

E.COMmerce

Rowan Alumns on the Web

By Jason Weigandt '00, '01

Jason Weigandt '00, an '01 masters degree candidate, participated in music and theatre before being bitten by the writing bug. Jason Weigandt '00, an '01 masters degree candidate, participated in music and theatre before being bitten by the writing bug.

Kara Elward '83

Weaving through a market with kids in tow and a grocery cart to navigate can be enough to drive a parent crazy. Easygrocer.com returns sanity to shopping quicker than shoppers can say “paper” or “plastic.” And just to make sure Easygrocer works the way it should, the site is supervised by an expert on family grocery shopping: a mom.

Kara Chapman Elward '83 runs Web support for easygrocer.com from her home. The mother of four understands the struggles of working parents, as she used to juggle her job schedule around caring for a growing family. “My family just loves this,” she says. “I’m really happy it all worked out so well.”

Elward finds life a lot easier since Easygrocer came along—and that’s the idea. Easygrocer.com uses the Internet to link customers with their local grocery stores for food delivery and pick-up service. This avoids the typical hassles of driving to the store and shopping, a great benefit for those short on time or long on children.

Of course, most Internet food-delivery services have been biting on a solid recipe of dust lately. Customers happily order books and clothing over the Internet, but they fear food won’t arrive fresh. So Easygrocer—through its corporate owner, White Rose Foods—teamed with established chains like Foodtown, Pioneer, ThriftWay and Food City to keep the grocer’s touch in the Web shopping experience. Participating chains set up a delivery service to bring Internet orders from a local store to a customer’s door. “The real difference between our site and the other dot coms is that we are a grocery company making a Web site, while they are Internet companies trying to sell groceries,” explains Elward. Easygrocer’s joint ventures with



While Kara Elward’s kids take a plunge, she takes care of business for Easygrocer.com.

established supermarkets let consumers get the products they want from familiar sources. “Maybe somebody likes the way their local butcher cuts their meat,” explains Elward. “We can offer that.”

Offering the wrong market mix sent many dot coms into a nosedive when entrepreneurs overestimated the public’s appetite for net-based grocery shopping. White Rose took a more cautious approach. They wanted a part-time employee whom they could trust and experience told them Elward was the perfect choice. In 1984, she had started working as a supervisor of financial support at Transco group, a company later acquired by an investor who owns White Rose Foods. In 1993, Elward left her job to become a full-time mom, but she kept in touch with her former colleagues. “They could trust me because they knew me,” she says. “I used to run their economic outlook plans, so this was relatively tame.”

Elward soothes any growing pains the Easygrocer site encounters. She double checks every order to make sure stores understand them. “One of the toughest things when we were brand-new was that stores would actually get the orders, but the employees wouldn’t know to fill them. Now I see all of the orders from my home computer,” she says. Easygrocer fills orders

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at two p.m. and five p.m., so during these periods, Elward calls each store to make sure they received their orders and know what to do with them.

Because customers can't touch and see a product like they can in a store, they often want more information before they buy. Sometimes stores don't have any details beyond price and weight, so Elward contacts manufacturers for a better description.

In her two years with Easygrocer, Elward has come to embrace the convenience of internet shopping. She just hopes it keeps expanding. The site hasn't hit her area yet, and Elward is itching for the chance to use it herself.

The race to exploit the Internet for profit led a lot of companies into starvation. Elward thinks Easygrocer will survive. Anyone who's juggled kids and groceries in a store can tell you why.

Doug Kirby '79

The open road may give Doug Kirby '79 enough fun to fill a book, but the information superhighway helps him make a living.

On weekdays, Kirby works as publisher of AT&T's corporate Web site, att.com. The site provides the content for millions of customers to communicate with the world and pay their bills. On weekends, he runs roadsideamerica.com, which documents the nation's most bizarre roadside attractions. His day job and side line may seem totally different, but Kirby's glad the Internet came along to inspire work as well as play.

When he graduated from Rowan, Kirby wanted to develop the creative tal-



Doug Kirby's early experience with computer technology at AT&T seemed to put the brakes on a creative approach. Then came the Internet and Kirby saw nothing but open road.

ents he nurtured with Venue, Rowan's satire magazine. "I was looking for a job to combine writing with some visual elements, as I had dabbled in comics and film," he says. The Middletown native got a job producing videos in AT&T's multi-media department. He also witnessed some emerging trends in computing, but his satirical soul couldn't find anything seriously rewarding about them. "I hated the computer stuff back then," he says. "You had to use punch cards and wear gloves and suits like you were on some other planet. All of the work had to take place in a cold room. And the computers were too slow to keep up with any quick, creative ideas you may have been struck with."

Kirby stayed with AT&T, but his creative juices were still flowing. He teamed with friends Ken Smith '80 and Mike Wilkins to write a book, *Roadside America*, about quirky American landmarks. As the book's following grew, Kirby and company started searching for ways to expand their business. The road trippers found their best option on the Web, and as luck would have it, AT&T was traveling down the same path.

"In 1994, we did a road tour with a New York Times reporter strapped into the backseat. We worked with Wired magazine, and they suggested we post trip details on the World Wide Web," he explains. "I got back from the trip and the AT&T research department started pitching the World Wide Web to us. It was quite a coincidence." The AT&T employees asked to see an example of a Web site, so Kirby suggested checking out the *Roadside* tour. They were impressed, and in October 1994, AT&T launched att.com.

As the site picked up steam, Kirby moved into the Web business full-time. He says the early days of Web design were gray and primitive, but things grew out of control once the technology picked up. With web-composing software at their fingertips, a brave new online world beckoned. People couldn't limit themselves on the unlimited space of the Web. "Some early sites were just filled with

huge pictures and blinking, animated cartoons," he says. "When I think of some of my favorite Web sites though, some of the coolest really aren't the most effective at getting their message out."

Kirby has to get the message out with AT&T. "I have a team that manages the top pages. The goal is to link people where they want to go as quickly as possible." To better serve the 15 billion impressions the site gets every month, Kirby studies focus group research and feedback from customers to make sure people understand every element of the site. AT&T may be a high-tech company, but sometimes it is served best by staying conservative. "We don't use technology for technology's sake," he says. "With a company as big as AT&T, you have to deal with a very wide demographic range. Some people just want things as simple as possible."

The site currently has more than 25,000 pages and is growing fast. It's up to Kirby to detect trends and lead creative discussions on growth. "It's interesting because we have a mix of design and tech thinking," he says from the AT&T office in Basking Ridge. "It takes a lot of investigation to come up with the best idea."

Kirby is a little less cautious with roadsideamerica.com, but he sees a connection between its free-wheeling nature and AT & T's straight approach. "With *Roadside* I can get more creative and I can bring some new ideas into AT&T that we might not have thought of. And at AT&T I've learned to be a lot more careful with code," he says. "AT&T always follows the best practices of Web design, and the good habits I learn there transfer over."

No matter which site he is managing, Kirby can thank the Internet for making work fun. Seriously.

Jocelyn Krasner '86

Saks Fifth Avenue wanted its Web site to exude the style and quality that has become synonymous with their clothing. They needed a copy writer with a solid background, someone who knew that beautiful writing is more than screen deep.



In New York City, Jocelyn Krasner puts more than window shopping within reach of almost anyone with the Saks Fifth Avenue online store.

They found the perfect candidate in Jocelyn Krasner '86. With 16 years of catalog-writing experience, she had a rock-solid writing foundation. And working on the Web would add the perfect new dimension to her resumé. "After 16 years writing catalogs, my job was getting stale," she says from her Manhattan office. "I thought, 'wow, here's a chance to apply my writing abilities and experience to something new.'"

Krasner became the copy director for saks.com and Folio, the Saks print catalog. With her staff of four writers and a proof-reader, she fits right into the familiar style of catalog writing. But writing for the Web provides a whole new experience.

Krasner says the Web differs greatly from store and print-catalog shopping. Most customers are new to Web shopping, and their inexperience can make them leery about ordering. "We keep the catalog's descriptions pretty basic, but we get into a lot more detail on the Web site," she says. "People are new to this channel, so you need to give them more information so they can be sure of what they're buying."

Web sites also need to encourage interaction. Krasner writes instructions on how to navigate through the site and check-out once an order is complete, working hard to reduce the amount of customers who drop out of the site without purchasing anything. "You need to keep the check-out process simple," she says. "We could show Flash Player movies of models on a runway, but we have to have a simple check-out process or people will leave."

The Web site is a completely new part

of the company but Krasner explains that employees from every department work well together. "There isn't the idea that one section is more important than the other," she says. "We meet constantly to keep everyone abreast of our needs. I get to work with the marketing, advertising and public relations people," she says. "I used to write for companies with in-house advertising that operated separately from me. Here, I get my hands in a lot of different elements."

The Saks crew has dubbed Krasner its guru of words. It's a reputation she's worked hard for ever since her days at Rowan. "I actually discovered my flair for the creative in my poetry class," says the communications graduate. She combined that creativity with practical studies in advertising to become a potent writer. After years honing her skills, she feels fortunate to be writing for a living. "I'm proud to think back and know I found what I liked and was able to get a job in it and really grow with it," she says.

Donald Mick '68

A good teacher knows how to learn and de-velop new processes and explain them to others. So it's no surprise that a savvy business consultant started his career with aspirations of teaching.

Donald Mick '68 is vice president of eLoyalty, an international business consulting firm. Mick travels the world to review his clients' business procedures, coaching on improvements of their practices. In today's Internet age, most of these corporate overhauls include some changes to their electronic presence. From more efficient databases to Web sites that deliver better information, eLoyalty pushes companies to find a new edge. Mick helps convince clients that the new ideas will work. "I write courses on how companies can improve themselves," he says. "And then I teach them."

Mick might not seem a likely candidate to promote hi-tech change in a corporation. Not the typical teenage desktop jockey, he earned a secondary education degree at Rowan and a master's of divinity before moving into Ph.D. work in psychology

and religion. He wanted to teach religion at a university, but after eight years of school, and with the U.S. economy struggling, Mick felt the pressure to get a job. He started working at an insurance company and stayed there for 18 years.

Mick crunched numbers for nearly a dozen years before landing a job in the company's advanced-technology sector. There, he became friends with several scientific theorists. "We had a great group," he says. "Probably 20 out of the 26 people had Ph.D.'s, with most of them from Harvard or MIT." In the 1980's, Mick saw technologies forming before most others did and past experience taught him to embrace such futuristic thinking.

At Rowan, Mick had garnered a knack for knowledge and an ability to learn from others. "While the subjects I learned at Rowan were a lot different than what I do now, I discovered the key interests that are still with me today," he says. "It was my first chance to really learn about history and literature and the first time I really thought about the great thinkers and figures in history."

Today, Mick keeps a tight network of smart people to help him stay on top of an ever-evolving field. "I really like being linked to some crazy people," he says with a laugh. "I get to work with a lot of young people, and I have friends that are cognitive psychologists." Mick combines the intellect his friendships deliver with a lot of hard work. "To learn all of this at my age requires a lot of investment," he says. "I had to teach myself at night, reading a lot of books and doing a lot of hard work to get the background."



In China, Don Mick and a group of U.S. sponsors bring high tech to an orphanage, linking the children's home to the Internet for education and communication.

Mick's biggest task is to make sure his clients, which include General Motors, Allstate Insurance, Dow Chemical, Virgin Atlantic Airways and Morgan Stanley, understand eLoyalty's abilities. He serves clients throughout the U.S., Asia, Australia and Europe. Wherever he arrives, his teaching skills always play a significant role in his consultations.

Mick cites a brainstorming session with MTV executives as a solid example of his work. In 1990, the company tried to picture their next ten years. While the Internet was still far from commercial use, they predicted technology for on-demand videos could exist by the turn of the century and pose a major threat to the channel. Slowly and surely, MTV has shifted away from videos and toward original programming, a move that has kept the channel strong despite the advent of Napster and streaming video technology. "You can't predict the future, but you have to look way ahead," he says. "We do multiple changes, taking small steps and then reviewing what we have done."

His advice may be as simple as making a Web site more interactive so customers can use it instead of expensive 1-800 numbers. Or it may be as complex as brainstorming a radical change that could revolutionize an industry.

Regardless, Mick loves any chance to make a change. "I work with a lot of really smart people trying to take on big challenges," he says. "Everyone wants to succeed, so we build a lot of tight relationships. There are really long hours under pressure. But it's fun."

Carolyn Gargaro '94

Instead of battling other Internet companies in a modern-day gold rush, the company Carolyn Gargaro '94 works for survived by trading instant riches for long-term growth. Gargaro is a Web site designer for InterStat Incorporated, a group that continues to thrive while much of their competition rests in a virtual graveyard.

InterStat specializes in making strategic decisions for clients, but their smartest idea centered around their own



Once an online novice, Carolyn Gargaro now qualifies as a bonafide hypertext code jockey.

business: they didn't offer stock to the public. While competing with stock-funded competition made life difficult early on, it has worked out in the long term. "Our prices are very competitive, but at first we couldn't understand how other companies could offer services for so little," says Gargaro. "It turned out they were just giving things away, spending their investors' money with no chance of ever getting it back."

As the competition overheated, InterStat stayed cool by expanding its services. Besides designing Web and e-commerce sites, they install firewalls, sell T-1 Internet connection lines and provide network system support and strategic Web counseling. To stay ahead of such a growing field, they need employees like Gargaro who are willing to constantly re-teach themselves.

After earning a degree in economics from St. Mary's University and then a master's degree in public relations from Rowan, Gargaro became the marketing director for the Rankokus Indian Reservation in Burlington County. She loved working there, but she would soon discover the virtual world's net appeal.

"I came back to Rowan in 1995 to attend a seminar about the Internet. I had never even used e-mail before," she says. "Once I saw it though, I was fascinated. I got my own e-mail account that day and thought 'this is so great, I have to learn more about it!'"

Gargaro quickly refocused her career around the still-burgeoning Internet. "I didn't think I could learn something so complicated." But excited at the possibilities, Gargaro launched a site for the Indian reservation and her own personal

site just for fun. In a matter of months, Gargaro was enrolled in on-line MIS classes at Nova Southeastern University. "I wasn't thinking of being a Web designer or anything like that," she says, "but I wanted to get involved somehow."

She began by teaching basic computer classes and after she received her master's degree in MIS in 1997, she was hired within days of answering an InterStat classified ad.

It's been a fast four years since her start. Gargaro specializes in handling HTML coding as well as cold-fusion, a process integral to running e-commerce sites. She also keeps daily contact with InterStat's clients, which include AC Moore, Waterford Crystal, The Rag Shop and Staten Island University Hospital. Gargaro never seems to tire from the hard work. "Some client's want changes on their site everyday," she says. "But we have a real close-knit, team environment here. And it's exciting work. Putting in extra hours feels like nothing special."

Gargaro may be well established in the field now, but she hasn't stopped learning. "I read constantly," she says, citing among her references both industry and consumer magazines, books and other Web sites. "You have to keep ahead of what's going on. Now we're seeing a lot of streaming video and audio coming into it. We tried to do that just a few years ago and it was very expensive. Now it's more accessible."

Despite the recent Internet shake-out, the Maple Shade resident knows the Web will only get stronger. "We're getting new clients, but more importantly our old clients keep expanding their involvement with the Web," she says. "The sites we used to do have come a long way."

Gargaro's career has come a long way, too. From on-line novice to a full-on hypertext code jockey, Gargaro turned her love of the Internet into a fun and profitable job. "The Web is so much more than entertainment," she says. "It's absolutely wonderful to be able to talk and network with people that are so far away from you." ■