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 years 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 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 mannequin the once-over. I tried it a second time, 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 Pallasaki'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.