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Downloading Pictures
from Internet Newsgroups
Using America Online

About this tutorial

This tutorial explains how to download and view pictures from Internet newsgroups via America Online. The tutorial is for the Macintosh, and was written for America Online version 2.1, UULite version 1.6 and UUPrepere version 2.0. The instructions here will probably work with later versions as well. It is assumed that you already know how to use your Macintosh and how to use the America Online software. If you do not know how to access newsgroups with America Online, you should refer to America Online's extensive online help section before going through this tutorial.

What is uuencoding?

Uuencoding is a way of transferring non-text files, including programs, pictures and sounds, over the Internet. This is not as simple as transferring files over a BBS or another online service, because much of the software used by Internet computers assumes that all the files being sent are ASCII files, meaning that they only use the lower seven bits of every byte. ASCII files are fine for text, but they are not fine for so-called binary files (non-text files), which use all eight bits of every byte. The uuencoding process converts a binary file into ASCII characters, seen as lines of nonsense on the screen, and the uudecoding process converts these nonsense characters back into a binary file. Uuencoding and uudecoding are performed by a program such as UULite, which is an excellent shareware program for the Macintosh.

The purpose of UUPrepere

To download pictures and other binary files from America Online, you will need not only UULite but also UUPrepere, another shareware program. This is because America Online has a tendency to insert carriage returns in the middle of the uuencoded data in a file as it is being downloaded, which causes problems for UULite's decoding procedures. UUPrepere will clean up the carriage returns to prevent decoding errors. Note that if you are not downloading files from America Online, you do not need to use UUPrepere.

Which newsgroups have uuencoded files?

The following is a mostly-complete list of the newsgroups which contain uuencoded files (binaries), organized by the type of file.

Programs:

comp.binaries.acorn
comp.binaries.amiga
comp.binaries.apple2
comp.binaries.atari.st
comp.binaries.ibm.pc
comp.binaries.mac
comp.binaries.ms-windows
comp.binaries.os2

Pictures:

alt.binaries.multimedia
alt.binaries.pictures
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.blondes
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.female
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.male
alt.binaries.pictures.erotica.orientals
alt.binaries.pictures.fine-art.digitized
alt.binaries.pictures.fine-art.graphics
alt.binaries.pictures.fractals
alt.binaries.pictures.misc
alt.binaries.pictures.supermodels
alt.binaries.pictures.tasteless

Sounds:

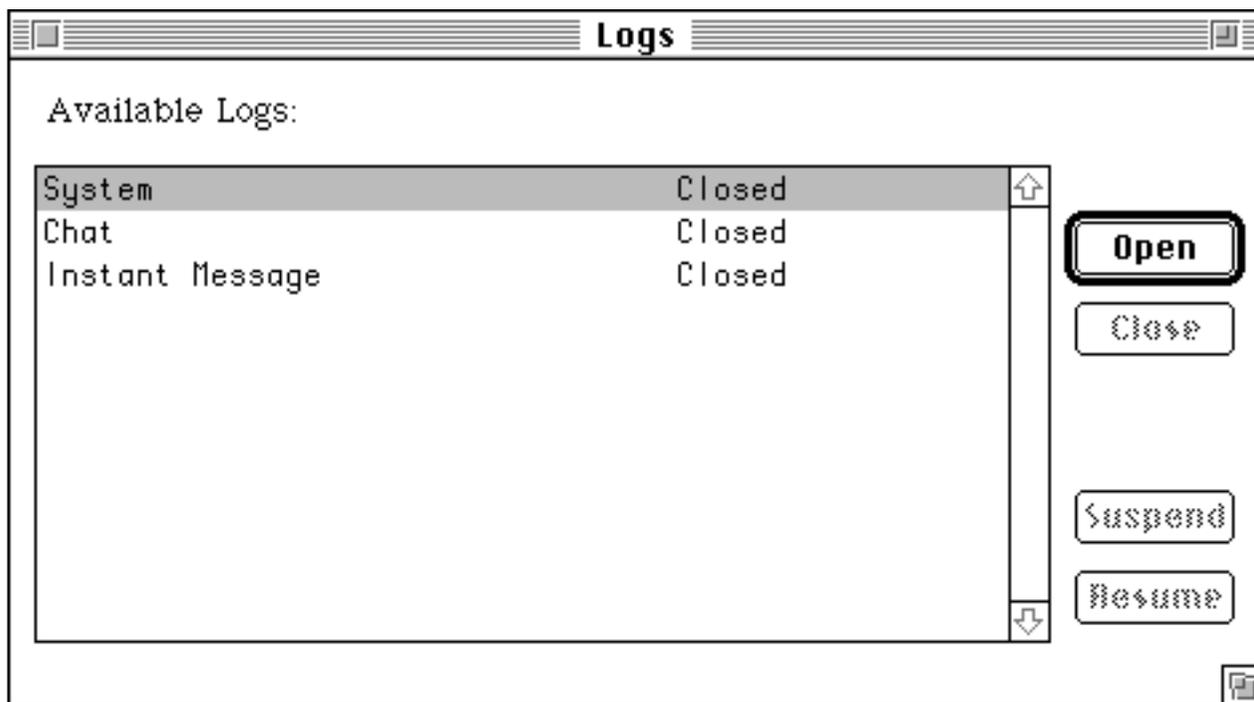
alt.binaries.sounds.misc
alt.binaries.sounds.music

Downloading uuencoded files from newsgroups

This section explains the process of getting uuencoded data from newsgroups on America Online to your hard drive. This is not as simple as it sounds. First, you cannot use the Save... item from the File menu, because this function is limited to files of 24K or less, and most uuencoded files are many times this size. The solution is to use the Logs feature, also available from the File menu. This feature has the advantage that when a log file overflows the 24K limit, another log file is begun automatically. Meanwhile, all the text which appears on your screen is being saved to the log file. Here are the step-by-step instructions for downloading a file. Note: going through this process takes a long time, usually ranging from 10 minutes to 30 minutes with a 9600 baud connection, depending on the size of the file to be downloaded. Take this into consideration when planning your downloads.

1. Open the message list window for the newsgroup from which you want to download, and find the messages you want to download. Note that a single file may be broken up into several parts, which are usually numbered like 1/3, 2/3, 3/3. Messages which are numbered 0 are usually descriptions and do not need to be downloaded.
2. Select Logs from the File menu.

Fig 1: The Logs dialog box



3. In the resulting dialog box, select System Log, then click Open. Choose a folder on your hard drive to which you will save the log files. Close the Logs dialog box.
4. Double-click on the first message which you want to download.
5. Wait for the text of the message (actually uuencoded data) to be transferred. You will know it is done transferring when the cursor stops spinning and turns into a black arrow (not a white arrow).
6. If the More button at the bottom of the window is not grayed out, click on it. Repeat steps 5 and 6 until the More button is grayed out and the cursor has stopped spinning.
7. Close this message. Repeat steps 4 through 7 for each of the messages which you want to download. Make sure you download the messages in order (by their numbers).
8. Select Logs from the File menu again, select System Log, and click Close. Then close the Logs dialog box.

There are now log files on your hard drive containing all of the text of the messages which you downloaded.

Downloading uuencoded files from your mailbox

It is possible that someone has sent you a uuencoded file over the Internet e-mail system. Such a file shows up as a message in your mailbox. If the file sent was over 24K, the America Online software has automatically segmented it into several messages of 24K each. Therefore, all you have to do to download this file is open each message in order and select Save... from the File menu. In the Save... dialog box, make sure you click on Text as the type of file you want to create, then just name your file, navigate to the folder you want and click Save. Instead of ending up with several log files on your hard drive (which is what happens with newsgroups), you will end up with several text files. The procedure for decoding these text files is the same. Note that the Logs feature will not work for files in your mailbox.

Decoding the downloaded data

After logging off America Online, look in the folder to which you saved your log files (or text files from your mailbox). You will probably find several of them, numbered like: System Log 5/28/94, System Log 5/28/94.2, System Log 5/28/94.3, etc. There is more than one file because, when the size of each file reached 24K, America Online started a new one. Make sure that your files are of type TEXT. This is the file type used by TeachText,

and not any more complicated word processor. If you try decoding files in a word processor format, UUPrepare will probably give you an error message. Anyway, it is now necessary to merge these text files into one larger file for decoding. Fortunately, UULite has a feature for this. After merging the files, you will run UUPrepare on the composite file, and then you will run UULite again. The final result will be your picture, sound or program. Here are the step-by-step instructions:

1. Launch UULite.
2. Make sure your Merge Preferences (available on the File menu) are set to Merge Only, not Merge and Decode.
3. Select File Merge... from the File menu.
4. In the resulting dialog box, select each of the log files in order (the file with no number comes first) and add them to the list of files to be merged.
5. Click Done. Name your composite file, then wait for UULite to perform its merging procedures.
6. Now you can quit UULite if you want to, but you may want to keep it running, because you'll be returning to it soon.
7. Launch UUPrepare.
8. The Open... dialog box will show up automatically after the splash screen and shareware message. In the dialog box, select your composite file and click Open.
9. Wait for UUPrepare to perform its operations. It will display a dialog box while it does this to inform you of its progress.
10. When the UUPrepare dialog box disappears, quit UUPrepare.
11. Go back to UULite.
12. Select Decode - Smart... from the File menu. In the resulting dialog box, select the composite file (which has now been modified by UUPrepare) and click Open.
13. You will be prompted for a folder to which the uudecoded file will be saved. After this, wait while UULite decodes the file.
14. When UULite is done decoding, quit UULite.

You should now have a normal Macintosh file on your hard drive containing the program, picture or sound which you downloaded. You can go back and trash the log files and composite file if you want to.

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