

Redefining News in the Era of Internet By blending print and television, Silicon Valley start-up shakes up traditional view of news

Daniel Sneider, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor . The Christian Science Monitor (pre-1997 Fulltext) ; Boston, Mass. [Boston, Mass]26 June 1996: 4.

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

On a background of vibrant colors, your computer screen displays summaries of the latest events in Europe and your home town. Up-to-the-minute quotes of the stocks you own, plus the baseball scores, roll across the bottom of the screen. In the upper corner is an advertisement for Saturn cars, pitched by a sequence of brightly colored, animated faces.

This vision of news is a hybrid of print and television, and, of course, being on the Internet, it's "interactive." It's a concept in which personalized news is broadcast to your desktop - and it poses a potentially huge challenge for traditional news media, industry analysts say.

The concept belongs to Pointcast Network, a Silicon Valley start-up that has shaken up the fast-growing Internet news business. While media attention has focused on the unveiling Monday of Microsoft's much-awaited on-line magazine, Slate, industry insiders say they are more impressed by the Pointcast Network (PNC).

FULL TEXT

On a background of vibrant colors, your computer screen displays summaries of the latest events in Europe and your home town. Up-to-the-minute quotes of the stocks you own, plus the baseball scores, roll across the bottom of the screen. In the upper corner is an advertisement for Saturn cars, pitched by a sequence of brightly colored, animated faces.

Welcome to the future of news on the Internet.

This vision of news is a hybrid of print and television, and, of course, being on the Internet, it's "interactive." It's a concept in which personalized news is broadcast to your desktop - and it poses a potentially huge challenge for traditional news media, industry analysts say.

The concept belongs to Pointcast Network, a Silicon Valley start-up that has shaken up the fast-growing Internet news business. While media attention has focused on the unveiling Monday of Microsoft's much-awaited on-line magazine, Slate, industry insiders say they are more impressed by the Pointcast Network (PNC).

"It's the latest innovation on evolving ways to deliver news digitally," says Paul Saffo, who watches the latest trends in cyberspace from the Institute of the Future in Palo Alto, Calif.

Competing visions of news

The Internet, a global computer network, began by putting printed text on screen, and then added the graphics that define its subset, the World Wide Web.

The Web's electronic magazines ("E-zines") such as Slate, edited by former New Republic editor and Crossfire co-host Michael Kinsley, flow primarily from the print model.

But Pointcast and other products coming down the pike are pushing the Web more in the direction of print's rival, television broadcast.

"Once you flip from realizing 'the computer is a device you type at' to 'a computer is more like a TV,' it starts

with developing the basic concept.

The outcome of this battle of competing visions of the Internet is likely to profoundly affect the entire news and information business.

Some analysts compare the Internet's impact to that of radio and television on newspapers and other printed products, where the change in the medium had a deep impact on content as well. Less sweepingly, Mr. Saffo likens it to the advent of the telegraph, which led to the development of wire services and changed the very definition of news.

"The fusion between technology and content - which can be very chaotic and violent - is happening across the board," says Steve Harmon, an analyst for Mecklermedia's iWORLD internet analysis service.

The most prominent example of this is computer software giant Microsoft, which is now investing large resources into moviemaking, with the Dreamworks studio, as well as in media, including a joint venture with NBC.

Many traditional media companies are also moving into the Internet, among them most major daily newspapers (including this one), news magazines, and television networks such as Cable Network News (CNN).

But as the example of Pointcast shows, much of the innovation is coming from the technologists rather than traditional media organizations.

"You look at this and you wonder - how come Dow Jones or Reuters didn't do it?," says Saffo.

Both Christopher Hassett and Gregory Hassett, the brothers who founded Pointcast, come out of the computer industry. The development of Pointcast was driven first of all by their analysis of how the Web's technological features could create a new hybrid medium that would lend itself well to advertising.

"We believed that if we made it compelling and useful, to the office worker first, and then adding more and more segments 'til you eventually get to everyone with a PC {personal computer} on their desk or living room," says Gregory Hassett, "then you would get a lot of eyeballs, and eyeballs translate into ad revenue."

Parallels with cable service

Unlike Microsoft, Pointcast does not see itself creating new editorial content. Rather, the Hassetts compare Pointcast to a cable television service that offers a variety of channels to the viewer. National partners such as Reuters and TimeWarner, or local partners such as the Los Angeles Times and The Boston Globe, feed these channels, sometimes selling their own ads.

Unlike traditional Web news products, which require the user to make an effort to go the site, Pointcast delivers content directly to the viewer, like a television or a newspaper on the doorstep. It acts as a "screen saver," coming on when a computer is turned on but idle, delivered either through corporate networks that provide the service to its employees or by direct dial-up. The user can, with a click, delve deeper into any story for more information or reconfigure the screen to display other news.

"PNC serves two needs, the interactive and the passive," says Christopher Hassett, the company's president.

Since its debut this spring, Pointcast has grown rapidly, with some 250,000 registered users, and is the second-most-trafficked Web site on the Internet. "They've opened some sort of magic box and, so far, they're the only wizards in town," says industry analyst Harmon.

But Pointcast is keeping an eye over its shoulder. Personalized news services such as Infoseek Personal, run by the popular Web search engine, are abounding. And there's always the question of what the 8,000-pound gorilla of the industry, Microsoft, is going to do.

Illustration

PHOTO: PRINT MODEL: Contents page from Microsoft's Slate, the electronic magazine that debuted this week on the Web. Slate is formatted more like a news magazine, as opposed to the television-derived format of the Pointcast Network, [HTTP://WWW.SLATE.COM](http://www.slate.com)

DETAILS

Publication title:	The Christian Science Monitor (pre-1997 Fulltext); Boston, Mass.
Pages:	4
Number of pages:	0
Publication year:	1996
Publication date:	Jun 26, 1996
Dateline:	CUPERTINO, CALIF.
Section:	UNITED STATES
Publisher:	The Christian Science Publishing Society (d/b/a "The Christian Science Monitor"), trusteeship under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Place of publication:	Boston, Mass.
Country of publication:	United States, Boston, Mass.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
ISSN:	08827729
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	NEWSPAPER
ProQuest document ID:	291243711
Document URL:	https://library.access.arlingtonva.us/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/291243711?accountid=57895
Copyright:	Copyright Christian Science Monitor Jun 26, 1996
Last updated:	2012-01-28
Database:	US Newsstream

Database copyright © 2019 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)