

SUNDAY

Living



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CINDY.COM The Official Cindy Crawford Website
 August 13, 1999

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What's New on cindy.com

- Visit the New Message Boards
- Cindy Speaks "For the Record"
- Photos and Videos in the Gallery
- New Message from Cindy
- Cindy Answers Your eMail
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Photo Gallery
 Browse through the ever-growing virtual album of Cindy's work. Members have access to even more photos in the photo gallery, including childhood and teenage pictures of Cindy, as well as some classic photos by the world's top photographers.

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With 400,000 new visitors a week from all around the world, Cindy Crawford's site has made her the virtual queen of cyberspace.

Stars are taking a shine to the virtual galaxy of cyberspace

By JOYCE COHEN

A flashing "truth alert!" embellishes the opening page of Barbara Streisand's official Web site. "Barbra and her husband are hiring a surrogate mother to bear them a child!" Not true, say Streisand's people, who are busily setting the record straight — on the Web.

Streisand isn't alone. These days, numerous celebrities are leaping into cyberspace via their own Web sites. Unlike the photo-filled cybershrines designed by their fans, these official sites let the stars present their information their way — call it cyberspin. There's also another reason the stars are turning to the Internet: commerce. Lots of celebrities have something to

sell, whether it's a favorite cause, a philosophy or something more concrete — books, CDs, clothing, cosmetics, concert tickets, posters or autographed knock-knocks. Over at www.barbarastreisand.com, there's a special section for merchandise connected to her New Year's Eve concert. As part of the spin control employed by Streisand's site, fans are urged to dig up

The stars shine

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malicious gossip, which her staff proceeds to debunk with gusto. "A lie uncorrected becomes a truth over time," said Streisand's manager, Martin Erlichman. "You get annoyed when people write falsehoods about you day in and day out. But at the singer's site, everything emanates from within," said Erlichman. "The public can trust this site."

Streisand's site is free, though some celeb Web sites charge a membership fee.

In turn, they provide content that's unavailable elsewhere, like childhood photos or behind-the-scenes tours. Through e-mail and chat rooms, many offer the chance — or at least the illusion — of communicating with the

stars.

That's what actress Yasmine Bleeth plans for her site, due mid-September.

"She's going to respond to everything — or she's going to try to," promises her Web producer Michael Simon. "It's not realistic for her to answer every piece of e-mail personally, he added, so she'll prepare various boilerplate replies that can be inserted quickly and easily.

Though Bleeth's site has yet to be launched, the former Baywatch beauty is no stranger to the medium's less-than-savory aspects. Several obvious choices for her Web address —

including www.yasmine.com — are registered to a company in Las Vegas that uses celebrity names as conduits to sexually explicit Web content. Her lawyers are on the case, Simon says.

Once Bleeth's site is up and running, it will promote her favorite cause, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. The actress' mother died of breast cancer, and Bleeth hopes her site will help raise money to fight the disease.

It's that kind of proprietary content that makes an official Web site valuable to a celebrity, said Lisa Spottedland of the William Morris Agency, who advises stars on building their Web presence.

"It's about creating something you can't create anyplace else," she said.

"Sometimes it's about creating new businesses, based on their interests. Celebrities should do a site because they have something they want to sell or talk about. They can't just put up a site in the middle of nowhere. They have to have something tangible, strong and unique to offer."

Dozens of star sites are on the superhighway horizon, including budding bedfakes Ashton Kutcher ("That '70s Show"), Desmond Harrington ("Joan of Arc") and Josh Leonard ("The Blair Witch Project"), whose young fans, presumably, grew up surfing the Web.

Twen singer Britney Spears is in a holding pattern for another week or so, waiting for the live launch of her site, www.britneyspears.com, which also appears at www.officialbritney.com. In its first 10 days, featuring little more than some pictures and a tour schedule, over 50,000 people signed up," said Michael Bolanos, head of her Web production company, Entertainment Drive.

Plans for the site include a \$20 annual membership to "Britney Best," where members can enjoy perks like preferred seating at concerts, access to photos taken backstage, contests, chat rooms and a service called BritneyMail.

Though Bolanos handles the sites of several stars, his most trusted celeb Web site belongs to supermodel Cindy Crawford. For a \$29.95 annual fee, members gain access to a message board, and receive a Crawford photo and CD-ROM (for an extra \$5.95 for shipping and handling).

Both www.cindy.com and www.cindycrawford.com lead to the Crawford site. Her messages are buoyant and brief. "The month has just flown by with us all getting to know each other," she enthuses after the birth of her son, Presley Walker Gerber, whom she was carrying when she appeared naked on the cover of



Barbara Streisand's people use the Net to get out the word — that she and James Bralton are not planning to rent a womb.



Her message boards explore such timely topics as should she cut her hair and whether her former husband, Richard Gere, is weird. (Topic subjects are suggested by fans, but a few are planted by Crawford's staff.)

Cindy.com, which launched in November, has more than 100,000 new visitors a week, each of whom looks at about 10 pages. And about half of the visitors are from abroad.

Though many of these official sites claim their stars are deeply involved, it's unclear just how much energy they actually expend. Crawford has a voice mailbox at the Web office, where she (or her assistant) calls in about three times a week, said Bolanos. On the site, though, she answers just six fan letters a month.

Kathy Ireland, another supermodel turned lifestyle guru, approves everything posted on her site, www.kathyireland.com, but during its four years of oper-

ation, she has yet to veto anything, said her spokeswoman Victoria Faraone Crawford.

Ireland's other business ventures, such as her clothing line at Kmart, are separate from her Web business. Though the site "emphasizes the importance of going to Kmart, [it] does not sell her clothes," said her spokeswoman. "It's not about Kathy the swimsuit model. That's what the fan sites are for."

The fans create their own buzz, via messages. Former Victoria's Secret siren Frederique Van der Wal's site receives thousands of e-mail messages from around the globe, said her Web producer, Patxi Pastor. "During busy times, I talk to Freddy three or four times a week," he said. "This relationship between the fan base and a celebrity has never been possible before."

Van der Wal nurtures this relationship by allowing fans a glimpse into her personal life. The site features a collage of

Leave it to David Bowie to have one of the most high-tech sites of all.



in cyberspace

family photographs that feels surprisingly intimate — little Frederique missing a front tooth, sporting an unfortunate shag haircut and building sandcastles.

Still in the works, Pastor said, is an on-line boutique to sell her line of lingerie.

Less basic and more high-tech is www.frederiquestudio.com, the rocker's official Web site. "He is known as an innovator," said Robert Goodale, a former Bowie manager who oversees the Web site, so leveraging technology for self-promotion makes sense.

The cyber world of Bowie, which boasts 10,000 members at \$5.95 a month, contains unreleased tracks from his last live tour, entries from his personal journal, a narrated tour of his house and provocative photos he took of his supermodel wife, Iman. There's also a spot for computer chatting with other Bowie fans and even, every month or so, with Bowie himself.

His fans also get the chance to participate in his career. For last spring's song contest on the Web, 80,000 visitors submitted 300,000 sets of lyrics, which

Bowie cyberclub members whittled down to 125. Bowie himself picked the winner, 20-year-old Alex Grant of Cleveland, who was flown to New York while Bowie recorded the song, "What's Really Happening," for his new album. The recording session was simultaneously cybercast over the Web site, allowing fans virtual access into the studio.

In the virtual world, if not the real one, star presence is just a click away.

So far, Frederique Van der Wal has shown her family photos on her site. Soon she'll be selling her own line of lingerie.

Over 50,000 people reportedly signed up for Britney Spears' site in its first 10 days. Rosewhite, actress-model Daisy Fuentes is doing a brisk business in knapsacks, shoes and sweaters.

The Boutique
Let's shop for...
[Bag] [hat] [jacket] [sweater]
[scarf] [boots]

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