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NEW SUNDAY TIMES

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We spent RM1.2b on SMS

It's now the ultimate in digital lifestyle

■ By Deborah Loh
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It's now the ultimate in digital lifestyle

■ By Deborah Loh
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — There's big money to be made in the Short Message Service (SMS) business. The *industry easily grossed RM1.2 billion* last year based on the estimated six billion messages sent at an average fee of 20 sen per message.

For Malaysians, the SMS is now *the ultimate in the digital lifestyle*, beating the convenience of e-mail, instant messaging, downloading songs and general surfing of the World Wide Web.

The six billion messages were double the 2002 volume, and the increase *also, to a certain extent, reflected* the increase in the number of mobile phone subscribers.

Figures obtained from the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) showed that in 2002, 3.64 billion SMS were sent, and in 2003, some *4.5 billion* SMS had been sent by the end of September.

Figures for the year's last quarter have not been finalised, but adding the average of *the first three quarters* puts the estimated total for the year at six billion.

"It is difficult to track the exact worth of messages sent due to the different *charges*," an MCMC spokesman said.

Charges depend on the operator, mobile phone package and type of service requested (contests, stock *prices, weather* and news updates, or other downloads).

In fact, at 76 per cent, *SMS usage* recorded the fastest annual growth,

□ TURN TO PAGE 5, COL 1

SMS RATES OF THE FIVE NETWORKS

Maxis (012)/Adam (017)	
Maxis/Adam to Maxis/Adam	- 10 sen
Maxis/Adam to other networks	- 20 sen
Maxis/Adam to international networks	- 50 sen
Celcom (019)/TM Touch (013)	
Celcom/TM Touch to Celcom/TM Touch	- 15 sen
Celcom/TM Touch to other networks	- 20 sen
Celcom/TM Touch to international networks	- 50 sen
Digi (016)	
Digi to Digi	- 10 sen
Digi to other networks	- 20 sen
	- 50 sen

NEW SUNDAY TIMES — NATION — FEBRUARY 8, 2004 11

'Dapat' information via SMS

■ By K.T. Chelvi
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The public will soon be able to send text messages via their handphones to government departments and agencies to obtain information.

The "Dapat" SMS service will be launched by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on Monday.

The information will be sent to the consumer within seconds by an automated data system which manages a department's SMS server.

Dapat, owned by Interactive Vista (M) Sdn Bhd, is a home-grown technology and probably the first of its kind in the world.

Interactive Vista executive vice-president Azli Paat said consumers not only have the luxury of information on demand but are also spared the long-drawn process of obtaining information from government departments.

"For example, to get a form from the Employees Provident Fund, all a person needs to do is type EPF followed by the name of the form and his e-mail address and send this to 32728 (Dapat).

"Dapat will retrieve the document from the EPF's information server and send it to his e-mail," Azli said.

Azli said the company is using Dapat to make SMS a formally accepted way of communication for businesses and government departments.

Interactive Vista, which started marketing the service about two months ago, has about 40 organisations and companies registered with it, including the police, Home Ministry, EPF, Tenaga Nasional and Peugeot.

Azli said the company expected to get about 5,000 companies, departments and organisations by the end of the year.

Dapat also provides Multimedia Message Services, whereby users are able to send photos of accidents, for instance, to the police or the insurance company.

Azli said a market test showed the public was receptive to the service.

Companies can also use Dapat to survey the market, receive orders and broadcast *advertising messages to* targeted customers.

SMS a quick and discreet way of passing information

□ FROM PAGE 1

much faster than cellular service usage at 20 per cent.

The growth of text messaging is phenomenal given that it has been less than three years since cellular operators rolled out the inter-operator SMS in October, 2001.

SMS appeals because it is a quick and discreet way of passing information. Messages can be sent to many people simultaneously. Recipients can choose to answer at leisure, or not at all.

Lately, SMS usage broke new ground in the Government, which used it in its public delivery system.

Youths used SMS to check if they had been called up for National Service. Motorists use it to check with the Road Transport Department if they had been summoned for traffic offences.

The RTD also uses it, through the general packet radio service (GPRS), to do background checks on individual motorists and vehicles.

Other SMS usages are just as compelling: sending feedback on taxi drivers to the Commercial Vehicles Licensing Board or checking the delivery status of registered and express mail through the "SMS-POS" service operated by Pos Malaysia Berhad. Citizens can also check their voter registration status with the Election Commission via SMS.

SMS has even enhanced political culture: one service provider allows subscribers to check their party membership status, obtain news flashes on the latest party happenings, or download ring tones of the party's song and logo.

Energy, Communication and Multimedia Communications Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie said using SMS in the public delivery system is part of the Government's effort to encourage the use of information communications technology.

"We are very much encouraged by developments taking place," he said in an e-mail interview.

"This is part and parcel of our move towards E-Government and towards incorporating the use of ICT in Government processes and, more importantly, dealing with and serving the public."

"SMS and the e-mail have become the norm for internal communication in the civil service," he said. "There will be more Government agencies offering information services via SMS."

The growing number of mobile phone users is also a factor in the increased use of SMS.

There were 10 million mobile phone subscribers last year, at a penetration rate of 42.4 per cent of the population. In 2002, 36.9 per cent used mobile phones and in 2001, 30.8 per cent.

With the advent of multimedia messaging service (MMS), will the mobile phone change the way the public deals with the Government? Will Malaysians one day apply for passports by sending photo and thumbprint through MMS?

Moggie did not commit himself but he said: "There is already tremendous development and popularity in SMS and picture messaging. Going by the trend, especially in Japan and Korea, the future of MMS looks promising."

Moggie said Malaysia was beginning to roll out new generation technologies which, once in place, would enable the migration from SMS to MMS.

It was also reported last August that cellular operators have begun talks on sending MMS across rival networks.

Equally important are the necessary legal frameworks and mechanisms to govern electronic transactions.

One is the Digital Signature Act 1997, which came into effect the following year. It ensures that personal information sent over communication networks is kept secure and confidential by recognising digital certificates.

"This will further facilitate and enhance the potential of MMS," Moggie said, "to become a conduit for the Government to deliver its services."

What a whopper!

A 138kg grouper is the current centrepiece at Chia Chiang Ong's seafood restaurant and the owner just can't wait to serve it to his patrons.

Sinking feeling

Parents of pupils in SK Danau Perdana in Taman Desa, Kuala Lumpur, fear for their children's safety as the school's structure seem to be cracking due to a shaky foundation.

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'Dapat' is helping the Government in its mesra rakyat or people-friendly initiative - *Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak*

ONE TOUCH: Najib launching the 'Dapat' service in Subang Jaya yesterday. Looking on are Sabri (left) and Television Airtime Services chairman Datuk Ruslan Omar.

'Dapat' access to a host of services

BY NICK LEONG

PETALING JAYA: Handphone users will now have access to a variety of information and services provided by government departments and corporations via a single Short Messaging Service (SMS) or Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) number.

By keying in *32728* or the word 'Dapat' on their handphones, users can check the amount they can withdraw from the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) or be alerted to any crime in their area.

They can also book air tickets from Malaysia Airlines, reserve a seat at the Sepang International Circuit or get advice from nutritionists about certain products.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the services provided by 'Dapat' could enhance the people's standard of living.

"By bringing this technology to the people, 'Dapat' is helping the Government in its *mesra rakyat* or people-friendly initiative," he said when launching the service provided by Interactive Vista Sdn Bhd (IT Vista) at *Holiday Villa, Subang Jaya*, yesterday.

Najib said 'Dapat' had good potential as there were 10 million handphone users in the country, representing some 40% of the population.

'Dapat' will transform ICT (information and communication technology) have-nots – the ordinary *rakyat* – into competent consumers of ICT, who will enjoy and exploit ICT benefits for their everyday course of life," he said.

IT Vista president Sabri Abdul Rahman said 'Dapat' not only helped organisations to reach out to customers but also "help customers find the organisations."

"For consumers, using 'Dapat' is cheaper than making a phone call and easier to use than the Internet.

"For corporations, 'Dapat's automated response facility saves the need to invest in and maintain costly infrastructure and manpower," he said.

Sabri said 33 government departments and corporations had enlisted with 'Dapat'.

He said government departments included EPF, the Kuala Lumpur, Kedah and Perak police, Fire and Rescue Department, Home Ministry, Human Resources Ministry and Anti-Corruption Agency.

He said some of the companies and corporations enlisted with 'Dapat' were Genting Bhd, MAS, Peugeot and Prime Group of Colleges.

"Among the organisations providing community services enlisted with 'Dapat' are the National Kidney Foundation, Community Support Network, PS Children and Pusat Majudiri for the

HELPING HANDS: Rohaina (right) and her personal assistant Wan Norhayati Wan Mahmood holding up a banner promoting the bureau in Petaling Jaya yesterday. With them is bureau manager Nashua Fauzun Shahril.

Puteri Umno sets up SMS hotline for abuse victims

PETALING JAYA: Victims of incest and domestic violence who are afraid to come forward can now seek counselling and help through a short messaging service (SMS) hotline set up by Puteri Umno's public complaints bureau.

Bureau chairman Rohaina Abdul Latiff said the service provided another avenue for the victims to report abuse and seek assistance.

"Incest victims, especially children or teenagers, may have difficulty in expressing themselves when they face such situations. They may feel embarrassed or ashamed to speak up or fear being punished.

"Through the SMS, there is no need for them to face strangers or anyone else when they reveal their problems," she said in an interview yesterday.

Rohaina said the service, which had been in operation since April, had been receiving good response with 15 to 16 messages a day.

"Not all the messages received were from incest or domestic violence victims as we also received messages from youth who needed other types of advice," she added.

She said it was not easy to coax victims to reveal the identity of the perpetrators but the counsellors were trained to be persistent.

"We have to treat them like friends and avoid applying pressure on them. We do not question them like the authorities do but instead provide a listening ear.

"This way, they are encouraged to come out of their shell," she said.

She said the victims usually took a few days before they revealed their identity and agreed to lodge a police report if the case was severe.

She added that the counsellors were trained to screen messages or calls to prevent pranksters from abusing the service.

Rohaina said at times the mothers of the victims also contacted the bureau through SMS for guidance or legal advice.

"The bureau also gives counselling to these victims to help them lead a normal life after facing the disturbing experience," she said, adding that education was necessary as the victims might perceive incest or other heinous crimes as normal practices.

She said the service would be officially launched on Friday in Kuala Lumpur Plaza, adding that several counters would be open to provide medical and legal advice.

For further information, contact the bureau at 03-4023 9394 or use the SMS service at 019-634 9941.

› Microsoft braces for MyDoom onslaught News 2

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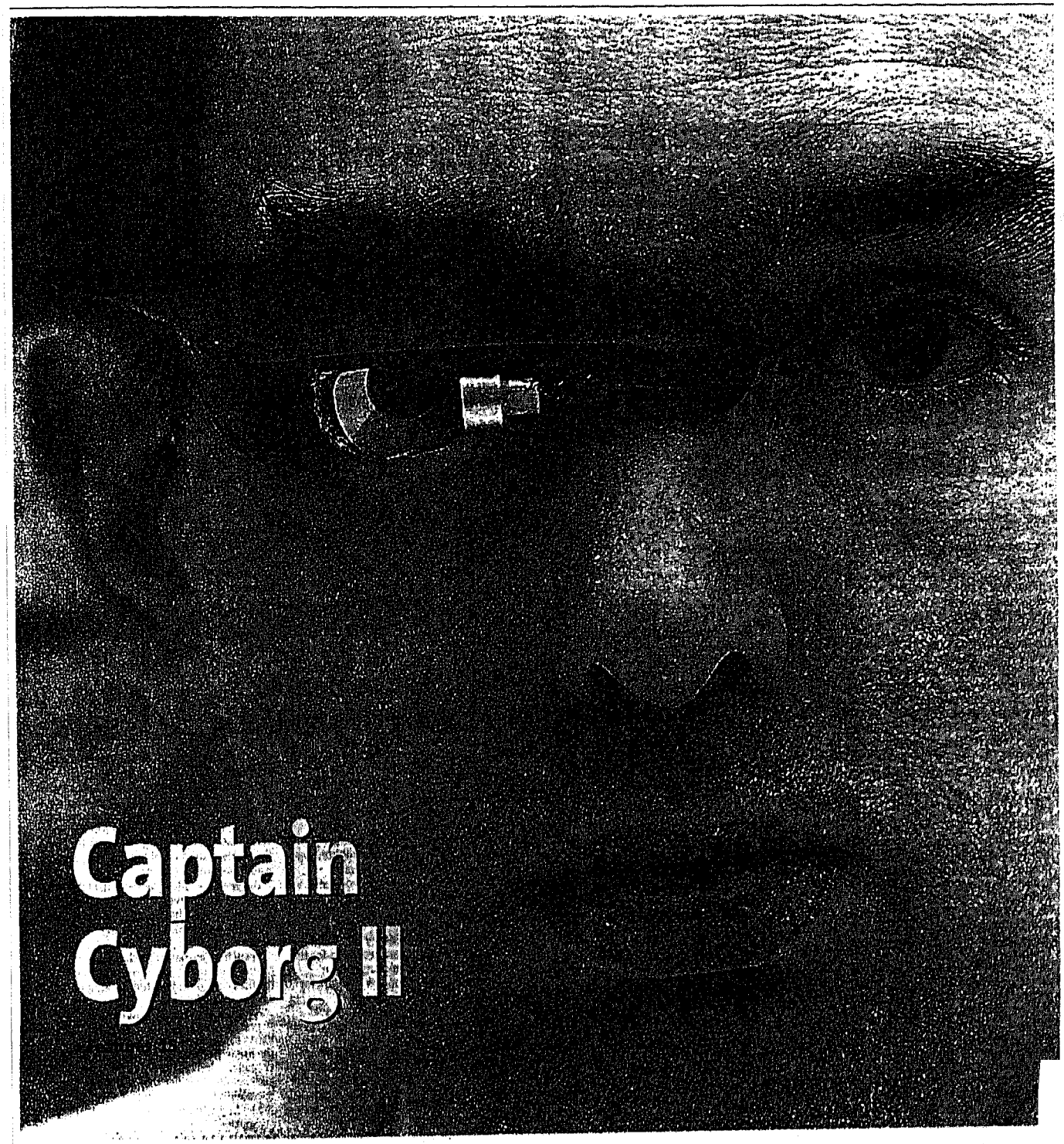


As a cyborg, eccentric professor tailors reality

BY BRIAN BERGSTEIN

WHEN you first meet Steve Mann, it seems as if you've interrupted him appraising diamonds or doing some sort of specialised welding. Because the first thing you notice is the plastic frame that comes around his right ear and holds a lens over his right eye.

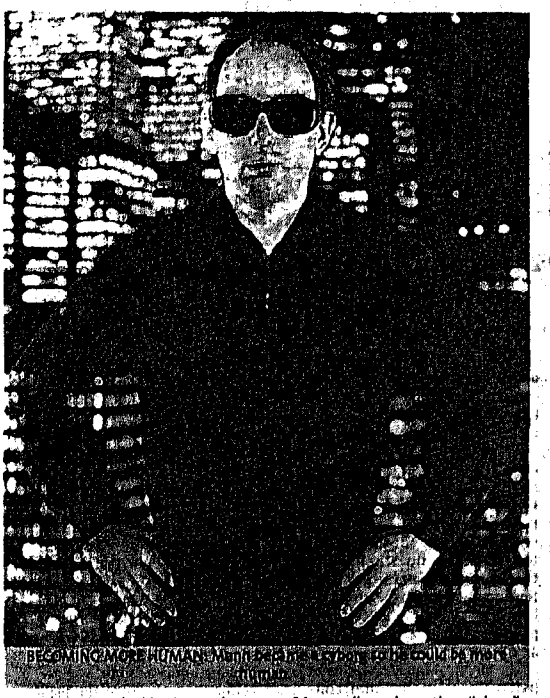
But quickly you see that there's more to his contraption: A tiny videocamera is affixed to the plastic eyepiece. Multicoloured wires wrap around the back of Mann's head. Red and white lights blink under his sweater.

Mann greets you, warmly at first, though he soon gets distracted by something on the tiny computer monitor wedged over his eye.

In fact, being with Mann sometimes feels like the ultimate, in-your-face version of having a dinner companion who talks on a cellphone.

But don't be put off by it.

Someday you, too, might be a cyborg.



BECOMING MORE HUMAN: Mann became a cyborg to be more human

More than human

Mann, a 41-year-old engineering professor at the University of Toronto, spends hours every day viewing the world through that little monitor in front of his eye – so much so that going without the apparatus often leaves him feeling nauseous, unsteady, naked.

While the small videocamera gives him a recordable, real-time view of what's in front of him, the tiny screen is filled with messages or programming code fed by a computer and wireless transmitters that Mann straps to his body. He calls the experience "mediating reality" – sort of like having icons from your computer screen transposed onto your regular vision.

Mann manipulates the computer through a handheld key device he invented, though he has experimented with putting electrodes on his skin and trying to control the cursor with brain waves.

If it sounds a bit creepy, consider this: Mann became a cyborg so he could be more human.

To be sure, that runs contrary to the sci-fi movie treatment of cyborgs (short for "cybernetic organisms") as electronic beasts, like in the *Terminator* movies. It also seems to violate a pastoral sense of what it means to be human: Governed by spirit, reason and instinct, not infused with wires and silicon.

But Mann has sensitive and perceptive motives for his electronic immersion, which began 25 years ago. He believes that wearing computers and cameras will give people more power to maintain their privacy and individuality.

Levelling the 'power dynamic'

For one thing, Mann touts the power of wearable computers to filter out advertising and other elements of daily experience he finds objectionable.

And in a world of ever-increasing surveillance cameras for security, and strong database-mining software for government intelligence and corporate marketing, Mann believes regular people ought to have cameras and powerful computers on them, too.

It's all about levelling the power dynamic.

"People feel they're masters of their own destiny when everything they need is right there with them," he says.

A cyborg could, say, take pictures of hostile police officers during a political demonstration and instantly post them on the Web – to spur others to join in the protest, perhaps, or to simply provide alternative documentation of the scene.

Mann calls such postings "glogs" – short for "cyborg blogs" ("blogs," of course, is itself shorthand for "weblogs").

In more everyday language, Mann advocates "using a bit of the machine against itself."

For example, Mann has created performance art by shooting video in stores that prohibit it, using handheld cameras more noticeable than the "EyeTap" ocular computing system (**www.eyetap.org**) he normally wears. When employees tell him filming is not allowed, Mann points to the stores' own surveillance cameras behind darkened domes in the ceiling.

Then he tells the employees that "HIS manager" makes him film public places for HIS security – how does he know, he tells them, that the fire exits aren't chained shut? – and that they'll have to talk to HIS manager.

His behaviour in such showdowns generally provokes hostility, confusion or resigned shrugs.

Rage against the system

But don't try telling Mann that the complaining employees are just doing their jobs, and that his real beef is with executives who make store policy.

Mann believes everyone should fight The System, those powerful institutions lurking behind the one-way mirrors.

"Clerks should be confronted with their clerk-iness," Mann says one afternoon in the Deconism Gallery, an electronic-art studio he runs near Toronto's Chinatown.

That comment is pure Steve Mann – onto something, but pedantic about it.

Cyberman, a 2001 Canadian documentary about his work, includes footage of Mann telling the director and producer which scenes they ought to use and which ones to cut, a conversation he surreptitiously filmed through the EyeTap.

Yet Mann's cyborg experience is much more than a political statement or geek showboating.

In his 2000 book *Cyborg: Digital Destiny and Human Possibility in the Age of the Wearable Computer*, Mann wrote about the surreal beauty he experienced in programming the computer in his vision to alter colours, or alert him to objects behind him.

"The wearable computer allows me to explore my humanity, alter my consciousness, shift my perspectives so that I can choose – any given time – to see the world in very different, often quite liberating ways," he wrote in *Cyborg*.

For example, Mann and his graduate students have developed software that can transform billboards or other rectangular shapes in the physical world – when viewed through the lens of a wearable computer – into virtual boxes for reading e-mail and other messages.

Mann envisions future generations walking down the street and seeing virtual, personalised messages on bus stops and building walls. A friend could log onto your glog to see where you were, then fire off a quick e-mail that only you would see on the park bench: "Turn around – you went two blocks too far."

Guinea pig geeks

Of course, there are more prosaic possibilities. Mann's graduate student James Fung once was wearing an EyeTap while sitting around a campfire with friends and used its wireless Internet connection to find a ghost story to tell.

"It was a nice example of myself and the computer working together," Fung says. "You could imagine that if it were completely concealed in glasses ... people would naturally think that I was able to recall the stories myself."

Mann builds his "WearComps" and "EyeTaps" himself, with input from his wife, Betty, who has worn the gear, too, for nearly 15 years.

He has shrunk it dramatically over time. His first wearable system had to be carried in a heavy backpack, then it morphed into a terrible-looking beast that featured a helmet topped with rabbit-ear TV aerials.

Eventually Mann developed a system that could be hidden behind sunglasses, and now uses the one-side-of-the-face wraparound.

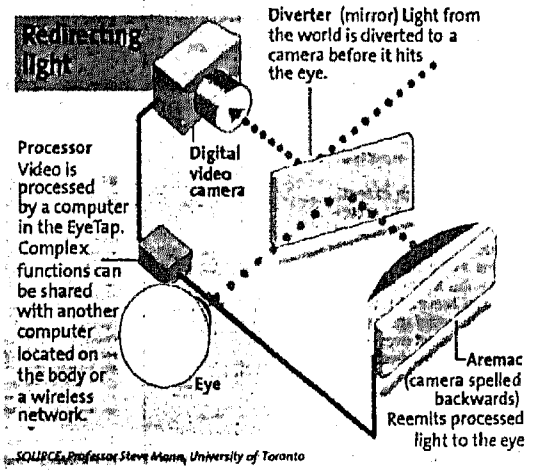
It can plug into a variety of computers and devices. One of his common setups involves a computer with a Pentium 4 processor, at least 512 megabytes of memory and a specialised operating system based on Linux.

Depending on where he's going, Mann carries a few different wireless transmitters so he can connect

● TURN TO PAGE 1

Behind digital eyes

The research of Professor Steve Mann has led to the development of a cyborg vision system – known as the EyeTap – that allows users to mediate reality. The system diverts light from the eye and runs it through a computer before returning it.



SOURCE: Professor Steve Mann, University of Toronto

● FROM PAGE 15

A cyborg future is inevitable

to whatever kind of network — WiFi, cellular, old-fashioned radio — happens to be available.

The system lets him check e-mail while out and about, for example, though Mann sets it to reject attachments that could clog the works. While lecturing to his classes, he can read his notes on the little monitor.

All this began in Mann's childhood in Hamilton, Ontario, where he was a tinkering misfit who would doodle circuitry designs in class.

He wired the family home to eavesdrop on his parents' conversations and invented a sonar raccoon detector for the backyard. He and his brother, Richard, now a computer science professor at Canada's University of Waterloo, put up sensors that would detect when a parent was coming upstairs, so the boys could pretend to be sleeping by the time their bedroom door opened.

As a teenager, Mann worked in a television repair shop and became fascinated by the mini-TVs that served as viewfinders in consumer camcorders. He decided to link that technology with computing, and by the late 1970s, he

began experimenting with wearable computers.

He wore one to a high school dance.

Merging man and machine

Steve Mann is not alone in dreaming of enhancing human capabilities with computer intelligence.

Some futurists consider it inevitable. Inventor Ray Kurzweil predicts a human-computer mind meld this century that will usher "The Age of Spiritual Machines."

Gazing into that same ethereal future, professor Kevin Warwick of Britain's University of Reading had circuitry implanted inside his arm for three months last year.

In one aspect of the experiment, Warwick moved his hand, and the implant relayed signals through the Internet to move a robotic hand.

The gestures weren't coordinated, but Warwick said the test showed the feasibility of plugging electronic devices into the nervous system. Now he hopes to lay the groundwork for a brain implant that could aid people with disabilities or augment existing abilities.

Mann believes a cyborg future is inevitable. Eventually, he says, everyone will want to be more tightly linked with computers, to enhance our memory and connections to other people.

And in that case, Mann contends that wearing the machine will be optimal. "My computer's twisted up like a pretzel around me, instead of me all hunched over a box," he says with pride.

Mann realises that for mass appeal, wearable computing will have to be small — perhaps incorporated into contact lenses. That will take a big manufacturer, and indeed, Mann has advised Xybernaut Corp, a Virginia-based company that makes wearable computers — including one that fits over one eye — for field technicians, the military and the disabled.

But that incarnation of wearable computing, says Mann, is too specialised, too limited.

"What's needed is the equivalent of the personal computer, which was designed for no purpose in particular, and so it started a revolution," he says.

But professor, could there really ever be widespread demand for your kind of device? Getting cues from a tiny machine or communicating through it is one thing, but when do you think John Q. Public would let a computer "mediate reality"?

Mann lets that question wash over him.

"Any prediction can turn out to be a combination of codswallop, kerfluffle and flapdoodle," he says while wearing the EyeTap at a Toronto pizza joint. "A lot of people try to predict the future, and I guess one question is, why should I listen to them?" — AP

● For *In.Tech*'s interview with Kevin Warwick, go to star-techcentral.com/search/archives.asp and type in "leading humanity forward" as your keyword phrase.