

Found It On The Net

Internet World Magazine

July 1996

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Hoo boy, am I having fun! I finally got around to trying out some Internet telephones this month and now I'm hooked. As I write this column, I'm talking to a guy in Malaysia using an awesome program called FreeTel that I downloaded off the Net. My new Malaysian buddy went to grab a sandwich so while I'm on hold <grin>, let me take a few moments to tell you about FreeTel.

Talk about plug-n-play...I installed FreeTel in under 60 seconds, and was talking to Seoul Korea from my Silicon Valley living room within about five minutes after that. Later that same hour, I chatted with someone in the Dominican Republic. And by the time the evening ended, I had made new pals in Quebec, Tokyo, and London. No cost for the calls and in most cases, a crystal clear connection to boot. Okay, so there's a bit of a delay in the conversation (kind of like a CB radio), but nothing to complain about—considering it's free.

There are a variety of Internet phones out on the market, and I've only experimented with a few them, but so far I'm a big fan of FreeTel. Mostly because it's completely free, offers a very clear connection, and is so simple to use. With the software in place, you can easily view a directory of everyone else who's logged in and awaiting voice communication. When you're ready to talk, just click on a person's name and it rings their FreeTel phone. After the other party accepts your call, the two of you can decide if you want to talk with your microphones, or if you'd rather type your responses. Don't be surprised if you feel a little like Alexandar Graham Bell discovering the telephone the first time you hear a fellow Internaut's voice coming through your speakers!

If you're like me, you'll want to find someone located as far away as possible so you can tell your friends and family that you spoke to someone on the other side of the world over your computer—and for free. Some people list their location next to their names so that you can identify where they're calling from. Most of the time, you can figure that out anyhow by simply looking at the domain portion of the user login (kind of like 'caller I.D.').

With Internet voice communication under my belt, I decided to go the whole nine yards and get myself one of those Connectix QuickCams so that I could videoconference with my fellow Net hounds as well. That turned out to be tons of fun too. Using the camera (which cost me less than \$100) and a demo of Cu-SeeMe software (free on the Internet), I was soon face-to-face with Internauts around the world. The video connection using my 28.8 modem is mediocre—movement tends to be jerky and pixelated—but once again, it's free, so I'm not complaining.

If you're interested in trying out either of these two cool applications, you'll find the software and instructions you need online. FreeTel is available at [_http://www.freetel.inter.net/_](http://www.freetel.inter.net/) and the Cu-SeeMe demo can be downloaded from [_http://goliath.wpine.com/cu-seeme.html_](http://goliath.wpine.com/cu-seeme.html).

So, there you have it...my favorite new Net toys this month and ones that I think you'll enjoy as well. After you've tried them out, give me a ring on FreeTel and we'll chat about it! In the meantime, I hear that my Malaysian friend is now back online. So, I'm headed overseas for some more chat, while you check out some of the other neat stuff found on the Net this month...