UnixWorld Online: Trade Show Report No. 001

Internet Expo, Web World & EMail World show report.

Held February 20th and 21st, 1996 in San Jose, California. 166 exhibitors; traffic medium-heavy; 5% of attendees wore suits.

By Walter Alan Zintz.

Questions regarding this article should be directed to the author at walter@ccnet.com.

Along with the explosion in Internet sites has come a boom in vendors who offer products and services to support them; mostly for the World Wide Web and e-mail. This trade show reflects the scramble to get aboard. The show's size has more than doubled since last year, and better than 20% of this year's exhibitors signed up after the program was printed.

The show's manager and chief sponsor, Digital Consulting, Inc., chose to cut its overhead by running four shows at the same place and time. The other three shows--Network World Unplugged (about mobile computing); PC Card '96; Field & Sales Force Automation--had only minor relevance to the Internet Expo, Web World & EMail World show, which itself was an amalgamation. The exhibition sections of all these shows were in one big (about 200,000 square feet) open show floor, with neither barriers nor signage to separate different shows' exhibitions. This led to enlightening experiences as I unexpectedly wandered into exhibition areas from the other shows.

But there were very few other distractions. There were only four technical seminars, each just two hours long; just 15 speeches and panels, held to 50 minutes each; and only two parties, both held right on the show floor. That left plenty of time for cruising the exhibits. Here are some product and service introductions from the show that I found newsworthy and useful:

Beat Japan's Non-Tariff Trade Barriers

Japan Computer Corporation was demonstrating its iBOX, which turns a TV set or computer monitor, plus a PPP link through an Internet access service, into a complete WWWeb browsing and transaction system. An iBOX includes a 28.8-kbps modem, a CD-ROM drive, a TV-like remote control that handles all functions, WWWeb browser software, and encryption/authentication software from RSA Data Security Inc. The basic iBOX is intended for home use, priced to retail below the $500 magic price-point.

Several million of these boxes are being distributed to Japanese homes by net access vendors there. A primary use for them is direct-order purchases from connected vendors, bypassing Japan's restrictive distribution channels. Japanese consumers are eager to order directly from United States vendors, and the American subsidiary of Japan Computer Corporation is presently recruiting direct-order firms in the United States to join the system.

JCC USA: WWWeb www.i-box.com; e-mail info@i-box.com; voice 415/473-1106; fax 415/473-1109.

Touching the Web

MicroTouch was demonstrating the week-old beta version of its Prospector product, a WWWeb browser based on Spyglass Mosaic that's designed for touchscreen operation. It combines simplified operation--only six or seven basic buttons--with optional security features such as restricting the sites to which users can surf and preventing users from closing or exiting the browser. Prospector is intended for both public kiosks and desktops, and is said to work with any touchscreen hardware. Shipments of the production version are scheduled for April 1996. At present, Windows 95 is the only operating system supported.

MicroTouch Systems, Inc.: WWWeb http://www.microtouch.com; e-mail touch@mts.mhs.compuserve.com; voice 508/659-9000; fax 508/659-9100.

Smarten Up That Mailbot

Are your customers still calling your voice helpline just because they don't want to get tangled up in the indexes and command format of your automated mailback help system or ftp site? The DataWave 7x24 service takes free-form e-mail requests from your customers, sent to an address with your company name in it, and by looking for keywords and keyphrases in the text, selects appropriate help documents and e-mails them back. WWWeb users can access your help documents, too, via the same search engine and knowledgebase.

Island Data: WWWeb http://www.islanddata.com; e-mail jeff@islanddata.com; voice 619/487-9335; fax 619/487-9315.

Do Radio or TV Broadcasts on the Web

With StreamWorks, your Web site can transmit digital audio or video/audio programs over the Internet. These are real-time broadcasts, which start playing on the user's multimedia system as soon as the signal starts arriving; no need to wait for a complete file load. StreamWorks can use a link as slow as 9600 baud (for AM-quality audio) or 14.4 kbaud (for one-frame-per-second TV) to maintain real-time transmission. But it can as easily deliver CD-quality stereo over a 2B ISDN link (128 kbps) or broadcast-standard TV over a T1 link (1.5 Mbps). StreamWorks usually uses the MPEG format, and the client software needed to receive either radio or TV is a freebie.

Xing Technology Corporation: WWWeb http://www.xingtech.com; e-mail streamsales@xingtech.com; voice 805/473-0145; fax 805/473-0147.

Keep an Automated Eye on Your Favorite Web Sites

Your WWWeb browser plus Smart Bookmarks software will check your list of hot sites at a user-specified interval, looking for sites that have changed since last you visited them. When it finds one, it notifies you of the changed site, tells you what has changed, and proffers a link to take you to the changed site directly. Or if your viewpoint is that of a site manager rather than a browser, Smart Bookmarks can be configured to e-mail notices of changes on your site to people who have been monitoring it recently.

First Floor Software: WWWeb http://www.firstfloor.com; e-mail lobby@firstfloor.com; voice 415/968-1101; fax 415/968-1193.

Slight disclaimer; despite its name, First Floor Software actually occupies second-floor offices. To be precise, it is in the second-floor space UnixWorld magazine had back when we were in Mountain View, California.

An E-Mail Vendor/User Group

No, e-mail is a long way from dead. An industry group has been launched to promote both e-mail use and new technologies for it. The Internet Mail Consortium calls itself a technical trade association, and seems intent on operating as /usr/group did in the Unix field: a core of vendor and large-user members paying most of the costs and calling the shots, while small users are allowed to come along for the ride.

Internet Mail Consortium: WWWeb http://www.imc.org/; e-mail info@imc.org; voice 408/426-9827; fax 408/426-7301.

An Industry Directory

The Internet & Online Industry Sourcebook proposes to become the hardcopy directory of products and services for online sites. It's to be primarily a directory of companies, their executives, their products and their ''strategic alliances'', with extensive indexing. We're also promised market analysis articles from big-name market research companies, a list of trade shows, and a glossary.

The sample listings on display were definitely not hype-free, but the hype was grossly outweighed by real information. This directory is co-sponsored by half a dozen well-known companies, and the consortium expects to produce a substantial first edition --400 pages, 600 companies, 2,000 executives--at a substantial $199 price.

Published by Gateway Publishing. Distributed by Publications Resource Group: WWWeb http://www.prgguide.com; e-mail info@prgguide.com; voice 413/664-6185; fax 413/664-9343.

Directory Assistance for E-Mail Users

A lookup service for e-mail addresses went online at the show. Bigfoot takes human names via e-mail or WWWeb, and attempts to return the corresponding e-mail address from its database of more than 3 million (said to be growing by a million listings a month). Listing is voluntary, and the vendor's terms of use attempt to protect listees from exploitation. There's no charge for searches or for listings, and no indication of how the company intends to turn a profit without charging someone.

Bigfoot Partners, L.P.: WWWeb http://bigfoot.com; e-mail info@bigfoot.com.

Filtering the Internet's Seamy Side

Suppose you have to arrange Internet access for schoolkids. Of course they can't be turned loose on the net; they have to be steered clear of objectionable matter in several categories. There are a number of services that attempt to rate everything that's accessible via the net, usually by running sample text from each site through programs that look for dubious words. But these programs filter out a lot of perfectly acceptable sites in their attempts to catch everything, and still let some thoroughly objectionable sites slip through.

Now there's a contrarian approach, the iscreen! system. This service uses lists of positively approved sites, checked by human raters, and prevents access to any site not listed. There are more than 50,000 iscreen!-rated sites today, and the list of sites checked was targeted on those most likely to be of interest to children.

Ratings profiles are set for individual users or groups, by the adults responsible for their Internet environments. The screenable factors list goes beyond the usual violence, profanity and sex categories to include hate speech, gambling, and almost a score more. Site ratings include an age-suitability factor, so sites inappropriate for kindergardeners may still be accessible to teens. iscreen! is an ongoing service--the site lists live on the vendor's servers, where they're continually being updated and expanded. The service is now in beta and available without charge--when beta is over, the plan is to charge about $40 per year per user.

NewView, Inc.: WWWeb http://www.newview.com; e-mail info@newview.com; voice 415/299-9157; fax 415/299-0522.

Read All About the Web

Web Review is a new magazine about the WWWeb that appears on the Web. It deals more with Web issues than with technical matters. Better view this magazine through a pretty high-speed link, because the graphics are very fancy and they're tightly linked to the information content. You'll find *Web Review* at URL http://gnn.com/wr/.

WebMaster is an ink-on-paper magazine. Despite the title it is basically a suit journal, a spin-off from *CIO* magazine, and its stated subject is business use of the net. Nonetheless, a fair amount of its content should be of real interest to thoughtful technical people. *WebMaster* is a controlled-circulation publication, and you get a free-subscription qualification form by phoning Denise Perreault at 800/788-4605.

News(papers) from Silicon Valley

The *San Jose Mercury News*, the major metropolitan daily newspaper in Silicon Valley, is proposing two new online services for employers and prospective employees: Talent Scout and Free Agent. They'll include resume matching, a recruitment database, and employment news reports from Silicon Valley. No start dates or pricing was available. (''The Merc'' is already publishing its news and classifieds on the Web, at fees that vary with services ordered.)

But right now, and without paying a penny, you can have the latest news from the entire San Francisco Bay area over the World Wide Web. The *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco Examiner*, daily newspapers that are at least as major as the Merc and far more cosmopolitan, are putting the full text of their daily and Sunday papers on the Web in real time. No fees, no need to register. Just point your Web browser to their joint Web site, http://www.sfgate.com, and start reading.

Techno-Inclined Women Confab on the Web

A grass-roots organization for women working in technological fields (and young wannabees) has put up a preliminary version of a WWWeb site for information and networking. Your reporter found an exceptionally high degree of usability there, with almost no self-promotion, and the Web-site rating service Magellan has already given it a maximum rating.

Women in Technology: WWWeb http://www.witi.com.

Edited by Becca Thomas / Online Editor / UnixWorld Online / editor@unixworld.com

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Last Modified: Friday, 08-Mar-96 14:37:17 PST