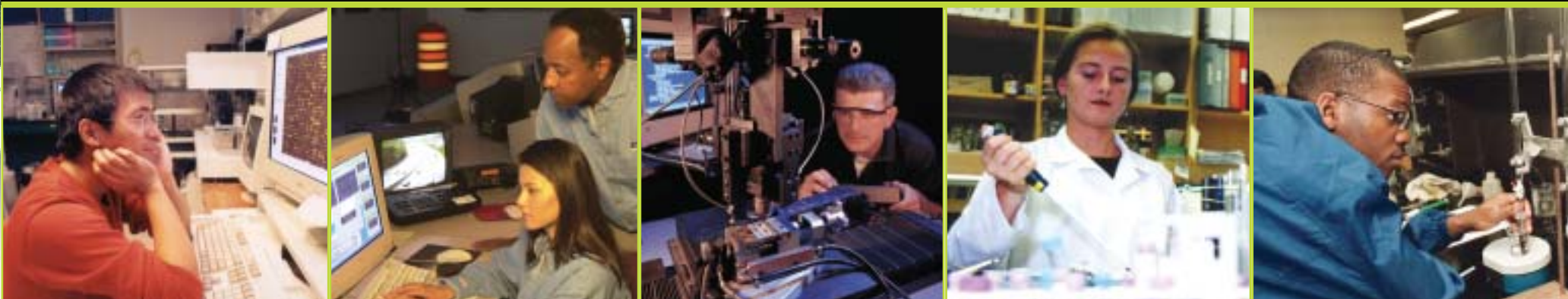




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Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce

Not your typical dot-com, irhine.com mission expands

By Chris Yeager



Ran Mullins moved his business, Metaphor Studio, to Over-the-Rhine (OTR) in October 1999.

"When we moved the studios to OTR, the press was negative – but we were having positive experiences," Mullins said. "We didn't like the negative focus of the articles we received."

That prompted Mullins to create a counter vehicle. By late February 2000,

wired urban district.

"We're producing editorial stories now," Mullins said, adding that promoting OTR's people and events remains a centerpiece of the site's purpose. The site's main page lists a menu of traditional marketing and commercial concerns – places in OTR to shop, eat, job openings, and entertainment.

But Mullins also sees irhine.com

participants to move forward. We want to remove labels from groups on all sides so folks can draw their own conclusions."

Thus, the site's community participation features – iVote, or the irhine.com Soapbox, may continue to expand the site. Plans for an irhine.com magazine will support the forum notion, Mullins said. That, too, may outstrip the originating marketing functions.

It will also implicitly push the idea that residents and business owners have an undeniable responsibility to continue rebuilding the district. "We'll be reporting on existing organizations," Mullins said. "It'll provide an opportunity to say what people are doing. It'll also talk about what people are not doing in OTR."

In effect, the site already features an on-line magazine, Artwhirled, edited by Ruth Meyer. "With the emphasis on the arts in OTR, it seemed appropriate to make an on-line arts journal," Meyer said. "It has a local emphasis, but also lets people find out about the arts community on a grass roots level. It's different from print journalism."

One difference Meyer favors is that the medium will allow for a more critical, perhaps academic language in the writing. She's also a fan of the cross-pollination only the Internet can provide. "Links to vehicles outside the city – that's the beauty of the 'Net,'" Meyer said.

Still, it can be argued that an Internet-based medium may be unduly limited in

a neighborhood

like OTR,

which has a

fairly high

number of low-

income resi-

dents. Perhaps

that's one rea-

son soon fol-

lowing the

site's launch

irhine.com vol-

unteers began

working to

bring a third

dimension to

the Web site.

Calling him-

self "somewhat

a kindred spir-

it" to Mullins,

Thomas

Courtney took

an early lead in

bringing irhine.com out of the virtual world and onto the pavement. Also a vice-president with Elegant Fare Catering, Courtney engineered, with irhine.com as a sponsor, OTR's first "Luminaria – Harmony of Light" celebration on December 8, 2001.

"It gave the community something positive," Courtney said. "Nothing like that had been done in Washington Park. Children were coming out of their homes to light candles."

What Courtney witnessed at the initial Luminaria indicated that while irhine.com's original intentions have evolved and grown, the desired effects inherent in its founding remain. "We had



Mark Bowen/IQ

Ran Mullins helped create irhine.com in order to provide a forum for a safer, cleaner and more profitable Over-the-Rhine.

he'd registered a domain name for his idea – irhine.com. "The original intent was to be a marketing arm for the OTR Chamber of Commerce, the OTR Foundation and all the existing non-profits in the neighborhood," Mullins said.

The 2001 OTR riots and destruction provided an unfortunate catalyst for changing original intentions, however. That event pushed up irhine.com's launch date from perhaps mid-year 2001 to April 20. It meant going ahead with the launch without the benefit of full, independent funding. When asked about the investment to date, Mullins said, reluctantly, "If we were charging a client, about \$65,000."

And the riots were, perhaps, a catalyst for irhine.com becoming something more than a marketing initiative, a means to attract commerce to the crossfired, cross-



becoming an ongoing community forum, one grounded in an acceptance of responsibility. "The real purpose of irhine.com is to provide a forum for groups of active

A catalyst for change

irhine.com was originally designed to be a marketing arm for the Over-the-Rhine Chamber of Commerce and other community groups. The 2001 riots pushed up the site's creation to April 20, and broadened its mission.

Ran Mullins and his firm, Metaphor Studio, could have charged a client about \$65,000 for the services provided to create irhine.com.

Group wants to help connect region to the Web

By Maria Lokshin



One of the key objectives of the area chapter of an international Internet professionals organization is to provide the guidance and networking Cincinnatians need to best utilize the World Wide Web, the local chapter's president says.

"When we look at new products and new technology that are coming out, we look at it; we try to understand it; and we try and say how does that help our members, and how does it help businesses in general?" said Bob Vincent, president of the local chapter of the Association of Internet Professionals, a Santa Monica, Calif.-based membership organization.

About 200 companies and individuals have joined the local chapter since its creation in 1997. Individual memberships cost \$99 annually. Annual corporate fees run from \$1,000 to \$10,000, depending on the revenue of the business.

The main event of the local chapter is a monthly meeting, the third Thursday of each month at 11:30 a.m. The next meeting is Sept. 19. Past meetings have focused on the legal ramifications of the Internet, using Web sites to do market research, the use of search engines and understanding streaming and multimedia.

Vincent, president of the e-Group, has more than 25 years of industry experience, having been the founder and CEO of two companies, one in Houston and one in Philadelphia.

One of AIP's main goals is to create

uniform standards for products and to guide consumers. The organization maintains neutrality, however, and does not endorse products but rather recommends them, Vincent stressed. The mission is simply to accommodate the public's interests. For instance, Vincent says

AIP's success depends on how well all Cincinnatians work together to utilize the Internet, Vincent said. He believes that organizations similar to AIP need to work closer together to remain on the scene.

"As a chapter, I think, that's one of the struggles we have here in town is (that) we have a lot of organizations kind of like AIP, and we all do our own little thing," said Vincent. "And for us to really survive and to be here in five years, we have to come together. We would be fools if we didn't network with other groups here in town that are doing very successful things as well."



that many Web sites with "flash" technology load too slowly for a dial-up modem, which is most users' gateway to the Internet. AIP encourages more user-friendly products that suit the needs of the majority of consumers at the lowest levels of technology.

Joyce Flaspohler, member and senior account executive at New Horizons Computer Learning Center in Cincinnati, says that AIP allows for an intimate insight into the newest in technology.

"It's a more in-depth perspective," she said.



Pictured, from left to right, are the officers of the local chapter of the Association of Internet Professionals: Brian Dwyer, vice president; Grant Szabo, secretary; Nancy Buck, director of corporate development; Jay Rottinghaus, director of communications; Bob Vincent, president; Steve Gutter, treasurer.

DOT-COM, continued from page 8...



people from the suburbs working side-by-side with people from Over-the-

Rhine. It shows that when people are given the opportunity to participate for something positive, they'll turn out."

To continue turning out or promoting neighborhood events - like the Shop Findlay Market effort or Bridging the Gap, or to produce the magazine, irhine.com needs funding. To reach that goal, irhine.com has filed for 501(c)3, non-profit incorporation. The grant opportunities, according to Courtney, could enable irhine.com to follow through on educational program initiatives and community awareness efforts, like the Heritage Campaign. Courtney said three photographers are at work photographing Cincinnati architecture. It's hoped that a book of those photos can be produced.

"We're not a traditional dot-com,"

Courtney said. "We're not a tech-only entity. And we're ready to take it to the next level, to step out."

Whatever ideas for irhine.com's continued growth and voice in OTR, Mullins indicated the intrinsic worth of the neighborhood, with its nationally-recognized architectural wealth and economically and racially diverse population - is keeping the attention of irhine.com staffers on some founding principles.

"We're still on the original mission - a safe, clean, and profitable OTR," Mullins said. "Are those dirty words? Depends who you talk to. This neighborhood has the opportunity to be our Greenwich Village. A lot of people want it to happen."