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from the July 03, 2000 edition

## Earn (very little) money surfing the Web!

James Turner

Consumers face a hailstorm of marketing schemes.

The latest: those "Get Paid to Surf the Web" offers you may have received via e-mail.

The concept sounds simple enough: You go to a specified Web site and download some software that can splash ads on your computer screen. In return, you get paid some hourly rate.

Perhaps a dozen of these programs are out there, but we'll stick to one of the best known: AllAdvantage.com. The site is relatively honest in its promotional material and policies. It has a clear privacy statement and goes to great lengths to explain its service.

AllAdvantage also has strong policies in place to prevent people looking for new referrals from using that annoying tactic called "spamming," where vast numbers of unsolicited come-ons are sent to random e-mail accounts.

The basic deal, however, is somewhat less attractive than you might expect based on the e-mail we received - claiming \$7,000 per month returns.

For every hour you surf with the AllAdvantage program running, they pay you a certain amount (currently 50 cents an hour for US users.)

AllAdvantage doesn't spell out what "surfing" consists of. It probably doesn't count time doing e-mail or talking in chat rooms. So even though the program may be spewing out ads, you may not actually be earning money all the time.

Even so, a buck every two hours may not sound so bad to those of us who spend hundreds of hours a month on the Web. Unfortunately, only the first 15 hours every month actually make money for you, so you'll never get more than \$7.50 a month no matter how much you surf. And you'll have to wait four months for that first check, since AllAdvantage doesn't cut one until you hit \$30.

OK, you say, but that's still \$30 I didn't have in my pocket. True, but in return you have (1) let them learn lots about the Web pages you visit and your browsing habits, (2) given up about a tenth of your screen space, and (3) kept a program constantly running that eats up some of your machine's available processing power.

So how do you get those huge checks the e-mails talk about? Why, you refer your friends, of course. As with every other form of "multilevel marketing," you only make big bucks if you get lots of minions generating revenue for you, and each of them gets referrals, and so on.

If this makes you think of certain ancient triangular Egyptian landmarks, I won't say you're wrong.

Is it worth the effort? Well, if you're one of those folks who gets excited when your Discover Card rebate shows up with the \$2.34 you earned that year, perhaps these programs are for you. Just surf over to

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\*James Turner is a computer consultant and avid Web surfer.

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