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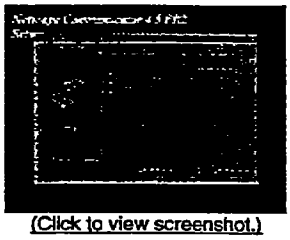
Netscape Communicator 4.5 Preview Release 2

The latest version of Netscape's browser adds useful browsing options for both Web topics and mail addresses.

By Jim Lynch

September 15, 1998 -- Netscape today released Netscape Communicator 4.5, Preview Release 2. Make no mistake about it, this version of the suite is a strong contender for best browser. Netscape has added lots of value for users with a new Messenger interface; enhanced Smart Browsing; a number of features allowing tighter integration with Windows 95, 98, and NT; PalmPilot address and mail synchronization; and various other new goodies.



(Click to view screenshot.)

During installation we were asked whether we wanted to make Communicator our default browser and Netcenter our search mechanism of choice as well as our start page. We answered yes for each choice, finished the installation, and then rebooted. After we rebooted, we checked to see what our default start page was under both Internet Explorer and Navigator. We weren't surprised to find that Navigator defaulted to Netcenter, but we were surprised to see that Internet Explorer also did so.

This is an interesting move on Netscape's part, essentially allowing for cross-browser synchronization of the start page to drive traffic to the company's portal site. The next logical extension for this feature might be to include it as a tool in Communicator's interface rather than just as part of installation, thus letting users sync up their start pages on either of the browsers at any time.

We also noticed that Communicator has added three buttons to the Quick Launch area on the Windows 98 taskbar, letting users launch Communicator components with one click. We found this to be a helpful feature. (We would have added the buttons anyway; having Communicator do it just saved us a few clicks.)

One of the more notable new features in the first release of Version

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4.5 was Smart Browsing through keyword searching. Simply enter a keyword into the browser and Communicator will check Netcenter's database for the right match, then take you to the appropriate site. If a good match isn't found, Communicator will present you with a list of possible sites. In this release the database has been expanded with more keywords to offer a greater range of choices in search results.

Netscape also added a feature to the first release of Version 4.5 called What's Related. When a user clicks on the What's Related button, Communicator will show a drop-down list of related sites. We found this to be an easy way to find additional information when we were doing research on a particular topic; we didn't need to visit a separate search engine to find additional sites.

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