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COMPUSERVE INTERNET ACCESS

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Val Steed is a CFO of K2 Enterprises and a member of the AICPA Information Technology Executive Committee. Will Fleenor is a CFO of K2 Enterprises and a member of the AICPA Computer Auditing Subcommittee. In this Alert, they discuss the Internet access features of CompuServe.

CompuServe's Internet access has been vastly expanded. Recently, CompuServe purchased Spry Mosaic which is a software product that provides CompuServe with a serious Web browser tool. They also have expanded their own direct Internet access through WinCim 1.4 to include FTP, more newsgroups, and IRC chat. CompuServe already had provided some newsgroups and E-mail in prior versions. (See Basic Internet Capabilities)

On April 28, 1995 CompuServe NetLauncher, the online provider's new Web access program, won the "Best of the Comdex/Spring" award sponsored by Byte Magazine and the Interface Group. NetLauncher is CompuServe's response to online access to the World Wide Web (the Web). It combines Web access using the Spry Mosaic browser and CompuServe Internet Dialer. Because of Winsock compatibility, NetLauncher allows CompuServe members to use the Spry browser or the browser of their choice.

Basic Internet Capabilities

- **electronic mail (e-mail)** — You can send and receive messages and files with other users provided you have their E-Mail addresses. This is user to user, controlled communication.
- **World Wide Web (the Web)** — Think of the Web as a interconnected set of places, somewhat like our cities connected with highways, phones, TV, etc. These places are, in general terms, like a BBS service only much better because they are all interconnected electronically and you can switch from one to another without changing your dial-up connection. These places are commonly called Home Pages or Web Sites. Each site has information available for you, most often in text or in files to download.
- **file transfer protocol (FTP)** — FTP is one of the methods of sending (uploading) or receiving (downloading) files from user to user. FTP sites are vast file storage areas that people access frequently by exchanging files using File Transfer Protocol. This is user to server, controlled communication.

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- **newsgroups** — A newsgroup is a information exchange area similar to a bulletin board in a company. People place want ads, for sale ads, discuss items all based on a common interest. For example, common newsgroups are Microsoft, cat lovers, home repair, etc. There are newsgroups for almost any interest. At the time of this print there were approximately 7,000 newsgroups available. This is user to many users, sometimes controlled (moderated) sometimes not.
- **inter-relay chat (IRC)** — IRC is an electronic, keyboard-based CB-radio type communication system. The discussions are live. Discussions can sometimes be heated, users access can be terminated, and some users are banned from the system, as this area is most often moderated. You can join a conversation or create your own channel and have your own discussion. This is user to many users simultaneous communication, sometimes controlled (moderated), sometimes not.

(Warning: Many areas of the Internet offer files, discussion, and other material that can be very offensive. Just as in real life, you must take time to make sure that users are educated and responsible to choose for themselves. Do not allow children to wander the Internet unsupervised.)

Pros:

- CompuServe Internet access is easy to setup with WinCim and NetLauncher.
- CompuServe Internet access utilizes a very good, user-friendly Windows interface.
- The new AICPA's Accountants' Forum will be on-line with CompuServe.
- When using CompuServe WinCim you are protected by CompuServe's security and firewalls.
- You may use any Web browser you desire with NetLauncher.

Cons:

- You must be a Windows user.
- CompuServe costs more than a direct Internet hookup from a local Internet service provider.
- CompuServe provides only limited access to the whole Internet.
- You must load both WinCim 1.4 and NetLauncher, the solution is not an integrated product yet.

In Summary

CompuServe now provides a good way for novices to begin using the Internet and learn about the services provided on the Internet as well as almost full access for Internet junkies.