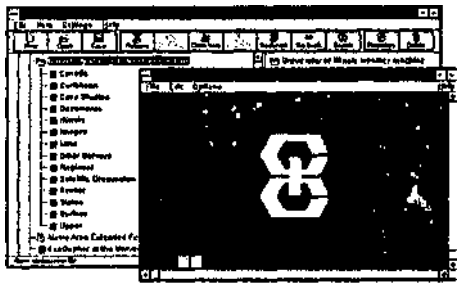
The Internet Channel



Last fall, when Continental Cable Vision (CCV) and PSI Inc. announced that they would be putting households on the Internet using their existing cable TV plant by mid-1994, many were skeptical.

But since March 8, Cambridge residences already wired with cable TV have been able to sign up for Internet access for approximately US$100 per month, according to Will Richmond, who engineers CCV's Massachusetts networks. For that price, you get a IOBase-T interface and up to three dedicated Internet IP addresses. The speed of the link is a cool half-megabit per second: plenty of bandwidth for viewing QuickTime movies or listening to Internet Talk Radio.

What makes it all possible is a new kind of cable converter that takes four TV channels and converts them into an Ethernet that spans the neighborhood. A router installed on each cable trunk bridges that Ethernet with CCV's fiber-optic backbone.

One of the bugaboos that still needs to be resolved is security. "I know that (PSI) has a number of security-minded design features,"says William S. Biedron, an engineer with CCV's network engineering group. Nevertheless, as the system is currently designed, any reasonably skilled hacker will be able to tap into neighbors' e-mail and TurboGopher sessions, unless some sort of encryption is deployed.

While $100 per month might seem like a lot of money to some, it's dirt cheap compared to the alternatives, which cost anywhere from $250 to $1,000 per month for the same level of service. Indeed, even Cambridge-based businesses don't get such a sweetheart deal from CCV. The commercial version of CCV's Internet access costs a cool $2,000 per month for a higher speed service (4Mbits per second).

These prices, like everything, will probably be outdated by the time the bits for this article see paper. One thing is sure, though: The prices are bound to plummet over the next two years. For information, contact *wbiedron@psilink.com* or *michmond® psilink.com* - *Simson L Garfinkel*

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