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Blinkenlight: Display in the heart of Berlin

Frustrated by the size of the display on your mobile phone?

Wish the games on that small screen were easier to see and play?

How about playing a game of Pong on a display as tall as an eight-storey building?

You can do just that on the huge interactive screen currently to be found on the front of one of Berlin's more famous office blocks.

Giant games

A group of German ethical hackers called the Chaos Computer Club (CCC) have turned the famous Haus des Lehrers in Berlin's Alexanderplatz into a vast interactive display dubbed Blinkenlights by CCC members.

The group created it to celebrate their 20th anniversary.

The top eight floors of the building have been turned into a 144-pixel display by putting computer-controlled lamps behind the front windows. The windows have been painted white to make them more reflective.

The lights can be turned on and off independently to create a monochrome display eight pixels high by 18 across.

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Blinkenlights featured
in a recent Kylie video

The CCC said it laid almost five kilometres of cable while wiring up the 144 windows to the computers that control the lighting patterns.

By dialling the Blinkenlights computer with a mobile phone, passers-by can play the classic computer game Pong on the giant screen.

Typically, players are pitted against the computer, but, if someone else dials in, they get to take over the paddle usually controlled by the computer.

When not being used to play pong, the display either shows love letter movies sent in by members of the public or movies created just for Blinkenlights.

The group has created a simple editing program that can be used to create and edit movies for the display.

Pop interest

Even if you cannot get to Berlin to see the movies played on the Blinkenlights screen, the website for the building is hosting most of them.

Current titles include a rotating 3D cube, Tetris and a recreation of the entire nativity story including angels and the baby Jesus.

The huge display caught the interest of antipodean pop star Kylie Minogue who featured it in the video for her song Can't Get You Out Of My Head.

Currently, the CCC is running a competition to find both the best Blinkenlights movies as well as the most useful software tools that help budding

directors create films for the building.

The competition closes after Christmas, and winners will be chosen by CCC members attending the winter conference held by the group from 27-29 December.

The CCC said the Blinkenlights display would remain until February 2002 when it will be upgraded.

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