

# COX NEWSPAPERS

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**Financial pages**

**By Shelley Emling**

## **NOW EVEN YOUR MOM MAY BE SENDING YOU JUNK MAIL**

ATLANTA--There's nothing like getting a letter from a loved one. But, say, what's this tucked inside the envelope with the letter? Could it be? No. Yes! It's advertising. And it's all thanks to Zairmail. Zairmail, the brainchild of Wilson Zehr, allows you to send hundreds of snail-mail letters without all the fuss \_ no paper, no stamps \_ and all for free.

The catch? You have to let Zairmail insert some ads in the envelope. It works like this: Just go to Zehr's Web site, [www.Zairmail.com](http://www.Zairmail.com), type in your letter and enter the recipient's name and address, as well as the recipient's hobby or special interest, i.e. traveling. The letter is mailed, accompanied by a one-page sheet of ads targeted to the recipient.

Simple? Sure. But even Zehr admits that not everyone's enchanted with the idea of getting ads along with letters from family and friends.

"Zairmail provides business and consumers with the best of both worlds: a fast and cost-effective way to compose a message online and deliver it quickly via postal mail," Zehr says.

I agree that almost nothing is free of ads these days. Not the Internet. Not even my kid's lunchbox. But a letter from a loved one? Now that should be left alone.

## **TALK-AND-TOSS CELL PHONE**

Ever been tempted to toss your cell phone out the window?

Soon you may be able to. A cell phone made of paper has been designed to be thrown in the trash whenever its allocation of calls is used up. New Jersey toy maker Randi Altschul came up with the idea four years ago when she was driving home and kept losing her cell signal. She says she was so mad that all she wanted to do was get rid of her cell phone forever. She didn't.

Instead, she got to work on a disposable phone \_ one as light as a credit card \_ and was able to make one after discovering a way of using metallic inks to print a phone's basic electronics directly onto paper.

She plans to sell the disposable phones for about \$20, including up to an hour's worth of prepaid calls, at retailers, gas stations and other venues. A pricier model that's programmed to accept incoming calls would be sold at airports and hotels. Now all that's left to do is get final regulatory approval and negotiate a deal with a U.S. service provider.

Altschul hopes to have her disposable phone on the market within six months. We already have disposable cameras and disposable diapers. Why not phones?

## **A STRANGE FISH TALE**

Remember the character Sid from the movie "Toy Story"? Well, now you too can wreak havoc on your toys so they behave in wild and wacky ways.

Technology buffs have figured out how to rewire Big Mouth Bill Bass, Rappin' Catfish and all those other zany singing fish so they say what you want them to say. In other words, instead of listening to the fish's tired rendition of "Take Me to the River" for the umpteenth time, you could program the fish to say something thought-provoking like "Get lost."

To learn more about how to hack a singing fish, go to [www.howstuffworks.com/singing-fish.htm](http://www.howstuffworks.com/singing-fish.htm). It really seems

American techies have too much time on their hands.

## **ASHING IN ON PUPPY LOVE**

In a society increasingly separated from family and friends, who are people likely to be close to? Their pets, of course. According to The New York Times, retailers have been rolling out a slew of new products for pet owners.

Old Navy's selling bright red bowls, leashes and bandannas splashed with hearts. Saks Fifth Avenue is selling Oh, My Dog! shampoo for \$20, the perfect accompaniment for Oh, My Dog! fragrance, designed to be worn by both pets and their owners. (Huh?) And Maxx's Closet has launched a new line of dog sweaters for a mere \$75 each. Ain't puppy love grand?

## **EXPLOSION OF E-MAIL**

A study by the University of California at Berkeley puts into writing what most anyone with a computer already knows: The number of e-mails has skyrocketed. Last year as many as 600 billion e-mails were sent.

Story Filed By Cox Newspapers