



Communications from a Field Near You

As all far-reaching technological successes require industry-wide cooperation these days, Nokia, Sony, and Philips recently formed the NFC (Near Field Communication) Forum, dedicated to developing products that will revolutionize data transfer in our daily lives.

The forum members are hopeful that NFC, a wireless data transfer technology based on RFID (radio-frequency identification), will one decade enable common devices such as cellphones, cameras, PDAs, and even charge cards to conveniently “communicate” with each other by touch.

Of course, staggering privacy implications come to mind—no more carrying your cellphone in its holster on a crowded subway. Never fear, as the NFC revolution will take a while to transform society as we know it, there’s plenty of time to deal with privacy issues.

At the very least, a new protocol for greeting strangers and friends can evolve. In the days of yore, an upraised hand or a handshake indicated that you weren’t holding a weapon. In the future, perhaps strangers can ritually use their cellphones to indicate friend-or-foe status.

WANT MORE?

<http://news.zdnet.co.uk/hardware/emergingtech/0,39020357,39149407,00.htm>

Light-Speed Disk Drives

Researchers recently used the SLAC (Stanford linear accelerator) to determine if there’s a “speed limit” to the rate at which data can be stored on computer disks. It turns out there is, and the limit is 1,000 times greater than what’s possible for today’s state-of-the-art hard drive. Basically, the high energy required for writing data any faster corrupts the data as it’s being written.

Glass half-full or half-empty?

While many people say there’s plenty of room to grow—and who needs to write data that fast, anyway—SLAC’s own database grows an amazing one terabyte a day, meaning that even if data transfer speeds increase a thousandfold, at some point in the future their ability to store and retrieve data will be dwarfed by the amount of data they store.

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2822333.stm>

Taking a second look AT

THE NEWS SO YOU
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Hand-Delivered Curried Spam?

No surprise, India’s large population produces a lot of mail. Also no surprise,

India’s large population is not 100 percent computerized. Not a problem; India’s postal system, the largest in the world, provides ePost, which enables people to send and receive e-mail through their local post offices.

In fact, this high-tech, low-tech solution is the best way—the only way—to reach customers living in remote or inaccessible locations. You simply go to your local post office, have your handwritten letter scanned and then e-mailed to the recipient’s post office for a charge of 10 rupees per page. A printout is delivered by *hakara*, the old-fashioned way, on foot.

It would seem that the *hakara* might become rather busy crossing the mountain passes with spam in their hands, as there’s no limit on how many addresses you can send the same e-mail to.

WANT MORE?

<http://www.indiapost.org/IndiaPost-E-Post.html>

Mind Control for the Masses?

Wheelchairs will soon be one of the most sophisticated vehicles around, steered by the “mind power” of individuals previously unable to navigate their environment.

As a result of advances in electroencephalography (EEG) developed at the Dalle Molle Institute for Perceptual Artificial Intelligence in Switzerland, electrodes in a skull-cap can capture brain signals activated during particular decisions. In this case the brain-computer interface uses Bluetooth and a C# signal-processing engine to make one of three realtime decisions: move left, right, or forward.

Sounds like a thinking cap that most of us would like to sport, no? Well, maybe. A few challenges have to be worked out first. Chiefly, although it’s no longer necessary to close your eyes to deeply focus on your intent, it remains difficult to “tune out” all the mental chatter an ordinary *distractible* brain produces. In other words, don’t watch “Jurassic Park” with your cap turned on.

WANT MORE?

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3089559.stm>