FEATURE – INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERNET

Part One: Super Highway? How many lanes is that?

BY DANIEL CLARK

It has been called the information super-highway, "the 'net", and online. It made Nicholas Negroponte's book *Being Digital* a household word. It helped cement Sandra Bullock as an idol for millions of techno-geeks. It even got Bob Dole's feathers in a muss. It is the Internet, and it's here to stay.

To dispel all the mystery of the Internet, we can define it as a network of millions of computers worldwide all linked together by either high speed data lines (57,600 bytes per second (BPS)), or telephone lines (up to 33,000 BPS).

The Internet is used to exchange information between your computer and another system somewhere else in the world. There are essentially six ways to communicate with another computer on the Internet.

The first and simplest is Electronic Mail. E-Mail, as it has been called, is a simple one-way communication from your computer to another, or vice versa. You can send messages or entire files. All you need is an E-mail account, a mail program (Pine, Eudora, Pegasus, Netscape, etc.), and the address of your destination.

The second information pathway is the World Wide Web. It is probably the most well known component of the Internet. It is a graphically designed, destination-oriented system where a individual can design and display information for you to browse.

Using a code known as the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML), an individual can design Web Pages, destinations one can visit and extract information from. The Web is the most user-friendly platform on the Internet; in most cases all one has to do is point the Mouse at whatever interests them...and click.

There are three main programs which are available for "surfing the Web". The Netscape Navigator and the Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) are currently the two most popular Web browsers, with Netscape capturing some 65% of the market with their superior browser. Both Netscape and Microsoft offer their browsers free to individuals at their official corporate websites (www.netscape.com, and www.microsoft.com respectively). The third program is a throwback to a time when the Web was text only. It is called Lynx, and it is available on the Dalhousie IS2 system.

A third method of accessing the Internet is called Telnet. Telnet involves the use of file servers, like Dalhousie's IS2 server, which is available to all Dal students. Telnet is a remote access utility, which allows account holders to access the file server on which they have an account from any remote terminal. For instance, I can be in Toronto, and using Telnet and my mother's Internet connection I can access my Dalhousie account.

The fourth surfing tool is the File Transfer Protocol (FTP). FTP is similar to Telnet in that it accesses remote databases and servers, but it is specifically designed to transfer files from your computer to the one you have accessed and vice versa. FTP is like a courier between a computer and a file server.

Netscape Navigator is now able to both send and receive files using FTP, but they still have not perfected it. The best program is WSFTP. The great advantage to FTP is that many systems have treasure troves of software. They allow anonymous logons, and let you copy these files. FTP is the perfect method by which to stock up on programs.

The next access ramp to the information superhighway is known as the Usenet. Usenet is a smorgasbord of Newsgroups. These are sites where individuals can post comments and information on virtually any topic. Subjects are as varied as alt.bible, alt.barney.die.die, sex.anal, and dal.general.

Usenet has encountered some scrutiny of late because it is impossible to censor, or even restrict in any way. The information is often explicit, and pulls no punches. This is not for the faint of heart. You can use Netscape to browse Newsgroups, or one of many other excellent programs available.

The final Internet access is the Inter-Relay Chat. IRC is what you get when you meld Newsgroups and Live Bulletin Board discussion groups. With an IRC program (there are several of them available) you can have live "discussions" with anyone in the world on virtually any subject.
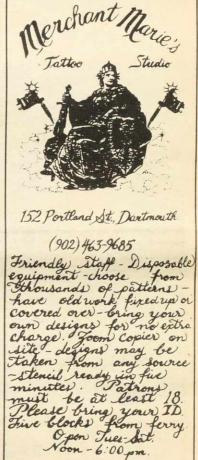
Like Newsgroups, IRC is divided into topics and geographic location. Communication is conducted via short, typed messages, or by video or audio conferencing which almost instantly appears on the screens of everyone else logged on to the discussion. You can receive replies and even go into private chatrooms to speak privately.

If you want to try out the Internet, you can always just wander into one of Dalhousie's computer labs. To get an account, go to the University Computer and Information Services desk in the basement of the Killam library, where they offer free IS2 connections.

And try looking up the Gazette web site (http://is2.dal.ca/~gazette/). If you have any problems you can talk to the kind folks at one of the help desks, once again located in the basement of the Killam Library.

Next week Dan will discuss how to get on to the Internet, what type of equipment you need, and what services are available to you.

Hoummas for Sale

BY MARIE ABI DAOUD

Have you ever tasted hoummas?

Do you even know what hoummas is?

Well, until that Thursday night when *Friends* had hoummas on the show, not many people did. However, Arabic culture and society are becoming more and more common for Canadians. Dalhousie students will be able to enjoy a hands-on experience of that culture today when the Dalhousie Arabic Society (DALAS) hosts an exhibition in the Green Room.

Students will get a firsthand look at Arabic society and style. The event will have exhibits on 21 Arabic countries, including food, brochures, pictures, clothes, music, and people on hand to answer your questions. There will also be 15-20 minute seminars on the many different Arabic countries.

Hazem Al-Agez, president of DALAS, believes that the exhibition will educate Dalhousie students about the life, religion, and economy in the different Arab nations. The treasurer of the society, Mohammad Abou-Shahla, agrees.

"What we (DALAS) are trying to do is show people, the Canadian people especially and the students at Dal, the diversi-fication of the Arabic world and how it differs from one culture to another," says Abou-Shahla.
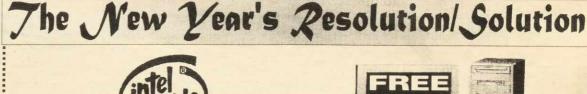
The Dalhousie Arabic Society's main purpose is to represent the voice of the Arab students at Dalhousie and to educate all the students about Arab nations. They're hoping to clear up prejudices and stereotypes about Arab nations that appear throughout everyday life. The Arabic society wants to show people, through their exhibition and upcoming banquet, that they exist and have great pleasure in presenting their respective countries to their friends at Dalhousie.

"Basically they (the visitors) will find an answer to all the questions they have in mind, hopefully, and clear up any prejudices or stereotypes, and get a taste of the culture as well," comments Al-Agez.

The exhibition will hopefully attract people to the society, making things meaningful and putting things into perspective for all.

"People should expect good food!" adds Ruba Afani, vice-president of the Arabic society.

So, do you want to actually taste hoummas? Your best chance is to come to the Arabic Society Exhibit today from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the Green Room.