

A PLUG-IN AND A PROMISE

PLUG-INS, those handy little applications that are supposed to spruce up a browser, sound enticing, right? Supposedly they make static Web pages interactive by adding video, audio, 3D, animation, and other intriguing features to your browser. The only problems are trying to decide which ones to install and how to get them to work once they've been downloaded. To help save you time and frustration, we've scouted the Net to bring you the best information about plug-in technology.

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Beef up your browser

Plug-ins are hot at the moment and new products are being developed daily. So, to make life a little simpler, here are a few of the best plug-ins according to *PC Computing*, October 1996.

Netscape Navigator.

Most plug-ins currently available are designed to work with Netscape Navigator. Here are some of the most useful ones available today.

▶ Macromedia Shockwave, <http://www.macromedia.com/shockwave/>, brings animation and sound to the Web.

▶ Inso Quick View Plus lets you view more than 200 file types including word processing documents, spreadsheets, and graphics files.

▶ Duplexx Net Toob handles all types of digital video including AVI, FLI, MPEG, and QuickTime.

▶ Progressive Networks RealAudio, <http://www.realaudio.com>, lets you listen to sound on the Web. You must have a sound card and speakers installed on your computer to make this plug-in work.

▶ VDO Net VDO Live, <http://www.vdo.net/enhanced.html>, gives you a taste of real-time video, albeit slowly. **Microsoft Internet Explorer.** You'll need ActiveX controls, which are interactive software objects developed to be embedded in Web pages, to make Navigator plug-ins work on this rival browser. ActiveX controls are a

A TOWEL, A MINI-BAR, AND A MODEM

First you logged on at the office, then at home, and now...in your hotel suite. Savvy hotels that are in-tune with technology are installing special telephone lines in guest rooms so that travelers can access the Internet, reports the *New York Times CyberTimes*.

Assisted by Atcom/Info, a software company based in San Diego, the Renaissance Washington Hotel in Washington, D.C., now offers computer terminals with high-speed Internet access in 13 of its 799 guest rooms. The hotel charges guests 33 cents a minute to use the equipment, with a maximum charge of \$25 a day. The Claremont Resort and Spa in Oakland, California, offers Internet access in 40 of its 240 rooms and plans to add 60 by April.

Another company that is helping hotels get wired is Fourth Communications Network, San Jose, California. The company has created a special "travel browser" that lets guests access e-mail, surf the Web, shop online, and retrieve business news and local travel information.

Ed Watkins, editor of *Lodging Hospitality*, says that although companies like Atcom/Info and Fourth Communications might have difficulty in the short term convincing hotels of the merits of in-room, high-speed Internet access, such a service will catch on as Internet usage grows because "hotels must offer travelers what they already have in their offices."

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Shocking NEWS

- 12/08/96. Come Celebrate Shockwave's First Birthday!
- 12/02/96. Shockwave Gets Smaller

CHA CHA CHA

Last year coffee metaphors for Java were all the rage: HotJava, Cafe, Latte, and Espresso. This year there's Castanet, a Java-based application developed by Marimba in Palo Alto, California. The company was started by former employees of Sun Microsystems and members of the original Java team.

Marimba founder Kim Polese, in a *Wired* article, describes Castanet using television metaphors. End users load a Castanet "tuner" onto their computers, while on the server side, companies buy a Castanet "transmit-

ter." The programming that is dispatched via the Internet between the transmitter and the tuner is called a "channel." Users subscribe to channels and can choose from such varied options as games, software tool kits, word-processing programs, and multimedia presentations. Channels are downloaded onto a hard drive and updated automatically by the content provider's transmitter.

The beauty of Castanet, say its developers, is that it is not restricted by HTML and it can run on all computer platforms.

TIPS FOR SPEEDY SURFING

According to *Fast Company*, October/November 1996, here are a few ways to supercharge your browser.

▶ Increase the cache. The "cache" setting in a browser tells a system how much information it can store on your hard drive as it comes over the Net. Set it higher (at least 8 MB) to speed up the process.

▶ Launder the cache. Under the options menu in a browser, you'll find a button to clear pages that have been temporarily stored on your computer's hard drive. Clear the cache every few hours.

▶ Avoid loading graphics automatically. When you turn off the auto load images option on your browser, all sites will appear with just text. When you want to see graphics, double-click on the graphics icons on the page or click on the "images" button of Netscape Navigator.

▶ Get online early in the morning. Net traffic is heaviest in the evening when both coasts are logged on.

▶ Hit "reload." If it takes more time than usual to access a site, it may mean you've got a slow connection. Hitting reload reinitiates the hookup.

component of ActiveX technology developed by Microsoft. The technology enables software components to interact with one another in a networked environment, regardless of the language in which they were created.

ActiveX controls automatically download and install themselves in Internet Explorer 3.0, but if you are using Netscape Navigator 3.0 or higher, you can download an ActiveX plug-in, ScriptActive from http://www.ncompasslabs.com/download_scriptactive/.

You can find links to most of these products on *PC Computing's* Web page, <http://www.pccomputing.com>; Netscape's plug-in page, <http://home.netscape.com/comprod/>

COOL SITES

▶ IntelliMatch, <http://www.intellimatch.com>. This site helps job seekers and employers find each other online. By using Precision Matching Technology, the site identifies specific candidate characteristics, matches them to job requirements, and determines in seconds whether a candidate is qualified. Once an employer specifies position requirements and a prospective employee provides his or her skills and experience in a structured resume, PMT automatically determines whether the position and the person are a match.

▶ World Learning Network, <http://www.worldlearning.com>. This is a new online service from Peterson's and the Electronic University Network that offers short-term courses and credit-bearing courses. According to the Network's creators, the WLN will provide each member—college, training organization, professional association, or public school system—with its own online campus.

▶ Mind Extension University, <http://www.meu.edu>. This site offers distance learning for adults that are interested in undergraduate or master's degree programs. Students watch class on ME/U Knowledge TV, a cable television channel, or via satellite or videotapes. Then, students correspond with professors and other

[products/navigator/version_2.0/plugins/index.html](#); or on the Browser Watch Web site, <http://browserwatch.iworld.com/>.

Common sense

Now that you know which plug-ins to use, all you have to do is install them on a browser. No problem, right? Not exactly. Plug-ins can be temperamental and all are designed differently. That means that what

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students via voice mail, postal mail, e-mail, private bulletin board system, or the Web. Mind Extension University works in conjunction with more than 30 universities including George Washington University, Kansas State University, Washington State University, and California State University.

▶ Web-based training information center, <http://www.clark.net/pub/nractive/wbt.html>. Here is a well-designed, easy-to-navigate resource for Web-based training. The site includes a glossary of CBT and WBT terms, rules for good WBT design, advantages and disadvantages of WBT, and information about the development process.

NET TRENDS

A recent study by Arlington, Virginia-based Robert Half International reports that 55 percent of executives polled said that time spent accessing the Internet for non-business purposes is undermining their employees' effectiveness on the job. The survey is based on a poll of 150 executives from the 1,000 largest companies in the United States.

"As with any misuse of time in the workplace, it is incumbent on managers to work closely enough with their staff to take notice of productivity losses," says Max Messmer, chairman and CEO of Robert Half International. But Messmer also cautions businesses not to overreact. "Managers should continue to encourage use of the Internet as a business tool. Online navigational skills used for legitimate research, commerce, or communication can enhance an employee's contributions to the job," he says.

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And you thought Mr. Potato Head was fun.

works to unleash one plug-in won't necessarily work for other types. Your best bet is to follow the manufacturer's instructions and use common sense. According to Tim Hickman, a plug-in expert at Netscape Communications, here are a few tips that will help Navigator users tame these unruly applications.

▶ Write down the name of the file you are downloading. That way, you can find it later and delete it to save disk space.

▶ Create a separate directory or folder for downloaded files. A file called "plug-ins" should suffice.

▶ After the file has been downloaded, go off-line and close Navigator, as well as any other applications that are running.

▶ Find the file in the directory and double-click on it. This will either unpack a compressed file or start installing the program immediately. If it only unpacks the file, you will have to run the setup.exe file after the unpacking is completed. Double click on the setup.exe file to install the program.

▶ Make sure that the program gets installed to the Navigator plug-in directory.

▶ Restart your browser and the plug-in should begin working automatically.

Those tips should work for most plug-ins and soon you'll be surfing like a pro. But remember, sound and graphics soak up bandwidth and may bring your browsing to a crawl.

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