

ired to the World

by Ralph Lee Scott

Internet Explorer 4.0

In the last *Wired to the World* column, I reviewed the new beta release of Netscape *Communicator Pro*; this time we will look at the beta release of Microsoft's *Internet Explorer 4.0*. Just like *Communicator*, Microsoft's goal for the new *IE* browser is improving access to the Internet for clients. Specifically, users have problems with speed and quality of downloads, the mass of information on the Internet, poor e-mail communication, slow software client loading (i.e. get *IE* to run on your desktop), and integration with other products like *Word* and *Excel*. Also, improved and increased use of Java technology has led to changes in the way in which the Java client is handled. Microsoft hopes that this new version of *Internet Explorer* will so dazzle the users that they will throw away their copy of Netscape *Navigator*. To make this offer even more attractive, Microsoft has traditionally charged the best of all prices — nothing at all.

You can download this beta version of *IE* at <http://www.microsoft.com/ie40/>; however, before rushing to try the beta version, I suggest that you first read the rest of this article. Microsoft has improved access to frequently used sites in this new version of its browser. Getting back to this "history" list both as a "favorite site" or through the "history list" has been made easier by an enhancer called "AutoComplete". "AutoComplete" enables you to click on your favorites directly from the main menu screen. *IE* allows the user to divide the main screen into two parts, the left part of which has your favorites listed. If you like frames, this feature will thrill you. On the other hand, if you don't like frames... Also, in the "just what you always wanted" column, the history list now can store the URL for any site (or home page) that you have visited in the last 999 days. This is (thankfully) not linked to your machine cache; the browser actually goes to the URL and downloads the current page contents. If you want the contents of the page as it was 999 days ago, you still have to remember to save the file on your local disk.

Current users of *IE* will recall the browser's reputation for "bells and whistles." The 4.0 version hopes to "provide a very rich viewing experience" for the users. Using Java-based technology coupled with a multimedia interface, clients will find a lot going on at their desktops. If, on the other hand, you don't want to be bothered by a lot of activity while you are reading, you might want to turn off some of these "enhancements" by just removing the Java application software from your PC. Be advised, however, that Microsoft won't like this, and will be bugging you to download the helper software every time you log on to their home site (<http://www.msn.com>). This can be stopped by changing your home page to another site that doesn't plead with you to download the missing software.

Microsoft claims that 4.0 will run faster. My general experience is that *IE* seems to run somewhat faster than Netscape's *Navigator*. While this is not always true, it happens to me enough that there must be something to the Microsoft claim of faster loading. Perhaps it's just that *IE* gets you something to read faster, or that the "bells and whistles" entertain me. Other *IE* users have reported that they don't think there is any difference in the loading speed. You might want to try the two browsers yourself (use *IE* 3.0; see below) just to satisfy your curiosity. Let me know what you find out and I will report back in a later column.

Everybody is interested in security on the Internet now, with prime time TV commercials chronicling the woes of people who had their credit card information stolen over the Internet, etc. The new version of *IE* promises increased security. What Microsoft has done is allow the user to have increasing levels of security, depending on where the browser and your e-mail or CGI form is going. For example, within a corporate or university LAN where you are perhaps less concerned about security because of a firewall in place, you could have a low level of security running under *IE*. Later if you go out of the building or LAN, you can invoke the security level to a higher plane to further protect the information you transmit. This feature is useful for those individuals who operate in a secure environment and want to be able to allow the free exchange of information between users with a minimum of hassle. Not that with the higher level security the information cannot get across; it's just that it is better facilitated in the low-security level.

Microsoft has bundled an e-mail software package called *Outlook Express*. This works like a standard e-mail package, but also has the added benefit of supporting standard Internet protocols automatically. This is different from Microsoft's other e-mail package *Exchange*, which requires a dummy client interface to use with an Internet Browser. This dummy client is awkward to use in actual practice, and does not allow the remote Internet client user the full functionality of the *Exchange* package. If you want to see how a dummy client looks on the Internet under *Exchange*, point your browser to <http://mail.ecu.edu>. You won't get very far without a password, but trust me, while the dummy client is better than no access, not being able to get to all of your e-mail file folders, for example, is frustrating. Microsoft has supposedly improved the functionality of its e-mail Internet browser in *Outlook Express*.

If you read the last "Wired" column, you would expect Microsoft to have a networking conference product in this software bundle, and it does. Called *NetMeeting*, it allows video and data network conferencing over the Internet. Other parts

of the bundle include *FrontPage* (for creating Home Pages), *NetShow* (for integrating multimedia into your Home Page), and software that lets you share HTML pages within your organization (called *Personal Web Server*).

The new version of IE will include code that will take advantage of "PUSH" technology to provide virtual webcasting from special "PUSH" sites. "PUSH" is an attempt at bringing television to your desktop. An example of the use of this technology is San Francisco's KPIX live television cameras at various sites along the freeways. The "PUSH" technology allows the cameras to transmit real time pictures to your desktop. Finally, the new 4.0 will have something called an *Active Desktop*. This is an attempt by Microsoft to integrate the Web browser into your PC operating environment. This should allow you to move seamlessly from the Internet to other software products on your desktop. For example, you should be able to move from an IE browser page to a *Word* or *Excel* page that looks and feels the same. This is an interesting idea. Will it work? Stay tuned! Like most new software packages, this new version promises network administrators "easy administration" on client desktops. Installation in existing networks and seamless running of prior HTML and Java code is promised. The jury is still out on this, of course; only a large scale installation of the client will give the verdict.

Unfortunately the beta test of this new software "suite" has not gone well for Microsoft. I would advise against trying it for the time being. One major problem is that you cannot run version 3.0 and 4.0 on the same machine. Downloading the 4.0 version overwrites the old 3.0 code, and if things go "South," then you have to remove everything and re-install the 3.0 version again. So a word to the wise, don't download the beta 4.0 version unless you are willing to take a risk to your desktop Internet capability. For example, if you use IE as your only Internet access tool, and the 4.0 version bombs (see below), you risk losing your web access. Since a number of

people have downloaded the free version of 3.0 from the Internet, if 4.0 fails, you are left with no browser and no Internet access. If not allowing the seamless operation of two versions on the desktop were not enough, *Internet Explorer* 4.0 will not (repeat will not) work with four major online services: American Online, CompuServe, AT&T, and, wonder of wonders, Microsoft's own MSN! Also some users have reported that IE 4.0 has changed settings in their operating systems, something you don't want downloaded software to do. In addition, the *Active Desktop* seems to have become inactive and goes to sleep after an initial download. Again, this seems to be software that is not working right. An extensive list of warnings and known bugs are listed at the IE 4.0 download site. While some bugs are always present in beta software, this version seems to have some interesting problems at the roll out of the beta version. It is hoped that in a few months these bugs will have been fixed and the new release of *Internet Explorer* 4.0 in its final version will not have many of these problems.

Along the bug front, the famous "Trojan Horse" bug in Netscape's *Navigator* has turned out to be worse than expected. The bug captures any CGI data you submit over *Navigator* into a file that can then be sent without your knowledge to third parties. CGI data might include: passwords, telephone numbers, account numbers, and credit card information. It appears that the Java script security software does not work as intended, and the user is left unprotected. A quick fix to this bug has been to disable the Java feature in *Navigator* using the pull down "Options" menu. Under the "Network Preferences" panel you can turn off the Java client by looking at the folder "Languages" and unclicking the box that reads "Enable JavaScript." If you want to continue using the Java features, remember that any CGI information you fill out can be stored on your hard drive and transmitted to third parties without your knowledge. C files/forms usually have the file extension ".CGI" such as: "order.cgi" or "tickets.cgi."

There's more than
ONE
way to do most things. You can have
ONE
serials management company, and
ONE
document delivery service, and
ONE
source for CD-ROM databases and yet another
ONE
for full text, index and abstract database searching.
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