Webcelerator

Have you recently become increasingly impatient with the "World Wide Wait"? Others have noticed this slowdown on the Internet and are attempting to market products to improve access to the Web. One interesting solution that surfaced recently is a program called "Webcelerator." The basic idea behind this program, developed by Acceleration Software International Corporation, is a host proxy computer that can surf the Web and update frequently used Web HTML files, while you do things more useful than watching the hourglass on your screen. "Webcelerator" can be downloaded free at <http://www.webcelerator.com>. There are 17 different international language versions of "Webcelerator."

Installation is very simple: click on the "Download Webcelerator" on the homepage. After downloading is complete, a Webcelerator icon will appear on your desktop. Double click on this icon and follow the installation instructions. "Webcelerator" will install a special acceleration icon in your Windows icon tray. System requirements for "Webcelerator" are: Pentium processor 75mhz or above; Windows 95/98 or NT; 32mb RAM; 20mb minimum install hard drive space; 14.4kbps modem or higher. You can turn "Webcelerator" on and off by clicking on the icon tray.

What does "Webcelerator" do for you? Other than having the most simple installation procedure I have ever experienced, the program constantly updates Web sites you have visited. You do not have to wait a lengthy time for your browser to download an HTML file because it has been previously stored on the "Webcelerator" proxy computer. You can scroll through the proxy sites in faster time because the information has been pre-cached and compressed by the folks at Acceleration Software. If you send e-mail or access other networked files, "Webcelerator" automatically stops and turns your computer over to the other task. When the file has been transferred, the "Webcelerator" resumes its loading of the compressed and pre-cached file into your system memory. In addition, you can visit Web sites repeatedly without being online. This is an important feature if you are a person or library the pays for Web information by connect hour.

My experience with this software is that it noticeably speeds up Internet downloading. It is especially useful for sites that you want to update frequently on your desktop, such as stock quotes, weather maps, or traffic cams. It is also useful for infrequently viewed sites that are not updated often. With this type of site, you do not have to waste time reloading the file; 'Webcelerator" has already done it for you.

Unfortunately, this neat technology comes at a price. First of all, you now have a proxy computer that knows every place on the Web that you have visited. You have no control over the proxy computer information or what is done with it. Secondly, "Webcelerator" pays for its computers and the free software it gives you by selling "business arrangements to get other people to pay" the cost of this system. And what is this form of "arrangement?" "Webcelerator" starts off by directing your browser when it starts up each day to a sponsor page. This means that you have to read a small ad about some service. For example, if you tried to rent a car over the Web, you might be greeted the next day with an offer from a competing car rental firm. While this might not bother some people, others are concerned about this invasion of their privacy. Advertising is becoming increasingly common on "free" Web sites that host e-mail and Web page services. It is only natural that this idea would migrate to acceleration sortware.

An additional problem can sometimes occur when you use a proxy server such as "Webcelerator" to access IP domain-protected Internet services such as NC LIVE. "Webcelerator," if you are using its cached file, sets your homepage address to a different one from the one NC LIVE is expecting. For example, your IP may become 127.0.0.1:24491 instead of the one assigned by NC LIVE to your institution. Thus you will be unable to access these IP-protected services until you go in and change the IP assigned by your network browser. This can be more than just a minor annoyance as I found out when trying out this software with NC LIVE and other Internet sites such as JSTOR and Project MUSE. Everything worked fine for a while, with information downloading faster. Then the next week, I was unable to logon to NC LIVE, because I was using a different IP address assigned by "Webcelerator."

Users seem quite happy with this product's fast speed, so you might give it a try. The only additional warning I would give is to remember to turn off your virus protections software when you are downloading software. After the downloading is finished, run the virus software on the files. If you do not do this, you will have interesting times with the Windows install programs imbedded in this type of software.

One additional note about Web surfing: fans of Netscape will be glad to know that version 4.5 is now ending beta release and will no doubt be out for general release by the time you read this. I have been using it; I find that it, too, is faster and contains several new features I like, such as a tray icon that indicates when your Internet connection has failed. With this version of Netscape Navigator, you have a clear indication that you have been dropped. The new version can be downloaded from: <http://www.netscape.com/download/sul.html>.