Don Lancaster's

RESOURCE BIN

number fifty five

Exploring the web for your first time.

Our 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* This is the place you go for instant tech answers. Among the many files in our library, you will find complete reprint sets for all of the *Resource Bin* and other columns. Plus a brand 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.

Why the Web?

These days, getting yourself on the web has become *absolutely essential*. Why? First and foremost, for instant email anywhere in the world. Second, because of the superb cyberspace info and entertainment values.

Third, because of the great heaping stacks of free or nearly free software. For *any* computer, no matter how old or unpopular. Fourth, to quickly find an expert in virtually any field.

Fifth, there is that great "equalizer effect" where you instantly can locate the exact market price and the dealer margins of any used car. Or the latest changes in a stock price.

Sixth, that mind-boggling array of movies, sound, animation, real time radio stations, and even the ability to phone toll free anywhere.

Seventh on through four thousand, two hundred and ninety fifth… well, you've got the general idea.

The net is *the* way nearly *everything* will get done in the future. The really big things about the net are its *speed* and its *efficiency*.

Benefits come about through the complete elimination of middlemen– retailers, wholesalers, distributors, the junk mail printers, postal bureaucrats, shippers, agents, and warehousers.

The stuff goes directly from who makes it to who needs it. Only when, where, and as wanted. Ridiculously faster. At vastly lower costs.

No sending out a hundred pieces of mail in hopes of getting three orders back. No having unsold products get hauled across the country only to get returned for credit years later.

All the while *strongly* favoring you individuals and small scale startups. Over slow reacting and hidden agenda Fortune 500 megacorps.

Yeah, there are a few spots on the web that may appear less than stellar at first glance. Like the site that is the definitive location for color images of Vienna Sausage can labels. With, of course, *Spam* can wallpaper.

Or the church that combines new age and traditional beliefs. They call themselves the *Krystal Methodists*.

> **NEXT MONTH: Don shows us how to start up your personal web page.**

That unique *www.cybersluts.com* site certainly gives deep new meanings to the term "technical expertise".

So…

This month, I thought I'd take you step by step into exactly how to get on the Internet. First to find out what all the excitment is all about. Then later I'll get you started on setting up your very own personal web site.

It is usually a good idea to separate finding what the net is all about and getting yourself online literate apart from actually starting a web page.

I'd recommend that you spend at least *one full month* wandering around online. Before you even think about creating a home page or attempting to deliver content. In fact, to make sure you get a month's practice, we'll hold off on home pages till next month.

Getting Connected

To surf over the net, you will first need a current computer such as a Windows 95 PC or a Mac. You will need some essential and free *browser* software from *Netscape.* And you will need some way to connect to the net through an *Internet Service Provider.*

Or ISP for short.

In turn, there are four main ways to find an ISP: Your phone company, a commercial online info service, your local service provider; or with your own dedicated net server.

Regardless of which ISP route you pick, *make sure it is a local call!*

Certain phone companies already do offer direct Internet access. *AT&T* has a five-free-hours-per-month deal going. But their less publicized fine print deals are a better buy. Especially if you intend using the net more than a paltry ten minutes per day.

Also, their current backlog is way over half of a million impatient users. And the phone company is less likely to provide the kind of hand holding a local ISP can.

Thus, your first step is to call your local phone company and see exactly what they have to offer when. There's no reasonable doubt that typical net users will choose the phone company for net access within a year or two.

The commercial online services are not nearly as good a deal as they used to be. All of them, without exception, are in deep trouble. Most users most of the time find they get more content faster and cheaper on their own.

The main problems are that the one thing the services were once best at – running lots of toll free lines around the country – is utterly useless today. And all their proprietary software has been unacceptably slow in keeping up with that fast changing net. Severely restricting your access options.

Access charges can easily approach several hundred dollars per month if you are not careful. Most people drop their trial subscriptions within one or two months at the most.

The biggies here are *America Online*, *Compuserve*, *Prodigy*, and the *Microsoft Network*. Plus a fast fading *Genie*.

By the way, quite a few of my 1600+ older files and reprints are available on *tinaja.com* PSRT.

But I'm adding support and new content *only* to that *www.tinaja.com* web site. Although I am moving these files over, it probably will take several years to complete the transfer.

These days, most users opt for a local ISP. You should find their ads in your local paper, typically at $19.50 per month. This should be a local call for you. Shop around.

But one big warning here: ISP's are very much an endangered species. Do *not*, under any circumstances, sign a long term contract with one of them! Even paying three months in advance is fraught with peril.

ISP quality varies all over the lot, so you may have to try a few before you get one that is acceptable.

Becoming your own ISP takes a big time computer, possibly a UNIX box, an uninterruptable power supply or two, bunches of specialized telecom equipment, hundreds of dollars per month in telco charges, lots of arcane software skills, and at least thirty to ninety hours a week of your time.

You do get slightly faster graphics access this way, though. But even if you know you are going to make the major commitment to high profile net access, chances are you'd be better off first using a local ISP and changing over later. Lots later.

Hmm. I guess we just might add cable companies as your fifth possible ISP route. But they are nearly certain to foul this one up big time. Because those cable systems are one direction only. And because their management does not have the faintest clue what they are up against.

And because of the little known fact that your telco's "last mile" currently handles compressed two-way video a lot *better* than cable does.

I recommend avoiding cable ISP's entirely. At least till the dust settles. Which it ain't gonna.

Temporary Setup

Let's assume you went with a local ISP and have some sort of temporary browser software that came with your computer or was given to you. If not, grab an older copy of Netscape for $30 or so from a local computer store.

Your first goal should be to teach the temporary software exactly where you want to go on the net.

If you are on a Win 95 PC, click on the *Dial up Networking* file that's in the system file whose default name is *My Computer*. Then click on *Make a New Connection*. Enter a name for the new service and select the modem you are going to use. Go to *Configure* then to *General*, and select your port, volume, and maximum speed.

Go to *Connection*. Then select your data bits, parity, stop bits, and the call preferences. Eight data bits, no parity and one stop bit is the norm. Go back to the main connection screen, select next, and enter the area code, phone number, and country code of your ISP service provider.

Next, reach into your *Control Panel* folder and click on your Internet icon. Enter the name of the service you are going to use. Click on the *Server Type*. Select the type of dialup server your ISP can handle, with *PPP Win 95* the norm. Select the protocols your ISP can handle, with *TCP/IP* as the norm. Click on TCP/IP Settings.

Now for the tricky part. Select a *Server Assigned IP Address* and *Specify Name Server Addresses*. You will then want to type in a pair of hyphenated four group numbers which your ISP should have given you. One group for the *Primary DNS*. Another for the *Secondary DNS*. Usually you will also select the default gateway.

Now, go into your browser itself and adjust its preferences. If you have Netscape, you can select *Options* and then the *Mail and News Preferences*. On general preferences appearance, pick picture and text, Netscape Browser, and underlined links.

On mail and news preferences, go to *Servers*. Then enter your temporary out and in email addresses.

Your email address will have been assigned you by the ISP. Then do the same with your *identity* selections. On *Appearance*, use Netscape for both mail and news selections.

All of this is a lot easier and faster

than it sounds here. If you have any trouble, find some seventh grade net rat to do it for you. Or ask your ISP to talk you through it.

To review, what you have done is told your computer who to dial, what internet server address to select with what protocol, and where to go.

Going Online

Next, you click on your temporary browser. The *Connect* screen should come up. Enter your user name and password which your ISP gave you. Click on *Connect* and your modem should dialtone and beppity-bloop.

A logging dialog box or two should come up. You should then have your browser connected. If not, puzzle out the error messages or talk them over with your ISP until connected.

Let's use my own web site as your own target practice location. In your *Location:* box, enter a *http://tinaja.com* Hit enter and this should bop you on into the *Guru's Lair* blue screens.

Don't worry just yet if the site looks a little wierd. As with nearly all of the newer and better net sites, mine has gotten carefully optimized *exclusively* for use with Netscape.

So, the very first thing you'll want to do is…

Getting Netscape

Your first and foremost net project *must* be to get yourself the latest free version of a *Netscape Navigator*. Any bright blue text you'll find in *Guru's Lair* is called a *hot link*. Clicking on a link may take you elsewhere within *The Guru's Lair.* Or surf you around the world on the web.

At this time, you click *only* on the

Netscape hot link. You should quickly move to the main Netscape site found at *http://netscape.com* Select their *download software* option. And get yourself the latest free trial version of Netscape Navigator.

In general, there are two flavors: Regular Netscape is for full Internet and mail access. Netscape Gold adds an editor that makes it easy for you to build your own web pages later on.

Go for the gold.

Getting Email

At this point, you go back to square one and reinstall your new Netscape Gold software in your computer. You then link your new browser to your existing ISP and server settings.

Next, you want to make sure your email works. When online, there's a little envelope at your Netscape lower screen right. A question mark beside it means your mail has not yet been checked. An exclamation point means you have new mail.

So, try sending yourself an email letter. Don't be surprised if it takes a minute or two to return; depending on the exact routing, it may have to go through Omaha.

By way of Beriut.

There is a pretty good chance you may end up changing your ISP or else getting your own registered web site in a month or two. Both of which are likely to change your email address. So it pays to view your initial internet address as *temporary*. Don't spread it too far or print it. Maybe even keep a list of who you gave it to.

Remember that it does not matter how long a guy's internet address is. It is what he does with it that counts.

Getting Acrobat Amber

Now go back to *http://tinaja.com* and my screens should look normal. Your next step should be to get free *Acrobat Amber 3.0* reader software. Most tech sites (including my own) are rapidly going to that Adobe Acrobat system for content presentation. The Acrobat advantages are overwhelming when it comes to full camera-ready docs with high quality illustrations. Plus easily searched and viewed reprints.

So, here we go again. Click *Acrobat Amber* to surf to *http://www.adobe.com* and follow the download instructions for Amber reader 3.0 or better.

Your Amber installation should be more or less automatic. But one *very* important point: Amber *must* install *into* Netscape *if* you are to receive its full benefits. So always get Netscape *first* and Acrobat *second.*

As a check on proper installation, click on *C:*, then on *NavGold*, then on *Program.* A plug-in named *ambr32a2* or something vaguely similar should be present in the folder.

To test Amber, get back online into *www.tinaja.com* and select the *Resource Bin* hot link or else click the *Technical Library* button. Then click on library selection RESBN55.PDF.

A multi-color copy of this column should magically show up on your computer screen. Note how you have full camera ready text here. With an infinite variety of precisely controlled fonts. Easily magnified with the "+" button. For "-" just use *control "+"* instead. On your Amber options, be sure to use smoothed text for easier reading and better legibility.

Amber access should be fairly fast.

It will get much faster whenever ISP's start picking up a newer net feature that allows file block downloads. And as the sysops all update to the latest Acrobat net optimizations.

Finally…

OK, you have an ISP, Netscape, and Acrobat Amber. And have everything talking to each other. Time to surf the web. At this point, you might want to temporarily change out your *Netscape Options General Preference StartWith* location to *http://www.tinaja.com* At least until you get your own personal web site. This can be a launch point for you. One which immediately leads you to hundreds of other sites.

By the way, some sites demand a *www.* in mid-address. In other sites, mine included, that *www.* is optional and works either way. It is simpliest to always leave the *www.* in.

As you pick up sites that you find useful, you can save them to a special *Bookmark* file. Saving a lot of retyping for you. For now, jot down all of the addresses that you do visit in a small notebook. For easy return.

So, what is all of this surfing stuff about anyhow?

Get back into *http://www.tinaja.com* Click on *Surf to Interesting Web Sites.* Go halfway through the list and click on the *Nuts & Volts Magazine* button. Presto. You have just jumped from Thatcher, Arizona on west to Corona, California in a single keystroke.

When you have finished exploring this site, click on your Netscape *Back* arrow to get back to Thatcher. Try the other buttons and see where they lead you. To go completely off the planet, click on *Church of the SubGenius.*

Now for some serious surfing. Go to the *Yahoo* button near the bottom of the list. Then click on their dice icon. Their dice lets you *hypersurf.* And will drop you *somewhere* in cyberspace.

I urge you to hit their dice icon at least *several hundred times* over the next few days. To see exactly where it takes you. And to get the full flavor of what the net is all about.

But don't expect more than one hit in twenty to be useful. After all, *url* is short for an *utterly rancid location.* And *www* is a *world wide wait.*

And I predict you will install a new 28.8K or a faster modem somewhere around dice hit number 327.

One *very* important rule whenever you use the dice icon: *Be sure to write down the url address or you will never find it again!* The odds of a second hit are one in sixty million.

Finding Useful Sites

A smaller notebook is by far your best way to initially accumulate a list of useful web resources. What you'll want to watch for are *gateway locations* which have useful links to dozens or even hundreds of additional sites.

One of the goals of my *Guru's Lair* is to become a gateway site for just about anything related to whatever it is we are up to here. By the way, if you ever find out, please be certain to let me know.

There are several printed Internet directories out there. Sadly, most of these are woefully incomplete and out of date. Two fairly good ones are the Gale *Guide to Internet Data Bases*, and the *Internet Yellow Pages.*

You'll find scads of brand new net magazines and trade journals. I have posted a great heaping list of them to MUSE100.PDF. Again, of course, on my *www.tinaja.com* I have also newly excerpted and updated a few of these magazines as this month's sidebar.

There are a number of freebie web search services that can make finding things a lot easier. Although *Yahoo* is the most obivous, *Lycos* and *Inktomi* seem to me to be the best. Some other search services include *WebCrawler*, *Open Text*, *Alta Vista*, *DejaNews*, and great heaping bunches more.

But best of all are those overlain *multiple* search services which let you simultaneously use *all* of the biggies at once. On one screen.

The best way to search is to hit the *Yahoo* button on *tinaja.com* Then ask Yahoo to search for anything. Give it any old subject. Your bottom of their search *results* page has hot links to the biggies, while hitting their *more* hot button leads you to all of those really useful secondary search services.

This Month's Contest

Tell me about three web sites: The very *best* one you have found. That *worst* one you've found. Plus the one that is *so bad it is good.*

For the latter, apply *mesmerizingly awful* as your criteria. Do tell me why these three are your choices.

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.

Let's hear from you. ❧