

DEMO models make debuts

These not-ready-for-primetime players could soon land key roles at newspapers

IN THE DIGITAL OUTPUT BUSINESS, it is important to focus not only on today's opportunities but on those on the horizon as well. If you want a preview of upcoming digital innovations, the annual DEMO conference is a great starting point.

One of the most interesting technology forums, DEMO showcases innovations that are fresh from the research labs, but not quite ready for marketing. The conference organizer, IDG Executive Forums, invites more than 60 companies to do either eight-minute demonstrations or 60-second elevator pitches. Each conference presents a dizzying array of products and services.

During the past three years, which have been one of the most technologically interesting periods in our industry's history, DEMO has shifted its focus from consumer tools and toys to infrastructure and enterprisewide products. Because innovative products go where venture capital flows, many of the recent unveilings featured mobile connectivity.

Why should mobile connectivity and other technology innovation matter to newspaper companies?

We don't operate in a vacuum. Our vendors, our advertisers, our readers, and our employees all are affected by changes in the technological landscape. DEMO can alert us to trendsetting products in the pipeline. For example, the Palm Pilot, among the first widely

adopted handheld digital devices, made its debut at a DEMO conference.

Here's a look at three fascinating companies and offerings featured at the DEMO 2002 conference in Phoenix last month.

Zinio Systems Inc. (<http://www.zinio.com>): Zinio is trying to do for the magazine industry what NewsStand Inc. tries to do for the newspaper industry: distribute an electronic

version of a printed product for display on a personal computer (PC).

Based on the limited demonstration I saw, Zinio's model (which, like NewsStand, uses Adobe Acrobat at its core) looks very user-friendly. Zinio folks say that their file size is even more compact than NewsStand's. I liked some of its features — especially its ability to highlight

interesting content and the ability to forward an article to another online reader.

Still, there is the underlying question of whether consumers want to adopt such a reading device.

Zinio's technology may work for magazine publishers because their medium's smaller page design more easily fits a screen the size of a PC. Newspapers would need to ensure that their underlying publishing systems can easily reformat content without significant additional labor.

Zinio's product matters because newspapers must find new ways to deliver compelling and well-designed

content to Internet readers. While the physical size of broadsheet newspapers is a big stumbling block for electronic editions, our special sections and other unique digital news products might make for successful use of this new electronic format.

PrinterOn Corp. (<http://www.printeron.net>): With lots of information being pushed to laptop computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and other mobile devices, one might think that paper printouts are a thing of the past. Not so. We seem to print out as much as ever. A truly mobile worker, such as a salesperson, doesn't want to carry a printer around, so getting a hard copy of a document is always a problem.

PrinterOn is building an Internet-based printing network, using the Internet Printing Protocol (IPP).

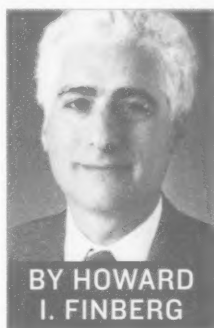
IPP is already built into some printing devices, such as Hewlett-Packard's JetDirect product. With PrinterOn's service and wireless communication from a PDA or laptop, mobile printing becomes easier. PrinterOn is developing a service model for use at airports, hotels, etc.

PrinterOn's printing-network idea matters because almost anything that makes it easier for our mobile employees to do their jobs is worth a look. Whether this company can pull off such a network remains to be seen.

Kettera Software (<http://www.kettera.com>): Kettera has a simple, but powerful, tool for enhancing customer relationships: AskBox 3.0.

This software tool, placed on a company's Web site, enables customers to ask questions, gather product information, and give us feedback — all without leaving the confines of the AskBox on the page. This means our customers won't be waiting for page reloads or irritated by pop-up windows. To see the AskBox in action, visit CNet.com (<http://www.cnet.com>) and take a poll.

Kettera's AskBox matters because sometimes simple things make our customers happy. Finding such a simple solution should make everyone happy. ■



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