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## ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO DOWNLOAD

Most of you have probably been sucked into the information void a few times. But there are ways to help cure information overload. This month we'll tackle one remedy, online news services.

Imagine logging onto your computer in the morning, and there, for your reading pleasure, is a personalized digital newspaper. From your screen you read stock quotes, industry data, and up-to-the-minute news. Sound implausible? Well, it's not. Internet news services

Be sure to visit  
ASTD's Web page at  
<http://www.astd.org>

are designed to help you wade through multiple newspapers and wire services.

Some are free, others cost a few dollars a month, and some are available only to online services such as CompuServe.

What's most appealing about a news service is that you can customize it to retrieve only the information that you want and need. Why waste your time sorting through the latest biochemical engineering trends when you just want information on HRD?

### Free, customized news

One service, PointCast Network, is free. I took PCN for a test run and found that it has limited capabilities. For example, PCN updates information randomly, so sometimes you will read the same headlines for a week. You can download PCN from PointCast's home page, <http://pioneer.pointcast.com>, or from a large shareware site such as Shareware.com, <http://www.shareware.com>. The product's SmartScreens, which are interactive screensavers, are activated at intervals that you select. If you see something interesting on the SmartScreen, just click on the image to activate the PCN Viewer, which lets you see the news item in more detail.

PCN offers the following channels: News, Companies, Weather, Sports, Internet, Industries, and Lifestyle. They can be customized to meet your needs and PointCast plans to add more channels in the future.

### In-depth coverage... at a price

Several companies offer subscription-based services. You either pay each month for the service or you pay for the software that runs it on your computer. Individual, <http://www.individual.com>, offers several products that it says, "transform the raw streams of electronic data into a single source of actionable knowledge." The company uses a core software engine, SMART, developed at Cornell University. It helps a computer sort through information, which is then retrieved, filtered, and ranked in order of importance based on a subscriber's preferences.

One of Individual's products, First, delivers stories every morning to you in full text via fax, e-mail, or over a groupware platform such as Lotus Notes or the World Wide Web. First! also asks subscribers to participate in a periodic grading process to determine whether articles are still rel-

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## JAVA JIVE

What's all the noise about Java? Well, if you are trying to incorporate interactivity on a Web site, it might just be the tool you need. Java is a programming language that creates *applets*, which are mini applications that can be installed temporarily on a computer. Instead of flat, static pictures, Java programming lets you create rotating objects, animation, sound bites, and interactive applications. Not all Net browsers are equipped to view Java applets, but the newer versions of Netscape Navigator do have Java capability.

evant. In that way, the software learns about a client's changing interests, and it can modify its selection procedure.

Another product from Individual is NewsPage, <http://www.newspage.com>, an interactive news site on the WWW that uses SMART-agent filtering. The service provides timely and relevant articles from more than 600 information sources. Users can view articles in brief or full-text versions. The product's basic service lets you view selected articles, but it takes a while to dig

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## WHAT IS ART?

Web-a-Sketch, <http://www.digital-stuff.com/web-a-sketch/>. Remember spending hours drawing on that beloved toy, the Etch-a-Sketch? Well, now you can relive those fond memories or, at least, try to recreate them virtually. This site resembles the original toy with a red, plastic-case motif. You can use your mouse to draw; then after hours of painstaking work, submit your masterpiece in weekly and monthly contests of Web-a-Sketch art.



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## CYBERLINGO

Here's some sassy terminology from *Wired* magazine.

**Quarterly Charm Deficiency (QCD).** An emotional disorder that arises in executives at the end of each fiscal quarter.

**Kubris.** An extreme form of arrogance found in multimedia auteurs that think they're Stanley Kubrick.

**Cold Transfer.** An incoming phone call transferred without notice or explanation from the transferring party. "Someone in customer service cold transferred the call to me; by that point, the guy was ready to crawl through the wires and kill somebody."

for the right information. If you want to look at articles about human resources, go to the business-management list. From there, you can click onto a list of human resource issues. As of this writing, the address was <http://www.newspage.com/NEWSPAGE/cgi-bin/walk.cgi/NEWSPAGE/info/d11/d3/>. Stories about workers' compensation, benefits, telecommuting, training, and cutting-edge HRD practices were listed.

The company's "hot-off-the-press" product, iNews, is a personal news service that helps professionals focus on late-breaking developments pertaining to their competitors, customers, and market segment. Subscribers can create personal profiles by choosing topics from the company's topic database and receive news briefs each morning based on their choices. Its source pool includes Business Wire, PR Newswire, Reuters, AP Online, Newsbytes News Network, and more than 60 Knight-Ridder newspapers.

Peopleware offers Farcast, <http://www.farcast.com>, a service that lets you get stock quotes from the NYSE, AMEX, and NASDAQ exchange find out about competitors by using *Reference Press's Hoover's Guide*, and read news from AP, UPI, Businesswire, PR Newswire, and Newsbytes.

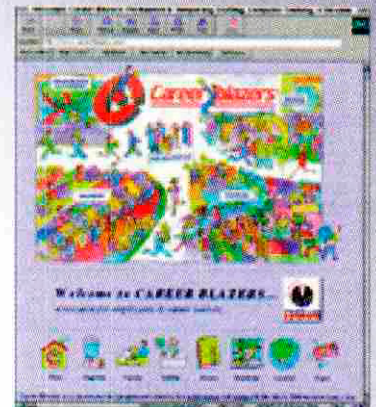
The product's broadcast features let you create your own newspaper. First, you choose from more than 70 categories, such as entertainment, health, and business. Then you select the topics that interest you, from general to

## COOL SITES

► **Inc. online, <http://www.inc.com>.** Launched mid-summer, this site includes marketing tips, software, Web tools, and an area where you can create your own home page.

► **Media Alliance, <http://www.medialliance.com>.** This annually updated buyer's guide features free access to the company's complete Trainer's Gold database and includes listings of the top 100 HR and management training videos selected by a panel of 25 trainers, consultants, and reviewers.

► **Economic Research Institute, <http://www.eri.com/~eri>.** Want to see what others in the field are earning? What about the cost of living in Akron, Ohio, versus Miami? Well, you can find all of that information and more at this terrific site.



► **Career Blazers, <http://www.careerblazers.com>.** According to Robert Doran, national director of corporate communications at Career Blazers Personnel Services, this site is geared toward human resource professionals, training managers, career seekers, and others.

specific. The service also offers customized searches that use *droids*, electronic agents that find articles for you. You can conduct up to 15 searches simultaneously.

Even the *Wall Street Journal* has hopped aboard the Web wagon with an electronic edition of the *Wall Street Journal, Wall Street Interactive Edition*. Though not as comprehensive as some news services, this is an excel-

lent way to track competitors, as well as stocks and mutual funds. You can also download *Personnel Journal*, <http://bis.dowjones.com/bizpubs/wsj-personnel.html>, to your laptop's hard drive and even read it while on the road. The software is free for a trial period, but a subscription costing \$12.95 per month will begin after two weeks if you don't call to cancel.

All of the news services provide you with timely, customized news intended to keep you competitive. Now, if you can just find the time to decide which one will work best for you.

## NET TRENDS

The number of North Americans with access to the Internet increased by 50 percent between September 1995 and April 1996, according to a recently-released study by Nielsen Media Research in conjunction with CommerceNet, a consortium that promotes Internet commerce.

"Internet access and use are increasingly becoming mainstream," says senior vice president of Nielsen Media Research, David Harkness. "While Internet users still tend to be upscale, their overall characteristics are coming more in line with general

population averages."

The latest survey found that 22 to 24 percent of people age 16 or older in Canada and the United States have access to the Internet, a 50 percent increase since August 1995. Five to 6 percent of North Americans use the Net daily, 11 to 12 percent use it weekly, and 15 to 16 percent have used it in the past six months.

Among the tallied Net users, the CommerceNet-Nielsen study distinguished between long-time users (those who had used the Net prior to August 1995) and those who began using the Net after that date.

## THE LAST WORD

From Phillip Winn's Tune In to Taglines Web page, <http://www.dakota.net/~pwinn/humor/taglines.html>.

- Hard work has a future payoff. Laziness pays off now.
- Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.
- Every time I've built character, I've regretted it.
- A clean desk is a sign of a cluttered desk drawer.