ROLL 'EM: THE LATEST IN WEB-BASED VIDEO

Web-based video. It sounds promising, but can it deliver? It's not easy to squeeze a chunky video file through the already clogged pipes of the Internet. And for that reason, this technology hasn't taken hold in quite the same way as some other smaller media, such as Web-based audio.

Despite its limitations, however, companies are beginning to use video to bring speeches, product announcements, news briefs, and presentations to their employees, partners, and customers.

To circumvent bandwidth limitations, a corporate intranet, not the Net, is still the delivery medium of choice. That's because it offers more bandwidth resources, and content can be distributed in real time. However, as compression technologies improve, video files will become less of the bandwidth hogs that they are today.

Play, pause, rewind

Several news companies, such as CNN Interactive, http://www.cnn com/ index.html, use video to deliver late-breaking news, entertainment, and political speeches to their viewers. The video clips are short and take time to download, but they work. Plus, they let you see the potential of this extraordinary technology.

To view most videos on the Net, you have to download a plug-in such as VXtreme (for real-time streaming video), http://www. vxtreme.com, or Apple's QuickTime (for standard video), http://www. quicktime.apple.com.

Other players in the Internet video field are MCI and Progressive Networks. They have teamed up to create a service that will deliver audio and video to broadcast-size audiences over the Internet. RealNetwork combines MCI's Internet backbone with Progressive Networks's multimedia streaming technology. Content providers for RealNetwork include ABC News, Atlantic Records, and ESPN.

The impact of Web-based video for the training community is important. Here are some possible applications:

▶ A trainer delivers a real-time coaching presentation to trainees at 25 different locations.

▶ A salesperson receives a competitor's late-breaking product announcement while on the way to visit a new client.

▶ A CEO delivers a speech to employees at several different locations. Those employees can choose when and where to view the speech.

▶ A consultant downloads a product demo over the Internet to show to his or her clients.

Currently, it's easier to deliver video on CD-ROM or over a corporate intranet. Whether or not there is widespread acceptance of the Internet as a video delivery channel will depend on bandwidth-solving technologies, advances in compression technology, and standards.

INTELLIGENT AGENT UPDATE

Back in January 1997, we took a look at intelligent agent technology. The growth in that area has been sluggish, in part due to the complexity of the programming involved. Now, IBM has introduced intelligent "concierge" software, which takes intelligent agent technology to the next level.

This new tool, Web Browser Intelligence (pronounced *Webby*), can remember what sites a user visits, usage patterns, and when a site changes. It also provides download and link times for sites and traffic signals. A red light means that a site is down, green means it is up, and yellow means it's running slowly.

IBM says that more than 70,000 users have downloaded WBI free from the IBM research Website, http: //www.alphaworks. ibm.com, in the past eight months.

(Source: Reuters, July 1997)

As of this writing, Microsoft and a group of multimedia software companies have agreed to a standard method of broadcasting video over the Internet. That makes it much simpler for users because they don't need to download many different plug-ins to view video on different sites. The struggle to define a single video standard is analogous to the Beta and VHS war that took place in the VCR industry years ago.

Another standard, a nonproprietary Video Encoding Standard (VES), was recently introduced by Oracle. According to *PR Newswire*, it makes "near-live" streaming of video over the Internet possible. Real-time encoding transforms live broadcast video into encoded video, allowing a viewer to access the digital video stream just seconds after the live event took place.

When the encoded video is stored on the Oracle Video Server, users then have immediate, full VCR-like control such as pause, rewind, and fast-forward of the stored video stream.

Whether or not Web-based video technology truly takes off, you have to admit that there is something very *1984* about watching the President deliver his State of the Union address while you eat a turkey sandwich at your desk.

(Note: In August, VXtreme was purchased by Microsoft. This acquisition is said to be part of Microsoft's strategy to "provide the industry's most comprehensive support, and accelerate adoption of streaming media for in-house corporate use.")

CYBER JARGON

Impress your friends and co-workers with some of these gems from *Wired*:

▶ **Flypaper meeting.** A spontaneous gathering that takes place after two people begin talking in a hallway or an office cubicle, drawing passersby into their conversation.

▶ **Para-site.** A Website that wraps its own identifying frame around other sites that are linked from it. Para-sites often create confusion as to who is responsible for a page's content.

▶ **Spush.** Indiscriminate, spam-like applications of push-media technology.

▶ **Voice novel.** A voicemail message that goes on forever.

NET BUSINESS TRENDS

Electronic trading will boom within the next four years, says Forrester Research, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The company expects the value of goods and services traded between companies to skyrocket from $8 billion this year to $327 billion in 2002. This trend is not surprising considering that Internet commerce is already up 1,000 percent from 1996.

To obtain that figure, Forrester researched the electronic commerce plans of 150 companies covering 12 major industrial categories. In-depth interviews were then conducted with executives at 63 of the businesses found to be actively trading goods and services over the Net.

For more information about the report, *Sizing Intercompany Commerce*, contact Forrester Research at 617.497.7090 or visit the company's Website, http://www.forrester.com.

INDISPENSABLE HRD AND TRAINING SITES

▶ **WorkIndex,** http://www.workindex.com. Here's a site that's designed to make getting around in cyberspace easier for HRD professionals and others. There are links to hundreds of key workplace-related resources. The index covers such issues as training and development, leadership, compensation, meetings, international HRD, and behavior at work.

▶ **ASTD's Technical Training site,** http://www.astd.org/techtraining/tt-home.htm. Launched in May 1997, this site is the home of *Technical Training* magazine. You'll also find the most up-to-date resources for technical training professionals, including articles, links, and surveys.

▶ **The Learning Center,** http://www.TheLearningCenter.com. Here, you can browse or search through thousands of training courses that are available via the Internet, a corporate intranet, CD-ROM, video, or print. Products fall into such categories as management, human resources, computer training, and customer service. Orders can be placed online or via phone or fax.

MINI MOOLA

Whoever said that "nothing in life is free" had a point. And soon, most things on the Net may not be free either.

With the advent of micropayment services, such as Millicent from Digital Equipment Corporation, Maynard, Massachusetts, Internet users can buy scrip from certified brokers and then trade the "money" for products and services on the Web. Then, online vendors exchange scrip for cold cash with the same brokers. Digital plans to allow for transactions as little as one-tenth of a cent up to $5.

With this payment method, users don't need to create separate accounts with many different Websites, and vendors don't have to create, maintain, and bill numerous accounts. In addition to simplifying online transactions,

[...]

for companies

[...]

of Research and Advanced Development, Corporate Strategy and Technology group, "A publisher, for example, that now has hard copy and online subscriptions for sale can offer the same information to Web users on a page-by-page or article-by-article basis, adding a new high-volume and profitable revenue stream."

So, what could your hard-earned penny buy on the Internet? Here are some suggestions from Digital:
- a movie review
- songs or lyrics
- sound effects
- a syndicated comic strip
- instant weather conditions for ski areas, roads, and highways

- personalized news headlines and stock portfolios
- 10 seconds of play in a distributed online game
- 10 seconds of use for a shareware program or applet
- a five-minute "subscription" to an online magazine.

And perhaps, a penny for your thoughts. (http://www.millicent.digital.com/html/penny-190.html)

@Work is a monthly column devoted to the use of the Internet. Email your online experiences and suggestions to atwork@astd.org.

EMAIL DECODER

Put an end to those annoying scrambled email attach-

[...]

Opener, a Windows

[...]

sitting on your desktop.

Opener decodes uuencode, MIME, and BinHex attachments. It also lets you view and print a file, or launch it in the program of your choice.

The product also decompresses files that have been downloaded from the Internet or received via email. It will decompress most compression formats, including Zip, Gzip, Z (Unix compressed), and TAR.

E-attachment costs $49 and is available for Windows 95 and Windows NT only.

Contact **DataViz,** http://www.dataviz.com, for more information.