

Technology

SILICON INJECTIONS

BY DAVID PESCOVITZ

Tools of Dialogue...

Marshall McLuhan's "global village" has been hard-wired. More than 20 million people around the world are connected by what began as a Department of Defense experiment and evolved into the anarchistic Internet. Cable TV providers, telephone companies and entertainment producers are in a mad frenzy to grab a piece of the Information Superhighway™.

Even as this is written, new technologies are being created that dramatically change how, and what, we communicate. McLuhan said that "propaganda ends where dialogue begins."

The tools of empowerment have arrived. The rest is up to us.

Listening In...

Only a month after Al Gore finally killed the Clipper chip (a proposed electronic mail-encryption standard to which law enforcement would hold a key) Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.) introduced in August the Digital Telephony Bill. The bill requires telcos' digital telephone networks to be "wiretap ready" for Federal Bureau of Investigation eavesdropping, with a warrant of course.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a computer users' lobbying group that participated in developing the bill, has been flamed on the 'Net for its support of the bill. The EFF's acceptance of the bill in its current fashion, members contend, lies in the bill's additional privacy provisions and its specific application — the "wiretap ready" requirements do not apply to Bulletin Board Systems or Internet-access providers.

In addition, under the bill the FBI must get a court order, as opposed to the current administrative subpoena required, before examining an individual's on-line records including electronic mail and downloaded information. The EFF, however, is concerned with who will cover the rest of the money needed for the phone companies to modify their systems if the \$500 million over four years in tax dollars earmarked by the bill runs out.

According to Jerry Berman, policy director for the EFF, the group is pushing for the House bill to hold government money accountable for all costs. A recent compromise on Capitol Hill tentatively designed in the bill that the Federal Communication Commission will be responsible for deciding who will cover additional costs of system changes.

The Digital Telephony Bill awaits a Senate vote. Its companion House measure is expected to reach the floor before Congress adjourns for the year.

The Future of Indie Record Labels...

Music enthusiasts looking for a true alternative sampling should check out the Internet Underground Music Archive (IUMA). Founded a year ago by two University of California at Santa Cruz students, the IUMA offers songs, band bios and publicity photos for browsing or downloading by anyone on the Internet.

The musical offerings range from folk to alternarock to Japanese noise. (The Duke of Uke's ukulele cover of The Ramones' "I Wanna Be Sedated" is a real gem.)

The IUMA is free to access and supported by donations from the bands that send in tunes.

To reach the IUMA, point your World Wide Web browser to: <http://www.iuma.com/index.html> For more information, send e-mail to info@iuma.com; or snail mail to 903 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

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Issues Born of Everyday Living.

Extracting the Facts about Echinacea

Anecdotal evidence suggests Plains Indians' snakebite cure helps cleanse lymphatic system of toxins

BY CRAIG LOVELACE

A blast from the past is making a comeback and may be just what the doctor ordered (or, in this case, didn't order) to help you through winter and the cold that is sure to tag along.

Echinacea angustifolia is an herbal extract that, proponents say, will ease and eliminate the aches, pains, runny nose and general blahs a cold can deliver. Derived from the roots and leaves of the purple coneflower and sold as a dietary supplement, echinacea is a top-selling herbal product.

"They are popular," says Eric Blake, the resident herbalist at New World Foodshop in Clifton. Blake, who began using echinacea and other herbal products four years ago, says a number of his customers swear by the extract's curative properties.

Echinacea is thought to strengthen the ability of white blood cells to fight off, kill or digest toxins that enter the body. Research done in the United States and in Germany indicates echinacea also cleanses the lymphatic system, which is the network of vessels that produce and store cells that combat infection.

Blake became a believer in echinacea while working at a restaurant in 1990. "I felt myself getting sick, and a woman who worked there suggested a mixture of echinacea with another herb. It worked."

He says he now takes echinacea whenever he feels himself getting sick. Others ingest it regularly.

Echinacea, also known as Snake Root, was first used by the Plains Indians to treat snake bites and as a salve. It was introduced to the medical profession in the late 1800s and was commonly used until the introduction of antibiotics in the 1920s.

Its resurgence began about 20 years ago. Available at health-food shops in several forms — capsules (the most popular), powder, liquid extract and tea — echinacea is the second best-selling herb, behind ginseng, clerks at local stores say.

Marilyn Gorman, an assistant manager at Cincinnati Natural Foods in Madeira, attributes the extract's popularity to personal testimonies, like those

from Blake's customers, and to its lack of side effects.

"There are so many side effects with drugs," she says.

But herbs and their extracts can cause side effects, which is why the Herb Society of Greater Cincinnati frowns upon claims that herbal products can aid the healing process.

"We do not recommend medicinal use at all simply because there is so much variation ... in the strength of the herb," says Pamela Shinn, former society president. "We certainly know there is a medical basis for

Health & Fitness

The Plains Indians used an extract of the purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) to treat snakebites.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WAYSIDE GARDENS, HODGES, S.C.

many of the herbs; obviously the pioneers had to use something."

The extract, like all herbal supplements, is not regulated. So people who sell echinacea are careful in what they say about it. ("Honestly, you can get more out of books at the library than what I'm allowed to tell you," says a sales clerk at a Blue Ash nutrition center.)

Likewise, product labels are generic. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration closely watches the labels, ensuring no claims of medicinal value are attached. Should that happen, the products would need FDA approval before they could be sold commercially.

Still, the lines aren't crystal clear, says Eric E. Batchlor, an FDA compliance officer in Cincinnati. "The folks who put these products out word smith them very carefully," he says.

For example, on a label for echinacea herbal tea, there are no medical claims. But there are assurances it has been tested. "Echinacea's virtues have been recognized by medical and scientific researchers throughout the world," the label says.

Labels or not, Tara Schuh says echinacea works for her. A clerk at Cincinnati Natural Foods, Schuh says she's been taking the supplement for five years: "Mostly when I'm getting sick, though I rarely get sick." ©