

# PC

# MAGAZINE

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## SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

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PLUS

### THE BEST WAYS TO MAKE YOUR OWN VIDEOS & DVDS

## Getting More Personal

BY THIS TIME, you might not be a newbie to the online-dating scene. You've already clashed with a few duds, so you've fine-tuned your tastes. And now all you'll consider is a nice Jewish guy or gal, a raging conservative, or a potential partner who shares your penchant for pets. While the meteoric growth of the online-dating industry is leveling off now, highly specialized sites are flourishing.



"People are getting more and more specific in what they're looking for," says Bill Tancer, vice president of research for Hitwise, an Internet-traffic-monitoring company. "Now there are sites like Conservative-Match.com and Liberal Hearts. There's a site called Animal Attraction—meeting people through their love of pets."

Personality-focused sites are also on the rise, Tancer says. Yahoo! Personals, the most popular online-dating service, launched its Premier version in November. Like eHarmony, it sorts for compatibility based on very in-depth personality questionnaires. The service costs \$34.95 a month.

"At this time last year we were looking at around 600 dating sites," Tancer says. "Now we're tracking 862, and almost all of the additions have been through some sort of niche."—Natalie Goel

## Setting Sights on Bionics

AS THE SCIENTIFIC community is just beginning to explore integrating bionic devices into humans, companies at the forefront have released some remarkable test results. With FDA approval, Optobionics has completed a series of clinical trials involving implanting a 2-millimeter silicon chip inside the eye in patients with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a degenerative eye disease with no cure. Test results have shown dramatic visual restoration.

Dr. Alan Chow, chief operating officer of Optobionics, says that RP patients lose their sight gradually and progress to the point where they see only shadows or no light at all. The chip contains 5,000 microphotodiodes, each with an electrode. When light enters the eye, the chip produces tiny electric charges that "concentrate on the electrodes, which stimulate the retina cells," says Dr. Chow. "The intention was to produce a pixelated image similar to a computer display to replace the function of the degenerated photo receptors." Not only have test patients begun to see light again, but retinas are functioning again. Their perception of color, resolution, and contrast are returning.



Patients confirm that it is like "turning back the clock 10 to 20 years," says Dr. Chow. He hopes his microchip will also be able to treat other conditions causing loss of vision such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Today, AMD and RP affect around 30 million people worldwide.—Karen Jones

**WATCH IT** The Senate has passed a high-profile copyright bill, called the Family Entertainment and Copyright Act of 2004. It calls for three-year prison sentences for anyone recording a film in a movie theater and increased penalties for trading music and movies before commercial releases. Technology policy groups say they are relieved that certain provisions in the bill were taken out, including one that would have allowed the attorney general to file civil lawsuits in cases of copyright infringement. The bill moves on to the House of Representatives next.

## The Never-Ending Search

DO YOU SPEND a lot of time checking the same products on eBay and Amazon.com? If so, a new software application might make life easier. Pluck Perch, from an Austin, Texas-based company automates tasks such as price checking and pushes e-commerce updates to you.

The word Perch in the product's name stands for "persistent search," which aptly describes what the application does. Essentially, it works like an RSS reader for Amazon.com and eBay (or you can do persistent Google or MoreOver searches, and get RSS feeds). You set up folders that appear in Internet Explorer, which Pluck Perch lives inside, and



the folders contain search criteria, such as "Green iPod."

Then, the application, a free download at [www.pluck.com](http://www.pluck.com), regularly checks the eBay and Amazon.com sites for your item. If it is there, it pulls the Web page into a folder and alerts you. You click on a link to

make the purchase.

"It can also alert you to price changes," notes Dave Panos, Pluck's CEO, so if you are waiting for a green iPod to reach a certain price threshold at eBay, you'll know when it does.

Pluck partnered with eBay, Amazon.com, and other sites so that whenever you purchase a product through Perch, Pluck gets paid. As a background electronic-shopping agent, and as a search engine monitor, it seems to have useful applications.—SR

**DIGITAL DIVIDE** Usage of high-speed Internet connections doubled to 20 percent of U.S. households between 2001 and 2003, says a Bush administration report. But only one in seven African-Americans and fewer than one in eight Latinos live in broadband homes.

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL BAXTER