Point Systems and MacWoof

A brand new offering from Craig Vaughan, MacWoof gives Macintosh users a powerful link to the FidoNet world at an affordable shareware price.

FidoNet is, by its very nature, a fairly sophisticated system of networking bulletin boards. It involves complex hierarchical distribution systems, a network nodelist over a megabyte in size, and a lot of trial-and-error on the part of the sysops to get it all to come together. The average Macintosh BBS user generally wants little involvement with it, aside from reading the numerous conferences that continuously flow into the BBS through this system. Craig Vaughan's new *MacWoof* is an exciting new tool that makes reading and replying to these messages easier than ever.

"FidoNet," to paraphrase Douglas Adams, "is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mind-bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist, but that's just *peanuts* to FidoNet. Listen…" and so on. In reality, FidoNet isn't quite as big as the galaxy, but it is big enough to create an *enormous* flow of messages in the popular networked public conferencing system known as EchoMail.

Some of the echoes The Macintosh Network carries, such as ECHOMAC (The general Mac discussion echo) and STTNG (discussion of the current Star Trek series) can take in one or two hundred new messages *every day.* Trying to keep up with them on-line is quite a challenge, even when checking-in every day.

An ideal solution to the echomail problem is the use of a FidoNet *Point System.* A Point is essentially a one-person FidoNet node. It automatically dials into a "Boss System," through which all the point's mail is routed, to get a fresh load of mail and to drop off any new messages that the user (usually called a Point Operator, or PointOp) may have created.

The nice thing about a system like this is that it involves much shorter connections to the host bulletin board than a manual connection. Mail is typically compressed by the host system, and is sent in a single, continuous session. No user interaction is required, other than telling the Point program to "do its thing." These quick sessions are a real boon to people who are out of town a lot and still like to keep up with the mail. Long-distance charges are greatly diminished, since the actual message reading and entry takes place off-line.

So what else does it do? Plenty. As they are on a normal host bulletin board, the messages are all divided up into their respective areas, and users can browse, delete, scan, and reply to their hearts' content. Point systems typically feature full-screen editors (which was enough to convince me to try it), and since the mail is already loaded onto the Point Operator's disk, he can go through the messages as quickly or slowly as he wishes, without worrying about running out of online time or tying up the bulletin board while reading or entering a message.

MacWoof

In development for over two years (and still undergoing constant improvement), Craig Vaughan's new *MacWoof* gives BBSers with Macintosh computers the opportunity to try Pointing first-hand.
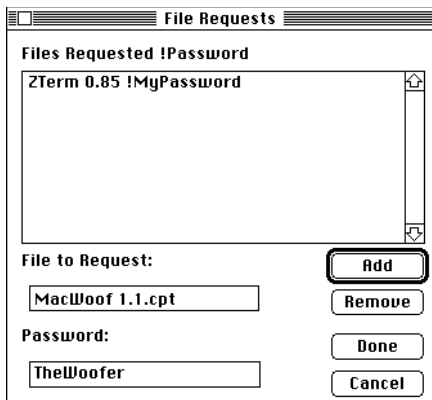
Before MacWoof's introduction, the only other Macintosh point system was Copernicus, by Michael Pester. (He's also the creator of the Mansion BBS we operate today.)   Though an good start as a Mac point system, it had two major flaws: First, it was a $40 commercial program, not giving potential users the chance to try pointing before committing money to it. Second, it had some real interface and performance problems.   (Copernicus II is said to be a major improvement. It was released in October of this year.)   MacWoof, on the other hand, is distributed through the *Shareware* system. The user has 30 days to try out Pointing with MacWoof before paying the low $25 fee to have his copy registered.

For the clean, compact program that it is, MacWoof packs a powerful set of features under the hood that make managing messages *very* easy. (See the screen image on Page 1.) To make things easier on the PointOp, the programs features an "Auto-Purge" function: each echomail area can be set to hold either a specific number of messages or messages that are under a certain number of days old. The areas are trimmed when the user tells MacWoof to call up the boss system.
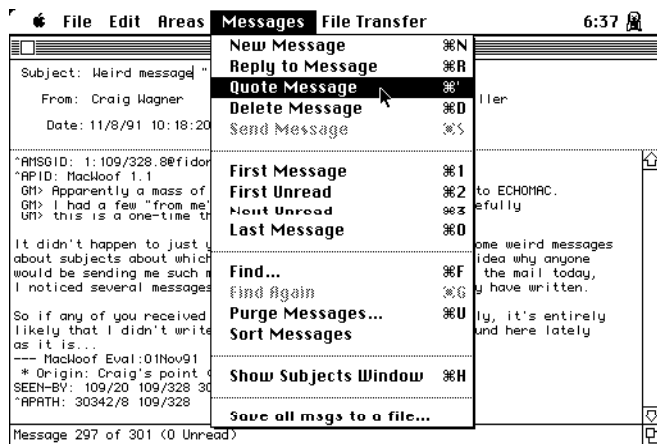
To keep disk clutter to a minimum, MacWoof keeps *everything* relating to the boss node—messages, phone number, auto-purge settings, and so forth—in a single file. It's a real boon to people who move around between different machines.   Users who wish to point off of several bulletin boards can use the same copy of MacWoof on as many bossnodes as disk space will allow, simply by creating a separate message file for each.

An interesting feature of FidoNet that has been implemented in release 1.1 of MacWoof is *File Requesting.* With a simple menu command, MacWoof users can enter the filenames that they wish to download from the host bulletin board. When the program dials up the boss node, all of the files are downloaded during that session, along with the normal mail packets. *File-Attaching* (sending files from the point to the boss node) is expected in the next release.

After using MacWoof for several months, I honestly don't know how I ever lived without it. It has, for all practical purposes, saved me enough time that I can keep up with the echomail *and* have a personal life. If you read echomail regularly, it's definitely worth giving a try. I only wish I had such a compact, useful program when I first started with echomail. **A.**

File Requests

Files Requested !Password

ZTerm 0.85 !MyPassword

File to Request:

MacWoof 1.1.cpt

Password:

TheWoofer

[Add]
[Remove]
[Done]
[Cancel]

With a simple menu command, users can request files to be picked up from the boss system next time MacWoof dials it up.

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