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Charboneau: Opening Remarks

# Opening Remarks

## Enjoying the Leisurely Life of a Virtual Shopper

It was the Saturday following Thanksgiving and, due in part to the mild November weather, I let a few family members persuade me to meet them at the local megamall to share in the joys of an afternoon of holiday shopping.

Huge mistake.

Highway traffic was terrible on the drive to the mall, and as I neared my exit I considered myself lucky not to have been sucked into the vortex of a fender bender, or worse.

Steering my car up the exit ramp, I turned onto a side street that led to what I thought was one of the lesser-known mall entrances. Ten yards later I came to a halt at the tail end of a massive line of idling cars stretched out like a dozing python, each waiting its turn to pass through the megamall parking lot's pearly gates looming so very far, far away.

After about 15 minutes I'd inched my car far enough ahead to become part of the python's nose, having long ago lost track of how many times the traffic signal had changed from green to yellow to red and back again, or why, for that matter, it even bothered. Finally my turn came to enter the lot. I gassed my Pontiac forward, giving the giant waving plastic Santa guarding the gate a long, dirty look as I rolled by.

Miraculously, after 10 minutes of searching I snagged a parking spot within a half-mile of the mall. My car safely docked, I set off on the treacherous footrace to the main entrance, lunging and leaping out of the way of the wild-eyed, white-knuckled, yet eternally hopeful motorists still bent on finding their own parking spots.

As the great, electrified glass entrance doors swung open and the mall welcomed me, I truly believed the worst was behind me. That was until it took me nearly an hour to locate my family, followed by two more

hours of being poked, pushed, elbowed, and nearly body-checked over an escalator railing by assorted members of the mallmob.

After that, I turned tail and ran—down the stairs, up the aisle, out the entrance, across the parking lot, into my car, out of the parking lot, up the side street, onto the highway, off the highway, onto my street—home. Total elapsed time: 12 minutes.

One Christmas and several birthdays later, I have yet to return to the mall. Now I follow the leisurely path of the virtual shopper and travel the glorious Internet, the wondrous World Wide Web, my beloved [www.iwillneverbekickedintheshinsbyastrangeragain.com](http://www.iwillneverbekickedintheshinsbyastrangeragain.com).

It was a major, though somewhat scary, life decision—particularly the first time I keyed in my credit card number and sent it off to cybergod-knows-where. But you know what? Nothing bad happened. My Amazon.com order arrived in flawless fashion, and no mysterious charges for dirty magazines or gorilla food ever appeared

on my credit card bill. I tried it a second time, then a third, and got the same result.

So long, megamall. Hello Internet commerce!

It would appear that I am not alone in my admiration for the newfangled Internet buy and sell. As Gary Pallascino's feature story "Wheeling and

Dealing in Cyberspace" in this issue reveals, folks like me have boosted retail spending on the Internet from \$2 billion to \$20.2 billion in three years. And that's just the retail side. Business-to-business Internet commerce is also flourishing, to the tune of \$100 billion a year and climbing.

It took three days for my ribs to stop hurting after some crazed shopper elbowed me out of her way at the entrance to Banana Republic. And when that squad of mallers almost sent me toppling over the edge of the escalator, well, I knew there had to be a better way.

There is: the cyberway.



JEFFREY CHARBONEAU  
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