The human side of the web.

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. 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.

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 sumptun", instead of thinking out a researched or carefully measured response.

Thus, any email message largely and ruthlessly stumps 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 Bonnevilles 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 surely 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 in at any time. A lot of these users often do tend to be pathetic juvenile newby flamers. 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...
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. You can also hit them directly at 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

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. Their internet site link can now be found at www.NeoSoft.com/internet/paml/.

There are some 14,000 newsletters
listed here. Accessible by your choice of name or subject. Do note that their subjects are set alphabetical by rows, rather than columns.

Ferinstance, to locate a newsletter which specializes in tan 1987 Synchro 4wd Vanagos having diff locks but non-Westy, start with automatic, then vanagon. Which should lead you on to LISTSERV@lentil.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 both feet. Instead, if you want to participate. If they are flooded with further tutorial background files. Scan this.

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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.

Strong 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 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 and tell me why you

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 guest 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.

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