Vision Technology Report

The Next Communication Revolution?

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Throughout history there have been fundamental developments that have changed the way we communicate. Language, writing, the printing press, and the telephone are four examples. As the need to communicate over distances increased the richness of face-to-face communication decreased and the complexity required to communicate increased. When we are face-to-face we communicate interactively and spontaneously with all of our senses and we can exchange information very easily (Here, look at this.....). Todays technology provides us with the means to communicate very effectively over great distances, but, several key features of face-to-face communication are lacking. A telephone call is highly interactive but lacks visual cues and easy exchange of information. The Internet is not real-time and does not provide adequate visual and audio information...yet. The fax provides information exchange, but, only on paper or in a file. Desktop videoconferencing combines many of these capabilities into one package but it is still—for the average person— difficult to install and difficult to use. *The next revolution in communication will come when any - one, regardless of technical capability, can install and use a device that provides natural face-to-face communication capabilites at a distance. The technology becomes invisible to the user.*

But building this kind of system may require a whole new way of thinking...... Almost all of the products on the market today use the computer as their platform. But the computer, as we know it, can be a very difficult tool to use and to maintain. If we continue adding complexity to the users devices we will only limit the number of people who want to use, or are capable of using, this technology. If we want to provide face-to-face communication capability at a distance, how do we do it? Do we continue to develop it around current computer technology? Do we build new devices? Do we integrate our communication into the TV? Do we re-locate the complexity to a central location? Does the $500 network computer fill the bill? However we do it....we need to keep one thing in mind above all others.

Can this new communication device be easily used by anyone? If not.......then we are missing the point.

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Desktop Products Evaluated

Evaluation consists of installation, video quality, audio quality, interface and icon design, features, collaborative tools......and ease of use in real situations.

Cameo, Intel Proshare, PictureTel PCS100, 50 & 200, Vic Hi-Tech, RSI ERIS, Vivo 320, Apple QTC, Creative Labs Mac3000 and PC3000...*more to come.*

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