FROM THE ETHER · BOB METCALFE

Predicting the Internet's catastrophic collapse and ghost sites galore in 1996

ALMOST ALL of the many predictions now being made about 1996 hinge on the Internet's continuing exponential growth. But I predict the Internet, which only just recently got this section here in *Info-World*, will soon go spectacularly supernova and in 1996 catastrophically collapse. Here's why there soon will be only World Wide Web ghost pages:

■ *Money*. Investors poured a lot of money into the Internet during 1995, but very little leaked out. Everyone will realize this suddenly in January when financial results are tallied. A hurried search for greater fools to absorb projected continuing losses won't pan out this time.

■ *Digital money*. As if to make up for the shortage of real money to finance Internet commerce, several companies have been trying to mint digital money. They have, however, failed to streamline financial activity — there are now more, not fewer, middlepersons. Therefore, transaction costs, at 50 cents each or more, remain way too high. Without efficient micropayments, there will be little Internet commerce, except, maybe, but probably not, some advertising.

■ *Measurement*. Advertisers only invest the big bucks in measured media, where they can have some inkling of how many potential buyers with what demographics are reading their ads. Even if, as Nielsen just reported, 37 million North Americans tried the Internet in the last three months, we'll discover in 1996 that the vast majority surfed for several hours and then went back to watching TV. After the third major corporation stuffs its Web pages full of dazzling product literature and gets no hits, the Internet's collapse will begin to accelerate.

■ *Monopolies*. Dazzling product literature and advertising require at least ISDN speeds. But the major corporations upon which we are relying to upgrade Internet access past 28.8Kbps are the local telco monopolies, which like our postal service and public schools have become little more than jobs programs. The local telcos will escape demonopolization in 1995 and, while they pursue long distance voice business in 1996, their motivation to lower costs on high-speed Internet access will wither, fatally constipating the Web.

■ *Security*. Already most TCP/IP networks are not on the Internet but behind security fire walls, in Intranets. In early 1996, another series of major security breaches will drive the rest of the productive Internet to safety and out of reach.

■ *Compatibility*. During 1996, the war for control of standards will tear the Web. And early initiatives to migrate to Internet Protocol Next Generation will add to a general loss of compatibility. Such losses, including the flight to Intranets, will reduce whatever systemic value was accumulating in the Internet, as governed by the inverse of Metcalfe's Law. (See "Metcalfe's Law: A network becomes more valuable as it reaches more users," Oct. 2, page 53.)

■ *Capacity*. You've read that the Internet was designed to survive thermonuclear war, but it's repeatedly been brought to its knees, its circuits choked, for example, by the reaction to one measly jury verdict in Los Angles. The Internet is intermittently overloaded, and the TCP/IP architecture doesn't deal well with overloads. Furthermore, the Internet's naive flat-rate business model is incapable of financing the new capacity it would need to serve continued growth, if there were any, but there won't be, so no problem.

■ *Privacy*. Internet backlash among professional paranoids will break into a full collapse after a series of well-publicized privacy violations instigated by the professional paranoids themselves for our own good.

■ *Video*. One of two bad things will happen with video over the Internet during 1996. Either the Internet's attached computers, operating systems, and applications software will fail to deliver video, or they will succeed. If they succeed, the packet-punctuated pre-Asynchronous Transfer Mode Internet will fail to carry it. In either case, without video the Internet will lack the energy needed to sustain its current expansion.

■ *Pornography*. The Internet traffic carrying arguments about pornography on the Internet will during 1996 swamp the actual pornography, so even the most sophisticated Web search engines will too often fail to find any. What quicker road to collapse?

So, in 1996, CD-ROMs through Federal Express will emerge as the information superhighway. Instead of an Internet brimming with Web pages under construction, too few of us will haunt ghost pages.

I hope I'm not being too negative. Tell me if you think so.

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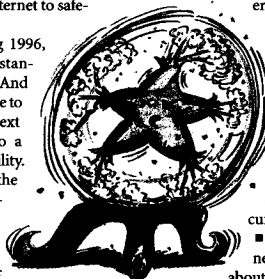
Action connects workflow to Web
■ Users can track progress of tasks via Home page

By Pardhu Vadlamudi

ACTION TECHNOLOGIES INC. this week will release Action Work-Flow Metro, a software package that allows users to access workflow applications using any standard World Wide Web browser.

Because more and more people are using the World Wide Web for customer service and support applications, Action is developing a series of applications and templates that will integrate workflow technology with the Web.

Using Action's workflow engine — for routing images and data internally — and Action's APIs, companies can continue to use tools such as Visual Basic and Power-Builder to develop workflow applications.

cations. With Action WorkFlow Metro, users can integrate structured Hypertext Markup Language documents into a Metro workflow.

"You have the ability to mix-and-match an API personality with the Web personality," said Rodrigo Flores, Action's vice president of product management.

An Action WorkFlow Metro application is launched from a company's Home page so that a customer can submit a technical support request. Once a request is submitted, the customer can track its status from the Web site.

Action WorkFlow Metro features two separate offerings: The Application Center, which comprises 20 applications designed for administrative tasks such as customer requests, and the Development Center, for creating and customizing workflow applications.

The Application Center is priced at $93,000. Pricing for the Development Center is not yet available.

Action Technologies, located in Alameda, Calif., can be reached at (510) 521-6190 or via the Web at http://www.actiontech.com.
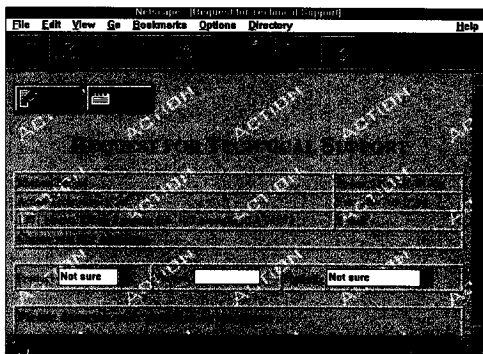
ACTION WORKFLOW METRO *lets users submit and track technical support requests from a World Wide Web site.*