

TechnoTechnoTechnoTechno

GO GLOBAL

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Imagine a public library that's open whenever you need it. Next door is a pub, where you can drop in and chat to other writers, or share your latest work. Across the street a college tutor and classmates help to hone your writing to a publishable standard. Imagine all this at your fingertips.

Take a ride on the global highways of the Internet and you'll discover worlds of information on every conceivable, and inconceivable, subject. For the price of a local phone call, you can sit at your computer and tap into the resources of governments, agencies, companies and individuals, all eager to offer you information, usually without charge.

Whether you write for fun or profit, you can research settings for a novel, collect up-to-date information for articles, and discuss the finer points of Shakespeare through forums and newsgroups. You can enrol on correspondence courses or download fact sheets to improve your writing. Or you could publish your own work on the Internet. You might be discovered by the publishers and agents who surf the web for new talent. With such exciting possibilities only a phone call away, there's never been a better reason for getting a computer.

Getting on-line

Most of the software needed to enjoy the full quality of the Internet, such as sounds, graphics and video, runs in the Windows environment. You can still connect with an Amstrad PCW or a 286 PC, but you'll be limited to viewing text. You need at least a 386 computer, though a 486 or Pentium is better, 8Mb RAM and plenty of space on your hard disk.

When choosing a modem, go for the fastest rate of data transfer, measured in Kbs (Kilobytes/second), you can afford. A 28.8 or 33.3 kbs modem will cost more, but will save you a fortune in phone bills. Though the manual may blind you with jargon, the installation software will set up the modem painlessly.

IAP's connect you to the Internet at local call rates. Whether you visit a web site in London or Australia, the cost is the same. Many providers have services or Bulletin Boards, covering a wide range of subjects. CompuServe, AOL (America On Line) and MSN (Microsoft Network) are among the best-known, each having a distinct look and feel. Smaller providers may be more Spartan, but their charges are usually lower. On average expect to pay between \$6-15 a month, plus the phone bills you run up while connected.



Many IAP's offer a month's free trial. Others have different charging bands so you can choose the scheme that suits you. Some will tempt you with free software and special offers.

Computer magazines bulge with advertisements and offers from providers, so shop around to get what's best for you.

Providers supply the browser that gets you on-line - usually Netscape or Microsoft Internet Explorer. All you have to do is install the software and your PC and modem will connect and sign you up. Remember to have your credit or debit card handy, even when taking a month's free trial.

Navigating the Net

Like a library where someone has switched off the lights and scattered the index cards across the floor, the Internet can be a devil to navigate. Faced with unfamiliar screens and a mystery tour around the global jungle, you could rush straight to the Help screens for guidance, or, if you're like me, you skip the manuals and dive in, learning by experience as you grope around.

The easiest way is to go to the ADDRESS BOX and experiment. Most addresses start with <http://www>. Follow this with the company name and **.co.uk** or **.com**. Universities are represented by their initials, followed by **ac.uk**. For reasons too boring to explain, always use lower case when typing in addresses. Type <http://www.bbc.co.uk> to visit the BBC web site. From there, you can navigate the hundreds of pages and sites about the BBC and its programmes by clicking the relevant boxes.

The alternative is to SEARCH for a specific subject. Click the SEARCH button and type 'writers' in the box provided. You'll get a choice of Search Engines, with names like Yahoo, Lycos, infoseek or altavista. Each can browse its own huge database for entries containing the word 'writers'. Don't be surprised if you're given over a million matches! Narrow the search by typing 'writers groups', or 'writers groups UK'. But make sure you choose the option to look for entries that contain all three words. Otherwise you'll get entries that contain one or more of the three. UK, for example, could call up all UK hotels.

Each entry has a brief summary. Scroll through until you find one that interests you and then click on it to connect to the site. You can then move around the site and use its links to others to get what you need. Store

If you have any computing questions, why not drop us a line?

useful sites in FAVOURITES so you can go direct next time, instead of clocking up the phone bill on another search. To save time and speed up the process, switch off the auto-load images and list topics without summaries.

When you find what you want, save time and money by either printing the pages, or downloading them. You can look at them later when you come off-line.

Most providers supply you with a program for sending and receiving E Mail. Windows 3.1 comes with Mail, while Microsoft Exchange is part of Windows 95, allowing you to send and receive through an application called inRox. If you have Word 7, you can use this word processor to compose your messages the way you write letters.

Incoming messages are stored by your provider. When you connect, it will tell you that several messages have arrived since your last visit. Click on the MAIL ICON, to view the list. As before, download the ones you want and read them off-line. After a week or so, your provider will delete the messages to stop the system clogging up.

Every subscriber has their own E Mail address. This will be on the message they send you, or if you join a newsgroup or forum, the address will be on the web page E mail addresses which will comprise of a name or numbers, the @ symbol, and a domain name **j.smith@nifty.net.co.uk**, for example.

And finally...

If you prefer instant communication, you can join a Chatline and converse through typed messages to others. Or with the requisite software, use a microphone and have a telephone conversation. You could talk to your publisher in Australia - all for the price of a local phone call.

Jargon Box

- Browser** - a program that allows your computer to download and display documents from the Internet.
- Internet** - a global network, made up of thousands of smaller networks, all linked by telephone wires.
- Internet Access Provider (TAP)** - a company that sells access to the Internet.
- Modem** - the electronic box that connects your computer to the telephone line. It can also double as a fax and answering machine.
- Newsgroups** - bulletin boards on the internet covering every conceivable subject.
- Windows** - the most widely used operating system, developed by Microsoft to run programs. Other systems include. DOS, OS2/Warp and Macintosh