

Starblvds: an old article but may give accurate information if you're interested

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Goodbye StarBlvd, We'll Miss You

By Nancy McPoland
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A landmark WebTV-related service is troubled, and may be shut down entirely. Pai-tung Chu, known to thousands of WebTV users as "Anthony," shut down his popular StarBlvd free transloader service, and may have to shut down the fee-based Transloader 2 service as well, due to the financial woes of his employer, Taiwan's Tatung Co.

Anthony created and coined the name "transloader" for a web server-to-web server file transfer service that allowed WebTV users to move images, sound files and text from an Internet location to their home page file managers. The services, originally based at GeoCities, and now hosted by Tatung's TISNet were an enormous drain of bandwidth and expense, which the subscription fees of the users couldn't even begin to cover.

We are in the process of piecing together this story, and have not yet heard from Anthony himself. We will have further details and user reaction in later coverage. However, as best we can determine now, the popular StarBlvd free transloader and its \$50-per-year pay-service counterpart TL/2 suffered a catastrophic disk failure March 4. Anthony posted in StarBlvd's Transloader Forum the following explanation:

About those files, yes, they are gone. I wish there is a way to recover them. The fact is, this time is it not a disk crash. The new diskarray system we bought two months ago in the hope to replace the old disk and get us better stability, blanked out entirely on its own disk slices even the Tatung's best hardware technicians cannot restored it. Those accounts being restored were from my calculations of the purchase records, they were manually created. The failure of the diskarray system meant that all of StarBlvd's free services, as well as the TL/2 services were interrupted. All of the files that were stored in the TL2 file pool were lost irretrievably. Anthony had to spend three days recovering customer accounts with the help of payment records and an old copy of the TL/2 software. TL/2 services were then partially restored, by opening new accounts for the users.

Anthony says that his employers are concerned that the StarBlvd free service and even the fee-based TL/2 service are a drain on the company's resources. He posted on the StarBlvd Forums:

This is the time to disclose what my boss told me
These are the facts, everybody please put them in mind before we discuss any further:

I am not a lone-ranger. I work for this company TISNet as a programmer. What this company tells me, I must accept or risk my job. I have kids to feed.

TISNet is not making money. It is a subsidiary of Tatung Co, which makes computers in Taiwan. Taiwan is facing an economic storm which seems no where near ending, and Tatung is now under pressure surviving this storm. TISNet is now facing severe review by the Tatung HQ.

TISNet has choices, all of them lead to cutting back expenses. The least one everybody likes is laying off.

Now here comes what my boss told me:

TISNet has invested bandwidth / equipments / manpower on this Transload Service project for more than three years.

What this project earned so far can't pay off the smallest fraction of its expenses.

TISNet has other projects, some of them are already behind schedule and the clients are pressing on us.

All manpower is to be switched to those projects. All resources to move to those projects which are paying.

The decision from the management, I cannot resist. I am truly sorry about this.

Anthony was instructed by TISNet not to restore StarBlvd's free transloader service. The paying TL/2 service appears to be in jeopardy as well at this time. The WebTV community is deeply saddened by the loss of one of its pioneering user-based services.

Anthony had not even seen a WebTV in his hometown of Taipei City, Taiwan when he debuted the original Transloader services. WebTV terminals weren't for sale, and the service would have been an international toll call from Taiwan. What he had seen was a network terminal similar to WebTV that had been a project of his employer, Tantung. He developed the transloader after seeing WebTV users posting their passwords on GeoCities forums, asking for help with file transfers. Knowing that releasing your password is a dangerous practice, he decided to use his programming skills to find

a way to help the WebTVers, and thus was born the transloader.

Anthony coined the word "transloader" to refer to a web server-to-web server transfer. WebTV cannot "download," or "upload," transferring files from an Internet location to or from the user's WebTV unit. This deficiency was causing a massive problem with WebTV users, who were having to remote load files from other Internet servers in order to make home pages of their own, angering webmasters and causing a huge bandwidth expenditure on their behalf. The transloader solved this problem by allowing an "Internet copy service" from one web server to another so that WebTV users could copy their files into their own file directories at their home page provider.

The original services were hosted at free homepage provider GeoCities. Problems concerning security arose when changes to the cgi programming caused errors with the transloader code. Anthony also became concerned about the secure nature of "cookies," small files which were sent to identify users, being used to store account information for the free service. GeoCities also refused to make Anthony a Community leader, despite the fact that the Transloader Angels, a support group of transloader users assisting other users, were formed there and had their own message boards.

Moving the transloader services to his employer's servers, Anthony was forced to limit the services available for free. He limited the free transfers to 30 KB to try to conserve bandwidth, and debuted a subscription-based service, charging \$50 a year for unlimited file transfers, multiple transfers, and unzipping utilities. He also added file storage capability, e-mail, an image tool, and an extractor to move images from e-mail into file storage. The paying service also had the ability to store account information without the use of cookies.

StarBlvd's free transloader is not the only transloading service available to WebTV users. Since the inception of Anthony's creation, several services, including Shane Norman's WebUp, which provided a transloader and home page editor, were offered. Shane Norman ran into enormous bandwidth costs, and had to change to a subscription-based service. Even the subscription-based service was not enough to cover his costs, and he was ultimately forced to shut down his services.

Other transloading services include: Domania Freeloader and Cameron Gregory's Transloader.com. Beth Candy, the WebTV PageBuilder expert, has two pages of information available on transloading and the tools WebTV users need for file transfers at [All I know about Uploading](#) , for information specific to WebTV's PageBuilder, and [All My Transloader Information](#) for general transloading information.

Despite the availability of other sources of service, the loss of StarBlvd's free transloader is a heavy blow to the WebTV Community. Anthony Chu will always be considered one of the first WebTV Heroes, and the community owes him a great debt of gratitude for his untiring efforts on its behalf.