

Going Wireless...

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Imagine: No cabling and wiring nightmares, instant high-speed access to the company network from anywhere—in or out of the office.

The prestigious Cahners In-Stat Group of Newton, Massachusetts recently reported. “The ballyhoo over wireless Internet access is not just hype...The strongest user demand for wireless Internet services comes from three categories: e-mail messaging, World Wide Web browsing, and pull content (also known as Web clipping). Of the three, e-mail messaging is the killer app.”

Wireless technology permits mobile users to communicate with customers, order products, deliver time-sensitive information and access corporate databases—all without having to lug around a spaghetti of phone cords or network cables. Several small wireless devices such as pocket PCs, PalmPilots, digital phones and pagers provide companies with an essential strategic advantage.

CEOs recognize the advantages of untethered Internet access, insisting that absence from the office is no longer an excuse for being out of the loop or non-productive. Thus, by accessing real-time data, mobile computing frees employees and customers to work remotely. As well as increased worker productivity and greater customer access, benefits include:

Increased mobility. Employees can keep pace with their ever-changing schedules and vast amounts of e-mail through a hand-held wireless device.

Instant accessibility. To survive in today's highly competitive marketplace, business professionals require

immediate access to corporate LANs, intranets and e-mail. They must be able to receive mission critical information, whether in an office, home, hotel room or at a client's site.

Not unexpectedly, there is a growing awareness of the value of wireless technology. In the past 15 years, the number of wireless subscribers in the United States has grown to 103 million from fewer than 100,000, according to Cahners In-Stat Group. This number is now increasing by 1 million a month.

Of these subscribers, the majority uses its digital cell phone to receive Instant Messages (IM)—what many dub the e-mail of IM standards.

Increasingly popular are small-screen Web phones and hand-held PCs used to pull up stock quotes, weather reports, and news. ABC, ESPN, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal* beam reports from their Web sites to wireless devices. AvantGo.com and @Mobile.com cull news and other clippings from hundreds of Web sites for wireless transmission. MapQuest.com helps users navigate strange cities by providing street maps and directions. Visa and AirFlash locate the closest ATM. Fodor's guides people to the best local-area restaurants. Users can also download information from Travelocity and Bloomberg to a wireless device. Even eBay and Amazon.com provide clipping services, letting users buy products from the back seat of a taxi!

Wireless devices are even becoming a form of e-cash, allowing the purchase of everything from soft drinks to car washes with the click of a button.

According to Cahners In-Stat Group, 89 percent of those surveyed prefer to use their notebook computers to

access the Internet wirelessly. Respondents also endorsed Cellular or PCS phones and PalmPilots equally as enablers of wireless Internet applications, with a third of respondents stating they plan to use one of these devices.

Recently, Qualcomm introduced a high-speed Broadband wireless networking technology, bumping existing wireless connections up to an astonishing 2.4Mbps—roughly 50 times faster than a standard dial-up modem.

The search for a device-to-device wireless communication standard has led to the development of Bluetooth. It holds the greatest potential for practical and efficient communication between portable devices and is supported by more than 1,400 manufacturers including Ericsson, Intel, Microsoft and Motorola.

Unlike the languishing IRDA infrared system, Bluetooth works at speeds of up to 1Mbps, communicating over longer distances—as far as 10 meters (about 34 feet)—and doesn't require line-of-site connections.

It's possible to “zap” files from a PC, Laptop, or Web-enabled phone to a printer or other device in a nearby office. A photograph taken by a digital camera can be beamed to a cellular phone—which then sends it across the country. Even more remarkably, a user can dial an ISP from a cellular phone and beam the connection to his portable PC or other device. The phone stays in the briefcase yet gives a laptop wireless access the to Net.

For those corporations driven by fear of *perfect competition*—where neither buyers nor sellers can affect prices—wireless technology offers a strategic weapon to provide a competitive advantage with a significant ROI. ♦