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TECHNOLOGY

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The PointCast Network

News you can use—when you pick and choose

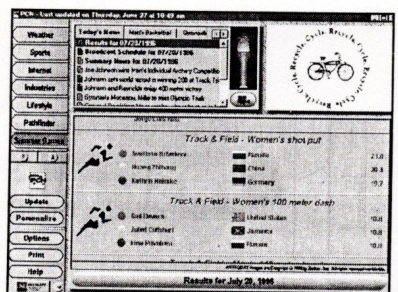
In today's electronic age, it seems we are all bombarded by so much information that deciphering what is important and what has relevance to our lives is the most difficult part. Think about how much time people spend filtering and sifting through memos, newspapers, e-mail, magazines, and of course flipping through all the channels on TV to find nothing of interest. There is now another option in news gathering, or information gathering, that allows you to pinpoint exactly what subjects interest you and receive information from some of the most credible sources when you want it, from one location on the Internet.

The PointCast Network, a new online broadcast news and information service, is flashing through the Internet and onto PC screens everywhere. Just this year, more than one million subscribers have download the free software off the Internet, growing by well over 250,000 new registered viewers per month. In fact, PointCast's central broadcast facility in Cupertino, Calif. is now receiving more than 35 million hits, and downloads 500,000 to 1 million bits of news data each day to individual viewers. It is the second most popular server to receive the most hits next to Netscape.

The PointCasts Network is the first news network to use the Internet to broadcast news and information to a viewer's computer screen. Viewers "pointcast": broadcast breaking news according to the interests of each individual user.

PointCast has a variety of "channels" that offer the latest news, stock quotes, weather, sports and industry data. The Channel Viewer displays News, Companies, Weather, Internet, Industries, Lifestyles and Pathfinder as the main categories that can be customized according to the user's choices. Clicking on a headline or graphic in the SmartScreen brings you directly to the full story displayed in the Channel Viewer.

The SmartScreen is automatically set up to be a screen saver, with the option of setting the amount of time you want until it goes into "idle-time." PointCast is only connected to the Internet during information updates scheduled by you. Internet users can download the PointCast



The Headline window displays all of the headlines for the selected channel. Full story text for the headline appears below.

WHAT'S AVAILABLE

NEWS: Reuters national, international, business and political news headlines and CNN.

COMPANIES: Charts with six weeks of stock price, volume data and a scrolling stock ticker from Standard and Poor's Comstock, PR Newswire and the Business Wire.

WEATHER: Satellite images, radar maps, the Ray Ban UV index and national and international weather maps from AccuWeather.

SPORTS: SportsTicker news and schedules including Major League Baseball, NFL, NBA, NHL, college football and basketball, golf, and tennis.

INTERNET: Access the World Wide Web through PointCast's built-in Web browser or Netscape Navigator 2.0 plug-in.

INDUSTRIES: Up to 40 industries, current trading prices and volumes for nine major financial indices including the NYSE, AMEX, NASDAQ composites and Dow Jones Industrials.

LIFESTYLE: Reuters NewMedia provides entertainment new, horoscopes, and winning lottery numbers.

PATHFINDER: Daily news from Time, People and Money Magazines.

AFFILIATE CHANNELS: The Boston Globe and the Los Angeles Times, Tampa Tribune, San Jose Mercury News and the Minneapolis Star Tribune are also available to viewers in each respective geographic region.

Network software by going directly to the home page located at http://www.pointcast.com. To download, you can use any Web-browser software on a 486/33 or faster IBM compatible-PC, with Windows 3.1, Windows for Workgroups, or Windows 95 operating systems that run on 8 MB RAM and 10 MB of free space. Viewers open up the application from within the directory the application was saved to, and personalize the information they want to see within each category.

Netscape Navigator 2.0 users can use Navigator whenever linked to the World Wide Web from PointCast for Netscape Web browsing. The Netscape Navigator 2.0 plug-in runs PointCast within the Navigator window for easy access to news and information. The PointCast Network also offers instant search capabilities through Infoseek. There is a "Tell me more from Infoseek" icon that is hyperlinked to a PointCast/Infoseek co-branded Web page. There, the viewer can choose from multiple, similar-type stories that are automatically displayed on that site.

MCI One is the exclusive sponsor of the "Weather" channel, and viewers can link from a 30-second animated commercial directly to the MCI One Web site. Also, using PointCast's built-in Web browser, viewers can click any URL included in news stories and be immediately linked to the World Wide Web for information. "PCN from MCI" will be part of the MCI One Internet service, providing automatic installation of the PointCast Network for MCI One Dial-up users.

For the first time ever, the Internet had a "channel" that broadcasted results of the Summer Games. In addition to regular channels, the Summer Games channel gave continuous updates and real-time results from Atlanta. Viewers selected from 33 different Olympic events taken directly from Reuters and SportsTrack.

Beginning in the fall, CNN Interactive will broadcast news from around the world directly to computer screens, as it happens. CNN will use the networks' global resources, which includes 30 bureaus around the world and the main news gathering facility at CNN's world headquarters in Atlanta. CNN Financial Network (CNNfn) will also be available as an option channel, and CNNSI, a joint venture between CNN and Sports Illustrated, will be an option in the future.

Recent investments of more than $36 million from leading companies in he publishing and technology industries such as Adobe Systems Inc., Compaq Computer Corp., General Electric, Knight-Ridder Inc., and Times Mirror puts PointCast in a good position to develop its current broadcasting capabilities and grow into becoming a leading information provider on the Internet

"The PointCast Network represents the next generation in publishing on the Internet," said Chris Hassett, president and CEO of Pointcast. "As the inventor and leading provider of broadcast capability on the Internet, we are focused on establishing strong relationships with leading companies that can help us best understand the merger of technology and publishing."

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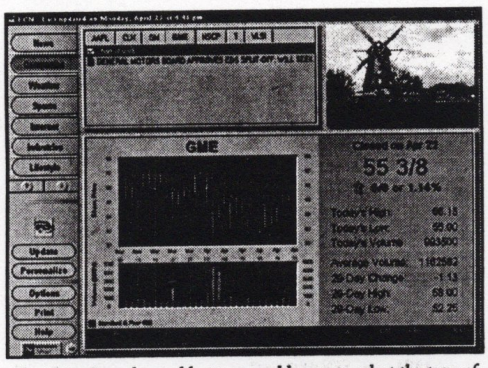
"EDS (Electronic Data Systems), formed a strategic and technology partnership to develop products and services for the PointCast Network. EDS provides an extensive technical and data support center from their global headquarters in Plano, Texas. EDS provides back-up services to accommodate large numbers of people downloading the PointCast Network from its web page.

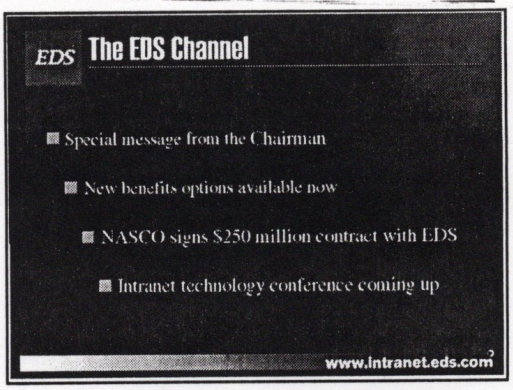
"EDS is fully supporting the PointCast Network and intends to work jointly with PoinCast to increase market opportunities," said Butch Winters, President of EDS' Internet & New Media business unit. "The PointCast network will help corporations empower their employees to use the Internet as a tool to obtain a competitive advantage."

EDS is currently testing a beta version of PointCast's new corporate Intranet product, the PointCast I-Server, which lets companies broadcast announcements, sales and employee benefits information directly to employees' desktops. The package costs about $1,000 per server CPU, which serves about 500 users. The I-Server is actually a new part of the PointCast Network that resides behind a corporation's firewall, and acts as a local broadcast facility for corporate Intranets. It extends the capabilities of the PointCast Network by broadcasting internal news alongside the public channels.



The PointCast channel buttons enable you to select the type of information you want to view.

"This will fundamentally change the way companies communicate with their employees," said Neil Weintraut, director of Internet research for Hambrecht & Quist, a San Francisco-based market research firm. "PointCast I-Server represents the first true example of 'community casting' - the ability to reach an entire community of workers with the immediacy and efficiency we've enjoyed with broadcast television."



The PointCast Network is definitely a step in the right direction as far as providing real-time information in a dynamic, easy-to-use format. The custom options in news delivery make this application a truly useful media outlet. It is not without flaw, though. Like anything on the Internet, the black hole of electronic commerce is forcing and pushing operating systems to their limits.

The main problem seems to be that amount of information is overloading corporate networks and causing network crashes. Also, during an actual transmission, if working in another application such as Word Perfect, it may delay commands, interrupting ease of work flow. PointCast has recently released a new version of its software that the will use data compression technology to reduce the service's traffic load and also will have the option to select and deselect channels. ★