I Found My Niche on the Internet:
A personal exposé

I come from pioneer stock. My great-great-grandmother came alone to America on a sailing ship from Europe. My family came West in the days of early Anglo migration. We were miners, farmers, bankers, and teachers. Sarting over in new lands must run in my blood. I live on a dirt road in Corrales. I can't get cable TV, but I'm on the Internet. And I'm earning a significant portion of my income from my work on the World Wide Web. I'm now involved in several co-ventures and my partner is in Florida. I don't know what's coming next and I love it! It suits me.

So, how did it happen? About two years ago I signed onto the Internet through a local, independent ISP (Internet Service Provider), Rt66 here in Albuquerque. "Hmm," I said, "That's interesting. I'll try that."

My sister told me about a company she knew that was selling Web sites and they needed some writing/marketing help. For this they would give me web space. I wrote to them, found my way into their irc (Internet Relay Chat) chat room—and found community. I found people I liked—many of whom were very, very helpful with answers about software, HTML, and how to do things on the Internet.

In this "room," which became my home base, I met people I eventually worked with developing web sites. And in this room I met my strongest business partner, Tim T.

My story about Tim T., about trust, about talent, about finding the ones you can count on wherever they happen to be is tech-based. I work on PCs, had a 486DX33 with 8 RAM, and Windows 3.1 when I got on the Internet. I started downloading software—what a hoot! How easy!—and then deleting the stuff I wasn't using.

The memory in my computer started giving me fits, and it almost died. I took it to one of the most reputable repair places in town—and after about 5 days they gave it back to me—unfixed! Five days offline! I was going through withdrawal. It was out of my control. I was going crazy. And they didn't fix what was wrong with the computer. Yes, we upgraded the system and added RAM, but the computer still didn't work right. Even when I said "Shoudn't we re-format the c drive?" (Horrors of horrors), they said "We only do that as a last resort." Well, hunh. How bad does it have to get?

I had already had a dozen long distance phones calls from my online community. "You okay?" "Can we help?" But I didn't want halfway help—the kind that gets halfway into the project and then isn't available. And really, how well did I know these people anyway? I'd never met any of them face-to-face.

Tim T. had called and said he'd heard I was having trouble. First time he called I said "Yeah, but I want to work locally, and I've taken the computer into a place here." "Okay," he says. "Let me know if ya need anything." I didn't really believe anyone online could help me.

A week later Tim T. called again. He said that Jeffe told him I was still having trouble. By this time, I was freaking out. I had my machine back and it wasn't working right. I had paid a lot of money to have it fixed, and it wasn't. I was facing technology complications and I had no expertise. I was almost in tears. I began questioning my judgement about working in an area that depended so heavily on machines. I'm a writer/photograher, a visceral person. I do much of my best work unconsciously. This was horrifying to me.

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So, I finally gave in. "Yes, Tim, I'm having real trouble and am not sure where to go from here. If this was your computer, what would you do?" He said he'd reformat the c drive. I mulled it over. "Okay."

"I'll walk you through it," he responded. "Let me call you back, get this on my phone bill." But, he was in Florida and I didn't want him to pay for the phone bill. This was my problem, I didn't really know him and I didn't want to be indebted to him. He said he wanted to do it that way and he wouldn't leave me stranded half way through the process. "I pride myself on finishing a job," he said. This sounded like my own deep beliefs about going to the end of things. I sighed. Maybe, just maybe things would improve.

Ten hours later my computer was reformatted and most of my programs were reinstalled. I got back online after a whole week and my friends had put an image on one of the sites I was building: an animated bouquet of flowers blooming with a message they missed me and welcomed me back. I was very moved – I had found a caring community.

A few months later I upgraded my whole system, and tried again to get local help by paying for a year's support. Tim laughed and laughed, and was angry I didn't use him for that, too. We now have a trade. He takes care of my equipment and I correct/ edit/ write for him. As he says, he speaks 18 languages, none of them human. It's an easy trade for each of us. Our business partnership now includes developing Internet businesses – including a web site access verification system and comprehensive merchant services, offering online sales and customizable storefronts.

I wanted to pay him, but he wouldn't accept money. So I sent him one of my fine art black and white linen prints, which he loves. He had found my photos at my web site.

Okay. So I've found community. And I found tech help for my computer. That alone doesn't answer the question "Why is the World Wide Web a good place for me?" The simple answer is "It suits me and I'm good at it." Since I've been in New Mexico, I've developed the artistic/creative parts of myself. Before that I had a career in advertising/marketing in New York City, and over the years I've done a fair amount of general business consulting. While developing my artistic talents has been satisfying personally, I missed the financial security I had working with big business and I missed the quickness, the energy, the intensity of work and life in New York City. I like mixing it all up; I want all these ways of living. I am also irreverant, entrepreneurial, and want to do things in my own way.

My work on the Internet allows me to use all my talents and all my experience and all my skills in a brand new environment where there is no "tried and true." I am finding that my non-tech point-of view is extremely valuable. I help make sites more accessible and easier to use because I approach them in non-tech ways. I am re-connecting with colleagues in New York and Los Angeles and finding ways to be in the rough and tumble of business while still living in New Mexico. My client base is eclectic—as diverse as a local budget consultantauthor and a women's motorcycle club to a telecommunications company and a personals dating site to Canadian auto dealerships and Caribbean boat charters—from Albuquerque to London. And surprise surprise, in a world that is known for being dominated by young white males, it's an advantage being an "older" woman with an artistic bent.

I have found my niche.

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