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TECH BITS

By Alan Goldstein, Jennifer Files / Staff Writers of The Dallas Morning News

Published 03-23-1998

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TECH BITS

HOUSE WITH A VIEW

Want a picture of your neighborhood as seen from space?

A satellite flying over North Texas last week was taking photographs of the area as part of a project between a North Carolina digital imaging company and Sovinform Sputnik, a branch of the Russian space agency. The satellite is producing images of major cities around the world.

Photos from space have real advantages for commercial mapping efforts when compared to standard aerial photography, said John Hoffman, president of Aerial Images Inc. of Raleigh, N.C.

If one image from space can cover an entire county, for example, there are fewer problems combining the mosaic of multiple images into a single, coherent view.

The photos will be available in June for about \$75 each, and customers will be able to download the images over the Internet. "You'll be able to distinguish your house, see the basic outline of the roof, the driveway, your car in front and the trees on the street," Mr. Hoffman said.

CALCULATOR UPGRADE

Falling memory chip prices haven't been all bad news for Texas Instruments Inc.

Cheaper memory chips have allowed Dallas-based TI to introduce a graphing calculator to the price-sensitive education market. The technology has been unavailable previously in a product that sells for less than \$100.

The TI-73 model, for sale to distributors this summer, can be upgraded as the latest software version is offered. It can also be customized to run different software applications.

The device uses programmable flash memory chips, whose prices have declined because of a global oversupply. In recent weeks, TI has been reducing its exposure to the volatile market for memory by pulling out of joint-venture plants.

"This is the first time this technology has been used in a calculator," said Tom Ferrio, vice president for educational and productivity solutions. A student can use the same calculator from 5th through 9th grades by upgrading it, he said.

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The software will be available for downloading to a computer from TI's site on the World Wide Web. Then, the software upgrade can be transferred to the TI-73 by connecting a cable between the computer and the calculator.

HOOKED ON 911

Americans used wireless phones to call 911 30.5 million times last year, a 40 percent jump from 1996.

Safety is a leading reason people buy mobile phones, and governments and health groups have been pressuring the mobile phone industry to improve networks to ensure that emergency calls always go through.

There's another side to the story: Most of the calls were to report vehicle crashes or other roadside conditions.

Multiple calls about a single accident can clog networks and tie up operators, forcing governments to assign more people to answer calls and to consider adding emergency numbers.

MAIL DIRECTOR

Businesses that employ personal computers to compile direct-marketing lists may benefit from some features in Microsoft Corp.'s Office 97 Small Business Edition, due to be released Monday.

The Direct Mail Manager takes advantage of the Internet to walk users through the process of developing mailing lists, then verifies the address lists against the U.S. Postal Service's ZIP+4 database of addresses.

It also has features for financial analysis, mapping and automatically converting documents into Web pages.

"We've tried to find what people use most and make it easier to discover," said Jacqueline Stamps, product manager for Microsoft's desktop applications division, on a visit to Dallas last week to introduce the product.

INFRARED INNOVATION

Researchers at Southern Methodist University in University Park have developed a breakthrough technology that may significantly lower the cost of **infrared** detectors. The development could pave the way for wide commercial use of heat-seeking and night-vision technology.

Today's **infrared** cameras, such as those used by the Pentagon, can cost \$100,000 or more. The breakthrough comes with new semiconductor materials that are highly complex, yet can be made more cheaply and are compatible with technology used in existing commercial products.

Tech Bits runs on Mondays. Technology Writer Alan Goldstein can be reached via electronic mail at AGoldstein@dallasnews.com. Telecommunications Writer Jennifer Files' e-mail address is JFiles@dallasnews.com.

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Microsoft Office 97's Small Business Edition includes features designed

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