

How then, do we avoid getting buried or outdated or both in an affordable communications strategy? Maybe before we take the plunge, we should first take a cool, hard look at the environment around us — the environment that any initiative will have to fit into.

What's Going On

Consider the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). In less than a decade, we have seen the growth of four new "CBCs": CBC Cable (or Newsworld), CBC Internet (<http://www.cbc.ca>), CBC Satellite (or Newsworld International), and finally, this fall of 1996 we saw the launch of Newsworld's first WebNet.² In the next five years, we will, no doubt, see refinements of those services and other new "CBCs" as digital technology grows.

A similar trend can be found with other broadcasters. At a recent meeting of CBC's Board of Directors, board members, for example, were advised to think in terms of many "CBCs" for the future rather than concentrating on what "the" CBC should look like. And therein lies a lesson for the federal government. Internet? Broadcasting? Satellite channel? Which do we choose? If we can take any guidance

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from other "broadcasters," they are discovering that flexibility is absolutely essential as the various technologies evolve and converge.

Some of the linear concepts of "programming" that we're familiar with today, will either disappear or be radically changed when convergence

becomes more of reality rather than simply the *Windows 95* promise of the 1990's.

In a converged world where the television is the computer is the television — we will have the capabilities to choose a program. We won't necessarily be tuning into the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) or CBC or TV5 or Microsoft (yes, it is a broadcaster too!). We'll probably be selecting this program or that program to be viewed at any time of the day or night.

Obviously, that will significantly change both the role and the profile of the broadcaster as we now know it today. For example, there will be no such thing as a network's "schedule," rather a network will have a list of programs to choose from. Prime time, therefore, disappears although there will still obviously be peak viewing periods. What all this means is that the viewer-network relationship will radically change, and the emphasis will shift to the program.

As for the Internet, many point out that it is a medium for the wealthy. It is a phenomenon that may rage throughout North America, Europe and Japan, but it barely touches people in the developing world. The reason? Telephone wires. In many regions, telephone systems, despite Northern Telecom's best efforts, have not penetrated the countryside and often exist in very on-again-off-again modes of operation.

2. A WebNet is a kind of a "station" on the Internet. It has live radio sounds, live video, live chats and could have a menu of choices that changes each hour.