

CHAP5

COLLABORATORS

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Chapter 1

CHAP5

1.1 Chapter 5: MAILING LISTS AND BITNET

Usenet is not the only forum on the Net. Scores of "mailing lists" represent another way to interact with other Net users. As if Usenet and mailing lists were not enough, there are Bitnet "discussion groups" or "lists."

Mailing lists
Bitnet

1.2 Chapter 5: Mailing lists and Bitnet (1 of 2) -- MAILING LISTS

Usenet is not the only forum on the Net. Scores of "mailing lists" represent another way to interact with other Net users. Unlike Usenet messages, which are stored in one central location on your host system's computer, mailing-list messages are delivered right to your e-mail box, unlike Usenet messages.

You have to ask for permission to join a mailing list. Unlike Usenet, where your message is distributed to the world, on a mailing list, you send your messages to a central moderator, who either re-mails it to the other people on the list or uses it to compile a periodic "digest" mailed to subscribers.

Given the number of newsgroups, why would anybody bother with a mailing list?

Even on Usenet, there are some topics that just might not generate enough interest for a newsgroup; for example, the Queen list, which is all about the late Freddie Mercury's band.

And because a moderator decides who can participate, a mailing list can offer a degree of freedom to speak one's mind (or not worry about net.weenies) that is not necessarily possible on Usenet. Several groups offer anonymous postings -- only the moderator knows the real names of people who contribute. Examples include 12Step, where people enrolled in such programs as Alcoholics Anonymous can discuss their experiences, and sappho, a list limited to gay and bisexual women.

You can find mailing addresses and descriptions of these lists in the news.announce.newusers newsgroup with the subject of "Publicly

Accessible Mailing Lists." Mailing lists now number in the hundreds, so this posting is divided into three parts.

If you find a list to which you want to subscribe, send an e-mail message to

```
list-request@address
```

where "list" is the name of the mailing list and "address" is the moderator's e-mail address, asking to be added to the list. Include your full e-mail address just in case something happens to your message's header along the way, and ask, if you're accepted, for the address to mail messages to the list.

1.3 Chapter 5: Mailing lists and Bitnet (2 of 2) -- BITNET

Bitnet is an international network linking colleges and universities, but it uses a different set of technical protocols for distributing information than the Internet or Usenet .

It offers hundreds of discussion groups, comparable in scope to Usenet newsgroups .

One of the major differences is the way messages are distributed. Bitnet messages are sent to your mailbox, just as with a mailing list. However, where mailing lists are often maintained by a person, all Bitnet discussion groups are automated -- you subscribe to them through messages to a "listserver" computer. This is a kind of robot moderator that controls distribution of messages on the list. In many cases, it also maintains indexes and archives of past postings in a given discussion group, which can be handy if you want to get up to speed with a discussion or just search for some information related to it.

Many Bitnet discussion groups are now "translated" into Usenet form and carried through Usenet in the bit.listserv hierarchy. In general, it's probably better to read messages through Usenet if you can. It saves some storage space on your host system's hard drives.

If 50 people subscribe to the same Bitnet list, that means 50 copies of each message get stored on the system; whereas if 50 people read a Usenet message, that's still only one message that needs storage on the system. It can also save your sanity if the discussion group generates large numbers of messages. Think of opening your e-mailbox one day to find 200 messages in it -- 199 of them from a discussion group and one of them a "real" e-mail message that's important to you.

Subscribing and canceling subscriptions is done through an e-mail message to the listserver computer. For addressing, all listservers are known as "listserv" (yep) at some Bitnet address. This means you will have to add ".bitnet" to the end of the address, if it's in a form like this: listserv@miamiu. For example, if you have an interest in environmental issues, you might want to subscribe to the Econet discussion group. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to

```
listserv@miamiu.bitnet
```

Some Bitnet listservers are also connected to the Internet, so if you see a listserver address ending in ".edu", you can e-mail the listserver without adding ".bitnet" to the end.

Always leave the "subject:" line blank in a message to a listserver. Inside the message, you tell the listserver what you want, with a series of simple commands:

```
subscribe group Your Name      To subscribe to a list, where "group"
                               is the list name and "Your Name" is
                               your full name, for example:
                               subscribe econet Henry Fielding

unsubscribe group Your Name    To discontinue a group, for example:
                               unsubscribe econet Henry Fielding

list global                    This sends you a list of all available
                               Bitnet discussion groups.  But be careful
                               -- the list is VERY long!

get refcard                    Sends you a list of other commands you
                               can use with a listserver, such as
                               commands for retrieving past postings
                               from a discussion group.
```

Each of these commands goes on a separate line in your message (and you can use one or all of them). If you want to get a list of all Bitnet discussion groups, send e-mail to

listserv@bitnic.educom.edu

Leave the "subject:" line blank and use the list global command.

When you subscribe to a Bitnet group, there are two important differences from Usenet.

First, when you want to post a message for others to read in the discussion group, you send a message to the group name at its Bitnet address. Using Econet as an example, you would mail the message to:

econet@miamiu.bitnet

Note that this is different from the listserv address you used to subscribe to the group to begin with. Use the listserv address ONLY to subscribe to or unsubscribe from a discussion group. If you use the discussion-group address, your message will go out to every other subscriber, many of whom will think unkind thoughts, which they may share with you in an e-mail message).

The second difference relates to sending an e-mail message to the author of a particular posting. Usenet newsreaders such as rn and nn let you do this with one key. But if you hit your R key to respond to a discussion-group message, your message will go to the listserver, and from there to everybody else on the list! This can prove embarrassing to you and annoying to others. To make sure your message goes just to the person who wrote the posting, take down his e-mail address from the posting and then compose a brand-new message to him. Remember, also, that if you see an e-mail address like IZZY@INDYVMS, it's a Bitnet address.

Two Bitnet lists will prove helpful for delving further into the network. NEW-LIST tells you the names of new discussion groups. To subscribe, send a message to listserv@ndsuvml.bitnet:

```
sub NEW-LIST Your Name
```

INFONETS is the place to go when you have questions about Bitnet. It is also first rate for help on questions about all major computer networks and how to reach them. To subscribe, send e-mail to `info-nets-request@think.com`:

```
sub INFONETS Your Name
```

Both of these lists are also available on Usenet, the former as `bit.listserv.new-list`; the latter as `bit.listserv.infonets` (sometimes `bit.listserv.info-nets`).