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On-line audio and video will go mainstream



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Will people watch video on the Internet?

When asked, most experts suggest not. They say that the infrastructure of the Internet is too slow. On-line video is too unreliable. And the screen — well, it's just too small and fuzzy, and the playback too jerky. It's absolutely painful to watch.

Yet one of the most popular destinations on the Internet today — **Adcritic.com** — is a Web site that consists of mostly video. How popular is it? Recent numbers suggest a few hundred thousand people visit it a day, most of whom watch at least 10 video clips.

The site has defied every prediction that the Internet is too primitive to support video. There's a buzz out there that this is one of the hottest Internet sites, and no wonder. It has great content, is good for a laugh and offers great video quality. And here is the weirdest thing about this popular site — the content is, get this, TV commercials. That's right, one of the busiest video sites on the Internet happens to show the thing that people hate to watch on television.

If Adcritic.com is any indication, then on-line video has a wonderful future. Some day. The fact remains that while there is no shortage of video content to be found on the Internet, most of it is never viewed.

Which raises the question: will on-line audio and video ever go mainstream? I'm convinced it will, and I think this will happen over the next five years as several trends come together.

First, we are going to see the arrival of many Internet-linked audio and video devices. Consider the concept of on-line audio by checking out Internet radio device Kerbango (**www.kerbango.com**). Set for release next month, you'll be able to bring it home, plug it into your high-speed home Internet connection and tune in hundreds of Internet radio stations.

Then there's the new Wurlitzer Jukebox (**www.wurlitzer-jukebox.com**), a product targeted toward bars, restaurants and other public locations. It will obtain its audio via the Internet. Are these isolated products? Not if you listen to the buzz coming out of Taiwan and Hong Kong. A flood of new Internet-based audio and video equipment is on its way.

The second key trend driving the audio-video future is that it is easy for anyone to place content on-line. Established radio and TV stations have long posted their broadcasts, but on-line broadcasters such as Canada's Iceberg Media (**www.theiceberg.com**) are really leading the way by using the Internet to broadcast into specialized niche markets.

And third is the issue of bandwidth. Sure, it is easy to discount all of this talk of on-line audio and video as simply the ravings of the Internet-loonies, as the Internet is just far too slow. If you believe that, then you should realize that leading edge fibre-optic technology lets 360,000 people download an entire full-length DVD-quality movie via the Net.

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That technology isn't part of the Internet yet, but one day it will be.

Which brings us to the final point — there is a massive and important business role for this technology, which will help to spur its implementation. Companies will realize that the Net can be used to distribute on-line training videos to distant offices, for example, or for live, interactive video conferencing of an extremely high quality. Corporate Web sites will be able to feature short instructional or product support videos, not to mention Internet-based telephone systems that cost virtually nothing for long-distance connections.

Science fiction? Cisco Systems is already there.

Practical business applications will help companies solve real business problems, or save significant sums of money. As the technology matures and as the business applications become apparent, we will see a rapid marriage of Internet audio-video to the way we work in the corporate sector.

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