

Web widened dramatically in world of entertainment in 2006

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The Post-Gazette's Adrian McCoy keeps an eye on the Internet and any online developments in arts and entertainment in her online column, Cybertainment, available at www.post-gazette.com.

I made my first trip into cyberspace in the early '90s on a vintage Macintosh with a memory capacity that was much smaller than that of an iPod. That first text crawl on a black and white screen was an amazing experience.

Who could have imagined then the far-reaching tentacles of Web 2.0 -- the Internet community created by second-generation users?

The year that's coming to a close brought sea changes in entertainment, as the Internet spread its Web over the way we consume music, movies, TV and more.

It made perfect sense for Time magazine to name You -- that's you all -- as the 2006 Person of the Year. With the explosive growth of YouTube, MySpace and other video-sharing and social networking sites, everybody could broadcast themselves across the Internet.

At first glance, the thought was, "Oh, great, a million bad home movies to choose from." Created by professionals as well as amateurs, it's all that and so much more: Hilarious mini-reality shows, Web diaries, music videos and vintage band performances captured on videotape, opinion and insight of every stripe, and weirdness limited only by the human imagination.

High-speed Internet has given us a front-row seat at the democratization of media.

In 2006, Pittsburgh was in the forefront -- for a change -- on the new media frontier. It was a stop on the PodCamp circuit, a new media conference held in November that attracted some of the pioneers in the emerging podcasting movement and encouraged a crowd of novices to launch their own.

Pittsburgh also is home to several innovative video and audio podcasting ventures, including a serial sitcom (somethingtobedesired.com), a witty and outrageous high school podcast (acornsandmerlot.com) and even a wrestling podcast (wrestlingmayhemshow.com).

Here are some other sites worth exploring:

- One of the high points of PodCamp, at the Pittsburgh Filmmakers' Oakland digs, was the screening of videos from the Web documentary series "Alive in Baghdad." These short videos are first-person accounts from Iraqi citizens about what their lives are like, providing raw perspective and detail -- and a human connection -- that's not present in most TV news. With plans to expand into Mexico in 2007 with a similar project and continue its work in Iraq, "Alive in Baghdad" points the way to a new way of experiencing the world we live in (aliveinbaghdad.org).

- Online radio stations are changing the way we listen to music. Internet radio site Pandora

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is a package for every kind of music fan. Playlists are tailored to fit each listener's individual music tastes, and listeners set up channels based on the artists and music they like. Pandora uses that criteria to pick out other songs and artists they'll probably like (pandora.com).

Technological advances have made online games even more engaging:

- Featured earlier this year in Cybertainment was "Mystery at Mansfield Manor," an online interactive mystery/movie in which players are the detectives who try to solve a murder. Clues are found by carefully watching a series of videos, in which each character tells his or her version of the events leading up to the murder (www.mysteryatmansfieldmanor.com).

- "Second Life" became a second life -- literally -- for many players. The 3-D virtual world's population is growing fast: more than 2 million at last count. Players/subscribers can interact, make money, buy property and more. It's complex, immersive, time-consuming -- and additive: not recommended for those of us who don't have enough time for our first lives (secondlife.com).

Forward thinking

This was the year the big screen came to the little screen. Services like Movielink and CinemaNow offer downloads of new and vintage movies, and other sites offer movies and TV shows for viewing online and on demand.

Some things to look forward to in 2007:

- Apple's iTV, that magic box that will stream Web content from a home computer to the TV set, tying online entertainment into home theater systems.
- Sony's new video downloads, which can be watched on Sony's PSPs.
- High-quality video sites like Zudeo, which will make original Web video more visually appealing and watchable.

And if Time is right, we'll be seeing You on the Web in 2007.

(Adrian McCoy can be reached at amccoy@post-gazette.com.)

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