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# Nabaztag :Cult Status In Europe

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The white plastic bunny from France looks sweet as it sits all by itself on a kitchen counter. It's a minimalist rabbit - bell-shaped with simple black dots for eyes and a mouth, and pointed ears that stick up straight. Quiet, nice bunny.

Then it gets an e-mail. Suddenly, the ears start twisting weirdly in different directions, lights flash in its belly and the bunny begins speaking.

Think of it as a cross between a pet rock and the Bride of Chucky. What brings about this transformation? Wi-Fi. Advertisement

The rabbit, whose commercial name is Nabaztag (Armenian for rabbit), is one of the latest attempts to give consumers another use for wireless Internet besides getting home computers online. According to Forrester Research, 27 percent of U.S. homes are now equipped for Wi-Fi, a technology that only a few years ago seemed exotic.

The bunny can pass along stock prices, weather forecasts and news headlines, all updated from Internet sources. It can play an Internet radio station or a short MP3 file sent by a friend.

Another recent product using Wi-Fi is a digital screen, framed in wood for hanging on the wall, that can receive pictures from Internet photo services.

With the rise of Wi-Fi came radios, cameras and portable Internet phones with wireless capability. But they never caught fire with the public. The latest rage, Apple Inc.'s iPhone, has Wi-Fi for Web browsing and e-mail, although not for making online calls.

Nabaztag is all about Wi-Fi. Although it didn't hit the United States until this year, it has been on sale in Europe since 2005, where it has gained a cult following.

On YouTube, there are scores of videos featuring Nabaztags dressed in a variety of outfits. Most elaborate of all are videos of a Wi-Fi bunny opera featuring 100 of the critters that was staged last year at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

"It's an interesting, quirky device," says Josh Martin, an analyst at Yankee Group. "But it doesn't do anything all that startling." And if it is a gimmick, it's a fairly expensive one at about \$190.

The PhotoVu picture frame has just one basic function - to show off digital photos. The Wi-Fi aspect of that is nifty, but not necessary. And the frames are pricey, starting at about \$1,000 for a 19-inch screen. Martin believes that the future of Wi-Fi devices lies elsewhere.

"You could have a portable music player that would put a piece of music you purchased on the home Wi-Fi network the minute you walk in the door," he said. "That's the kind of thing that has more of a chance of succeeding."

<http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/entertainment/stories.nsf/tvradio/story/D9C890CA89B988CB862573470067623C?OpenDocument>

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