

# The advent of the virtual mall

Without a doubt, we are well ensconced in a virtual age. Sometimes I think the virtual part is not always on the computer. Things are often not what they appear to be, but nonetheless exist.

For instance, when you see a teenager with green hair, a minimum of a dozen body piercings, covered in tattoos, and wrapped in a sack with holes for appendages, you know that somewhere in that package is a person. It is not a living, breathing fishing lure in a ripped denim bag. It is just a virtual person, disguised as something else. I don't know what, but I'm sure they had something in mind when they created their image.

However, today we are going to discuss some real virtual stuff. I know - "real" and "virtual" in the same sentence sounds like a contradiction in terms, but that is often the case in the virtual world. I believe, for the sake of accuracy, we should use the term "virtual reality" - a concept of the computer age in which we live.

One of the great realities that came from this wonderful period of invention is the advent of the "virtual mall." It's not a real mall made of bricks and sticks, but with a few strokes on a keypad, you can buy stuff in it. Since different stuff can be purchased from different stores, and all in one place, it deserves to be recognized as a "mall." This is a good thing.

The virtual mall has all the advantages of a real mall, without the bad stuff that comes with actually going out into the real world where real shoppers, mostly women, will maul you to death if you do something like grab the last of any item on a shelf that they happen to want.

Bad experiences like this, and we have all had them, are no lon-

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**You can't beat a system you can't understand**

By Sam Bari

ger necessary. I actually prefer to call computer-generated stores "virtual shopping centers." The term "mall" bothers me because I have always suspected that "maul" would probably be what would happen to me if I actually went into one of those places and tried to purchase something.

Anyway, shopping at the virtual mall can be a very cool experience.

You can take your laptop computer to your nearest wi-fi (wireless Internet connection) restaurant, sip coffee, eat delicious pastries, and shop till you drop, or your credit card ceases to be accepted.

I often find my friends in these places, and we shop together while having friendly conversations, and compare notes on where to buy whatever at the cheapest prices. It's fabulous - no massive parking lots to contend with, or malls the size of the average small country, where you have to find a store that is always on the opposite side of where you parked. And best of all, no obnoxious shoppers or surly clerks are on hand to ruin your day.

Another big advantage of the

virtual mall is that every store delivers. They have no choice. Shoppers never have to carry armfuls of packages to their waiting vans again. Everything is conveniently brought to your doorstep, where you don't even have to go out in inclement weather. And most virtual stores will gift wrap your purchase for free, or for a nominal fee. What more could we ask? Virtual malls are shoppers' heaven.

Now it is difficult to imagine the days when dreaded trips to the mall for Christmas shopping were unavoidable. However, I suppose when the real malls and shopping centers were invented, everybody thought they were a far step ahead of the days when people actually made Christmas presents for each other. Stores were often far and few in some areas of the country. Back in those days, you couldn't

even get a pizza delivered, let alone a gift, because the telephone had yet to be invented.

I don't want to even think about making anything. The last time I tried to assemble something I bought at a mall, my dog licked the crazy glue on a cabinet door before it dried and his tongue stuck to it. Nothing is more pitiful than a bulldog trying to bark with his tongue glued to a door. "Ark! Ark!" It's just not dignified. It was downright pathetic. Then I got my fingers stuck to the same door trying to free him. We were a mess.

Anyway - this year, I'm going to do all my Christmas shopping at the virtual mall. It's so convenient. If only someone would invent virtual presents that are paid for with virtual money, it would make life in this system we can't understand a whole lot easier.

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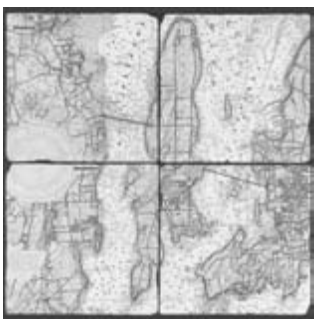
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