

Central Maine Wide Area Network

Megabits, T-1 lines, 56K, FTP and World Wide Web. All techno-jargon, right? Why should these terms mean anything to you? Because these are just a sprinkling of terms used readily by those who use the Internet. And if the computer gurus are right, these terms will be rolling off your tongue in no time at all.

Paul Booker, founding partner of The Maine Internetworks, Inc. (MINT) says, "People have tried to draw an analogy about the impact the Internet will have on people. First they compared it to the impact of cable TV. Then, as the Internet still grew, they compared it the impact of the telephone. Now, the growth is compared to the impact the television, telephone, and cable TV combined had on people."

Thomas College, along with MINT (a local company providing Internet access via a line installed in the Thomas College computer center) are developing a central Maine wide area network with State Cable TV (see network graph). Anyone living in the State Cable area will be able to be connected to the network where many high-technology applications can be shared. Video conferencing, library resources, information, access to the World Wide Web (WWW) and other multi-media applications could be exchanged. Schools, hospitals, businesses, governments, organizations, and personal computers from homes could share information, access the WWW, and teleconference. People working from their home computer could access their work site, their child's school, or share information with colleagues while working at their home.

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The growth of the network is no longer based on cost but on speed. How fast can you get the information, how fast can you call it up on your screen, how fast can you do a search, import a graph, or FTP(file transfer protocol) a file?

Information traveling along a line is made up of ones and zeros, known as binary information. A megabit is one million of these ones and zeros. A 10 Mbps line carries information at ten times that speed, or ten million ones and zeros per second. Transferring information or a photograph between computers on a 10 Mbps line becomes 178 times faster. Businesses in Maine generally use speeds between 56K and T-1 (1.544 Mbps) to connect internal networks to the Internet. The vast majority of people connected to the Internet from their homes use speeds of 28.8 baud modem, about one half the speed of a 56K line.

Thomas College, a leading player in Central Maine's access to this superhighway of information, has increased the speed of data transmission by recently installing a high speed 10 megabits per second (Mbps) line to MINT. This high speed line is 178 times faster than the standard 56K line, and 6.5 times faster than a T-1 line. (see line speed graph)

State Cable TV's coaxial cable line is also 10 mbps, known as Ethernet speed.

The Waterville School system is connected to the central Maine area network via State Cable TV's coaxial cable line. The Waterville schools currently use the area network to share data

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between the school buildings. Waterville School's Assistant Superintendent Russell Clukey says, "The use of the existing cable from State Cable TV is the key to what the school is able to do. The school system is able to get information to the right people faster and more economically. We are able to communicate with people in the entire region in seconds at very little cost." Mr.

Clukey sees the future use of the network in distance learning for the school system. "Teachers can communicate with professors at colleges, teleconference classes, and share resources," states Clukey.

Thomas College's Director of Information Systems Chris Rhoda agrees. "This wide area network will allow us to share limited resources in central Maine. Whether it's library information, providing college courses to high school students by teleconferencing, or sharing expertise, we'll all benefit tremendously," states Rhoda.

Now that the wide area network is in place, members of the partnership (MINT, State Cable TV, and Thomas College) will be providing an informational meeting within the next few months. For more information, interested parties should contact Chris Rhoda at 873-0771, or e-mail: chris@thomas.edu.

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