

German soccer team learning to tackle the Web

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MUNICH - Germany's national soccer team may not be the most tech-savvy in the world, according to its manager, but things could improve with the introduction of a Web-connected bus to get them to and from matches.

Until recently, some of the players still depended on fax machines to communicate with each other, said manager and former soccer star Oliver Bierhoff, at a technology forum Tuesday at Munich's new football stadium.

"Now most of them have e-mail," he said. "Believe it or not, though, we still have a few players who struggle with this new medium, and we intend to help them."

The players may soon be able to improve their tech skills by using their downtime on the team bus to surf the Web, reply to fan e-mail or download video clips.

IPmotion GmbH demonstrated its technology for linking moving vehicles to the Internet in the German team's official bus parked outside the new stadium.

"We're in talks to have the technology installed for the World Cup games," said IPmotion Managing Director Florian Kempff, in an interview inside the luxury bus. "A lot of other clubs have expressed interest as well."

IPmotion's system, called Car-A-Wan, can connect cars, trucks and buses to the Internet via a mix of GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) and wireless technologies, including GPRS (General Packet Radio Service), 3G (third-generation), EDGE (Enhanced Data for GSM Evolution) and WLAN (wireless LAN).

"The technology works according to the least-cost routing principle by searching for the best connection while the vehicle is moving," Kempff said. "It is designed to get the maximum capacity out of a data connection, unlike many handsets designed, which frequently have a lower quality link to preserve their batteries."

In the future, IPmotion plans to add WiMax technology, which promises higher speeds and greater coverage than early Wi-Fi systems, he said.

Asked about demand for Internet access on a team bus, Matthias Tausendpfund, managing director of Web content provider Tomorrow Focus Technologies GmbH, said many players use the downtime today to send text messages from their phones or play on game consoles. "I think many of them would love to have a wireless device when they're on the road," he said.

Siemens AG, which sponsored the technology forum, was selected by the German Football Association a couple of years ago to provide technology consulting services.

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