

Perpetual Connection

OH, WHAT A WEB HP WEAVES WITH ITS NEW COOLTOWN CONCEPT.

BY PAT MATSON KNAPP

No one knows for certain where Web technology is headed, but many are weighing in with their predictions. Hewlett-Packard (HP) has its own vision of the Internet's role in our future: perpetual connection. At home, at work, at the mall and in our cars, we'll be connected to the Internet via "intelligent" appliances and context-aware e-services that guide us through the day.

HP envisions a wide range of Web technologies: an intelligent Internet radio that not only wakes you up and plays a customized music and content selection, but also tells you to leave an hour early due to weather or traffic; a bathroom mirror that serves as a multipurpose interface to your e-mail, calendar and personal correspondence; and Web-enabled rental-car services that coordinate every aspect of the transaction, from your ergonomic preferences to warnings of malfunctions.

But what might these appliances and technologies actually look like? After seven years spent developing cooltown, its Web vision and research program, HP has opened three customer-experience centers designed to showcase the emerging technologies. The first cooltown demo center opened last year in Palo Alto, Calif., followed by centers that just opened in London and Singapore.

The centers are essentially stages where HP can demonstrate how pervasive mobile technology can be applied, says Glenn Steiner, HP's program man-

ager for North America cooltown. "Today, HP Labs researchers are focused on providing seamless connectivity to the Web, while masking the complexity of the process," Steiner says. "The demo centers allow us to engage customers with HP's vision, technologies and capabilities, and in doing so, help them develop their own vision."

Visitors—mostly top-level executives of companies that could potentially apply the technologies—enter the Palo Alto demo center through a replica of Bill Hewlett's and Dave Packard's garage. The 3,500-square-foot space is divided into five environments representing home, work, shopping, transportation and an airport lounge. Web-connected smart cars and workstations are customized to personal preferences, a digital closet lets you match wardrobe items while you're shopping at the mall, and the airport lounge provides personal-access screens that enable you to select an in-flight movie and make sure your luggage was actually loaded on the plane.

For most of us, using the Internet involves turning on a computer, waiting for it to boot, bringing up a browser, typing in a URL and searching for the information we need. Steiner says, "HP's vision is about connecting appliances to the Web to provide seamless access at any time, based on who and where you are and what you're interested in doing at that time."

For additional information, visit www.cooltown.com.

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HP worked with Folio, an Irvine, Calif.-based exhibit and environments company, to design and create cooltown, a center that gives visitors a taste of an all-digital future.

