PLUGGING INTO THE NETWORK

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This article gives a summary for the uninitiated of information available through JANET and the Internet.

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You will perhaps have noticed that the UKSG recently took possession of its own JANET electronic mailbox, "uksg@uk.ac.bham". To commemorate this historic leap forward, here is a simple guide for the perplexed, aimed at opening up some of the possibilities of the electronic highways and networks for those still in the outer darkness. Seasoned network-surfers should move on instantly to the next article.

What network?

The Joint Academic Network (JANET) provides computer networked access to higher education and research institutions and, more recently, to a widening range of bodies in the UK which have connections with HE but are not strictly part of it. Its Acceptable Use policy defines who does and doesn't have to pay for the right to use the network (tel. 0235 445517 with enquiries). JANET is one link in the larger, global web of computer networks collectively called the Internet. Access to JANET implies easy access to the Internet, and all its glories. To give an idea of scale, there are reckoned to be more than 2 million computers linked via the Internet, with a whole host of e-mail, online database and information resources available to the networker. You may have access to a JANET connection and not know it; ask someone who knows about your institution's computers. It's worth finding out.

How to get connected

If your group or institution is already linked into JANET (typically via a central computing facility), your network access requires a pc or computer terminal and some communications software. If your institution or company is not already connected, there is an additional range of options available from companies offering computer services to non-academic and Internet users. For example, CIX (Compulink Information eXchange, 081 390 8466/ 1244) provides full Internet access, as well as conferencing and e-mail functions, for a £25 registration fee plus time usage charges; they will charge to a credit card if you prefer. Compuserve (0800 289 458), Demon Systems Internet (081 349 0063) or EUnet GB similarly offer suites of facilities based on regular subscriptions with additional charges related to the range of services (with or without e-mail, news information, etc.). There is a useful discussion of these in *Personal Computer World*, April 1993, pp.388-94. What

you will probably need for your computer, if you are not already using one for online searching, is a modem (to convert data for transmission over phone lines) and suitable communications software (e.g. Windows includes its Terminal application). Crucially, do not believe anyone who tells you that setting up a remote connection of your own is straightforward. Make the most of the Help Desks the services invariably offer.

There are four basic uses to which you may consider devoting your network access: Electronic Mail, Bulletin Boards, Electronic Newsletters and Discussion Lists. Innumerable further opportunities are hinted at later.

Electronic mail

Electronic mail systems have developed along two paths: on the widest network scale, to allow simple connections and messages to bridge different computer systems, and, at the local area network level, to provide more sophisticated communication options for groups working together. The richness of the options available to you in sending and receiving e-mail messages will depend on the software you use - you may be able to queue messages, download and upload them, attach files to them, forward and edit them and log them to "folders", as well as simply sending, reading and replying to them. Most important for the success of e-mail communication via the network is an understanding of the structure of the e-mail address (which reduces ultimately to an ability to interpret the message a remote mail-server returns to you when it can make no sense of the address to which you have e-mailed). The world of e-mail is bigger than the world of the Internet, and there are several formats of address to be mastered depending on the system used and the nature of the "host" or home computer addressed. Study one of the texts listed at the end of this piece. They will also explain the greater delights of File Transfer Protocol (FTP), which allows you to move files (text, lists, data tables) from a remote computer to your own, where you can manipulate or edit it at your ease.

Bulletin Boards

These contain information loaded onto the "board", either by direct mailing or via the moderation of an editor. Once you know the network address of the board you can scan its contents (usually selecting from a series of menus), which will in the best cases be regularly updated and weeded. UKSG members in the UK will find much of particular interest to them on two bulletin boards available via JANET: NISS and BUBL.

The NISS Bulletin Board (NRS address uk.ac.niss) from the National Information Services and Systems team gives current information on computing initiatives, databases, online and library services activity. It includes detailed information on academically-discounted software, and, most usefully, offers gateway facilities (including the mildly exotic search tools called Gopher and WAIS) into a range of Library OPACs, Directories, BUBL and the Internet.

BUBL (NRS address uk.ac.bath.bubl), the JANET Bulletin Board for Libraries, has grown to become, in its own words, "a hub around which the growing UK Library and Information Science networking community can organise its activities". It features discussion lists, notices, network access tools and useful lists of other network facilities, with their addresses. UKSG already announces its conferences and events on BUBL, as well as listing the contents of Serials (in the "current contents" section).

Electronic Newsletters

These, like their superior relatives the electronic journals, bring together contributions from interested parties for circulation by their editor as a regular e-mail message to those who have registered as subscribers. It is usually also possible to obtain electronic "back-issues". Two good examples are:

Newsletter on Serials Pricing Issues, edited by Marcia Tuttle at the University of North Carolina, which covers from a US angle the content of its title, and includes information about evaluation and cancellation policies and procedures as well as announcements and reports from meetings. To subscribe, send the message SUBSCRIBE PRICES *yourfirstname yourlastname* to the email address listserv@gibbs.oit.unc.edu

Citations for Serial Literature, which publishes tables of contents and abstracts for a number of serials journals; send SUBSCRIBE SERCITES

yourfirstname yourlastname to
listserv@mitvma.mit.edu to join up.

Discussion Lists

These are managed by a "listserver" or
"mailbase" computer. Contributions in the form
of e-mail messages are sent to the list and are then
automatically distributed by the listserver to all
members of the list, which may have an open or
closed membership. Lists have a designated
administrator or "owner" who can control
membership, and moderate or edit the list and
contributions to it.

The major UK listserver is Mailbase at
Newcastle University, managed by NISP (the
Networked Information Services Project). Among
its hundreds of lists is a series devoted to library
and information matters, all prefixed by "LIS-".
To join the public list for news and general library
discussion, LIS-LINK, send the message JOIN LIS-
LINK *yourfirstname yourlastname* to the address
mailbase@uk.ac.mailbase. A new important list
specifically for the discussion of serials matters,
LIS-SERIALS, is currently being introduced.

For an American equivalent, covering a wide
range of serials topics from how to catalogue
particular titles to how to run a serials
department, join the list Serials in Libraries
Discussion Forum. Send the message SUBSCRIBE
SERIALST *yourfirstname yourlastname* to the
address listserv@uvmvm.uvm.edu

Navigation tools

Out there on the Internet is an enormous array of
information sources, especially in the developing
area of electronic publication. Getting to grips

with this proliferation is a daunting prospect,
particularly if you are working in a small unit
with no one with whom to pool experience. In
order to help networkers find their way around,
several software tools have been developed that
allow the user to search by subject or file name
and be connected painlessly to the remote source.
The Internet Gopher is a lookup tool that lets you
select resources from prepared menus; to see how
powerful it can be, experiment with the versions
available on BUBL. Wide Area Information
Servers (WAIS) (also available through NISS and
BUBL) help you search indexed material by word
or phrase and provide a list of online files that
contain those words. Most innovative of all, the
World-Wide Web is a gopher-like facility based
on hypertext technology that allows cross-
references or links to be followed between related
sources. Finally, be assured that the best way to
test the usefulness of all these tools for your
circumstances is to try them.

Some helpful publications

The Whole Internet User's Guide and Catalog
Ed Krol, O'Reilly & Associates, 18.95, 1 56592
025 2.

Internet: getting started April Marine et al,
Prentice Hall, 23.95, 0 13 289596 X.

The Internet Complete Reference Harley Hahn and
Rick Stout, Osborne, 22.95, 0 07 881980 6.

*Directory of Electronic Journals, Newsletters and
Academic Discussion Lists* Michael Strangelove et
al, Association of Research Libraries, ISSN 1057-
1337 (3rd ed. 1993).