

Big Horace was no idler. By day, fawning bank clerk. Much put upon. Reviled and ignored. By night, budding dotcom entrepreneur. Wizard of the World Wide Web. Horace had a pal, Squiffy Hunter. Squiffy knew a few things about web-design. Been on the course. Had the certificate, the carrier-bag, had the pen to prove it. No job yet. Big Horace sent Squiffy an email. Want to use your skills. When can we meet? Squiffy emailed back: tea with my mum tonight, Line-Dancing night Thursday, how about Friday. Big Horace emailed Squiffy: step out of the Line-Dancing, got a plan.

Squiffy Hunter knew Big Horace's plans were always stonkers. Said so to his mum on Wednesday night, over the macaroni cheese. Squiffy's mum did not agree. Thought Big Horace would get her boy into trouble. Squiffy's mum shed a tear and made Squiffy promise never to let her be ashamed of him. Squiffy promised. Washed the dishes. But still met Big Horace down at the Snooker Club. Thursday night. Line-Dancing put on hold.

Big Horace's plan - dead simple: create web-site, ask people for their money, ride off into sunset. What kind of web-site, asked Squiffy, scratching his head and looking dead confused. Big Horace said: see me, Squiffy. You're looking at the CEO of www.movablefeast.com, said Horace. Virtual take-away portal. OK, said Squiffy. He liked his food. He liked the word "portal" - it had come up at his course. Sounds total, said Squiffy. Sounds good, affirmed Big Horace.

Big Horace threw ideas at him. Squiffy designed web-pages. Squiffy designed a database of dishes. Vegetarian dishes, Halal dishes, Kosher dishes. Menus for the carnivores. Pick-n-click for the weight-conscious. Movable feasts for the weight-unconscious. Pictures scanned in from Squiffy's mum's recipe-books. Squiffy's other pal Tam 'Heavy' Smith recruited. Went round the local Chinese and Indian places. Sat down. Examined menus. Pocketed menus. Wandered back into street. Came back, typed all the dishes into the database. One finger typing. At the end of night, Tam exhausted, barely able to speak the words: "Mine's a pint of heavy".

Squiffy had brainwave. Why not zipped-up meals, says he? Faster download times. Great idea, said Horace. Get on to it. Make it 3-for-the-price-of-2. Buy in bulk, suggested Horace: buy 100 compact meals, get your next order free.

Big Horace sat in his plush CEO's office. Horace thought of slogans. Virtual Food for a fiver. Roast chicken only a cluck away. Scroll for your roll. Drop your food items in the shopping-basket, click to pay, walk away. A one-stop shop for all you one-pot shoppers.

The world visited www.movablefeast.com in droves. In the first week of operation 800k hits. 247,673 downloads of the top-selling menus, over 125k of the zipped-up ones, 85k to the US alone. 73 terabytes of data shifted all over the globe. At £5 a download (\$10 in the US, 8 Euros elsewhere), Big Horace was a very rich man in a matter of days. On paper at least. Stacks of money credited to his account.

Next phase, announced Big Horace. www.emperorsnewclothes.co.uk. Same formula. Wardrobes instead of menus. Pictures of clothes instead of pictures of food. Tam goes round the boutiques during the day, gathering collections. Tam's friend Harriet the Horse accompanies him. Clothes Horse, joked Squiffy. Got a smack round the chops for his wit. Harriet a girl with a viewpoint.

Major order received from the Emperor Hirohito. Simple mis-translation by his surfing secretaries, understandable. Then the White House made a visit: two gross of dark suits. Number 10 followed pretty smartly thereafter.

One month in, disaster: World Food Organisation wants to know more about www.movablefeast.com. Can they place a major order to feed the world's hungry? Could Horace deliver electronically? Easy way past the world's trouble-spots. Get the food to those that need it. Big Horace struggles with conscience. Can't do it. Sends email to WFO explaining the scam. Newspapers get hold of the e-correspondence. Huge e-scandal. Big Horace sells CEO chair, goes into hiding. www.movablefeast.com customers clamour for their money back. Indigestible, they said. Outrageous, they said. Always thought there was something off. Visa repays all the customers. American Express demands access to Big Horace's bank-account.

Knock-on effect on the www.emperorsnewclothes.co.uk. Orders begin to fall away sharply. Dropping trousers. Fading denims. Reversal in the sales of reversible leisure-jackets.

Plans for www.easyhair.net put on hold. On-line ads for the hair-curling plug-in modem withdrawn. Technical tangle. Split ends in the wiring.

Squiffy confessed all to his mum. Box of hankies. Back to Line-Dancing on Thursdays. Tam and Harriet revert to shoplifting at M&S on Saturday afternoons. Big Horace went back to the bank, nine till five.
