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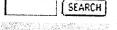### Women of the Webbies
At awards for the year's best Web sites, women stake their claim.

by **David Harris** | may 15, 2000

Dubbed the "Oscars of the Internet," this year's Webbie Awards honored more than two dozen of the year's best Web sites. But was the room packed with male techies with flustered hair and thick black glasses? Hardly.

In other words, it wasn't even close to an all-guy gala.

Winners such as radio producers Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva of the Kitchen Sisters, who helped launch Lost & Found Sound just one year ago, were thrilled to be holding the slinky Webby statuette. Their Web site, which features 56 radio programs, is a national collaboration between radio producers, collectors, film sound designers, and public radio listeners.

"It's very exciting," said Nelson, who sees the Internet as a vital component of what she says everyone we will be calling radio years from now.

Emceed by Tony Award-winning actor Alan Cumming, the May 11 ceremonies featured a strict five-word limit on acceptance speeches, numerous references to web developers as "revolutionaries," and, naturally, performance artists who repelled down from atop the auditorium at the beginning and closing of the festivities.

"This year's winners hail from South Park [San Francisco], the South of France, Soho, and all points in between," said Tiffany Shlain, the founder and director of the Webby Awards, which are presented by the International Academy of Digital Arts & Sciences. "What links them, however, is that they represent the

best of the best in a medium that knows no boundaries."

What Gender Divide?

One of those traditional boundaries has been gender. But the "digital divide" between the sexes has been bridged dramatically over the last several years, especially with the proliferation of Web sites that act as resources for women, as well as a clearer understanding of the differences between the online practices of women versus men. Studies have shown that women tend to use the Internet for information and, unlike their male counterparts, aren't interested in being online for hours at a time.

According to the San Francisco-based research firm VentureOne, women were chief executives in about 6 percent of venture capital-backed Internet firms and held top management positions in 45 percent of such start-ups in 1999. Just one year before, women held the chief executive position 4 percent of the time and accounted for only 21percent of senior management positions.

Evite.com, an online resource for event planners, which took home the Webby in the "Services" category, has three women on an executive board of seven. For them, winning a Webby was sweetly gratifying.

"I think having a female engineer and a female executive makes for a different culture at work," explained Sarah Jordan, a marketing and communications associate at Evite.com.

"It feels fantastic," said Selina Tobaccowala, the vice president of engineering and co-founder of the company. "When you're surrounded by smart people, gender doesn't matter."

Still, Tobaccowala, who received a degree in computer science from Stanford University, is somewhat of an exception to the rule in computer science academic programs across the U.S., which many see as the gateway to competitive offers from Internet companies to new graduates. According to a 1998 study, the peak year for computer science female graduates was 1983-84, when women earned 37 percent of computer science bachelor's degrees (32,172 degrees). In 1993-94 that percentage dwindled to 28 percent.

But apparent statistical discrepancies don't matter all that much when web-celebs like Mahir Cagri, the Turkish bachelor who created the wildly popular "I Kiss You" site are hanging about. In the end, product, not gender, is what matters on the Internet, and guests were less concerned with gender than with the post-party bash awaiting them.

"Our site is everybody's brainchild," said web engineer Sandra Wong of Lost and Found Sound, a winner in the "Radio" category. "Hundreds of people helped put this together."

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