

# I'd bet my shirt on e-gambling

**I**T'S five years ago, I'm in Jersey, and I have a premonition. Dennis Bergkamp, Arsenal's expensive new signing from Inter Milan hasn't been performing, but I reckon he's about to come good. Something tells me that he is about to score. "Best put a bet on," I thought. Twenty quid for the blonde Dutchman to find his first piece of net. So, did he come good? Read on a little and you'll find out.

Internet shopping will never replace the High Street as people like the experience of going to the shops. Beats me but there you have it. Some people like to visit shops; to browse, to touch, to feel and to be served. For them, buying exactly the same product, let's say its luggage for example, over the Internet from their bedroom or office is just not the same and perhaps never will be.

But by the same reasoning, e-gambling has to be a real winner, because, surely, no one enjoys visiting a betting shop?

Internet gambling is wonderfully and dangerously entertaining.

It is also just too damn easy. Try, if you dare, [www.ladbrokes.com](http://www.ladbrokes.com) or [www.flutter.co.uk](http://www.flutter.co.uk). You can bet on anything — horses, football, golf, celebrities — or play blackjack, poker, craps or roulette with stereo sound and 3D graphics.

There is no need to visit a smoke-filled, tear-stained betting shop ever again, and worst of all, no need even to pop out to the cash machine. It is so simple that I dread to think where it could end: "I bet the house I am sitting in and the shirt on my back on ... red."

Betting shops have always been a sitting duck for the Internet. They are a health hazard, smoking is almost mandatory and the overall sense of loss in the atmosphere is overwhelming. Even the winners' smiles are usually tainted by their bad fortune at not having paid their tax earlier. Add to this rather depressing atmosphere the fact that the bookies is the second most likely place to be held up at gun-point after a bank, and you have to wonder how your urge for a flutter might be better served elsewhere. Enter the Web.

So what of the advantages of betting at home? Tea that is hot and tastes of tea, cold beer, fresh food, pleasant surroundings or at least to your taste if you've decorated, 24-hour opening and no tax! Need I go on?

Add to this the "no embarrassment factor" about placing a bet on whatever takes your fancy. Placing a fiver on Baby Spice having a baby by

**DAN WAGNER**



**THE  
EVANGELIST**

the end of next year is much easier from home, let me tell you. I'm due two grand if she pops, incidentally.

Anyway, what's this got to do with business? Is Bright Station now looking to get into Internet gambling? No Siree (even though eGambling is forecast to rise to £125 billion over the next 15 years), but we are looking to emulate some of what they have done.

They realised that they could use the Internet to expand their market. They put themselves in their customer's shoes, realised what turns people off gambling and used the Internet to remove every single one of these negatives, making the whole experience easy and fun. Forget the moral dilemmas for a second and just applaud the strategy.

But anyway, what of my man Bergkamp? As an avid Arsenal fan who can wax lyrical on the merits of Dennis the Great, I have mixed feelings about the £20 bet I placed that day at a local Jersey bookmakers. Dennis more than fulfilled his role as striker that day, as I knew he would. But I only learnt about his heroics at the airport after my flight home, and to this day haven't been able to claim my £200. The irony hurts.

Still, I won't make the same mistake again. Now that I bet over the Web, it doesn't matter where I am. But if anyone is going over to Jersey soon, give me a call. I'll try to find the old betting slip and split it with you.

● Dan Wagner is CEO of Bright Station, [www.brightstation.com](http://www.brightstation.com)