

# ***Party Life.com***

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

## **CUBICLE DWELLERS LET LOOSE AT FRENZIED INTERNET NIGHTLIFE SCENE THAT IS SWEEPING S.F.**

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PHOTO: RICHARD KOCI HERNANDEZ -- MERCURY NEWS

[Marketing Executive](#) Phil Yeh, above, celebrates after taking a shot from the "ice luge," an ice sculpture that dispenses liquor. The party, which had a Mardi Gras theme, marked the first anniversary of Beenz.com.

Patty Beron, queen of the city's dot-com party scene, stands on the balcony and surveys her subjects.

Hundreds of Internet professionals are dancing on the marble floor of the San Francisco Federal Reserve building to the syncopated beat of a zydeco band. They're gobbling the piles of free jambalaya, rice and beans and pecan pie that line the walls. They're standing three-deep at the bars for the free booze.

And one is eagerly pressing his mouth against the bottom of an ice sculpture that will soon dispense a shot of lemon-flavored vodka -- a dot-com standard known as the ice luge.

"Not bad," says Beron, who runs a Web site ([www.sfgirl.com](http://www.sfgirl.com)) that chronicles the exploding dot-com party phenomenon that is transforming San Francisco's night life. "The turnout is lighter than I thought. There was a lot of hype for this one, maybe too much."

Tonight's bash is courtesy of Beenz.com, one of those Internet companies that does, well, something or other on the Web. For many here tonight, this is the fourth dot-com party of the week -- or is it the fifth? -- and things are getting a bit blurry. Nobody even seems to care that the theme of the \$40,000 party is Mardi Gras even though it's being held on St. Patrick's Day.

Such details don't bother the new hip-shaking, Prada-wearing, martini-swilling Internet crowd. Their days are spent in a cubicle. Their nights are spent finding the next party, crashing it, consuming all the free booze and food they can get and then hoping they won't be so hung over the next morning that the glare of the computer screen will hurt their eyes.

All this is possible thanks to the largess of venture capitalists, investors and Internet executives desperate to create buzz for their new enterprises. As their money pumps through the veins of San Francisco, it's providing a ready-made social scene for dot-commers flocking here.

It is also filling the pockets of club owners, entertainers and event planners. In the increasingly crowded Internet scene, companies are counting on these people to help them stand out.

The Net set knows this won't last forever. But for now, the Internet is a party, and someone else is picking up the tab.

"It's a great thing if you're single and in your 20s or 30s," says Beron, who is 32. "When you come, you know your friends will be here and you'll run into people you know. In reality, everyone is craving a sense of community or a sense of belonging. Deep down, that's what this is about."

## **Making her entrance**

Beron rolls the cherry-red Mardi Gras beads between her fingers and descends the stairs past a makeshift Bourbon Street sign into the Beenz.com party crowd. Her blonde hair is pulled back, and she's holding a vodka-and-cranberry-juice in one hand. The other hand is wrapped in a splint, fractured in a recent skateboarding accident.

She brushes past one of the dozen unsmiling Beenz.com employees dressed as giant red kidney beans -- the company logo. The costumes are so wide that the human Beenz must walk sideways through the crowds.

Under a spotlight, Beron finds a dozen of her closest friends dancing -- the SFgirl party posse.

The members of the mostly female posse work for Internet companies doing marketing, business development, accounting and advertising. Beron manages a community content team for a company that will go public in the next few weeks. They are a youthful, good-looking, high-energy bunch -- just the kind of people a hot start-up covets.

"These companies are concerned about morale and people leaving," says Gene Smith, an event planner for Encore Productions who is juggling 12 to 14 events at any given time. "The headhunters can't fill the jobs. So they want to make sure it's a fun place for people to be."

Of course, tech companies have always spent conspicuous amounts of money on parties, hosting big events at trade shows, Friday beer bashes and wine-and-cheese affairs for big customers.

What's notable about the San Francisco scene is not the lavishness of any single event, but the sheer quantity of them -- four or five nearly every week, sometimes two or three in a night. The parties are concentrated in the South of Market area, where most of the city's Internet companies -- and many of the trendiest party venues -- are located.

Last week's party train started on Wednesday at the Spectrum Gallery with Radiate.com's celebration of its relocation from Indiana.

## Looking for more

As that party wound down around 9:30 p.m., the crowd moved on to WildCard Wednesday, a regular rotating schmoozefest, held this week at the Glas Kat bar and sponsored by E-Color and Finlandia Vodka.

Dimitri, a male model who didn't want his last name used, gazed out at the crowd and shook his head in wonder at the Internet worker bees buzzing around the room. Dimitri said he was hired to model in the party's fashion show, but he sometimes gets paid to simply show up at dot-com parties.

"It's weird," he said. "They're not looking for the real me. They just want another attractive face there."

On Thursday night, the dot-com crowd reconvened at the Spectrum Gallery for the launch of Wholepeople.com, the Internet subsidiary of Whole Foods. Though neither is based in the Bay Area, Wholepeople said it felt the launch party needed to be here to generate buzz.

All this led up to the Beenz.com affair Friday to celebrate the company's first anniversary.

Perhaps no one brings a better resume to the dot-com party scene than Beron.

The Los Angeles native graduated from San Francisco State University in 1992 with a degree in recreation and leisure services.

A short-lived career in event planning changed her life. First, it exposed her to computers, and she now works as a Web site developer.

Second, she learned that "the city is big on free things if you know where to look." Beron got invites to restaurants, nightclubs and hot spots who wanted her business.

Things were more beer-and-peanuts when she moved to the tech industry in the mid-1990s.

Then the Internet money spigot turned on full blast. Beron had started SFgirl.com last April as a site for San Francisco Internet professionals, but it quickly became a guide to the burgeoning party scene.

## Rating the action

Beron recruited a friend to review parties anonymously under the byline "sfboy." He's dubbed the crowd of dot-com party seekers "Webtrash" and offers razor-sharp reviews of the various events.

His biggest rave went to Acteva -- formerly Tixtogo -- which brought more than 3,500 people to a former airplane hangar on Treasure Island last October. The party featured trapeze artists, pig races, go-go dancers, an appearance by Mayor Willie Brown, a funk band and a DJ.

"Long after the company goes belly-up due to a lack of revenue, the renaming of Acteva will be remembered as a lesson in corporate debauchery and a refuge for those seeking the ultimate free Thursday night," wrote sfboy.

Creating those pricey extravaganzas is big business.

Ruby Skye, a downtown nightclub owned by Inner Circle Entertainment, opened last month with the high-tech party scene in mind. The large space has concert-style lighting and a back room for caterers.

Lynda Karpaty, director of sales for Inner Circle, helps pick the music, entertainment and food for an event -- things a young company usually has no clue how to do.

"These people don't want to have a party at a hotel," she said. "They want some 'wow,' and money is no object. And that's a beautiful thing."

Thomas Roedoc, owner of the Spectrum Gallery, has watched as his clients have gotten younger and hipper. Their main problem comes when the chief executive gets up on stage to talk about the company.

"I try to tell them to keep it short," Roedoc said. "They actually think people are really interested. They're not."

Part of the challenge for party hoppers is finding out about the events -- and crashing them. Besides SFgirl.com, there are a handful of e-mail lists that alert people to upcoming parties, including WorkIt and the WildCard Group.

Since many of the official invitations go out over e-mail, they can be easily spammed all over town.

New York-based Beenz.com found that out in February when it held a party at the Great American Music Hall to create some buzz for its Internet "currency," which works like a frequent flyer account, giving you points -- or beenz -- for visiting Web sites.

"We wanted to build some awareness," said Tonya Edwards, Beenz.com's [vice president marketing](#). "We hadn't made a splash in the local market."

## Invitations by e-mail

Edwards sent out her carefully selected invitations by e-mail, hoping optimistically to get 500 RSVPs. But the invitation was forwarded to others, then posted on SFgirl.com. On the night of the party, 750 people squeezed in, and hundreds more were turned away.

Total cost: more than \$40,000. "But we were pleased at the quality," Edwards said. "It was really good networking for us."

The buzz from the first party prompted Beenz.com executives to hold last Friday's anniversary celebration in San Francisco -- the last in a weeklong series of parties around the world.

A little before midnight, the Beenz.com party is still building energy, like a light getting brighter just before it burns out. An impromptu conga line swivels through the room. And one of the employees dressed as a kidney bean arches his back and slides under a makeshift limbo bar.

"There's all this free food," says Beron, imploring her restless friends to stay a bit longer. "And I don't even have a buzz yet."

The party seekers never know whether tonight's party will be the last. Surely someone will come to their senses. Or the stock market will plunge.

"It can't last forever," says Scott Engler, manager of business development at Egreetings.com, who attends several parties each week.

But it's not over yet. Just for tonight.

The lights are going out. Some of the dot-commers are trying to steal the giant Beenz.com bean bags scattered around the second floor. A few are making a last, half-hearted attempt to convince someone else they shouldn't go home alone.

And a man wearing a court jester's hat is looking for someone, anyone, to finish off the last few shots of the lemon-flavored vodka at the ice luge, which is melting fast.

