

# THE HEIGHTS

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## Usenet provides another level of communication on the 'Net

There are many interesting places on the Internet. There are personal web pages that reflect all aspects of a person's psyche, gigantic image vaults that contain pictures of every actor to appear in the Star Trek series, and Artificially Intelli-

### My Corner of the 'Net Anthony C. Tecca

gent web servers that emulate the personalities of the characters from "Friends." However, these locales represent a cross-section of one level of the Internet, a single piece of this five-levelled pentagon that encircles the globe.

The Internet, at its roots, was a doomsday service. A myriad of computers were connected together in an indestructible network. This network would continue operating no matter how many of its numbers were destroyed. Such a system was designed to continue operation after a nuclear war, but to what end? So that college students could keep busy e-mailing each other Top Ten lists during the Nuclear Winter? Well, maybe.

The Internet was created to keep open the lines of communication between important institutes of knowledge and reconstruction. If an engineer in Las Vegas needed some figures on how long it would take to fix a 200-foot hole in the Hoover Dam, he could just e-mail MIT's engineering department.

Such exchanges of information took place from the second the "Net" was activated. Communication between universities through e-mail began in the early 80's. It

was still the domain of the "nerds" at that time, but its popularity grew steadily until it became the vast communication medium we know today.

As with all highly-evolved, well-crafted systems, many saw room for improvement. A data bank which allowed an individual to leave a message for the public to see was one idea. As more and more people started to contribute their messages, different topics were formed.

Each topic had its own group of messages, all of which were written by different people. You could save the message to your hard drive, reply to someone else's message, or send them an e-mail about their message. The system was called the "Usenet," probably because it is a user network or a marketplace for users.

ence fiction novel was written.

It is in bad taste to post a message to a group that has nothing to do with its topic. Someone might send you an irate e-mail, or you might even get "Spammed," meaning that you see sent thousands of e-mail messages from irate surfers so your mailbox will overload and

crash. The name comes from the Monty Python sketch about "Spam Spam Spam Spam..."

There are many different headers used to identify news groups. If the name comes with "alt," it's an alternative group where anything goes, i.e. alt.sex.stories. If it starts with "comp," it's a computer-related news group. "Sci" is science, "news" is current events, and "soc" is society. Any group that starts with "bc" is a local news group that only BC inhabitants can access.

After twenty years of use, tens of thousands of news groups exist, with titles ranging from "rec.games.trading-

cards.marketplace.magic.sales" to "alt.bunny.die-die-die." Particularly useful ones are the marketplace groups because you can post that you are looking for a particular hard-to-find item. You will receive e-mails from several people the next day with varying prices.

To get on the Usenet, you can use Newswatcher, a program that came with the EagleNet 96 installer for Macintosh, or Free Agent, a news reader for Windows 95. Netscape also has the ability to read the Usenet. All three applications require some personal information and the name of BC's news server which is delphi.bc.edu.

A web site that gives you the ability to read and post to the entire Usenet is <http://www.dejanews.com>. It has some great searching options and its database goes back to 1994.

All of my past articles are kept on my web site at <http://www2.bc.edu/~tecca/ac/comp.html>. Come and visit if you want the links to sites mentioned in past articles or if you are reviewing for future publication.

*As with all highly-evolved, well-crafted systems, many saw room for improvement on the Internet. Usenet, with tens of thousands of newsgroups, is one of those improvements.*

Boston College has access to a limited number of these news groups. The 2,500 available are organized under specific headings. For example: In "rec.arts.sf.composition," the "rec" means recreation, the "arts" means it is an art form, "sf" means science fiction, and "composition" means it is for those who compose science fiction.

Here, a person could post a message if he or she liked (or disliked) the way a particular sci-