

# Panting on the Internet's Doorstep

**JOHNNY MNEMONIC: IT WON'T BE LONG NOW BEFORE WE CAN ALL BE ON TV WHENEVER WE WANT**

Processor and Windows 95 will be marching into our homes and offices before the end of 1995. The point is that, like it or not, image reproduction and transmission has become the province of every 10-year-old with a basic computer system, video camera and a pinch of creativity.

It is already clear that many telephone, film and cable companies are simply panting on the Internet's doorstep, their arms filled with flowers, fibre optics and cash. But exactly what it is they are hoping to win is not quite clear. Surely no one company or government agency can be naive enough to think that the public will relinquish its "freedom to see" without a mighty uproar. So, no one has any idea just how attractive and fun this whole evening of entertainment is actually going to be, except, of course, the public, who seem to be lining up in droves. For them, things can only get better than they are today: more channels, more choice, more freedom to send, receive, be diagnosed, vote, or just hang out by remote.

It seems reasonable to expect that in addition to the ability to tune in several million Internet channels (never mind the paltry 500-channel universe), the public will still have a hearty appetite for well-crafted entertainment and information vehicles. And the demand for these products will increase with heightened awareness of information transfer. In the meantime, for those in communications industries who are wondering what all of these developments might mean: remember that someone out there is going to have to come up with the ideas and programming to fill all the air time. Why shouldn't it be you and me?

James Sanderson is a technology writer based in Toronto.

Recent developments in Internet technology present filmmakers, distributors and others in the communications industries with a new set of problems and opportunities. A worldwide system of open and varied networks available to anyone with basic computer equipment, the Internet is now known to most as a huge, accessible and, most importantly, unregulated phenomenon. New tools for Internet users, which are quickly being developed by such companies as Netscape, are enabling those who use the system to transmit larger amounts of data and images more easily. This means pictures, sounds, as well as full-motion video. Software "front ends" are constantly being refined. Witness the appearance of such packages as *C-U C-Me* and *Director*, which allow video files and sounds onto the highway. Hardware developments are increasing the volume of data (voice, video and text) to which Internet users have access. Cable companies in Canada are positioning themselves to become partners in a much higher capacity fibre optic network than the one currently in place.

With these developments in mind, what are the implications for professionals in the filmmaking and communications communities? At issue is how producers and other legal owners of images and sound can safeguard their products. Will the common Internet user get sued if he emblazons his E-mail letters with graphics which he lifted off

CNN or a Blue Jays game? What if he decides to use these images for profit or advertising purposes? Who is going to catch him? Of course, if you listen carefully, you can probably hear a chuckle of satisfaction from the many who have viewed the established domains of film and television as the territory of a privileged few. It won't be long now before we can all be on TV whenever we want. So, you people making movies, get ready to move over.

We can certainly expect major players in the communication industries to lobby hard for some means of control or intervention in the public's right to generate, duplicate and send images. The problem here is that the Internet (or whatever transmission system will replace it) seems by its very nature immune to control, and cable companies and others seeking to invest in the future of the Information Highway must surely be experiencing a major attack of the heebie geebies. In the office or home, any person with a Mac or IBM-compatible computer that has 16 MB of RAM, a video capture card (about \$400), a 28.8 modem (about \$300) and some video editing software, can easily capture and send still, video or sound images to millions of people. It does not overly matter right now that these images might not be true 30 frames per second NTSC, or sound files of stereo quality. Those refinements will soon follow, just as surely as the 686