

Web prize junkies

Who would have thought the Internet would be a treasure-trove of free goodies? **PHILIP MEHIGAN** will show you how to use the internet as a tool for finding great competitions and getting those elusive prizes.

WHEN I set about researching what the internet had in the way of competitions and freebies, I didn't think much of it - I just thought that I'd find a lot of websites with annoying pop-up windows that promised millions, but instead delivered spam if I gave them my email address.

But what I did find out surprised me. Behind the thin layer of garbage that the internet usually pulls up when you look up "competitions" on a search engine, there are some interesting sites out there.

On www.lottos.com.au I found an entire community of Australian competition junkies, 'compers' or 'compoholics' as they call themselves.

For \$35 a year members of the website gain access to view a huge online database of thousands of current competitions sorted and summarised into various categories.

I posted an invitation for an interview on the lottos forum and a woman from Tamworth NSW responded.

Sharon is a 'comper'. A stay-at-home mother of two who enjoys entering competitions as a hobby. She devotes three hours a day to researching and entering comps and last year won more than \$16,000 worth of prizes.

These included a home entertainment package with a TV, surround sound and DVD player and also a three day holiday to the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

At this time she was given VIP status, which afforded her

and her family early entry to the show and the meeting of celebrity racing car drivers.

As well she and her family stayed in the presidential suite of the Westin Sydney hotel, free limo rides, \$1000 worth of free show bags for the kids and free food the whole time.

"They made it so that we couldn't have anything but rave reviews for the holiday, we were treated like royalty," Sharon said.

Sharon started entering contests from a young age, doing colouring-in competitions, radio competitions and providing entries for the local newspaper just for fun.

But the prizes got her hooked. So for the past 15 years it has been something of an addiction.

"It was a lot of work to begin with, buying magazines, newspapers and browsing the aisles of the supermarkets looking for stickers on tins of peaches and displays with entry forms, but since I found www.lottos.com.au I can just look up the competitions on the forums without having to go look for them. It saves me a lot of time, and I can be choosy and search for competitions with prizes that interest me, no more running around!

"The lottos forum is one big community. Despite the anonymity a nickname and hundreds of kilometres afford, everyone is friendly and helpful. For example there is no Action supermarket near where I live, but I heard that the chain was holding a



Presidential Suite in the Westin Sydney Hotel, one of the prize opportunities on the web.

competition, so I just posted a request for entry details and a friendly member of the forum went out of their way to find me the details and post them up on the board so I could enter."

I asked Sharon about whether her family supports her competition hobby, and she says the whole family gets involved.

Her husband collects entry forms and products with promotions at the supermarket on Saturdays, her kids enter the children's competitions and everyone gets to enjoy the prizes when they arrive in the mail or by courier van.

Recently Sharon entered a Second Chance draw for a Tim Tam competition and won five

boxes of Tim Tams totalling close to 1000 chocolate biscuits all up. Her kids were rapt.

"Christmas time is a big time of year for me. All the competitions occur around consumer holidays like Easter, Mother's Day and Father's Day, but especially around Christmas.

"All the brands are competing for sales and they all start offering competitions. Luckily for me, everyone is busy around the Christmas period, so I just enter all the competitions and clean up all the prizes. I hardly need to do any Christmas shopping because the prizes I win cover it. I get food hampers, toys, clothes and DVDs to give away

as gifts. In the lead up to Christmas I get prizes every day in the mail. It's great!"

When I asked Sharon whether she would recommend 'comping' as a hobby, she said "definitely".

The Lottos forum makes it an easy hobby to get started in as each competition has all the details of what is required, whether it is an answer to a trivia question, 25 word or less slogan, a bar code number, etc. Just send your entry to the address and you are in.

Sharon says she goes through \$25 worth of stamps a week and her postie where she puts her competition entries in her letterbox and he takes them when he delivers the mail each day.

Sharon had some advice for new compers.

- Don't get discouraged if you don't start winning straight away
- Read 'Winners are Grinners' by Mach N Dinh-vu
- Ask other compers for advice
- Watch out....competitions can become addictive!!

Alert! [X] [] []

Congrats!

Your banner
ID #184B6832
has won our
hourly contest.

Click here

to claim
your prize.

Search tips and tricks

HAVE you ever searched the internet only to find that there are too many results from your search? It pays to construct a search carefully. Here are some basic hints that will help reduce the frustration.

- always be as specific as you can ie; use barramundi instead of fish.
- when searching for an exact phrase or a person's name, use quotation ,arks ie; "dead sea scrolls" or "Cathy Freeman"
- Some search engines use an asterisk as a "wildcard". If you are searching for "volcano" and you also want your search to include volcanoes and volcanic, all you need to do is use volcan* for your search word. You can also use wildcards within a word. For example, organi*ation, will find "organisation" as well as "organization".
- Get to know what your search engine can do to make your search more precise. A good place to start is at the help screen.

How to join lottos

Go to www.lottos.com.au

Click on forums and browse,

You can gain Premium access to the site and be able to check out all the competitions and use the Comptracker tool for a \$35 a year membership fee

Go to

www.lottos.com.au/forum/purchase.php to become a premium subscriber

Once you are in, you will have access to thousands of competitions

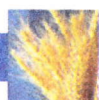
Features of lottos

A list of forum members winnings updated daily. An average of 1400 running competitions is listed with an average total prize pool value of \$75 million. Also includes free email accounts hosted by lottos.com.au

Premium Features

Access to the competition directory, sorted by date, prize value and 82 other ways. InclAccess to the Comptracker which allows people to mark competitions as 'entered' or 'not interested' which is useful when there are on average 1400 competitions running simultaneously.

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