

Don Lancaster's

# RESOURCE BIN

number sixty four

## The human side of the web.

**O**ur usual reminder here that the *Resource Bin* is now a two-way column. You can get tech help, consultant referrals and off-the-wall networking on nearly any electronic, *tinaja* questing, personal publishing, money machine, or computer topic by calling me at (520) 428-4073 weekdays 8-5 Mountain Standard Time.

US callers only, please.

I'm now in the process of setting up my new *Guru's Lair* web site you will find at (where else?) [www.tinaja.com](http://www.tinaja.com) This is the place you go for instant tech answers. Along with the new Synergetics Consultant's Newtwork & lots of links to unique web sites.

You will get the best results if you have both *Netscape Gold* and *Acrobat Reader 3.0* installed. This new reader does utterly amazing things online.

### The Human Side of the Web

In past columns, we have looked at getting yourself web literate, starting your own home page, finding favorite web sites, and doing online research. More details on these files are found on my *Webmastering Library Shelf* of my [www.tinaja.com](http://www.tinaja.com).

But the web can be many things to many different people. So, this month, I'd thought we'd take a gander at the human side of the web. Those special interest places where folks one-on-one talk to each other. Or can get answers to really tough questions.

Three wildly different personal web services now include *newsgroups*, *chat rooms*, and *newsletters*.

### A Warning

Let's start with this warning: The acronym "net" stands for *not entirely true*. Anyone on the human side of the web can say anything at any time for any reason. Regardless of their skills, motives, emotional stability, fervor, greed, or competence.

There's a tendency with email to impulsively "quickly say sumpthun", instead of thinking out a researched or carefully measured response.

Thus, any *email message largely and ruthlessly stomps out any and all creative thought*. Within a six block radius.

Some people may genuinely try to help, but do not have the faintest clue what they are talking about. Often, they might cause lots more harm than good. Some may have an axe to grind. Others may be selling something you might not want. Or are perpetuating outright scams. Yet others may react violently to anything they consider a personal affront.

Thus, take everything you read on the net with several Bonneville's of salt. *Always* get a second and even a third opinion. *Always* look before you leap. And *Never* flame, confront, or infuriate anyone. For they surly will return with a vengeance.

Buyer beware.

### Chat Rooms

Chat rooms are offered by most of the commercial online services. They are similar to a telephone party line or an open CB channel. Anyone can call

**NEXT MONTH: Don shows some unique resources for video game development.**

in at any time. A lot of these users often do tend to be pathetic juvenile newby flammers. Org.

Who quickly drive all of the useful participants away.

More organized chats are known as *conferences*. They include a *moderator* that plays "Mother May I" and instills some sort of order. This is particularly useful whenever any guest speaker is present, fielding questions.

Pick your chat rooms with care. For

the overwhelming majority are an utterly mind-rotting waste of time.

### Newsletters

A *newsletter* is an automated list of email recipients. Often with a tightly targeted special interest. Some person who feels strongly about this interest area elects to *maintain* the list and the mailings. Some lists will accept any posting from anyone. Others may be edited to one degree or another.

Newsletters can be either public or private. Your only real difference is whether the moderator decides to let you get on the distribution list.

Virtually anybody can join a public newsletter. All you'll need is a way to send and receive email. Your typical procedure is to put the word *subscribe* followed by the newsletter name into the body of your email message.

Which will start getting you great heaping quantities of email. Possibly hundreds a day. A scant few of which are genuinely useful. By hitting your browser's *reply* button, you'll answer any email sent you.

Or start a *thread* of your own.

You also might have the option of *subscribe digest*. In which you get one or two humongous mailings per day instead of hundreds of smaller ones. But these might be a royal pain to go through. It can be an even bigger pain to respond to a single message.

An *unsubscribe* message should get you off their list. But oftentimes might not do so on your first try.

While newsletters are easy for the host to set up and run, nearly *all of the hassles and inconveniences get placed on the end user*. Thus a typical newsletter is extremely *user vicious*. And often might have the *exact opposite* effect of what the provider intended. But these do have controlled distribution.

There is also that old "W. C. Fields" problem. In which you may not want to subscribe to a newsletter that will

accept you as a subscriber.

There are 18,000 public newsletters. And probably three times that many private ones.

## Newsgroups

A *newsgroup* is any special Internet service provided by a *news host server*. Sort of a syndication. Arrangements have been made by the group's host moderator for distribution. To read newsgroup postings, you will simply select the news group from your news server. You then pick out only those messages of interest to you. And then only respond to those you wish to.

Thus, a news group places most of the hassles on the provider. And very few on the user. Anyone can access a newsgroup. So long as they do have access to an ISP with a news server. Such access may cost a dollar or two a month extra with certain ISP's.

You don't have to be a news group member or a subscriber. Because of open access, a newsgroup is poor for sensitive, proprietary, "gray", or any potentially litigious content. There are tens of thousands of newsgroups.

Let's look at a few newsletter and newsgroup resources...

## News:

To access most public newsgroups, first make sure your ISP offers one or more *news servers*. Then simply type *News:* into your browser. The listing of offered news services should pop up. When you know the name of your desired newsgroup, just enter it. For instance, one great *Adobe Acrobat 3.0* newsgroup is called *comp.text.pdf*.

The last few day's of postings will show up in a browser window. Click on the ones you want to read. Right mouse click to post your reply. More clicks can save or flag a message.

The more dots in any newsgroup name, the more specific its content. To get a list of all newsgroups, just go to your browser's *options* box and click on *show all newsgroups*. You may also have options of viewing *active*, *new*, or *subscribed* newsgroups.

To keep the listing short, most are found in closed folders. For instance, you will find at least 2500 newsgroups whose name starts with ".alt".

I've posted a NEWSLIST.HTML file to my [www.tinaja.com](http://www.tinaja.com).

For this month's resource listing, I somewhat randomly chose a bunch of newsgroups you may find of interest. Note this is only a tiny sampling of what is really available.

## Deja News

The oldest and finest newsgroup snooper is called *Deja News*. I have a link to it through my "search all sites" feature on the *Web Related Links* of my [www.tinaja.com](http://www.tinaja.com). You can also hit them directly at [www.dejanews.com](http://www.dejanews.com)

Simply enter your subject phrase, and a list of all recent messages to all newsgroups pops up. There is also a historical archive.

Perhaps you need a schematic for a *Lambda* power supply. You punch in *Lambda power supply schematic* to see where it directs you. If you are lucky, you'll get *direct* hits that give you a useful answer.

If you aren't lucky, you enter *power supply schematic* and get the *indirect* list of all the newsgroups where such questions are likely to be asked or answered. When that does not work, try *schematic wanted*.

Another neat feature of *Deja News* lets you find where *else* someone has been posting. This gives you a quick check on credibility and interests.

## Alta Vista

Of all the major search services, I personally found *Alta Vista* the most useful. Link to it from my "search all sites" or [www.altavista.digital.com](http://www.altavista.digital.com)

Note that there is a seldom noticed window on *Alta Vista* which lets you select *Web* or *Usenet*. When *Web* gets selected, you're searching home pages and similar content. When *Usenet* is chosen, you're searching for personal newsgroup postings.

If you do *not* put your keywords in quotes, *Alta Vista* will automatically pick the "best" places to go for your information. When you do quote your keywords, it searches for those words *only in exact sequence*. Without quotes "Don" will hit any time that the word "don't" appears in a message.

Thus, quotes are useful to restrict you to a very specific subject. But they also might miss a lot, may be slower, and may not report your best results first. Your best rule is to *quote names but very little else*.

## P. A. M. L.

This great service is short for *Public Accessible Mailing Lists*. And does to newsletters what *Deja News* does to newsgroups. This time, you'll find a direct button on [www.tinaja.com](http://www.tinaja.com) Their internet site link can now be found at [www.NeoSoft.com/internet/paml/](http://www.NeoSoft.com/internet/paml/)

There are some 14,000 newsletters

## new from DON LANCASTER

### ACTIVE FILTER COOKBOOK

The sixteenth (!) printing of Don's bible on analog op-amp lowpass, bandpass, and highpass active filters. De-mystified instant designs. **\$28.50**

### CMOS AND TTL COOKBOOKS

Millions of copies in print worldwide. THE two books for digital integrated circuit fundamentals. About as hands-on as you can get. **\$28.50** each.

### INCREDIBLE SECRET MONEY MACHINE II

Updated 2nd edition of Don's classic on setting up your own technical or craft venture. **\$18.50**

### LANCASTER CLASSICS LIBRARY

Don's best early stuff at a bargain price. Includes the CMOS Cookbook, The TTL Cookbook, Active Filter Cookbook, PostScript video, Case Against Patents, Incredible Secret Money Machine II, and Hardware Hacker II reprints. **\$119.50**

### LOTS OF OTHER GOODIES

Tech Musings V or VI . . . . .	\$24.50
Ask the Guru I or II or III . . . . .	\$24.50
Hardware Hacker II, III or IV . . . . .	\$24.50
Micro Cookbook I . . . . .	\$19.50
PostScript Beginner Stuff . . . . .	\$29.50
PostScript Show and Tell . . . . .	\$29.50
Intro to PostScript Video . . . . .	\$29.50
PostScript Reference II . . . . .	\$34.50
PostScript Tutorial/Cookbook . . . . .	\$22.50
PostScript by Example . . . . .	\$32.50
Understanding PS Programming . . . . .	\$29.50
PostScript: A Visual Approach . . . . .	\$22.50
PostScript Program Design . . . . .	\$24.50
Thinking in PostScript . . . . .	\$22.50
LaserWriter Reference . . . . .	\$19.50
Type 1 Font Format . . . . .	\$16.50
Acrobat Reference . . . . .	\$24.50
Whole works (all PostScript) . . . . .	\$380.00
Technical Insider Secrets . . . . .	FREE

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For most individuals, patents are virtually certain to result in a net loss of sanity, energy, time, and money. This reprint set shows you Don's tested and proven real-world alternatives. **28.50**

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The reprints from all Don's Midnight Engineering columns. Includes a broad range of real world, proven coverage on small scale technical startup ventures. Stuff you can use right now. **\$24.50**

### RESOURCE BIN I

A complete collection of all Don's Nuts & Volts columns to date, including a new index and his master names and numbers list. **\$24.50**

### FREE SAMPLES

Check Don's Guru's Lair at <http://www.tinaja.com> for interactive catalogs and online samples of Don's unique products. Searchable reprints and reference resources, too. Tech help, hot links to cool sites, consultants. email: [don@tinaja.com](mailto:don@tinaja.com)

FREE US VOICE HELPLINE

VISA/MC

**SYNERGETICS**  
Box 809-NV  
Thatcher, AZ 85552  
(520) 428-4073

Write in 146 on Reader Service Card.

## A FEW WEB NEWSGROUPS

alt.2600.QnA alt.algebra.help alt.alien.research alt.amazon-women alt.angst alt.animation alt.aol-sucks.moderated alt.architecture.alternative alt.armourers alt.art.pyrotechnics alt.ascii-art.animation alt.atheism.satire alt.autos.antique alt.aviation alt.bad.clams alt.barney.dinosaur.die alt.bbs.doors alt.beer alt.bigfoot.research alt.binaries.clip-art alt.binaries.emulators.nintendo alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.spam alt.binaries.slack alt.bizarre alt.bonsai alt.book.reviews alt.books.kurt-vonnegut alt.books.mysteries alt.boomerang alt.brain alt.buddha.short.fat.guy alt.building.survey-mapping alt.business.home.pc alt.caving alt.cellular-phone-tech alt.cesium alt.christnet.sex.fetish.fat.guy alt.coatings.paint alt.college.tunnels alt.comedy.stapstick alt.comics.dilbert alt.comp.hardware.homebuilt alt.comp.lang.yorick alt.comp.shareware alt.comp.virus.source.code alt.config.control-freaks alt.conspiracy.retards alt.consumers.free-stuff alt.cows.moo alt.crackers alt.crafts.professional alt.cult.nudism alt.culture.sardines alt.current-events.kobe-beef alt.cyberspace alt.devilbunnies alt.dissasters alt.disney.the-evil-empire alt.divination alt.drinks.kool-aid alt.drugs.pot.cultivation alt.folklore.kooks alt.drugs.psychedelics alt.duck.quack.quack alt.dumpster alt.energy.homepower alt.energy.renewable alt.engr.explosives alt.fairs.renaissance alt.fan.ceiling	alt.fan.furry.muck alt.fan.lemurs alt.fan.nancy-kerrigan.ouch alt.fan.power-rangers.puke alt.fan.spinal-tap alt.folklore.urban alt.food.chocolate alt.food.pez alt.food.wine alt.fractals.pictures alt.fringeware alt.galactic-guide alt.games.tiddlywinks alt.games.video.classic alt.geek alt.graffiti alt.guinea.pig.conspiracy alt.hackers.malicious alt.hash.house.harriers alt.hemp.politics alt.home-theater.marketplace alt.housing.nontrad alt.html.editors alt.human-brain alt.humor.best-of-usenet alt.humor.puns alt.insults alt.inventors alt.jokes.limericks alt.journalism.freelance alt.ketchup alt.kill.the.whales alt.lemmings alt.lifestyle.barefoot alt.locksmithing alt.magick.chaos alt.make.money.fast alt.marshmallow.peeps alt.mcdonalds alt.med.vision.improve alt.memetics alt.mindcontrol alt.mountain-bike alt.movies.independent alt.mr.blobby alt.music.roger-walters alt.music.tragically-hip alt.neo-tech alt.non.sequiter alt.nuke.the.USA alt.paranet.skeptic alt.paranormal alt.personals.aliens alt.pinecone alt.privacy alt.psonics alt.psychoactives alt.psychology.mistake-theory alt.psychotic.roommates alt.pyrotechnics alt.radio.pirate alt.religion.emacs alt.restaurants alt.sci.physics.new-theories alt.sci.planetary alt.security.alarms alt.sex.sheep.baaba alt.shared-reality.startrek.klingon alt.shut.the.hell.up.geek alt.silly	alt.skunks alt.slack alt.smouldering.dog.zone alt.solar.photovoltaic alt.solar.thermal alt.spam.barf alt.sport.korfball alt.stagecraft alt.startrek.klingon alt.stop.spamming alt.support.jock-strap alt.support.nutty.as.a.fruitcake alt.surrealism alt.sustainable.agriculture alt.sys.mac.newuser-help alt.tasteless.jokes alt.tech-support.recovery alt.telescopes alt.toys.hi-tech alt.treasure.hunting alt.tv.dinosaurs.barney.die alt.tv.eek-the-cat alt.tv.infomercials alt.ufo.reports alt.videogames alt.wolves.hybrid alt.zines aol.newsgroups.bugs asu.research.modelling aus.bushwalking aus.jokes az.forsale bionet.agroforestry bionet.photosynthesis bit.listserv.apple2 bit.listserv.bgrass-1 bit.listserv.geodesic bit.listserv.movie.memorabilia biz.tadpole.sparcbook comp.benchmarks comp.bugs.misc comp.cad.synthesis comp.compilers comp.compression comp.dcom.isdn comp.forsale.comp comp.cad.synthesis comp.compilers comp.compression comp.dcom.isdn comp.forsale.comp comp.graphics.algorithms comp.graphics.apps.lightwave comp.graphics.rendering comp.hardware comp.home.automation comp.home.misc comp.ibm.pc comp.jobs.offered comp.lang.c++ comp.lang.postsript comp.laser-printers comp.lsi.testing comp.multimedia comp.music.midi comp.networks comp.object.logic comp.org.acm 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rec.video.desktop.toaster rec.video.production rec.video.satellite rec.windsurfing rec.working sci.aeronautics sci.agriculture sci.archaeology sci.astro.amateur sci.chem.electrochem.battery sci.crypt.research sci.electronics.basics sci.electronics.equipment sci.electronics.repair sci.engr.color sci.engr.heat-vent-ac sci.engr.lighting sci.engr.micromachining sci.engr.semiconductors sci.engr.television.advanced sci.environment sci.fractals sci.geo.satellite-nav sci.image.processing sci.math.num-analysis sci.med.nutrition sci.med.pharmacy sci.nanotech sci.optics.fiber sci.physics.electromag sci.physics.research sci.polymers sci.psychology.journals sci.skeptic sci.stat.math sci.techniques.spectroscopy seismic.general soc.college.financial-aid soc.culture.maghreb soc.genealogy.method soc.history.science soc.history.war.world-war-ii soc.support.depression talk.politics.crypto us.jobs.offered vegas.food
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listed here. Accessible by your choice of name or subject. Do note that their subjects are set alphabetical by rows, rather than columns.

For instance, to locate a newsletter which specializes in tan 1987 *Synchro* 4wd Vanagons having diff locks but non-Westy, start with *automotive*, then *vanagon*. Which should lead you on to [LISTSERV@lenti.med.unm.edu](mailto:LISTSERV@lenti.med.unm.edu). You can then email them by using *subscribe vanagon firstname lastname*. For the digest, use *subscribe vanagon digest*

*firstname lastname*. And to get off the list, use *unsubscribe vanagon*.

The rules are sort of similar for any newsletter, but the details may vary. So, *always read the fine print*.

Stash a hard copy somewhere.

### User Etiquette

*Never* jump into a newsgroup with both feet. Instead, *Always* study the group for a few days. As a lurker. To soak up the vibes, competence, and their coverage levels.

Next, see if there is a FAQ area for *frequently asked questions*. Scan this background and see if you are up to speed. Then find out if there are any further tutorial background files.

Newsletters and newsgroups work *only* when useful experts willingly participate. If they are flooded with stupid newby questions or any flames from epsilon minuses, they will surely leave. Every time.

Avoid committing what the French Veterinarians call a *four paw*. Such as

asking a caving newsletter where you can buy a large ball of string.

Or using words like *overunity* or *free energy* at a real science group.

*Never flame!* First and foremost, you always *wait ten seconds* before hitting your send button. Always ask yourself "Is this what I really want to say?" Do remember that your message will be on the net for a long time.

The best way to avoid a tug-of-war is to not pick up your end of the rope. Avoid any second or higher response to a message. And remember that the other side *will* have the last word. The best strategy is to decide just when or where you will let them do so.

Never spam newsgroups! Send the tightly targeted query to *one* site only. Maybe two in a dire emergency.

Yes, it is permissible to post a brief commercial message. So long as it is a "more details" part of a posting with genuinely useful content. Your usual trick is to put your *short* hard sell into your signature file.

*Always* make sure your comments are relevant to the group's goals.

It is also considered poor form to send any longer files to newsgroups or newsletters. Especially binary files or images. Keep your message short and to the point. Any time you have longer information to submit, give them a separate download link.

Respect your readers time!

### Scams and Chain Letters

Sending a get-rich-quick scam or a chain letter to many newsgroups is not even dumb. First and foremost, because your response will be zero.

What happens instead is that more than a few of their readers will take very strong exception to your invasion of their privacy. A few are *certain* to find creative ways to get even. Such as trashing your web site. Or maybe requesting tons of junk mail for you. Or writing your local postmaster and your state's Attorney General.

Or, as has been suggested under current "shrinkwrap" laws: filing a \$500 "proofreading" fee against you. And then taking you to small claims court in a place that costs you a lot more than \$500 to get to. Since you did not show up to contest, the claim becomes valid and *will* be awarded. The claim is then given to a collection agency. Spamscam enough of these newsgroups, and you can end up owing millions of dollars.

Some more "etiquette enforcement" ideas are at [www.scambusters.com](http://www.scambusters.com)

### Two Horror Stories

I was repeatedly placed on a highly intrusive tech newsletter without my knowledge or consent. Lots of polite requests for my removal were ignored. Those that were not caused an ever increasing flow of ping tests.

Forever and ever.

Stronger removal techniques seem to have finally worked. Needless to say, I now am highly praising all their competitor's products whenever and wherever I get any chance. Their link also is banned from my website.

It turned out that *any* email contact with their company *automatically* and *permanently* placed you on the list for their newsletter.

But the absolute worst offender on removals are the yoyos at Yoyodyne. Especially with their Zonker scam. These epsilon minuses have ignored *hundreds* of removal requests from me over the last year.

Their usual response is to ask you for a nonexistent members password. Or else they obtusely explain their 347 step procedure for your asking to be considered by the selection committee to get on the waiting list for a removal application request form. And then repeatedly email you back to say you forgot to say "Mother May I?".

The single time I did reach a real person, they assured me I would be removed from the list. Needless to say, the whole process started up all over again a week later.

And continues to this day.

So, I guess it is way beyond high time someone passed on these rules of web newsletter...

### Host Etiquette

If you are in charge of running a newsletter, the first and foremost step you can make for user friendliness is to *replace it with a newsgroup as soon as you possibly can!*

Once again, newsletters place all the hassles and all the mind-rotting inconvenience on the end user, while newsgroups put them on the host.

It is a good idea to provide some *archive* file area for previous traffic, a *Frequently Asked Questions* stash for any newbies and casual dropins, plus a *Tutorial Background* area for serious first time visitors.

*Never* enter anyone without their knowledge and consent! Make sure their request is specific and valid.

*Always personally* read *all* postings at least *twice* a day. If *anyone* wants

out, *personally* and *immediately* remove them. *By hand!*

Do *not*, under *any* circumstances, ask them to place specific words in certain message positions. And, above all, do not require a never-received or long forgotten password or member id number for removal.

*Always* be sure to remove anyone *immediately* on their *first* request.

*Always* make sure your digests are timely and consistent.

*Never* use the newsletter email list for any other purpose. Unless you get *specific* permission ahead of time.

Show all subscribe and unsubscribe messages in plain English. Some of those UNIX stock message screens are totally undecipherable gibberish.

Do make sure the unsubscribe info appears in *every* message sent.

*Always* test your list once a month. Send a short email message advising that *any* response will delist. All any current subscribers has to do is ignore the test message.

And will welcome your concern.

### This Month's Contest

As our contest this month, just send me a list of your favorite newsletters or newsgroups and tell me why you like them. Or tell me any funny or bizarre story involving these. Or tell me how to get off of that Yoyodyne Zonker scam mailing list.

There will be a largish pile of my new *Incredible Secret Money Machine II* books going to the dozen or so better entries, plus an all-expense-paid (FOB Thatcher, AZ) *tinaja quest* for two that will go to the very best of all.

Send all your *written* entries to me here at *Synergetics*, rather than to *Nuts & Volts* editorial. ♦

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*Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 33 books and countless tech articles. Don maintains his no-charge US tech helpline found at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all of his own books, reprints, and consulting services. Don also has two free catalogs full of his resource secrets waiting for you. Your best calling times are 8-5 on weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.*

*US callers only, please.*

*Don is in the process of setting up his Guru's Lair at <http://www.tinaja.com>*

*Full reprints and preprints of all Don's columns and ongoing tech support appear here. You can reach Don at Synergetics, Box 809, Thatcher, AZ 85552. Or send any messages to his US Internet address of [don@tinaja.com](mailto:don@tinaja.com)*

