Phoenix Newspapers entering cyberspace

By David Hoye
Staff Writer

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Arizona is getting wired.

By late this year, the best the Grand Canyon State has to offer will be available online, thanks to an agreement between America Online and Phoenix Newspapers Inc., publishers of **The Arizona Republic, The Phoenix Gazette** and the **Arizona Business Gazette**.

For the first time, anyone with a computer and an account with America Online will have immediate, 24-hour access to news and information from around Arizona.

The agreement will, for the first time on America Online, provide community-oriented news and information produced by the papers and other sources from across Arizona.

"Our goal is to bring together information for an entire community," said Howard Finberg, PNI's senior editor of information technology. "This is not going to be a replication of a newspaper online. This is a very different model we think will be a huge success."

News, sports, entertainment and photographs from the two daily newspapers will be included in theinitial launch of the service early this fall. It will be identified on America Online by a special icon and other features that can be clicked on with a computer mouse.

But later the service will go far beyond what readers are provided in the printed papers.

PNI officials envision information on Arizona hotels and restaurants, travel destinations such as the Grand Canyon and Sedona, Super Bowl XXX and the annual Fiesta Bowl, community non-profit organizations and schools.

The service also is expected to offer products for sale from Arizona businesses. Real-estate agents could offer electronic tours of homes for sale.

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And government entities will be able to offer details on regulations, demographics and business opportunities.

The as-yet-unnamed service also will include online classified ads, searchable archives of articles from both newspapers and an arts and entertainment area with features such as interactive television listings and event calendars that would be accessible 24-hours a day.

PNI's offerings on America Online will be broadened by the addition of links to the World Wide Web, a hot corner of the Internet that features graphics and electronic bridges to computers around the world.

The newspapers will host a site on the Web, a sort of electronic mall that will offer a slightly different mix of services than will be available through America Online.

Regardless of where they live, computer users with either America Online accounts or access to the Web will be able to tap into the sights, sounds and heart of Arizona.

"This is going to significantly increase our ability to distribute information and news to people in Arizona," said John Oppedahl, executive editor of the **Republic** and **Gazette**.

"Ultimately, it will be used by people from throughout the metropolitan region and beyond for information and news in a depth and detail that's cost prohibitive to put into a newspaper."

Oppedahl said he also expects users from around the world to dip into the pool of Arizona information.

"Let's say I'm an Arizona State University grad and I follow ASU sports, but I live in Schenectady (N.Y.)," he said. "The Schenectady paper only runs short stories about the Sun Devils. But by connecting with this service, I'll be able to get all the information I want."

He said PNI also expects a significant portion of users to live abroad, including places such as Germany and Japan, increasingly important sources of tourist dollars for Arizona.

Bob Smith, vice president of affiliate development for America Online, said he believes PNI has a winning plan.

"The key to success is you have to let your audience take it where they want to go," he said.

You also "have to be willing the step outside your box. I think people in Phoenix are ready to get out of the box and look at new forms of program-

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ming."

PNI's decision to go online follows an industry trend.

Steve Outing, a newspaper industry consultant who specializes in online services, said some 250 newspapers around the world have some degree of online presence. That's up from about 100 in 1994, and 20 in 1993.

"I have started getting several announcements a week from people telling me they're doing something new online," Outing said. "It's definitely picking up, and 1995 seems to be the year they're all doing it."

Publications online range from small, regional newspapers to giant, national dailies. On the Internet, computer users can find **The Citizen**, a daily that serves Laconia, N.H. Meanwhile, the **New York Times** and the **Chicago Tribune** hold court over on America Online.

Industry experts say the trend will continue, and should lead to more than 2,000 online newspapers by the end of the century.

"There's lots of factors driving it," Outing said. "Primarily its the growth of subscribers going to online services and the Internet. There's a market emerging there, and newspapers need to get ready for that."

The commercial online services report a combined customer base of between 5.5 million and 7.5 million. But because of the disjointed nature of the online world, experts have found it difficult to say exactly how many people use the Internet. Most estimate the number at between 20 million and 40 million.

Usage of the World Wide Web is only slightly easier to estimate.

Adam Schoenfeld, vice president of Jupiter Communications, a new media research, consulting and publishing firm, recently estimated there are between 1.5 million and 2.5 million home computer users with access to the Web.

Growth has been so dramatic, he estimated that the number would exceed 5 million by the end of the year.

Despite the popularity of going online, industry experts report that few newspapers have found success in offering electronic news and information.

"The **San Jose Mercury News** has been on America Online since May, 1993, and they still aren't making money," Outing said. "They were hoping to get out of the red sometime in 1996."

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Some attribute online failures to a lack of understanding of the online world. Instead of offering features that take advantage of graphics, sound and video offered online, many newspapers have simply posted copies of stories that already appeared in their printed versions.

Finberg stressed that PNI's plans are radically different.

"Some of the newspapers that have gone online built their service and then stopped. That's why they're in trouble," he said. "Building online services should never stop. You are never done. We are going to build an online area for Arizona that goes well beyond the content in our newspapers."

Smith said that's the kind of thinking that brought both parties together last week.

"We haven't signed a newspaper since December, 1993. But we didn't really stop looking," he said. "We were just looking for the right partners and the right approach.

"We're very excited about working with the folks at PNI," Smith said. "We think they've got a great concept for a service for Arizona and we think it will be a great addition to America Online."

Eventually, PNI officials said, the service even will offer interactive sessions with Arizona celebrities and government officials. Newspaper readers and users of the service will also be able to send electronic mail to reporters, editors and others who work at the newspapers.

"This is going to be a terrific way to get information and news," Oppedahl said. "And when its fully up and running, it will be quite an innovation for not only people here, but people around the world."

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The world at your finger tips

By David Hoye
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Feel like visiting the Louvre? How about chatting it up with a New York cabdriver or a publisher in Amsterdam? Want to grocery shop without leaving home?

It's all possible these days, thanks to commercial online services, such as America Online, and the Internet's World Wide Web, two of the hottest spots in the computer online world.

With a click of a mouse, online beginners and veterans alike can skip around the world, sampling art, music, games, literature, retail outlets, live chat lines and up-to-the-minute sports.

They can send e-mail, check the weather in cities a thousand miles distant, view pictures of planets and nebulae, play chess with unseen opponents and swap messages on topics as diverse as Shakespeare and O.J. Simpson.

As simple as it is to participate, it often sounds quite confusing, and downright intimidating, to the uninitiated.

But like all things new, going online just requires a simple understanding of how things are organized and a little hands-on practice.

Get that under your belt, and you'll soon be zooming down the information superhighway, feeling like a modern-day explorer bounded only by the limits of your imagination.

Nothing has contributed more to the growth of the online world than commercial online services such as America Online.

The company ranks as one of the "Big Three" commercial online services, along with CompuServe and Prodigy. Within the next year, others will join the fray, including services by Microsoft and AT&T.

The commercial online services represent one of the three main parts of the online world. The others include the global computer network known as the Internet, and computer bulletin boards, which typically are small systems that allow just a few users to connect at any given time.

When America Online was founded in 1985, the Vienna, Va., company ven-

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tured into a world dominated by traditional online users: students, engineers and other professionals. Some saw the few thousand subscribers to America Online as latter-day pioneers.

Today, however, the online scene has changed. America Online now boasts more than 2.5 million subscribers, giving it a larger domestic base than even CompuServe, the granddaddy of online services.

The service has proven popular among computer users because of its ease of use and its content.

America Online provides local telephone numbers that allow subscribers across the country to connect without having to make long distance calls. And software provided by the service makes connecting almost a mindless task.

America Online features a wide variety of services and information. Some of the most popular attractions include:

- The Internet Connection, an online area that provides users with access to newsgroups and a variety of software tools for use on the Internet. Soon, the area will offer a World Wide Web browser that will take visitors out on to the popular corner of the Internet that supports graphics.

- Computing, an online spot where users can share information on computers and software. There's also thousands of software titles to download, including some of today's hottest games.

- People Connection, where America Online users from all walks of life can gather and participate in real-time conversations. Users can create their own "rooms" in which to gather, or can visit any of the permanent rooms.

There's also areas devoted to travel, clubs and hobbies, personal finance, the daily news, the marketplace, sports, education and reference, entertainment and kids.

The World Wide Web is a different beast, but nearly as easy to use.

Simply put, it's a corner of the Internet that supports graphics and allows the use of hypertext, which are words or phrases or images that, when clicked on, link users to related files or other computers anywhere in the world.

Created five years ago by scientists at CERN, the European Laboratory for Particle Physics near Geneva, Switzerland, the Web has proven one of the most popular places to be online.

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Like America Online, the Web offers easy navigation by clicking with a mouse, and is constantly exciting because it's constantly changing. New Web sites appear every day. Online experts estimate there are now more than 12,000 sites on the Web, up from 130 in June, 1993.

Connecting to the Web can be done through Prodigy and CompuServe. America Online offers a trial connection, and hopes to release a permanent way of connecting by fall.

The other way of connecting to the Web involves getting an online account through an Internet access provider. Like the commercial online services, such companies offer local telephone numbers that allow users to connect without making long distance calls.

Once connected to the Web, the world is at your disposal.

There are Web sites for museums such as the Louvre in Paris, for major corporations such as Microsoft, for schools and universities and for the government. Even individuals can have their own places online.

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Tools you'll need to go online

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The online world awaits.

You only need a few things to join the party — a computer, a modem, a telephone line, software and, more often than not, an online account.

The computer you use need not be fancy. It can be an IBM-compatible PC or a Macintosh. Some people still use Amigas, Commodore 64s, Apple IIs and other outdated models.

Obviously, the better your machine, the better your online experience will be. Newer models operate faster and more reliably, and usually have bigger hard drives, or storage space, for games, files and other goodies you might want to download.

The same rule of thumb holds true for the modem you use. It need not be lightning quick if your online plans focus on viewing text. But if you want to use graphically oriented services, such as America Online, or visit the World Wide Web, you modem should be as fast as your pocketbook will allow.

For text, modem speeds of 1,200 baud or 2,400 baud will do fine. But for graphics, you'll want a modem capable of at least 9,600 bps. Most sold today are rated at 14.4 kbps. Some are as fast as 28.8 kbps.

As for the telephone line, any standard home or office line will work fine. All you have to do is unplug the line from your telephone and plug it into the back of your modem.

If you have it, you'll want to temporarily disable call waiting before using the line with your computer. Instructions to do so come with all communications software.

Speaking of which, you'll need a computer program to make it all work. Communications software comes in all shapes, sizes and prices for the Macintosh, PCs and other computers.

A generic communications program, such as Procomm Plus for Windows or the simple Terminal program that comes with Windows 3.1, can be used to call computer bulletin boards and some commercial online services, such as Delphi.

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Other places in cyberspace require that you use special software. To link with America Online, for example, you'll need a copy of the America Online software. Phoenix Newspapers will provide the software for free when it launches its online service.

There are two paths to the World Wide Web.

The first requires a dial-up account through an Internet access provider, such as Phoenix-based Primenet or Internet Direct. To open an electronic doorway to the Web through an access provider, you'll need a program such as Winsock. To do the actual navigation of the Web, you'll need another program known as a browser.

Popular browsers include Mosaic and Netscape. Luckily, some of these programs are available for free or at nominal cost. Commercial versions, such as Internet in a Box, are sold in stores.

Some Internet access providers supply users with all the software they'll ever need when they open an account.

The second path to the Web, and perhaps the simplest for beginners, leads through the commercial online services. America Online, CompuServe and Prodigy all offer Web access and browsers that work through their services.

If you have an account through America Online, CompuServe or Prodigy, you can access the Web. No additional online account is necessary.

So what about online accounts?

Most computer bulletin boards and all commercial online services require users to register and open an account.

They charge monthly fees for online access. America Online, for example, charges $9.95 a month. For that, users get five hours of connect time each month. Additional hours are billed at $2.95 an hour.

A dial-up account through an Internet access provider typically will cost about $20, and will provide users with 100 or more hours of connect time each month.

And don't worry about having to make long-distance calls with your computer. You can connect with all the commercial online services and most Internet access providers with just a local call.

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A glossary for cybernauts

Baud: A unit that measures the speed of electronic data transmission through a modem. The higher the number, the faster the modem operates. Often used interchangeably with bits per second, or bps, although the two terms mean different things technically.

BBS: A computer bulletin board system. Thousands exist around the world. They can be operated by anyone with the right equipment and software. Most are text-based, and offer discussion areas, games and software that can be downloaded. Some offer access to the Internet. Some charge membership fees.

Communications software: Programs that enable computers to "talk" via modems and telephone lines. Most computers running Windows already have a simple communications program, called Terminal. Others include ProComm and Crosstalk.

Commercial online service: A giant BBS that charges users monthly fees for access to vast libraries of software, games, clubs, discussion groups and information, including newspapers and magazines. Most offer colorful graphics and the ability to navigate by clicking with a mouse. The three largest services are America Online, CompuServe and Prodigy.

Cyberspace: A generic term used to describe the intangible "place" computer users visit when they go online. John Perry Barlow once described cyberspace as "where you are when you're on the telephone."

Download: The process of using a modem and telephone line to copy computer files from a remote computer (such as a BBS or a commercial online service) to your computer, where they can be saved and used. Software, graphics, text, video and even audio files can be downloaded. Opposite of upload.

E-mail: Electronic mail sent from one computer user to another. E-mail can be sent over networks (such as within an office building) or through modems and telephone lines to users on BBSs, commercial online services or on the Internet.

FAQ: Frequently asked questions. New users tend to ask the same questions, so many spots in cyberspace offer FAQ files that can be read at leisure. Reading FAQs can avoid online blunders.

Fax modem: A computer device that operates both as a modem and a fax machine, enabling users to link with remote computers via telephone

lines, and send and receive faxes.

Information superhighway: Term used to describe electronic networks that link people around the world. To purists, that means the Internet. Others include cable television and telephone networks. Same as information highway, the infobahn and the I-way.

Internet: The worldwide computer network that links millions of computer users at schools, businesses, government institutions, military installations and homes.

Modem: A device that enables remote computers to be linked via telephone lines. Some are installed inside computers. Others are external, connected to computers with cables.

Online: Electronically linked, as in, "I'm online with America Online." Similar to cyberspace.

World Wide Web: A part of the Internet that supports graphics and allows users to navigate by clicking with a mouse. It features hypertext, or words, phrases or images usually outlined in blue that, when clicked on, send users to related files or other computer systems anywhere in the world. Also referred to as WWW or the Web.

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