(Press Release)

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Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp.
Nippon Travel Agency Co., Ltd.

NTT and Nippon Travel Agency begin Joint Trials of "World Wide Navi" - a roaming map-style travel guide service that supports communication between users

-- A new style of service that enables users to meet valuable travel information and fellow travelers --

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp. (NTT; Head Office: Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo; President: Norio Wada) and Nippon Travel Agency Co., Ltd. (NTA; Head Office: Minato-ku, Tokyo; President: Akira Kanai), begins joint trial services today to evaluate "World Wide Navi," a roaming map-style travel guide service that uses communication support technologies and roaming map-style content guide technologies developed by the NTT Cyber Solutions Laboratories.
Using roaming map-style content guide technologies, WorldWideNavi places large-volume
contents in a world map on a PC screen, enabling users to encounter a wide range of travel resources based on a global "walk-through" perspective. Furthermore, using communication support technologies, it creates a real-time visualization of the user accessing the contents on the map, and also provides a bulletin board function, enabling travelers to use the system as a venue for meeting other travelers and exchanging information. (Ref. attachment)
"World Wide Navi" can be accessed between January 13 and March 31 (tentative) at a trial site accessible from NTA's homepage (http://www.nta.co.jp/).

1. Background and goals of joint trial services

Many of the travel information services on the Internet provide search services based on departure and destination locations, dates, and other conditions. These services are thus useful for users who have narrowed down their destination and travel dates to some extent, but if the travel plans are still undecided, the user ends up relying on guidebooks, or gathering pamphlets from travel agencies.
The new World Wide Navi service allows users to gather information easily on the Internet as though they were roaming around the globe. It offers a real-time visualization of the user accessing the contents (a world's first), and provides a function that lets the user know which travel spots are most popular, using an expression of "activity" that shows how many people have accessed the contents on the location in question. The system also provides functions for gathering comments from users, and dialog functions to promote smooth communications among users or between users and travel agencies.
By conducting trial services targeting Internet users, both NTT and NTA will evaluate the technological aspects of the above functions, and the business potential.

2. Role of each company

(1) NTT

In addition to proposing the World Wide Navi concept, NTT will provide the technologies and systems required for the joint trial services. It will conduct questionnaire surveys and technological evaluations of a variety of functions through publication on the Internet using real travel information contents, and will reflect the results of these evaluations and surveys in improvements to functions and interfaces.
(2) NTA
NTA will provide real travel information contents and the network environment required for the construction of the trial site. It will also appeal for the trial participation to the NTA Internet members, and operate the trial services, and evaluate the service potential and business potential in preparation for the start of commercial services.

3. Features of "World Wide Navi" technologies
(1) Roaming map-style content guide technology
In the case of travel guide services using conventional Web display technologies, it was difficult to display lists for huge volumes of information content, and when users tried to display details from that list, they had to switch pages over and over, or open many browser windows. That meant they had to press the "Previous page" button over and over or close the newly opened windows to get back to the original list. For users who were still forming ideas about their travel plans, all this work could make the traveler lose interest in the whole project.
To resolve this situation, NTT developed a roaming map-style content guide technology that combines a roaming map interface technology(*1) and a quick viewing interface technology(*2). In this way, the system is able to display huge volumes of travel information contents on a map, and to provide quick viewing functions by which a pop-up window opens to display the information from a Web link only when the mouse is positioned over that link. The user can thus seek out large volumes of information contents without the tedious work that results in a loss of interest.
(2) Communication support technology
There is a great significance to visualizing the relationship between the user and the information contents. For example, if there is a crowd of people on a downtown street, we are seized by an impulse to go and look. Similarly, if we can show that there is a "crowd of people" in an information space as well, this can be used as a means of drawing the traveler's interest, thus increasing the opportunities for that traveler to encounter new information. Services showing homepage rankings(*3) have been offered for some time now, introducing popular Websites with a tabulation and renewal cycle of one or two days. In order to achieve the "Crowd" effect discussed above, however, it is necessary to execute tabulation and renewal with an extremely short cycle, and to display the rankings in real time.

NTT's "Communication support technology," which achieves this goal while at the same time offering a venue for information exchanges between users, is comprised of the following two technologies.
- Real-time access user grouping technology
In order to express the concept of "activity" in real time while protecting the anonymity of users, NTT has developed a technology tabulates the accessed users in a short time, and displays the result as a "user group." In this way, we have made it possible to draw the user's interest based on the "crowd" effect, and increased the opportunities for new encounters.
- Field-dependent dialog support technology
We developed this technology to support information transmissions by users, and a sense of "connection" between users based on this information. The system enables

users to submit comments, and gathers the information from users along with replies to these comments. It then displays the newest information in a timeline within the scope of the user's viewing field (according to the zoom rate being used), expressing this information in the form of a real-time dialog. In this way, the system encourages users to notice the latest submissions within their "field of vision," and to make comments of their own.

4. Future developments

NTT will verifies the possibility of next-generation Navigation Services while feeding the evaluation results of trial services back to technical development.
NTA will study the business potential of these technologies, including the possibility of new commercial services based on the data and know-how accumulated through these trials.

Glossary

*1: Roaming map interface technology
A user interface technology that enables easy navigation using a map-based approach. (http://www.ntt.co.jp/news/news01e/0112/011225.html)
*2: Quick viewing interface technology "ForeScope"
An interface that enables the user to view large volumes of hyperlink contents consecutively using a selected Webpage as a base. This technology allows the user to view Webpages quickly without any interruption of his or her train of thought. (http://www.cyber-trial.com/forescope/)
*3: Homepage ranking display servicesExamples are "Homepage Ranking.com" (http://www.hpranking.com/) and "Web Ranking" (http://www.webranking.net/).

- (Attachment) "World Wide Navi" interface and technology map

For further information, contact:
Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp.
NTT Cyber Solutions Laboratories
PR Section; Sadakata / Yamashita
TEL: 046-859-2032
e-mail: ckoho@lab.ntt.co.jp

Nippon Travel Agency Co., Ltd.
PR Section; Torigoe / Sato / Tajimi
TEL: 03-3572-8180
e-mail: honsha_kohoshitsu@nta.co.jp