

*Frugal  
Free-Lance (both free-lance (works better)  
Gotta  
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# Working In An E-Lance World

**M**y 9-year-old son's school assignment was to write a 150- to 300-word essay on, "How Computers Have Changed Your Educational Experience." After reading his first draft, I sadly informed him that although what he penned was OK, his work was about 100 words short of the minimum requirement. By the look on his face, you would have thought he was being asked to write an epic the size of *Ulysses*.

After spending some time actually thinking about all the things a computer can do, he proudly returned with his word-count-verified, 151-word essay. I can't blame him for the less-is-more approach. After all, he's the son of an editor. But, what caught my eye reading his final draft was the amount of emphasis he put on the Internet over the other programs and tools the computer provides: "Looking up stuff" (research); "Talking to people" (e-mail); and "Buying Beanie Babies" (e-commerce) were the *best* things a computer could do to enhance his fourth-grade "educational experience."

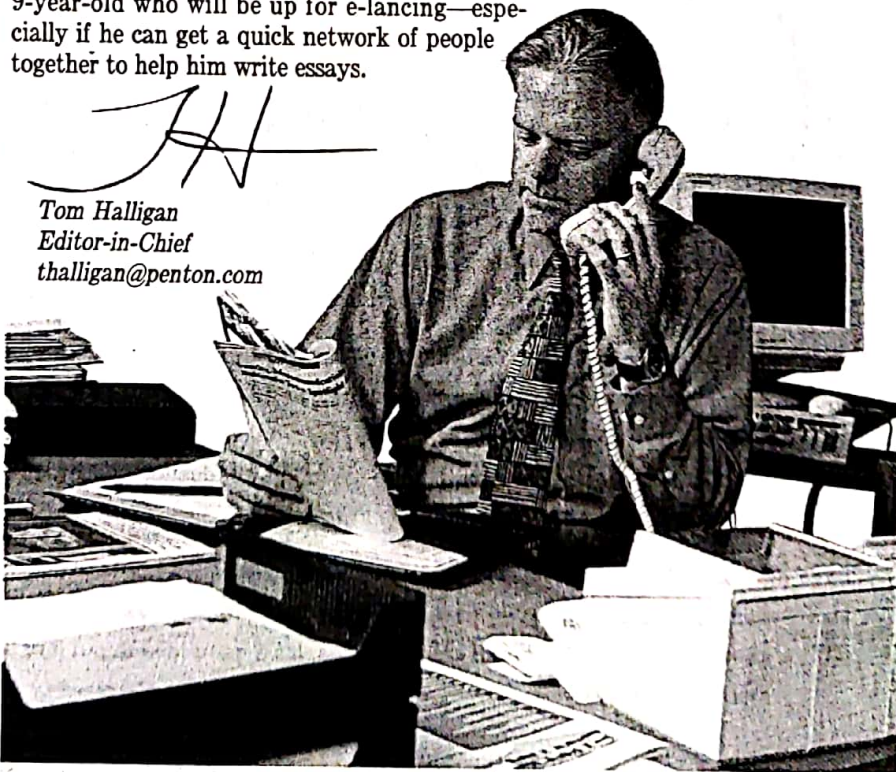
Routine functions such as word processing, playing games, and creating graphics are old hat to most of today's kids because they've always had access to a computer. They don't understand the convenience of it. To them, the computer is just a tool used to get their homework done and kill some time playing CD-ROM games. But, add an Internet connection and the computer morphs into a whole new animal for kids. I guess I shouldn't be surprised that the focus of his essay was on what the Internet can do, rather than the computer itself. To update Sun Microsystems' mantra: The Internet (not the network) is the computer, and it's the reason that sub-\$1000 PCs are selling a heck of a lot more than their brawny and more expensive siblings.

I recently read an article in the *Harvard Business Review* authored by two scholarly guys who contend that we're now moving into the "Dawn of the E-Lance Economy" (September/October 1998). Not knowing what an "e-lance" was, I inquired and was told that, "The dominant business organization of the future may not be a stable, permanent corporation, but rather an elastic network that may sometimes exist for no more than a day or two (to complete a project). Once the project is done, the network will disband and the e-lancers (workers) will move on to their next job via the Internet."

Some of us may have doubts about working in an e-lance world. But, I know one 9-year-old who will be up for e-lancing—especially if he can get a quick network of people together to help him write essays.

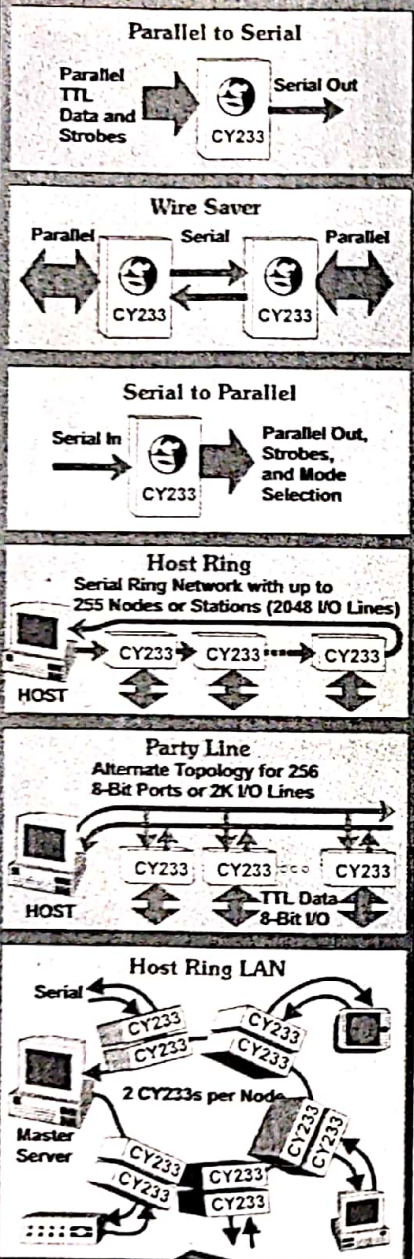
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