

# Life/Science & Technology

## Bringing families closer together; all politics all the time

**W**hat Kevin Strauss, president of FamilyJournal Online (www.familyjournal.com), doesn't know about his family could fill numerous books, and the 33 year-old bachelor is not alone. That is exactly why he created FamilyJournal.com.

"There is a lot parents, children and siblings don't know about each other," Mr. Strauss says from his office in Columbia, Md. "The problem is that it can be difficult to start and maintain the communication process."

FamilyJournal.com came about thanks to Mr. Strauss' day job at Amron, a private research company in McLean that works with the National Institutes of Health to provide ideas for NIH's Small Business Innovation Research grants program. NIH turned down the concept for FamilyJournal, giving Mr. Strauss the opportunity to develop the Web site.

"The concept emerged when I began thinking about how important family communication is and e-mail. Some of my best friends I have only met in person a few times, but because we have such intense e-mail conversations, I knew more about them than people I have known for years, including my own family," Mr. Strauss says.

"But families don't use e-mail to share their more personal thoughts and feelings, so I thought if you could create an environment where a dialogue could begin with a few simple questions designed to encourage people, families, to share with each other, it might be helpful."

Mr. Strauss created the site's content with help from Wendy Kliewer, Deborah Hage and Allie Henze, his teen liaison. That finished content was turned over to a commercial Web-site developer, and the site was introduced in January.



JOE SZADKOWSKI

Tech gadgets

The site's main user interface consists of two elements, the Daily Experience Worksheet (DEW) and the Memo. The DEW consists of four simple questions that could be on any topic, such as favorite memories, health, goals, dreams or achievements. The list is endless. Family members simply log into their private account each day and answer the DEW questions, leaving their responses for other family members to read.

The Memo can then be used to send a quick note to discuss those daily DEW responses or just to let Mom know you aced your math test.

"The site's function is important because it does start the communication process, something that not all families are good at," Mr. Strauss says. "The hope is that by starting that communication process, as our children grow they will feel more connected, which will hopefully help to keep them from destructive behaviors. And if the time should come that they need to talk to someone, they will already be comfortable sharing with Mom and Dad, grandparents, siblings, anyone that you register into your family group."

For the time being, FamilyJournal.com is a free service, but that is something Mr. Strauss hopes to change soon. Without having done any marketing, he already has registered more than 70 families in six countries — a number he hopes will grow through word-of-mouth advertising.

"The Internet is a global medium, and there are millions of families in this world," Mr. Strauss says. "And all families have issues at some time. All families can benefit by improving their communication. The things I have learned about my parents through the DEW have surprised me and brought me even closer to them. This is an easy way to learn to talk to each other before it becomes a necessity."

At this time, FamilyJournal has limited resource content, something Mr. Strauss hopes to change as he creates new areas filled with links to health and human services organizations around the world, as well as member-driven ideas for family entertainment — from polls and contests to fun ways to spend the evening at home.

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