



by Ralph Lee Scott

Battle of the Browsers: Round Two

Like the projected arrival of the *Raleigh Hurricanes* (hum ... wonder where they came up with that name?), Internet users are eagerly awaiting the release of the latest version of the two major Internet browsers: Microsoft's *Internet Explorer 4.0*, and Netscape's *Communicator/Navigator 4.0 Suite*. Both of these packages are now available to be examined in beta release form.

The *Communicator* suite is called *Netscape Communicator Pro* in the beta 4.0 release version, and consists of nine software packages bundled in one: *Navigator*, *Composer*, *Collabra*, *Messenger*, *Profile Manager*, *Netscape Conference*, *Netscape Calendar*, *IBM Host On-Demand*, and *Configure Media Player*. *Navigator* is the browser that most of us are familiar with; *Communicator* is the Netscape version of an e-mail program; *Composer* is an expanded hypertext markup language editor/composer; *Collabra* is an electronic listserv/news mail manager; *Netscape Conference* is an online electronic real time discussion group manager; *Netscape Calendar* is a personal electronic calendar; *IBM Host On-Demand* is a telnet session launcher; and *Configure Media Player* allows you to configure *Communicator* plug-ins. Plug-ins are software application programs that run programs to display .gif pictures, and run .mpeg movies.

Major enhancements to the *Navigator 4.0* browser include changes in the menu system, icons and toolbars. The bookmarking system has an icon that divides into four components: a navigation toolbar, a personal toolbar, a location toolbar, and a component toolbar. When you click on the bookmark icon folders the screen fills up with your bookmarks which you can then arrange, edit, and click and drag. For traditionalists the old bookmark pull down still exists. The location toolbar has been added as an icon next to the Web address field, which is located to the right of the navigation toolbar. Underneath the navigation toolbar, you will find your personal toolbar, indicated by Netscape icons and the name of the toolbar (i.e. *icon* Bill Gates). For example, you could have personal toolbars for subject areas, hobbies, or the names of different persons who share Netscape software on one machine.

The icon system of *Navigator* has been changed to incorporate some of the more important features of former pull down menus. For example, there is now an icon for reload, that handy feature we have all come to enjoy! Large arrow icons are provided for back and forward. Additional icons include: home, search, places, print, and security. The entire menu system has been redesigned and incorpo-

rates a minimization bar. Basically what this means is that the menu is divided into three sections, each of which can be minimized at will to save screen space so that you can better see your other Internet goodies. The three sections consist of a top bar that contains the basic icons listed above (home, reload, etc.), a middle bar that has the navigation toolbar and the Web address field (which can be expanded as a pull down menu for prior URLs), and a lower bar which has the personal toolbar arranged in a row. This allows you, for example, to minimize the personal toolbar row to save space. Changing the bar back is just a click away.

Netscape Messenger, in keeping with the modular nature of *Communicator*, is a separate software package that handles e-mail and listserv readers. This used to be part of *Navigator*, but now you can manage your mail and reader traffic through a series of mailboxes as you would in a typical mail handling package such as Microsoft's *Exchange*. Typically you have an inbox, an outbox, trash, personal mailboxes, a new "draft" box, and boxes for newsgroup readers. Large buttons on an icon bar enable you to edit quickly and add groups and messages. These icon bars can be minimized like the bars in *Navigator*.

Collabra is basically another private newsgroup reader that has the ability to add internal newsgroups that you create. For example, if you want to route a memo to a group of people (say the History Department faculty), all you have to do is create that group. People you give rights to can read and add to this group discussion. You also can have a suggestion box that people can write to but not read or edit. So, for example, if you received a posting on a listserv that you want to distribute to support staff, you could move from *Messenger* to the appropriate group in *Collabra*. Yet to be seen is whether users actually like this method of communication transfer.

Communicator suite has an HTML page editor called *Composer*. *Composer* can be used to create and edit mail, documents, or Web pages. It is similar to a word processing package like *Word* or *WordPerfect*. The design of *Composer* is like the previous components of *Communicator* (minimized bars, icons, buttons). Instead of adding the HTML code, the user can click the appropriate function on the menubar and add text or graphics. *Composer* has a built-in *Java* script editor, a spell-checker, and templates to fill in to make page construction even easier. When you get everything in the right order, a *Composer* routine can upload the page to the

server that you specify. Neat, efficient, and a lot easier than learning HTML coding!

Conference is basically a software package that allows you to chat and have a conference meeting over the Internet. People can send ideas, files, graphics, etc. to the conference for all to read. This is a Netscape version of *Cool Talk*.

Communicator's other features are fairly standard. *Profile Manager* enables you to set suite parameters; *Configure Media Player* does what you would expect it to do. *Calendar* is a standard electronic reminder calendar; and *IBM Host On-Demand* is basically a telnet launcher (TN3270).

With this new version of *Navigator*, Netscape has changed from an all-in-one browser to a bundled group of software packages that explores the Internet. Given the growth of applications on the Internet, it makes sense to break out the different applications into separate, integrated software packages that can be launched individually, but are linked together under the *Communicator* suite. It remains to be seen if the marketplace likes this type of arrangement or prefers the integrated approach that Microsoft's *Internet Explorer* will continue to use in its 4.0 release.

URLs: www.microsoft.com/ie/
www.netscape.com/comprod/products/communicator/

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