

Sex, Jobs and Rock 'n Roll

by Jeff Westover

The stories you are about to read are absolutely true. Only the names have been changed to protect the, um, innocent.

Deep in the lush heart of California's Napa Valley lives and works a man named Mark Harris, a mechanical engineer working for one of the better known wineries in the area. Mark's job demands that he works sixty plus hours each week, or so it would seem. Mark is married and the father of two children. He is also a regular Internet thrill seeker. He spends hours each day online trying to woo women as "MudStud66" in Internet chat rooms. He does not dare use his home computer for such things. He is afraid his wife might find out. So he does it on the job.

Natalie Bushman uses her work computer for personal pleasure too. Only her vice is MP3 music files. "I can download and store far more music at work than I can at home because it is faster." Natalie said.

Her boss knows all about it. "It's better than the radio because I can choose what to listen to and I develop my own play lists. There are no commercials to distract anyone like the radio does and as long as I keep the volume down and reasonable, my boss doesn't mind."☒

Laura Matthews thinks it is okay too. She fires up her ICQ icon the first thing every single day and makes herself available to chat to anybody out there online that wants to bend her cyber-ear.

Laura is an insurance administrator who surfs online and chats at will without her supervisor's awareness (or so she thinks).

She admits it is risky, but the Internet has given this self-proclaimed wallflower a social life. Through cyberspace and her employer's broadband connection, Laura has become a cyber-tramp, having cyber sex in the middle of her workday on her employer's dime.

~ Getting into Women's Underwear ~

There was a time when employers had to worry about sex in the workplace in the form of inappropriate conversation, leering, or, in extreme cases, sexual behavior behind closed office doors. But a sue-happy society and the prospect of enduring endless hours of sexual harassment training have made inroads in the fight against sex on the job. Besides, it is easier these days for workers to get their kicks by tickling the computer mouse. And they are doing it a lot.

In May, Victoria Secret broadcast their second online fashion show over the Internet. The first show, broadcast in 1999, drew a million viewers who struggled with home connections during peak Internet use hours to watch a tiny 2-inch view of models parading in lingerie.

This year, the folks at Victoria's Secret changed their strategy by broadcasting the show during the middle of the workday. With many taking advantage of company broadband capabilities, more than 2 million high-speed connections were made, much to the delight of the program's promoters.

Websense, a manufacturer of Employee Internet Management Software, estimates that the Victoria Secret webcast alone cost business to the tune of \$120 million dollars. Websense and other companies engaged in fighting the battle in the workplace against Internet abuse are finding themselves part of an exploding industry. According to IDC Research, Internet workforce management will become a \$562 million dollar industry by the year 2004.

Why? Because the boss knows that workers didn't watch the Victoria Secret webcast to shop for Mother's Day. Sex is simply too irresistible, especially on the job. Employers know that 70 percent of web surfing at pornography web sites takes place during business hours and with ever increasing access they anticipate ever increasing abuse.

~ Avoiding Cyber VD ~

The danger of sex in the workplace lies in getting caught. The real tragedy of such activity is that it destroys careers and ruins personal relationships. But many workers today have been lulled into thinking that Internet sex is not really sex and that, while distracting, it is a harmless diversion in which nobody gets hurt. Many consider it the safest form of sex.

But don't you believe it. The only safe sex in the workplace is total abstinence. And here's why:

You wouldn't use the company phone to call a 900 number. You wouldn't pick up a hooker in a company car. And you wouldn't plaster nude pictures from a magazine in your cubicle.

Unless you wanted to get fired, that is.

You can have all the anonymous ID names online that you want. The fact remains that every click, every file and every web page are recorded on computers when you go online. If you are on a company computer when you do it, the boss can and likely will find out.

Co-workers can sue you for it too. If a support technician from the IT department is doing some routine maintenance on your system and comes across offensive material they can sue for harassment. You might as well tape it to your forehead.

Your spouse or significant other can find out far easier than you suspect. Ask Mark Harris, a.k.a. the Mud Stud. Shortly after being interviewed for this article, Mark ran into a very willing online partner going by the name of DaisyChain. She gave a phone number to Mark to take their "innocent" fun to the next level.

He called the number from work, of course, and found himself talking to his soon to be ex-wife.

Seems she spent time online at work too and found someone there that wrote suspiciously like her husband.

Society may be growing in acceptance of alternative lifestyles and growing in tolerance of sexual preferences, but a reputation in business is still very much gauged by an ability to keep sexual lives in control. Ask Bill Clinton, Wade Boggs, Jimmy Swaggart, George Michael and any of the thousands who have been caught and lived to publicly regret it.

Where they are now is not where they once hoped they would be, and can now never hope to achieve.