

Looking for someone you know? You can often find your old friends and colleagues on the web. CAROLYN BOND reports.

Fancy meeting you here

"Hi, I'm searching for Carolyn Bond from Topsfield, MA, is that you?"

"No it's not", I reply, "I'm Carolyn Bond from Melbourne, Australia. I am married, have two children, I work at....." Why is it that the Internet can make us feel quite comfortable telling our life story to a complete stranger - who may not even want to know?

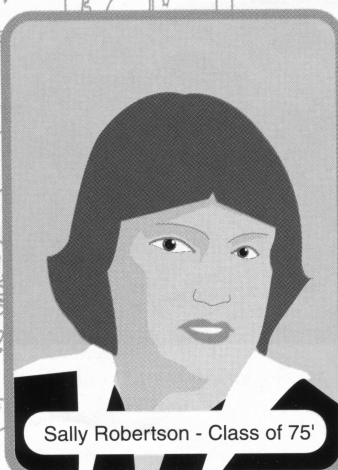
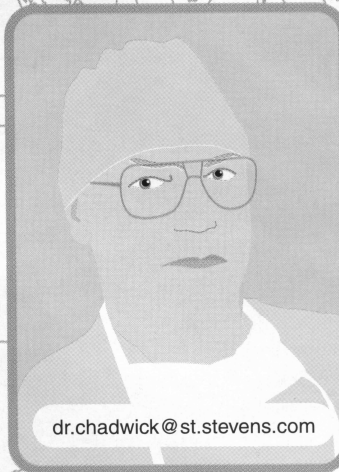
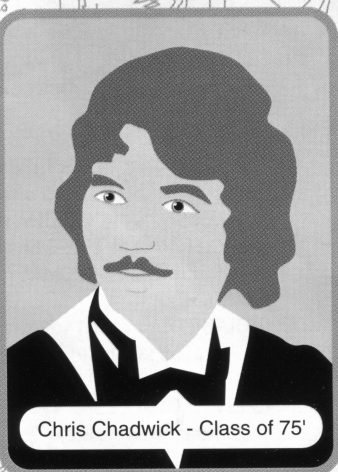
I recently sent out an "is that you?" message myself when I thought I'd stumbled across an old acquaintance. My son was searching the net for information on water rockets, and many sites were listed. One site referred to a Melbourne group, and I noticed the name of the site's owner. Wasn't that the name of the baby brother of my friend at school 35 years ago? I sent an email. "Do I know you?"

The reply came. Yes, he was my schoolfriend's younger brother, but my name was more familiar to him because I had recently worked with his wife! Emails followed about his sister, primary school and, of course, water rockets.

The Internet is a place where many people strike up new friendships, but it is also possible to run into old friends.

If you have noticed all the sites and search engines which claim to find people, you might think it's quite easy to find someone you're looking for by using the Net. Actually, trying to find someone on the Internet is a matter of hit and miss, but there are a number of things you can try.

Enter the person's name - first name followed by last, and in quotation marks, e.g. "John Smith". If the name is a common one, you will probably need to limit your search to sites within Australia by choosing to search "Australia" rather than "the World" in



the search engine. The person's name may not be mentioned on any site, but it's amazing how many people are – either because they have their own site, are listed as members of a club, staff of a company, are members of a professional body, or they are named in other documents on the Net such as newsletters or newspaper articles. The results may be quite revealing, providing information about the person's interests, club memberships, family, and perhaps even their family tree! Search for your own name – you may be surprised where it shows up.

As well as searching the Web, you can search newsgroups for the name. A search of newsgroups for my name revealed a message I sent to a newsgroup three years ago. The advantage of finding someone in this type of search is that you are also likely to find the person's email address. At <http://www.altavista.com/> choose to search "discussion groups", and enter the person's name. As long as the person doesn't use a pen name, messages from that person to any newsgroup should be revealed.

There are many directories on the net where you can look up email addresses and other details of individuals or businesses, and other sites designed for locating people, such as alumni registries. However most of these sites are based on people registering their details. Choose the "Email Directories" category in LookSmart, or go to Australian and New Zealand Email at

<http://www.southerncross.aust.com/> or try <http://www.email-it.net.au/>. You can register your details at these sites if you want to.

You may be able to find old friends at World Alumni Net, <http://www.alumni.net/>, which has an Australian section. There are many sites for those searching for missing persons. Try www.missingpersons.info.au/ for Australian links and advice about missing people.

You will find services which search public records for a fee, but I couldn't find an Australian site to match Investigative Resources on the Web, <http://www.inil.com/users/dguss/wgator.htm>, which had links to a wide range of sites for searching for individuals, and includes data from fishing licences, obituaries, and lists of jail inmates!

You will have no problem finding information about famous people on the Net, and you may be surprised how many ordinary people show up. However, if you're serious about locating a specific person, there may be easier ways to do it.

In fact, you may find the old ways are still the best, and that telephone directories on the Net are probably the most helpful. Choose the "Find People" category in Looksmart, then click "International White Pages". You will have a list of sites which take you to telephone directories from around the world. Or visit the Australian White Pages online.

LISTED SITES

www.altavista.com/
www.southerncross.aust.com/
www.email-it.net.au/
www.alumni.net/
www.missingpersons.info.au/
www.inil.com/users/dguss/wgator.htm
www.whitepages.com.au



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