

With the Electronic Postcard, anyone can send a digital postcard to anyone else in the world who has an email address and access to the World Wide Web. As in the real world, you choose a card from a variety of images, write your message, and send it off. These postcards, however, are electronic. No physical card is sent. The image and the message are kept online. Because the Electronic Postcard is part of the World Wide Web, the message contents can be hypertext: images and sounds can be part of the message, and there can be links to any other data in the Web.

Since there is no mechanism within the Web for reading mail, the postcard is not sent directly to the recipient. Instead, the recipient receives a notice that a postcard is waiting at the Postcard Office. The notice includes the Web address for the Postcard Office and the recipient's claim number. At SIGGRAPH 95, a special branch Postcard Office features images from the Art Gallery and the technical programs.

The World Wide Web is potentially an excellent environment for online communities. It contains a wealth of

information on a huge number of topics, ranging from the most esoteric of artistic and scientific endeavors, to the most mundane of product advertisements. It includes electronic facades of big corporations and sometimes surprisingly candid self-portraits of thousands of individuals. Yet it is not possible to communicate with others in this environment; each Web explorer wanders alone.

The Electronic Postcard provides a way to use the World Wide Web for interpersonal communication. With the ability to intersperse links to other

sites in the text of the message, one can not only supply pointers to useful information, but also develop a new vocabulary of asides, puns, and references.

<http://postcards.www.media.mit.edu/postcards/>

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