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LESSON

TUNING NETCASTER

In this lesson you will learn about Netscape's push technology component, Netcaster.

WHAT IS PUSH TECHNOLOGY?

Netscape Navigator, the Web browser application in the Netscape Communicator suite, uses what is called *pull technology*. When you use Navigator you point the browser at a particular Web page and the browser “pulls” the contents of the page down to your computer and displays on your screen the information you are interested in seeing. You only see the information contained on the Web pages you explicitly request.

Push technology is somewhat different. Instead of you requesting specific information and *pull*-ing the information down to your computer, a Web server will periodically *push* information down to your computer which you can later view. Think of it this way: Pull technology is similar to you going to a newsstand and buying a newspaper. You have to initiate the action and you might only go every other day or just once a week. Pull technology, in turn, is like having the newspaper delivered to your front door every morning. You don't have to initiate any action to have information delivered to you.



My Netcaster Works Differently Netscape released the Communicator package without the Netcaster component. It is possible that when Netcaster is released in its final version, the descriptions and steps listed next could vary from the version that you are using.

WHAT IS NETCASTER AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Netscape Communicator now includes a push technology application—Netcaster (see Figure 19.1).



FIGURE 19.1 Netscape Communicator's push technology.

Netcaster allows you to subscribe to Websites equipped with push technology, now referred to as *channels*, which can push information content down to your computer. It should come as no surprise that while Netscape was busy developing Netcaster, numerous other companies were busy developing sites with push technology and information content preparing to push it to your desktop. As you begin to get familiar with Netcaster, there are already a dozen or more well-known companies eager to supply you with information. As you might expect, most of these companies already provide news and financial information—for them this is just another means of delivering that information to you. Some of the companies you can subscribe to today with Netcaster are ABC News, CBS Sportsline, CNN Financial News, the Gartner Group Advisor, the Home Arts Network, and HotWired.

SUBSCRIBING TO A CHANNEL

Before Websites can start pushing information your way, you need to subscribe to one or more channels.

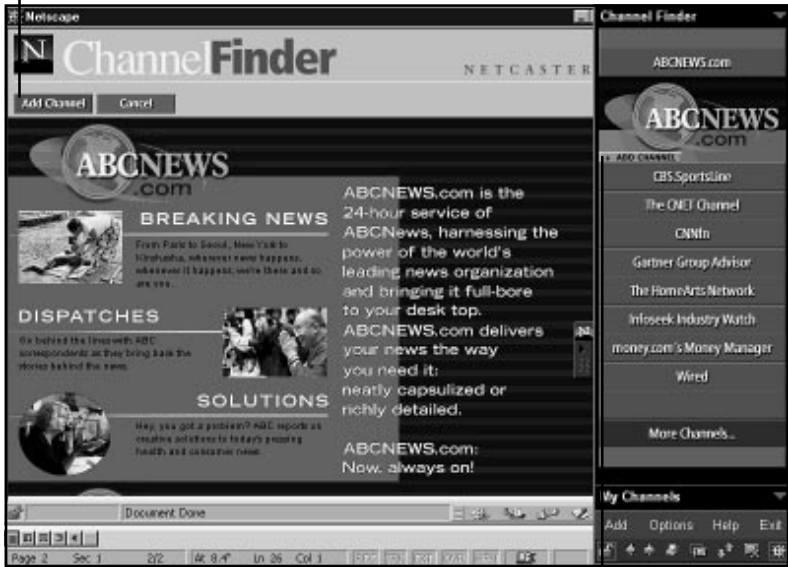
1. Start Netcaster if you haven't done so already. If you are running Windows 95 for example, double-click on the Netcaster icon. In a few seconds the main Netcaster Channel Finder interface is displayed on your screen.
2. Select one of the information provider channels displayed on the interface. Or you can select More Channels to see additional providers. For this example let's select one of the providers displayed on the main interface—select the ABCNEWS.com button. In a few seconds a slightly larger logo banner appears just below the ABCNEWS.com button (see Figure 19.2).



FIGURE 19.2 The ABCNEWS.com logo banner just below the ABCNEWS.com button.

3. Select the Add Channel button on the logo banner to open the ABCNEWS.com Channel Finder interface (see Figure 19.3).

The Add channel button on the ABCNEWS.com interface



The Add Channel button on the logo banner

FIGURE 19.3 The ABCNEWS.com Channel Finder interface.

4. Select the Add Channel button on the ABCNEWS.com Channel finder interface to open the Channel Properties dialog box (see Figure 19.4).

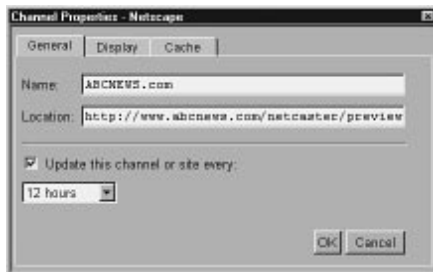


FIGURE 19.4 The Channel Properties dialog box.

5. The default update time interval is 12 hours for this site. Change this setting to every hour.
6. If you wish to change how ABCNEWS.com is displayed on your screen select the Display tab and change the default value. If you wish to change the Cache setting to control how many levels deep in this site your update will include or how much information is stored at one time on your computer, select the Cache tab and change the default values.
7. When you have completed any changes you wish to make to the settings for ABCNEWS.com select OK to save your settings and close the Channel Properties dialog box.
8. To confirm that ABCNEWS.com channel has been added select the My Channels button on the main Netcaster interface and you should see ABCNEWS.com on your list.

That's all there is to selecting channels for Netcaster. Now every hour ABCNEWS.com will push updated news and information down to your computer.

For any additional channels you want to subscribe to simply repeat steps 2-8 above.



Too Many Channels Be careful you don't initially subscribe to too many channels. Depending on the speed of your computer and the speed of your network connection, you may find that your computer is doing nothing but receiving updates and you may not be able to get much work done.

To start viewing ABCNEWS.com select ABCNEWS.com on the My Channels interface and in a few seconds the Web site appears on your screen.

To see current news select one or more of the items listed under Today's News. Check back an hour later to see if the news has been updated.

In this lesson you learned about Netscape's new push technology application—Netcaster—and how to use Netcaster to subscribe to news and information channels. In the next lesson you will learn about Netscape and Internet security.