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Sandpiper Puts Its Footprint in Marketplace

■ Internet: New service is designed to help Web site publishers speed delivery of their content to users cost-effectively

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A Westlake Village company is hoping to raise the speed limit on the World Wide Web with the release today of Footprint, a service aimed at helping Internet publishers distribute their content more efficiently over the increasingly congested network.

Footprint is the first product from **Sandpiper Networks**, one of the Tech Coast's most talked-about start-ups. Analysts are lauding Footprint's approach to bypassing online traffic jams, and companies that have used the service are giving it rave reviews.

"It's flawless," said Will Evans, senior network engineer for Los Angeles-based **Automation Engineering**, which is using a test version of Footprint to distribute five of the Web sites it hosts.

KEN LUBAS / Los Angeles Times

Footprint graphics are projected onto Sandpiper Networks President and Chief Executive Leo Spiegel, left, and company co-founders Andrew Swart and Dave Farber.

Footprint runs on a private network of 32 Sandpiper computer servers around the world that communicate with one another over the Internet. Collectively, they can store 1 terabyte of data, which is the equivalent of 1,000 of the latest personal computers with 1-gigabyte hard drives.

Sandpiper's software makes copies of popular content so that Web surfers can get it from nearby servers instead of tying up the network while they get it from its original source.

The Sandpiper network will do for the Internet what automated teller machines did for banks, said Leo Spiegel, president and chief executive of the 2-year-old privately held company.

"In the old days, if you needed money, you had to go to your bank, and if they didn't have any branches, you might have to drive across town," Spiegel said. "Then ATMs came out. Footprint is like an ATM network publishers can use to push their content into local neighborhoods so people can get it in a hassle-free way."

Making copies of popular Web sites is not a new trick. Internet service providers often keep caches of frequently requested sites on their own networks for the benefit of their users. Mirror sites also increase the supply of content that is in demand.

Footprint improves on both of these methods by giving Internet publishers more control over copies of their content, said David Farber, who co-founded the company with Andrew Swart. With it, they can be sure their readers are seeing the

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most up-to-date version of their sites instead of copies that are days—even weeks—old.

The service also should give Publishers a more accurate picture of how many people are visiting their sites and what they are looking at, Farber said. Web masters normally can't get feedback about visits to mirror and cached versions of their sites.

Sandpiper hopes to convince customers that it's easier for them to outsource their network management functions and concentrate on creating content. Spiegel expects Footprint to cost customers roughly half as much as the cost of building their own networks. A typical monthly bill would range from $6,000 to $7,000, said Scott Yara, Sandpiper's director of marketing.

"The economies of scale mean they can provide the service much more cheaply than I can," said Jeff Maysurk, manager of systems and network engineering for Los Angeles-based **E! Online**, which has been testing Footprint for six months.

Peter Christy, a principal at Collaborative Research in Los Altos, said that the economy aspect of the service should appeal to small and medium-sized Web publishers—although even large publishers such as **NBC Interactive** and the **Internet Travel Network** are testing the service.

"I can envision that almost anyone would want this," Christy said.

But so far, the thing that impresses people most about Sandpiper is its network.

"Their approach is innovative," said Brian Wenger, senior Internet architect at **EarthLink Network**, which has allowed Sandpiper to install some of its computers at its Pasadena headquarters.

"One of your bottlenecks on the Web is the server itself," Wenger said. "By distributing content closer to the end user, you're making that whole experience better and faster for the user."

That will make a big difference once high-speed Internet connection services, such as digital subscriber line and cable modems, take off with consumers, a development that is expected to make the Web even slower.

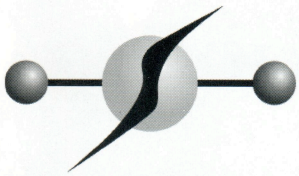
Despite the enthusiastic reviews of the Footprint beta testers, the service could be a hard sell to Web publishers, especially when they're not focused on their network operations, said David Card, senior analyst for Web technology strategies at Jupiter Communications in New York.

Plus, Sandpiper should prepare to face some competition. At least two other companies—**IBeam Broadcasting** of Santa Clara and **SkyCache** of Laurel, Md.—have plans to offer a similar service using satellite connections, Christy said.

Multicasting companies such as Seattle-based **RealNetworks** and Dallas-based **Broadcast.com** are also potential rivals, Card said.

But Sandpiper executives are optimistic, and so are their investors. Brad Jones, a general partner with **Brentwood Venture Capital** in Los Angeles, said his firm shopped the idea around to many Web publishers before deciding to invest $2.25 million in the company. (All together, Sandpiper has raised $6.6 million in venture capital.)

"Uniformly, people said, 'This is the right architecture. If this is what they build, people will buy it,' " Jones said.



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