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PointCast unveils free news service

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SAN FRANCISCO--PointCast today launched a beta version of a free service that will keep Internet users constantly up-to-date with information from three major news organizations. The service is available for download from PointCast's Web site.

The Cupertino, California, company announced plans with the *Boston Globe,* CMP Publications, and the *Los Angeles Times* to provide content for the personalized information service called The PointCast Network. The service is designed to display regularly updated news in place of a user's more conventional screensaver.

The network features six categories, called channels: News, Companies, Industries, Weather, Sports, and Lifestyle. Users can personalize the service to get access to stock quotes from any U.S. stock exchange, national and international news, weather reports from specific cities, and the latest game scores for their favorite team.

Based on patent-pending SmartScreen technology, the service appears when the PC is idle or when users points to a box in the corner of their screen. Although conventional screensavers are deactivated when users touch the keyboard or mouse, PointCast Network users can press the Alt key to freeze the screen and then select a particular headline with their mouse. The service then sends them to the full text of the story on the Web site of the given news provider.

The company anticipates that its PointCast Network will attract 1 million users by the end of this year.

"The goal of our service is to effortlessly deliver a variety of content to users at anytime," said Christopher Hassett, PointCast CEO. "We feel very strongly that the PointCast Network will be the news network of the 21st century."

PointCast is set to deliver the advertiser-sponsored service for Windows users in April. A version for the Macintosh is set to enter beta testing in late spring.

The news ticker will also be available in April as a free plug-in for the Navigator browser from Netscape Communications.

The service supports industry-standard firewalls, according to the company.

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