

Leveling the Playing Field #4

By Dave Olson

Hemp Activism on the Internet

Used to be, if an event like WTO rolled around, I would have been right excited about it. But now I have realized that my activist efforts are better served from the comfort of my couch.

Let's get a few things clear right off the bat so you aren't confused about what I am saying here. Sure, those who suffered gassings and police nonsense in Seattle were indeed courageous, and I agree that direct action is needed to stir-up the complacency, personally I have swapped in the placards, cold mornings and handcuffs for a warm beverage and iMac keyboard to make my opinion heard by policy-makers.

Before you start cussing, I do have activist and blockade credentials from the Clayoquot blockades on Vancouver Island and in early nineties I stood the line at the nuclear test sites in Nevada and committed plenty of acts of creative eco-terrorism throughout the four corners area. Heck, I have met Allen Ginsberg, chatted with Edward Abbey and been to Moab before Lycra bike shorts were allowed. Verily, even Gary Snyder knows who I am.

But these days, instead of yelling and cutting down billboards, I "protest" using my couch and the prolific publishing medium of the Internet. Like a modern-day fleet of Gutenbergs, web servers can publish and disseminate information in a reliable and efficient manner, 24/7, in full color to a worldwide audience. Another reason web-sites are such a great tool for activist groups is that printing and postage is a major expense of most any non-profit organization's budget (not to mention the environmental impact and the labor time to assemble such mailings).

The Internet is full of worthy examples of activist organization

lobbying their legislators and producing accredited documentation to support their cause rather than alienating the "common man" with acts of urban mayhem. The Hemp Cannabis legalization itself movement makes for a fine case study.

Used to be in the early 80's and the "birth of the modern hemp movement," information about this mysterious "hemp" plant was disseminated on leaflets, poorly produced and non-accredited books, and occasionally incorrect but well-intentioned factoids passed along at Grange halls, Grateful Dead shows and yearly political rallies. It was a start and indeed the technology of the time didn't permit much more sophisticated self-publications than Jack Herer's book, "The Emperor wears no Clothes."

Today's activists distribute information on sites like www.crrh.org which features dozens of video film clips, a Hemp "Jeopardy" trivia game (I got a perfect score), TV and radio re-broadcasts and more. This fine site was donated to Campaign of Regulation and Re-legalization of Hemp by a San Francisco web design firm who liberally sprinkled chunks Macromedia Flash throughout.

In 1997, I attended the first stand-alone symposium on Commercial Industrial Hemp at the fabulous Canada Place in Vancouver B.C., while working a documentary film about Hemp. This was also the first time I saw a crew doing a real-time audio simulcast over the Internet to paying customers all over the world. The symposium was physically attended by hundreds of qualified delegates from around the world, but coupled with the power of the Internet, hundreds more were able to be educated. Parts of the symposium were used in the video itself. Some video clips and audio tracks can be enjoyed at www.hempenroad.com, but the whole deal will soon be available in Real Video format at www.hemp.ca (which is under construction but aims to be a portal for the hemp industry in Canada and the Pacific Rim).

When the government runs rampant, flagrantly breaking it's own laws or stealthily making new ones, speed of communication is an essential ally to prepare an effective

protest. A good example of this is the recent DEA Hemp Embargo in which the DEA over stepped their jurisdiction and instructed the US Customs to seize a truck shipment of food-grade hemp seed.

The hemp was legally grown in Canada to exacting specifications regarding THC content (3% max.) and was en-route to a food processor in California who manufactures and distributes energy bars until the illegal embargo. (Learn more about this year's Canadian and other hemp crops at www.kenex.org, www.hempline.com).

Right away, www.hemplobby.org published articles about this fiasco on a searchable database-driven web library as news was received from various media sources and concerned parties including embassies, lawyers, farmers, US Customs and business people. The result of the quick access to accurate information was the DEA had to release the seeds and let them on their way.

Hemplobby also sends out mass e-mails to members, politicians and media sources, announcing new postings to the article library. From a web site design production standpoint, because the articles are added via a password-protected web interface, it beats formatting each article in <html>, linking it in manually and ftp'ing up to the server.

Another very useful project that www.hemplobby.org published on the web is a .pdf booklet called "Practical Guide to Cannabis." This booklet full fo of legislative bills, crop reports, grow guides and application studies of Industrial Hemp, was distributed in (hemp) paper form to dozens of policy makers and government agency heads. For the activists and curious folks world-wide, the Adobe Portable Document Format allowed easy download while retaining the layout and integrity of the printed version so they could easily distribute to others.

Even more so since Woody Harrelson got arrested in Kentucky for planting industrial hemp, cannabis issues have emerged as a popular topic for thesis, reports and science

fair projects. Fortunately, there exists a plethora of resources to fill you bibliography.

A great example of a (a rather self-indulgent example) is the evolution first web site I ever made originally called "Hemp in Japan." This research proejct started for me while in Japan working as a mushroom farmer (no not that kind) in Tottori-ken and Nagano-ken. I kept finding cultural references to hemp -- in town names, paintings, paper, poetry, etc. I started to gather pictures and notes and after returning to North America a few years later, I made an on-line "scrapbbok of all the stuff I had collected. Turns out others were researching the same kinda topic so eventually this all grew into www.Taima.org, ("taima" means cannabis in japanese). Now the site boasts the findings and stories of many along with heaps of pics of all sorts. The site is slowly being translated into Japanese as well which should help continue to increase the thousands of user who stop by per month from around Asia and the world.

My research article "Hempen Culture in Japan" was excerpted in a book called Hemp Horizons, the publisher's web site, www.hemptech.com offers many scientific and agricultural based books.

A while later, the fine Vancouver based magazine, www.CannabisCulture.com published it as their cover story. Their site features the first couple years issues on-line as well as grow tips and a section I particularly like, Budbabses. CC magazine's publisher Marc Emery also has a site www.emeryseeds.com at which he will help you "Overgrow the Government" by purchasing high-quality genetics to start your own garden. Sorta the gray area of protest but hey, something has got to finance the revolution.

There are a few Hemp/Internet companies worthy of note. www.Hemp.net is a Seattle ISP offering shell, dial-up or DSL to activist/customers. The Hemp.Net web site is an interesting amalgamation of tech support, legal challenge and calls to action. Hemp.net distributes several mailing lists specifically about Hemp legalization in Wa. State. You'll find mass e-mail forms to send your peace to legislators and

editors.

www.hempseed.com is based in NYC and have positioned themselves as an Internet resource for the hemp industry. They feature store guides, product lists as well as educational material.

More educational material can be found at independent research sites such as: John Dvorak's www.hempology.org, Dr. Dave West's archive www.gametec.com/hemp, Carl Olsen and the Schaffer archives can be found at www.druglibrary.org which is especially strong for drug policy issues.

In order to make your voice heard, one can simply venture to www.access.wa.gov and www.fedworld.com to quickly access any state or federal representatives contact info. The League of Women Voters also has a fine site for Washington voters called www.washingtonvoter.org. www.vote-smart.org is similar in scope and our own Secretary of State's web site can help you get registered right quick if you are (no excuses).

The "dark-side" is using the web as an information tool as well. A beauty example is the www.mfiles.org site which is a pet project of Lt. Gov. Brad "Don't call me Bob" Owen. With it's cheesy *X-files* theme, the professionally produced site unabashedly throws out old-wives tales like how pot makes young boys grow breasts as medially validated fact.

After learning all this stuff you can find some neat hemp products at www.knowwearhemp.com, a cottage industry run by a nice young woman named Maggie. www.hempys.com is a growing company making good-quality surf/snowboard equipment and clothing. www.realgoods.com and www.patagonia.com are even vending hempen wares for the yuppies who want to be looking their best at the next big protest. This is easy on the stores too since protestors cannot kick in the windows of an e-shop during a protest.

Dave Olson would like life better if there were a couch for him everywhere he went. Like Al Gore, he chose to smoke cannabis in college and unlike Bill Clinton, he figured out how to inhale. In fact, he is very good at inhaling and if you are lucky, he may show you.