 Click to Print[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Keeping up with Gen Xers.

A new breed of parenting Web sites

By Meredith Broussard

For The Inquirer



Like most people, at 29 Rufus Griscom thought a lot about sex. So in 1997 he started the wildly popular Nerve.com, a Web site and community devoted to "literate smut."

Once Nerve became established among the hipster set (today it boasts a line-up of serious writers such as Rick Moody, Mary Gaitskill, Alice Sebold and Jonathan Ames), Griscom thought a lot about dating. So, he started the Spring Street Networks, the online dating engine behind more than 100 sites, including Salon, Esquire, and numerous alternative weeklies.

Now Griscom, who lives in New York, is married and has a 2-year-old. Naturally, he's thinking a lot about parenting. Thus his latest project: Babble.com, one of the new breed of parenting Web sites for Gen X parents who aren't willing to sacrifice all of their street cred for the Sesame Street years.

"I've been accused of starting magazines and online communities relevant to whatever phase of life I happen to be in," says Griscom, now 39.

Call it the aging of the Internet generation - or maybe it's just because Generation X is spawning. As the people who started some of the early Web sites 10 years ago age, the focus of the sites is changing along with them.

For the field of parenting, where content is typically geared toward the mindless and pastel-colored, this is nothing less than a revolution.

"Our goal is not to be fear-based," says Babble editor Ada Calhoun, the mother of 7-month-old Oliver. "I felt like all the things I was reading while I was pregnant were about the terrible things that would happen if you gave your kid a pacifier."

On Babble, these thirtysomething parents can find summaries of expert opinion on the usual gamut of parenting-advice topics: sleeping, TV-watching, breast-feeding, and so on. The site also offers articles, blogs, and personal essays by established writers such as A.M. Homes, Barbara Rushkoff, and Steve Almond. A group blog, Strollerderby, is written by a number of popular parent bloggers including Stefania Pomponi Butler of

CityMama, Rachael Brownell of CrankMama, James Griffioen of Sweet Juniper, and Pierre Kim of MetroDad.

Babble readers, Griscom says, tend to be affluent, urban, and well-educated - much like Nerve's users. They also have a sense of humor and a healthy dose of skepticism about the parent-industrial complex.

"Parenting is a powerful and disruptive life experience. It's deeply moving, it's hilarious - but none of this comes across in print publications," Griscom says.

Babble tries to go beyond the Bugaboo-vs.-Maclaren debate and the heavy "fear and gear" focus of typical parenting media, though it does give a nod to the need for equipment.

"Parenting is a survivalist experience," says Griscom. "My wife and I thought having a baby would be a heartwarming, serene experience, not unlike going to the beach. Turns out, it's more like trekking to the Pole. . . . It's like you're going into battle every day - you need your gear."

Babble also posts reader-submitted YouTube video clips that demonstrate how to use common kid items. In one endearing segment, Calhoun's husband, Williamsburg actor Neal Medlyn, demonstrates the proper use of an infant bathtub - with Oliver looking on and gurgling.

With its attitude and modern appeal, Babble joins other sites such as Alt Dot Life, "the site for an independent woman's well-rounded life" (www.altdotlife.com). Unlike Babble, which is primarily a magazine that also has message boards for readers, ADL is primarily a message board that also has magazine-style content created by readers.

The community began in the traditional manner. A group of women met on the message boards of Indiebride.com, a site for women who are enthusiastic about their weddings but roll their eyes at mountains of tulle. The women liked each other's company so much that they hung around on the site's online community, Kvetch, well after the big day.

As indie brides became indie moms, the motherhood discussions became more and more active, with hundreds of members trading tips and wisdom on mothering. That's when site regular and software engineer Dorothy Brown, 35, decided that the landscape of motherhood and married life deserved its own space. While on maternity leave after the birth of her daughter Sarah in 2005, Brown put together the bones of an online community and invited her friends from Indiebride.

"The first few weeks, there were a lot of librarian-like conversations about categories," says Brown. "Four months later, there was a disproportionately large influx of new mothers. The population tripled in a space of two weeks." Now, the site has about 2,000 members and even a small forum for men, called XY.

ADL has non-mama topics like alt.sports and alt.health, and features general chat for mamas of babies of a certain age ("Rollers, Creepers, and Crawlers" for the 6-to-9-month set or "Fourth Trimester" for newborns). There are also chats on topics like DIY onesies, twins, traveling with kids, parenting and self-employment, or trying to conceive.

Many moms give daily or weekly reports on their babies' progress. "People tend to use it as an online baby book; I know I'm not together enough to actually put one on paper," says Brown. "The thing I find fascinating is reading about everyone else's kid - keeping up with what they're doing."

It's easy to get lost in a conversation on ADL about how much a toddler should be eating, or how much one's baby measures up to a cohort of similarly aged babies. The site is a lifesaver for neurotic moms and has a truly impressive depth of knowledge on childrearing and options: Useful recommendations include using leftover Lansinoh nipple cream on babies' chapped lips and cheeks.

One of the regional discussion threads covers maternity and birth options in Philadelphia, with opinionated commentary on the best midwives at the Birth Center in Bryn Mawr. ADL tends to be more hippie than Babble, with many members interested in attachment parenting, babywearing, and vegetarian living; alternative families are also a large presence.

Both ADL and Babble differ from another popular parenting community, Urbanbaby.com, in that they tend to be

less competitive and aggressive.

In a recent Urbanbaby post, one woman complained, "My self-esteem has been terrible during pregnancy. I wish I could see through my husband's eyes, he is constantly telling me how I am beautiful, sexy, etc. Just wish I could see it." A respondent warned her: "Leave this board . . . before someone makes you feel worse than you do."

At a popular Philly parenting site, DancingMeatballs.com, the tone is nothing but positive - even whimsical, according to its founders. This site, launched in August 2006 by 30-year-old Wharton grads Cheryl Provorny and Janelle Tsai, features a weekly newsletter and listings of free and inexpensive events for parents and kids.

"We try to screen as many places as possible beforehand for stroller accessibility, and to make sure the bathrooms are clean," says Provorny, who is expecting her first child in September.


Working parents have been the biggest fans of the site so far, especially those whose weekend kid time tends to be heavily scheduled. "Parenting is already a serious matter - it should also be about enjoying your kids, going out and having fun with them," says Tsai.

The coupling of parenting and pleasure may be the most radical idea behind the new breed of parenting Web sites. And why not? Shouldn't raising a child be as much fun as making one?

Meredith Broussard is the editor of an anthology, The Encyclopedia of Exes. Her Web site is www.failedrelationships.com. To comment on this story, e-mail image@phillynews.com.

Find this article at:

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/image/20070401_Keeping_up_with_Gen_Xers_.html

 **Click to Print**

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© Copyright 2007 Philly Online, LLC. All Rights Reserved.