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## Want to avoid Starbucks? Check out the web

By Karen Schwartz

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When it comes to cafe choices and finding a good cup of joe, a three-person California artist collective wants people to know they have more options than just the Starbucks down the street.

That's why the three started Delocator.net, a Web site launched April 1 that, taking its cue from the hugely popular online store locators, lets people search for nearby alternatives to the corporate coffee-house chain Starbucks.

Instead of stopping at cookie-cutter Starbucks stores, visitors can search by ZIP code for independently run cafes. The site also lets visitors enter the names and addresses of their favorite haunts, along with comments about what makes each place special. In its first two weeks, almost 3,000 independent coffee shops have been added by visitors to the site.

The site is designed to give the cafes a voice, said Xtine Hanson, 30, an artist from Long Beach, Calif., and one of the founders of Finishing School, the artist collective.

"It's anti-corporation more than anti-Starbucks," she said. "It's mostly like 'let's have a voice for the underdog' of the independent cafes, for those people who are still living their American dream and having their business."

Delocator.net reflects a wider movement aimed at reclaiming the unique and rejecting that which can be classified as a "prepackaged" or "plastic" experience. In the '90s, just as coffee shops evolved into meeting places and popular hangouts, the anti-globalization movement was picking up new converts.

[\[albrecht CNS nonStarbucks 108A.jpg\]](#)

Delocator.net helps coffee drinkers find alternatives to the ubiquitous Starbucks. (Leslie Albrecht/CNS)

[\[albrecht CNS nonStarbucks 100A.jpg\]](#)

The Mudtruck is listed on Delocator.net as an alternative to the Starbucks across the street. (Leslie Albrecht/CNS)

[\[albrecht CNS nonStarbucks 003A.jpg\]](#)

Even the humble coffee cart is preferable to

Starbucks helped spawn the coffee-shop culture, but, with 9,261 corner-dwelling copies worldwide, it has become, to some, a prime example of excessive corporate control and standardization. Critics like Hanson question if being able to drive to any corner in any town and get the same drink is a good thing.

Starbucks for users of Delocator.net. (Leslie Albrecht/CNS)

On the Web site, store names, along with comments on what makes them "authentic," run down one side of the page, the Starbucks locations run along the other. But where the Starbucks list includes just addresses and phone numbers, the list of independent stores has links to maps and even photographs submitted by site visitors.

"That list looks a lot more authentic, less homogenized," Hanson said. "These cafes each have a voice, they each have their own idiosyncrasies."

The site is set up so that visitors have the option of starting their own projects. In addition to offering alternatives to corporate coffee, the site also includes a tool kit visitors can download, complete with all the code needed to create a delocator site for anything from Wal-Mart to Borders or McDonald's.

According to Brian Boyer, 29, a Finishing School member, the artists came up with the idea on a stroll around New York. They were looking for somewhere to get coffee, but since they weren't familiar with the area, they didn't know where to look for something that wasn't Starbucks.

The Web site was launched at a mock cafe, in a gallery-turned-coffee-shop at the San Francisco Art Institute. Visitors can check e-mail and drink coffee donated by the campus coffee shop, Pete's Cafe, while seated on comfy couches in the dim lamplight of a "staged" cafe setting. Computers are available and wireless service is free.

The collective entered the thousands of Starbucks locations into the database by hand, copying and pasting from the Starbucks locator site. But the other half of the database was empty, awaiting people's preferences. "So seeing people enter in their cafe alternatives was nice because they were completing it," Boyer said.

The mock cafe closes May 7, but individuals anywhere can add their local coffee houses and continue using the site. Currently, visitors can search for coffee shops within a five-mile radius of any ZIP code.

Boyer said he was surprised at the number of cafes added to the Web site. "There are 6,000 Starbucks stores in the United States. It'd be great if we got to 6,000 local coffee houses being entered," he said.

"The fear is that those places you go to might one day not be there, whether or not that is true," said Boyer. "It's nice to be reminded of that, that those places are still there and will probably always still be there."

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