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LOOSE WIRE

By JEREMY WAGSTAFF



This Just In ... From Your Pocket

New software lets you send instant video from cellphone to the Web
 December 21, 2007

Singapore

After broadcasting, narrowcasting, podcasting, screencasting, simulcasting, netcasting, multicasting, Zunicasting, Bluecasting and typecasting I thought, frankly, I was inured to anything ending in casting, but surprisingly I've found one more I'm quite enthused about.

It's called PocketCaster, and it really has nothing to do with transmitting inside your pants, or from your pants. In fact, it could usher in a modest revolution in the way we use our cellphones and get our news.

PocketCaster is the term given by the Canadian company ComVu Media (comvu.com) to its free (for now) software that allows owners of camera phones to transmit video live. Point the camera, fire up the ComVu software and the resulting video (and audio) will stream to a Web page that can be viewed by anyone you want.

ComVu isn't the first to offer live Web feeds. Veodia (www.veodia.com), for example, offers live broadcasts of TV-quality video from your computer, while kyte (kyte.tv) is closer, offering among its services something called LifeStream, which it describes as "a real-time broadcast of your life through your mobile phone."

But ComVu's product works better. I stumbled and struggled with kyte, whereas PocketCaster worked the first time. Downloading and installing the software is straightforward (it works with most Windows Mobile and Symbian S60 camera phones). PocketCaster itself is easy -- just a press of a button, really -- and the video will appear on the Web site after a five- to 10-second delay. All your friends need to do is visit the Web link and they can see the video in progress. (The streaming videos are saved automatically and can also be posted to YouTube and some blogs.)

That said, I didn't really appreciate the work that had gone into the product until ComVu Media executive vice president Olaf Lohmann, who is based in Singapore, gave me a demo in a nearby Starbucks. First off, the software is flexible enough to take into account the different speeds that cellular operators offer their customers. This is important because PocketCaster streams the video to servers using the quickest wireless network available -- choosing from the usual alphabet soup of services that handle data to and from your phone like EDGE, EVDO, UMTS and HSDPA, but also WiFi if it's available, as the handset has a wireless chip inside. If you're on a slow connection, the quality of the video is reduced, but on a fast connection the picture looks surprisingly good. Singapore boasts pretty fast 3.5G connections and we were able to transmit our inane mutterings at an impressive 200 kilobytes a second -- about four times faster than an old dial-up modem could manage on its best day.

But as with all these things, the question arises: What, exactly, would we use this for?

Well, there's the obvious stuff. You could broadcast your status from the top of Mount Fuji to friends and family back home at a prearranged time, or, armed only with a cellphone, transmit a wedding/party/Bar Mitzvah in real time to the Net.

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