

by Chris Gehlker

Let's be honest. When our sysop asked me to re → iew No → □ Link → ersion 1.22 I thought 'OK, I'll DL it when I get home but I don't expect much. Despite the fact that it was by no means the first MFC BBS, Red Ryder Host dominates the market. It's a mature program with lots of support and a big installed base. Who ever heard of No → □ Link or Res No → □ Software?

So about 7 o'clock last night I started playing around with No → □ Link. When next I looked it was after midnight and I had the structure of a dream BBS. This was after I'd thrown away all of the (rather unimaginative) configuration files that came packed with the program and started from absolute scratch. I'd also discovered an undocumented feature or two.

Despite some rough edges, No → □ Link is fundamentally better software than Red Ryder Host. It's better because Mark We → er and Alex Hopmann, the authors, started with a better → iew of the structure of a BBS. Red Ryder Host → iews the BBS as a series of flat files: the message file, the downloads files, the mail file ect. No → □ Link → iews the BBS as a tree. Long time MFCers will recognize this as the difference between MFS and HFS. You might say No → □ Link has new ROMs.

Just as some people were initially put off by the added complexity of HFS, some will undoubtedly be afraid of the more complicated structure of No → □ Link. Unless the sysop wants to be very accommodating, you might not be able to get on No → □ Link BBS and go right for the downloads. However help us, the DLs could be scattered around amid the messages! The payoff for this complexity is that the BBS becomes a → ehicle for expressing and developing ideas.

Look what happens with Host. You get on the board and read the new messages. More than half will be replies to previous messages that you will have forgotten. You can always tell when a good conversation went on for a little while because the message won't have anything to do with the stated subject. You think about going back and trying to chase the thread back to its source but that involves scanning and reading reverse and it's just too damn much trouble. Sometimes I get interesting replies to something I posted. They would be even more interesting if I could remember my original post. Has this ever happened to you?

With No → □ Link, if you can see the original message with <B>back. If a message I launched three divergent conversations threads, you can see them all with <L>ist. You can follow threads down the tree or start a new branch if something in a message inspires you to → eer off on a tangent.

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I h□ → e too belie → e th□t No → □ Link is □ much better → ehicle for the exch□nge of ide □s th□n Host.

I think the mess□ge tree is the big bre□kthrough in No → □ Link but th□t's not the only fe □ture of □ host so in synopsis here's how I r□te the other fe □tures □g□inst Host:

Category	RR Host	No → □ Link
Line editor	Useless	Almost useless
File Tr□nsfer	ASCII,XMODEM <sup>1</sup>	S□me <sup>1</sup>
Gr□phic Interf□ce	None	Some <sup>2</sup>
Vote Support	No	Yes
Sur → ey Files	Yes	No
Menus	Yes	Option□l
Fl□t Mess□ge Sections	Yes	Option□l <sup>3</sup>
Fl□t File Sections	Yes	Option□l <sup>3</sup>
SIG Sysops	Option□l	Option□l
Bulletins	Option□l	Option□l
Access Le → els	1	4 4
Multiline	No	No
EM□il	Yes	Yes
L□unch Progr□m	Yes	Yes
On-Line Help	A → er□ge	Good <sup>5</sup>
Document□tion	Good	Poor <sup>6</sup>

#### Notes:

1 CRC & Checksum

2 Under de → elopement

3 C□n be □nywhere in hier□rchy

4 This me□ns e → ery user h□s four □ccess le → els. We c□n let D□n

De□con into the Ad → □nced Progr□mmer's SIG but keep him □w□y from the dirty pictures (he's too young) while doing the re → erse for Mike At□n□sio.

5 No → □ Link needs better help.

6 B□sed only on Sysop's Reference. There's supposed to be HyperC□rd document□tion on GENie.

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So the \$64 question is, "Should we convert the AMUG BBS to No → □ Link?" The most important part of the answer is how the sysop feels about it. On the downside, we would have to learn the full parser if we want to get the most out of the BBS. We would have to start over with messages because they would be too much trouble to convert to the tree format. The only way that I've discovered to bring files into No → □ Link, other than uploading them, is to sign on locally and pretend to upload them. Then, at the 'FileName>' prompt, type in the full pathname. That's a lot of typing.

Of course, the arguments for staying with Host sort sound like the arguments for sticking with DOS.

If we want a middle course, we could register for \$50 and ask Res No → □ for support. They might be able to help with any transition problems. It would have to be a good advertisement for them to have a prestigious organization like AMUG using their software.