

Gizmos, gadgets galore at Vegas electronics show



MIKE WENDLAND

The annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas is the marketplace's most influential technology gathering place. This year's mega event was no exception.

There were gizmos and gadgets galore. But there were also clear indications of a major trend shaping up.

Everything had a common theme: It's connected world. And the Internet is the plug that does the connecting.

Take, for example, the "dot com home" from Sun Microsystems. It was a display built to look like a typical house. Every room, every device, every appliance was wired to the Internet. Push a button from anywhere in the house and the coffee maker starts. If someone

comes to your front door, you're paged or beeped on your wireless phone. A camera takes their picture and displays it on your own family Web page. You can talk to them by phone from anywhere and even open the door if you want.

When you run out of, say, olive oil or sugar, you're alerted. You can upload your shopping list to the supermarket. If the dishwasher needs the belt tightened, you're notified. The refrigerator has a flat panel computer screen constantly hooked up to the Internet.

And all the technology in the "dot com home" is available now. It works. These weren't prototypes I saw. They were actual products now being developed.

Not to be outdone, 3Com put together a wired house on the outskirts of Las Vegas and hauled reporters out by the bus load for a look-see. It had many of the same connected features. Again, using available technology.

These homes make the home

on the old Jetsons cartoon series seem obsolete.

Eric Benhamou, chairman and CEO of 3Com, introduced new technology called Session Initiation Protocol that will allow users of Palm organizers to register their identity with Internet phones and thus have phone calls follow them anywhere.

Benhamou demonstrated by using his Palm to register his identity on a telephone, using the Palm's infrared port to transfer data. This allowed him to receive phone calls and information. "Our vision is called pervasive networking," Benhamou said, referring to the billions of computers, handheld devices and wireless communication products he wants to hook up.

"I was also impressed by the 'ring thing.'"

Actually, they call it the Java Ring, because it contains a tiny microchip loaded with Sun's Java operating system. It can be loaded with personal identification info. It will open doors and validate transactions like a sig-

nature. If you're hurt or sick and have to go to a hospital, the ring has all your personal medical information stored and available for doctors to download.

Next to networking the home and everything in it, digital technology was the other major trend.

Everyone was talking about: Digital music - The MP3 format. Tiny little devices that fit in your pocket or attach to your telephone and play stereo-quality music you can download from the Internet.

Digital phones - They all connect to the Internet now. Browse the Web, read e-mail on your handheld phone. My first reaction: People already seem to have trouble driving and talking on the phone. What safety problems will be added when they're also surfing the net and reading e-mail.

Digital radio - There was a lot of excitement about satellite broadcasts being beamed into your car with amazing sound quality. It threatens to drive all

but the biggest local stations out of business.

Digital connectivity - A cool new technology called Bluetooth transmits data between electronic devices. It is being touted as a way to link up phones, handheld computers, digital cameras and home appliances.

And then there were the new high-tech acronyms that we'll all soon be puzzled by. Acronyms like WAF, for Wireless Access Protocol, the new standard that wireless phones use to connect to the Internet for services like paging, e-mail and Web surfing. Then there's SACD, for Super Audio CD.

SD for Secured Digital, a memory chip format. DTCP for Digital Transmission Copy Protection, a technology that prevents illicit video duplication.

And HRT for Holographic Reflector Technology, something that provides crisper LCD computer screen resolutions.

I saw a lot of stuff I'd like to have but I took home only one

thing this year: A portable keyboard for my Palm V handheld organizer.

Made by a new start-up called Think Outside, the "Stowaway Portable Keyboard" folds up to about the size of a pack of cigs. It unfolds into a full-sized keyboard. The Palm fits upright into a docking slot in the middle of the board and, voila ... the Palm has all the capabilities of a laptop.

I got mine. If you want one, you'll have to wait a few weeks. They'll be on the market sometime by the end of the first quarter.

Mike Wendland reports about computers and the Internet for NBC television stations coast-to-coast. His radio show is heard every weekend on TalkRadio 1270, WXYT. You can reach Mike through his Web site at www.pcmike.com

Job fair attracts thousands

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and the HomeTown Newspapers announce their Spring Job Fair from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 29 at Burton Manor Banquet and Conference Center in Livonia.

This is the fourth general job fair by these two subsidiaries of HomeTown Communications, Inc. of Livonia. As many as 125 companies will be recruiting employees.

This general job fair will feature recruiters including:

Absopure, Accountants Connection, Airtouch Cellular, ASK Healthcare Services, Bartech Group, Comeria, Delta Dental Plan of Michigan, Dorothy Day, Envision, Federal Reserve Bank, First Federal of Michigan, First Investors Corporation, Flagstar Bank, Frito-Lay, Frommer & Associates, Graybar Electric, Great Lakes Bank, Jabril Circuit, Jewish Vocational School, Kroger, Mattress & Futon Shoppe, Nextel Communications, Office Mate's 5, Old Kent Bank, OLDE Discount, Perisian, Paychex, Personnel Unlimited, Plestipak Packaging, Providence Hospital & Medical Centers, Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers, Republic Bancorp Mortgage, Ricoh Business Systems, Rose Moving & Storage, Sav-On Drugs, Sears, Staffing Services of Michigan, Tempro, Trans Inns Management, U.S. Vision, United Parcel Service, University of Michigan and Virginia Tile.

Space is available for a fee of \$725 for the Complete Exhibitor Package which includes an 8' table plus a quarter page ad in the Job Fair supplement. Electricity is available at your 8' foot table, on a limited basis, for an additional \$40.

For further details and space reservations, call (734) 959-3070 or (888) 999-1288. Burton Manor is located at the Jeffries Freeway (I-96) between Inkster and Middlebelt roads.

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers publishes 16 twice-weekly community papers in Oakland and Western Wayne Counties. HomeTown Newspapers publishes papers in Northville, South Lyon, Brighton, Novi, Northville, Milford and Livingston County.

BUSINESS MARKETPLACE

Computware acquisition
Computware Corporation of Farmington Hills recently announced that it has completed the purchase of substantially all the assets of the CACI Products Company from CACI International Inc. With the acquisition, Computware makes its debut in the application capacity planning market while creating important synergies with its EcoSYSTEMS line of application service level management products.

Looking for a house — read the Observer real estate section

Want to take a friend to the Auto Show?
We have just the ticket.

DaimlerChrysler proudly presents Women's Day on Tuesday, January 18, at the North American International Auto Show. And here's the best part. Buy a ticket to Women's Day at the Auto Show, then stop by our registration desk and get another one free. The following workshops will be offered consecutively from 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Dodge, Chrysler and Jeep exhibits. All were specifically designed with women in mind.

- Vehicle Maintenance • Shopping for a New Vehicle Can Be Fun • Financing/Leasing
- Off-Road Driving—Tips & Tricks • "Fit for a Kid" Child Safety Seat Installation

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