

Plugged In

Registry gets on infobahn

Federal, state agencies letting more people get on line instead of in line / **Simson L. Garfinkle**

EARLIER THIS month, the state's Registry of Motor Vehicles said that Massachusetts drivers can now pay their speeding tickets over the Internet. Instead of standing in line at the Registry, or sending in a check and hoping that it's processed before you need to renew your license, you can simply point your Web browser at the RMV's home page (<http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/rmv/>), select "Express Lane," and then click on "Citation Payments." You can also renew your vehicle registration. And pretty soon, you'll be able to order vanity license plates as well.

The Registry's new Web site is a taste of the future, says Daniel Greenwood, deputy general counsel at the state's Office of Management Information Systems. Greenwood boasts that Massachusetts is the first state government in the country to allow transactions to be processed over the Internet.

"We believe the public would rather be on line than in line," he says.

Or at least the Web-surfing public. Right now, using the state's system requires a credit card, personal computer, Internet connection and a World Wide Web browser, which implements the necessary cryptographic protocols to scramble your credit-card num-

ber (so it can't be intercepted by wily hackers).

"We're actively looking for additional transactions to pilot," says Greenwood. He invites Massachusetts citizens who have ideas for services that would be better done on line to send him e-mail at DGreenwood@state.ma.us.

Paying citations isn't the only thing happening on the state's Web site. The Department of Education now has extensive community profiles for every school-district in the commonwealth on line. Located at <http://info.doe.mass.edu/pic/www/pic.html>, the profiles

contain general information about each community, such as population and per-capita income, and also report detailed statistics about each district's schools: the number of students enrolled, the student/teacher ratios, racial composition, SAT scores, drug education programs and more. And proving that it's easy to mix politics with raw statistical data, each profile lists at the top whether the district has school choice, which grades are open to choice, whether or not there is intradis-

trict choice and if the district has magnet schools.

Also on line is a complete list of all state legislators, including their photographs, telephone numbers, the names of the committees on which they serve and a tracking system that lets you follow the flow of legislation through Beacon Hill (<http://www.state.ma.us/legis/legis.htm>). There's even the full-text of the commonwealth's Constitution.

Unfortunately, the state's Internet presence still has a few rough edges. For example, the Department of Public Utilities has a Web site with complaint forms, a telephone directory and information about how to make electronic filings. It's at <http://www.state.ma.us/dpu/>.

But the complaint form isn't interactive: Instructions at the top of the page invite you

to print it out and fax it in. The on-line telephone directory lists just 15 phone numbers. And the instructions for electronic filing painstakingly explain how to call up the department's proprietary electronic bulletin board system and convert your form to Word Perfect 5.1 or 6.1 files using the ZMODEM protocol. How anti-Internet.

Massachusetts isn't alone in this spotty approach to the Internet. The state's primary competitor in the computer industry, California, has fielded a

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SURF SITES FOR THE INTERNET EXPLORER

BITS 'N BYTES

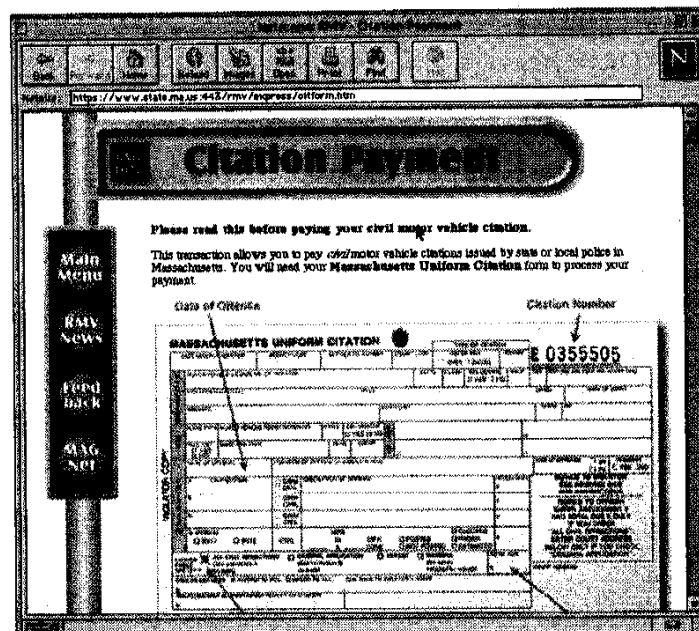
<http://www.mplayer.com/> Games

<http://www.walrus.com/~jonnonyc/cgi-bin/quotes.cgi> Wild

<http://cu-ames.arc.nasa.gov/marslife/> Life on Mars

<http://wbanimation.com/> What's Up Doc?

<http://www.hollywood.com/> Movies



legislative information system at <http://www.assembly.ca.gov/> which has all the laws for the state of California. What's missing are California's regulations. Apparently, the state licensed electronic rights for the regulations several years ago, and the contract doesn't expire until April 1998.

At the federal level, practically every agency now has its own electronic home. On the Federal Aviation Administration's Web site you can look at the reported aircraft accidents and incidents over the past 10 days (<http://www.faa.gov/avr/aa/iiform.htm>), or follow the administration's efforts to commercialize space flight (<http://www.dot.gov/dotinfo/faa/cst/cst.html>). The Central Intelligence Agency has put up its 1995 World Factbook (<http://www.odei.gov/cia/publications/95fact/>), which contains detailed information about

every country on the planet.

Another useful CIA publication is Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments, last updated on Aug. 12, 1996, and with an address that's too long to print here.

On the Federal Communication Commission's Web page (<http://www.fcc.gov>) you can find the FCC's new regulations for children's television, as well as the entire Telecommunications Act of 1996. And if you are looking for a list of all the federal agencies that are on line, check out the White House Interactive Citizens' Handbook at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/html/handbook.html>.

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