

BUSINESS

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TALKING BUSINESS

That is a rocket ship price. We had been expecting \$2 billion to \$2.3 billion.

NICHOLAS HEYMANN,
analyst, on SmithKline
Beecham's saying it would pay
\$2.9 billion to buy Sterling
Health

Experts try to deal with Internet's growth

■ Computer scientists search for remedy for the giant network.

BY RORY J. O'CONNOR
Mercury News Staff Writer

A year ago, the Internet was a pleasant, tightly-knit community of highbrow computer users that was just beginning to open its doors to the general public.

Now, the giant collection of computer networks that make up the Internet is

growing so fast that the tools available for locating and obtaining information are simply inadequate, according to computer experts at a San Jose conference Monday.

That's especially true for the millions of novice users who have poured in over the past several months, thanks to connections between the Internet and on-line services like America Online.

"The problem we're having with the In-

ternet is that you have too much information and too many details," said Henry Lieberman, a research scientist in the Media Lab of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. With millions of pieces of information scattered among thousands of computers on the Internet, he said, "you get that 'lost in hyperspace' feeling."

About 70 computer scientists from academia and industry, and techno-musician Todd Rundgren, considered several ways to deal with the problem at the "New Paradigms for Using Computers" conference at IBM's Almaden Research Center.



Rundgren

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Rundgren, who has been experimenting of late with "interactive music" on CD-ROM. Some of the technology he developed could let people search the Internet for certain types of music, by composer, title and even mood or other characteristics.

Interfaces also have to deal with several issues of security, from preventing fraud to such modern crimes as electronic stalking and harassment.

The Internet "is an information

wilderness," said Terry Winograd, Stanford professor of computer science. "It's like calling California a wilderness and then saying there's gold in them there hills. Suddenly the settlers, the miners and the desperadoes all come in."

As a result, the Internet may soon less resemble the liberal, college town Main Street neighborhood it has long been. Instead, it may become like modern suburbia, with carefully controlled shopping malls and walled subdivisions, where activities are homogeneous and tightly policed.

Old-timers may hate it. But

Many are working on active research projects at MIT, Stanford University, International Business Machines Corp. and other places, that could be helping users within a year or two.

IBM, for instance, is working on a project called Relevance and Trash — RAT for short — to actively help users locate the most likely data bases to search for any given information, and then pluck relevant documents.

A more unusual idea was discussed by

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that may be what the public wants — and may be what persuades people to make even wider use of the Internet.

"I think within two years, the Internet will be as important as the Xerox machine or the telephone," said conference organizer Ted Selker.