

## Compressed Data

### *Stanford Gave Writer A Start, but Not a Ph.D.*

It turns out the name isn't the only thing made up about Robert X. Cringely, the writer and television personality whose program, "Nerds 2.0.1: A Brief History of the Internet" will be on PBS next week. Mr. Cringely, whose real name is Mark Stephens, has acknowledged that he exaggerated his academic credentials.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported last week that Mr. Stephens had not been a professor at Stanford University and had not earned a doctorate there, as he had claimed. He responded in a statement: "The fact is I never did finish those final touches on my dissertation and therefore do not technically have a Ph.D. from Stanford. A new fact has now become painfully clear to me: You don't say you have the Ph.D. unless you really have the Ph.D."

Cringely is often identified as a former Stanford professor in biographical materials and was described that way on the jacket of his 1993 book, "Accidental Empires: How the Boys of Silicon Valley Make Their Millions, Battle Foreign Competition and Still Can't Get a Date."

A university spokeswoman said that Mr. Stephens had worked as a teaching assistant and earned only a master's degree.

The Web site for PBS, which runs a column by the writer and promotes his television work, has now revised his on-line biography ([www.pbs.org/cringely](http://www.pbs.org/cringely)).

"As everyone knows, Cringely is a vital part of the Silicon Valley scene," a spokesman for PBS said. "We feel that the extent



Mark Stephens as he appears on-line.

to which he completed his doctoral requirements at Stanford and his teaching status there do not affect the stature of his television work."

A gossip column in the computer trade magazine InfoWorld gave birth to the pseudonym Rob-

ert X. Cringely. Mr. Stephens inherited the job as writer of the column in the mid-80's.

The Cringely name was originally added to the magazine's masthead as a joke earlier in the decade, "to see how much mail we got," said Sandy Reed, the editor in chief. It then became a byline for the column.

After Mr. Stephens was dismissed from the job in 1995, the magazine sued him for trademark infringement for continuing to use the Cringely name. He countersued, and in a settlement agreement he was allowed to continue using the name as long as it was not used in a competing publication.

The column continues under the Cringely name, but with a different author. Ms. Reed said the column would spoof the disclosures about Mr. Stephens in the upcoming issue.

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