



A Real® Success Story

Real helps make the daily workings of South Dakota's government available live on the Web



"We get great, reliable quality—even at low rates.

We looked at other solutions, but we keep coming back to Real."

Larry Rohrer

*Director of Internet Services
South Dakota Public Broadcasting*

In the fall of 1804, Lewis & Clark raised the American flag over present-day South Dakota. Now 200 years later, South Dakotans again reside at the edge of a new frontier. They are the first state in the nation to offer live digital audio of their government at work.

In 1998, South Dakota Public Broadcasting (SDPB) recognized the potential of the Internet for extending its coverage of government. Although legislative sessions were already open to the public — House and Senate chambers have 100 chairs for observers — SDPB saw a way to enlarge the public gallery by thousands of seats. The legislature convenes in the same locale on a fixed schedule. Once the technology was in place, live audio of the proceedings could be streamed to desktop computers in homes, offices, and schools across the state.

At first, some legislators were reluctant. How many of us would want every comment, mis-statement, or gaffe broadcast live to a potentially unlimited audience? Couldn't their political opponents capture the audio out of context for use in future campaigns? To alleviate these fears, SDPB agreed to broadcast the sessions in their entirety. The audio would not be edited, nor would the streams be downloadable. Even users who access archived feeds hear only the unedited audio playing in real time. First attempted only for House and Senate sessions, in 2001 the project expanded to include the 24 standing committees in which each bill or resolution is discussed at length.

Listening In On Government At Work

In Pierre, South Dakota, PA systems in the restored State Capitol building are linked to a control room in the basement. There, ten PCs running RealProducer® Plus capture and encode the audio feed from both chambers and every meeting room. Via ethernet, these machines talk to SDPB's server two blocks away. RealProducer enables the organization to broadcast live audio to their Web site while simultaneously saving it for archiving. Statewide, citizens can eavesdrop on their representatives at work. Users can even request to be notified by email whenever a session is about to begin. The audio feed appears in online archives within fifteen minutes of the closing gavel.

To placate nervous legislators, an off switch was installed in each room. Lawmakers can use the switch to interrupt a live stream during a sensitive discussion or any situation in which they would request members of the public to leave the room. So far, not one of the switches has been used.

In 2001, the legislature convened for 8 weeks, during which SDPB's web site handled 86,000 requests for audio. Nearly 11,000 clips were accessed during the first two weeks of January alone. Key committee meetings were among the ten most-accessed feeds. Interestingly, fully one-third of all requests came from IP addresses inside the state government. An unexpected bonus of the project: instead of traveling to Pierre, state employees can remain at their posts- and still attend important committee meetings.

And what of the once-reluctant legislators? Immediately after the 2001 session concluded, they began reporting a wave of positive comments from constituents. Even the most skeptical lawmakers now see streaming media as a boon to citizen participation and official accountability. One state representative took it upon herself to provide play-by-play commentary for the Internet audience, filling the silences whenever a witness was being rounded up or a slide projector repaired.

2601 Elliott Ave Seattle, WA 98121
800.444.8011 206.674.2700

www.real.com

The importance of this radical democratic experiment cannot be overstated. Until now, there had been no record of every word spoken as the state's laws were proposed, debated, and voted upon. Even the legislature's own publications are limited to summaries. Thanks to streaming media, however, citizens, lawmakers, journalists, and historians can use the Internet to read the text of a bill, then hear the entire discussion surrounding it. In addition, audio can convey nuances of speech that the printed word cannot.

Real Meets the Need

Of the state's 730,000 people, about one-third have Internet access. The far-flung population — which is evenly divided between urban and rural residents — requires that audio feeds be available at a wide range of connection speeds. Over 75% of users access the audio over 28-56K dial-up connections. Because SDPB cannot provide technical support to the entire population, they needed a player that was easy to download and simple to use. They also needed reliable encoding software that enabled both live and on-demand streams. Their choice of Real met those needs and more:

- RealPlayer® downloads seamlessly and makes playback easy
- Live encoding with RealProducer is easy and takes just seconds
- Content can be encoded at different bit rates for different audiences
- Quality sound is assured at many different connection speeds

In addition to helping inform the people of South Dakota, SDPB is stockpiling audio and video for the day when digital television is deployed across the state. Real technology enables them to better serve today's audience — and prepares them for an all-digital future.

Deployment Scenario

- The SDPB Streaming Media Solution
- Windows 98/Windows NT (standard in state government)
- Gateway PCs with 800 MhZ and 128-256 MB RAM
- Ethernet network
- ¼ terabyte, expandable storage on Compaq running RealSystem Server
- RealSystem Producer Plus 8.5
- Beringer® audio processor

Contact Real Today

For more information about Real, and to review other first-hand accounts from customers who rely on Real products and services to build their businesses around streaming media, visit our Web site at www.realnworks.com/industries/resources/casestudies/

To speak to a Real sales representative, call **1-800-444-8011**.

