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More than 500,000 people have already made telephone calls on the Internet, using microphones and loudspeakers installed as part of multimedia. Sound quality is variable and set-up can be hard. It is best for use on a pre-arranged basis.

An advantage over conventional phone is ability to share documents and pictures - worked on by both simultaneously.

### **Video-links at home**

The Connectix video-cam: a small golf-ball sized device which plugs into the printer port of any PC (desktop or laptop).

Time consuming to set up, but relatively easy to use. At \$100 it is a remarkable device which may be a standard feature on many computers within two years. CU-SEE ME technology has revolutionised videoconferencing on the net.

I have taken part in eight way video-conferences on the Internet using a 28.8kbps modem. Sound is impossible at this speed and each picture refreshes only intermittently.

Sound is good with video turned off, or sound could have been carried via a conventional phone. At present, video-links are aided by typing messages on screen.

ISDN allows quite reasonable videoconferencing on the net with one person, continuous sound links and faster image refreshing. While none of these options come anywhere near the standards of a commercial videoconference suite, they are at the cutting edge of Internet technology and as such attract large numbers of users to sites offering communal "drop in" video conversations.

## Videostreaming

Videostreaming has come of age since early 1997.

RealAudio and Vox are two systems which allow low grade live TV running on a 28.8 modem. Both systems work better at 50+bps. Therefore the technology already exists for a PC user to be able to watch any channel from a choice of tens of thousands.

Mass market commercial TV on the net is only a three or four years away with huge advances in network speed, capacity and compression techniques.