

Network Update

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[Editor's Note: Thanks to Carolyn for filling in for this issue. If anyone is interested in writing the Network Update column, please contact the Editor by email at read@lss.wisc.edu.]

How Are Language Professionals Using The Internet?

We hear daily reports of exponential growth in Internet use worldwide, but what do these reports mean? More importantly, what is happening in our corner of the world? Are language professionals taking advantage of the new possibilities in electronic communication? I undertook to find out how those who are already on-line and using language discussion lists for professional communication were using some of the information retrieval facilities that are available. Working backward from there, I made some inferences about general Internet use by language professionals.

Some of us are making decisions as the designers of on-line resources, as technology trainers for our faculty, or simply as users of the Internet. What services can we use or should we be asking our system operators to provide for us and to our faculty? If we need to choose one of these retrieval methods for information and content storage, which would more of our colleagues be likely to use?

The Survey

A questionnaire similar to the one that follows this column was sent to four popular on-line discussion groups first on September 15, 1994 and then a second time about October 1st. The accompanying table shows the results from this fall 1994 survey on the use of the information retrieval programs FTP, Gopher, Lynx and Web browsers.¹ The survey respondents compose a small and probably not random sample since enthusiasts may have been more willing to respond to the survey.

**FTP, Gopher, Lynx and Mosaic Use
Among On-Line Language Professionals
(Table)**

	LLTI	FLTEACH	SLART	TESL	General
Total Subscribers	601	383	1,208	4,286	5,650*
NO. OF RESPONDENTS	32	30	76	48	114
FTP ever	81%	60%	43%	65%	62%
FTP median use/mo.	6	4	4	4	4
GOPHER ever	81%	63%	49%	75%	70%
GOPHER median use/mo	10	16	10	10	8
LYNX ever	25%	17%	9%	19%	14%
LYNX med use/mo.	12	12	13	13	12
GRAPHICAL					
WEB BROWSER ever	53%	17%	17%	27%	26%
BROWSER median use/mo	15	6	2	3	4

* This figure is a NET total when overlaps in subscriptions to various lists is taken into account. Overlap information is provided below:

Total subscribed to 1 list only:	5,092	or	90%
Total subscribed to 2 lists	558	or	10%
Total subscribed to 3 lists	46	or	1%
Total subscribed to 4 lists	16	or	3%
Total subscribed to 5 lists	2	or	.04%

Email and List User Population Counts

I gathered information on enrollments by using listserv commands to retrieve information on the various lists' subscriber bases. Using a spreadsheet program, I matched the various lists against each other to extract the overlap data that is reflected in the section at the bottom of the table. The point of this exercise was to obtain a number for the net list population (which turned out to be 5,650). A side benefit of this exercise was that I got a count of how many people actually subscribe to more than one list. Some people might be interested in whether populations tend to overlap a lot or a little. It seems that most of us (90%) are sticking loyally to one discussion circle. One conclusion you might draw: multiple postings of that job offer or conference are probably a good idea rather than an annoyance for your on-line colleagues.

Enrollments to the various lists depend both on the population in the particular areas of specialty and how long the list has been in operation. The TESL-L (Teachers of English as a Second Language) list wins hands down at well over 4,000 for both reasons. It was one of the first language lists (established in 1992) and also draws from the enormous population of ESL teachers. The FLTEACH (general list for Foreign Language Teachers) enrollment figures have changed quite a bit since this survey was taken and now exceeds 1,000. But at the time of the survey FLTEACH was the "new kid on the block." As we know, there are a lot more foreign language teachers than there are language lab personnel. LLTI's fall '94 figure of 601 is pretty stable and at latest count is still around the 750 mark. Given the comparatively low ratio of lab people to teachers in the entire language profession, this qualifies as very high participation. The SLART (Second Language Acquisition, Research, and Teaching) population of 1,208 seemed very high considering that its traffic was extremely low at the time of the survey. This list was begun at about the same time as the TESL-L list, so may simply have benefited from its early appearance on the list scene to garner many subscribers. Since a recent change in the list's setting for the reply function (going to the list rather than to individuals), traffic has picked up quite a bit on SLART. Now many more of those 1,208 are participating and the SLART list is finally fulfilling its role as a forum for research discussions. My point here is that list population is by no means an indicator of list traffic; list management style can, however, have a great impact on whether or not the list works for its subscribers.

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The figures for "Number of Respondents" to this survey may reflect how active the particular list is and how visible

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the survey message might have been to members of the list. I suspect that some lists have a larger population of lurkers (people who observe but who don't participate) than others. Also, some lists have so much traffic that the participants are prone to wholesale deletion of messages in order to deal with it. Any survey would be the prime target of such deletion. Therefore, you will notice no correlation between list population and number of respondents to this survey.

What can we infer about general Internet use among language professionals based on this survey? Current reports point to a probable worldwide email population of from 30 to 45 million of which 13.5 million have access to the services we are discussing here.² Of those, it is reported that 5 million actually use the services. That is, one third of email users in the general population do something beyond using simple email. Let us infer, therefore, that because we know that at least 5,650 people in our profession are using lists, there may be an email population of around 17,000 in the language profession.³

Use of Retrieval Facilities

Let us now return to the focus of the survey, which is use of the retrieval services, FTP, Gopher and World Wide Web. File Transfer Protocol, or FTP, has been around longest of all these services and fills a basic function of permitting the transfer of data files across the Internet. Documents of any sort can be transferred from word processed documents, to authoring programs, to sound files. Sixty-two percent of the respondents had used FTP at one time or another, with LLTI subscribers being the heaviest users. This is not surprising, as LLTI has a high percentage of technically proficient participants.

The most popular information retrieval service among all our groups was Gopher. This is consistent with general trends. Gopher is much easier to use than FTP, as it does not require a series of commands but rather uses a relatively easy menuing system for navigation. File retrieval through Gopher is done by selecting the file and pressing the enter key. Again, LLTI subscribers were the heaviest users. Also, TESL-L subscribers tended to use it extensively. These two lists both have their own Gopher services, and list managers have probably repeatedly encouraged their users to try them out. FLTEACH had only just begun their Gopher site at the time, thus less participation in Gopher from that group. However, those FLTEACHERs who did use it tended to use it a lot more than other groups.

Now what of Web use among our colleagues as of fall '94? The May 1995 *Matrix News* (Matrix Information Services), cit-

ing an October '94 Internet survey, states that there were 13.5 million users of 3.5 million computers capable of accessing the World Wide Web. You could take that figure and reduce it somewhat due to the fact that many people who have access do not have the computing service support to take advantage of that access. That might be nine million of the October '94 population of 30 million or about one-third of the total Internet population.

In our estimated population of 17,000 language professionals on the Internet, we have said that one-third are list users. I don't believe, however, that all of these 5,650 people are now using the Web. Our survey indicates, in fact, that only about one fourth of our list subscribers had used the Web by last fall. That would be only about one tenth of our total estimated population of language profession Internet users. However, the recent popularity of the World Wide Web is such that it would be safe to say that Web use has increased significantly since the survey was taken.

Conclusion

"...The language profession is significantly behind the general population in using the World Wide Web."

I want to conclude by focusing on two ideas. First, the large majority of the language profession, which is estimated conservatively to have 103,000 members, is woefully uninformed of or unable to take advantage of even the most basic email connection. Through the results of this survey I am estimating that a maximum of 16% of us have email at all. Second, this survey shows that the language profession is significantly behind the general population in using the World Wide Web. Those of our profession who have the basic person-to-person connection now need support to learn how they can reach out to obtain the wealth of information that exists for research, teaching and organizational purposes. We must all become connected to the World Wide Web, which is the superset of all retrieval methods. Let us consider how we can encourage funding initiatives aimed at bringing our sector of the electronic universe in line with other sectors. In the meantime, I look forward to a continued examination of our professional participation in the on-line universe through the annual Internet Use Survey. ■

Notes

- ¹ See accompanying help section for definitions.
- ² "Summary of the Results, Second TIC/MIDS Internet Demographic Survey," *Matrix News*, vol. 5 no. 4., April 1995. Austin, Texas: Matrix Information & Directory Services. p.1.
- ³ The total population of language professionals is estimated conservatively to be around 103,000. That is composed of approximately 30,000 documented college level personnel,

54,000 secondary level personnel, 12,000 middle school personnel, and 7,000 elementary level personnel. Some feel that the real figure could be as high as 250,000.

Second Annual Internet Use Survey

If you found the information in the preceding article to be useful, I would ask you to kindly participate in the Second Annual Internet Use Survey by filling out the information below. It has been kept intentionally short in order to encourage you to participate.

How often do you use the following services:

FTP: directly _____
via Web browser _____

Gopher: directly _____
via Web browser _____

Lynx: _____
Graphical Web Browser (html documents via
Netscape, Mosaic, etc.): _____

Other: _____

An abbreviated answer is all that is required, *e.g.*:
FTP—twice a month, Gopher—once a week

If you don't use them, you are invited to **briefly** explain why, *i.e.*:

- I'd use X if I could get a little instruction on how
- Never heard of it
- Not interested
- Not useful to me
- Service not available

You may send your survey response to:
Carolyn Fidelman
91 Baldwin Street
Charlestown, MA 02129
or by email to cgf@agoralang.com

This survey will also be posted to LLTI and some other popular lists in September. If there is other information that this survey could be providing, please make a suggestion.

While seeking to keep the format small and focused, I also wish to take advantage of the opportunity to gather the most pertinent data. Thank you in advance for helping out. ■

Network Humor

Among the serious bits and bytes of information we find on the Internet, we sometimes find lighter fare. A recent posting to the Alternate Dr. Internet column of NETTRAIN, a list dedicated to Internet training issues, was this humorous piece from Thomas Dowling at the University of Washington, reprinted here with permission (of course!).

Frequently Asked Questions About the Internet

**by Thomas Dowling,
University of
Washington Libraries**

How big is the Internet? When did it start? How did it grow?

The Internet is actually much smaller than most people think. It is primarily composed of fiber optic cables no thicker than a human hair, which can be conveniently rolled up and stored in a foot locker. Janitors at the National Science Foundation do this on the third Tuesday of every month when they wax the floors.

Since fiber optics are the size of human hairs, they also make attractive wigs. The next time you watch a Sprint commercial, you'll see that Candice Bergen's alleged hair is really the T4 backbone.

The earliest origins of the Internet can be traced to Ancient Greece, where a loosely connected set of networks was used to discuss exploration in the Black Sea. The Argonets, as they were then called, were entirely subsidized by the government, and won one of William Proxmire's first Golden Fleece awards.

The Internet grows hyperbolically, but is usually described elliptically.

Who owns the Internet?

There is no one person or agency that owns the Internet. Instead, parts of it are owned by the Illuminati and parts are owned by Free Masons.

What do the Internet addresses mean?

Precise meanings are often hard to determine. The address `baker.lib.washington.edu`—which is sometimes written `baker@lib.washington.edu`—seems to refer to a computer either owned by a baker or by someone named Baker. This can be deceiving however; names like this actually refer to where a computer is located. This one is on top of Mt. Baker.

In addition to names, computers on the Internet also have numbers. This is part of the whole right brain/left brain thing.

Tell me how to get on and off various lists and discussion groups.

Getting off on various lists is currently the subject of pending legislation.

What is "Netiquette?"

"Netiquette" is one of many cutesy neologisms created by combining two other words. In this case, "network" and "tourniquette" combine to describe a program that shuts down a computer if it starts transmitting information too fast.

What is "Flaming?"

Along with an improvisational approach to floating point arithmetic, early Pentium chips were noted for generating heat. While some hackers speak fondly of roasting marshmallows over their first P60s, others found themselves badly singed as the chips caught fire. This "flaming" sometimes occurred while the user was composing email, resulting in poorly chosen or excessively vitriolic verbiage.

What is "Bandwidth?"

As capacity on the Internet has increased, people have begun to transmit material other than simple text. One notable example is audio recordings of rock concerts. These audio files are much larger than even very long books, so they have become a standard unit of network usage. One Rolling Stone song equals one "band" width, and so on.

Why can't I FTP to some places?

There are two main reasons for this. The first is that the site you want to FTP files from is exercising a certain degree of control over its network resources; in network parlance, this is called "fascism."

The second reason is that the remote site may be dabbling with such network fads as Gopher or the World Wide Web. This is called "keeping up with the times."

What is the World Wide Web, Gopherspace, etc.?

The World Wide Web, or WWW, is an experiment in generating acronyms that are much more difficult to pronounce than the words they replace.

Gopherspace is an older network term. In response to the Soviet space program's early use of dogs in space, NASA mounted a program to orbit a number of different rodents. The programmers involved in this project adopted the motto "Gophers in space!" which has since been shortened. The only

actual Gopher to go into orbit had been digging up the carrots in Werner Von Braun's garden, and was named Veronica after his daughter.

Why can't I get some WWW stuff via FTP?

It can be hard to say this, but some users of the Internet are unable to do things because they are stupid. The comparatively trivial task of getting an FTP client to do every single thing a WWW browser can do is beneath this column's attention.

Tune in next time for Ask Dr. Internet—
"I have a master's degree...in Internet!" ■

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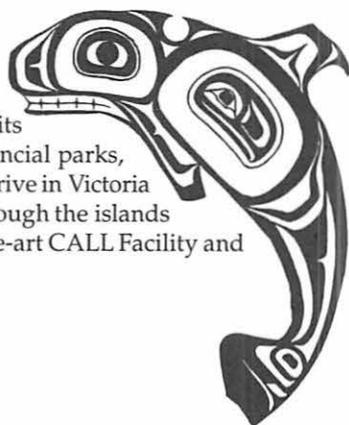
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— Rudyard Kipling

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