

Internet: the where's, how's and why's

by Matt Joy

The easy answer is, that it's like cable TV for your computer, except anyone can host their own show.

So, let's start with the basic term, on-line. On-line is simply another way of saying that your computer is able to communicate to another computer on a telephone line. That communication involves two computers, a host and the caller. The host computer will usually run a program which tells it how to answer the phone, ask for a name, password, and other stuff like that.

A typical on-line program which you may see run on a host is a Bulletin Board System or BBS. BBS's

typically have a few screens of general information. They usually also have a screen where you can send private messages, called e-mail, to other people. Many BBS's allow users to send computer files to the host computer. This is called uploading. Receiving computer files is called downloading. Another nifty feature is the ability to exchange messages in an open forum for any one to read.

Once you get on-line, you can exchange stories, problem-solve, send and receive free software programs, or do other neat things. There are BBS's which cater to many interests like pilots, gamers, inventors, political causes and many more.

The whole Internet thing is pretty much the same concept as the BBS except that each host is also on-line to one or more other hosts which are in turn on-line to still more hosts. The Internet is now global; You can send files or messages to another computer users on the other side of the world. And all you have to do is call the host closest to you. Thus, if the host is in your town, you have no long distance phone charges to get your message there!

Another bonus is that you can share information with any other user that is connected to any other Internet provider. The Internet is now large enough that you can share information with billions of other people.

A "web page" is like putting a brochure out that can be read by anyone else who is connected to the Internet. Many businesses have found this useful because that it makes their "brochure" available to billions of readers all over the world.

"Surfing the Net" really means connecting to a host and then jumping around to other host computers to see what interesting things they have to share.

**You may wonder,
"why do I want it?"**

The answers are varied because people own computers for different reasons. Common reasons are entertainment, information, communications, advertisements, business contacts, research, or free software.

So what's it going to cost?

Less than you might expect. A basic account is typically about \$25 per month. If you are lucky enough to have an Internet provider in your local town, then that is usually all you pay. Otherwise you may end up spending some more money on the long distance phone connection. Most Internet providers allow you to post your own web brochure or 'Home Page' at no extra charge with a regular account.

What do I need?

A computer, a modem (faster is better) and an Internet account with an Internet service provider and a software package like Internet in a Box, Netscape Personal Navigator Mac PPP or Netmanage Chameleon. Most new accounts include the software you need at no extra cost.

Isn't it hard to use the Internet?

Not anymore. In the past few years, many tools have been developed to make using the Internet as easy as possible. These easy-to-use tools have largely been responsible for the tremendous boom in the popularity of Internet services.

Who owns and runs the Internet?

Nobody Everybody. The Internet is really not owned or run by any one person, company or government agency. Each host computer has an owner but there are millions of hosts and no one person or company owns all of them. It is a cooperative effort.

Do I have to worry about getting computer viruses?

If you only send and receive plain text files, pictures or sounds then you will never encounter a virus through the Internet. However, a precaution, you should virus scan program and other types of documents you get from the Internet before you run turn on your computer.

What about security?

Most people will probably use Internet browsers which allow you to receive information without unknowingly sharing anything on your system.

Clients who wish to put entire networks on the net or who have special security concerns can request assistance from their Internet service provider.

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