News Track

WARS BLOGGED

Just as the Vietnam War was the first televised war, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq will likely be known as the first wars to be blogged. *BBC News* reports that members of this new generation of U.S. military bloggers, or milbloggers, are sharing their fighting experiences online, giving rise to what many followers claim is some of the most riveting reporting about the war. Pioneering bloggers, with names like Greyhawk, Lt. Smash, and Sergeant Hook, have garnered a global following and inspired countless other soldiers, pilots, marines, and sailors worldwide. However, military officials, now more than concerned about the content of these burgeoning blogs, have begun clamping down on the unregulated wartime writings as a potential security risk. In fact, some bloggers have been disciplined for releasing sensitive information or for breaking other military rules in their blogs. Greyhawk advises fellow milbloggers to think how a post will be received by his or her mother, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Osama bin Laden. "Not everyone can approach a keyboard with that kind of responsibility over their heads," he says.

SNAP JUDGMENTS

First impressions not only count, some lasting impressions are made in the first 50 milliseconds of viewing. So concludes a study by researchers at Carleton University in Ottawa who found the brain can make flash judgments almost as fast as the eye can take in the information. *Nature* reports the study shows the snap decisions Internet users make about the quality of a Web page have a lasting impact on their attitudes about an organization and the people or products behind it. Volunteers were presented the briefest glimpses of Web pages and were asked to rate the sites on visual appeal. Unbeknownst to them, these pages had been previously rated as easy or jarring on the eye. The images were flashed for 50 milliseconds, roughly the duration of a single frame of standard TV footage; still, their verdicts reflected previous judgments. So what kind a Web page makes a lasting impression? London-based Web designer Marc Caudron says graphics on a page should be strictly limited, perhaps to a single eye-catching image. Use a "puritan approach" to get information across simply and quickly, and make sure your Web site loads quickly. "That can be the difference between big business and no business," says Caudron.

CMU's ROBO-RECEPTIONIST

A team of researchers at Carnegie Mellon has developed a robotic receptionist named Marion "Tank" LeFleur that answers questions typed into its keyboard, often with a healthy dose of robo 'tude. In an effort to make robots more interesting and engaging, CS professor Reid Simmons told NPR Online that the Tank team included members of CMU's School of Drama to help create storylines to give the robot more personality. Unfortunately, some of Tank's "history" includes former careers at NASA and the CIA that failed miserably and left him quite cynical. "Everyone knows those government agencies have quotas to fill. I was the