1996 Waste Information Expo:

Exploring The Internet

E-mail: the low tech foundation

One of the most versatile, and easy to use, features of Internet technology is electronic mail. Once confined to computers connected by an internal network, today this tool is responsible for much of the explosion in Internet services.

E-mail may provide the a new method of communicating with employees, customers and vendors. But it unquestionably provides access to new information from peers, government agencies and other special interest groups.

Logistics
First, your computer needs a modem, a telephone line, e-mail software and an account with an e-mail provider. Modem speed is not as critical for e-mail accounts, since they transfer only text. Still, if you are in the market for a modem, buy the fastest you can afford (14.4 baud minimum recommended).

A dedicated phone line is recommended; it can be the line you share with your fax machine (just recognize that you can't send or receive faxes while you are sending/receiving e-mail).

If you choose one of the online providers – like American OnLine, CompuServe, Prodigy or MicroSoft Network – for your Internet account, then your e-mail software is provided with the service. This route is recommended for start-up because of its ease of installation and use. Just make sure that you do not have to pay a charge for each post (e-mail) that you send or receive.

The more adventurous, or anyone that begins to use e-mail seriously, should consider a direct Internet provider. For this service, you should will need e-mail software. Eudora is a popular software program for the Macintosh or the PC.

One plus of starting with the online services is access to their files of freeware or shareware for Macs and PCs. Eudora is available in these online forums or on a disk with one of the many books touting Internet access kits.

Sending Mail
The next step is sending mail! To do that, you need your recipient's address. E-mail addresses have two parts – letters or words that preceed a "@" sign and letters or words that follow the "@" sign. The letters and words are often separated by a period, which is vocalized as "dot" when you tell someone your address.

Let's look at President Clinton's e-mail address: *president@whitehouse.gov*. This is spoken as "president at whitehouse dot g-o-v."

All mail is not sent directly to "a person." Information from EPA, for example, can be received weekly by "subscribing" to a mailing list. To do this, just send an e-mail to *listserv@unixmail.rtpnc.epa.gov* with this request in the body of the message: subscribe internetnb-l your name, for example, subscribe internetnb-l Joanna Smith.

Simple, Cheap
That's all there is to it. Instant (almost) mail to anywhere on the globe. All for the cost of a local telephone call for most. (Some rural areas must dial long-distance to access the Internet.) And with an online service, you should be up and running within an hour, once your hardware is in place.

This communications tool is spawning specialty newsletters right-and-left. No postage, no post office forms, no printing! Send a newsletter to potential or existing customers. With e-mail delivery, you will save on printing and postage.

As we become more familiar with the capabilities of new technologies, we must change our references about how the world works. Only then will our imaginations be free to maximize this communications medium. So go get familiar!

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