

HIGH-TECH HYPE

Continued from page 6

dimensional home viewing and movie theaters.

And the producers of the hot new entertainment programming won't be the high-tech companies. They'll be the same sources that produce programming today for the broadcasting, cable and motion picture industries.

Until then, the vast majority of the population will still be "logged on" to their TVs, radios and movie theaters.

TECHNICAL KNOCKOUT

A sizable niche of predominantly young, relatively upscale and educated consumers will develop a sophisticated appreciation of the entertainment capacities of the computer. This niche will include highly defined segments of the adult population, predominantly male.

But despite its glamour and publicity, computer interactivity won't be an activity with mass appeal, in part because navigating the information superhighway will still require considerable education, skill and patience — even after it's simplified.

Note: *With economic trends pointing to a shrinking middle class and a growing lower class, the computer as an entertainment medium will not appeal to the downscaling majority. This passive "spectator" majority will not "go interactive" but will continue to channel-surf for the latest in talk shows, game shows, soaps, sitcoms and sporting events.*

Advertising

Beginning in 1994, rumors of a cyber gold rush swept the business community. From the Chrysler Corp. to the Centerville Chamber of Commerce, businesses big and small staked their product and service claims "on line."

A Web site became a must. Getting onto the Internet, to many companies, meant being hip and "on trend."

Respected advertisers, with long traditions of buying media strictly on solid demographic and cost-per-thousand criteria, suddenly jumped

Trend Trap

Beware of 'Webchic' Broadcast News

Don't be fooled by the latest gimmick that many TV, cable and radio news shows use to promote themselves as unique, techno-savvy information sources.

These broadcasters take ordinary news and features — the same type they've been reporting on for years — and repackage them to suggest they're exclusive information made possible only through the wonders of the Digital Age, the Internet and interactivity.

'WINDOWS' DRESSING

By attaching high-tech names to features and segments, or http://www.addresses to ordinary stories, or pretending to click on computer-screen icons, broadcasters generate a spurious climate of high-tech exclusivity.

Audience members are led to believe that by watching their favorite anchor "punch it in, log it on" and "get connected," they're receiving privy information they couldn't get before.

But this is just a charade. Virtually every story broadcast under the guise of selective on-line information appears in major newspapers or is available to the newsrooms and the general public from the wire services.

Note: *Space and time limitations and editorial selection in the print and broadcast media prevent many news stories from reaching the public. Going on line to access this information is an invaluable additional tool for trend trackers. But going on line alone is not a replacement for reading good newspapers. (See "How to Track Trends On-Line," Fall 1994, page 7.)* M

onto the Webwagon — with nothing to support their collective hunch but sizzle and rumor.

Void of research to guide them or a track record to go by, advertising agencies set up special Web divisions. Trade publications disproportionately extended themselves to accommodate upstart media.

As with many gold rushes, the nuggets were few and the terrain hostile. A public deluged daily with print and broadcast advertising chose not to exercise free will in calling up still more ads on their computer screens, even when lured by incentives. ("Win prizes!" "Play games!" "Get free advice!")

CLICK-THROUGH RATE

Now, as a result, consumer advertisers are beginning to re-evaluate their enthusiasm. Of the \$71.7 million spent to advertise on the World Wide Web in the first half of this year, only 14 percent plugged consumer goods, according to Jupiter Communications, an Internet consulting and research organization.

And fully two-thirds of the ad dollars were spent by Internet, telecommunications and computer companies, all of which had a vital interest in the success of the Web.

Total spending for Web advertising is projected to reach \$312 million this year, according to Jupiter. But the figure is still a tiny fraction of the \$174 billion to be spent this year for all U.S. advertising.

Even by the year 2000, when some believe the Web will become a mass medium, total Web advertising will still account for only a small slice of the total U.S. ad-spending pie.

To be sure, commerce is being generated on the Web and will continue to grow. But there's no evidence or valid research to suggest that money spent on Web advertising influences consumer purchases, either on the Web or elsewhere.

Despite techno-promises that the Web will serve as an advertising medium with compelling innovations, it won't excite consumer interest for the foreseeable future. It will continue to lag far behind TV, radio, print, outdoor, event and other traditional media and forums.

Note: *The most effective advertising is wrapped around and integrated with entertainment. Ads work in magazines and newspapers because they're sandwiched between news stories and features without overtly distracting readers.* M