10 HEARING SOUNDS ON THE WEB

In this lesson, you learn about playing sounds on the Web, how to configure Netscape to play sounds, and how to use the RealAudio plug-in.

WORKING WITH SOUND FILES

One of the reasons the World Wide Web was created was to bring multimedia to the Internet. While most Web pages are still not living up to that potential, many are incorporating audio technology. If you haven't run across a Web page that includes sound, eventually you will. In fact, if you complete this lesson, you will experience sound on the Web.

There are many different types of multimedia files you may come across on the Web. Netscape Navigator comes equipped to play several different kinds of multimedia files. For example, Netscape can play sound files in AU, AIF, MID, and WAV file formats. Depending on your computer system, you may have other player programs for listening to sound files. For example, if you're using Windows 95, you can use Media Player (Mplayer) to play WAV and MID type sound files.

> **TIP**
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> **Are You Wired for Sound?** Before you can get sound, make sure your computer is equipped to reproduce sound. It takes more than the speaker that comes with each computer. Depending on your operating system, you may need a sound card, speakers, or a PC-Speaker driver (a program that enables Windows to play sound files on the PC's speaker). Check your computer manual for more information. You can find PC-Speaker (speaker.exe) at **http://www.microsoft.com/kb/softlib/ mslfiles/speak.exe**.

If you're not sure about preexisting player programs on your computer, don't worry. There are many types of audio plug-ins you can install to play sound files that are available on the Web. Check out the following players:

> **TIP**
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> **What Platform?** Not all players are available for all platforms. Be sure to check the Web sites mentioned to find out which players will work with your operating system.

- **RealAudio**—A popular audio plug-in for listening to near-to-live audio transmissions, similar to radio on the Web. You can download the RealAudio plug-in at **http://www.realaudio.com**/. (Learn more about using RealAudio later in this lesson.)

- **TrueSpeech**—Another plug-in for listening to real-time audio, without waiting for the entire audio file to download. You can download the TrueSpeech plug-in at **http://www.dspg.com/allplyr.htm**.

- **Crescendo**—An audio plug-in for listening to MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) files. MIDI files are used to play music clips. You can download Crescendo at **http://www.liveupdate.com/dl.html**.

- **StreamWorks**—A plug-in designed especially for listening and viewing radio and TV broadcasts sent over the Web. Visit the StreamWorks Web page at **http://www.xingtech.com/streams/info/reg/client.html**.

- **Internet Wave**—A real-time audio player program that comes with Internet Phone (a program for communicating long distance through your computer without the long distance phone bills). Learn more about Internet Wave at **http://www.vocaltec.com/home.htm**.

- **ToolVox for the Web**—A player program that focuses on speech files. You can download a copy of the program from VoxWare's site at **http://www.voxware.com**.

- **Shockwave Streaming Audio**—A program for listening to audio files on the Web without waiting for them to download onto your computer. You can download a copy of the program from Macromedia's site at **http://www.macromedia.com/shockwave**.

CONFIGURING NETSCAPE FOR SOUND

If you attempt to play a sound file, and Navigator does not recognize the file type or does not know how to play the file, you will need to configure Netscape to use an audio player appropriate for that file type.

Follow these steps to configure sounds on Netscape:

1. When you encounter a non-native audio file type, Netscape displays the **Unknown File Type** warning box. Click the **Pick App** button to display the **Configure External Viewer** dialog box.

2. In the text box, enter the full path of the directory where the audio player is installed.

3. Choose **OK** to save the Helper App configuration. Netscape launches the Helper App to play the audio file in the link.

Just Pick One   There is one drawback with this procedure. You must know which audio player will play the audio file type that is causing Netscape to balk. Fortunately, with the proliferation of plug-ins since the release of Netscape 2.0, you aren't likely to run into too many audio files that require a Helper App.

TIP   **Windows 95 Media Player**   If you're using Windows 95, you can use the Media Player (Mplayer) to play WAV and MID sound files. In Netscape's Preferences dialog box, choose the **audio/x-wav** file type and configure the Windows 95 Media Player (**Mplayer.exe**) as the helper app.

Although Netscape Navigator comes installed with its own sound player (npaudio.dll—the LiveAudio plug-in), you may decide to use Mplayer.exe with Windows 95 because Mplayer.exe produces a better quality of sound.

DOWNLOADING AND PLAYING SOUNDS

There are tons of Web sites you can visit and play sound files. You'll come across these sites while surfing the Web, or you can choose to look for them with a Web search engine (see Lesson 6, "Searching for Web Sites"). To help you get started, follow these steps to play or link to some sample sound files:

1. Connect to your Internet Service Provider and open the Netscape program.

2. In the Location text box, type **http://sunsite.unc.edu/ pub/multimedia/pc-sounds/** and press **Enter**. This takes you to a Web page where you can sample WAV files (see Figure 10.1).

3. Select a WAV file to try. For example, scroll down the page a bit and choose **beback.wav**. It's the voice of a

fairly well known actor who most of you should recognize. Using a 14.4 modem, it should take about 10 seconds to download.
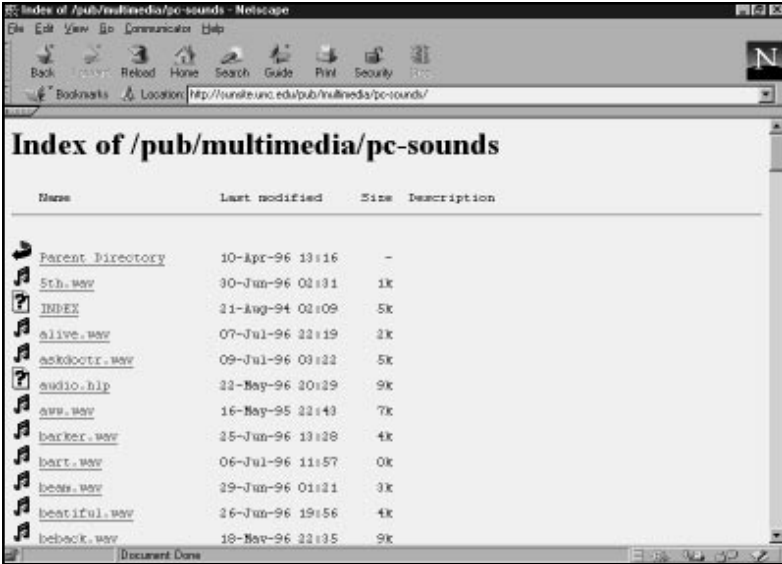

FIGURE 10.1   Sample some WAV sound files at this site.

4. When the file is downloaded, Netscape automatically loads the audio player program configured to play WAV files. To play the sound, click the player's **Play** button (see Figure 10.2). In the example, Windows 95 Media Player program is configured to play the sound clip.

What's a Viewing Location Box?   When you play a file on the Web, whether it's a sound file or another type of file, Netscape looks for a plug-in or helper application to use. A temporary Viewing Location box appears on-screen, telling you Netscape is looking for a player program to play the file. Once the file is downloaded, Netscape opens the appropriate player program and the Viewing Location box disappears.

> **It Didn't Play the Sound File!**   You may have to config-
> ure another audio player program to play the WAV file.
> Follow the steps in the previous section to reconfigure a
> player program and then try to play the sound file again.
> Make sure that your sound system is working properly.
> Most sound cards come with some type of diagnostic
> program. Pull out your sound card's manual to see how to
> run the diagnostics program and test your sound card.
> Oh, and make sure your speakers are connected and
> plugged in correctly.

Click here to close the player

Select Play to hear
the sound clip

FIGURE 10.2   The program you have configured to play the WAV
file appears.

5. Click the **Close** button to close the player program.

6. In the Location text box, type in the URL **http://
www.pointcom.com** and press **Enter**. This opens the
POINTreview section of the Lycos site, shown in Figure
10.3, where you can look for sound files to play.

7. Click the **Sounds** link to open a search form that looks
for sound files.

8. Scroll down the page to locate the search text box. Under
Looking for, click the **Sounds** option. Enter the type of
sounds you're looking for and then click the **Go Get It**
button. The Lycos search engine, which POINTreview
uses, looks for sound files and links matching your re-
quest.

9. When the search is complete, scroll down the page and
read the various sound file descriptions. To play a file,
click the link. Depending on the size of the file, down-
loading may take a while.

FIGURE 10.3   You can search for specific sound files on the Web.

There are many sites you can explore on the Web that enable you
sto play sound clips. (Check out the Lycos sound search engine at
http://www.lycos.com/lycosmedia.html.) But, that's not
the only kind of audio you can find. Did you know you can listen
to live audio on the Web, such as news or radio broadcasts? In the
last part of this lesson, you learn how to use the RealAudio Player
plug-in to listen to near-to-live sound on the Web.

USING THE REALAUDIO PLUG-IN

How about trying out a real-time audio player? RealAudio Player,
by Progressive Networks, is a popular plug-in available for listen-
ing to live or prerecorded audio transmissions found on the Web.
Live transmissions aren't exactly as the name implies; there is a
slight delay between the time the sound is sent and when you
finally hear it. Near-to-live is a better description. Unlike other
audio files you hear on the Web, you don't have to wait for the
RealAudio file to download before you can start listening.

More and more Web sites are applying the RealAudio Player technology. Several broadcasting companies, such as PBS, ABC, and CBS, are placing their newscasts online with RealAudio Player technology. Even radio broadcasts are jumping on the bandwagon, such as NPR (National Public Radio). But, before you can join in on the fun, you first have to download and install a copy of the RealAudio program.

FINDING AND INSTALLING THE REALAUDIO PLAYER

There are several places where you can look for a copy of the RealAudio Player. The Netscape Plug-ins page can link you to a copy, or you can go directly to the RealAudio Web site download area at **http://www.realaudio.com/products/player/download.html**. This version is the shareware version of the RealAudio player. You can go back to the top of the RealAudio site (**http://www.realaudio.com**/) and follow the links to order the commercial version (RealAudio Player Plus).

As part of the download procedure, you need to fill out a form detailing your name, operating system, and modem speed. When you're ready to download the program, follow the instructions and save the file into a temporary directory or folder.

> **TIP** **How to Download** Flip back to Lesson 8, "Working with Plug-Ins," for tips on downloading and installing plug-ins.

To install the program, run the file and follow the on-screen prompts. When the installation is complete, the RealAudio Player opens and plays a test file (see Figure 10.4). After the test file plays, click the **Close** button.
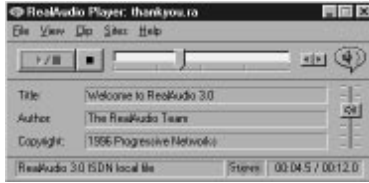
FIGURE 10.4 The RealAudio Player.

VISITING A REALAUDIO SITE

To test your new RealAudio Player plug-in, go back and visit the RealAudio Web site again. There you will find many links to other sites that use RealAudio technology.

Follow these steps to listen to a prerecorded RealAudio file:

1. Connect to your Internet Service Provider and open the Netscape program.

2. In the Location text box, type **http://www.realaudio. com** and press **Enter**.

3. When the RealAudio page appears, click the **Timecast** link. This takes you to a page detailing other RealAudio sites, as shown in Figure 10.5.

> **TIP**
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> **File Names**   While surfing the Web for sound files, you may want to know how to recognize RealAudio files. RealAudio files use the file extensions RA and RAM and often appear with its distinct RA (RealAudio) logo.

FIGURE 10.5 The Timecast Web site contains links to other sites using the RealAudio technology.

> **It Didn't Work!** If RealAudio does not play the sound file after you've followed the preceding steps, check and make sure the player is correctly installed. You may need to follow the steps in "Configuring Netscape for Sound" to help Netscape locate the player program. Remember, RealAudio files use the RA and RAM file extensions.

Try out some of the live sites listed on the Live Guide drop-down boxes on the Timecast Web page. You can listen to live radio broadcasts from around the world while surfing the Web.

In this lesson, you learned how to configure Netscape Navigator to play most types of sound files you may come across on the Internet and how to use the RealAudio plug-in. In the next lesson, you learn how to configure Navigator for viewing different types of graphics on the Web.