TECH LIFE

FIRST PAST THE POST

L-MAIL AIMS TO ADD INTERNET SPEED TO THE TRADITIONAL DOORSTEP POSTAL SERVICE. **BABITA WAKELIN** REPORTS

It is the telegraph with a 21st century twist, a new way of sending mail which aims to put Leicestershire at the hub of a global communications network. L-Mail, designed by a computer whizz kid from Ratby, is a new service which bridges the gap between snail mail and net-mail.

Launched this week, it offers businesses and consumers the chance to post letters via the internet – and promises to open up a market of up to five billion people who can't access e-mail.

To use it, customers simply type their letters into the website. At a click of a button, they are printed out in another location and then sent using the traditional postal service. There are seven global centres so far, six capital cities and Ratby.

The developers of L-Mail claim it will save users time and money. "People want the convenience of typing an e-mail but receiving a letter," said Peter Harris, managing director of QIQ, the company behind it.

DESTINATIONS

"At present, only a billion people in the world have e-mail, so there are around five billion you can't send e-mail to.

"Typically if you're overseas and travelling and want to get in touch with elderly people, you might want to send a letter.

"This way, you can type out the letter using the web browser and it gets printed out in one of seven destinations."

Initially, while you will be able to send L-Mail to any address in the world, it will be printed and posted from either Ratby, London, Edinburgh, Sydney, British Columbia, Madrid, Ellensburg, on the west coast of America, or New York.

"It's ideal for businesses wanting assurance of reliable, next-day delivery," says Peter.

"If you want to do mail shots or business letters, it can be done easily. At the moment, you can only send a standard letter, but in the next couple of months we will be giving businesses the ability to upload logos, send multiple letters and format text and letter heading."

ARTWORK: IAN FRANKLIN

TWIST IN THE MAIL: L-Mail involves the convenience of typing an e-mail but receiving a letter, say the system's developers

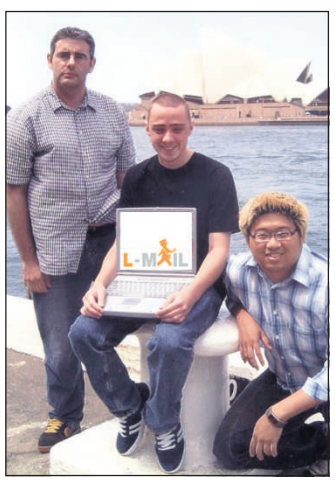
The site, designed by Ratby-born Paul Hamlington, is easy to use. There are four steps to sending out your letter.

The former Groby Community College student said it took him 12 months to develop the system. "I'd already worked for Pete at L-Mail during my degree," said the 24-year-old.

"After I'd finished my degree at De Montfort University, I jumped at the chance of working in Sydney with Pete.

"After Pete come up with the idea, and researched it, it took around 12 months to sort out."

The system sounds good in principle, but however fast the electronic side of L-Mail is, it relies on Mr or Ms Postie dropping the letter off at the other end.



INNOVATING: Peter Harris, Paul Hamlington and Billy Law, of L-Mail inventor QIQ

PUTTING L-MAIL TO THE TEST

ON the day of launch we sent a letter to Sydney and one to Whitwick.

It cost 58p to send a message to Ellie Marlow in Whitwick. That's 30p more than a first-class stamp.

Nine hours later we got an automated reply, telling us the letter had been printed and posted.

It was delivered to Ellie the following day, but the service is really aimed at overseas post, so we sent a letter to journalist Rebecca Jenkins in Sydney.

This cost 80p – against a £1.56 price for a stamp to Australia.

It only took 20 minutes for the response, noting the letter had been printed and sent, and also how much my credit card was going to be debited.

Thanks to the vagaries of e-mail though, and the time difference between Britain and Australia which stops us giving her a call at work, we're still not sure if the envelope has arrived.

Be warned, the service costs more if you use a debit as opposed to a credit card.

Spider: The guide for webheads

DEREK Tastes of Earwax was the bizarre title of a captivating edition of the BBC2 programme Horizon this week.

It told the story of a condition called synaesthesia, in which the senses overlap and become intermingled, causing sounds to evoke particular tastes or black letters to appear in colour.

Scientists reckon creative people are more prone to the phenomenon. Find out if you have a mild form of it here.

www.bbc.co.uk/science/human-body/mind/index_surveys.shtml

GLOBETROTTERS among you will be familiar with them, but the rest of us can only sit and wonder what the sick bags look like on jets operated by All Nippon Airways, Air Tahiti, Hawaiian Airlines and the like.

Until now. The site Museum of Sick Bags reveals all. They are clean, fortunately.

apollomaniacs.web.infoseek.co.jp/bags/foreigne.htm

FACT: More working days are lost to staff doing image quizzes than to flu.

Actually, that is not true, but they are going round like a virus. This one is different from the film-TV-football bunch and is relatively simple.

The site shows you some images, you figure out what search words produced them.

blog.outer-court.com/quiz/

GAWP at celebrity nips and tucks gone wrong.

www.awfulplasticsurgery.com

POPULAR: Jo Guest

THE TOP 10 INTERNET SEARCHES

1 Jordana Jardel
2 Lucy Pinder
3 Jo Guest
4 Natalie Denning
5 Abi Titmuss
6 Cheap Flights
7 Games
8 Brooke Burke
9 Loans
10 Horoscopes

Chart supplied by Lycos.co.uk

LIFESPAN ON MONDAY: THE HIDDEN DISEASE

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