

DOT NOT SO CALM

If the Online Shopping Industry is planning to do \$9 billion dollars this year, I think they'd better revise their estimates to \$8,999,999,5000.00. because they're not getting a cent of my money.

It's not that I don't want to give them my business. I've pressed so many dot-coms there's a blank on my keyboard where the dot used to be. Even though I've never been in a store that asks you to register before you even have a peek at the merchandise, I do what they tell me to. If they ask me to register, they've got it. I click "Register". Obediently, I fill out each square. I accept their privacy code. Anything they want. I give them my user name. I put in my password. I click "Submit". The little icon at the top of my screen goes round and round, checking me out. It doesn't like what it sees.

I'm instructed to try again. They say some part of my application was either inaccurate or incomplete. Which part is left to my imagination. Since I'm pretty sure of my name, address and telephone number, that leaves my user name and/or password. I give it a few tries. I know I have a list of passwords around here someplace. This e-merchant doesn't like my answers. I give up on that site.

New try. Great. No need to register. They say I can just browse the site. They welcome me. I'm feeling all warm and fuzzy, looking around for a few minutes, a very few minutes. I'm just about to order what I want when a message appears on the screen, telling me in effect, that I've taken too long, there are other customers waiting. I can try again later. I've been bumped. A little discouraged, but still game, I'm going to a site that's promising free shipping if I order by midnight of the day I'm trying. Fine. All the colorful boxes appear on my screen with the various categories and products offered. I click on my category. I wait. I wait and I wait. My mouse is frozen. I press every button I can reach. Nothing works. I can't go on with my order. I can't escape.

Finally, the message appears. "HTTP error 403. 403.9 access forbidden. Too many users are connected."

Once more. I'd really like to use this easy shopping tool. I have no trouble getting to this site. It's very user friendly. It likes me. This time there are no glitches. I find what I want in the color I want in the size I want and would have ordered it if a message in bold black lettering with a *Verboten* symbol on it had not appeared on my screen.

"This program has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down." Vaboom. Is that a knock on the door? Who's to blame for this illegality, my computer or me? I've been taken offline in shame.

Still anxious to save all that time shopping, standing in line at a store, I want to succeed and I might have if I just could have gotten online the next day. Ever hopeful, I sign on as usual and sit quietly as my connecting number is tried. It isn't busy. Good sign.

Everything's a go until Step Six. Connecting to AOL. The screen is frozen. No movement at all. I wait and I wait. At last The Message appears: "The modem has lost the carrier signal. Please try signing on again later".

Not me, brother. You had your chance. These little fingers are going to do their walking in the Yellow Pages. I'm cyberspaced out.