WinYarn

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Introduction

WinYarn is a Microsoft Windows front-end for the Yarn program. Yarn is a USENET news and mail reader. It is written to run under DOS. You can start Yarn through a Windows PIF but a Windows front-end affords more flexibility especially when it comes to running the Yarn utilities (such as import and expire).

Before you can try out WinYarn, you must have the Yarn environment set up under DOS. If this is set up, and runs correctly, then WinYarn should run correctly also. If you have problems you can seek help from the alt.usenet.offline-reader newsgroup.

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Installation

You must first have a working setup for Yarn under DOS. If Yarn is installed correctly, WinYarn should work correctly also. This documentation is not written for computer neophytes. If you can set up Yarn you should have few problems setting up WinYarn.

First, create a directory for WinYarn and unzip the archive there.

Next make sure that you have the following DOS environment variables set in your autoexec.bat:

        HOME
        YARN
        TEMP (or TMP)

Next, copy the following files to your WINDOWS\SYSTEM directory. Make sure that if these files already exist that the WinYarn versions have a more recent date/time stamp. If not, use what you already have.

        FPTAB10.VBX
        FPIMPRNT.VBX

Make sure the following files exist in your newly created WinYarn directory:

        WINYARN.EXE   WinYarn executable
        WINYARN.WRI   WinYarn documentation
        README.TXT   information file
        CHANGES.TXT   revision history
        MAKEINI.EXE   create WinYarn profile
        TODO.TXT   wish list and known bugs
        TESTERS.TXT   notes to beta testers
        PACKING.LST   list of files in the WinYarn distribution

You also need the following file in your WINDOWS\SYSTEM directory:

VBRUN300.DLL   (not included in this distribution - see readme.txt)

Run the MAKEINI.EXE program (from the Windows Program Manager, select the File | Run menu item). This will create a default WinYarn.Ini file and put you in Notepad. Edit the entries to conform to your Yarn configuration. This is a very important step, otherwise, WinYarn won't be able to find the correct files. The INI file will be created in your $YARN directory (where you keep all of your other Yarn executables). If you have problems later where the program can't find files, check your environment variables and your winyarn.ini settings.

The WINYARN.INI file should have the following entries:

[WinYarn]
Command-Processor = command.com
Yarn-Executable = yarnx.exe
MailNewsPacketType = [single | separate]
MailNews-Pathname = c:\xfer\mailnews.zip
News-Pathname = c:\xfer\news.zip
Mail-Pathname = c:\xfer\mail.zip
Replies-Pathname = c:\xfer\replies.zip
Summary-Pathname = c:\xfer\summary.zip
Summary-Batch = editsum.bat
Expire-Options = rnd
Jump-DOS = c:\yarn
DOS-Screen = [FullScreen | Windowed]

If WinYarn cannot find the INI file, or if it does, cannot find any of the above entries, the following defaults will be used:

Command-Processor = command.com
Yarn-Executable = $YARN\yarnx.exe
MailNewsPacketType = separate
MailNews-Pathname = $HOME\mailnews.zip
News-Pathname = $HOME\news.zip
Mail-Pathname = $HOME\mail.zip
Replies-Pathname = $HOME\replies.zip
Summary-Pathname = $HOME\summary.zip
Summary-Batch = editsum.bat
Jump-DOS = $HOME
DOS-Screen = FullScreen

where $HOME is the contents of the HOME environment variable and $YARN is the contents of the YARN environment variable. **$YARN should be on the DOS path.**

The Command-Processor setting lets you specify an alternate command processor to DOS's command.com. For example, 4DOS users would specify 4dos.com. **It is assumed that the command processor is on the DOS PATH.**

The Yarn-Executable lets you specify which Yarn executable to use (i.e. real-mode yarn.exe or DOS-extended-mode yarnx.exe).

The MailNewsPacketType setting is required. If you import your mail and news in one combined packet select the "single" value. If you import mail and news separately, then use the "separate" value. I import mail and news separately because I select the news articles that I want (edit summary feature on the news tab) and then create a download packet for those articles.

MailNews-Pathname is required only if the MailNewsPacketType is "single", and specifies the path and filename of the mail and news file.

News-Pathname is required only if the MailNewsPacketType is "separate", and specifies the path and filename of the news file.

Mail-Pathname is required only if the MailNewsPacketType is "separate", and specifies the path and filename of the mail file.

Replies-Pathname is required and specifies the path and filename of the replies packet.

Summary-Pathname specifies the path and filename of the summary packet. You only need to specify this if you intend to edit news headers and select the news that you want to download.

Summary-Batch specifies the name of a batch file to run when you edit news headers. This lets you perform other operations such as file movements and cleanup. This is required if you are going to edit news headers.

The Expire-Options setting lets you set the initial state of the Expire tab checkboxes. The letters r,n, and d correspond to setting the -r, -n and -d<n> checkboxes, respectively. You can string them together in any order to set more than one checkbox. If you don't want any expire options then do not include this directive in your ini file. The makeini default is to leave this option out.

Jump-DOS specifies the directory you wish to start in when invoking the Jump | DOS menu item.

DOS-Screen specifies the screen type when starting Yarn in a DOS box. By default the sessions start as a full-screen. If you prefer windowed DOS sessions, for instance if you have a large monitor, specify "windowed" rather than "fullscreen". To use the "windowed" setting you must be running Windows in the 386 enhanced mode.

Lastly, open File Manager, go to your WinYarn directory, find the WinYarn.Exe entry, and drag it to one of your available program groups. This will let you double-click on the WinYarn icon to start the program. Of course you can always double-click on the WinYarn.Exe entry in File Manager every time...

System Requirements

286 processor or better
Windows 3.1 or higher
VBRUN300.DLL (usually located in WINDOWS\SYSTEM directory) dated 5/12/93 or later.
Yarn 0.71 or higher

(note: WinYarn should run on a 286 but it has not been tested on such a machine. If you are successful, please let me know).

Windows enhanced mode is necessary to use windowed DOS sessions (see the WinYarn.Ini entry 'DOS-Screen'.

Assumptions

WinYarn assumes that the Yarn required DOS environment variables HOME, YARN, and TZ are set. Also TEMP and/or TMP should be set. WinYarn will bomb if HOME and YARN are not set.

Future versions of WinYarn may use the other environment variables as well.

Limitations

WinYarn tries to limit you to running one Yarn function at a time. In Windows, it is possible to have multiple DOS sessions running at one time. It would be possible to be reading netnews in one DOS session, then launch another DOS session to run the expire function. WinYarn tries not to allow this since there are possible combinations of Yarn functions that would give undesirable results if certain Yarn files were accessed simultaneously.

The Program

WinYarn, when started, displays a "splash" screen. It disappears in eight seconds or if any keyboard or mouse key is pressed.

The WinYarn main screen uses the popular index tab metaphor. The eight most used functions, by my definition, are a mouse click away. Each tab has an "Ok" button to actually launch the function so if you click on a tab you won't have to worry about unintentionally starting something you didn't want to (like expire!).

Since WinYarn is a Windows shell to a DOS program, there is a fair amount of overhead each time you invoke one of the main functions (News, Mail, Folders, Replies) since a new DOS session must be started. Once a DOS box is launched, Yarn loads the 32-bit DOS extender, then loads itself. This can take five seconds or so. Also, WinYarn is limited in what it can do since it is fronting a DOS program. A lot of Windows niceties can not be accessed, such as Clipboard functions.

Note that the normal Yarn functionality has not been altered. Instead of selecting, say, the Replies tab to view/edit your reply packet, you can still run Yarn through the News tab and then press "R" to get to your replies. If you intend to access a bunch of Yarn functions in one sitting, this approach is a bit more efficient than accessing the separate function through the WinYarn tabs.

Menu

The WinYarn menu has the following structure:

        File
            Exit
        Jump
            DOS
            File Manager
          Notepad
        Paste
            Mail
            News
            Replies
        Help
            About

File | Exit
        This is how you exit the program.   Alt+F4 is the accelerator key.

Jump | DOS
Start a new DOS window. The WinYarn.ini entry Jump-DOS controls which directory the DOS window starts in. By default it starts in $HOME.

Jump | File Manager
Activate File Manager. If File Manager is active and in the background, it will receive the focus. If minimized, its window will be opened. If not running, you will be asked if you want to start it.

Jump | Notepad
Activates a Notepad window. Same situation as File Manager (see above).

Paste | Mail
This allows you to paste material on the Windows clipboard into the Mail window. The program does not check to see what is on the clipboard. It should be plain text. To paste into Mail, the Mail window must be "windowed." This implies that Windows is running in 386 enhanced mode. You can either have Mail running in a windowed session by specifying the WinYarn.Ini directive DOS-Screen= Windowed. If you prefer your sessions to be full screen, you can use the standard Windows Alt-Enter key combination to turn the window from full screen to windowed.

Paste | News
Paste text on the Windows clipboard into the News window. See the Paste | Mail command to see how this works.

Paste | Replies
Paste text on the Windows clipboard into the Replies window. See the Paste | Mail command to see how this works.

Help | About
Information about WinYarn and your system.

Status Bar

At the bottom of the WinYarn screen is a status bar. There are two indicators. One is a continuous date/time display. The second is a mail/news/replies/summary file status.

The mail/news/replies/summary file status indicator lets you know if there are mail and/or news to import and replies to be sent. WinYarn checks for the existance of these files, as specified in your winyarn.ini file, and displays a letter to indicate the existance of that file. For example,

   MNR   indicates the presence of a mail.zip, news.zip and replies.zip files,
   MR indicates that you have mail to import and replies to be sent,
   NS   indicates that yo have news to import and a news summary to edit

The file status is updated when events such as the Import function are run. It is possible for the file status to become incorrect if you start manipulating these files through the File Manager (or through a DOS session).

The flags are:

        M   mail packet exists
        N   news packet exists
        R   reply packet exists

       S   summary packet exists

Note that if you are importing combined mail/news packets, as set by the 'MailNewsPacketType' ini directive, then you will see a combined 'MN' flag.

The only thing that you have to pay careful attention to is the replies packet. After you send your replies via your communications program, you have to remember to come back and delete the packet. Otherwise if you create new mail, it will be appended to the old replies packet.

News Tab

The News tab has two options selected by radio buttons. If you select the "Read News" button (followed by the Ok button) Yarn will be launched and you will find yourself at the familiar newsgroup screen.

If you select the "Edit Summary" button, WinYarn will try to run the file $YARN\editsum.bat. Rather than download all of a newsgroup, I use the uqwk program on my Internet provider to give me a summary listing of articles which gets sent to me as a zip file. I run a batch program which moves and unzips the summary, launches my DOS editor, zips and moves the results so that I can send it back to my Internet provider to retrieve the news articles that I have selected.

Subscribe Tab

The Subscribe tab implements the Newgroup, or "add newsgroup", function.

Unsubscribe Tab

The Unsubscribe tab implements the Rmgroup or "remove group" function. WinYarn assumes the existence of a $HOME\yarn\newsrc file which keeps track of the active and inactive Yarn newsgroups. This is a standard Yarn file.

A combo-box lets you scroll through the contents of the newsrc file and select the newsgroup you wish to delete. Pressing "Ok" launches the Yarn rmgroup program to handle the deletion.

Other Tabs

The other tabs should be self-explanatory. The best way to learn about them is to try them.

Problem Solving

1. Yarn functions starts, you see the DOS window being created, then you find yourself back in WinYarn. This may be to an out-of-memory condition. It may be a lack of disk space (where TEMP is located), it may be total memory is low, or it may be the USER resource memory pool in Windows is low. The best way to solve this is to EXIT (not minimize) some other Windows applications to free up memory. Occasionally you may need to exit Windows completely. The reason for this is that some Windows applications do not free up Windows resources correctly (which programmers call memory leaks). Mircosoft's Word for Windows 2.0 was noted for this. I have noted, on my system, that WinYarn will not run if I have Word for Windows 6.0 loaded, even if it is the only other Windows program.

2. WinYarn can't find your mail and news files. This is usually due to: 1) incorrect Yarn

environment variable settings, and/or 2) incorrect settings in the WinYarn.Ini file. If you didn't use makeini.exe to create your ini file, or if you've made substatial modifications, try saving your current ini file, running makeini, and comparing the two files. See what makeini recommends for pathnames and see how they compare to your current settings.

3. If you have problems with "file not found" or similar messages, make sure that $YARN is on the DOS path. Also make sure your environment variables are set.

4. Many of the text boxes have a "lowered" look. If these boxes start to appear "flat", then something is wrong with system memory. This has happened to me just once, but I had to exit Windows and reboot. On a laptop with suspend/resume, I had to do a "cold start." The "warm boot" didn't work.

5. If all else fails, try posting to alt.usenet.offline-reader or sending me email. So that others may assist you, you need to post at least the following information: your machine configuration (processor, memory, DOS/Windows versions, other running apps, Yarn version, WinYarn version), what you were doing, DOS environment variable settings, and the contents of your WinYarn.Ini file.

Tips

1. DOS Window Clutter: When a DOS window is created, there is an eight-line help message printed telling you how you can manipulate the window. You can turn it off by adding the line

    DOSPromptExitInstruc=Off | No

to the [386Enh] section of your system.ini file. If you try this, don't forget to save a backup copy of system.ini first.

2. Who sent me mail? This is a Yarn tip. On several occasions I have had problems with transmitting mail from my Unix provider to my PC. As a result I have lost mail. As part of my Unix batch file that gets my mail I include the following before my uqwk command:

        mail -H > mail.headers

which saves the mail headers (the address of who each mail message is from) in a file called mail.headers. If I have a problem then I can ask each sender to resend their message. This file get rewritten every time I download new mail. This doesn't work with every unix box. You might need to use a different switch or even a different program.

The Fine Print

Version

This documentation corresponds to version 0.71 of WinYarn. I will not support earlier versions of WinYarn.

WinYarn has been tested with Yarn 0.75. As of this writing, Yarn 0.78 has new features that WinYarn cannot take advantage of now. A new version of WinYarn will be forthcoming to correct this deficiency.

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What the above paragraph says in English is that the standard software disclaimers apply to WinYarn. I don't guarantee that the program will do anything useful or remotely close to what is claimed in this documentation. If it trashes your computer, that's tragic but tough. The program works for me and that's all that I claim.

If you want support for the program I will provide a level of support commensurate with what you paid me for it. An email to me might elicit a response, and then it might not. I am interested in making changes or improvements to the program to benefit the greatest number of people. I am not interested in providing every possible capability. This would lead to program bloat and make the program harder to use and more difficult for me to maintain.

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Programming Notes

The techo-weenies out there may have guessed that WinYarn is programmed using Microsoft's Visual Basic (because WinYarn requires the VBRUN300.DLL support file). The program also uses the Tab/VBX and Imprint custom controls from Far Point Technologies for the tab control and many of the text boxes.

Restrictions

According to the licensing agreement from Far Point Technologies, the vbx files provided in this distribution may not be included as part of another program or distributed separately.

Acknowlegments

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    Richard Hsiung
    Otto Ruppel

Author Information

Stan Wong

MicroMime
s.wong@ieee.org
2/1/95