

STER CRAZY

Are we tired yet of self-styled cool Web sites adding the suffix "ster" to their names? A half-dozen or so ventures, all related to online social networking, have adopted the moniker, apparently assuming that bad boy Napster gave "ster" an allure. We wonder if the folks running these sites know "ster" used to be a sexist suffix (as in "spinster," an old maid useful for textile work). Napster was named after its creator, Shawn Fanning, who earned the nickname when his basketball buddies mocked his nappy hair. We trace the modern path of this ancient syllable:

► Napster

The original riff on "ster" was an underground site known for illegal file-swapping, but now it's a licensed music-downloading site relaunched by Roxio in October 2003.

► Monster

Predating Napster, this 40-million-member job site has just launched a paid networking site for job seekers.

► Friendster

Social-networking behemoth launched in March 2003, now boasts 7 million members, with not a dollar spent on marketing. John Kerry has 2,800 friends on the site.

► Eurekster

Search engine combines with social-networking sites to tell you which searches your friends found useful.

► Frumster

A singles site for *frum*, or Orthodox, Jews, screens applicants with the help of a rabbi. Claims 220 successful matches since December 2001.

► Christianster

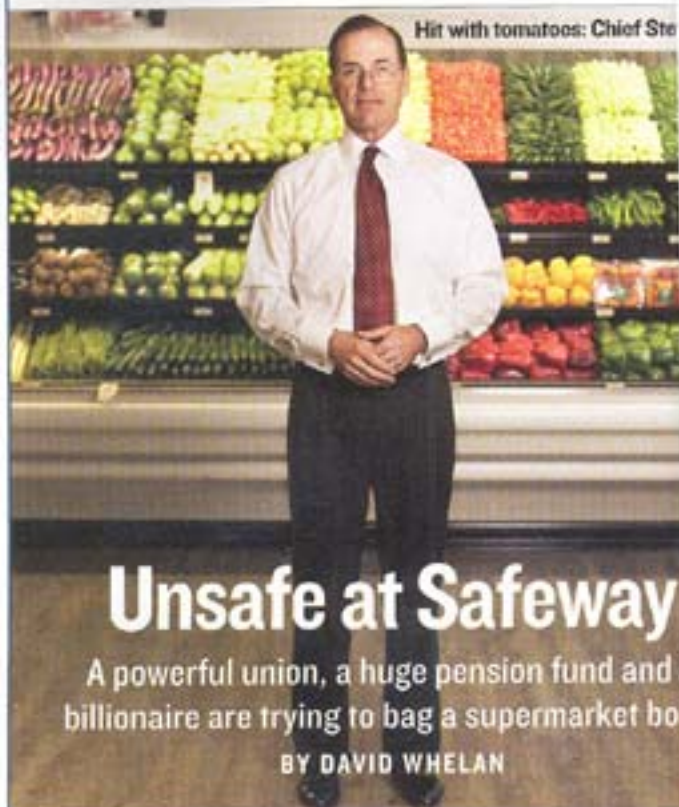
See above, but for religious Christians. The idea is to meet digital friends, but "the focus here is only the popularity of one person—Jesus Christ," the site reads.

► Dogster

Yes, there is a social-networking site—ahem—"canine sharing application"—for dogs. Each mutt gets its own profile page.

—Chana R. Schoenberger

Hit with tomatoes: Chief Steven Burd



Unsafe at Safeway

A powerful union, a huge pension fund and a billionaire are trying to bag a supermarket boss

BY DAVID WHELAN

ONE MORNING IN JANUARY SAFEWAY CHIEF STEVEN Burd, in a northern California neighborhood woke up to 250 protesters marching on his home, where ministers led a prayer service on behalf of 60,000 striking grocery workers in the state.

You can forgive Burd if he's feeling put upon these days. He's punching bag of three formidable, interlinked adversaries. One is the 1.4-million-member United Food & Commercial Workers union led by Burd's tough stance during contract time. Another is the California Public Employees Retirement System (Calpers), which happens to be headed by the same fellow, Sean Harrigan, who heads the food union on the West Coast. And then there's billionaire supermarket magnate Ronald Burkle, famous for merging Fred Meyer and Kroger. Burkle has known Harrigan for more than a decade, has been stymied by him in buying a chain owned by Safeway.

During the strike Calpers, and some of its board members in solidarity, called on Safeway to cave in to worker demands. Harrigan says he will not participate in Calpers' anti-Safeway campaign. But the rest of Calpers, including other labor leaders, picked up the slack. "Just because you have a union card doesn't mean you have to recuse yourself," Harrigan says.

Burd got the contract he wanted in February, requiring workers to agree to wage and health care cuts. But soon after that the pension fund switched to a corporate governance complaint, saying (a) Burd had managed the 1,800-store, \$35 billion company, and (b) there is too much incestuousness on the board. Interesting charge, given Safeway's performance in the stock market (up 13.7% a year from when Burd took over through May 13, compared to 9.2% for the S&P 500 index). Safeway recently has been weak—the strike is hurting.

Now let's switch to Ron Burkle, a Democratic fundraiser and major contributor, Friend of Bill and head of Yucaipa, an investment buyout firm. He met Harrigan in 1991 when the two were sitting across a bargaining table hammering out grocery worker contracts.