

## Progressive Networks Delivers the "Real" Thing

Michael Devitt

Have you ever thought about listening to radio broadcasts in another state or country, or being able to watch TV on your computer? The Real Player, a beta-tested, downloadable application from Progressive Networks (<http://www.real.com>), gives you that opportunity.

With this program you'll be able to listen to hundreds of radio stations and programs worldwide, watch specially-made short films and video clips, hear interviews, concerts, news and sporting events, and watch television and movie previews, all on your computer any time of day. The best part is that it's free.

Downloading the Real Player is a snap. Once you get to the download page (<http://www.real.com/products/player/download.html>), there are four simple steps to follow:

1. your product. In this case, we want the beta version of Real Player 4.0.
2. your computer's operating system, i.e., Windows 95/NT/3.1, Macintosh OS 7, Unix, Linux, etc. Some operating systems currently only let you access a portion of Real Player called Real Audio, not the entire player. If you have such a system, you can still use the program for radio broadcasts.
3. your processor type. You can choose from Pentium, 486, and PowerPC, among others. Again, some processors can only utilize the Real Audio portion of the program.
4. your connection speed. This is the same as the maximum speed of your modem. Most connections are made at 14.4 kbps and 28.8 kbps. The faster the speed, the better images and sound you'll receive.

After you've made your selections (and typed in your name and e-mail address), you can go to the download and instructions page, where you can choose from a number of sites that have the Real Player available for download. Select a destination, then select a folder to download the file to. The program is approximately one megabyte. It will take between 10-15 minutes to download, depending on your operating system and modem speed.

After you've downloaded the program you'll need to close your Web browser, otherwise the Real Player won't install itself. When you locate the folder, open it and click on the file. This should begin the Real Player beta setup process, which will guide you through the rest of the installation. The Real Player should install itself both as a plug-in program for your Web browser, as well as a stand-alone application by itself.

Once you've installed the Real Player on your system, you'll want to know how to connect with all those radio and television stations. The best of site for this information is Timecast (<http://www.timecast.com>). An electronic media guide for sites that use Real Player technology, Timecast divides its program guide into four categories: Daily

Briefing, Live Guide, Audio Guide, and Video Guide.

The Daily Briefing section is a collection of recent audio clips from a variety of news sources. The sound bytes, which are usually a minute or so long, cover national and global news, industry, business, and sports, as well as comedy clips and entertainment updates. You can choose as many clips to listen to as you like, and you can customize Daily Briefing to receive audio clips on the subject(s) of your choice.

Like the Daily Briefing, the sites on Audio Guide are broken down by subject. A dozen main topics exist, including: arts, communications, education, and society/culture. A number of hidden treasures exist within the various subtopics. For example, I recently accessed the National Museum of Art via the "reference" section and found two audio clips; one of a poetry reading, the other an interview with a White House artist.

The newest addition to Timecast, the Video Guide offers links to more than 60 different networks and programs, which are also broken down by subject. Although the pictures were not of television quality, due to low modem speed, I was able to see and hear real-time Senate proceedings on C-SPAN in stereo sound, a specially-made Spike Lee short film, and an excerpt from a show on the Comedy Central network. There are also a number of music companies which use the video guide, marketing certain performers or songs by releasing clips of music videos on Timecast.

The Live Guide itself is broken down into four subguides. Live Now displays important news and sporting events that are currently happening. Live Today shows current events, as well as upcoming programs that will air later that day. This Month presents that day's programming in a calendar format. You click on a specific date and get a list of everything that will be broadcast that day. Live Stations provides you with an up-to-date list of links to every radio station broadcasting with Real Player technology.

Each page has its own search engine, as well. For example, I typed the word "jazz" at one of the search pages; the search provided me with a list of all stations playing jazz music on the Internet, as well as upcoming interviews and concerts by noted jazz musicians.

Of course, the Real Player isn't perfect. As a beta version, it only lasts 60 days. After that time, the program becomes unusable, and you'll have to download another version. And as I mentioned before, unless you have a 28.8 kbps modem or faster, the video playback can be rather jerky at times.

Aside from those minor inconveniences, it's one of the best beta programs the Web has to offer and is well worth looking into. If you are having problems installing the Real Player on your system, or if you have any comments or questions about this column, please contact me at the e-mail address below.

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