

# Around the OneNet

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Lately, there's been a fairly apparent observation that I'd like to share with all of you. It's something of a structure that, I believe, makes up a true online community such as The OneNet Member Network (ONMN).

There seems to be this triangle of activity that makes a OneNet system thrive. The three pieces are obvious, but not as obvious as it might initially seem. In addition, the combination of these three sides of that triangle adds up to a direction I believe OneNet needs to start heading. More about that later.

These pieces are:

1. The System (The OneNet server hardware and its members).
2. A paper based publication that reflects "The System." It acts as a pointer, educator, directory of what's on the system.
3. Live contact. Actually meeting, on a regular basis, the people you've been conversing with online for weeks, months or even years.

## 1. The System

This is the mechanical collector for everything. It acts as the 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week meeting place. A directory, coffee shop, hang out, library.

Because you can leave a message there for someone, or a group of someones, anytime, this collector transcends time. In effect, it shifts it. Because you can send your message, (i.e., communicate) with someone who is geographically far away (or on the next block), even when **they** are away, it also renders location irrelevant. It's a complete equalizer. Your age, sex, race, religion and physical appearance are simply unimportant. Here, you meet people on a level playing field. This, is something we all already know. Either intuitively or through direct experience. It's part of what draws us to being part of an online community.

## 2. Paper publishing and electronic publishing—more synergistic than we thought

Pick up the latest (February, 1994) issue of *Wired* magazine and check out page 20. A list of all the online versions of *Wired* covers three-quarters of the page; right in the middle of the list you find OneNet.

We're starting to see more and more usage of the network for this kind of thing. Publishing and online systems seem to be a good match and, as time goes on, we will see this combination as becoming something you won't really be able to tell apart.

Virtually all publishing entities in the coming years will have online/electronic equivalents. Does this mean that the paper versions of publications will be going away? Unlikely. What we suspect is that you'll be seeing more of a synergy between the paper publication and its electronic counterpart. Some experiments we're currently starting up in both California and in Colorado underline this.

In California, specifically the San Francisco Bay Area, the OneNet Los Altos system is expanding to cover the entire area with OneNet systems. This new regional system will be called the **Bay Area OneNet**. These systems will use the features of the new FirstClass v2.5 server software from SoftArc to create what appears to be a single 'virtual' server. Everyone on a OneNet system in the Bay Area will be able to send mail to any other user as if they were on their local system. All conferences will also be replicated among the systems to create a single look and feel.

Each of the local systems will, of course, still have a local flavor. For instance, OneNet San Francisco will have information on local goings on in the City of San Francisco. OneNet Santa Cruz will have the latest on beach and wave conditions. OneNet San Jose will have information on the latest goings-on downtown, on 2nd street or in the specific neighborhoods.

In addition to this virtual, distributed system, we will begin publishing a paper version of **Bay Area OneNet** that will exist as a sub-set to the online system. It will contain highlights of what's available online, as well as information that's of interest to anyone in the regional OneNet community. Initially, this publication will cover the entire Bay Area, but over time, we see a specific version forming up for each Bay Area OneNet system containing international and national information from **OneNet World**, regional information from the **Bay Area OneNet** publication and local information from the local OneNet node, all packaged in a local/global monthly publication specific to the local members of the local node on the OneNet.

In Colorado, a similar experiment is underway. OneNet Boulder, the primary hub of the OneNet Member Network, will be publishing a paper-based publication that focuses on the Denver metro area business and user community. This publication will be more commercially oriented. Although it will have stories and information that originate from the online system and its members, it will also focus on determining what the relationship is between businesses that operate online and how that translates into electronic AND paper advertising for that business. We hope to learn from these experiences and develop models that will allow us to help other areas of The OneNet Member Network expand into a fuller role as an online community.

Communities support all aspects of life. Currently, the ONMN supports most of these aspects (e.g., discussions on education, religion, entertainment, etc.), and, we hope, over the coming year, to create workable models on how to introduce commerce into the overall OneNet scheme. With that component of the online community in place, The OneNet becomes a self-sustaining entity.

### **3. Live contact**

As human beings, we don't get all of our jollies through electronic "touch." We at OneNet Los Altos recently started a monthly meeting for the Bay Area OneNet called **OneNet Live!** This regular, monthly meeting of OneNet members is nothing like a computer user-group meeting. At these meetings we ask a conference moderator to come and speak to the group on a particular topic. The topic has something to do with life, not computers. In January, 1994, we had a

lawyer speak to us about the right of privacy and how it affects every aspect of all of our lives. In February, we'll have a scientist from NASA come and speak about the space shuttle and the Hubble telescope. In March, the FBI will be speaking to us about how encryption technology isn't for techno weenies, and that all of us should be aware of what it means to have the government hold the key to privacy.

In addition at these meetings, we have a period where everyone gets to mingle and get to know each other. A sort of "real world" chat. The meeting then comes back together, and we discuss how to better use the system and to answer questions on how things work on The OneNet. We extend the meeting into the evening and, as it gets later, the discussion tends toward the arcane. By 11 p.m. or so, all that is left is usually just a bunch of administrators from Bay Area OneNet sites. By the end of the meeting, bonds have been built, deals have been cut, friendships made or expanded, and the sense of "community" is all the stronger.

If you really continue this thought of "community" to its logical conclusion, it's pretty clear where we need to take The OneNet over time:

**An online version of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and government.**

Now **this** is something of a big jump. We'll explore it more in future issues of *OneNet World*, but we wanted to get these ideas into people's minds so they could start thinking about the possibilities and, over time, implementing them.

The Pilgrims and other immigrants who landed in America developed a set principles to govern their new country/community. Something they called the Constitution. It had a set of rules that said what the members of that community were entitled to, called *The Bill of Rights*. Like those pioneers, we need to take our "community" to a similar place.

Over the coming year or two, the OneNet Board of Directors plans on working with the regional hub administrators, and the metro, city and neighborhood level system administrators to come up with an online equivalent of a Constitution and Bill of Rights for The OneNet Member Network. Along with these documents, we need to form a government of sorts—a method for distributing the control of the overall system to its members. This government should have a structure that allows checks and balances to keep the system and its community in sync.

These ideas, of course, are not new. Nor are they untried. The United States is a good example of a system that works most of the time. Yes, it has problems, but the basic principles, rights, and governmental structure are sound.

We'll be looking to you to help us to form this new "online nation"—a nation that transcends the current geographic boundaries of countries. The OneNet should become, over time, a fully "global village," with a focus on the information that is appropriate to its member's needs; and access to the global community of The OneNet Network when they need communication and communities. This access

should be available for day to day needs whether it be education, religion, entertainment, or business.

We'll keep you informed of these adventures as they develop. And if you're interested in being more involved, we'd love your help. We don't have any money to speak of, but we do have a worldwide community of people that could benefit from your help and leadership.

If you'd like to volunteer in helping us—if you've got skills in the areas of law, government, religion, engineering, programming, art, design, marketing or organizational skills—or, just plain want to help in any way, give us a call (415-948-4775) or write me at the address below. We need your help and direction to make all this happen, and to move us toward a more connected and empowered world.

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