

A winner or a wince?

WinCIM 2.0 is here at last. There are some new features, but some niggles too. "Was WinCIM 2.0 worth the wait?" asks Stephen Cobb. Plus, the latest buzz on security from Internet World '95.

Users of Windows and CompuServe may be pleased to know that Version 2.0 should now be available. I say *should* because although you can ask for a copy to be delivered through the post (using GO ORDER), and a copy may be distributed on a forthcoming CompuServe CD, there is no word yet on a version for downloading. In fact, the new version appeared in the US some time before the UK release was ready, but I had a chance to install and use the new version just

buttons look different but the menu structure is practically identical to version 1.4. The real changes are deeper within the code, the biggest technical innovation being the integration of CompuServe Information Service (CIS) and the World Wide Web. This means that buttons and menu items within CompuServe can now take you directly to the Web. You can even enter a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) such as <http://www.compuserve.com>, directly into the GO field in WinCIM to get

to an Internet site. For example, to reach the Compaq forum on CompuServe you enter GO COMPAQ. To reach Compaq's Web site, you enter www.compaq.com. Furthermore, if Compaq's Web master decides to implement the right code you will be able to link from the Web back into CompuServe. Unfortunately, I couldn't get this to work, despite several hours of playing with different settings and reading numerous message threads in the WinCIM support forum.

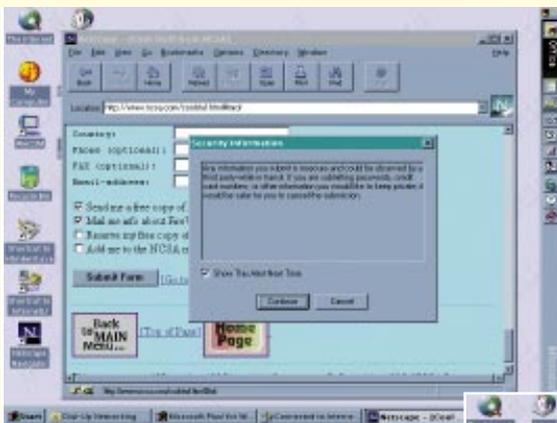
In order to accomplish this wizardry, WinCIM 2.0 comes with the CompuServe Mosaic Internet browser which, I can report, is a significantly improved version of the Spry Air Mosaic browser that CompuServe has previously distributed. Once you have established a Winsock-enabled CompuServe connection you can enable CompuServe and the Web simultaneously. You could do this before 2.0, but now you can launch into the Web from within WinCIM and you don't have to use the CompuServe Mosaic browser if you already have a browser preference.

before the deadline for this column. I can report that it does exist and that it does perform the basic email and forum browsing just like the previous version (1.4). Unfortunately, some of the newer features are more problematic. By next month, I should be able to report in depth on performance since I have taken a chance and installed it on my "real" computer.

As far as appearances are concerned, WinCIM 2.0 looks pretty much the same as the previous version. A few of the

Left Netscape lets you know when data travels "in the clear", but the risk of lost connections is much greater

Below WinCIM 2.0 works under Windows 95 and offers hyperlinks between CIS and the Web, although configuring Internet connections and browsers can be tricky



The view from Internet World '95

The big picture

Last month I went to the Internet World '95 show, in Boston. The place buzzed with excitement. You could sense the unstoppable logic of using one enormous network for everything from banking, to shopping and paying taxes. Back in 1983 a lot of people felt the same way about everyone getting their own PC. Of course, at that stage in the game it was unclear what those computers would look like, or even what operating system or application software they would run (CP/M was still a strong contender for business systems and Apple had not yet sued Franklin Computer for making clones of the Apple II). You just felt that everyone getting their own computer was just around the corner.

The same is true of the Internet. Everyone knows it's the right idea, we just don't know exactly how it will take shape. Before we get there we will see any number of false starts, dead ends and surprising comebacks. One thing we can do to ease the transition to a truly networked world is to learn from past mistakes. Remember that like all great advances in technology, ubiquitous personal computing only became a reality many years after the leading edge was first discerned. The same proved to be true of networked computing. And by the time these technologies became commonplace they exhibited another classic techno-trait; fallibility. Every technology has its down side and the sooner we accept that fact and work to minimise it, rather than pretend we have found the first truly riskless technology, the better will be our chances of success.

Are we there yet?

A lot of the people I talked to at Internet World wanted to know when the Internet would be secure enough for commerce? When would the World Wide Web be safe enough for banking or filing tax returns? These were not vague speculations; recent figures suggest that the number of commercial Web sites is growing at a rate of 27,000 per month. The question about taxes came from a senior revenue service official.

My response to such questions is to point to my notebook computer. I explain that I have had it for about a year so it is not quite state of the art, but that I am intimately familiar with its operation. Then I say, in all honesty: "I never know when it is going to crash next. I do not back it up as often as I should. I have to run a virus scanner over every disk I put in it. Many of the applications I use have annoying bugs, but I dare not upgrade them in case that makes things worse.

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At last! You can search the contents of your WinCIM filing cabinet in the new 2.0 release. But does it have to take so long?

files may be necessary since CompuServe installs its own version — this can conflict with previous versions if you have already been browsing the Web through a non-CompuServe connection.

into CompuServe. Unfortunately, the process for customising WinCIM to do this is not a menu item. You actually have to edit the CIS.INI file as well as edit the "helper application" section of your browser (I can understand the folks at CompuServe wanting everyone to use their browser, but automating the CIS.INI part of this configuration process would have been more considerate).

Next month I will report on how this all works; if I can make it work. At first glance it looks like some fiddling with winsock.dll

For people who can make a local PPP Internet call cheaper than dialling into the nearest high-speed CompuServe number, configuration of WinCIM 2.0 can get decidedly complicated.

One new feature that should make the diagnostics a little easier is a Help option in the failed connection dialogue box. But some of the advice is indicative of how far we have to go before software is as easy to use as it should be. Consider this for instance: "Increase the HMI Time-Out value in WinCIM. Choose Session

Internet World '95 (contd)

I live in fear that someone will steal it. And you expect me to use it for banking?"

Of course, some people think the answer to this hangup is just to buy a newer, better computer, or to be a better user but this leaves much to be desired. Consider what happened to a friend of mine who was on a business trip to Argentina. In front of two hundred people, who had paid for him to be there, his brand new Toshiba Pentium notebook running Windows 95 froze up just two slides in to a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation: not just Ctrl+Alt+Del crashed; not just turn it off and start over crashed; but because Windows 95 was in control of the power management system when the crash occurred, he had to take out the battery pack and then wait for the backup battery to drain before he could even reboot. And this is no neophyte but a surgeon, pilot, programmer, and former head of a software company (who wrote a lot of the program code himself).

What has this got to do with telecommunications? Consider what happens if we start banking on the Web any time soon. Mr Smith wants to transfer some money from one account to another: he clicks on the home banking icon, the modem dials and a connection is made. He types the details of the transaction, clicks the send button, and... crash. The general protection fault dialogue box appears with that ridiculous choice between Close and Ignore (we all know they mean the same thing). At this point, Mr Smith may think that his biggest problem is figuring out whether or not the transaction was completed. But the really big problem is who to blame. Here are some choices: the PC maker, the operating system publisher, the shop that sold the system, the modem maker, the Web browser vendor, the phone company, the local Internet service provider, the regional backbone supplier, the bank's Internet service provider, the company that makes the system that runs the bank's Web server.

In other words, the lack of universal secure transaction protocols is not the main obstacle to commerce on the Internet. Before we worry about people stealing credit card numbers off the Internet we have to deal with basic hardware and software reliability. According to Simba Information (a market-research firm based in Connecticut), about \$20m traded hands on the Internet in 1994, although numbers for 1995 were not yet available — they are bound to be higher than 1994 but I doubt whether they will be spectacular. While there may be 24 million people with Internet access in the US alone, very few of them are ready to rely on the current technology for serious commercial activity.

Settings from the Special menu, select the More button in the Setup Session Settings dialogue and then increase the value in the box beside HMI Time-Out. A reasonable value is 120." I'm sorry, but if 120 is a reasonable value why is the default setting 30?

Looking for your mail?

Last Friday, I left the office a little early and didn't check my email until Monday; there were over 20 messages in my WinCIM in-basket. So as far as I am concerned the most hoped-for improvement in version 2.0 is the Search option in the WinCIM Filing Cabinet. You access this through the Filing Cabinet command (Ctrl+F is the shortcut). As you may know, a variety of objects such as mail messages, forum messages, articles, and news stories can be stored in the filing cabinet. The problem has been getting back to the items filed long ago (several of my folders contain several megabytes of information and I had taken to using a generic Windows search tool to find things).

Now you can find any object by date or date range, subject, sender or contributor. You can even perform a text search based on any text string in the body of the

message. You can search folders, In-Basket, Out-Basket, or a combination of all three. But you'd better not be in a hurry.

Apparently, WinCIM does no internal database-style indexing of your filing cabinet contents, so the search process itself is no faster than using an external search program such as Outside/In (which allows you to start reading target files before the search is completed — something you cannot do with the WinCIM search command).

All of this suggests that CompuServe still hasn't grasped just how much mail serious users receive, or how much they come to rely on their mail program to organise it for them. More immediately helpful for email buffs is the simplified addressing of non-CompuServe mail users such as Internet and cc:Mail. This is handled via a list box for address types in the address book dialogue box (no more typing INTERNET: in front of Internet addresses).

There are some nice additions in other areas, too. For example, a preference has been added for both Forum Conferencing and CB Simulator to automatically update the "Who's Here" list every so many seconds (you can select the setting). You

will find this very handy if you use these areas of CompuServe.

Was it worth it?

Unfortunately I couldn't find one of the new features that had been announced; the ability to view a wider range of documents. The README file says that a new View button works like this: "If the file to be viewed has a Windows file association defined, the appropriate application will be used to view the file." But I couldn't find a button that worked like that, which is a pity because this feature is tied to another area of enhancement; the ability to send binary files to enhance conferences. These can be still motion video clips from a video feed; that is, graphic images sent at regular intervals, closed captioned text, charts, sound, or pictures. The moderator can send any combination of files and file types to conference participants.

Network users of WinCIM will be pleased to know that secure logins are built-in to version 2.0, so that your password is not transmitted across the network in a readable format. A General Preference has been added to control window handling with Keep Windows Maximised as the default setting (when a window is maximised, subsequent windows will also be maximised until you restore the size). International icons have been added throughout the product to accommodate the global CompuServe Membership. Lastly, for the iconically-defective such as myself, the mouse now displays hints as to the purpose of any icon at which you point — if you are one of those people who instinctively recognises the meaning of any icon you can turn this feature off.

So was WinCIM 2.0 worth the wait? I am inclined to think not, but I am unsure as to what the alternative is. I suspect that I will eventually figure out how to get it working properly, but I seriously resent the effort involved. The search feature sounds good, but unless I am missing something really obvious it is not a big improvement on my existing methods of coping with email. I have been told that the problem of filing cabinet breakdowns has been fixed, but there should be more to cheer about in a 2.0 upgrade than "it doesn't break any more".



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