broadband news

Kazaa set to reward fileswappers

Sharman Networks has launched an update to its popular fileswapping Kazaa Media Desktop, promising an improved interface and better search options. Version 2.5's peer-to-peer network and controversial Peer Points Manager program offer rewards for participating users willing to share their PC with the network.

Industry watchers suggest the latest update is an attempt by Sharman to position Kazaa as a viable music-for-sale service, not a digital music piracy tool. "The more Kazaa steers its users to buy content rather than download it for free, the more it bolsters Kazaa's argument that it's acting as a legitimate service and not a media piracy haven," says Lee Black, senior analyst with Jupiter Research.

Most people use Kazaa to share multimedia content for free, but the latest software update pushes content for purchase. The software uses icons to distinguish premium content from free files within standard search results.

The Peer Points system lets you trade hard drive space and internet bandwidth for points redeemable for premium content, cash and prizes. Kazaa uses your hard drive space to store this premium content and it utilises your bandwidth to send it to other Kazaa users.

Kevin Bermeister, the chief executive officer at Altnet, a Sharman subsidiary, has likened this approach to baiting illegal fileswappers into buying legitimate content. The company's biggest challenge, however, won't be in attracting willing users, but in gathering the multimedia content people want.

Another new feature, created by Sharman Networks, called Participation Level, aims to boost file quality and sharing by rewarding users who consistently offer high-quality files. The idea is that if these visitors score enough points they'll get more search results as well as priority over other users when vying for the same file to download.

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Faster wireless standard approved

Along-awaited standard for WLANs (wireless local area networks) that offers faster data transfer than the current 802.11b specification while using the same frequencies has won final approval.

The new standard, 802.11g, is capable of speeds between 24 and 54Mbps (megabits per second), while remaining backward-compatible with the existing 802.11b standard which runs at a maximum 11Mbps. Both use radio spectrum in the range of 2.4GHz.

Many vendors, including Belkin and Apple, have been shipping equipment based on drafts of the standard for months. The companies promise these products will meet the final specification by releasing free downloadable updates.

Although wireless products only have to provide a maximum 24Mbps carrying capacity to meet 802.11g's speed requirements, the industry group Wi-Fi Alliance will require support for 54Mbps performance for its own 2.4GHz high-speed label.

British Airways embraces broadband

British Airways could follow in the footsteps of German airline Lufthansa. This follows positive response to its three-month trial of in-flight broadband on its planes between London and New York.

Like the German carrier it decided to test out onboard high-speed internet before deciding whether to roll out the service across all its long-haul flights. The tests, which ran from February to April this year, saw business traffic down due to the war in Iraq, but BA said that the feedback from customers was positive.

It tested the broadband offering in three of its four long-haul cabins – First, Club World (aka business) and World Traveller Plus (aka premium economy).

However it has made no decisions about which, if any, cabins would receive the service should it go ahead with a commercial offering. "We are going through the results of the trials to see if we want to move forward with it," a spokesperson added.

This leaves BA trailing behind Lufthansa, which plans to roll out broadband services across its entire long-haul fleet starting in 2004. But although BA admits that the trials show "broadband availability could influence passenger choice of an airline", it feels that this is only one factor of many that wins over business travellers.