Emily Postnews Answers Your Questions on Netiquette

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Emily Postnews, foremost authority on proper net behaviour, gives her advice on how to act on the net.

TaskArrowSm.tiff ¬ NOTE: this is intended to be satirical.   If you do not recognize it as such, consult a doctor or professional comedian. The recommendations in this article should recognized for what they areÐadmonitions about what **not** to do.

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Q: *Dear Miss Postnews: How long should my signature be? Ð verbose@noisy*

A: Dear Verbose: Please try and make your signature as long as you can.   It's much more important than your article, of course, so try to have more lines of signature than actual text.

Try to include a large graphic made of ASCII characters, plus lots of cute quotes and slogans.   People will never tire of reading these pearls of wisdom again and again, and you will soon become personally associated with the joy each reader feels at seeing yet another delightful repeat of your signature.

Be sure as well to include a complete map of Usenet with each signature, to show how anybody can get mail to you from any site in the world.   Be sure to include Internet gateways as well.   Also tell people on your own site how to mail to you.   Give independent addresses for Internet, UUCP, and BITNET, even if they're all the same.

Aside from your reply address, include your full name, company and organization.   It's just common courtesy ± after all, in some

newsreaders people have to type an **entire** keystroke to go back to the top of your article to see this information in the header.

By all means include your phone number and street address in every single article.   People are always responding to Usenet articles with phone calls and letters.   It would be silly to go to the extra trouble of including this information only in articles that need a response by conventional channels!

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Q: *Dear Emily: Today I posted an article and forgot to include my signature.   What should I do?* Ð forgetful@myvax

A: Dear Forgetful: Rush to your terminal right away and post an article that says, "Oops, I forgot to post my signature with that last article.   Here it is."

Since most people will have forgotten your earlier article, (particularly since it dared to be so boring as to not have a nice, juicy signature) this will remind them of it.   Besides, people care much more about the signature anyway.   See the previous letter for more important details.

Also, be sure to include your signature **twice** in each article.   That way you're sure people will read it.

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Q: *Dear Ms. Postnews: I couldn't get mail through to somebody on another site.   What should I do?* Ð eager@beaver.dam

A: Dear Eager: No problem, just post your message to a group that a lot of people read.   Say, "This is for John Smith.   I couldn't get mail through so I'm posting it.   All others please ignore."

This way tens of thousands of people will spend a few seconds scanning over and ignoring your article, using up over 16 man-hours

their collective time, but you will be saved the terrible trouble of checking through Usenet maps or looking for alternate routes.   Just think, if you couldn't distribute your message to 30,000 other computers, you might actually have to (gasp) call directory assistance for 60 cents, or even phone the person.   This can cost as much as a few **dollars** for a 5 minute call!

And certainly it's better to spend 10 to 20 dollars of other people's money distributing the message then for you to have to waste $9 on an overnight letter, or even 32 cents on a stamp!

Don't forget.   The world will end if your message doesn't get through, so post it as many places as you can.

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Q: *What about a test message?*

A: It is important, when testing, to test the entire net.   Never test merely a subnet distribution when the whole net can be done.   Also put "please ignore" on your test messages, since we all know that everybody always skips a message with a line like that.   Don't use a subject like "My sex is female but I demand to be addressed as male." because such articles are read in depth by all USEnauts.

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Q: *Somebody just posted that Roman Polanski directed Star Wars. What should I do?* Ð smartaleck@some.site

A: Post the correct answer at once!   We can't have people go on believing that!   Very good of you to spot this.   You'll probably be the only one to make the correction, so post as soon as you can. No time to lose, so certainly don't wait a day, or check to see if somebody else has made the correction.

And it's not good enough to send the message by mail.   Since you're the only one who really knows that it was Francis Coppola,

you have to inform the whole net right away!

Using the most confrontational and impolite language you can, don't forget to point out the folly of the error made by the person.

Q: *I read an article that said, "reply by mail, I'll summarize."   What should I do?*

A: Post your response to the whole net.   That request applies only to dumb people who don't have something interesting to say.   Your postings are much more worthwhile than other people's, so it would be a waste to reply by mail.

Q: *I collected replies to an article I wrote, and now it's time to summarize.   What should I do?*

A: Simply concatenate all the articles together into a big file and post that.   On Usenet, this is known as a summary.   It lets people read all the replies without annoying newsreaders getting in the way. Do the same when summarizing a vote.

Q: *I saw a long article that I wish to rebut carefully, what should I do?*

A: Include the entire text with your article, particularly the signature, and include your comments closely packed between the lines. Be sure to post, and not mail, even though your article looks like a reply to the original.   Everybody **loves** to read those long point-by-point debates, especially when they evolve into name-calling and lots of "Is too!" Ð "Is not!" Ð "Is too, twizot!" exchanges.

Be sure to follow-up everything, and never let another person get in the last word on a net debate.   Why, if people let other people have

the last word, then discussions would actually stop!   Remember, other net readers aren't nearly as clever as you, and if somebody posts something wrong, the readers can't possibly realize that on their own without your elucidations.   If somebody gets insulting in their net postings, the best response is to get right down to their level and fire a return salvo.   When I read one net person make an insulting attack on another, I always immediately take it as gospel unless a rebuttal is posted.   It never makes me think less of the insulter, so it's your duty to respond.

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Q: *How can I choose what groups to post in?*

A: Pick as many as you can, so that you get the widest audience. After all, the net exists to give you an audience.   Ignore those who suggest you should only use groups where you think the article is highly appropriate.   Pick all groups where anybody might even be slightly interested.

Always make sure followups go to all the groups.   In the rare event that you post a followup which contains something original, make sure you expand the list of groups.   Never include a "Followup-to:" line in the header, since some people might miss part of the valuable discussion in the fringe groups.

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Q: *How about an example?*

A: Ok.   Let's say you want to report that Gretzky has been traded from the Oilers to the Kings.   Now right away you might think rec.sport.hockey would be enough.   **Wrong**.   Many more people might be interested.   This is a big trade!   Since it's a **news** article, it belongs in the news.* hierarchy as well.   If you are a news admin, or there is one on your machine, try news.admin.   If not, use news.misc.

The Oilers are probably interested in geology, so try sci.geo.fluids. He is a big star, so post to sci.astro, and sci.space because they are also interested in stars.   And of course comp.dcom.telecom because he was born in the birthplace of the telephone.   And because he's Canadian, post to soc.culture.Ontario.southwestern. But that group doesn't exist, so cross-post to news.groups suggesting it should be created.   With this many groups of interest, your article will be quite bizarre, so post to talk.bizarre as well.   (And post to comp.std.mumps, since they hardly get any articles there, and a "comp" group will propagate your article further.)

You may also find it is more fun to post the article once in each group.   If you list all the newsgroups in the same article, some newsreaders will only show the the article to the reader once!   Don't tolerate this.

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Q: *How do I create a newsgroup?*

A: The easiest way goes something like "inews -C newgroup ....", and while that will stir up lots of conversation about your new newsgroup, it might not be enough.

First post a message in news.groups describing the group.   This is a "call for discussion."   (If you see a call for discussion, immediately post a one line message saying that you like or dislike the group.) When proposing the group, pick a name with a TLA (three-letter acronym) that will be understood only by "in" readers of the group.

After the call for discussion, post the call for flames, followed by a call for arguments about the name and a call for run-on puns. Eventually make a call for "votes." Usenet is a democracy, so voters can now all post their votes to ensure they get to all 30,000 machines instead of just the person counting. Every few days post a long summary of all the votes so that people can complain about bad mailers and double votes.   It means you'll be more popular and get

lots of mail.   At the end of 21 days you can post the vote results so that people can argue about all the technical violations of the guidelines you made.   Blame them on the moderator-of-the-week for news.announce.newgroups.   Then your group might be created.

To liven up discussion, choose a good cross-match for your hierarchy and group.   For example, comp.race.formula1 or soc.vlsi.design would be good group names.   If you want your group created quickly, include an interesting word like "sex" or "activism." To avoid limiting discussion, make the name as broad as possible, and don't forget that TLA.

If possible, count votes from a leaf site with a once-a-week polled connection to botswanavax.   Schedule the vote during your relay site's head crash if possible.

Under no circumstances use the trial group method, because it eliminates the discussion, flame, pun, voting and guideline-violation accusation phases, thus taking all the fun out of it.   To create an ALT group, simply issue the creation command.   Then issue an rmgroup and some more newgroup messages to save other netters the trouble of doing that part.

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Q: *I cant spell worth a dam.   I hope your going too tell me what to do?*

A: Don't worry about how your articles look.   Remember it's the message that counts, not the way it's presented.   Ignore the fact that sloppy spelling in a purely written forum sends out the same silent messages that soiled clothing would when addressing an audience.

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Q: *How should I pick a subject for my articles?*

A: Keep it short and meaningless.   That way people will be forced to actually read your article to find out what's in it.   This means a bigger audience for you, and we all know that's what the net is for. If you do a followup, be sure and keep the same subject, even if it's totally meaningless and not part of the same discussion.   If you don't, you won't catch all the people who are looking for stuff on the original topic, and that means less audience for you.

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Q: *What sort of tone should I take in my article?*

A: Be as outrageous as possible.   If you don't say outlandish things, and fill your article with libelous insults of net people, you may not stick out enough in the flood of articles to get a response.   The more insane your posting looks, the more likely it is that you'll get lots of followups.   The net is here, after all, so that you can get lots of attention.

If your article is polite, reasoned and to the point, you may only get mailed replies.   Yuck!

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Q: *The posting software suggested I had too long a signature and too many lines of included text in my article.   What's the best course?*

A: Such restrictions were put in the software for no reason at all, so don't even try to figure out why they might apply to your article. Turns out most people search the net to find nice articles that consist of the complete text of an earlier article plus a few lines.

In order to help these people, fill your article with dummy original lines to get past the restrictions.   Everybody will thank you for it.

For your signature, I know it's tough, but you will have to read it in with the editor.   Do this twice to make sure it's firmly in there.   By

the way, to show your support for the free distribution of information, be sure to include a copyright message forbidding transmission of your article to sites whose Usenet politics you don't like.

Also, if you do have a lot of free time and want to trim down the text in your article, be sure to delete some of the attribution lines so that it looks like the original author of ± say ± a plea for world peace actually wrote the followup calling for the nuking of Bermuda.

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Q: *They just announced on the radio that the United States has invaded Iraq.   Should I post?*

A: Of course.   The net can reach people in as few as 3 to 5 days. It's the perfect way to inform people about such news events long after the broadcast networks have covered them.   As you are probably the only person to have heard the news on the radio, be sure to post as soon as you can.

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Q: *I have this great joke.   You see, these three strings walk into a bar¼*

A: Oh dear.   Don't spoil it for me.   Submit it to rec.humor, and post it to the moderator of rec.humor.funny at the same time.   I'm sure he's never seen that joke.

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Q: *What computer should I buy?   An Atari ST or an Amiga?*

A: Cross post that question to the Atari and Amiga groups.   It's an interesting and novel question that I am sure they would love to investigate in those groups.   In fact, post your question at once, to as many technical groups as you can think of, concluding your request with the line "Please reply by mail, as I do not follow this

group."   (No one will find such a statement impertinent; remember, the net is a resource to help you.)

There is no need to read the groups in advance or examine the "frequently asked question" lists to see if the topic has already been dealt with.   Any such warnings are for people without your innate sense of netiquette, and whose uninspired questions are bound to be repetitive.   Your question is sure to be unique; no point checking the list to see if the answer might be there already.   How could it be, when you only just thought of the question?

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Q: *What about other important questions?   How should I know when to post?*

A: Always post them.   It would be a big waste of your time to find a knowledgeable user in one of the groups and ask through private mail if the topic has already come up.   Much easier to bother thousands of people with the same question.

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Q: *Somebody just posted a query to the net, and I want to get the answer too.   What should I do?*

A: Immediately post a following, including the complete text of the query.   At the bottom add, "Me too!"   If somebody else has done this, follow up their article and add "Me three," or whatever number is appropriate.   Don't forget your full signature.   After all, if you just mail the original poster and ask for a copy of the answers, you will simply clutter the poster's mailbox, and save people who do answer the question the joyful duty of noting all the "me (n)s" and sending off all the multiple copies.

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Q: *What is the measure of a worthwhile group?*

A: Why, it's Volume, Volume, Volume.   Any group that has lots of noise in it must be good.   Remember, the higher the volume of material in a group, the higher percentage of useful, factual and insightful articles you will find.   In fact, if a group can't demonstrate a high enough volume, it should be deleted from the net.

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Q: *Emily, I'm having a serious disagreement with somebody on the net. I tried complaints to his sysadmin, organizing mail campaigns, called for his removal from the net and phoning his employer to get him fired.   Everybody laughed at me.   What can I do?*

A: Go to the daily papers.   Most modern reporters are top-notch computer experts who will understand the net, and your problems, perfectly.   They will print careful, reasoned stories without any errors at all, and surely represent the situation properly to the public.   The public will also all act wisely, as they are also fully cognizant of the subtle nature of net society.

Papers never sensationalize or distort, so be sure to point out things like racism and sexism wherever they might exist.   Be sure as well that they understand that all things on the net, particularly insults, are meant literally.   Link what transpires on the net to the causes of the Holocaust, if possible.   If regular papers won't take the story, go to a tabloid paper ± they are always interested in good stories.

By arranging all this free publicity for the net, you'll become very well known.   People on the net will wait in eager anticipation for your every posting, and refer to you constantly.   You'll get more mail than you ever dreamed possible ± the ultimate in net success.

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Q: *Emily, how can I put out my billboard on the information superhighway?*

A: The best way to do it is to perform a spam.   It's called that

because everybody loves it as much as the customer in the Monty Python "Spam" sketch loves his spam.

The best way to do this is to find some naive programmer and ask it to write a script that posts your message to every newsgroup. You'll start by getting as big a list of newsgroups as you can find. The members of Usenet, hoping to see your ad, have prepared these lists just for you. It doesn't really matter what your product is. If people on the net might use it, they'll be happy to read about it in every group.

Now create a message promoting yourself. Be bold, be daring, and be sure to provide info on how to contact you in ways that people on the net can't shut off. (More on that later.)

Because the reaction is going to be so overwhelming, be sure to take the following steps:

a) Unlist your phone number. The networking public is going to want to contact you so much to talk about your product or service that they'll even try to call you at home. If they get your home phone or address, they'll be sure to share it with all the other people seeking to send you their admiration, and your fame may prove too much. You want business, of course, but do you want to take orders all night?

b) Get an account with some other internet account providers. For reasons not quite certain, your provider probably has a clause in their contract with you saying not to do a spam. Even if they don't, they will probably delete your account a few hours after you announce your product, so be sure to get other accounts under assumed names so you can follow what's going on. This is the reason that expecting E-mail replies to your ad won't work.

c) Be sure you've lead a clean life. You and your product are going to become as famous as Gary Hart and O.J. Simpson! But, as you

know, such fame has its downsides, as your eager fans will research every tawdry episode from your past history.   So be sure there are no skeletons in your closet.   (Unless your product is skeletons!)

d) Due to the Brady Bill, you may want to file your firearms acquisition request a few days in advance of your ad.   Soon you're going to be rich, and you'll need to protect that wealth.

e) Load plenty of fax paper in your fax machine.   Hire extra staff to load the rolls.   There may be orders in all the faxes you will get.

f) Resign any memberships you may have in any professional associations you may have joined relating to your business that might have something as pesky as a code of ethics.   Why put them through the trouble of handling all the calls from your adoring fans, looking for somebody to talk with about you?

Ok, now you're ready.   Unleash the posting program.   Have it send your message once to every group.   There are thousands.   Now picture in your mind the prospective customer.   She starts her day, perhaps, reading a group about her hobby.   And right there is your ad!   The title is curious so she reads it.   Your name is now inserted into her mind ± you've got mindshare.   It's true your product didn't have anything to do with her hobby, but the net is there to find customers for you, not for people to share their thoughts.

Then she goes to her next group, perhaps about her brand of computer. There's your ad again!   You've sneaked into the great demographics of the high-tech world.   As she goes on, she sees your ad again and again.   Imagine her joy as she sees your now familiar headline everywhere she goes.   "Wow, they must be really big and important," she'll think.   "They're as famous as IBM." Soon that joy will be so much that she'll be ready to buy, buy, buy.

Now comes the bad news.   Usenet is unreliable, and postings don't

always work.   So, for unknown reasons, a few hours after you make your postings they will all have disappeared.   Normally you would just post them again, but by this time your internet mail access will have been deleted, as I said above, so you'll have to just sit back and bask in the adulation and orders.   There is a theory that some people, who don't like your ad, will have a smarter program than your posting program root around the net and stamp it out, but I hardly think it's likely anybody would do that.

There will be some people annoyed, it's true.   But the net has at least 10 million people on it, and you'll probably only **really** annoy perhaps 3 to 4 million of them ± a minority!

Others who have tried this have reported not only that a mere minority show displeasure, but that vast numbers of people take the time to send back inquiries and orders just so you can have more to read. Unfortunately, they rarely actually pay.   Some theorize that those in the vocal minority who don't like you are sending in pretend positive responses, to waste your time.   Who would bother to do that?   Perhaps just 1% out of the 3 to 4 million annoyed people, at most.   That shouldn't bother you too much.   A similar percentage may try to phone you, or fax you, or send bricks postage due, or subscribe you to magazines.   Ignore them.   They're just 40,000 or so of the lunatic fringe, communist element you find on the net. They're just upset because you're making money and they're not. In fact, suckers that they are, they actually ended up paying to transmit your ad everywhere.   Learn to ignore them.   (That's not advice, it's just something you'll have to do.)

Now at this point you probably have to stop answering your phone, but keep those faxes coming in, and of course get ready for the mail. If you ever do get to see some of the E-mail you got sent ± wow, what a flood!

When it settles a bit, threaten to sue anybody who didn't like you. That should put some fear of God into them.   They should have

known better than to build a system so open.   Sure, they built the network as a cooperative effort, but if they didn't want your ads, why didn't they put in protections against them or enact laws to stop them?   What you did was probably legal, so what's their complaint? They're like people who leave their keys in their cars and whine when they get stolen.   Really, like they didn't deserve it.   They just don't see the wonderful new purpose to which their network can be put, to help small, exciting firms like yours get famous.   That's the American dream, after all, and you're living it, or will, when the time comes to come back out of your bunker and reconnect your phones.

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Q: *What does foobar stand for?*

A: It stands for you, dear.

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