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DIGITAL RADAR

More Bang For Your Bandwidth

While Microsoft and RealNetworks are futzing around on the desktop with advertising deals and strategic partnerships, startup Instant Video Technologies is doing something that really advances the state of the art of streaming video. IVT's Burstware promises the instant gratification of streaming, but with smoother video playback and better use of bandwidth.

IVT makes a point of calling its technology bursting, not streaming, but the label is largely a marketing distinction. Instead of sending a steady real-time stream, Burstware delivers data in faster bursts to a local buffer on a client hard drive. This constant buffering ensures uninterrupted playback even if there's a hiccup on the network, and playback -- as with streaming -- starts right away. The technology works in the same way AV hard drives capture video without bringing the system to a halt: Instead of hogging the bus in a steady 10Mbps stream, the video comes across in bursts two to four times that rate, leaving time in between for the bus to attend to other tasks. Bursting allows more efficient use of bandwidth -- which should relieve IS folks who are worried that video will clog the network and prevent corporate data from getting through.

Burstware's current client and server interfaces are pretty rudimentary. However, corporations have been interested enough in IVT's powerful bit pump to write their own interfaces to the player. And Burstware is moving toward the mainstream with plans to support Microsoft Media Player later this year. IVT could be an attractive partner for companies with clever intranet video applications. Down the road, the technology

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could expand from intranet video on demand to the general Internet, which could definitely benefit from more efficient use of bandwidth.

--Jeff Sauer

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