



Surf's Up

Saturday morning and I could be at the gym, doing something healthy. Instead, I'm sweating away as I perform surgery on my Dell computer

EARLIER THIS MORNING, I WAS UTTERLY DISCOMBOBULATED when I turned on my computer. For some inexplicable reason, I couldn't get onto the Internet. Understand, Web surfing isn't a hobby for me. My time on the Internet is an addiction.

I call my service provider and the help person tells me that the problem is my card—a 10/100 or 100/10 something. I have to switch my card to an open slot. Huh? I don't know how to open the computer shell.

My helper assures me he'll be here (invisible but connected) to help me get through it. If his grandmother could be instructed to fix her computer over the phone, surely I can be, too. (His naiveté is scary, but forget about that—I'm in good hands.)

I get the Dell open. I even find the card. But all my slots are filled. He tells me to switch the cards to see if the problem is the card or the slot in which it's seated. My fingers start to quiver. Suddenly, a thought comes screaming from my brain: Why am I here?

The answer, I'm afraid, is a sign of the times. I desperately want my high-speed internet service. Crazy, I know, but I have become a Web junkie. I need (the key work here is "need") to read New York newspapers to hear about my favorite hometown teams. I need ESPN to tell me what's happened in the sports I follow and what's going to happen next. Of course, I need to check out *NASA Watch* to feel in the know. Then I need to check flights, since my wife Dianne and daughter Amanda are on a short vacation. I also need to check my e-mail for

presentations I'll be working with colleagues. If this isn't enough, on Saturday my son Daniel and I need to play an on-line game with my brother and his friends in Phoenix.

"Place firm pressure on the cards—"

It's okay. My helper is right here.

"—but don't force them."

NYPost.com, ESPN, Dianne and Amanda... I'm on my way. I fumble to put the second card in it's slot.

It's in place! Eureka!

I turn on the computer and... Yes, it all works. Touchdown. Grand slam. Happy feet!

"Thanks, kid," I say and then I hang up and begin to surf.

The Web has become a source for everything: work, play, collaboration, networking, information, research, stories, news,

music, communication, decision making, pictures, surveys, assessments, and everything else. When the system goes down, I start to react like a man with a crack habit.

By no small coincidence, this story coincides with the fact that on July 31, the APPL Web portal debuted. New and improved, as they say. Working with Jeanne Holm's JPL team, the NASA Chief Information Office, and a group of brilliant Web fanatics, we've built an amazing virtual APPL. First up, *ASK Magazine* is again available online—when, where, and how you want it. The Web will also allow us to expand some of our *ASK* features, so keep an eye on us and enjoy.

Be careful, however. You might just find appl.nasa.gov is addictive. •

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