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Cyberspace acquisition makes man our 'mayor'

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By [JEFF JARDINE](#)
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Meet Modesto's other mayor, and I don't mean Carmen Sabatino.

He's an Internet tycoon named Rick Schwartz. He lives in Boca Raton, Fla., and unless you're really into the Web domain market, you've probably never heard of him.

He has nothing to do with Modesto beyond having "bought" the city through a Web site called Weblo.com, which sells, among other things, the titles of virtual mayor.

Weblo.com bills itself as "a virtual copy of the real world and a way for anyone to make money on the Net." It allows people to create Web sites pertaining to, among other things, cities, states and famous landmarks.



Schwartz

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For instance, an owner, or "mayor" of a city site, can add content such as photos and video that hopefully will attract visitors and, eventually, advertisers. Revenue from ads is shared by the site owner and Weblo.

Property owners also make money off other Web sites within their city or state limits, or by eventually selling their site.

And, of course, it sells domain names. That's where Schwartz really makes his living.

Schwartz bid a whopping \$5 on Weblo.com to "own" Modesto when the site opened in September 2006. He's also the mayor of 119 other cities and the "governor" of Florida, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Maine. He's spent \$50,000 of real money in this game, seeing only a 1 percent return so far. But that doesn't deter him.

"I'm just one crazy, old guy with time on his hands," Schwartz said.

Modesto popped up as being available one day, and he bought it. He said he knew the city's name for some reason — probably the three major national news stories connected to the city since 1999, though he couldn't name any of them.

"It must have been in the back of my mind when I was going through the site," he said.

His Modesto investment certainly won't pay the rent. He's made just 14 cents from it.

Schwartz said he visited the city a few times years ago, but beyond that we're nothing more than a dot on a map in cyberspace.

"I remember they have nice roses growing there at the homes," he said.



Recent comments from our readers... ...on a variety of topics.

Xiuhcoatl: Isn't that what prison is for?

Steve: What is so shocking? This sub-human killed a Police Officer. Someone whose job it was to make sure...

hate this place: jesus freaking christ. is that all they care about. is pot the singlehandedly most violent crime?

Salida Now: Just who are these "Developers"? And there was only a very few "leaders" of the community who backed...

Xiuhcoatl: What a shock! I can't believe the government, our government, would kill somebody...eye for an eye,...

confused: why is it, when a man strays, his wife or girlfriend targets the 'other woman'? So many of these 'ot...

The ex-wife: I am not offended by being called an enabler. There are no excuses here. Ed admitted to what he had

Drew: Excellent. Unfortunately, he'll sit on death row for a long time. Better there than on the streets....

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Schwartz never has spoken to Jim Ridenour, Modesto's real and elected mayor. He couldn't name even one of the city council members.

It's no different with any of his other cities or states. This is just a hobby, a cyberbreak from his real business.

The 50-something Schwartz is both a legend and a villain in the domain market, according to Domain Name Journal, an online publication. The glib and often acerbic New Jersey native is respected by some and despised by others for his aggressiveness in the domain market.

Domain names — for those of you who, like me, are technosaurs with only a vague understanding of the Internet — are the names in front of the dot-coms. As an example, our Modbee.com is a domain name.

He owns 5,000 such monikers including candy.com and property.com, and if he happens to own the one you want, you have to buy it from him. That can get expensive.

A dozen years ago, Schwartz plopped down \$100 for LipService.com, his first foray into domains. According to the magazine, he sold one of his domain names — Men.com — for \$1.32 million.

He also makes money through advertising from the 3 million Web sites associated with his domain names.

He made \$20 million in his first eight years working the domain market and became the self-proclaimed "Domain King."

"I make my living on the Internet," he said.

Indeed. In 1997, he bought a domain name called porno.com.

Yes, Modesto's virtual mayor owns porno.com.

He paid \$42,000 for the name, and his friends thought he'd gotten so absorbed in the domain market that he'd lost his mind.

"They thought I was a moron for paying that much for one that, a few years before, I could have gotten for free," he said.

It paid for itself within three weeks through the advertising on the site, he said.

A similar site, porn.com, sold Thursday for \$9 million, according to DomainTools Blog. It's just a matter of time before someone makes an offer on his porno.com site, and his \$42,000 investment will make him look like a genius.

"You have to do things when everyone thinks you're stupid to be smart down the road," he said.

Which brings us back to his being Modesto's virtual mayor. He bought the city before it was named the worst metropolitan area in the country according to the recently released book, "Cities Ranked and Rated, Second Edition."


But like any other "mayor," he's not discouraged.


"If you are the best, you can only go down," he said. "If you are the worst, you can only go up."


Kind of like the value of a domain name or even a cybercity.


To check out Schwartz's Modesto site, go to www.weblo.com/property/city/Modesto/65393.

To comment, click on the link with this column at www.modbee.com. Jeff Jardine's column appears Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays in Local News. He can be reached at jjardine@modbee.com or 578-2383.

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