Borne out of the innovative talents of 3D animation company Protozoa, DotComix is fast becoming a stylish and diverse production-destination voice on the Web. Using performance animation as its cornerstone, dotcomix.com is a whirlpool of contemporary animated content with approximately 14 episodic titles now online. These zany, irreverent cartoons all showcase the Web potential for deep, rich real-time programming. By successfully marrying a passel of characters with their award-winning motion-capture software Alive!, DotComix can boast of bringing new animated series to life faster and at a lower cost than anyone else on today’s Internet domains.

Launched in March of 1999 from their headquarters in San Francisco, the entertainment company’s array of online shows is an eclectic mix of original fare alongside animated productions based on comic books and radio series. Targeting the early adopter Internet crowd of 18-34 year olds, the site’s comedy writing is satirical and cheeky -- with the added attraction of being able to offer dead-on topical stories drawn from headline news, made possible by the incredibly fast turnaround of their unique production process.

Dotting the Net
Two of the site’s most popular titles are Gates Of Hell, a madcap parody starring the beleaguered Microsoft chairman, and Virtual Bill, another real-life celebrity lampoon featuring a digitized President Clinton. Initially created in 1998 for MTV on-air broadcasts, Virtual Bill has been the first major property to underscore the creatively successful and technically seamless transference of a DotComix show between the broadcast and Internet mediums.
Although photo-realistic humans are very hard to achieve in CGI, especially when animating recognizable figures, DotComix did their homework with these two properties by first clocking the real-life characters’ expressions and mannerisms, carefully casting both the motion and voice actors, then skillfully animating them within their special blend of motion sensor and computer artistry.

Other current Net productions include: the original series Sister Randy, an uproarious course in art history conducted by a cigarette-puffing nun (having gained immense popularity, the series was just recently licensed by BBC America).... Mr. Cranky, a disembodied face and hands spouting angry yet timely reviews on the latest video releases (the series motto being: "He never met a movie he didn’t loathe!")…The Dr. Science series, based on the long-running NPR program, is currently airing on entertaindom.com, along with the original DotComix series Floops…. and Tom Tomorrow, This Modern World which utilizes a flat, cut-out style of animation that is, nonetheless, also produced with a motion-capture underpinning to achieve a quicker production schedule. For community play, the site offers up a SPAM-O-GRAM section which gives the viewer a revolving selection of toon favorites that can be personalized with messages, then forwarded swiftly through e-mails around the online world.

DUKE 2000 — An Animated Quest for the White House

A major company effort (and source of great fun) surrounds DotComix’ newest collaboration with Gary Trudeau on the production of the Duke2000 Presidential campaign. The company first worked with Trudeau on a 3D animated rock video, which was webcast during NetAid’s live international event to fight hunger on October 9th of last year. The on-going Duke2000 campaign, unquestionably the first transmedia event of its kind, entails the fictional Ambassador Duke running for President in the real world. Animated and produced by DotComix, written by Trudeau and a team of writers working together with the dotcomix staff, Duke has been appearing in multiple media locales since his candidacy was announced earlier this year. Venues include: online (with new content going up each week at dotcomix and the Excite sponsored duke2000.com), on television (a one hour Larry King Live interview featured the animated Duke interacting in real-time with celebrities Al Franken and Bill Maher, with a number of other TV appearances coming up soon); on radio (a 30 city drive-time interview tour was just completed last month); and in print media (including Duke’s regular visits to Trudeau’s Doonesburystrip, and published interviews such as the one in the May issue of George magazine). As the company describes it: "With Duke’s subversive campaign, the walls between the various media are crumbling."

Note: Readers may contact any Animation World Magazine contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.