



ired to the World

by Ralph Lee Scott

— Whackers —

Now that fall is in full swing, do you know what your Internet connection is doing? Are you spending too much time staring at an hourglass, while your Internet request has gone off to join the newfound life on Mars? If this sounds like *you*, then you might consider the following new Internet tools.

Several software products have been introduced recently that will reduce your need actually to be online over the Internet to view your favorite sites. These software programs go under the general name of *whackers*. Whackers automatically download single web pages, groups of pages, or entire web sites, storing them for later viewing on your personal computer. The process of automatic download is called, as you might expect, *whacking*. When you whack a site, you get all the text (HTML) and images that are specific to that page. The beauty of this capability is that you can regularly whack your favorite pages while you are away from your computer, and then return and view the images later without having to wait for the page to be transmitted back to you over the Internet. This is because the Whacker has stored the images in your computer already, and you simply view the files as local pages stored on your hard drive.

The original and best known of these whackers is *WebWhacker*. *WebWhacker* is available online from the ForeFront Group at: <http://www.ffg.com/whacker.html>; so if you want to try out this technology, just point your favorite browser (Internet Explorer, Mosaic or Netscape) to ForeFront's home page and download *WebWhacker* over the Internet. A FREE (yes, free) demo is available for Windows 3.1, Windows 95 and Macintosh users. *WebWhacker* is being billed as "an indispensable World Wide Web tool ... (that) makes it easier for teachers to use Internet resources in the classroom."

In case it has not dawned on you, you can download a number of web pages to your local workstation, and let any number of students do assignments on the web using the download text and graphics files. This is one of the best tools schools can use to reduce Internet online telecommunications charges. As mentioned earlier, you can also use *WebWhacker* to do your downloading work for you, while you go on to more important assignments (lunch for example, or listening to the latest memo over the school loudspeaker).

Like any piece of software, *WebWhacker* must be configured to your special situation. First of all, you have to tell the whacker what sites you want to whack. You need to also tell *WebWhacker* what network browser you are using, and your e-mail address. Getting past a firewall will require an "http proxy" (a fake web address that your system administrator uses to provide web access) and the port of the proxy.

To use *WebWhacker* after it is configured, you just double click on the whack symbol on the toolbar (a broad sword) and the whacking begins. For example, the author whacked the American Library Association web site prior to the New York 1996 convention and obtained a lot of up-to-date information about events at the convention. You can instruct *WebWhacker* as to the level of whacking you want to do at each site. You can just whack the anchor page of ALA, for example, or you can go to a specific organization (like the American Library Trustee Association home page) and whack away there. There is also a "Whack All Levels" choice on the pull down menu.

Another software package that does something similar to *WebWhacker* is *ZooWorks*. *ZooWorks*, which describes itself "as taming the World Wide Web," is available at: <http://zoosoft.com>. A "lite" version is available to test free of charge. *ZooWorks* automatically records information such as the correct URL, page header, and other needed information, and organizes and indexes the documents automatically. You then can search the *ZooWorks* database and automatically reconnect for updates. *ZooWorks* requires Windows 95 or WindowsNT and Internet Explorer or Netscape browser software.

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