

# Electronic Distribution

The NeXT community is a perfect testbed for electronic distribution. The market is still small; we know where almost all of the computer owners are, and the community is more fluent with networking than most. And we have more than our share of creative people willing to tackle problems in new ways.

## What is the problem?

- What if you are a NeXT owner and you are looking for a particular application- and you know the 3<sup>rd</sup> part catalog is out of data, the Internet archives are incomplete and complicated and there is no reseller within 500 miles?
- What if you are a NeXT dealer and your customer wants fifteen different software applications and no one distributor carries them- you have to contract with each developer individually?
- What if you are a developer and want to offer your application at a reasonable price, but no distributor will carry it for you because there are not thousands of buyers waiting out there?

## Enter electronic distribution.....

Many of these problems are caused by the use of physical inventory. The developer has to print boxes and manuals, the distributor has to buy inventory and hold it, the user has to order a product and wait for shipment. And when a product is revised, everyone loses while inventory is discarded or replaced and new inventory is shipped.

“The developer has to print boxes and manuals, the distributor has to buy inventory and hold it...”

On the other hand, electronic distribution simplifies things. Applications are stored on a CD-ROM or in a database and users know where to look for them. Resellers can look to one source for their software products and get a volume discount for purchasing multiple products. Developers can avoid contracting individually with every reseller and vice versa.

## Why NeXT?

The NeXT is powerful stimulant for information. If we aren't looking for new applications, we are seeking white papers, clip art, background images, databases and fonts. The need is much greater than can be supplied via traditional means- floppy disks and printed packaging.

Also, the NeXT community is very well connected, electronically, and tends not to be intimidated by technology, so it is logical that this is where most of the experimentation in electronic distribution should take place.

***“The NeXT community is well connected, electronically and tend not to be intimidated by technology”***

#### *Program locking*

Delivering software electronically is a different problem than delivering packaged good. *Protection* is an important consideration. The publisher must protect the information from misuse, and that is generally done by locking the purchasable files on the CD-ROM or database. The user calls to purchase a key to unlock the desired files.

This kind of technology also fosters the notion of *licensed programs*. When an application is loaded for the first time, it is licensed to a user, a host, or to a particular number of simultaneous users on a network. This licensing technology needs to be dependable as well as easy to use.

Fortunately, a selection of locking technologies is available for the NeXT. Some are server-based and rely on a system-administrator-loaded daemon to keep track of which versions of a program are running. Others are more comprehensive, running across networks and over gateways to quietly guarantee that the programs are being used as they should.

#### *Software vendors*

Liveware offers an object set to developers called LockOut. This includes everything the developer needs to provide program locking, including a user authentication object a network server and a key generator.

Another product, Elan License Manager from Elan Computer Group, provides very sophisticated program locking. At optional cost, the developer can include Redundant License Management, which protects the user in the event that the main license server is incapacitated.

You can get more information on locking products by calling Paget at (206) 448-0845.

#### *An electronic identity*

When a developer moves from printed packaging to electronic distribution, there are several benefits. No longer does the printing process delay shipping. No longer does physical inventory get obsolete. No longer are there big shipping bills to pay.

Also, when a developer goes electronic, he has an opportunity to create a more comprehensive identity system. With printed packaging, a logo and a particular "look" are important to catch the buyer's eye in a retail store.

With electronic delivery, the developer can create an animated logo with a matching sound bite. That logo can be played in a demo application, shown at the beginning and end of multimedia products clips, and can be the basis for the company's graphic logo.

*What kinds of information?*

The NeXT has a selection of software available electronically through ***the archives***. While this does not solve the bulk purchase problem nor is it accessible to all, it is at least a passive form of electronic delivery. Currently, there are other several proactive electronic distribution projects under development for the NeXT.

***User groups***, including the ***Bay Area NeXT Group (BANG)*** will be creating and releasing CD-ROMS.

***Skylee Press*** has taken over the Big Green Disk from Lighthouse Design. A CD-ROM containing shareware, examples, and public domain software, the Big Green Disk will be revised from time to time and provides an interesting body of information for the NeXT owner. This CD-ROM is available for \$99 and the upgrades will be priced very reasonably.

**Look for electronic information from ANDI, BANG, Paget Press and Skylee Press, among others.**

The Association of the NeXT Developers (ANDI) under Bill Stehl is building an electronic database and network of all kinds of information navigated through a lively multimedia environment. In addition to applications, developers will be able to find examples and share objects. Bill is working with a variety of vendors to provide a high-speed network at a low cost, which will be available for an annual membership fee.

Paget will publish the first Electronic AppWrapper, a quarterly CD-ROM of programs and information for NeXT users this fall. The CD-ROM will contain free information, such as a catalog of available software for the NeXT, as well as purchasable items, including software, fonts, clip art and how to tips.

The Paget CD-ROM will take advantage of the rich NeXT environment by using the multimedia capability for information access. A free multimedia player, MediaBrowser from Imagine, Inc., will be included so users can enjoy multimedia tutorials and "advertorials". An annual subscription to the first Electronic AppWrapper will cost \$24 (\$36US International.). Current AppWrapper subscribers will receive one year's subscription to the Electronic AppWrapper free.

NeXT Release 3.0 brings better drivers and CD-RO handling capability. The capacity of each CD-ROM is sizable, 680 Mbytes, buy there is an almost unlimited supply of information to be published.

As the installed base of CD-ROM drives grows, we can anticipate more information published with better organization directed toward more specific markets. (And one day soon, lets hope a NeXT developer announces the Personal Publishing Wizard where you can get just the information you want in just the format you want.)