

Book Reviews

Diane P. Janes, Editor

Hands on Internet: A Beginning Guide for PC Users, by David Sachs and Henry Stair. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: PTR Prentice Hall, 1994, ISBN 0-13-056392-7 (275 pages).

Internet: Mailing Lists, Edward T. L. Hardie and Vivian Neou (Eds.). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: PTR Prentice Hall, 1994, ISBN 0-13-289661-3 (582 pages).

Reviewed by Diane P. Janes

To continue my self-imposed mini-series on the Internet, it seemed appropriate to examine two new offerings by Prentice Hall.

Hands on Internet: A Beginning Guide for PC Users asks the question "Are you frustrated by the mass of Internet publications available which lack hands-on, how-to information?". The answer for me was yes. In my job, I am often called upon to give students enough information to send email messages to their professors, or asked by the faculty and staff to help them solve some Internet dilemma they have stumbled upon. The information provided by our campus computing department when I started exploring the Net was unreadable. (To be fair, the material has improved...or is it that I can now understand it?> Our campus librarians got into the act and produced a series of valuable handouts, again useful but missing something. Even the seminars provided by the campus library on using the Internet and specifically Memorial University's own system, did not seem to provide the basic solution to the problem.

Hands on Internet does try and solve the problem. I cannot say the authors were completely successful, but they do make a valiant attempt. The problem: how do you explain the infinite ways available to a user, to

get to that point when the computer asks for your username and password. In my laboratory alone, there are two different methods, depending on the computer you use. Add to that my home modem, the terminals in the main computer labs, the terminals in the library and you could and do have confused users.

Hands on Internet tries to solve this problem by, as they say, having the reader “learn by example” and “train by doing”. They make the reader comfortable by using common language, using bold font to emphasise jargon, and offering an explanation of the jargon within the context of the Internet. Rather than using chapters, the book is organised by what the authors’ call sessions. Beginning with the Introduction, the authors attempt to personalise the reader’s system by asking the reader questions. Yes answers get led in one direction; No answers in another. This, one hopes would solve the problem of different systems, etc. Yet when I gave this book to several users, the more experienced user found the book beneficial. (I use experienced here, lightly. The user knew how to get into his/her system and log on.) The more novice user became confused early on, until we realised she was using a VAX/VMS account, where the book indicates it will be using a UNIX based system. It took a second look to discover this information.

After the Introduction, ***Hands on Internet*** uses nine sessions (all hands on and conducted while the reader is logged on to the Internet) to teach. Session One deals with logging on to the Internet, what is an account, login names and passwords, password security, making a mistake, directories, and finally “Getting out Gracefully”. Session Two explores electronic mail - from what it is to uploading and downloading files. Session Three explores the news groups found on the Internet. (Careful here, Memorial University, as an example, uses a newsreader called TIN on its UNIX system -TIN is not mentioned in this book, that I could find). Session Four discusses contributions to Usenet, rules, posting to groups, flames and automatic signatures. Session Five describes mailing lists. Session Six explores telnet. Session Seven describes file transfer protocol (FTP). Session Eight, called Finding Things, takes the reader through gopher,archie, WAIS, and world wide web practices. Session Nine is a quick reference to all of the previous eight sessions. The sessions are followed by 4 appendices (Where to Learn More, PC Communications and the Disk, Dial-up Internet Services, and The Internet Society) and an Index. The spine of the book is colored to allow the reader quick access to a particular session. Each session ends with a vocabulary and command summary.

Hands on Internet comes with a 3.5” disk that includes “...a fully functional demonstration version of [deltaComm Development, Inc.’s] communications program Telix Lite”. Instructions on how to install and use this software and software from LotusWorks, Microsoft Windows and Microsoft Works are included. Discount forms from a number of commercial internet services are also included.

Once over the hurdle of logging in to the Internet on the system you are using, *Hands on Internet* becomes a valuable tool. Its language is clear, jargon explained, step-by-step procedures are used. Caution must be shown by novices so that they will check with their systems administrator, campus computing department, communications software manual or other experienced user to ensure the proper procedures for their own personal system.

The other book reviewed here, *Internet: Mailing Lists* is designed for the more experienced user of the Internet - the user who has logged on, who does use email regularly, but who hasn't really discovered, yet, that the Internet is a wealth of information and research possibilities.

Internet: Mailing Lists is a relatively simple book. It is part of the SRI International Internet Information Series, published by Prentice Hall. Divided into four chapters, the first three chapters take up the first 15 pages, discussing generally the Internet, BITNET and USENET, types of mailing lists, how to join a mailing list, and how to start your own list. The remainder of the book discusses over 800 mailing lists available for you to explore. The book ends with a request to readers that if they have a list they administer and would like to have it included in the next edition of this book, a template for information to be sent and an email address is included for use. The final section of the book is an index of the mailing lists. It is alphabetical but does include not only the proper name of the mailing list, but subject categories that will lead you to the appropriate mailing lists.

The book asks "What do deadheads, chess players, science fiction fans and birdwatchers have in common?". Of course the answer is the Internet and its world of special interest groups. Mailing lists can be unmoderated (anything goes), moderated (usually messages are screened before being passed on to the membership on the List, and digest formatted (messages are gathered by the moderators and grouped. Groups are sent out regularly by the moderator to the List membership). According to the editors "There are hundreds of mailing lists covering almost every topic imaginable, allowing individuals with common interests to share their thoughts and discoveries". By adding your email address to a Mailing List, the editors suggest that "...participating in a mailing list is closer to being part of a conversation than being the passive recipient of an organization's mail".

Let's look at an example from *Internet: Mailing Lists*. Have an interest in discussing the use of computers as an educational tool in higher education? Try CBEHIGH on LISTSERV@BLEKULIL.BITNET or LISTSERV@CCI.KULEUVEN.AC.BE (134.58832). Owned by several individuals and the Computer Based Education University Computing Centre, University of Leuven, Belgium, the list entry indicates who would be interested in participating in this list, who to contact if you have materials you would like stored and made available to people reading the list, how to subscribe to the list, and importantly, how to unsubscribe if you

find it is not to your needs, how and who to send a message to, and finally, that the list is unmoderated. The owners ask those sending messages to "... Make sure your messages are intended for public consumption".

If the idea of subscribing to lists as a way to broaden your Internet horizons appeals to you, then this book may be for you. A word of caution. Like all Internet books, it can become quickly out of date as the Internet grows and expands. As well there are some mailing lists that have very particular 'netiquette', that is an expected level of behavior from its members. If you are new to a mailing list, I would suggest passive monitoring (a.k.a. lurking) of the group for a while before posting. This would give you a feel for the group's "corporate culture", if you like. Also look for FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions). FAQ's are valuable in answering the most basic of questions about the group and avoids the frustration often felt by experienced users who get asked the same questions, over and over, by new subscribers. Enjoy!

REVIEWER

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