to visit America Online and CompuServe renditions of AARP, (the American Association of Retired Persons), a nonprofit organization dedicated to meeting the needs of the older adult. On America Online, (keyword AARP) you can attend nightly meetings with other seniors; browse the AARP research center; and download software files relating to retirement, life transitions, social security, and more. On CompuServe, (go AARP) you can access: the AARP monthly bulletin; information on Medicare and Medicaid; government publications; and files related to grandparenting, pensions, and home care.

**\*Women Of The Net\***

If you're a woman with access to the World-Wide Web, grab a bookmark and place it at the Sexual Assault Information Page (<http://www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/saInfoPage.html>). This not-for-profit information and referral service has catalogued an extraordinary collection of materials, including information on: acquaintance rape; crime victims compensation; sexual harassment; violence and women; rape prevention; self defense; recovery; and much more. Access legal information, support groups, crisis centers, and many other resources.