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SPECIAL FOCUS

OUTSOURCING IN THE '90s

The New Deals

Managing The Modern Outsourcing Relationship

AN INTERNATIONAL DATA GROUP PUBLICATION

Swiss Bank Corp.'s
Craig Heimark

TRENDLINES

UNSOUND BITES

THE FUZZY TRUTH

Hard-nosed, cynical and sometimes downright mean, news reporters might not seem the type to be easily duped. But when the snake oil is technology, the media routinely falls prey to the slick sales pitch. Technology pranksters are increasingly relying on the media's ignorance of IT to engage in new forms of "culture jamming," or the attempt to shock people by jamming or manipulating mass media outlets such as advertising and news broadcasting.

This past fall, one Joseph Bonuso, who claimed to represent a team of attorneys and computer scientists, introduced to the media The Solomon Project, a supercomputer "virtual courtroom" that used artificial intelligence technology and the "wisdom of the ages" to retry famous criminal defendants. The project (which found O.J. Simpson guilty and Mike Tyson innocent) was a sensation with reporters, receiving coverage from *The New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and CNN, which also posted the story on its Web site.

The project's contrived foundation was "fuzzy logic," which computer cognoscenti know to be a system that adds gray to computational black and white, but which Bonuso described cheekily as "the decision of which factors are more important, not the quality of the thinking." "Bonuso"



really was Joey Skaggs, a notorious New York spoof artist whose quarter-century resume includes such infamous scams as Fish Condos and The Celebrity Sperm Bank. The Solomon Project, as publicized by CNN and other news organizations, included a room full of computers operated by a team of programmers and actors. After Skaggs ended the three-month hoax with a press release, CNN ran on-air and online corrections.

How did such venerated news organizations fall for such a prank? "People suspend critical thinking for wishful thinking," says Skaggs.

Other examples of jamming include the bogus Bob Dole for President World Wide Web page (<http://www.dole96.org>), which describes the "founder of the Dole Fruit Company" as the "ripe man" to be President, and the companion Buchanan for President page (<http://www.buchanan96.org>), which, with a swastika backdrop, offers links to various fascist organizations.

Historically, culture jammers have expressed themselves by faking news events, à la Skaggs, or by such stunts

as disrupting CNN's *Larry King Live*. Now the hoaxes are going hypertext, and some observers think Solomon is just the beginning. "Get used to stuff like this," says Michael Sippey at his Web-critical site, "Stating the Obvious" (<http://www.theobvious.com>). "The Net/Web—with its inherently open architecture, low entrance fee and

its 'instant-publishing' nature—is going to spawn much more complex culture jamming. Combine that with the fact that most print or television journalists don't have a clue when it comes to the Internet."

And although culture jamming ultimately embarrasses the mass media, the public generally responds favorably, Skaggs says.

"I get a lot of calls and letters, and they're usually really positive," Skaggs says. "People say the hoaxes reinforce their skepticism of the media."

Of course, there *are* those who don't get the joke.

"I just got a call from England," Skaggs says, "from a doctor who thinks [Solomon] is real and wants to talk with Bonuso and write a paper."

—Tom Field

AND THE WINNER IS, ER...WAS?

Too bad Leonardo da Vinci's mom isn't alive today. She would've been so proud. More than 450 years after his death, and after centuries of what amounts to a modest record of achievement and recognition, da Vinci finally hit the big time. In March, he and eight other people were inducted into the Automation Hall of Fame for breaking new ground in manufacturing and automation systems.

According to the Hall of Fame, a partnership of Carnegie Mellon University, Microsoft Corp., the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago and seven other organizations, da Vinci was honored for his drawings articulating the basic principles in mechanical devices such as chain drives, gearing systems and screw drives.

A representative of the Italian Consulate General in Chicago accepted the award for da Vinci, who was unable to attend. ■