z/Bottom Line

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A Lesson in Netiquette

Our pooch Elle is a sports hound. Each week when our copy of *Sports Illustrated* arrives, she fetches the magazine and immediately opens it to the inside back page. That's where her favorite columnist of all time (the nerve!), Rick Reilly, posts his weekly thoughts on the sports world.

But Reilly's May 1, 2006 column took on a different tone, and Elle made sure I saw it immediately. His column, titled "Nothing But Nets," talked unabashedly about the need for nets. As he said, "Not hoop nets, soccer nets or lacrosse nets." Reilly was talking about mosquito nets.

I was astonished and embarrassed to learn so much from this sports article. Nearly 3,000 kids die every day in Africa from malaria. And according to the World Health Organization, the spread of the disease could be reduced by 60 percent with an adequate supply of mosquito nets. As Reilly exclaimed, "Three thousand kids! That's a 9/11 every day!"

Reilly went on to correlate the "nets" of the sports world with the need for nets in Africa. So, since our techno-world also is full of nets, Elle and I thought we'd skip our deeply thoughtful insights into the mainframe world for one issue and deliver a lesson in netiquette.

Respect for manners needs to shift our focus from the Internet to the MosquitoNet, at least briefly enough to matter. Why? Because for just a trifle more than a latte and a muffin at Starbucks, you could save a kid's life. The insecticide-coated nets cost between $4 and $6. Some of the nets can cover a family of four and last four years. So, if everyone who touches the world of computing could contribute $20, it could mean the difference between living or a miserable, premature end to a child's life.

Reilly and *SI* have stepped into the fray by setting up a special site through the United Nations. Just go to www.unfoundation.org/malaria, and look for *SI*'s "Nothing But Nets" logo (or you can call 202-887-9040) to add to the network. If all of us Netheads out there jump in and give $20, we will make the kind of difference that counts. In fact, every time any of us invokes the 'Net in any way, think about either donating or spreading the word to others who will. That means every time you surf the Internet—ka-ching! $20. Logging on to the corporate Intranet? There's another pair of Hamiltons you need to send in.

Even more important, we need to "net-work" with the leviathans of our industry. Hey, IBM, how about donating 1 percent from all your sales of IBM Tivoli NetView to buy nets that count? Yo, CA—how about setting up a "click-to-donate" on your Website with an agreement to match all donations for anyone who .com's to visit your Website? Our company has.

Then there is the obvious contributor. The one that put the dot in NET. How about it, Microsoft? You shouldn't be able to rule the world with the architecture called .NET, without buying mucho nets. Oops—seems they already beat us to the punch. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is taking on the African malaria issue with new funding of more than $250 million, on top of the $250 million already donated since 1999. "Deaths from malaria have doubled over the last 20 years," Gates said during a teleconference call when the endowment was announced. "It's a tragedy that the world has done so little to stop this disease that kills so many African children every day." Turns out Mr. Bill is investing in the "net" even more than we knew.

We've seen how the Internet has changed our lives in so many ways. Some would argue not altogether for the better. But the one thing it *has* done that's so significant is woven us together in a web of interconnectedness that's unmatched in human history. It has helped create a HumanNet that can make a difference.

Reilly's goal is to raise $1 million with his effort. I hope the computer industry at large can double that. That means between sports readers and computer geeks we can save more than 200,000 kids.

On the 'Net, www.dictionary.com has many definitions for the word "net," but the one I found most endearing is this one: (nĕt)2: conclusive in a process or progression; "the final answer."

Let's hope it's true.

And that's z/Bottom Line. **Z**

About the Author
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