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Internet Access Application: Netscape Communicator 4.0

The Internet is evolving into an information appliance. A source of mass media, collaboration and individual communications, it is a maze of protocols, services and applications. But accessing the Internet doesn't mean learning dozens of specialized applications. Internet access applications like Netscape Communications Corp.'s Communicator 4.0, Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer and Apple Computer's Cyberdog provide a common interface for various Internet services.

While all three products integrate a Web browser, e-mail, news and other Internet applications into a familiar interface, Communicator goes the extra mile to walk away with the prize. Netscape's Communicator includes applications like teleconferencing, a network-aware calendar application, a multimedia player, a tool to centrally administer and configure Communicator clients and an HTML editor. Finally, Netscape thoroughly integrates the Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) to access directory services.

Microsoft Internet Explorer adds NetMeeting, a teleconferencing application, while Apple leads the charge in supporting OpenDoc, an open-component architecture that lets you quickly and easily embed Internet functions in documents or other applications with Cyberdog. Apple has recently announced that Cyberdog will be included as part of both MacOS 8.0 and Rhapsody.

Netscape Communicator 4.0 (Netscape Messenger), $59, Netscape Communications Corp., (415) 937-2555, home.netscape.com RS #375

Honorable Mentions: Cyberdog, free to download, Apple Computer, (800) 767-2775, cyberdog.apple.com RS #376

Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.01, free, Microsoft, (800) 426-9400, www.microsoft.com RS #378

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