

**he Net is changing every day. Each minute, a new email address is created. Each hour, a new file is uploaded. Each day, a new site is activated. Well, at least it seems that way, if you think about it. It would be impossible to collect accurate statistics about these sorts of trends and changes. After all, the Net is, essentially, an unregulated, international network that has no end or beginning - how would you chart it and how would you know when you've measured it all?**

**Some trends are clear, though, and one such trend is the trend towards TCP/IP connectivity. The Net is clearly moving away from Unix accounts (more commonly know as Shell accounts). Though the majority of the Net is more than likely still operating with these kinds of accounts, a growing percentage of people are hooking up with SLIP/PPP accounts. SLIP (Serial Line Interface Protocol) and PPP (Point to Point Protocol) are the two currently available types of TCP/IP Internet connections. At one time, they were significantly more expensive than a Shell account (and sometimes still are), but their prices are dwindling rapidly as they become increasingly common. SLIP/PPP accounts differ from Shell accounts in that they actually connect your Mac directly with the Internet. With a Shell account, you are using modem software to give commands to a computer which then passes your commands on to the Internet - there is a middleman in this process, a computer that relays your commands to the Net and the Net commands to you. TCP/IP eliminates the middleman.**

**What are the benefits of eliminating the middleman? There are a number. The primary benefit is performance. SLIP/PPP accounts tend to be faster as they connect you directly to the Net. Shell users have the extra wait from the time period that it takes for the server computer to relay commands. Also, since there is no relay of commands with TCP/IP, there is a reduced instance of error in transmission, smoother integration with the Net, and any time you download, the download goes directly into your computer (no more downloading to your Shell account and then downloading from your Shell account into your computer).**

**The next benefit of a SLIP/PPP account is the interface. Many Mac users go through a near culture shock when getting used to a Shell account's text-only interface. TCP/IP users retain their point and click environment. In fact, TCP/IP users get a whole variety of software to do their Net surfing with. All of this software is programmed like standard Mac software, so it's all point and click, graphic user interface. But don't be fooled - good interface is more than just a preference. It may take thirty to forty minutes to go through all the usenet newsgroups on a Shell account using rn or tin newsreaders, but with a TCP/IP newsreader program, it takes maybe one minute to retrieve the information at startup and then you just scroll on down. Reviewing the entire usenet newsgroup list may take five minutes which means that you save time and, thus, money.**

**The last big reason to switch to TCP/IP is the World Wide Web. It is increasingly apparent that most of the Net is switching over the HTML or Hyper Text Markup Language. The only way to read HTML on a shell account is with a program called Lynx. Looking at HTML through Lynx is like, well, trying out a restaurant's food by picking through it's trash. Lynx does no, I repeat, NO justice to the Web. You really do need to use a proper Web viewer for using the WWW (see article on Netscape for an example of one). HTML is gradually engulfing all of the Net and, soon, we will probably all be reading**

**usenet, sending email, FTPing, and GOPHER hopping on the Web. Think of it as being like when the music industry converted to CD's, sooner or later, you have to keep up with the changes or you'll be left behind and forgotten.**

**That just about sums up the three biggest reasons to convert your Shell account to a SLIP or PPP account. In case you're wondering, there is no better or worse between the two accounts. SLIP accounts are more common, but I've been told that PPP accounts tend to be somewhat more reliable. In either case, additional software will be required. MacTCP, the Control Panel needed to enable your system to establish a TCP/IP connection, comes with System 7.5 (you'll need to purchase it separately if you are using a system before 7.5). In addition to this, you'll need a program like InterSLIP or MacPPP to create and maintain the SLIP or PPP connection. After this, you still need supporting software, like Netscape, for example, to be able to do something with you TCP/IP connection. Yes, the TCP/IP software will take up more space than Zterm did, but it will do things Zterm never did!**

**- a. anderson**