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Business Update



ENTREPRENEUR: Howard Baer has created a new Web site, TheAnonymousEmail.com, that allows people to send messages but avoid being identified.

Paul O'Neill Tribune

Web site allows you to tell it like it is

By Tony Natale, Tribune

Would you like to tell your boss he or she has bad breath? Or, lodge a complaint with your son's Little League coach that your kid isn't getting enough playing time? How about informing Sheriff Joe Arpaio about your next door neighbor's drug dealing activities?

You can deliver these messages without giving your name or any tell-tale signs that the information came from you by using a new email program called TheAnonymousEmail.com.

The program costs \$24.96 a year, or \$19.95 if you subscribe during an introductory offer, and is the creation of Scottsdale entrepreneur Howard Baer.

"Wouldn't you just love to tell somebody exactly what you're thinking today without fear of being caught?" asked Baer, 63, who created the Web site two weeks ago at his office at 7740 E. Evans Road, Scottsdale.

"Having the chance to speak out without negative repercussions is a great stress reliever," Baer said. "And it's a lot cheaper than therapy."

Baer is a full-time investment banker who explores cyberspace on a profit-making, part-time basis.

He owns The Suggestion Box, a privately held Scottsdale-based corporation that offers TheAnonymous-Email.com and is also founder of the 5-year-old www.politics.com, a popular Web site offering controversial political information as well as paid advertising.

His idea for TheAnonymous Email.com came suddenly during a conversation with his wife, Kae, at their Paradise Valley home last New Year's Eve, he said.

"We were talking about making New Year's resolutions, and the subject of quitting smoking came up," Baer, a nonsmoker, recalled. "She said if somebody told me I should quit smoking because I had bad breath, it would make an impression and I would quit.

"I told her nobody would tell me that directly to my face. Then, I thought, what if I got an e-mail from somebody telling me I had bad breath from smoking? I wouldn't know who sent it, but it would really make me start thinking about quitting."

Baer began thinking about other circumstances where a "masked e-mail message"

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might carry a similar powerful message. He envisioned everything from simple complaints by employees to compliments, suggestions and just plain insults.

No obscenities or threats of violence, if you please.

"We don't allow anything that is considered illegal," Baer said. "Yes, we know who would be sending these illegal e-mails because they have to identify themselves to us before being given permission to use the site."

A list of suggested anonymous e-mails on the Web site include various topics and messages such as "Complain": "Your service is terrible"; "Pranks and Jokes": "I saw what you did last night"; "Rant and Rave": "Your barking dog is driving me nuts!"; "Watchdog": "You are sharing too much personal information at work"; "Constructive Criticism": "You are always late"; and "Intervention": "I'm concerned about your drug habit."

Baer said he already delivered an anonymous e-mail to a principal in an unnamed East Valley high school from a mother whose daughter told her about drug use in the school.

"The mother asked her daughter to e-mail the principal using their Internet service, but the girl was afraid of being identified," Baer said. "They agreed to use our anonymous Web site. A few days later, I got a call from the mother who said the principal expressed his gratitude to the students, thanking whomever sent him the important information."

"Total confidentiality is guaranteed," Baer said. "The only exception is if I get a court order to disclose the sender's identity."

This could come, he said, if a threat of violence or a stalker sends an e-mail.

"Offenders will be banned from the site and could get reported to authorities," Baer said.

The site prohibits messages that are unlawful, harmful, abusive, harassing, disparaging, defamatory, vulgar, obscene, slanderous and libelous, among other listed violations.

Messages can only be sent to one recipient at a time, but there is no limit to the number that can be electronically mailed.

He said once a subscriber sends an anonymous message through the company's server, a random code is generated for that message.

It is sent to the recipient from the server without disclosing the identity or Internet address of the sender.

The recipient has the option to reply or simply block the sender.

If the recipient replies to the sender, the dialogue may continue as long as a new message is sent from the subscriber.

A sender can log on to the Web site to determine if the recipient has opened the email. If not, the recipient after seven days may receive a written letter on paper via the U.S. Postal Service informing him or her if they have e-mail on their computer.

"It can be a therapeutic outlet, a desire to take action or simply just for fun," Baer said. "This site can be a tool to improve others' bad behavior, encourage good behavior or help you feel an amazing amount of power to finally say what's been on your mind."

Baer said he plans to install a link in the new Web site called AnonymousTips.com that would relay the e-mails to selected law enforcement agencies.

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