

"Gimme back my name!"



Huw tries to establish himself on the Net, but it's not as easy as he thought...

Tignorant, pompous, rude, stupid, lazy, a face like Bill Gates' and thighs like Tina Turner's. Yes, I've been accused of many things, but never of being a shrinking violet.

This is why I have no qualms about using my own name as an Internet domain. I realise that it's as vulgar as putting your name in lights over Piccadilly Circus, just a lot cheaper. But as soon as I decided to register my own domain name, my problems started...

Initially I planned to register **www.huw.co.uk**. I felt certain that Huw was such an uncommon name that nobody else would have used it yet. I was wrong. Huw V Jones, a PhD student at the University of Wales, Bangor, had got there first. The swine!

I have **no qualms** about using my own name as an Internet domain. I realise that it's as vulgar as putting your name in lights over Piccadilly Circus. It is however a lot cheaper

Okay, my first name is moderately uncommon. My surname, on the other hand, is as rare as a sober journalist. Right then, I'd just register **www.collingbourne.co.uk**. But, the Collingbourne domain name unexpectedly links to a page about Col in the Western Islands of Scotland. From here you can link to a list of British village names, including Collingbourne and Collingbourneducis, which have been gratuitously registered by a company called

Webhound Ltd. Give me back my surname, you rotters!

Lost their marbles?

All this serves to illustrate an increasingly common problem. There are only so many words and names you can construct from letters and digits. Most of the really good, short, memorable names were snapped up long ago. The cost of buying a domain name has dropped in recent months and some Internet Service Providers (ISPs), such as Freenetname (**www.freenetname.co.uk**), let you pick a free domain name when you sign up.

Even quite big businesses are being caught out. The Marbles credit card people (**www.marbles.com**) can't use **www.marbles.co.uk**, since it has already been registered by the Marbles PR agency. The

confusion caused is a headache to both companies because potential credit card customers who fail to find the Marbles site jam up the Marbles PR site instead.

The scarcity of good names makes it all the more urgent for serious companies and flippant columnists to register a

memorable domain name. My own Web site is called Huw's Pleasure Garden. So when I discovered that **www.huwsgarden.co.uk** was available, I resolved to register it without delay.

The first job was to pick a company to take care of the registration process. While all names are ultimately registered with the Nominet organisation, it is cheaper for an individual to register with another company that has negotiated 'bulk discounts'. The two year registration fees charged by these companies varies from a few pounds to over £100.

I decided to register my domain name with a company called Easily. It charges under a tenner for a **.co.uk** name and about £30 for a **.com** name. Unlike Freenetname, which charges a £94 administration fee, Easily doesn't charge me if I decide to move the domain name elsewhere. Registration is simple; you pick a name, fill in your credit card details and wait. Easily doesn't host your Web site, however, so you also need to have an account with a regular ISP.

There is a catch to all this. When people enter your domain name into their Web browsers they don't go directly to your Web site. Instead, they have to take a detour through the Easily computer which then redirects them to your site. When they arrive at your site, the name in the address bar changes from your domain (such as **www.huwsgarden.co.uk**) to the address used by the ISP (in my case, that's **www.treetops.u-net.com**).

What is more worrying is that Easily's 'Web redirection' service puts an extra link in the chain leading to your site. If the Easily computer goes down, your domain name goes down with it. So, even though **www.treetops.u-net.com** is up and running, if the Easily computer has problems then people won't get through when they enter **www.huwsgarden.co.uk**.

In the month since I registered my domain name, the Easily system went down on several occasions, taking my domain name with it. As far as I am aware, Easily goes off-line only for short periods of, maybe, half an hour at a time. All the same, if I were running a commercial Web site, that's long enough to lose a sale.

I contacted Easily to ask the reason for the system downtime. I was told that they were having problems with their DSVR, in effect, their ISP. To my non-technical ears, this DSVR sounds worrying like yet another link in the chain. According to Easily, time and money is being spent on improving its service and it will soon be taking the 'hosting management' in house, which should remove that link. I'll let you know how things develop.

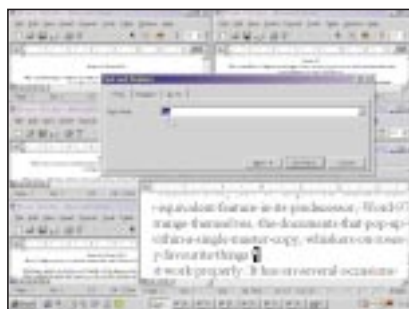
Lost for words

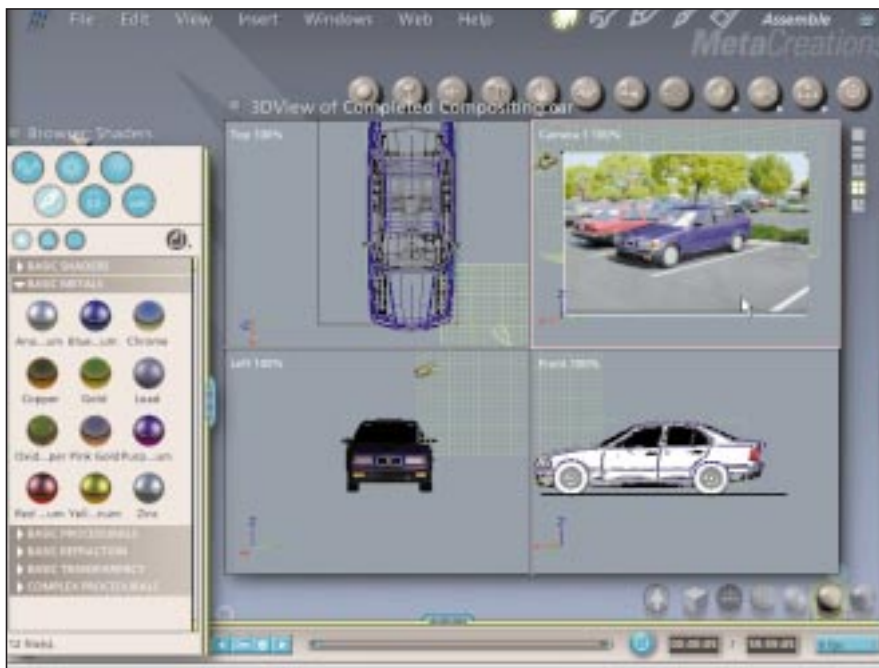
My off-line activities this month have been enlivened by Word 2000 and MetaCreations' new 3D graphics package, Carrara. The more stressful of these programs is undoubtedly Word 2000, so I'll get that out of the way first.



A face like Bill Gates

Word 2000! Its free-floating document windows mess up my desktop and it's now started losing my paragraph markers! Arggggh!





MetaCreations' Carrara has more going for it than just a silly name. In fact, I think it's one of the best budget priced 3D packages. I only hope that MetaCreations thinks so, too.

The Collingbourne domain name has been appropriated for the use of the Scottish village Collingbourne Ducis. From the look of the bare Web page, it seems the inhabitants couldn't care less.



I have fulminated against Word 2000 in this column previously. To summarise, even when the program works properly, it is excessively irritating. Almost every new or improved feature that has appeared in this release strikes me as inferior to the equivalent feature in its predecessor, Word 97. The slow help system, the menus that automatically rearrange themselves, the documents that pop up in separate free-floating 'copies' of Word instead of within a single master copy, whisks on roses and raindrops on kittens – nope, these aren't a few of my favourite things!

Worse still, Word 2000 frequently does not work properly. It has on several occasions scrambled the document I'm working on. The first symptom is that it fails to recognise paragraph markers. So if I search for ^p (Word's code for a carriage return) it finds some but not others. If I ignore this foible and carry on, eventually the text begins to get scrambled, words I didn't write appear on screen, and words I did write disappear.

Maybe my PC is haunted. But I tend to favour the more prosaic explanation that maybe, just maybe, it's all the fault of the software.

The Word help system suggests that the best way to fix a corrupted document is to save it in some other format, such as RTF (Rich Text Format). But when you do this, all the 'phony' carriage returns are stripped out so you end up with a single block of text with no paragraphs. When you happen to be writing the *Great Novel of the 21st Century* (publishers are invited to start the bidding at £1,000,000), that can be the teensiest bit vexing.

I am coming to the conclusion that much of the new stuff in Word 2000 is unnecessary fluff that's only been added to tempt people to upgrade. Personally, I am considering downgrading to the altogether more elegant and reliable Word 97.

Quick on the drawers

Using MetaCreations' Carrara has been a lot more fun. Until now MetaCreations has had two general-purpose 3D animation applications, RayDream Studio and Infini-D, which was originally developed by a different company. In spite of MetaCreations' attempt to differentiate these two products by claiming that Infini-D was for 'video professionals', the overlap was too great for comfort.

Carrara merges most of the best features of its two predecessors. It has five working environments for modelling, adding textures, assembling objects into a scene, creating a multi-frame storyboard for an animation and rendering the finished image or animation. You can instantly switch from one environment to the next by clicking icons at the top of the screen.

Each environment provides a set of palettes that can be dragged out from the side and bottom edges of the screen. These palettes are like drawers filled with goodies. One drawer contains shaders that let you add metallic or organic surfaces to objects. Another contains 'behaviours' that can animate anything from waves on water to explosions in outer space. There is also a sequencer panel that gives you precise control over each object throughout an animation and a Properties panel where you can control effects such as reflection, refraction and motion blur.

If you are lucky enough to have a PC with two monitors, Carrara provides two screen support to let you place the various tools on one screen, leaving the other free to display the main workspace. We did find a couple of problems with this mode, however. Sometimes, in two screen mode, the colour picker doesn't display colours. Moreover, if you change the screen resolution, the entire environment gets moved across to one monitor and its menus

disappear off-screen. Apart from anything, this makes it very difficult to quit the program!

In spite of quirks, this is a nice program. But now that MetaCreations has decided to concentrate on Web technologies rather than its graphics products (see *Rants & Raves*, issue 163), Carrara's future looks uncertain. I only hope that it isn't left to moulder in some quiet corner of MetaCreations' basement.

And finally...

Did you know that the UK permits naughty words to be used in domain names? Most countries ban them. So while you won't find any vulgar .com domain names, you can find some very rude .co.uk ones. If you don't believe me, pick a swear word at random (four letters is the recommended length) and try it. If you fancy registering your own naughty word, however, you are likely to be out of luck. All the juicy ones in my vocabulary have already gone – including one that's been registered by The Fulchester Underwater Canoeing Klubb...PCP

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Huw's Web site is at: www.treetops.u-net.com/ or (with luck!):
www.huwsgarden.co.uk

CONTACTS

Under Discussion

Carrara
Updated figure modelling and animation package.
£351 (£299 ex VAT)
MetaCreations/Computers Unlimited
020 8943 2111
www.metacreations.com
www.unlimited.com