

Broadband bonanza for Morpheus file-swappers

Broadband users searching for that rare, 1968 version of Smoking Whiskers the Creole Cat playing *Nothing but Fried Chicken* at Ronnie Scott's will draw comfort from a recent announcement by P2P (peer-to-peer) network Morpheus.

StreamCast Networks is preparing an upgrade to its Morpheus file-sharing software that will allow users to search further across the peer-to-peer network for songs and other files, making it easier to locate obscure or rare recordings.

Like many other file-sharing services, when Morpheus scours the internet for a file it looks at a 'cluster' of about 15,000 PCs even though as many as a million Morpheus users may be online at any given time. While that's often enough machines to find a popular song, more obscure files often don't show up.

But in 2003 the company will introduce an upgrade to its client that allows 'cluster-hopping'. If the Morpheus client doesn't find what it's looking for in the user's local cluster it will hop further afield to other clusters of PCs until it finds the file.

The new features may be welcomed by broadband file swappers but the recording and motion picture industries will probably



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be less than enthusiastic. They are suing StreamCast, along with other popular file-sharing services, in a US district court for allegedly contributing to mass copyright infringement.

StreamCast so far has incurred some £2m in legal costs to battle the case and for a time last year its future was in question due to the burden of the fees. The company makes money selling advertising and would be profitable were it not for the legal costs, according to Steve Griffin, StreamCast CEO.

If the judge were to rule that Morpheus should be shut down StreamCast has no surefire way of ending the service, according to Griffin. Unlike the ill-fated Napster service, Morpheus does not rely on a central server for a list of the files in its P2P network, making it harder to pull the plug on its users' activities.

"Once the software is downloaded... we don't have anything to do with what [our users] trade," said Griffin. Unfortunately for him, the entertainment industry doesn't see things the same way.

For an in-depth exploration of the legal ins and outs of file sharing over P2P networks, see the feature *Fair shares* on page 82.

ISPs line up pre-Easter promos

Broadband service providers are jockeying to win the most enticing special offer award in an attempt to push ADSL towards a genuine mass market.

ISPs BT Broadband, Demon, Eclipse, Pipex and Freedom2surf were among a slew of ADSL ISPs to step forward with tempting offers last month.

While Freedom2surf announced it was cutting connection fees by 50 percent to £29.99 ex VAT, Pipex is offering users a choice. Customers can go for a free connection, modem and filters with a one-off activation fee of £23.44 or, if they already have an ADSL modem, they can enjoy completely



free activation and a month's free connection. A spokesman for Pipex said the offers would run at least until the end of March, but if successful could well be extended further into the year.

Freedom2surf and Pipex were preceded by Demon and BT, both of which announced they would waive setup costs for broadband connection to users who signed up before 31 March 03.

Sony puts TV into broadband home

In the broadband age, the humble TV, not the PC, will be the key conduit for online entertainment, Sony President and Chief Operating Officer Kunitake Ando said at the opening of last month's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

"The television is being reborn as an always-on and interactive device. The first 50 years of colour TV were only the infancy stage," he said. Ando called for industry co-operation in consumer electronics as well as technology to make the broadband revolution happen, otherwise everyone might miss the boat.

Back in December, Sony and Matsushita Electric Industrial, better known by its Panasonic brand, announced they had begun joint development of a version of the Linux operating system for digital consumer electronics devices. Japan's top two players also secured basic support from a number of other major consumer electronics makers.

"Traditional competitors like Sony and other consumer electronics companies will have to work together. If they don't, the broadband wave will come over us. My message is that we need to collaborate now in order to realise our broadband dreams and to deliver real value to our customers," Ando said.

"We are advocating an open approach. Companies must work together, smashing barriers and developing interoperability between PCs and audio and video products," Ando continued.



Sony will offer its CoCoon Linux-based networked movie and music jukebox, already announced in Japan, on a worldwide basis. "CoCoon will transform television into an interactive experience," Ando said. It's not clear when it will arrive in the UK, as Sony did not give a timeframe for the international availability of CoCoon.

CoCoon has a hard drive and connects to broadband network services, allowing users to access movies or audio over the internet. The device can be operated with a remote control, through a home network using the PC, or with a mobile phone, said a Sony representative during a demonstration at the show.

Microsoft ramps up Windows Media Player

Microsoft has updated Windows Media Player and Windows Movie Maker, making the virtual world a more palatable place for broadband users.

Windows Media Player 9.0 Series, available for download at www.microsoft.com/windowsmedia, includes a Smart Jukebox feature that lets users manage a collection of up to 10,000 songs.

The application also offers support for fast streaming with instant-on/always-on streaming for broadband users. It also offers better sound quality than previous versions and supports the latest in surround sound, which is streamed across the web at speeds of 128Kbps (kilobits per second) and 96KHz/24bit audio fidelity.

Windows Movie Maker 2.0 for Windows XP includes a revised user interface, with improved timeline and storyboard views. It supports the WMV 9.0 format which offers improved file compression of up to 50 percent over earlier versions and can store the equivalent of 15 one-hour DV (digital video) tapes in 10GB of hard drive space. In addition, Movie Maker 2.0 includes around 30 video effects, 60 video transitions and more than 40 titles and credits.



Broadband key to selling content online

Broadband users hold the key to the future success of selling content online, according to a latest in-depth study.

The survey by research company Jupiter, which asked European consumers about their readiness to procure music over the internet, concluded that one in four of all broadband users would be prepared to do so.

In contrast, just 18 percent of dialup users answered affirmatively. Similarly, 18 percent of broadband users would cough up for video content, while a mere 11 percent of dialup users said they'd be willing to open their wallets.