# Learfield and the Internet: 1995 - 2005

When the Internet began morphing into the World Wide Web in 1993 and 1994, I was leading an effort at our company to create a low-cost alternative to the Associated Press. A cheap wire service for broadcasters affiliated with one of our radio networks. I'd played with BBS's and had a CompuServe account but wasn't thinking of the "web" as all that relevant to our business.

In 1994 the White House launched its website; businesses were starting to create commerce sites; our email inboxes began filling up with "spam"; and we started using something called Netscape Navigator to "browse" the web. The first banner ads appeared on Hotwired.com in October. In December a St. Louis company called P-Net registered the domain MO.net and wanted our permission to use it in advertising. Our lawyer said it would be difficult to stop them so we didn't try.

In 1995 CompuServe, America Online and Prodigy started providing dial-up Internet access and people started getting online. In April some tech folks from the University of Missouri came to our offices in Jefferson City and gave us a demo of the "World Wide Web" and our first look at Netscape Navigator. I can't speak for the others in the meeting but I was mightily impressed.

I knew a bit about the Internet but nothing about how to create a website or register a domain, so I contacted Mike McKean, a professor at the J-School at the University of Missouri, and asked if he could put me in touch with a student who knew how to do this stuff. He introduced me to Dan Arnall, a senior journalism major. Dan was technically adept but he brought along Allen Hammock who was majoring in computer science. Dan and Allen were high school classmates in Springfield, Missouri, and were in members of a student leadership organization at Mizzou.



These guys were smart and confident and recognized an opportunity to get some experience with a big company. By the time we'd had a few meetings to talk about an online strategy for Learfield, they had formed their own company (Echo Communications). I don't think Dan saw himself as an "employee," even at that tender age. Allen Hammock recently shared some of his memories. (12 minutes)

From a memo by Learfield CEO, Clyde lear, dated May 22, 1995: *"Learfield has had more than a passing interest in the Internet for a number of months now. We thought that this new medium may have advertising potential. We are confident some of the program offering services that Learfield owns are candidates for inclusion on the Internet. We're just not entirely sure how all of this can come together as a business venture nor are we real sure about how it can evolve organizationally. While we were thinking about this, two young men from the University of Missouri — Dan Arnall and Allen Hammock — came to us with an interesting concept on*

*building a business venture around the Internet by providing a service for advertisers. They had an innovative and interesting approach and we have met with them several times and like what they say. Now we believe it is time to get a broader group of us together to dream and think about how clearfield can create a desirable service that ultimately can be profitable."*

From its inception, Learfield had been an advertising supported operation and the web looked like something we could use to distribute our news, farm and sports programming and sell sponsorships. We had a meeting at the Lake of the Ozarks on May 31, 1995, to talk about "the web." In attendance were: Matt Gamewell, Kay Henderson, Matt Lear, Mike Mayfield, Brad Scrivner, Dan Arnall and Allen Hammock, Clyde Lear and Steve Mays.

In August we registered our first domain: Learfield.com. While we didn't have a clear strategy, we could see it was important to own the domains for our various networks. Dan and Allen got busy (hand-coding the HTML) creating our first websites. Here's what Radio Iowa looked like in December, 1996, and The Missourinet site from April, 1997 (screenshots from the Internet Archive Wayback Machine)



### Mark Cuban and AudioNet

In September of 1995 we received a phone call from Mark Cuban. He and a partner (Todd Wagner) had recently acquired a company called Cameron Audio Networks, named after its founder Cameron Christopher Jaeb. The company had acquired rights to broadcast radio and professional sports games live on the Internet. Cuban wanted to listen to the basketball games of his alma mater, Indiana University. Learfield owned the media rights to IU (and eight other universities and colleges). Cuban renamed his company AudioNet.

**From the AudioNet media kit, October 1995:** *"AudioNet is one of the most popular destinations on the Internet. People around the world know that when they want their choice of*

*realtime and on demand audio programming there is only one place to go, WWW.Audionet.Com, the world's first Broadcast Network on the Internet!"*

*"We offer them realtime broadcasts of radio stations such as KLIF Dallas, KFI Los Angeles, KOA Denver, XTRA San Diego, WQAM Miami, WJFK Washington DC WCKY Cincinnati, with many more to come. The there is the realtime broadcasts of exciting sporting events such as Texas A&M, University of Southern California, Baylor, Southern Methodist University college football, a growing schedule of professional football, baseball, basketball ad hockey, and Indoor Soccer."*

*"In addition to sports programming we offer a complete choice of entertaining programming (you) can't get anywhere else, like the Janice Malone Show, The Mark Cuban Show, Jeffrey Lyons Movie Reviews and Hollywood Reports, Medical Matters, Tech Talk, NetRadio, Geek Free Radio, Legal Matters, NetRadio, Celebrity Interviews with Michelle Pfeiffer, Patrick Swayze, Dustin Hoffman, George Foreman, Gennifer Flowers and much more. What's even more exciting is that AudioNet is doubling (its) content offerings every month, with new things being added every day. Listeners know to stop by and see what's new, and they do!"*

On November 10, 1995, we met with Mark in Kansas City to discuss how our two companies might work together. It was Clyde, Allen Hammock, Steve Mays and (maybe) Chief Engineer Charlie Peters. Since Learfield owned the broadcast rights, we couldn't see the value of what AudioNet brought to the table. At one point Mark walked over to the whiteboard and scrawled some numbers, offering to sell 10% of his new company to Learfield for half a million dollars (others recall the number as one million). Learfield didn't have the money at the time and really couldn't see the value of AudioNet in any event. (Cuban sold his company to Yahoo! on April 1, 1999 for $5.7 billion, making it the most expensive acquisition Yahoo! had made at the time.)

In December, 1995, [Learfield and AudioNet signed a letter of agreement](#) for Internet distribution of our live college sports programming. AudioNet provided a minimum of 10,000 RealAudio streams while Learfield provided audio of our football and basketball broadcasts. We were also responsible for development of all content for the websites. Any advertising sold by Learfield, the split was 80/20 (80% to Learfield). If AudioNet sold the ads, the split was 60/40 (60% to Learfield). The term of the agreement was two years.

At some point during our talks with Mark, someone at Learfield asked why we couldn't just do this on our own. Why did we need AudioNet? I recall Mark explaining he had an arrangement with RealAudio for streaming licenses that no other company could get. That was his edge.

In October we brought Learfield.com online and started running promos on our news networks, promoting our websites. This wasn't popular with the newsroom staff -- who hated giving up precious seconds of airtime -- or our radio affiliates who would prefer people listen to their station than visit the network website.

From a [memo from Clyde dated October 31, 1995](#): *"Today at 2:15 p.m. will discuss putting our 9 properties on the Internet live. The proposal I'm suggesting would begin as soon as possible on all nine schools. New equipment and line installation would cost about $80,000 now. Annual*

*operations will cost $35,000 before personnel costs. Personnel costs, including benefits, could amount to as much as $75,000."*

Clyde was never one to do something halfway.

All-staff memo from Clyde dated November 6, 1995: *"We are moving ahead with expanding the Internet project. We began looking at moving onto the Internet last summer and began involving Dan Arnall and Allen Hammock in the effort, eventually handing their company (Echo Communications) a 6 month contract to develop a home page for clearfield and to help us think about long term uses of the Internet. This project has proved fruitful. We are going to launch our nine university sports broadcasts live not the Internet — hopefully by early next year. That means that wherever you are in the world, you'll be able to access the Internet and hear any one of our teams play-by-play. And, there is much more: coaches programs, interactive discussions, links to other home page and other live sporting events. The mind is the limit."*

*"We're not real sure about the distribution system or the equipment that will be necessary. The hope is to do what we have to do to make this work ASAP. The organizational structure of this new effort will be a new limited liability corporation, of which Learfield is the majority owner."*

From all-staff memo from Clyde on December 28, 1995: *"On January 6 (1996) we will begin (streaming) live our basketball broadcasts over the Internet. That means that wherever you are in the world, you can listen to the broadcast by simply accessing the Internet and our Home page.*

*On January 13, 1996, we will be providing live Internet coverage on an exclusive basis of the Republican GOP candidate debate from Iowa. The Internet project will be put into its own Limited Liability Company very soon. The new name is STRAYLIGHT."*

By 1996 there were approximately 45 million people using the Internet, with roughly 30 million of those in North America. 43.2 million (44%) U.S. households owned a personal computer, and 14 million of them are online. There were only 100,000 websites.

Bill Clinton and Bob Dole were running for president and with lots of attention was focused on the Iowa Caucuses, we looked for ways to use our website to promote Radio Iowa's (one of Learfield's news networks) coverage. From one of our news releases:

*"A new service for computer users will focus exclusively on Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses, the first test of the 1996 Presidential campaign.*

*Radio Iowa's CAMPAIGN COUNTDOWN may be found on the World Wide Web, a computer network which provides almost instant transmission of data around the globe. On-line users, or "web surfers," can access the INTERNET global network using a modem and simple browsing software.*

*When arriving at the Radio Iowa web site, users may read the latest news from the Iowa campaign scene in the TOP STORIES section. In addition, web users with multimedia or sound*

*equipment may listen to a minute-long review of the week's campaign activity at the SOUND BOARD.*

*The REFERENCE ROOM is available for those who wish to search the Radio Iowa archives for information on a specific candidate or topic. Links that allow visitors to browse through other campaign-related Internet sites are also available in the REFERENCE ROOM.*

*Three Iowa political correspondents will provide weekly commentary at the REPORTER'S ROUNDTABLE. Informal question-and-answer sessions with Iowa politicos will also be a feature in this section of the web site."*

By the beginning of 1996, Learfield's Internet "project" was well on its way to becoming it's own company. While Learfield owned controlling interest, Clyde allowed some employees (True Believers) to invest in the new venture. The official launch came on July 1, 1996.

Dan, Allen and Steve Mays made a trip to Dallas that month to see Mark Cuban's operation. It was in the Deep Ellum section of the city and was mostly a big warehouse packed with computers and miles of cable. Lots of energy.

By the end of the summer we'd registered domains for all of our news and ag networks and struggling with what to put on these new websites, as well as who and how this would be accomplished.

In September -- and again in November -- Allen Hammock was a guest on The Derry Brownfield Show, a new radio program that spun off from The Brownfield Network, Learfield ag radio network.

By the summer of 1997, Clyde decided Straylight needed to be closer to the Internet action and Dan and Allen packed up and moved to Seattle where they could be around other Internet start-ups. Better access to talent, resources and ideas. They opened the Seattle office on July 1, 1997.

In October, following a two-day visit, Clyde reported to Learfield's management team:

*"Product - The Gamecruiser produce we had in place last year is still functioning in much the same manner. An update is planned for basketball season. The new "ad active" product is still in development. Since the two go hand-in-hand, Allen has been spending much of his time perfecting the availability of audience information while at the same time trying to grow that audience. The "ad-active" product is an entirely new concept. It will be a tool for advertisers to use to grow relationships with each individual customer. Gamecruiser has five elements: audio, chat rooms, product sales, statistics and fan pages. Fan pages and chat room  have very limited*

*appeal, therefore the guys are backing off on their work on those. The chat room is already in place however, through "Talk City", (so) there is no cost to us. We are part of their "college connection." However, for this to really be successful, we need to get talent in the room or utilize chat as part of the Coaches Shows. Both have staffing and management obstacles. The guys just don't have time to get this in place. It's a neat idea but lots of work. And the pay-off is relatively small. The value is building loyalty. The guys have a deal they can take with Stats, Inc., however it's about $5,000 per month -- totally outside their budget range, even with a strong advertiser. They are reviewing the possibility of utilizing the SID (sports information director) produced statistics during and following the games on line.*

*The audio is in place, of course. They guys are also looking at covering local breaks with demographic specific audio advertising; and they've found a way to do it technically that is hassle-free.*

*Ad Active - [The Ad Active product](#) is in the "functional specification stage." This is where they are drafting the specification for how the product will work.*

*Marketing - Over the last two months Dan has made separate calls on 63 potential advertisers. 40% have been national and 60% regional and local. He's had a diverse range of response. One objection he's getting frequently is we don't have numbers. He suspects this is only an objection because the Internet press is saying most advertisers are pushing for site branding; i.e. where the advertiser gets full sponsorship that penetrates into the content.*

*The pricing for local is $1,000; for regional, $10,000 and for national, $100,000.*

*Regarding his pitch: he goes in with a custom pitch for each advertiser. Most of his (prospects) already have a web presence. He's learning a lot about their objectives now and making sure he's calling on the right people within the company and determining budget year, agency, etc. Much of this work as of today is pretty preliminary.*

From a [memo by Clyde on November 12, 1997](#): *"The guys in Seattle continue to work on their AdActive program which is an innovative software package that will allow us to closely watch each person who signs on to listen to one of our ten universities. You should look at the new design of the basketball website that was created primarily by Jason Sonderman. It looks very good. This division is a long way from budget because it hasn't realized any sales on modest projections for this year. Dan says he still believes some business will be forthcoming."*

By July of 1998 Straylight had stopped working on Gamecruiser. Most people still had dial-up Internet connections with speeds ranging from 28.8 Kbps to 33.6 Kbps. 56 Kbps modems became available the year before but there were inherent challenges in getting people -- even loyal sports fans -- to listen to games on their computer. Radio had trained them to expect a mobile listening experience. Dan and Allen put all of their efforts into Ad Active, "the intelligent ad banner."

Imagine the banner above as the standard 468x60 pixel banner ad that was so common in the early days of the web. The space above the red bar along the bottom would be the sponsor's message. Clicking one of the six emoticons enabled you to respond to the ad. Three 'faces' would indicate a positive (not shown), neutral or negative response. You could send a message to the advertiser; get more information; or indicated you didn't want to see this banner again. Advertisers were *not* ready for that range of options in 1998. That visitors to a website might not want to see *any* kind of advertising, even an "intelligent" one had yet to occur to anyone. By the end of the year, Straylight ceased operations.

In October Mark Cuban and Todd Wagner visited Learfield in Jefferson City and met with Clyde Lear. The following April Cuban sold his company -- now called Broadcast.com -- to Yahoo! for $5.7 billion. They had 570,000 users, and the purchase price was $10,000 per user. Cuban sold most of his Yahoo stock that same year, netting over $1 billion.

**Ballot Box**
In 1998 we took our first — and last — shot at developing a commercial software product. Ballot Box was a vote tabulating package we developed in cooperation with The Des Moines Register. For news networks like ours, there was only one source for election returns: The Associated Press. I recall paying $2,000 for their election night package and that was on top of the annual subscription. A large paper like The Des Moines Register probably paid much more.

The idea behind Ballot Box was we (Radio Iowa and The Register) would have a stringer in each county who reported the vote tally (by phone). The votes would be entered into the Ballot Box database where the returns could be analyzed and reported by our network and the newspaper. If it worked, we'd no longer have to pay the AP and we'd have a product we could sell to other news organizations. Election night was a disaster. The software or the hardware or both simply did not work. It was an embarrassment for our network and The Des Moines Register.

Software development and Internet start-ups were clearly not our thing. Our experience and expertise was network radio and, increasingly, sports marketing. But even the most skeptical in our company could see "this Internet thing" wasn't going away, and we continued to search for ways to incorporate it into our business.

*1999 - College student Shawn Fanning invents Napster, a computer application that allows users to swap music over the Internet. The number of Internet users worldwide reaches 150 million by the beginning of 1999. More than 50% are from the United States. E-commerce becomes the new buzzword as Internet shopping rapidly spreads. MySpace.com is launched.*

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**Andy Waschick and Gestalt**

By the spring of 1998, Dan Arnall and Allen Hammock (fondly referred to as The Cybertwins) were intensely focused on developing and selling AdActive. They no longer had time to work on our growing number of websites so we began looking for a designer.

We were constructing our websites one page at a time which meant even a minor change could take hours because it had to be replicated on every page on the site. Phil Atkinson had be telling me for months we needed to move to a database development platform. And our sites were ugly. We needed professional help and found it in Andy Waschick.

We met Andy in May of 1998. He was a senior at Missouri State University (graphic design?) in Springfield, Missouri, and was working for a company called NCS (Network Communication Systems). We came across some really nice looking websites he had designed and got in touch. In addition to looking nice, they were running on Cold Fusion based platform that would give us the database flexibility Phil Atkinson had been pushing for. We hired Andy to design a new site for us (<span style="color:red">which site?</span>)

When Andy graduated he formed his own company which he called Gestalt, Inc. For the next ten years Andy designed and helped maintain dozens of websites for Learfield and our clients, all running on his proprietary content management system.

Andy was brilliant and designed really beautiful websites. But he was a one-man shop and had other clients. It could take months get a site designed and online which was frequently a problem when creating a site for one of our network advertising clients. But Andy did really nice work, at a good price. I think we usually budgeted around $5,000 for a new site. In addition to our client projects, Andy designed several systems for our internal use.

*CATS (Customized Affiliate Traffic System)* - One of the most important tasks for any radio network is getting network commercials to affiliate radio stations so they can air "make-good" spots. For each network there was a daily satellite feed of these commercials. A time-consuming and tedious process for the network and the affiliates. On their end someone had to record each commercial as it was fed via satellite. Using the CATS website, an affiliate could log in, find the commercials the needed and download them. We also used CATS to upload news sound bites, an important time-saver for our reporters as well as the affiliates. CATS became the primary tool for communicating with affiliates. Scott Brandon was in charge of operations and production for our news division at the time and came up with the features Andy built into CATS.

*MCAL (Master Corporate Account List) and SALT (Sports Account List Tracker)* - These were sales management tools we used to track network advertisers (current and prospective). These were custom designs from the ground up, incorporating every feature and tool our sales managers could come up with. This kind of one-off was Andy's specialty. If we could dream it

up, he could build it. And they were never "done." We kept adding new features and tweaks. The downside of this kind of endless development was there was only one person on the planet who could work on these sites if something broke. Andy Waschick.

Eventually we had more websites up and running than Andy's one-man company could support. And we needed a faster, less-expensive development platform. WordPress launched in 2003 and within a few years Learfield had begun using it as a content management system for some of our site. It was inexpensive and easy to use and by 2010 our relationship with Andy had shifted to support of the existing Gestalt sites. Thanks to his creativity and hard work Learfield was able to include website development as an important service we could provide our clients.

Where sports programming was live and long-form, our news and ag networks produced short programs that our affiliate radio stations could easily incorporate into their formats. One and three-minute newscasts; five-minute farm reports. Streaming audio from a website opened up new possibilities. For the first time, we could deliver our programming -- of any length -- directly to the listener.

**Legislature.co**m

Our original news network, The Missourinet, had two reporters covering the state legislature. If they were unable to be in the House and Senate chambers when floor debate was underway, they could monitor from our newsroom via audio loops installed for that purpose. We could -- and occasionally did -- put this debate up on a satellite channel if the event was of sufficient interest to our affiliates. But no station was interested in giving up regular airtime for dry, legislative debate. In March of 1998, Chief Engineer Charlie Peters began talking with Dan and Allen about using our RealAudio encoders to stream the debate live from The Missourinet website.



Starting the next session of the legislature got underway in January of 1999, we were streaming the debate and it was an immediate hit with limited, but potentially important, audience. The office of each member of the legislature was wired so they could monitor what was happening on the floor of the House and/ or Senate. When we began streaming debate audio, legislators (and lobbyists) could listen in their office or from any location with an Internet connection. By this time we had switched from RealAudio to Windows Media for audio encoding/streaming.

But we were limited in the number of streams we could feed simultaneously (first come, first served). Legislators quickly figured this out and started sending their secretaries into the office

early to grab and hold a stream. To counter this, we frequently rebooted the encoder just before debate got underway, to give everyone an equal chance of grabbing an audio stream.

In November of 1999 we [registered the domain, Legislature.com](). In January of 2000 we began charging ($500) for a "subscription." Seemed like a lot of money but we were the only game in town and some bought *two* subscriptions so they could monitor the House and Senate debate simultaneously. [[Screenshot]()]

Unfortunately (fortunately?) there are no surviving records of whether we made or lost money on this service. But some members of the legislature did not like having to pay to listen to their own debate. They didn't have to, of course -- they had monitors in their office -- but they liked the convenience of listening via the web. So by the following year the House and Senate Information Offices were streaming debate audio… for free.

I don't recall if we were archiving our debate audio in year one but would have been very difficult to locate debate on a particular issue or bill, given the size of the archived audio file. To add value to our subscription service, [we began indexing -- by bill number -- the archived debate](). A subscriber could search for and 'jump' to a specific bit of debate.
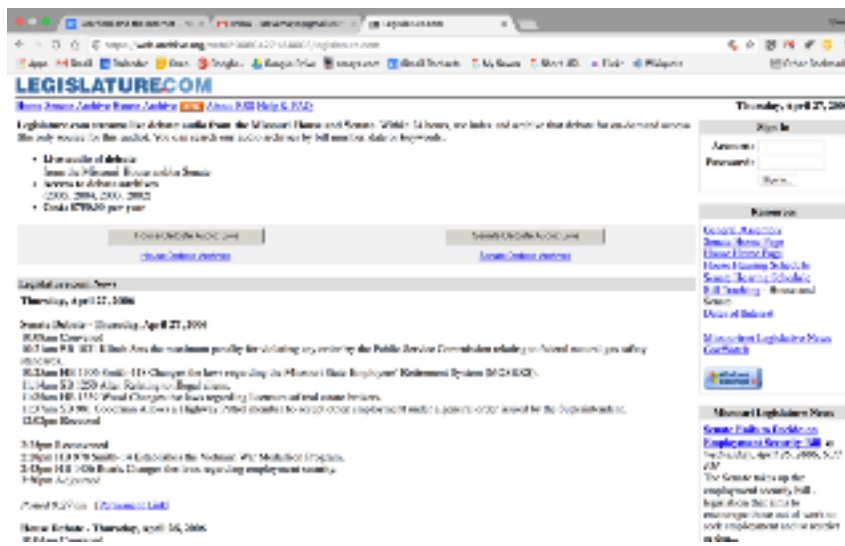


With the beginning of the 2001 session, we raised the cost of a subscription to $750 per session and that -- in light of the free alternative -- proved too costly for a lot of subscribers. It wasn't until 2010 ([January]() and [February]()) that we started experimenting with streaming video.

**Missouri Supreme Court Oral Argument**s
In January 2000 we took on another streaming project: Oral arguments before the Missouri Supreme Court. Like debate in the state legislature, arguments before a state supreme court is pretty dry. Nothing like the second half of Law & Order. But we thought there might me another niche audience so, [after months of negotiation with Chief Justice Ray Price]() and the court's tech people, we got approval to install an audio loop from the court chambers to our our encoders across town. Missouri was one of only a handful of states making argument available online.

After a year (two?) of making the arguments available at no charge, we again moved to a subscription model. Our assumption was law firms would have an interest and could afford a modest annual fee. A few did but not enough to make the project worth the time and effort it demanded. It wasn't long, however, before the court informed us they would start streaming the arguments (at no charge).

This was a phenomenon we saw again and again. We invest the time and money to prove the concept, only to see the "content creator" take over once they saw it could be done.

Given Learfield's long history of providing audio programming to radio stations, it was only natural we looked for new sources of audio for our websites. Nobody was thinking seriously about video in those days. The tools and bandwidth were still in the future. But we also thought in terms of "what do we have access to that others do not." One answer to that question was Missouri Highway Patrol Crash Reports.

**Missouri Highway Patrol Crash Reports**
We had a long history with a Missouri law enforcement network called MULES. The MULES system connected all of the law enforcement agencies in Missouri for communication purposes. The Highway Patrol, sheriff's department, police departments, etc). Most of that information was (and remains) proprietary and not for public dissemination, but the system also fed accident reports (the MHP preferred the term "crash reports").

The Missourinet had been transmitting these reports to radio stations for years. We started wondering if there might be a way to put the reports online. The only way a private individual would get this information would be from their local radio station or newspaper (who got it from the Associated Press).

We approached the Missouri Highway Patrol about putting the reports on a website but were assured by their technicians this was not technically possible. Phil Atkinson, the head of the Learfield IT Department wasn't much into "impossible" and after several hours in front of his computer he brought me a url and said, "Take a look at his."

It was a web page showing, in real time, MHP crash reports from the MULES feed coming into our office. I called and got a meeting with my contact at MHP. "Take a look at this," I told him. He summoned one of his tech guys to his office where we showed him a web page scrolling the latest crash reports.

When this page went live it was hugely popular with the public. They could search by name, date, troop number, etc. Insurance companies *loved* this website. I vaguely recall trying to monetize the page but don't think we were successful. The exact date we went live with crash reports is unknown but [we have screenshots with links](#) as early as April, 2000. And you can guess how the story ends. Eventually [MHP began providing crash reports on their site](#).

**MissouriDeathRow.com**
It's difficult to keep all of our Internet project in chronological order because we were doing a lot of stuff simultaneously. In September 1999, Missourinet News Director Bob Priddy sent an email describing an idea for another site:

*Something that might get a lot of hits on our web page would be a page on the death penalty in Missouri. At every execution, the corrections department gives us folders that contain:*
1. *A summary of what the guest of honor did that has earned him this special place in our hearts.*
2. *His criminal history.*
3. *The chronology of his case.*
4. *The History of the Death Penalty in Missouri.*
5. *A list of the inmates currently under the death sentence.*
6. *A list of the inmates who've been croaked by the state.*

*We also have in our files the list of all inmates who have been brought to room temperature since the state took over executions from the counties in the 30s. It might be a ghoulish page. But it also might be something pretty interesting for people to see. We could even list "coming attractions" when new execution dates are scheduled. The department, by the way, gives us photographs of the nearly-departed. We probably could even get pictures of the execution chamber, the Potosi Prison, the drug injection machine, stuff like that.*

Bob showed me a file cabinet filled with the folders given to the media at every execution and assured me none of the material was online. Anywhere. While working on this site I learned that executions were politically sensitive for the Department of Corrections (Missouri ranks #5 in number of executions, behind Oklahoma, Texas, Delaware and Virginia). Department of Corrections officials took the position Missouri did not have a "Death Row," even though inmates under a sentence of death were all housed together. They were willing to cooperate with our effort but it never officially. We started working on the the site in September of 1999 but didn't register the domain [MissouriDeathRow.com](#) until 2004.

Missouri was one of nine states to use lethal gas as a method of execution. Prior to 1938 [executions in Missouri were handled at the county level](#). In 1968 a moratorium on capital punishment was invoked, after 39 people were executed in [Missouri's gas chamber](#). In 1989 executions resumed, using lethal injection. A Missourinet reporter has witnessed every

execution since.

We started by creating a web page for every inmate currently on Death Row. This included a legal chronology, case facts and a photo. Information that was included in the media packets. For executions prior to 1989, we had to find and transcribe case facts using a legal library. Countless hours went into this effort. For executions carried out between 1938 and 1965, we spent a week in the Missouri State Archives. There we found photos of each inmate as well as correspondence and documents of a historical nature. For a brief period the site included a discussion forum but the topic was too volatile and it was eventually taken down.

By 2000 Learfield's management structure was evolving almost as fast as the Internet. In a February 23 memo, CEO Clyde Lear named Roger Gardner Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer; Greg Brown, Senior Vice President-Sports; Stan Koenigsfeld, Senior Vice President-News; Chuck Zimmerman, Vice President of Operations Brownfield Network (as well as Farm Director); Travis Ford, Vice President of Operations-News Division; and Steve Mays (this writer) was put in charge of Learfield Internet "effort."

From that year's annual corporate report (August 21, 2000):  *"Our effort on the Internet took us to new areas; in late August we began putting our weekly high school football scoreboard show online -- both audio and text; in November we created an online database for high school basketball scores; in January we launched "Legislature.com" and began charging for Missouri House and Senate audio; more to come in Iowa and Wisconsin. We began audio streaming and archiving of Missouri Supreme Court oral arguments in the spring; free now but charges are coming."*

Since this account is more personal recollection than official history, here's my take on where the company was -- and had been -- in terms of the Internet.

Our attempt at an Internet start-up (Straylight, Gamecruiser and AudioNet) failed. We knew how to create radio networks and sell advertising but this new "Internet thing" was beyond our scope. Our pivot to subscription services (Legislature.com, Supreme Court Arguments, Crash Reports, and others) never got off the ground. But it was clear (I think) to all of our senior managers that the Internet was important and we needed to understand how it could be integrated into our core businesses. For better or worse, I had been allowed to lead this effort during the late 90s.  I doubt most companies would have created the position I was allowed to fill and I was fortunate and grateful. Shortly after the management reshuffle mentioned above, I voluntarily took a reduction on salary to better reflect the work I was now doing. A decision I never regretted.

The Internet had not gone unnoticed by the advertisers using our radio networks and our sales staff were getting requests for help creating websites and managing content. By 2000 blogging was a getting attention and we began helping some of our clients set up and use this new marketing tool. We quickly discovered there was greater value (for us) in providing these services as "added value" to an advertising campaign on one of our networks. It made sense for us to invest a few thousand dollars in creating a website for a client that was spending a hundred thousand dollars on a network radio schedule. Our sales people loved having this incentive.

**ObitsOnline**
But we continued to come up with ideas for new content to draw people to our existing -- or new -- websites. In early 2000 we created ObitsOnline. It was an online database of funeral announcements from throughout the state. Missouri to start but we had dreams of doing this in other states.



As I write this in 2017, it's difficult to image such a site didn't already exist but I could find nobody that was doing this (successfully) in 2000. We pitched the idea to the Missouri Funeral Directors Association and brought the site online. We had a simple web form the member funeral homes could use to enter the information and the public could search by name, date, city, etc.

**High School Football Scores**
The program most-requested by Radio Iowa affiliates was a high school football "scoreboard" show. Sports Director Todd Kimm was more than willing to produce and host the Friday night show but gathering scores from that many games was a logistical challenge. We were able to rely on our 60+ affiliates but had to make arrangements with stringers and coaches for the rest of the scores. And coaches who lost were not always eager to call in the score. But Football Friday Night went on the air with almost every station on the network "clearing" the show. We brought in part-timers to take calls with score updates throughout the evening and while the focus was on the live broadcast, we were also putting scores on the Radio Iowa website. For the first time, high school football fans could get all the scores, statewide (with some exceptions) the same night, rather than wait for the next day's Des Moines Register. We never attempted high school basketball scores because there were too many games, played on too many different nights. No way to pull off a scoreboard show like Football Friday Night.

We did attempt to put basketball scores on Missourinet.com but took a different approach. We invited someone (student, fan, coach) from each high school (or the local community) to be the official basketball score reporter for their team. I don't think we had the term "crowd sourcing" back then but that was the idea. It didn't work. We simply couldn't get enough reporters and scores to make the page credible. We eventually launched a football scoreboard show in Missouri and put the scores on Missourinet.com.

Learfield wasn't the only company trying to get on the Internet bandwagon. The late 90s was a crazy time before the "dot-com bubble" burst (sometime between 1999 and 2001).

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*By January 2002, 58% of the U. S. population (164 million people) was using the Internet. Worldwide there were 544 million users. Facebook launched in 2004. YouTube in 2005.*

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Our strategy of using what we'd learned about the Internet to support our advertising sales and and marketing efforts was bearing fruit and in July of 2005, Learfield InterAction became a business unit within the News/Ag Division. In addition to working with our sellers, I was responsible for maintaining all of Learfield's internal and public websites, with the technical support of a *really* good IT and engineering department.

*Updated 11:00 a.m., April 27, 2017*