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Your Quarterly Connection to Technology for Real People

Spring 2000

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World Wide Wedding

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Internet broadcasting is young and growing fast. The technology for real-time broadcasting of sound and video -- called "streaming" -- has been widely available for just a couple of years. Radio stations and music sites were among the earliest users of streaming audio; more recently, large-scale news and entertainment sites like CBS.com, CNN.com and VH1.com have begun streaming full-motion video with sound.

Streaming took a big step forward last year, with the release of Microsoft Windows Media Technologies 4, a suite of free software products for making and playing back digital media. Windows Media offers industry-leading sound and video quality, with CD-quality sound possible for people with fast connections. Even typical dial-up users can hear FM-quality sound with Windows Media, and the Windows Media Player automatically adjusts video quality to guarantee the best picture for any connection.

And, as streaming technology becomes more common and easier to use, people like Jeff and Wendi are finding it the perfect tool for sharing special occasions.

Virtual Flock

Peachtree Presbyterian started using streaming video in March 1999. Currently, the church has three broadcast-quality television cameras to webcast weekly services, musical concerts and other events. A recent Christmas service attracted more than 3,000 online guests.

Of course, all this webcasting requires some know-how, which is provided by Gary Russell, a Peachtree Presbyterian member who owns AtlantaEntertainment.com, a multimedia Internet marketing company. The church hired Russell's company in mid-1998 to provide a less expensive alternative to television broadcasting.

"Primarily, the church wanted to reach members who no longer could attend services because they were ill or elderly," said Russell. "We've now found additional uses for the technology. For instance, it appeals to members who may be out of town and to kids, who find it cool. And then, of course, there is the occasional wedding."

At first, Russell streamed only audio over the Internet. Then he set up a Web cam, which updated a still image every five seconds. Russell still wasn't satisfied. So he turned to Microsoft Windows Media Technologies, which allows him to stream video live, in real time, and to store the

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broadcasts so Web visitors can view past church events at any time.

"With this technology, we are able to put on a very compelling show, even when it is accessed with just a dial-up modem," said Russell. "In my opinion, streaming media is the thing that will make the Web surpass television in popularity."

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