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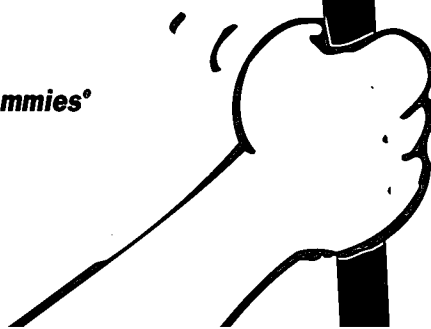
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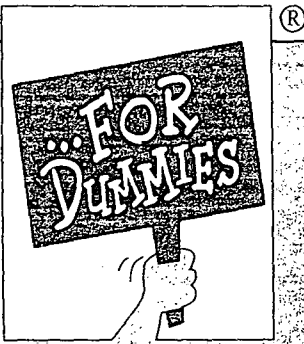
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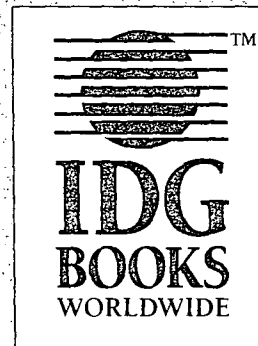
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FOR
DUMMIES[®]
3RD EDITION**

by John Kaufeld

Foreword by Steve Case
President and CEO of America Online, Inc.



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About the Author

John Kaufeld got hooked on computers a long time ago. Somewhere along the way, he discovered that he *enjoyed* helping people understand how computers worked (a trait his Computer Science friends generally considered a character flaw. John graduated with a B.S. degree in Management Information Systems from Ball State University and became the first PC support technician for what was then Westinghouse, outside Cincinnati, Ohio. He learned about online services in the Dark Ages of Telecommunication (the 1980s) by guessing, failing, and often doing unmentionable things to his modem.

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John's other IDG Books titles include *Global Network Navigator For Dummies*, *Access For Windows 95 For Dummies*, *FoxPro 2.6 For Windows For Dummies*, and *Paradox 5 For Windows For Dummies*. He regularly uses America Online (where he's known as JKaufeld) and other online services. He loves to get e-mail and valiantly attempts to answer every message he gets.

John lives with his wife, two children, one overbearing canary, and a lovable American Eskimo dog in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Dedication

To Jenny, for keyword testing above and beyond the limits of sanity. To J.B. and the Pooz, for being incredibly patient. *Now* it's time for Chuck E. Cheese! To my friends and compatriots at IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., for the opportunity of a lifetime. Thank you, one and all.

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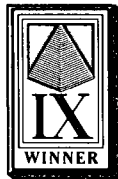


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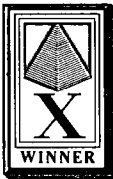
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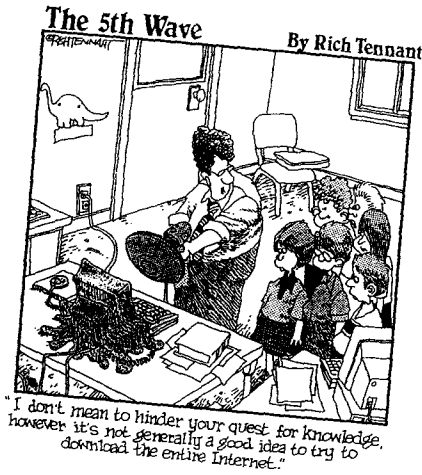
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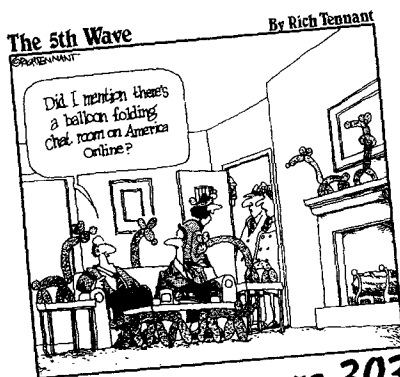
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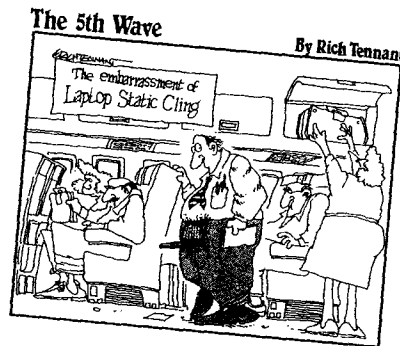
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Foreword

We founded America Online, Inc., with a simple objective: to make online services more accessible, more affordable, more useful, and more fun for people from all walks of life. And that formula appears to be working. America Online now serves more than 6,000,000 customers, and that number is growing daily. In fact, AOL is the fastest growing consumer online service in the nation.

That success has been driven in large part by remaining faithful to our original charter: making online services accessible to everyone. In designing the service, we wanted to make it as “intuitive” as possible, meaning everybody from Fortune 500 executives to elementary school students could “surf” throughout our many departments. We didn’t want customers to labor over a copy-intensive book to get connected, so we made the software easy to install and use. As a result, new America Online customers are usually up and running in less than 15 minutes. Try doing that with your VCR.

We’ve also worked hard to continually add new services through strategic partnerships with content providers. If it seems as if America Online is in the business sections of major newspapers on an almost daily basis, it’s because we are; we are adding new content to our service at an incredibly rapid pace and have no plans to slow down.

And still there’s more: With increased interest in the Internet and the World Wide Web, we upgraded our Internet gateway to permit AOL subscribers full access to this “network of networks” and all it has to offer. And it’s all there at a simple, affordable price.

But as good as we’ve been at making the service simple to operate, the sheer volume of information available has made the online world akin to trying to tour the Smithsonian in one day. That’s where this book, *America Online For Dummies*, comes in. Although we think America Online is already “dummy-proof,” John’s book makes AOL just that much easier to enjoy. And enjoy you will as we continue to add unique new services, sign on more content providers, and expand AOL subscribers’ access to the Internet.

As you’ll discover, America Online is a living, breathing “electronic community” that bridges the lives of all our members in an engaging, interactive format. Every day, tens of thousands of AOL subscribers go online and scan their stock portfolios, talk to friends, make airline reservations, read their favorite magazines and newspapers, and actively participate in discussions about hundreds of different topics. We provide the framework; beyond that, America Online is shaped by the collective imagination of its participants.

How often do you get to take part in a revolution? A new interactive communications medium is emerging, and it will change the way we live, work, and play. America Online is at the forefront of this revolution, and we invite you to join us in shaping this new medium.

Steve Case
President and CEO
America Online, Inc.

Introduction

"Hi — welcome to the neighborhood!"

That probably wasn't the first thing you expected to hear when you joined America Online, but it's just the first of many surprises awaiting you. America Online is quite different from those *other* online services. Luckily for you, *America Online For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is equally unique.

This book is your friendly tour guide and road map to an intriguing corner of the digital world. In here is everything you need to get started with (and get the most from) the friendliest and fastest growing online service in the country: America Online. The best part is that you don't need to be some normalcy-challenged computer technoid to make sense of it all. *America Online For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is written in plain language — the way everyone talked back when *computers* interfaced and *people* had conversations. The book is designed to give you the information you need quickly so that you can get back to the fun stuff at hand.

But don't just take my word for it — jump on in and discover what's here for you. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Who I Think You Are

To know you is to understand you, and goodness knows, if I can't understand you, I can't help you. With that statement in mind (a challenge in itself), here's what I know about you:

- ✓ You're either interested in America Online or are currently using it (and are feeling the effects).
- ✓ You use an IBM-compatible or a Macintosh computer.
- ✓ You have a modem attached to your computer.
- ✓ You care more about dinner than about modems and computers *combined*.
- ✓ Terms such as *BPS*, *download*, and *Internet* nip at your heels like a pack of disturbed Chihuahuas.

If these statements sound familiar, this book is for you.

It's All English — Except for Parts in "Geek"

When you're working with America Online, it's kind of like being in a two-way conversation: You give commands to the system, and the system displays messages back at you (so be careful what you say!). This book contains stuff about *both* sides of the conversation, so keep in mind the following ways to help you figure out who's talking to whom:

If the text looks like this, America Online is saying something clever on-screen that you don't want to miss.

If the text looks like this, it's something you need to tell America Online by typing it somewhere on-screen. (Remember to be nice — no yelling.)

If it's time to choose something from a menu, the text shows some options separated by an arrow — for example, Mail ⇨ Compose Mail. That means you should choose the menu marked Mail and then click the Compose Mail option.

Because you're using America Online in either a Macintosh or Microsoft Windows environment, you also must deal with the mouse. In this book, I assume that you know the following basic mouse maneuvers:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Click | Position the mouse pointer and then quickly press and release the mouse button (specifically, the <i>left</i> button, if your mouse has two to choose from). |
| Double-click | Position the mouse pointer and then click twice — basically, two regular clicks. (That's why they call it a <i>double-click</i> — remember, the people who designed this stuff weren't hired to be clever.) |
| Click and drag | Position the mouse pointer and then press <i>and hold</i> the mouse button as you move the mouse across the screen. As before, use the left button if you have more than one button. After the mouse pointer gets to wherever it's going, release the button. You often use this technique to highlight some text on-screen, such as when you're editing a mail message. |
| Right-click | This doesn't do anything in America Online, but at least it makes you <i>feel</i> as if that other button is there for a reason. |

If all this mouse stuff is news to you, I wholeheartedly recommend picking up a copy of *Windows 3.11 For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, *Windows 95 For Dummies*, or *Macs For Dummies*, 4th Edition, all from IDG Books Worldwide, Inc.

Frolicking (Briefly) through the Book

This book is organized into five distinct parts, plus a couple of appendages — oops, sorry — *appendixes*. To whet your appetite, here's a peek at what each contains:

Part I: Driver's Ed for the Digital Traveler

This answers the stirring question, "Just what the heck is America Online and why do I care?" Part I gives you a broad overview of what the whole service is about. It explains what you need to know about online services in general, walks you through an average America Online day, gives you some pointers for making the place a little more like "home," and concludes with some tips for being a good online citizen. In short, it's kinda like digital driver's education.

Part II: Surviving the Software

At least half (and possibly more) of working with America Online is dealing with the custom communications software. It's this software that really sets America Online apart from its competitors. America Online's software is a full-featured program that does everything except wax your car (and I've heard they're considering that for a future version). This part pushes the buttons, plays with the windows, and generally fiddles with everything else that's important to your online life.

Part III: Flipping through the Channels

In yet another attempt to keep you from completely shorting out when faced with all the stuff America Online has to offer, the service is split into channels. Part III looks behind all those doors and introduces each one in turn. You find out what's available and where to look for the things that interest you. You even get spaces to write in notes about additional services (because something new is *always* popping up).

Part IV: Going Your Own Way

This part is *especially* for you — well, for you, your kids, your neighbors, and various broad stratas of the country's entire populace. You see, this part has a chapter for just about everyone. That's the whole point of Part IV: to give you a view of America Online from whatever unique perspective you may have, whether as a parent, a student, a small-business person . . . or something else.

Note: If you're already an America Online user and are not using Version 3.0 of the America Online software, you won't see the clever channel motif that the AOL programmers came up with for this latest version, and you won't see 21 channels, either. They did some reorganizing this time around and turned the 14 departments into 21 channels. Always something.

I strongly recommend that you upgrade to the 3.0 version as soon as possible, which you can do with the enclosed disk if you're running Windows. Mac users can call 1-800-827-6364 to get a copy of the Mac version when it's available.

Part V: The Part of Tens

It just wouldn't be a ...*For Dummies* book without a Part of Tens. You'll find here what you need to make your money go further, make sense of what's happening in the chat areas, and get a few more laughs in before the end of the day.

Appendixes

No, the Appendixes are *not* a chain of mountains in the outer reaches of Mongolia; they're the last two chapters (sorta) in the book. The Appendixes tell you how to install the America Online software on a Macintosh or in Microsoft Windows 3.1 or 95. They explain the entire installation process (and even tell the Macintosh folks how to get a free copy of the latest America Online software; Windows users, of course, have the one included with this book — but don't gloat!). If your software is still languishing on a disk, this is the place to start.

Icons, Icons Everywhere

To make finding the important stuff in the book a little easier (and to help you steer clear of the technical hogwash), this book has a bunch of icons scattered throughout. Each icon marks something in the text that's particularly vital to your online existence. Here's a brief guide to what these little road signs mean:



This icon marks ideas that stretch your online dollars as far as possible. Put enough of these to work and this book pays for itself (really — it will).



This icon *notes* details that you should keep in mind. Why? That's an excellent question. Because they're important, that's why.



If you see a Remember icon, get out your highlighter, because the text is *definitely* worth bearing in mind, both now and in the future.



You can benefit from my experience (both good and bad) whenever you spy a Tip icon. Whether it marks a trap to avoid or a trick to make your life easier, you can't go wrong heeding a Tip.



Like it or not, I have to include some truly technical twaddle. To shield you from it as much as possible, I mark the techie stuff with this icon. If you see this turkey, flip — don't lazily turn — to the next page. Really, it's better for everyone this way.



If you need to do something that's just the tiniest bit dangerous (such as walking the trail into the Grand Canyon while blindfolded and on laughing gas), this icon tells you to proceed with caution. Pay close attention to these warnings; they mark the most dire of pitfalls. (Don't worry, though; they aren't too frequent in America Online.)



A few things work a little differently on the Mac than they do in Windows. This icon points you Mac users to information and procedures that relate specifically to the Mac.

It's Time to Get Started!

So much for the introductory stuff. Time to get out there and see what you can do with America Online. If you're completely new to America Online, go through Chapter 1 before doing anything else. You may also want to swing by Chapter 2 for some ideas of where to start. More experienced AOLers can go directly to Parts III and IV to catch up on the latest in America Online services.

Either way, go on out there and have some fun — and keep this book handy, just in case you need a little help now and then.

Part I

Driver's Ed for the Digital Traveler

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

Driver's Education class is the only thing holding this country together. It's a massively shared experience. Everyone, at one time or another, learns how to drive. And we all do it with white knuckles the first time, thinking that 20 miles per hour is kinda fast and that maybe we ought to ease it down to a nice, pedestrian 10 miles per hour for a while.

The first time you face the vast plains of the online world, that old memory may rise up. Gripping the disks with white knuckles, wondering if maybe 14,400 bps isn't just a little fast and that perhaps you should just run the modem at 2,400 bps until you get the hang of it.

Hey — it's going to be okay. The truth is that you can surf the Internet, hold an interactive conversation with people all over the country, and receive files from a computer that's 7,000 miles away without knowing (or caring to know) the details of how it all works.

This part gives you an overview of what this crazy America Online thing is all about and what it can do. It also offers some tips for getting comfortable in your new digital habitat and a note or two about working and playing well with others online.

Get ready for the ride of your life. Now, where did I put those car keys?

Chapter 1

What You've Gotten Yourself Into (and What You Need to Get Out)

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ What this *online* thing is all about
 - ▶ The stuff you need to make it work
 - ▶ Details about hardware, software, modems, and more
-

Perhaps you just bought a new computer and happened across a stray icon labeled *America Online*. Or maybe your parent, child, or significant other decided that it was time for you to join the online revolution and endowed you with all the goodies this revolution requires. Or perhaps you don't quite know what to make of all this talk about the *Information Superhighway* and worry that you're getting left behind at the rest stop.

If you want to get an idea of what *online* means and understand what it takes to get there with America Online, this is the place to start. This chapter explains all this introductory stuff to prepare you for the real meat of the issue: actually going online. (Don't panic — that happens in the next chapter.) For now, kick back and get ready to understand what your parent, child, or significant other has been talking about all this time.

What Online Really Means

What *is* this *online service* stuff anyway? And does it have something to do with the Information Superhighway? Do you even care? Why or why not? Please write a detailed answer on the inside cover of a matchbook and then set the whole thing on fire, watching with pleasure as it burns to a crisp. Don't you feel better now?

If you do, you're not alone. Many people feel apprehensive about this mysterious electronic world you're entering. Take heart, though, because online services used to be *much* more mysterious than they are today. Don't worry if the whole concept seems more than a bit bizarre to you right now. That's okay; the reaction is normal. Mainly, those feelings prove you're not a nerd. Congratulations on passing the test!

But back to the question at hand: What *is* an online service? Conceptually, it's a lot like cable TV. You buy a subscription from your local cable company and hook your television into its network with a funny looking box that freaks out sometimes. A special wire connects the box to a wall socket. If everything does what it's supposed to, you turn on the TV and choose among a wide variety of programming, depending on your interests. When it doesn't work, the problem may be in your TV, with the used-to-be-funny-looking-but-is-now-totally-brain-dead little box, or somewhere from the wall jack to the cable company itself. At the end of the month, you get a bill that you grudgingly pay, all the while wondering if cable TV is really worth all the money you spend on it.

With a few clever substitutions, the same analogy describes America Online (and those *other* online services as well). You hook your computer to a funny looking box called a *modem* (which, like its cable TV counterpart, sometimes freaks out), and plug a plain phone cord from the modem to the phone jack on the wall. With some special software, you sign up for an America Online account. If everything does what it's supposed to do, you dial a local number and contact America Online's computers in Virginia. After connecting, you choose among a wide variety of services, depending on your interests. When things don't work, the problem may be with your computer, the software, the modem (stupid modems . . .), or somewhere from the wall jack to America Online itself. At the end of the month, you get a bill that you gleefully pay, flush with the memory of everything you did online.



By the way, the term *online* means "to be connected with." If you're *online* with America Online, a link is actually set up through the phone between your computer and America Online's computers. When you get right down to it, the computers are having this swell digital conversation behind the scenes, while you're busy reading the news, sending electronic mail, or doing whatever else you do on America Online.

The entire process looks much like Figure 1-1. Your computer, running America Online's special software, tells the modem to call a particular phone number. The modem dials the number and waits to hear from another modem. The two modems whistle and beep at each other for a while (the technical term for this is *feature negotiation*, although I always thought of it as some kind of electronic flirting). After the modems settle down, they get to work completing your connection to America Online's computer system.

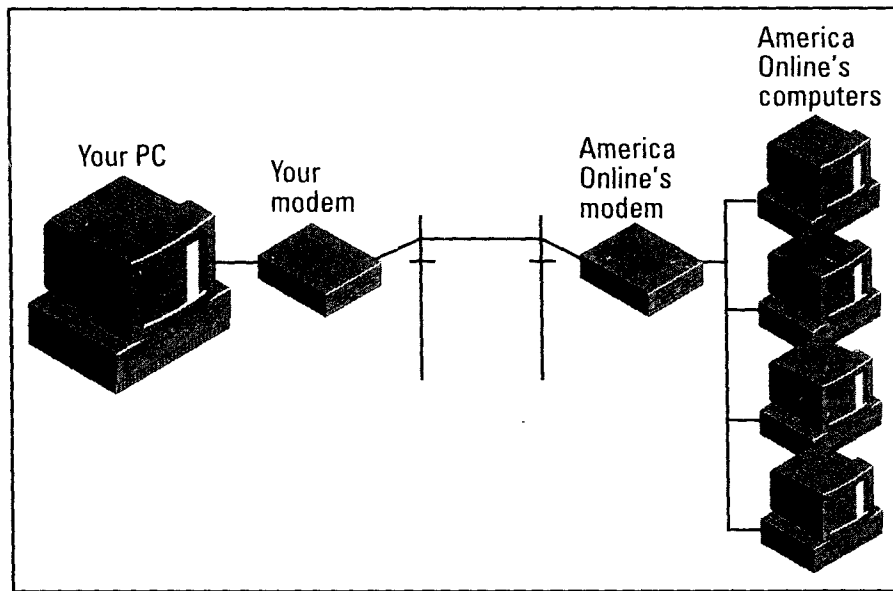


Figure 1-1:
Going online
usually
means
going "on-
phone-line."



Want to know something neat? That's *all* you need to know about the technology behind America Online. Really — I wouldn't kid you about something like this. All the cool things you can do, all the fun tricks, all the stuff that makes America Online a really wild and woolly place — all these *do* require a *lot* of technology, *but it doesn't matter to you*. You don't have to know any of this to use America Online!

All It Takes Is a Bunch of Stuff

Now that you have a conceptual picture of how all this online business happens, you're ready to dig a little deeper and get into some specifics. You need four parts to make this online thing a reality: the America Online software, a computer, a modem, and a phone line. The following sections explore each element just enough to give you a good understanding of what you need without turning you into a computer nerd (ewww — the very thought gives me the shivers).

If you're starting from scratch and need to get *everything*, I recommend finding a computer guru to give you a hand. Depending on where you find your guru, this help may cost anywhere from a few dozen brownies to a few dozen greenbacks. If you *do* seek expert help, make sure that your expert understands online services (preferably America Online) and gives sound, unbiased advice. Don't get help from someone you just met whose primary experience comes from working at a computer store. Check with your friends for the name of a trusted and handy computer guru you can borrow for a while.

First, you need the right software

America Online is a pretty special place, not only because of its content and services but also for the look and feel of its interface (the buttons, menus, and windows that are on-screen). America Online's programmers reviewed how other online services looked and worked. From this investigation came a startling analysis: "Yuck. Where are the windows? And the mouse? What — no buttons or drop-down menus? Geez, this is grim."

America Online's programmers decided to do things the *right* way from the start. This decision meant a break with tradition, because people would need special software to join America Online; they couldn't use the good ol' modem program they knew and loved. It was a risk, but it paid off handsomely in better features, ease of use, and consistency.

To sign on to America Online, you need the official America Online access software — accept no substitutes. You can't use PROCOMM PLUS, MicroPhone, or any other plain vanilla modem program. Nope, they just won't work with America Online. But don't let that worry you, because the access software is (lean in closer, I don't want everybody to hear this) *free*. Better still, the latest copy of the software for Windows is right in this book!



If you're a Macintosh user, please don't feel left out. You can get a copy of the latest America Online software by calling 800-827-6364. (Plus, you can give the software for Windows that comes with this book to a friend who uses Windows and then have someone to explore the service with.)

If the America Online software came preloaded on your computer, make sure that you have the latest version. Table 1-1 shows the current software version number for each kind of computer platform that America Online supports and explains how to politely find out which version you have. You don't have to be (and, in fact, *shouldn't* be) signed on to America Online to find out the software version number.

Table 1-1 Version, Version, Who's Got Which Version?

| <i>Platform</i> | <i>Current Version</i> | <i>How to Find the Version Number</i> |
|-----------------|------------------------|---|
| DOS | 1.6 | With the America Online software running, choose Help ⇨ About from the Main Menu. The version number is in the pop-up dialog box. (See the impending sidebar for some important information.) |
| Macintosh | 2.7 | In the Finder, click the America Online icon once and then choose File ⇨ Get Info from the Finder menu or press ⌘+I . The version number is in the pop-up information dialog box (see Figure 1-2). |

| Platform | Current Version | How to Find the Version Number |
|----------|-----------------|--|
| Windows | 3.0 | With the America Online software running, choose Help → About America Online from the menu bar. The version number is near the top of the screen (see Figure 1-3). |

Figure 1-2: Check the version number of your Macintosh software directly from the Finder.

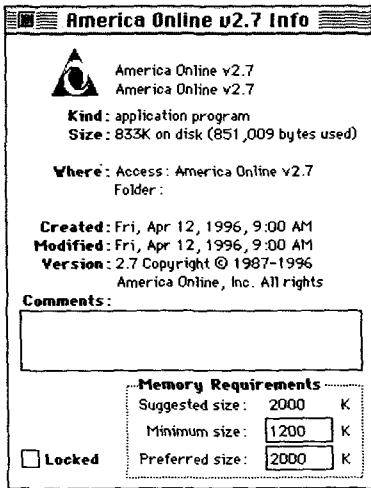
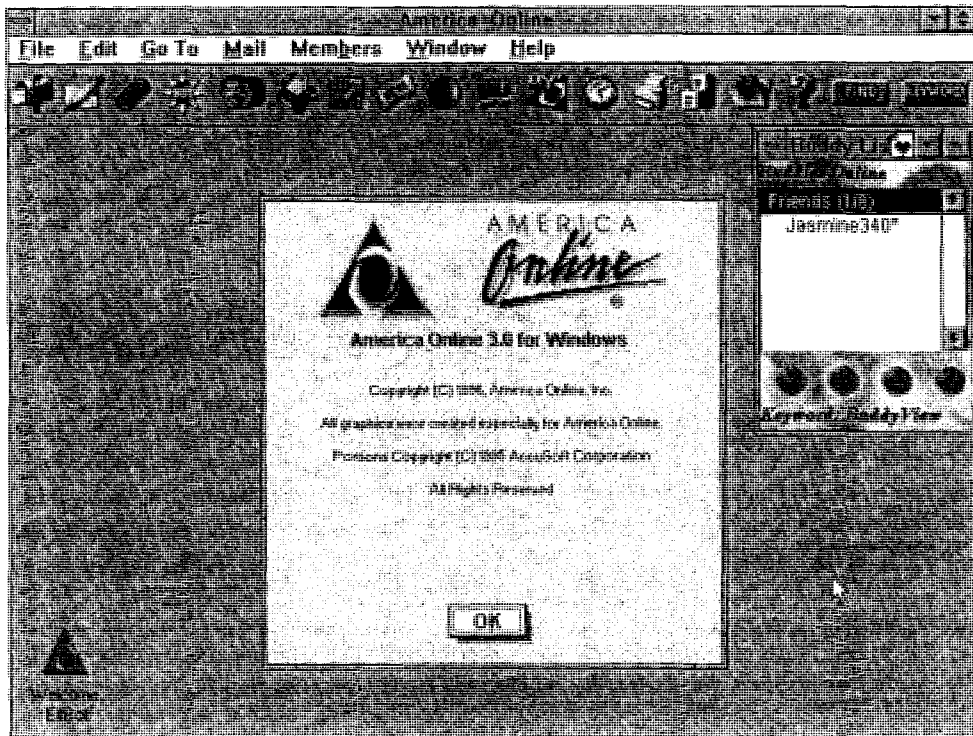


Figure 1-3: The latest America Online software for Windows shows off its version number.





Although knowing your program's version number seems a little nerdy, you have a good reason to find out what it is. This book covers the *newest* America Online software. If you're using an older version, you're going to get confused very quickly (and that's definitely *not* my goal). Also, if you're using the software for DOS, now's the time to consider upgrading to Windows (see the sidebar "Alas, poor DOS, I knew it well" for details).

A computer is a must

You can't get around this one: To use America Online, you *must* have a computer. Sorry, but that's the way these things go. Having settled that point, the next logical question is, "Okay, smart guy, what *kind* of computer?" "Well," I reply, "that's up to you."

Because America Online's special access software comes in both Macintosh and Windows versions, you have some leeway in choosing your computer. (A DOS version also exists, but just pretend that it doesn't.) Choose whichever one you feel more comfortable with. Don't worry if you use Windows at work but prefer a Macintosh for home (or vice versa). You'll be able to share documents, spreadsheets, and many other files between your computers without any problems.

Alas, poor DOS, I knew it well

The newest America Online software contains truly cool stuff: access to the World Wide Web, lots of multimedia gizmos, neat graphics, and sounds for every occasion. Yup, it sure looks great on the Macintosh and in Windows. Unfortunately for you DOS users out there, those are the only places you can see it.

The current software for DOS, Version 1.6, is probably the last of its kind. America Online says that it isn't working on any new software for DOS. Sorry, but it had to happen sooner or later.

If you use the software for DOS, all is not lost. You can keep right on using the software you already have. The downside is that you'll miss

out on the World Wide Web and all the multimedia features and never know the thrill of loading new software and discovering the wonderful gadgets those clever America Online programmers came up with this time.

My advice: Upgrade to Windows. If your computer is close to heaving its last labored breath, consider donating it to a worthy cause (or if it's *particularly* close to failing, give it to a cause you don't like) and buying a replacement. I'm sorry I don't have better news for those of you who use DOS. Look on the bright side: At least you can still access the system while you figure out what to do.

If you buy a new computer for your online adventures, make sure that it has the following:

- ✓ A fast processor (at least a Pentium for Windows or a Power PC in a Macintosh)
- ✓ Plenty of random-access memory (8 to 16MB is good for either a Macintosh or Windows)
- ✓ A quality color monitor (15 inches is a good size, 17 inches is better)
- ✓ Lots of hard disk space (800MB or more)

If all this computer jargon sounds foreign to you, pick up a copy of *PCs For Dummies*, 4th Edition, or *Macs For Dummies*, 4th Edition, both from IDG Books Worldwide, Inc.

A modem enters the picture

The next piece of the puzzle is a *modem*, the device that converts your computer's electronic impulses into whistles, beeps, and various digital moose calls. It then yells these noises through the phone line to another equally disturbed modem attached to another computer.



The term *modem* is actually an acronym (and you thought you were safe, didn't you?). It stands for MODulator/DEModulator, which is a computer nerd's way of saying that it both talks and listens. To learn more than you could possibly want to know about modems, get a copy of *Modems For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, from IDG Books Worldwide, Inc.

The main things you're looking for in a modem are a well-known manufacturer and blazing speed. My recommendations are as follows:

- ✓ Get a modem made by US Robotics or Hayes. Although many other modems are available, these manufacturers stand behind their products better than all the rest.
- ✓ If you're buying a new modem, make sure that it's fast — 28,800 bits per second (bps) is above average these days, 14,400 bps is good, and 2,400 bps is utterly out of the question.
- ✓ If you buy a 28,800 bps modem, get one that supports the V.34 standard. V.34 is the international screeching and whistling standard for 28,800 bps modems. More importantly, you *don't* want a modem that only supports something called V.FC (a competing modem standard).

Many computers include a modem as part of the deal these days. If you aren't sure whether your PC includes one, glance at the back of the machine and look for a place to plug in a phone cord. Congrats — there's your modem!



A few words about modem speed

A modem's speed is measured in *bits per second* (bps). The more bits per second, the more information the modem stuffs down the phone line in a given period of time.

Because America Online doesn't charge extra to use a faster modem, you save a lot of money in the long run by using the fastest modem you

can. Right now (as I write this book), America Online supports 28,800 and 14,400 bps modems in major cities, with continuous expansion plans on the horizon.

My advice: Pay a little extra and get the fastest modem possible, because it will pay you back tomorrow and many days thereafter.

What about a phone line?

All this other stuff won't do you a whit of good if you don't have a phone line to connect it to. The phone is your link with beautiful, metropolitan Vienna, Virginia, the home of America Online. Luckily, you don't need a special phone line — just about any phone line will work.

The key words in that last sentence are *just about*, because not all phone lines are created equal. Many phone lines have been endowed by their subscribers with certain very alien services — such as call waiting — that interfere with a computer's basic rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of a connection with America Online.

(Sorry, I've been reading American history lately and got a little carried away. If I had an "I'm so embarrassed" icon, rest assured I'd insert it here.)

To successfully use a modem, you need an *analog* phone line. If your home has a single phone line (or two plain, old-fashioned phone lines), you have an analog phone line. Fax machines need the same kind of phone line, so in times of emergency, you can unplug the fax and use its phone line to reach America Online.



At work, the story is a little different. Many office telephone systems use *digital* phone lines. You shouldn't plug a normal modem directly into one of these lines. Please, for the sake of your modem, don't try. At best, the modem won't work this time. At worst, the modem won't ever work again because it's fried. If you're planning to use America Online from the office, contact your telephone folks and tell them that you have a modem and need something to connect it to. Remember to ask nicely, or they may not give you the answer you're looking for.

Put your call waiting on hold

One final note about call waiting: You need to disable it when you call America Online. I'm not saying that you have to disconnect call waiting, just that you need to turn it off when your modem starts to dial. Luckily, doing so isn't hard at all. Those clever engineers at the phone company made it pretty simple — and the America Online software will do it automatically every time you dial. Just follow these steps:

- 1. Start the America Online software but don't sign on to the service yet.**
- 2. In the Welcome dialog box, click Setup.**

Doing so opens the Network & Modem Setup dialog box.

This process is a little faster on the Mac. Instead of displaying yet another dialog box, the Macintosh America Online software takes you directly to the Connection Settings dialog box in Figure 1-4. Because you're already there, skip ahead to step 4 and wait for the Windows people to catch up.

- 3. Click the Home entry in the Choose Location list box and then click Edit Location.**

The Network Setup dialog box pops into view. If you have call waiting at a different location than Home (the in-laws' house, for example), choose that location instead of Home.

- 4. In Windows, click the "Use the following command to disable call waiting" check box, near the bottom of the dialog box, to have the software automatically disable call waiting. On the Macintosh, the setting is called "To disable call waiting, dial," but it works the same way.**

Figures 1-4 (for the Macintosh) and 1-5 (in Windows) show you how it's done. On the Macintosh, remember to click in the "To disable call waiting, dial" checkboxes for both the primary *and* secondary phone numbers. The generally accepted "please disable call waiting" code is *70,. The comma right after the code tells the modem to wait a couple of seconds before dialing America Online. This pause gives the phone company time to get its act together and be ready for the phone number you're dialing. If this code doesn't work with your phone system (and your telephone company may do things differently), call the operator and ask how to disable call waiting. If she tells you it's *67 where you live, change the entry in the disable call waiting box from *70 , to *67 ,. (I'm just using *67 as an example. In Indianapolis, the built-in *70 , code works just fine.) Don't forget to put in the comma after the new code if you change it.

- 5. Click Save to save your changes and close the dialog box.**

If you're using a Macintosh, you're done — and a step early, too!



6. Click OK in the Network & Modem Setup dialog box to make it go away.

That's it — you're done. Every time you call America Online from Home (or whatever location you changed), the software automatically dials the special "make call waiting go away" code and then makes its computer connection. Pretty cool, eh?

Figure 1-4:
The Connection Settings dialog box, ready for your changes.

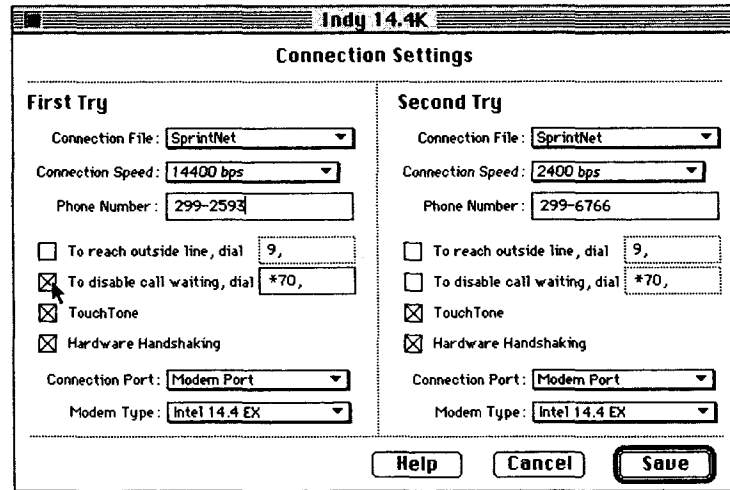
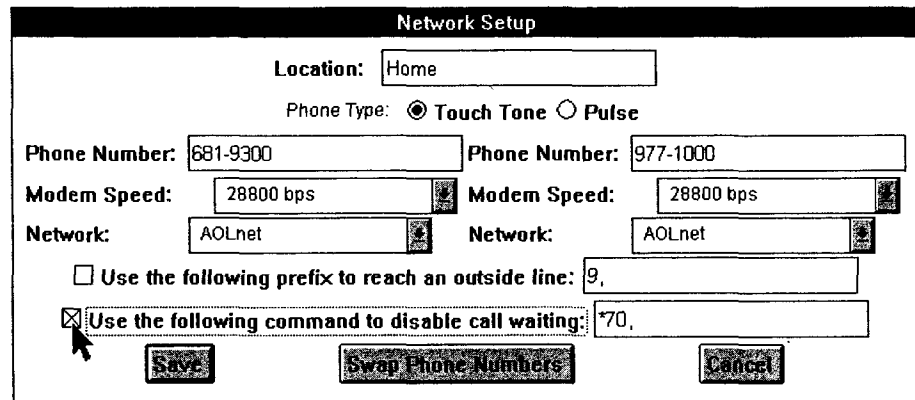


Figure 1-5:
One click and call waiting won't bother you again.



Chapter 2

A Brief Romp through an Average Day

In This Chapter

- ▶ Starting your online day
- ▶ Checking your mail
- ▶ Reading the rags
- ▶ Making sense of your dollars
- ▶ Grabbing some new software
- ▶ Surfing the Internet wave
- ▶ Shopping — need more be said?
- ▶ Chatting with the neighbors
- ▶ Relaxing with some online games
- ▶ And still there's more

Beep Beep Beep Beep BEEP BEEP! [whack] {yawwn} <<strreeetch>>
Ah, good morning! Nice to see you're up (and looking as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed as ever, I might add). A full chapter lies ahead, so I'm glad you slept well.

This chapter is a whirlwind tour through an average online day. Think of this tour as a visual sampler, a platter of digital appetizers, each one delicious in itself, but also tempting in the knowledge that more waits to be discovered. Collectively, this chapter gives you a broad idea of what you can do with America Online — and what it can do for you.



For now, kick back and read on. If something piques your interest, take a break and try it online. Each section of the chapter includes the keywords and menu instructions you need.

First, You Need to Sign On

The online day has to start somewhere, and signing on to the service is as good a place as any. Just follow these steps to sign on to America Online:

1. Turn on your computer, monitor, modem, stereo, food processor, and cordless toothbrush/answering machine. Marvel at what modern technology has accomplished (and how noisy it all is), and then turn off the unimportant stuff.

No, you need to leave the computer *on* for now.

2. If you're on a PC, you may also need to start Windows. At the DOS prompt, type WIN and press Enter.

On the other hand, Windows may start automatically on your computer. If that's the case or if you're using a Macintosh, skip ahead to the next step.

3. Find the triangular America Online icon covering among all your other software icons and double-click it to start the program.

Figure 2-1 shows the America Online icon in Windows with its little tiny title. Figure 2-2 is the same view, Macintosh style. After the program finishes loading, it displays the Welcome dialog box, as in Figure 2-3.

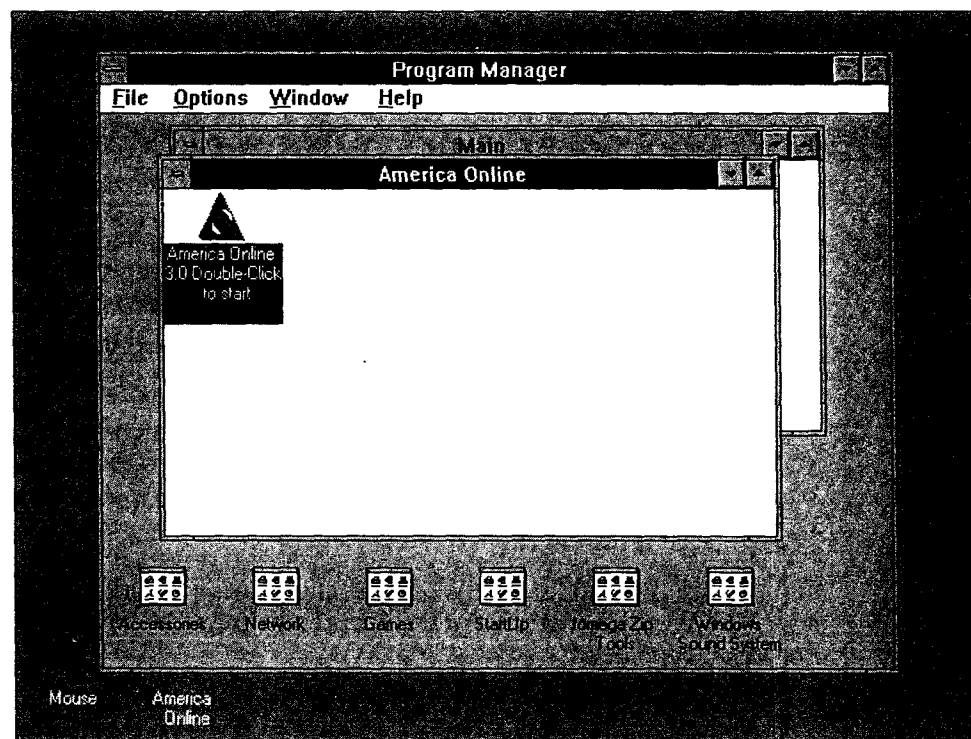


Figure 2-1:
The America
Online icon
in Windows.

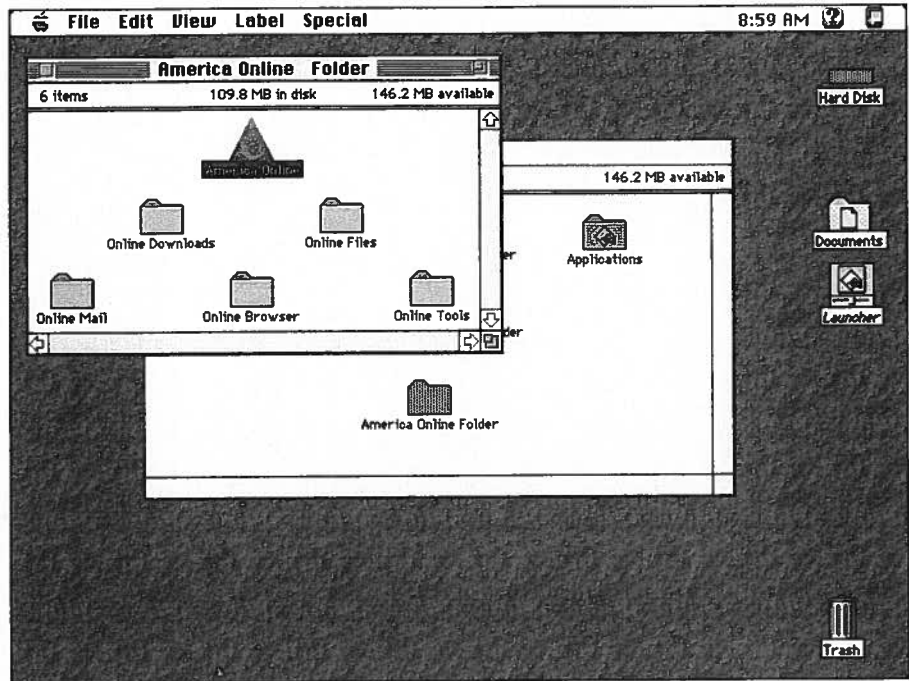


Figure 2-2:
The
America
Online icon,
Macintosh
style.

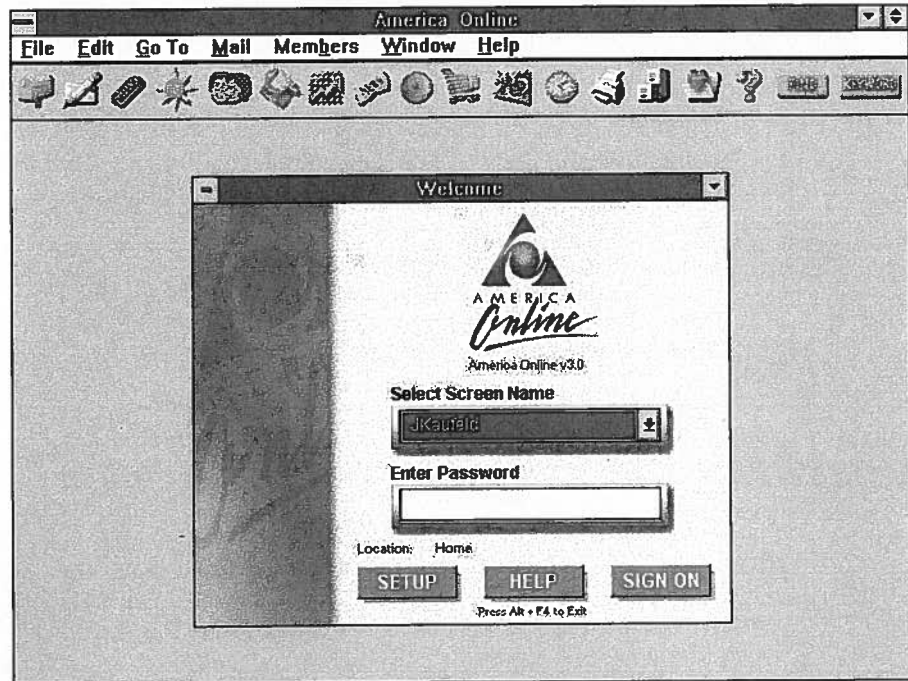


Figure 2-3:
Ready to
sign on.

4. **Choose the screen name you want to use (if you have more than one) by clicking the down arrow next to the Select Screen Name list box and clicking the name of your choice.**

Don't panic if the Enter Password text box disappears after you choose a screen name. That means the password for that name is already stored in the access software. You can find more about this feature in Chapter 3.

Even if your account has more than one screen name, you can sign on with only one at a time. To switch from one screen name to another, sign off the system, select the new screen name in the Select Screen Name list box, and then sign on again. This solution's not elegant, but it works.

5. **Press Tab to move down to the Enter Password text box and type in your password.**

Your password appears as asterisks — not words. That's a protection feature to keep that guy looking over your shoulder from breaking into your account. What guy? Why, that one right there. (Yipe!)

6. **Click Sign On to open the connection to America Online.**

The software goes through all kinds of cool visual gymnastics while it's connecting (as shown in Figure 2-4), but all this glitz really does serve a purpose. If the process doesn't work for some reason, make a note of the last step number (in Figure 2-4, for example, the process is on step 3). If you talk to the America Online technical support group, it needs that step number to solve your problem. Before you call for help, though, you may want to breeze through Chapter 37 for the top ten problems and how to solve them.



7. **After a moment, the Welcome window appears on-screen, just like Figure 2-5.**

Congratulations — you're online and ready to get some stuff done. Chapter 6 explores these windows (in case you're interested).



To see the Channels window, either click anywhere in the Channels window's title bar or click the Channels button on the Toolbar. By the way, if you don't see the Channels window on your screen, don't panic yet. It may not be configured to appear automatically. To find out, turn to the "Preferences" section in Chapter 3.

Checking the E-Mailbox

Electronic mail (or *e-mail*) is one of America Online's most popular services. That's why you can find a big graphic button right in the Welcome window to tell you whether mail is waiting in your inbox. You can't miss the YOU HAVE MAIL button in Figure 2-5 because it kinda takes over the bottom left side of the window. If you don't have any mail waiting, the graphic shows a closed mailbox emblazoned with Mail Center.

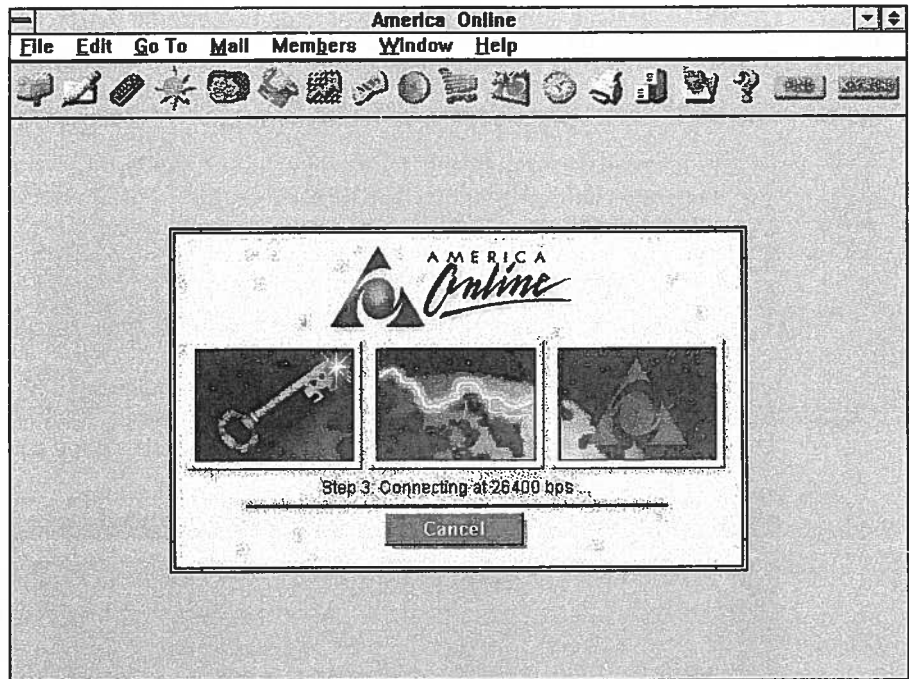


Figure 2-4: Watch those steps — that last one is a doozy.



Figure 2-5: The Welcome window upstages the Channels window.

To read your mail, either click somewhere on the graphic button or choose **Mail**→**Read New Mail** from the menu. After the New Mail dialog box pops up, as in Figure 2-6, click **Read** to start through your mail.



- ✓ If you're writing a mail message instead of reading one, why are you logged in? Sign off the system and choose **Mail**→**Compose Mail** to write your message offline. After you finish, turn to Chapter 7 and read about the myriad ways to send mail.
- ✓ If you do a lot of e-mail with America Online, and want to save both time and money, then I see FlashSessions in your future. Mark your place and flip ahead to Chapter 7 for more about this incredibly useful feature.

As you may have figured out by now, Chapter 7 tells you everything you need to know about addressing, sending, receiving, and generally dealing with e-mail. I had to put this information somewhere and that seemed as good a place as any.

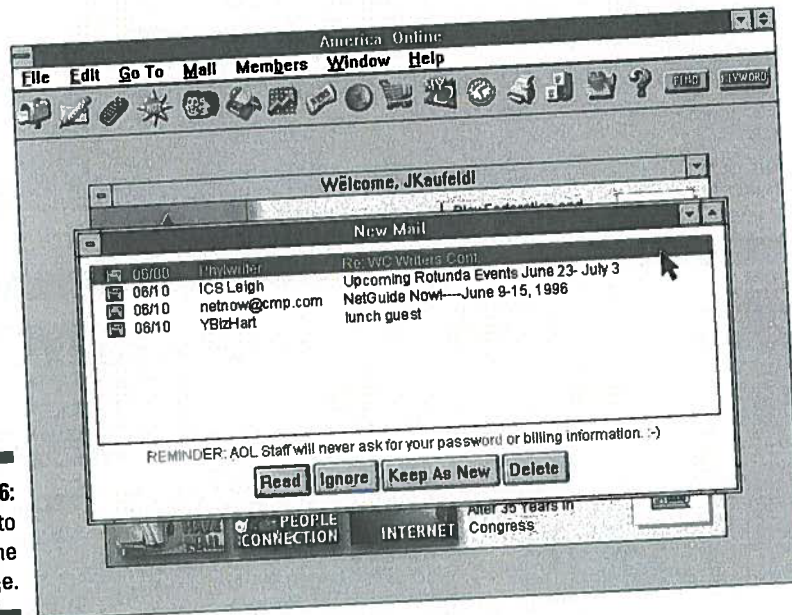


Figure 2-6:
Ready to
read the
message.

Reading the Morning Paper (And a Magazine or Two)

There's nothing like disappearing behind the morning newspaper while waiting for that first cup of coffee to turn you into a human being. With America Online, you have your choice of not one, not two, but — heck — a whole slew of



Say the magic keyword and get there fast

Keywords are America Online's answer to the Star Trek transporter. A keyword is a single code that immediately takes you to a particular forum or service in the system. A sidebar in Chapter 5 explains all the details of keywords, but for now, I want to briefly tell you how to use them. Check out that other sidebar for more detailed information.

To use a keyword, either press Ctrl+K (⌘+K on the Macintosh) or choose Go To→Keyword from the menu bar. When the Keyword dialog box appears, type in your keyword and press Enter or click OK. Was that fast or what?

newspapers and magazines. To get there, click the Newsstand button in the America Online Channels window or use keyword **Newsstand**. The Newsstand dialog box, as in Figure 2-7, appears at your call.

If newspapers are your thing, try the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, or the *San Jose Mercury News*. Are you more into magazines? Check out the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Navy Times*, *Newsweek*, *Scientific American*, or (my favorite magazine in the world) *Wired*. To curl up with whatever publication suits your fancy, scroll through the Publications list box in the Newsstand dialog box and double-click your choice.



If you find a lengthy article that interests you, save it to your computer's disk drive by choosing File↪Save from the menu bar and read it *after* you sign off America Online.

To find out lots more about this Newsstand stuff, check out Chapter 23.



Columbus, Eriksson, Magellan, and you

New services appear on America Online faster than facial aberrations on a teenager. There seems to be something new every week. How do you keep up with it all? Leave it to those clever America Online programmers to think of a way: the Discover AOL member orientation center (Keyword **Discover**).

From the Discover America Online window, my personal picks for *really cool buttons* are Places of AOL and Talk about AOL. The Places of AOL button displays a subject-based peek at America Online's content. The Talk about AOL button brings up discussion boards and chat areas specially geared to new members. If you're new to America Online, you should definitely check out these two areas!



Figure 2-7: The Newsstand — your favorite “reads” available at the touch of a mouse button.

Eyeing the Markets

Managing your stock portfolio was never easier than this. America Online's Quotes & Portfolios service (keyword **Quotes**) tracks the stocks closest to your heart and pocketbook.

To satisfy a brief curiosity, you can look up a single stock by its symbol. Figure 2-8, for example, tracks America Online's stock activity by using the symbol AMER. If looking at the *big picture* is more to your liking, the Display Portfolio feature (keyword **Portfolio**) follows all the stocks you choose, tracking the current market price *and* how that translates into a gain or loss for your invested dollars.

- ✓ Don't panic, but the information in Quotes & Portfolios is delayed about 15 minutes. I guess that means you can't call it *up-to-the-minute* information. Hmm — how about *up-until-quite-recently* information?
- ✓ You can save the portfolio information to a text file by choosing **File** → **Save** from the menu bar.

America Online charges no extra fee to use the Quotes & Portfolios service — it's just part of the service. Flip ahead to Chapter 26 to find out more about America Online's financial offerings.

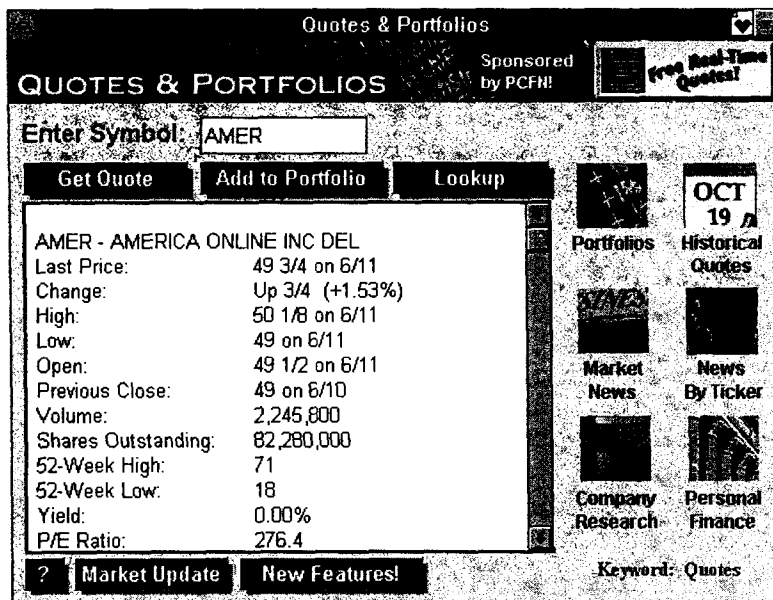


Figure 2-8:
Be a stock
spy with
Quotes &
Portfolios.

Internet On-Ramp, Next Right

At this point in your online life, you've probably heard, read, or otherwise been exposed to *something* about the Internet. If you *haven't* heard about the Internet yet, don't worry; you're about to.

The Internet is the worldwide "network of networks" that's all the rage these days. You can't get your hair done, shop for tires, or even play cricket without bumping into the Internet somehow. "Oh, is that a new cricket bat?" you ask. "Aye, a player in the rec.sport.cricket Internet newsgroup recommended it." See what I mean?

Several broad kinds of services are available on the Internet. Through the America Online Internet Connection (keyword **Internet**), you can reach the World Wide Web, Gopher, the Internet Newsgroups (see Figure 2-9), and much more. You can also find an index of mailing lists available for your perusal and subscription pleasure. Of course, you always have America Online's e-mail feature, which lets you send mail anywhere on the Internet.

An "average" day in the Internet Connection may include browsing through the newsgroups you read, checking out the Mother of All Gophers at the University of Minnesota, and just about anything in between.

There's far too much to say about Internet to do so here, so cruise on to Chapter 17 and get ready for the ride of your life.

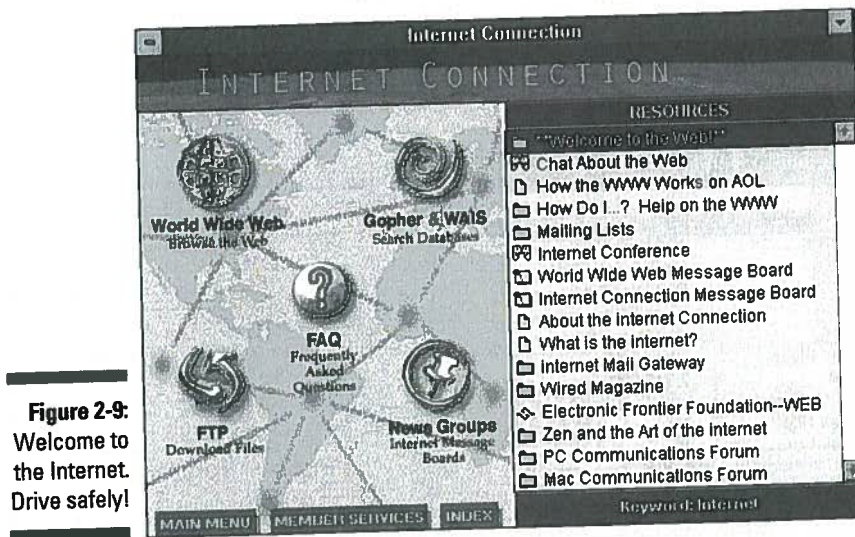


Figure 2-9:
Welcome to
the Internet.
Drive safely!

The Joys of (Nearly) Free Stuff

It seems like everywhere you turn in America Online, you find a software library. You don't have to be anywhere special; just about every service area has something to offer.

Exactly what's available depends entirely on where you are. In the *Omni* magazine area (keyword **Omni**), you can browse through the Antimatter Files and find UFO pictures, NASA photographs, and text files of selected *Omni* articles. The Cooking Club (keyword **Cooking**) serves up recipes and a variety of cookbook programs (both shareware and commercial demonstrations). The Dolby Forum (keyword **Dolby**) offers white papers exploring the latest in audio and video technical information for the demanding listener.

Thanks to America Online's Internet links, you also have access to the infinite software libraries available through File Transfer Protocol, lovingly known in Net lingo as *FTP*. Troll the likes of Winsite ([ftp.winsite.com](ftp:winsite.com) — widely acknowledged as the world's largest Windows software library), Sumex ([sumex-aim.stanford.edu](ftp:sumex-aim.stanford.edu) — the home of more Macintosh software than anyone could possibly need), and the Walnut Creek Archive ([ftp.cdrom.com](ftp:cdrom.com) — a great spot to find all kinds of programs) with ease. Filling your hard drive has never been so much fun!

Whether it's fonts and clip art, games and playing tips, or something a little more businesslike, you can find the details of getting it, unpacking it (watch out for the foam peanuts!), and making it work for you in Chapter 8. For FTP info, check out Chapter 17.

Let the Fun and Games Begin!

Because all work and no play makes me *really* grumpy (and probably does the same thing to you), take a break from the Internet and indulge in some fun. The online world offers games to suit every age, style, and taste.

If you're a shoot-'em-up kinda person, work through your aggression (and sharpen your aim) in Air Warrior (keyword **Air Warrior**), the first of a new breed of interactive online games. For enthusiasts of more sedate games, America Online offers a dedicated crossword area (keyword **Xwords**), chess (keyword **Strategy**), and interactive Trivial Pursuit (keyword **Trivial Pursuit**).

Feeling lucky? Take a spin at an online game of chance in RabbitJack's Casino (keyword **Casino**). Want to build a business empire? Put your entrepreneurial skills to the test in Federation (keyword **Federation**), a multiplayer game of intergalactic business — and a personal favorite of mine.

For pure social enjoyment, drop by LaPub, the best (and perhaps only) electronic bar and meeting place, and try out the hot tub and the Jell-O jump. Find this site at keyword **LaPub**.

All this fun stuff and more is waiting in the Games channel. For more fun, flip ahead to Chapter 13.

Shopping without the Crowds

Imagine shopping the malls on the day after Thanksgiving. After you regain consciousness, get a drink of water and then come back and keep reading.

Now imagine the same shopping trip with no crowds, no pushy children, and no whining adults. It's a dream, right? No, it's the America Online Marketplace (keyword **Marketplace**), your 24-hour shop-'til-your-fingers-drop electronic mall.

Take a stroll through the Classifieds (keyword **Classifieds**), America Online's own version of a digital flea market. Or pick up some high-tech goodies at the Sharper Image (keyword **Sharper Image**). Have something a little bigger in mind? Try the Shoppers Advantage club (keyword **ShoppersAdvantage**), with the best in just about everything you could want — and great prices as well.

If your credit card is already out, take a break and power shop through Chapter 21 for all the details.

Having a Little Chat

The People Connection (keyword **People**) is the home of America Online's *chat* areas. Here, you can interactively talk live with other America Online subscribers. All this chat happens in what the technology jockeys call *real-time*, which is a fancy way to say that right after you type a message, the other people in that chat area see the message on their screens, wherever in the country they are.

The chat areas usually hold a maximum of 23 people. America Online does have some larger rooms, but you find out about them in Chapters 6 and 7. Online chatting takes some getting used to, as you can tell by looking at the sample chat session in Figure 2-10. The trick is to follow only one (maybe two) conversations at a time. For example, Big T Rex asks a question near the top of Figure 2-10. Although Jonalyn answers Big T Rex immediately, Big T Rex's reply to Jonalyn is a couple lines down from there. Trust me — it gets easier the more you do it.

I have a confession to make, though. At first, I thought the chat areas were, well, kind of silly. You know — what kind of hopeless computer nerd would spend time *typing* at people? Then I tried it. Oops — big mistake.



Don't do the People Connection unless you want to meet interesting new people, have a marvelously fun time doing it, and are braced for the meteoric rise in your monthly America Online bill. Don't say I didn't warn you. If you're feeling brave, go on to Chapter 25.

Figure 2-10:
A sample conversation from the Red Dragon Inn, an online chat area.

```
Breetai13:      There. No problem.  :: whispers to mapkoc::
Mapkoc:         Are you ok
Big T Rex:      WHO IS SERVING?
Jonalyn:        Tis self serve Rex
Pastorale:     :::waving a hand, conjures a lemonade:::
Big T Rex:      thank you
Scott L J:     :::sighs, depressed:::
Seeker7079:    :::shaking head like a puppy, sending water flying:::
EvyI Elf:      :::finishes off the bottle of Evlen White:::
YngGlaswik:    So how are you today Jim?
Breetai13:     :: looks at dgtl::
Mapkoc:         Ok
Breetai13:     Hey dgtl!
Big T Rex:     :::Stomps towards bar and pour hiself a whiskey:::
Drakari2:      :::walks over to OnyxRose:::
Breetai13:     ::: walks to morgan:::
Jonalyn:       :::props her legs more comfortably upon the bar:::
MorganFaye:    Oh, so now I'm a charity case, Bree?
Seeker7079:    :::removing cloak and giving it a good shake::: blasted rain
Scott L J:     Hey Chaos...
Breetai13:     You don't look good.
Breetai13:     No, I didn't say that.
Drakari2:     Hello M'Lady
Dgtl Chaos:    :::looks around:::
Big T Rex:     :::Thuds towards fireplace:::
Seeker7079:    :::makes way to the bar in hopes of a warm drink:::
EvyI Elf:      :::shrugs::: I'll do what it takes...
Pastorale:     :::lifting her glass to her lips:::
OnyxRose:     :::Looks at Drakari2::: Hello
Jonalyn:       :::drinks deeply, glancing at the usual chaos:::
Dgtl Chaos:    :::she's not here:::
Mapkoc:        Hows it going btr?
```

But Wait — There's More!

This chapter doesn't even begin to tell you what's available out there in the wilds of America Online. Come to think of it, that's what the rest of the book does.

- ✓ To find out more about a specific channel, look up the area in Part III.
- ✓ To follow the biddings of your own interests, look in Part IV.
- ✓ If you feel the need to follow other interests, the bathroom is down the hall.

When It's Time to Say Goodbye

All good things must come to an end, and so it is with America Online. Signing off the system is quick and painless, though. Here's how to say goodbye to America Online:

1. When you're ready to call it a day (or night, or whatever), choose **Go To⇒Sign Off** from the menu bar.

The dialog box in Figure 2-11 (or one a lot like it) appears.

If a dialog box appears and worries that you still have something to send or receive, don't be concerned. That's America Online's way of saying you have unread mail in your mailbox or perhaps mail that you typed offline and forgot to send. If you're not using FlashSessions, clicking OK and blowing off the message is perfectly all right. If you *are* using FlashSessions, you may want to check your outgoing mail (choose **Mail⇒Read Outgoing Mail** from the main menu) and make sure that everything you wanted to send actually *left*. For all the details about this mysterious FlashSession thing, check out Chapter 7.

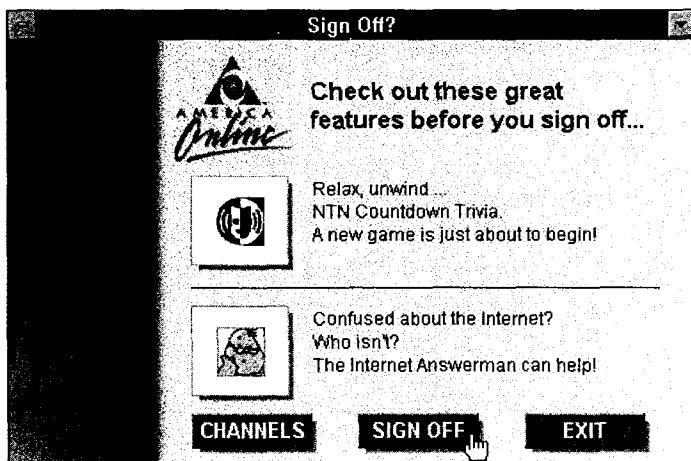


Figure 2-11: America Online doesn't want to say goodbye, either.

2. To sign off the system and leave the America Online software running, click **Sign Off** in Windows or **Yes** on the Macintosh. If you change your mind, click **Channels** in Windows or **No** on the Macintosh to stay signed on.

At this point, you can reply to your Flashmail, write a quick offline message, or sign onto the system with a different screen name. Figure 2-12 shows America Online waving goodbye and offering a farewell advertisement about an upcoming event in the AOL Live! area (keyword **AOL Live!**). For more about all the cool stuff happening in AOL Live!, see Chapter 25.

3. To shut down the America Online software, choose **File**⇨**Quit** on the Macintosh or **File**⇨**Exit** in Windows. You're done!

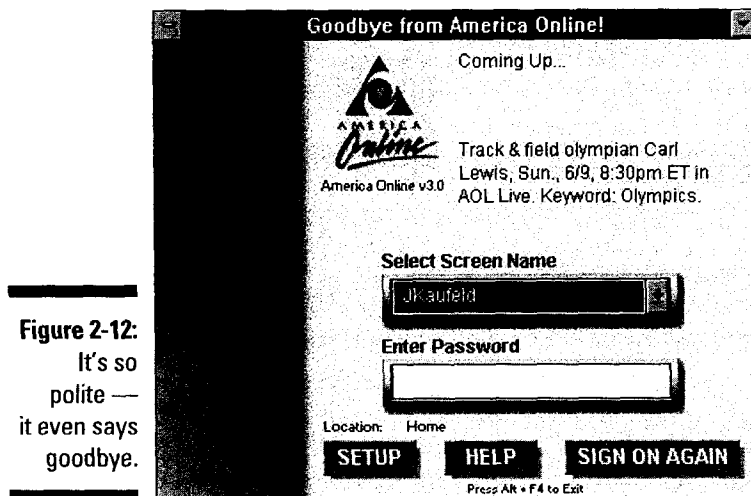


Figure 2-12:
It's so polite — it even says goodbye.



Put the top down and go touring

To get a really good overview of what America Online has to offer, I suggest taking the official Highlights tour. The tour walks you through 12 samples picked from the wide array of online offerings. If something makes you sit up and yell, "Yes, that's for me!", you can jump off the tour, give whatever it is a try, and then come back to finish the tour.

To get there in Windows, press **Ctrl+K** (⌘+K on a Macintosh) to open the Keyword dialog box.

Type keyword **Tour** and press **Enter**. After the Highlights window appears, click **Start** to take the tour.

I recommend taking the tour about once a month. Things change so rapidly on America Online that keeping up with everything is almost impossible. Taking the tour every now and then may introduce you to something that slipped in when you weren't looking.

Chapter 3

Making Yourself at Home

In This Chapter

- ▶ The whole screen name thing
 - ▶ Managing screen names
 - ▶ Filling out your profile
 - ▶ Setting your preferences
 - ▶ Applying some parental controls
-

A new America Online account is like a college dorm room on the first day of the school year: completely bare, devoid of anything beyond the marvelously institutional look of gray linoleum tile surrounded by lime green concrete block walls. But when its inhabitants move in, that room becomes unique; it becomes more like home.

Making yourself at home in America Online means setting things up just the way you want them. That's what this chapter is all about. The chapter covers topics such as screen names, the Member Profile, and setting your personal preferences. It also explores the parental controls, the online version of a good, old-fashioned grounding.

If you're completely new to America Online, start with the next section and continue through the chapter from there. If you're looking for details about specific preference settings, screen names, the online profile, or parental controls, flip ahead to the detail sections later in the chapter. If you're hungry, go get something to eat (and order me a vanilla malt, would you?).

What's in a (Screen) Name?

When you join some online services, you mechanically receive a clever, memorable name from a computer that's quite proud of itself for calling you 71303,3713. After all, the computer has no problem remembering it — why should you?

America Online, though, was started *by* humans and designed *for* humans. As a direct result, *you* (a human) get to choose the name you use on America Online. You can be yourself if you want to: *Anne*, *Paul*, or *Susan*. Of course, you could also be a little more daring and become *BlasterMan*, *Supermom*, or *LoveBug*. The choice is *almost* entirely up to you (but more about that later).

Every America Online account has space for five different screen names: one primary name, plus four others. The primary name is the one you choose when you sign on to the service for the very first time. This name is special — it's kind of like your permanent file in school. (The mysterious record always spoken of in dark, terrifying phrases such as, "This will have to go in your *permanent file*.") The primary name is *permanent* — you can't ever change it. The other four names, though, can come and go as you please.

Technically speaking, America Online doesn't place too many limits on screen names. Screen names need to be between three and ten characters long and must start with a letter. After the required first letter, you can use letters, numbers, and spaces to create your online identity.



- ✓ You can have five screen names in your account — one that's primary and four others.
- ✓ The primary name is permanent, and you can't ever change it; the other screen names can come and go as you wish.
- ✓ Choose your primary name carefully; it's going to be with you forever.
- ✓ Screen names are three to ten characters long, start with a letter, and contain any combination of letters, numbers, and spaces your imagination can dream up.

Now be nice!

A creative screen name is your tool for carving out a unique identity in the world of America Online. You're *supposed* to be creative — that's the whole point. However, a subtle line separates *creative* and *obnoxious*.

Here's a simple guideline for creating a good screen name: Make it as creative as you want, but if you blush at the idea of explaining it to your children, parents, spouse, or significant other,

your screen name is probably beyond the bounds of good taste.

One final thought about choosing a screen name: Make it appropriate. A screen name for official business e-mail is quite different than one for a character in the Free Form Role Playing area. If you want to be *BoogerDigr*, that's your choice, but your new e-mail address (*boogerdigr@aol.com*) may look a little funny on a business card.

Dealing with Screen Names

Managing the screen names in your account isn't just a job — it's a creative adventure. The following sections go through everything you need to know to keep your screen names in order.



These instructions *don't* apply to your account's primary name. You can *never* change that. So there.

Creating a new screen name

I think the people who started America Online must have read Shakespeare. In the play *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo can't decide on a screen name. Juliet tries to calm him with the observation, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." His confidence thus buoyed, he tries making a new screen name for himself in his father's account.



Kids — *don't* try this at home. Romeo and Juliet did, and look what happened to them. (If you don't know what happened to Romeo and Juliet, you can find out on the Internet. Just page ahead to the section, "Famous Books (Gopher)," in Chapter 39, to read the classics with Project Gutenberg.)

Making a new screen name isn't hard at all. Just follow these steps:

1. Sign on to America Online under your account's primary name.

Only the primary name can create new screen names.

2. After safely connecting to the service, choose **Members → **Edit Screen Names** from the menu bar (or use keyword Names).**

The Create or Delete Screen Names dialog box opens, displayed for your viewing pleasure in Figure 3-1. If you haven't read the screen names sidebar yet, this is an excellent time to do so.

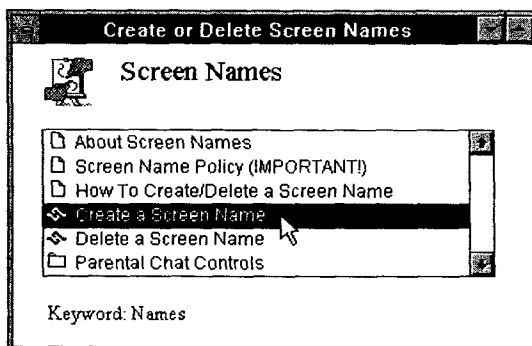


Figure 3-1:
The Create or Delete Screen Names dialog box.

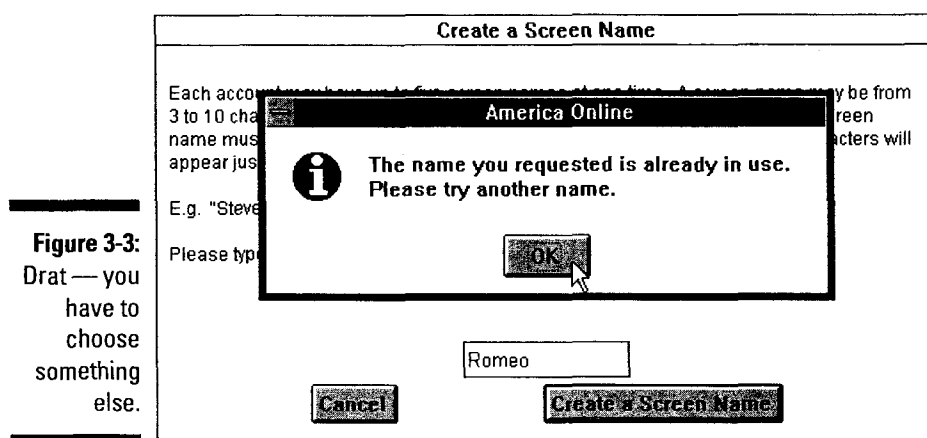
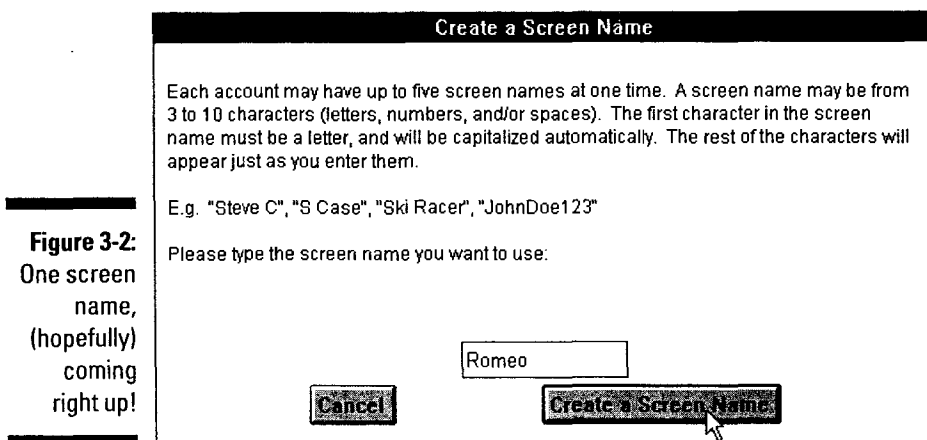
3. Double-click the Create a Screen Name option in the dialog box.

The Create a Screen Name dialog box appears on-screen.

4. Type your new screen name in the text box and then click Create a Screen Name.

Figure 3-2 shows our hero ready to establish himself online.

If the screen name you typed is available, America Online creates it and tells you. Otherwise, the system suggests that you choose something else, as shown in Figure 3-3.



5. If America Online tells you that your desired screen name is not available, click OK to make the information dialog box leave you alone, and then go back to step 3 and try again.



The big computers at America Online sometimes feel creative and attempt to *help* you make a valid screen name. The outcome is a lot like having your three-year-old *help* you make a cake from scratch. Figure 3-4 shows the computer's suggestion for poor Romeo. At this point, I think Juliet's earnest advice is by far the wisest: "O, be some other name!"

After you and America Online agree on a screen name (which may take several tries), the Set Password dialog box appears, as in Figure 3-5, asking you to set a password for the new screen name.

Figure 3-4:
Don't let the computer "help" you make screen names.

Figure 3-5:
Type the same password in both boxes.

6. Type the password twice and then click Set Password.

You type the password first in the box on the left and then again in the box on the right.

Whatever you type for your password doesn't actually appear in the boxes. (Yes, it's *supposed* to happen that way.) Instead, the boxes display a little star for each letter. It's a security thing. Because it doesn't show you what you're typing, America Online makes you enter the password twice. If the two entries don't agree, America Online warns you, and then it lets you try again. By the way, America Online passwords must be between four and eight characters long.



See the upcoming sidebar for some important thoughts and warnings about passwords.

7. To use the new screen name, sign off America Online by choosing **Go To**⇨**Sign Off** and clicking **Yes** in the dialog box that appears.

The sign-on screen clears and the Goodbye dialog box bids you a fond farewell.

8. Click the down arrow next to the Screen Name list box and choose your new screen name from the list.
9. Press **Tab** to move to the Password box and type the new password you created.
10. Click **Sign On**.

Poof — it's the new you!

Deleting an old screen name

Even screen names reach the end of their usefulness. And when that time comes for the screen names in your account, delete them and go on about your business. Just follow these steps to delete a screen name:

1. Sign on to America Online with your primary name.
2. After you've connected, choose **Members**⇨**Edit Screen Names** from the menu bar (or use keyword **Names**).
The Create or Delete Screen Names dialog box appears. (It's the same one shown back in Figure 3-1.)
3. Double-click the **Delete a Screen Name** option in the dialog box.

The Delete a Screen Name dialog box pops up.



Psst — what's the password?

Just like music and cooking, there's an art to making a good password. Here, in two sentences, is my accumulated knowledge on the subject.

The best passwords string together two common but unrelated words (such as *GRAINFUN*) or add a number to the end of a word (*TRAIN577*, for example). Your password *should not be* your name, birthdate, spouse's name, dog's breed,

shoe size, or anything else someone can find out about you.

By the way, if you're setting up a screen name for a child or password-phobic adult, you can configure the America Online software to automatically enter that screen name's password. Discover the details in the "Making Your Preferences Known" section later in this chapter.

4. Type the screen name you want to delete, and then click Delete a Screen Name (see Figure 3-6).



Be *dam sure* that you want to delete this screen name before clicking that button. After you delete it, a screen name is gone for ever and ever (or at least for the next six months). *Nobody* can revive it; not you, not anyone else. It's gone, kaput, done, finished, no deposit, no return, no salesman will call, some restrictions apply, not valid with other offers, buyer is responsible for tax, title, and freight, dealer retains incentives. (Whoops — I got a little carried away.)

5. After you've done the dirty deed, America Online issues the brief, generic obituary shown in Figure 3-7.



You can't delete the primary name.

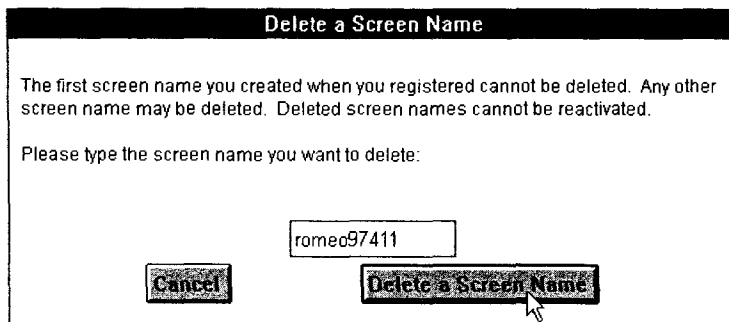


Figure 3-6:
Alas, poor
Romeo97411
— I barely
knew him.

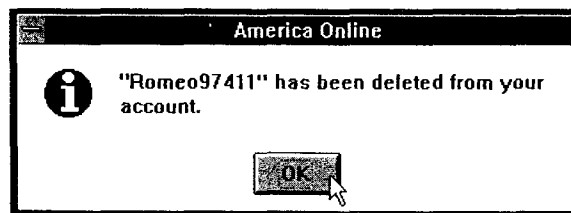


Figure 3-7:
He's history.

Changing a screen name

What if you have a screen name and decide you want to change it a little bit? Well, you're out of luck. To paraphrase the wisdom of Yoda, the Jedi Master from *Star Wars*, no *change* is there, only *delete*.

Your only option is to delete the existing screen name entirely and create a new one from scratch. Sorry to break the news to you like this, but that's life in the big online services, I guess.

Turn a Bit and Let Me See Your Profile

When you meet people on the street or in the office, the first thing you notice about them is their physical appearance. Beyond that, they're a mystery until you meet, talk, and invest some time getting to know them.

In the world of America Online, you determine "how you look" when you choose a screen name. In the chat areas you get to meet people and talk. But America Online has something else, too — something really neat that I personally wish existed in real life: the *Member Profile*.

A Member Profile is a collection of tidbits and trivia about the owner of a particular screen name. For example, my Member Profile appears in Figure 3-8. Despite what you may think, I'm an average, all-American game player, computer jockey, musician, husband, and father of two. And I write books (but you already knew that). If I'm chatting with someone online and the other person wants to know a little more about me, all he has to do is choose Members⇒Get a Member's Profile from the menu bar (or press Ctrl+G in Windows or ⌘+G on a Mac), type my screen name into the Get a Member's Profile dialog box, and click OK. Presto! My Member Profile appears on-screen.

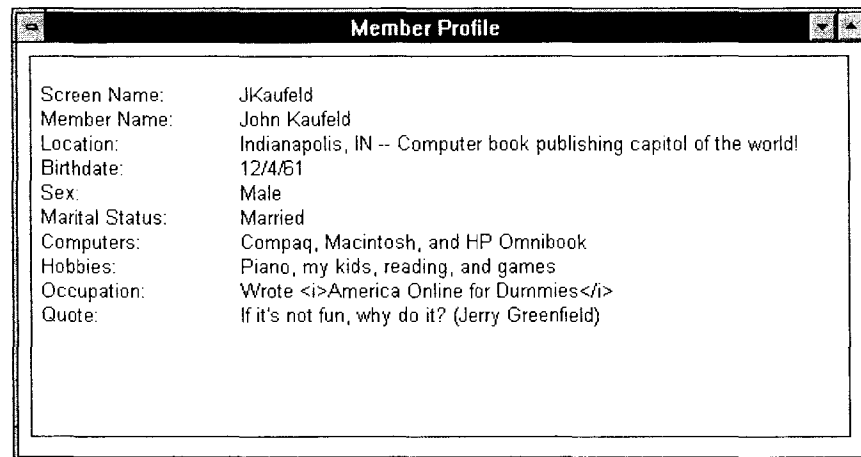


Figure 3-8:
Now you
know
everything
about me.

So *where* does all this information come from? From you — that's where. It's up to *you* to create a Member Profile for your screen name. If you don't create one, other members can't find out about your likes, interests, and hobbies. In short, you'll barely exist on Planet AOL.

✓ Please, oh please, fill out your Member Profile. Leaving it blank is like moving into a new neighborhood because you heard it had lots of fun people and then acting like a hermit.



- ✓ There's another reason to fill out your Member Profile: so that people who share your hobbies and interests can find you. A special command for searching all the Member Profiles is available. It's revealed in Chapter 7.
- ✓ Although this falls under the heading of *common sense*, I want to drive home a point. *Do not* put your phone number, address, or other truly personal information in your profile. On a scale of good to bad, doing that is reeeeeaaaaally bad. Parents, check your kids' profiles every now and then just to make sure that they didn't put anything (too) weird in there.
- ✓ If you use more than one screen name, you need to fill out a Member Profile for each one. Every screen name has its own Member Profile.
- ✓ Some parts of the service (such as Starfleet Online simulations, keyword **Starfleet**) rely on information in your Member Profile as part of the game. To find out more about these interactive online entertainments, refer to Chapter 12.

To create (or update) your Member Profile, follow these steps:

1. Make sure that you've signed on to America Online with the correct name.

Every screen name has its own Member Profile.

2. Choose Members → Member Directory from the menu bar, and then double-click Create or Modify your Profile.

The Edit Your Online Profile dialog box appears. If you're *creating* a Member Profile, the dialog box is blank. If you're *changing* the Member Profile, your current information appears in the spaces (just like mine in Figure 3-9).



Edit Your Online Profile

To edit your profile, modify the category you would like to change and select "Update." To continue without making any changes to your profile, select "Cancel."

Your Name:

City, State, Country:

Birthday:

Sex: Male Female No Response

Marital Status: Single Married Divorced/Separated No Response

Hobbies:

Computers Used:

Occupation:

Personal Quote:

Figure 3-9:
Here's my Member Profile "under construction."

3. Fill out the Member Profile form. After you finish, click Update.

Don't worry if you type past the end of the boxes for Hobbies, Occupation, and Personal Quote. You have plenty of room to type — the text scrolls through the box until you can't enter any more text. At that point, the box is full. Use your directional arrow, Backspace, and Delete keys to correct any typing or editorial errors.

After you click the Update button, America Online replies with a little dialog box that says, "Your profile is being updated." It takes a little while (usually ten minutes or so, but *much* longer if the system is busy) before your newly entered (or updated) Member Profile is available for the world.

Making Your Preferences Known

You know, America Online is starting to look kind of cozy now. Fine-tuning a few personal preferences should finish the job.

The *preferences* are your chance to tweak the America Online software so that it behaves *exactly* the way you want. (No, you can't have preference settings installed in your kids — I tried, but it didn't work.) These options cover every aspect of the software from sign-on to sign-off, plus a whole lot of stuff in between. The following sections explain all of the preference settings and how to change them.



Although America Online remembers your settings from session to session, you can change them any time you want. For instance, if I'm working late and want to keep the noise level down, I hop into the Preferences window (explained in the next section), click General, and then turn off the Enable Event Sounds option. Later, when I'm ready for some noise, I turn it back on (and crank up the speakers, too). For more about the General preferences, keep on reading.

Finding the Preferences



You can work on your preferences in two ways. If you're somewhat new to the preferences and want a lot of hand-holding while making your changes, use the My AOL dialog box in Figure 3-10. To get there, either click the My AOL button on the Toolbar or choose **Members**⇨**My AOL** from the main menu. If you're *really* new, check out the sidebar called Hitting the highlights in one easy step for a cool tip about setting the important stuff all at once.

When you feel more comfortable with the preferences, use the Preferences window (seen in Figure 3-11) to make quick adjustments. To open the window, choose **Members**⇨**Preferences** from the main menu.

Figure 3-10:
My AOL
packs a lot
of settings
into one
location.

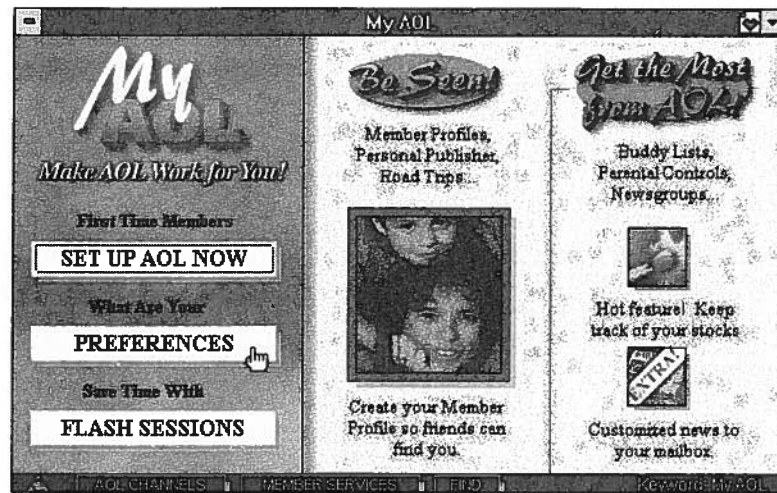
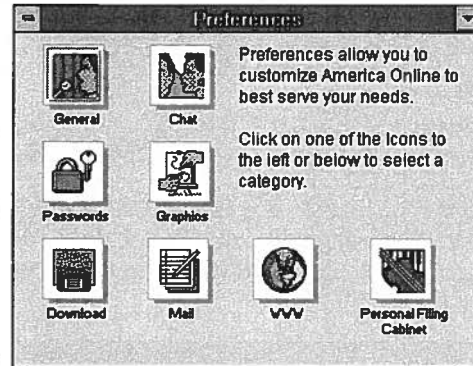


Figure 3-11:
The
Preferences
dialog box.



Chat

The interesting settings in the Chat Preferences dialog box are the notification options and the capability to alphabetize the chat group member list. (See Figure 3-12.)

The notify options tell America Online to let you know you when new people join the chat area or when current attendees leave. I haven't decided whether I like these features or not. Try turning on one or both notifications and determine how the results strike you. You can turn on these settings by clicking in the appropriate check boxes.



The Alphabetize the member list option is *genuinely* handy. If you turn off this setting, the chat area member list is an absolute morass of mixed-up names. Run, don't walk, to turn on this setting.



Hitting the highlights in one easy step

When you're new to America Online, working with the options is a bit overwhelming. You have so many things to choose from — where should you begin? What should you change first?

In an effort to reduce your stress and make the preference setting process ever so slightly simpler, America Online collected the most-used settings into the cool Setup AOL Now dialog box. With a clear menu and descriptive instructions,

this dialog box leads you through the most popular settings to change, including your Member Profile, screen names, passwords, and the General and Mail preferences. It also helps you build Buddy Lists (more about that in Chapter 7) and set the Parental Controls.

To open the Set Up AOL Now window, click the aptly named Set Up AOL Now button in the My AOL window. It's the first button on the left side of Figure 3-10.

Figure 3-12: Customizing the online chat experience.

Graphics

The new America Online 3.0 software offers a very important option in the Graphics preference setting (shown in Figure 3-13).

Figure 3-13: Finally — a way to get the art under control.

Do you remember the “Downloading art . . . please wait” dialog box? (Now don’t scream — I only asked if you remembered it.) All that downloaded art is hanging out on your hard drive, taking up valuable space. Up to now, you couldn’t do much about it, because once the art arrived, it was there to stay. Thanks to the new option in the Graphics preferences, those days are over.

The new (and lengthily named, I might add) preference setting called *Maximum disk space to use for online art* gives you the ability to limit the size of your art database. The default is 20MB, which is fine when you have plenty of hard drive space available. If your disk drive feels smaller every day, try nudging the maximum size down to 10 or 15MB.

So what happens when the art database grows bigger than the maximum size you set? An electronic version of the old-fashioned Spring Cleaning, that’s what. The America Online software throws out art that you haven’t used for a while to make room for the new stuff. It happens automatically, behind the scenes — you won’t even know about it.



For an idea of how big your art database currently is, use File Manager (Windows 3.x) or Explorer (Windows 95) to check the size of a file called MAIN.IDX in the IDB subdirectory of the America Online software.

General

The first stop on the preferences tour is the General area, shown in Figure 3-14. Although this area is nothing to jump up and down about, some settings in here are worth mentioning.

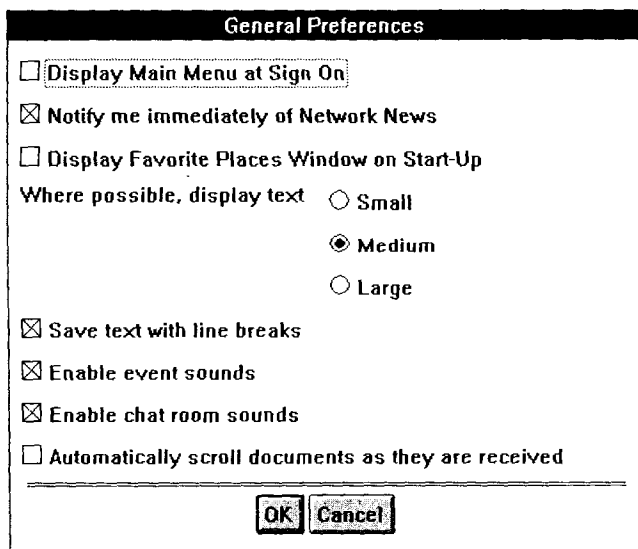


Figure 3-14:
The General
Preferences
dialog box.

The first useful option is right there at the top, Display Main Menu at Sign On. If you're distressed that the Channels window pops up automatically every time you sign on, here's the remedy: Turn off this setting. I did — and I'm much less distressed.

The next useful option is the text display size setting. On my computer, I changed this setting to Small, because the default text size came out pretty large on my screen. Conversely, if you're having trouble reading articles or chat area text, try setting it to Large. To change the setting, click the radio button next to the text size you want.

My other favorite settings govern event sounds. If you have a sound card in your computer, I suggest turning on both the Enable event sounds and Enable chat room sounds settings. Click the check box next to each setting to do so. Why do it? Well, it's more fun that way — what better reason do you need?

Passwords

Clicking the Passwords button opens a dialog box for storing your screen name passwords. If you store the password here, you won't have to type it every time you sign on to America Online. (See Figure 3-15.)

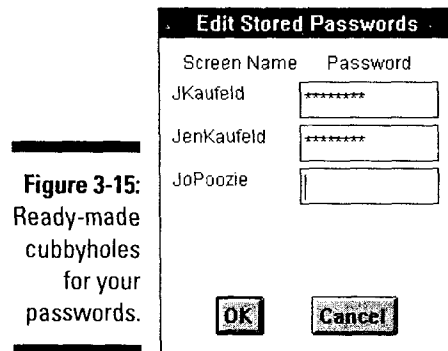


Figure 3-15:
Ready-made
cubbyholes
for your
passwords.

As far as I'm concerned, the jury is still out on this feature. This feature is nice if you're making a screen name for someone who doesn't really *care* about passwords anyway and would probably write the password on a note taped to the monitor. The flip side, though, is that after you store the password, *anyone* with access to that computer can sign on to America Online with that screen name. *Anyone*.



I don't recommend using this feature because it's a big-time security risk. But I can also think of many cases where the feature is either handy or helpful. With that in mind, here's how to store a password:

1. From the Preferences dialog box, click Passwords.
2. Click the Password box for the particular screen name you want.
3. Type the password.

As before, the stars appear in place of the actual password. If you mistype something, backspace over the whole entry and start again.

4. Repeat the process for any other passwords you want to store. Click OK after you're done.

If you change a password in the future, you must return here and change it as well.

Download

These settings govern some trivial details about the download process. I recommend turning *off* the Delete ZIP and ARC files after decompression option but leaving everything else turned on. An option is turned on if an *X* appears in the little checkbox. Click in the checkbox to toggle the setting on and off (or if you just like watching the little *X* appear and disappear).

Mail

E-mail is one of the most useful features of America Online. Keeping track of your e-mail, though, is one of the most hair-reducing features. Thankfully, help is waiting in the Mail Preferences dialog box, shown in Figure 3-16.

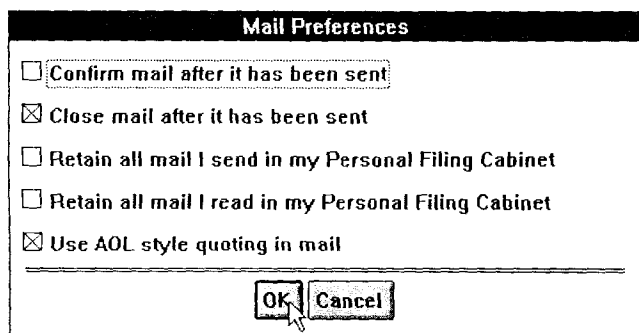


Figure 3-16:
Here's how I
like to set
the Mail
Preferences.



The option that you simply *must* turn on is Retain all mail I send in my Personal Filing Cabinet. This one is a real winner, particularly if you're using America Online with your business. Turn this puppy on, and the access software automatically puts a copy of all outgoing e-mails into the Mail You've Sent

folder (which itself is in the Mail, Archives folders). Imagine: No more worrying about whether you replied to someone's message or wondering what you said. Life just doesn't get much better than that, now does it?

The mate to this setting, Retain all mail I read in my Personal Filing Cabinet, isn't quite as great as its counterpart but still deserves consideration. Like its sister, this option is *great* for when you need to account for all your correspondences.



One word of caution though: All this filing uses space on your computer's hard disk, so regularly go through the messages and delete the useless ones. For more about the Personal Filing Cabinet, see Chapter 6.

WWW (World Wide Web)



Although most of the stuff in here borders on techno-weenie, there's one thing that I want to mention: the Clear Cache button.

Although not really a preference setting, *Clear Cache* is a button you should hit every now and then if you enjoy surfing the Web. Every time you view a Web page, the America Online Web browser keeps a local copy of what you see in a *cache*. This isn't a nefarious plot to use up your hard disk space — all the popular Web browsers do it.

On the plus side, the cache makes your Web browser respond faster when you're bouncing back and forth between a couple of Web pages. The down side, though, is that the cache fills up after a while. Unfortunately, a full cache slows down your Web browser a bit (which is the kind of help that the World Wide *Wait* doesn't exactly need).

Luckily, emptying the cache is easy. In the WWW Preferences dialog box, click the Advanced button. In the new, much smaller preferences dialog box that mystically appears, click Purge Cache (see Figure 3-17). When the America Online software asks if you're sure, click Yes. After it's done (emptying the cache only takes a moment), click Cancel twice to get back to the Preferences dialog box.

Okay — there is *one* thing in here that you might, just *might* use someday. I'm talking about the Home Page option at the bottom of the WWW Preferences dialog box. This setting tells America Online which World Wide Web page you want to see when you start the Web browser. Put the address for your favorite page here — you can even use a page that you wrote yourself! On the other hand, if this talk of Webs and browsers makes little or no sense, flip ahead to Chapter 17 and prepare to watch your America Online bill get bigger as you explore the wonders of the Web.

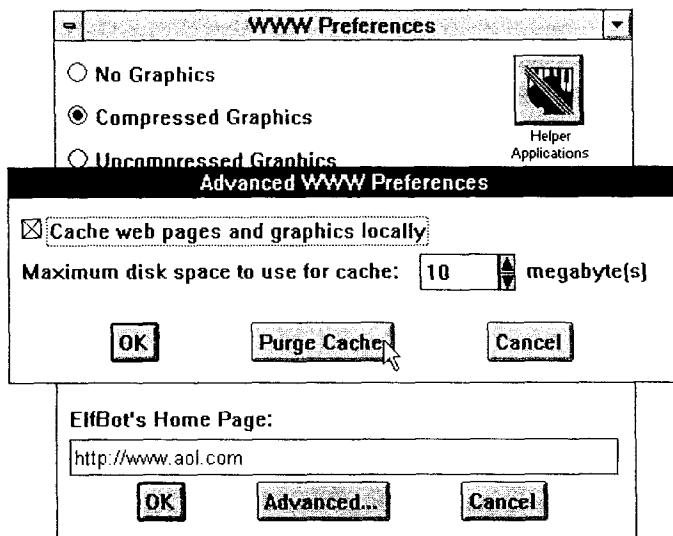


Figure 3-17:
One more
click and
the cache is
empty.

Personal Filing Cabinet

The Personal Filing Cabinet, that collector of Flashmail, Favorite Places, and all kinds of other stuff, is a really useful tool. The options in the Personal Filing Cabinet Preferences dialog box (see Figure 3-18) make it even better.

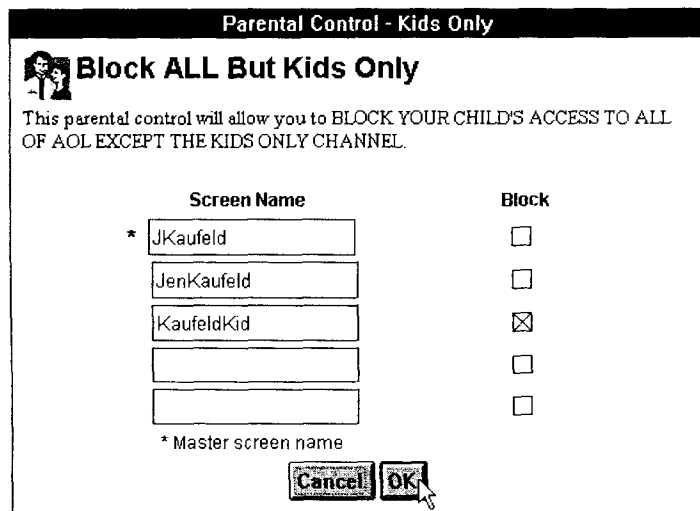


Figure 3-18:
These
settings
make sure
that the
Personal
Filing
Cabinet
won't fill
your hard
drive.

The two warning preferences instruct the America Online software to let you know when space is dwindling in the Personal Filing Cabinet and when the Cabinet is trying to single-handedly take over your hard drive. There's no need to change these options — the default settings should be fine.

For safety's sake, I recommend leaving both of the Confirm check boxes turned on. However, if you get highly annoyed with all the *Are you sure?* messages while cleaning out the Personal Filing Cabinet, feel free to turn them off here.

Multimedia Preferences

America Online is a massive graphical experience. That's one of the things that makes it fun, but it's also very frustrating if you have an older modem with a speed less than 9,600 bits per second.

You can address your frustration in two ways. First, consider buying a faster modem. Your old modem isn't getting any faster, but as time goes on, your online experience will get a lot slower. These days, you need at least a 14,400 bit per second modem to get the most out of America Online. If you're buying a new modem, I recommend making the jump all the way to 28,800 bits per second. The cost difference is negligible, but the speed difference is startling.

If a new modem isn't in your budget this year, you're not out of luck. Instead of speeding up your access, change the Multimedia Preferences so that your modem doesn't need to work so hard. The Multimedia Preferences aren't in the Preferences dialog box (that would be too obvious). Instead, they're tucked away in the Preferences section of the My AOL window. To get there, click the My AOL button on the Toolbar or choose Members↔My AOL from the main menu. When the My AOL window appears, click Preferences. In the Preferences window, click Multimedia Preferences. (Feel free to rest a moment and recover from the grueling journey before continuing.)

By default, graphics are always turned on. If you have a slow modem or a perpetually bad connection to America Online, click the radio button next to *Show document graphics at 9600 baud & higher*. With this option turned on, you won't see the graphics when your connection is slow, but you will see them when you upgrade to a faster modem.



Please, for your continued personal safety and mental health, spend the money to upgrade your old, wheezing modem. The online world of the '90s requires a fast modem — it's just a fact of life.

Marketing Preferences

I'm not particularly big on junk mail. Frankly, I don't like it. My feelings are born from a combination of personal privacy issues, environmentalism, and the simple fact that I have a small mailbox.

If you feel the same way, here's your chance to strike back. By the same token, if you *like* junk mail, here's an opportunity to get *exactly* the kind you want.

The Marketing Preferences aren't part of the regular Preferences dialog box. To find them, either use keyword **Marketing Prefs** or click My AOL on the Toolbar, click Preferences in the My AOL window, and finally click Marketing Preferences in the Preferences dialog box. When you arrive, double-click the entry called Tell Us What Your Mailing Preferences Are.

Doing so opens a dialog box that lets you specify what kind of junk mail you want. (Of course, I was most interested in the "If you'd prefer not to receive any mailings" option.) Follow the on-screen instructions to fill out the form. Click Send when you're done.

If you're a direct mail hermit like me, you'll be interested in two documents in the Marketing Preferences dialog box. These documents contain information about the Direct Marketing Association's Telephone and Mail services. Briefly, the documents explain how to obliterate all traces of your earthly existence (at least as far as the direct mail merchants are concerned). I *highly* recommend reading these documents and doing what they say.

Parental Controls: Taking Away the Online Car Keys

Like any major city or tourist destination, there's a lot to see and do on America Online. Unfortunately, the similarities don't end there. Every big city has a *don't go there* side and a small population of less-than-moral people. If I said that America Online was immune to this, I'd be a fool (and no editorial comments from the people in the audience who know me personally).

Whether you like it or not, people and things that we need to shield our kids from are out there in the online world. That's what the Parental Controls (keyword **Parental Controls**) are all about. They allow you to exercise some control over what your kids can and can't do on America Online.



- ✓ Different people have different views about what kids should and shouldn't see. Please understand that I'm not trying to get on a moral high horse and tell you what's right and wrong for your kids. I'm not passing judgments about what's available out there, but merely explaining the tools available and giving some very general advice for parents whose kids know the Internet better than they do.
- ✓ To make the Parental Controls work, only you, the parent, should know the password to the master screen name (that's the screen name you created when you first signed up for America Online). Create another screen name specifically for your child to use. Remember that each America Online account can have up to five screen names — one master name plus four others.

- ✓ Are you curious why I'm making such a big cloak-and-dagger deal out of who's using which screen name? Here's the reason: The master screen name is special. Only the master screen name can set the Parental Controls and create new screen names in your account. If your child uses the master screen name for her online access, then she can simply turn off whatever parental controls you turn on. Whoops! Instead, create a screen name especially for her, place the controls on it, and then keep the master screen name for yourself.

Figure 3-19 shows the main Parental Controls screen. Apart from the parental controls themselves, the window also contains some general tips and a discussion board for swapping ideas with other parents about the trials and travails of having online kids.

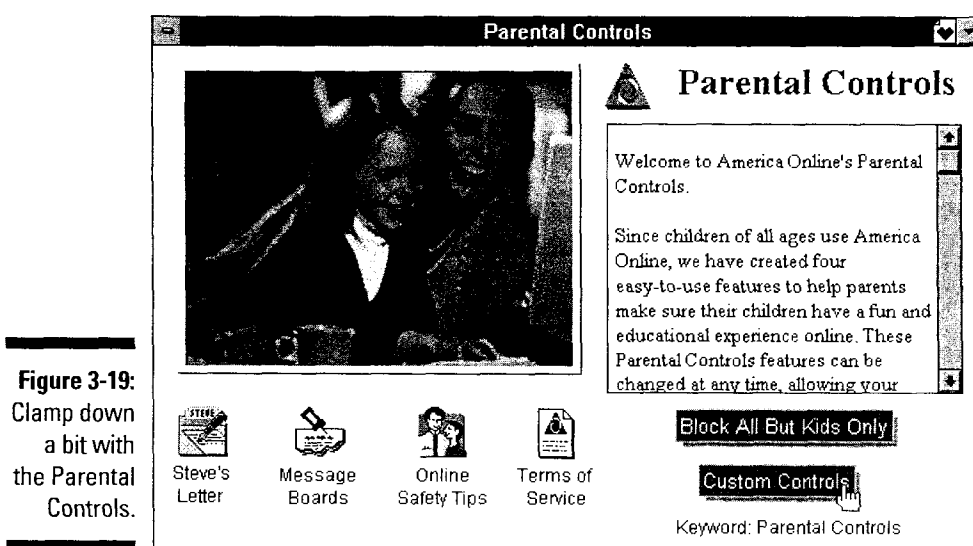


Figure 3-19:
Clamp down
a bit with
the Parental
Controls.

The two large buttons in the lower right side of the screen are your parental control options. *Block All But Kids Only* limits your online child to the Kids Only area (keyword **Kids Only**). *Custom Controls* offers controls for interactive chat, file downloading, and Internet Newsgroups. Each of these is explained later in the chapter.



How do you choose the right controls for your kid? Well, it depends. Consider the age and maturity of your child. Granted, our kids are all above average in intelligence and everything else, but for this one moment try to be especially objective. How responsible is your child? And how naive? How trustworthy? Yes, they're tough questions, but this decision is a very important one.

- ✓ For children 12 or younger, I recommend using the *Block All But Kids Only* option. Kids Only is specifically designed for that age group, so you can feel pretty comfortable that your little one won't run across anything incredibly weird.
- ✓ The teen years are more challenging. (Stating the obvious is one of my strengths.) If you use any controls at all, select some specific Custom options. I would recommend blocking Member Rooms in the Chat control, FTP in the Download control, and any Internet Newsgroup containing the magic word *sex* in the Newsgroup control. That combination maximizes the widely acceptable stuff while blocking off the Internet's most *colorful* content.
- ✓ If you feel comfortable giving your kids free run of the world, that's cool. Nothing says you *must* use the controls — they're just available tools.

You can change the settings at any time, so don't worry about ruining your child forever by making the wrong choice. Pick the settings, talk to your child, and see how everything works. If you need to make adjustments, do so. Most of all, work with your child and let him know that you're interested in his online world. That makes a bigger impact than any control ever can.

Block All But Kids Only

This option keeps your child exclusively in Kids Only, America Online's special world for the 12 and under set. They have free run inside Kids Only, but can't venture outside of it. The Channels window, Favorite Places, and any keyword that points beyond Kids Only are off-limits.

In addition, this option also blocks all Instant Messages and People Connection chat rooms (except for the special Kids Only chat rooms). On the Internet side of things, they're free to use sites listed within Kids Only, but can't see anything else. They also can't manually enter a Web site address.

To turn on the Block All But Kids Only parental control, follow these steps:

- 1. Sign on with the master screen name and then choose Members → Parental Control from the main menu.**

The Parental Controls window appears.

- 2. Click the Block All But Kids Only button.**

An informative window describing this setting pops onto the screen.

If your child doesn't have a screen name yet, click Create a Screen Name at the bottom of this window and make an online name for her. Your child must have a personal screen name before you can set up the Parental Controls. For all the details about creating a screen name, flip back to the beginning of this chapter.



3. Click the Block All But Kids Only button at the bottom of the window.

The Parental Control — Kids Only window in Figure 3-20 appears.

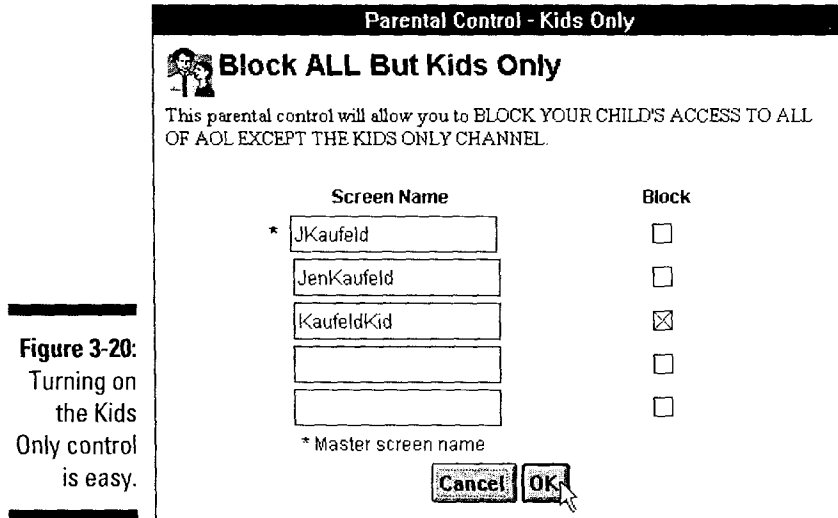


Figure 3-20:
Turning on
the Kids
Only control
is easy.

4. Click the box next to your child's screen name to turn on this control.

In the figure, KaufeldKid is limited to Kids Only access, but my other two screen names have free run of the system.

5. When you're done, click OK.

A dialog box appears and proclaims that your changes are saved.

6. Click OK and then close all the Parental Control windows.

That's it — the control is in place.

To remove the control, repeat the steps. Clicking next to the child's screen name in step 4 clears out the check box, turning off the control. To turn off the control completely, you also have to clear some settings in the Chat Controls window. Don't panic — America Online walks you through the changes automatically.

Chat Controls

The People Connection chat rooms are a big attraction on America Online. On your monthly bill, though, the word *popular* often translates into *expensive* because losing track of time while chatting the night away is so easy.

To keep your kids (or even yourself) out of the chat rooms, follow these instructions:

1. Sign on with the master screen name and then choose **Members** → **Parental Control** from the main menu.

The Parental Controls window hops energetically onto the screen.

2. Click **Custom Controls** and then click **Chat**. Finally, click **Chat Controls** at the bottom of the window.

The chat controls window in Figure 3-21 appears.

Parental Control

To restrict a screen name from an area, select the checkbox that is across from the screen name and under the area you wish to restrict.

| Screen Name | Block Instant Messages | --- People Connection Block All Rooms | --- Block Member Rooms | Block Conference Rooms |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| JKaufeld | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| JenKaufeld | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| KaufeldKid | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Cancel OK

Figure 3-21: Be sure to set all the options — there are a bunch of them here!

3. Click the check boxes next to your child's screen name for each chat control you want to turn on.

Table 3-1 explains each of the four options.

4. When you're done, click **OK**.

America Online responds with a brief note that your changes are saved.

5. Click **OK** and then close all the **Parental Control** windows.

Another one's done!

Turning off the chat options is as easy as turning them on. Just repeat the preceding steps.

Download Controls

Of all the Parental Controls, these are probably the least important. Granted, there are some things in the world that I don't want my kids downloading from America Online or the Internet, but that's hardly my biggest concern about online life.

| <i>Control</i> | <i>Severity</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Block Instant Messages | 1 | The screen name can't send or receive Instant Messages (see Chapter 7 for more about this feature). |
| Block All Rooms | 5 | Completely blocks access to the People Connection interactive chat areas (see Chapter 25 for more details). |
| Block Member Rooms | 2 | Prevents access to private chat areas, but allows the use of the regular People Connection areas (more in Chapter 25). |
| Block Conference Rooms | 10 | Blocks <i>all</i> interactive rooms throughout America Online, including the discussion rooms in Learning and Reference (see Chapter 7 for more). Use this <i>only</i> as a last resort! |

If it's a bigger worry in your life than in mine, follow these steps to limit your child's access to downloadable programs and such:

- 1. Sign on to America Online with your master screen name and then choose Members → Parental Control from the main menu.**

If everything works just right, the Parental Controls window appears.

- 2. Click the Custom Controls button and then click Downloading. When the Download Controls button appears at the bottom of the window, click it.**

The vaguely impressive Downloading control dialog box, shown in 3-22, leaps into view.

- 3. To turn on the Download controls, click the check boxes next to your child's screen name. When you're done, click OK.**

An energetic dialog box pops up, letting you know that your changes are saved.



I wouldn't bother with Block AOL Software Downloads, but turning on the Block FTP (File Transfer Protocol) Downloads option is a good idea. FTP copies files through the Internet, and there's no telling what your inquisitive kiddo might find out there.

- 4. Click OK and then close the Parental Control windows.**

Download controls are now in place!

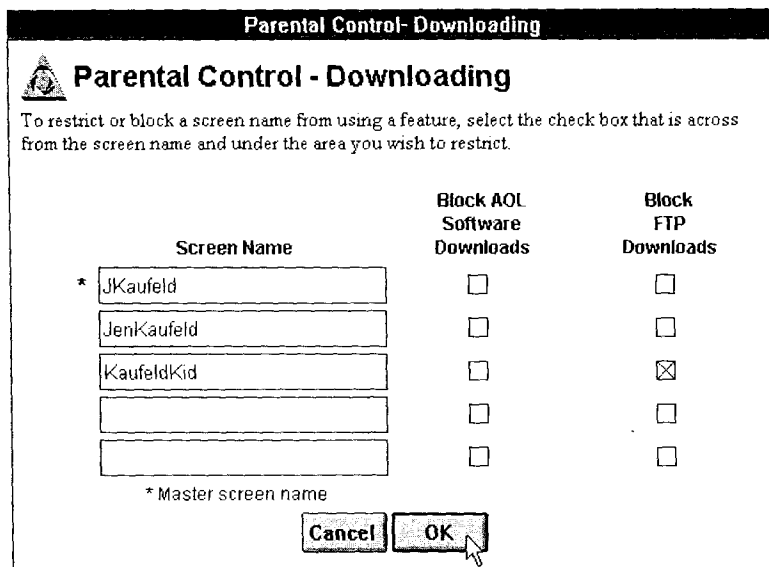


Figure 3-22:
The important option here is definitely FTP.

As you may have guessed by now, to undo the Download controls you simply repeat the steps to create them. The big difference is that this time you click the check boxes *off* instead of turning them on.

Newsgroup Controls

Of all the custom Parental Controls, this one is the most valuable. The Internet Newsgroups are an incredible resource, filled with discussions on almost every topic imaginable. However, not all the conversations out there are designed for eyes under 18.

To block out the most (I'm being kind here) exotic material that the Newsgroups offer, follow these steps:

- 1. Sign on with the master screen name and then choose Go To⇒Keyword from the main menu. Type keyword Newsgroups in the dialog box and press Enter.**

The Newsgroups window appears on-screen.

- 2. Click the Parental Controls button in the lower-left corner of the window.**

A window listing your screen names pops into view.

- 3. Click the radio button next to your child's screen name (see Figure 3-23) and then click Edit.**

The screen name list is replaced with the Blocking Criteria window.

- 4. For most kids, I recommend setting the controls just like Figure 3-24. When you're finished, click OK.**

Figure 3-23:
Choose the name for the controls and then click Edit.

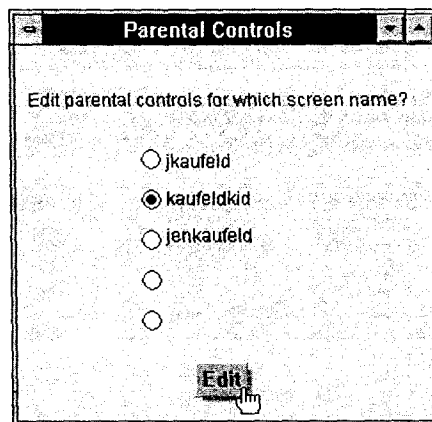
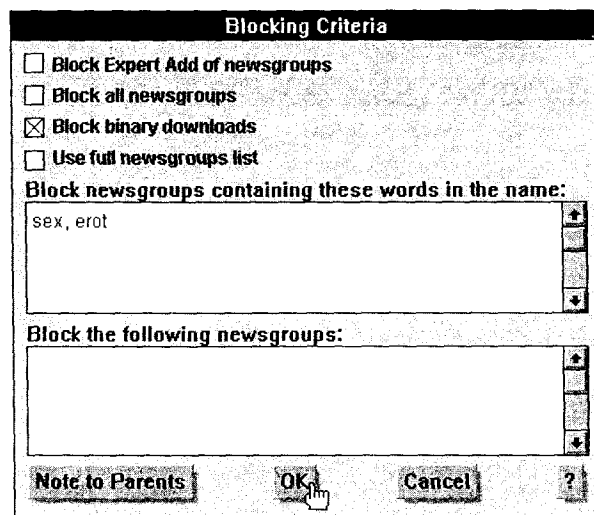


Figure 3-24:
These two little words keep your kids out of so much trouble that it's amazing.



The example setting blocks your child from any Internet newsgroup with, shall we say, *stimulating* words in the name. This one setting quickly blocks off most of the content that many parents are concerned about.



This setting does *nothing* to keep your kids out of the more explicit areas of the World Wide Web. As I write this, some Web-based controls are planned, but they're not currently available. By the time you read this book, though, those controls may be ready. Keep checking keyword **Parental Controls** for the latest news about Web controls.

5. Close all the various open windows and continue with your regularly scheduled day.

Your child is now safe from most of the newsgroups.

To undo these restrictions, work back through the steps above. In step 4, delete the entries in the Block newsgroups text area. Remember to click OK when you're done!

Chapter 4

Manners in the Electronic World

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In This Chapter

- ▶ What you type is what you say
 - ▶ The best e-mail tips ever
-

“Talking” to people in America Online really means “typing” to them. Whether you communicate in an e-mail message or in a live chat room, the other people out there know you only by what you write.

And wouldn't you know it — a whole bunch of rules, procedures, guidelines, and statutes exist about how to behave in the wonderful world of electronic communication. Unfortunately, none of them are written down anywhere. At least they weren't when I got started. You, however, are far luckier than I.

This chapter presents to you what I learned the hard way. It briefly explains how to write e-mail messages and Internet newsgroup postings without getting *flamed* (electronically yelled at). In short, this chapter is the best of the rules, procedures, guidelines, and statutes out there just waiting to trip you up.

In E-Mail, No One Can Hear You Smile

When you talk to someone face to face, what you say is only *part* of the message. Most of the message comes along with vocal tone, eye contact, and body movement. On the phone, the only thing you have to go on is what the other person says, but the *way* it's said provides clues and meanings for the words.

A little further down the communication food chain is e-mail. E-mail is *pure* message: no voice, no gestures, no *nothing*. It's WYTIWYS (What You Type Is What You Say) messaging at its best.

And this purity of message, I submit, is a problem.

Well, perhaps it's not really a problem, but it certainly is a breeding ground for problems. Whatever you type *is* the message. Leave all your emotion, intent, sarcasm, and inflection at the keyboard — all that remains on-screen are your words.

For example, one morning you're "invited" to attend a meeting at the office. After enduring two hours of the most *incredibly* boring presentation of your life, the speaker expires and everyone goes to lunch. After you get back, you drop an e-mail message to Jane, another coworker who suffered through the morning's activities. "Wasn't that the most incredibly fascinating talk you ever heard?" you sarcastically write. Jane reads your message, thinks the meeting snapped your mind, and has you placed in an institution for the rest of your life (thus freeing up your windowed office for herself).

Would this same unfortunate scenario happen in face-to-face conversation? No, probably not. You'd roll your eyes as you described the meeting, and your voice would carry enough sarcasm for every man, woman, and child in metropolitan Dayton, Ohio. Even though the words are the same, the *message* is completely different.

Keys to Good E-Communication

All the e-mail gurus assume that you already know a little bit about the electronic communication thing. I must have missed class that day because nobody ever taught me anything. I had to learn it all on my own.

In a blatant attempt to save you frustration and abuse, the following sections explain what you need to know about the gentle art of writing e-mail.

Listen before you type

If you're adding something to an America Online message area or posting a comment to an Internet newsgroup, *listening* to the conversation before joining really pays off.

So, how do you "listen" to a discussion board? Do you view it and put your ear to the monitor? (Just kidding — don't do that.) Read other people's postings. Learn how the group talks and interacts. When you add your own thoughts, write clearly, keep to the point, and make it short. This

is *particularly* important on the Internet. The last thing you want to do is earn the label *newbie* (someone who's new to the Internet and doesn't have a clue as to what he or she is doing).

You're entering a whole new society. The online world (including both America Online and the Internet) has its own way of doing business. It's up to you to learn how things work before joining the fray or risk the consequences (and the consequences *aren't* fun).

Abstain from verbosity — pursue lucid prose

This little ditty comes directly from its original appearance in *How to Write Software Manuals for Fun, Profit, and Minimal Comprehension* (obviously, they didn't understand it either). It means, *say what you have to say and use normal language to do so*. Don't try to blow people away with your amazing command of the language; impress them with the simplicity and clarity of your message instead.



The next time you write an e-mail, try writing the way you talk. Describe your message out loud and write what you say. Quite different from your usual style, isn't it?

Spel wurds rite

Nothing is more annoying than a misspelled word in the middle of an e-mail. Misspellings are distracting and deeply reduce the credibility of your message. In short, don't let it happen to your messages.

If your e-mail package has a built-in spell checker, use it! If it doesn't, take an extra moment to reread your work and ferret out those spelling errors.

Come to think of it, even if you *have* a spell checker, reread your message before sending it. Fine-tuning your meaning before sending the message is a whole lot easier than cooling off a mad coworker who misunderstands what you're trying to say. Enuf sed.

DON'T SHOUT!

Here's one for those of you who like typing in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. Using all caps is *incredibly* bad form in both e-mail and online chat rooms.

Why? BECAUSE YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING, that's why.

I understand that some mainframe computers didn't even *have* lowercase letters a few years ago. Really — I do. But times have changed, and the prevailing communication winds of the day demand messages in upper- *and* lowercase text. Please, for your sake (and my hearing), don't type messages in ALL CAPS. (Oops, sorry — I didn't mean to shout.)

Judge Not, Lest Ye Be Flamed

This rule is the hardest one to remember about life in the Brave New Digital World. On the surface, it's really simple. In practice, it's really tough.

The rule is as follows: *Everyone* has a right to an opinion, no matter how uninformed, narrow-minded, or upsetting you think it is. *You* have the right to ignore, disagree, and discuss anything people post in an Internet newsgroup or an America Online bulletin board. You may *not*, however, question the person's right to hold the opinion. That last line is the tough part.

The simplest way to live by this rule is to stay out of areas that you find upsetting. If you read something that stirs your ire, either don't reply right away or don't reply *at all*. Remember that someone out there thinks your opinions are more than a little off the wall, too.

Apply humor carefully (ha!)

I touched on this subject at the beginning of the chapter, but it bears repeating. Humor is a wonderful thing (I can't imagine a ...*For Dummies* book without it), but you must treat humor with respect. The phrase "You're a goober" can be anything from a gentle reproof to fighting words, depending on how it's said.

If you're trying to be funny in a message, say so. I recommend an occasional *emoticon* (those little smiley faces made with typing characters) to ensure that your humor is heard and understood. Don't overdo it, though. Tacking a smiley emoticon onto the phrase, "You're really stupid," doesn't quite turn those words into a playful jest. When possible (and that should be most of the time), let your words speak for themselves. For more about America Online's most popular emoticons, see Chapter 41.

Dnt typ lk ths

I'm not sure why, but all of a sudden using quasi-intelligible shorthand for e-mail messages is in. It's something about dropping the vowels out of words so that you can type more quickly. (Yes, I think it's silly, too.)

If you *must* use an abbreviation or two, that's fine as long as you're sure that the person getting the message will understand what you mean. If you aren't sure, don't use the abbreviation — spell out the phrase instead.



If you're introducing a new abbreviation, follow what the newspapers do: Write out the phrase the first time you use it and put the abbreviation in parentheses behind it. After that, just use the abbreviation by itself.

Part II

Surviving the Software

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

The only thing standing between you and a brain-numbing quantity of mundane details is the America Online access software. You and this program are a team — you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish together.

This part explores the pretty pictures, menus, and windows that meet and greet you while you're using America Online. It also explains the fine art of sending e-mail and using the Download Manager to grab programs from the system's online libraries. In short, it's the boring stuff you have to wade through to get to the interesting stuff on the other side.

But of course, I made *sure* that it isn't boring at all. Really.

Chapter 5

Icons for This, Menus for That, and Keys for These and Those



In This Chapter

- ▶ What all those Toolbar buttons do
- ▶ Looking through all the menus
- ▶ Making your own menu
- ▶ Remembering your Favorite Places
- ▶ Shortcut keys for the mouse-phobic



Using America Online is one thing. But before you actually *can* use it, you must tangle with (insert scary organ music here) *the user interface!*

No, it's not something *else* that you need to buy. The term *user interface* is just a fancy way of saying *the tools you use to interact with the software*. It's like an automobile engineer looking at the layout of a dashboard and thinking, "Golly, that's a clever user interface." (Yes, despite their various specialties, most engineers respond to the simplest stimulus in predictably unintelligible ways — they're just that way.)

This chapter covers the three main tools in your user interface for working with America Online: the Toolbar, the menu bar, and the shortcut keys. It doesn't matter whether you use these tools together or separately, but *I do* recommend using them; collectively, they make your life a little easier. (That's more than you can say for *most* software on the market.)










Revealing the Toolbar










It's always there right below the menu bar — watching you, daring you, enticing you with color buttons. But the *Toolbar* remains a mystery. What do those little pictures mean? Why are there so many of them? Is it time for lunch yet?

Table 5-1 strips away the Toolbar's shroud of mystery, showing, naming, and explaining each button. So much for the mystical Toolbar, eh?

- ✓ Take a little time to learn what the Toolbar buttons do; they give you quick access to some of the main areas of America Online and make wandering around the system a little less confusing.
- ✓ After years of Toolbar envy, Macintosh users *finally* get a Toolbar of their own in version 3.0 of America Online for Macintosh. It's about time, isn't it?

Table 5-1 Everything on the Toolbar

| <i>Button</i> | <i>Button Name</i> | <i>What It Does</i> |
|---|---------------------|---|
|  | Read New Mail | Opens the New Mail window; same as clicking the You Have Mail button on the Welcome window or choosing <u>M</u> ail⇨ <u>R</u> ead <u>N</u> ew Mail. |
|  | Compose Mail | Opens the Compose Mail window; same as choosing <u>M</u> ail⇨ <u>C</u> ompose Mail. |
|  | Channels | Displays the Channels window; same as choosing <u>G</u> o To⇨ <u>C</u> hannels. |
|  | What's Hot | Opens up the What's Hot window; same as keyword Hot . |
|  | People Connection | Puts you in a randomly selected room of the People Connection; same as clicking the People Connection button on the Channels window. |
|  | File Search | Displays the Software Search dialog box; same as keyword File Search . |
|  | Stocks & Portfolios | Opens the Quotes & Portfolios window; same as keyword Quotes . |
|  | Today's News | Displays the Today's News window; same as clicking the Today's News button on the Channels window. |
|  | World Wide Web | Starts the built-in Web browser and displays the America Online Web home page; same as keyword Web . |

| Button | Button Name | What It Does |
|---|--------------------|--|
|  | Marketplace | Allows you to go shopping in the Marketplace window; same as clicking the Marketplace button on the Channels window. |
|  | My AOL | Displays the My AOL settings window; same as Members→My AOL. |
|  | Online Clock | Displays the current time in Vienna, Virginia, along with a timer showing how long ago you signed on; same as Go To→Online Clock. |
|  | Print | Prints text and graphics in the current article window (if an article window is open); same as choosing File→Print from the main menu. |
|  | Filing Cabinet | Opens the Personal Filing Cabinet for the current screen name; same as choosing File→Personal Filing Cabinet from the main menu. |
|  | Favorite Places | Opens the Favorite Places window; same as choosing Go To→Favorite Places from the main menu. |
|  | Member Services | Sends you into the free Member Services window; same as keyword Help . |
|  | Find | Opens the Find It on AOL dialog box; same as pressing ⌘+F on the Mac or Ctrl+F in Windows. |
|  | Keyword | Displays the Keyword dialog box; same as pressing ⌘+K on the Mac or Ctrl+K in Windows. |

Running through the Menus

Beauty, as the cyberbard says, is only button deep — and there's more to the America Online interface than mere pretty buttons. How about that menu bar up there? What's it do? Actually, quite a lot. I can't *imagine* trying to figure out America Online without the menu bar.

Because the menus are so darned important, this section looks at them one by one. The section doesn't go through every item, because there's more to life than menus (a collective whine issues from the nerds of the world). Instead, the section points out the menu choices that make life in America Online Land a little bit easier.

File

The **File** menu governs everything dealing with documents (such as magazine articles, bulletin board postings, and forum announcements), files, and other trivialities such as exiting the America Online access program (but who'd ever want to do that?). The most interesting **File** menu commands are



- ✓ **File⇨New:** Starts the built-in text editor and gets ready to create a new plain-text document. I often keep a blank document window open when I'm browsing through the system and use it like a notepad for keywords, screen names, and anything else I want to remember. It works really well!
- ✓ **File⇨Open:** Opens a document (a plain-text file — not a WordPerfect or Microsoft Word .DOC file), graphic, or sound file that you downloaded or saved to your computer's disk drive.
- ✓ **File⇨Save:** Saves the current document (article, discussion board posting, and so on) as a plain-text file on your computer's disk drive. If a graphic is on the window (a photo accompanying the news story, for example), the America Online software automatically offers to save a copy of it, too.
- ✓ **File⇨Save As:** Saves the current document under a new filename. If the current document is an article, discussion board posting, or something else in an online area, then this command behaves just like **File⇨Save**.
- ✓ **File⇨Print:** Prints the current document. If you choose this option and don't have a printer connected to the computer, your computer may seem to lock up for a minute or two. Be patient — the machine should come back to life, probably complaining that your nonexistent printer is either turned off or out of paper. (Silly computer.)
- ✓ **File⇨Print Setup:** Opens the Printer Setup dialog box, where you can change the options for the default printer or temporarily select a different printer.
- ✓ **File⇨Personal Filing Cabinet:** Displays the Personal Filing Cabinet so you can root through your stored stuff. Chapter 7 reveals the cabinet's mysteries.
- ✓ **File⇨Download Manager:** Starts the Download Manager, the Master of All That You Choose to Download Later (and a piece of software that has not a shred of ego, I might add). Chapter 8 has all the details on this feature.
- ✓ **File⇨Log Manager:** Controls the online logs. *Logs* are like very fast electronic scribes, scribbling notes about everything that's said in a Chat area (discussion areas and theaters, too) or during other parts of an America Online session (capturing articles and stories, for example). For more information about Chat logs, see Chapter 25. Session logs are covered in Chapter 8.

- ✓ **File⇨Stop Incoming Text:** Tells America Online to stop sending the current text document to your system. Works in articles, discussion board postings, Internet newsgroup postings, and other text windows like those.
- ✓ **File⇨Exit:** Closes the America Online access software.

Edit

Just about every Macintosh and Windows program has an Edit menu. This menu contains your basic text-editing tools; apart from that, the Edit menu is nothing to write home about. Your main choices in this menu are

- ✓ **Edit⇨Undo:** Undoes the last change you made. I use this command a lot when I'm writing e-mail messages. My fingers enjoy playing tricks on my brain, so they take charge of the mouse and randomly delete text. After my brain goes spastic for a moment, it brings the hand digits back under control and uses Undo to recover the nearly lost text.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Cut:** Removes highlighted text from the screen and puts it on the Clipboard.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Copy:** Copies the highlighted text from the screen to the Clipboard, leaving the original text in place.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Paste:** Inserts text from the Clipboard into the current document.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Select All:** Highlights all the text in the current document.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Find in Top Window:** Searches the current window for a given piece of text. Open a Web page, an article in the News section, or a discussion board posting and give this menu choice a try.

If none of these menu items sounds familiar to you, get a copy of *Windows 3.11 For Dummies*, 4th Edition, *Windows 95 For Dummies*, or *Macs For Dummies*, 4th Edition, all available from IDG Books Worldwide, Inc. You can thank me later.



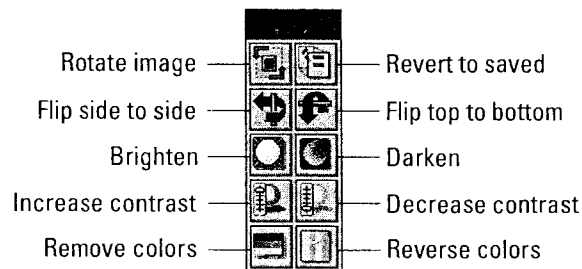
The final items on the Edit menu are graphic editing tools. The America Online programmers threw in a miniature art studio with several tools that modify the overall look of a graphic file. You have tools for cropping the image, adjusting the brightness and contrast, and flipping the picture vertically or horizontally. There's even a tool that sucks all the color out, leaving you with a stark black-and-white illustration. (It appeals to the minimalist in me.)

The graphic editing tools are available only when you view a graphic file that's stored on your computer. To do that, choose File⇨Open from the main menu and double-click the graphic file you want to work with. The America Online software displays the graphic in a new window. Now you're ready to have some fun!

Here's a rundown of the image editing menu items:

- ✓ **Edit⇨Crop Image:** If the graphic is too big, use this tool to trim out the parts you don't need. Click and drag across the image to draw a box around the part you want, and then choose this menu item. The America Online software discards the rest of your graphic, leaving only the part you highlighted.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Fit Image to View:** Resizes the image to fit into the current window. After you choose this menu item, the **Show Image in Original Size** menu choice takes its place on the menu.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Show Image in Original Size:** Turns off **Fit Image to View**, returning the image to its full size. After you choose this menu item, the **Fit Image to View** reappears on the menu.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Show Image Tools:** Displays the image editing tool palette shown in Figure 5-1. After you choose this menu item, **Hide Image Tools** replaces it on the menu.
- ✓ **Edit⇨Hide Image Tools:** Puts away the image editing tool palette. After you choose this item, **Show Image Tools** takes its place on the menu.

Figure 5-1:
Unleash the artist inside you with the image editing tools.



These tools *don't* work on graphics that America Online displays during your online session (things like Channels window pictures and such) unless you choose **File⇨Save** and make your own copy of the image.

Go To

This menu is one that you can't live without. **Go To** gets you darned near everywhere you need to go in America Online; it's navigational one-stop shopping at its best. Following are several of your choices in the **Go To** menu:

- ✓ **Go To⇨Set Up & Sign On:** Displays the screen name and password window before you sign on to America Online.

- ✓ **Go To⇨Sign Off:** When you're ready to leave America Online and come screaming back to the real world, select this menu choice. Remember to sigh wistfully as well — doing so enhances the dramatic mood of the moment.
- ✓ **Go To⇨Exit Free Area:** Leaves the no-charge areas of America Online and returns to your regularly scheduled bill. I wondered for the longest time why this item didn't exist, only to find out that I was looking for it in the wrong place. (I hate it when that happens.) Use this command to get back to online civilization from Member Services, TechLive Help, or any other free America Online area.
- ✓ **Go To⇨Channels:** Brings up the Channels window (which used to be known as the Main Menu window).
- ✓ **Go To⇨Welcome Menu:** Displays the Welcome window, which used to be called the Spotlight menu.
- ✓ **Go To⇨Keyword:** Opens the Keyword dialog box for quick access to everything that's not in the Go To menu. Same as clicking the Keyword button on the Toolbar.
- ✓ **Go To⇨Find:** Opens the Find window and searches for people, places, things, and events. (It *may* even be able to find your car keys.) Same as clicking the Find button on the Toolbar.
- ✓ **Go To⇨Online Clock:** Displays the current time and tells you how long you've been signed on.
- ✓ **Go To⇨Favorite Places:** Opens the Favorite Places window. See "Organizing the Places of Your Heart" later in this chapter for more about tracking your best-loved Web sites, America Online areas, and Internet goodies with this incredibly cool tool.
- ✓ **Go To⇨Edit Go To Menu:** Changes the items at the bottom of the Go To menu. The next section of this chapter has all the information about this feature — you're gonna love it!

Mail

I'd be lost without e-mail — it's that important to my work and play. Because my dependence on it isn't unique, America Online dedicates an entire menu to this function. The menu contains lots of options, but the following list covers the ones that you really care about:

- ✓ **Mail⇨Mail Center:** Goes to the America Online post office. If you want to know more about doing e-mail the America Online way, this place is a good area to explore. (Of course, Chapter 7 isn't bad either.)

- ✓ **Mail⇨Compose Mail:** Opens the Compose Mail window, which is ready to take down your new digital missive. Same as ⌘+M on the Macintosh or Ctrl+M in Windows.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Read New Mail:** Opens the New Mail window. Choosing this command is the same as clicking the big You Have Mail button in the Welcome window.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Check Mail You've Read:** Displays the Old Mail window, where you can reread messages from your friends, acquaintances, and whomever else sends you mail. Old mail usually stays in this window for seven days; once in a while, it lives a couple of days longer.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Check Mail You've Sent:** Displays the Outgoing Mail window, which is the half-brother of the Old Mail window. The concept is the same, except that this window shows messages that you actually wrote to other people. Messages stay in this window for at least seven days and no more than 30. After a message is past the seven-day mark, it may vanish at any time without warning.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Check Is in the Mail:** This really isn't a menu item, but I think that it should be, what with electronic payment options and all that kind of stuff.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Fax/Paper Mail:** Opens a Help window containing all the gory details of America Online's fax and paper mail gateways. This is *the* place to find answers about America Online's special mailing services.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Edit Address Book:** Opens the Address Book window.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Set Up FlashSessions:** Opens the FlashSessions setup window. FlashSessions jump into America Online, send messages that you wrote offline, quickly pull new mail into your computer, and download any files left in the care of the Download Manager. They're great time and money savers. Chapter 7 has the details.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Activate FlashSession Now:** Starts a FlashSession (but you probably figured that out on your own).
- ✓ **Mail⇨Read Incoming FlashMail:** Reads mail retrieved with a FlashSession.
- ✓ **Mail⇨Read Outgoing Mail:** Double-checks messages waiting to be FlashSessioned (is that a word?) to America Online.

Members

Interacting with other America Online members is a blast. The most interesting people (you and me, for example) are out there just waiting to be met. This menu offers several options that help you meet and greet people online. Here are the best of these options:

- ✓ **Members⇨Member Services:** Goes to the free online Help area. Chapter 31 has everything that you need to know about this area.

- ✓ **Members**⇨**My AOL**: Opens the My AOL information and setup window. Chapter 3 explains all about this helpful option.
- ✓ **Members**⇨**Preferences**: Customize your online environment with the Preferences dialog box. The options in this dialog box include Preferences, Stored Passwords, Parental Controls, Screen Names, and your profile. See Chapter 3 for everything you never — er, ever — wanted to know about Preference settings.
- ✓ **Members**⇨**Parental Control**: Controls the kinds of services that each screen name in your account can use. See Chapter 3 for more information.
- ✓ **Members**⇨**Member Directory**: Displays the Member Directory menu. Your options in that menu include searching the Member Directory and messing with your *profile* (what other people see about you when they search the Member Directory).
- ✓ **Members**⇨**Send an Instant Message**: Use the Instant Message function to drop a quick “Hi!” on someone’s head. Same as pressing ⌘+I on the Macintosh or Ctrl+I in Windows.
- ✓ **Members**⇨**Get a Member’s Profile**: Learn more about the person you just bonked on the head with an Instant Message. Same as pressing ⌘+G on the Macintosh or Ctrl+G in Windows.
- ✓ **Members**⇨**Locate a Member Online**: Finds out whether a particular screen name is signed on to America Online right now. If so, the system tells you whether that person is in a chat room, a private chat room, or just wandering around the service somewhere. Same as pressing ⌘+L on the Macintosh or Ctrl+L in Windows. (In earlier versions of the program, this keystroke used *F* for *Find* instead of *L* for *Locate*.)
- ✓ **Members**⇨**Buddy Lists**: Opens the Buddy List dialog box, to use, change, and generally manage your Buddy Lists. To find out more about Buddy Lists, check out Chapter 7.

Window

This menu is a whoa-I-have-too-many-windows-open navigational lifesaver. If you misplace an Instant Message window or lose track of your Web browser, head to the **Window** menu and find it right away. Best of all, tracking the errant window is merely a two-step process:

1. Choose **Window** from the main menu.

The **Window** menu drops down, displaying some marvelously technical options near the top and a numbered list of your open windows at the bottom. On the Macintosh, the windows aren’t numbered, but they’re still listed at the bottom of the menu.

2. Click the name of the window you want to display (see Figure 5-2).

The until-so-recently-lost window immediately pops to the top of the heap. Is this a great country or what?



If you're completely fed up with all those open windows (or if it unexpectedly starts raining), close them all with a quick visit to the **Window**→**Close All** menu choice. Like it says, selecting this option makes all the open service windows go away and minimizes the Welcome window.

As for the other items in the **Window** menu, don't worry about them. They're for people who actually *care* about the difference between tiling and cascading windows — definitely folks with too much time on their hands.

Help

If you have trouble getting onto America Online, check the **Help** menu for assistance. This menu isn't particularly good at helping you with problems after you've signed on to the system, but it does have some specific ideas about getting there. Help menu options include

- ✓ **Help**→**Contents**: Displays the Help system's Contents page.
- ✓ **Help**→**Search for Help On**: Searches the list of keywords in the Help file. This is my favorite way to get help fast.

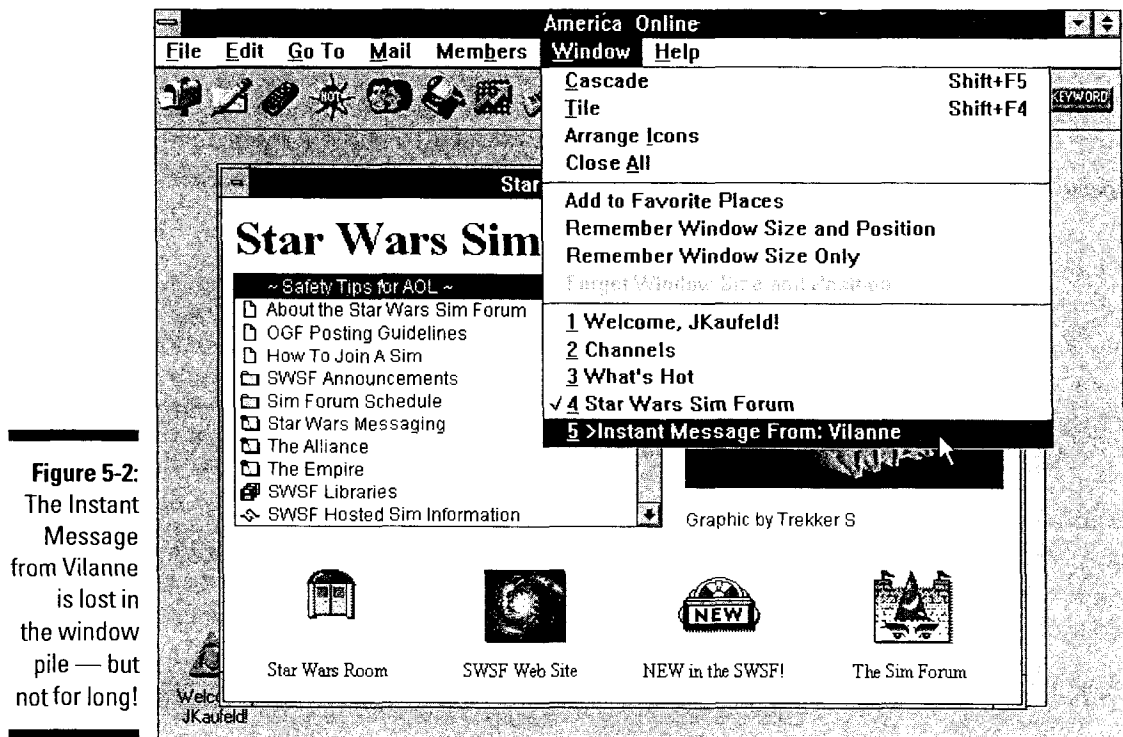




Figure 5-2: The Instant Message from Vilanne is lost in the window pile — but not for long!

For help *after* you sign on to the system, check out these two Help menu goodies:

- ✓ **Help⇨Online Support:** Sends you directly to the free Member Services window. Same as using keyword **Help**.
- ✓ **Help⇨New Member Info:** Opens the Discover America Online new member orientation window. Same as using keyword **Discover**.



By the way, you won't find a Help option on the Macintosh America Online menu bar. Instead, it's filed in the  menu. To find it, choose ⇨Help.

A Menu to Call Your Own

Once again, someone in the access software programming department of America Online was *thinking*. If this particular person *hadn't* been thinking, the bottom section of the Go To menu wouldn't exist today.

The Go To menu's bottom section is your very own customizable menu space. Load it with up to ten of your favorite online destinations. This menu comes preloaded with entries for seven popular parts of America Online (or at least parts America Online *wants* to be popular, like Sign on a Friend), but you can easily change those entries to things *you're* interested in.

- ✓ You just need to keep one rule in mind: Only services and forums with a keyword can be in the special Go To menu. If you can't get there with a keyword, you can't get there with the Go To menu, either.
- ✓ Some my picks for a starter Go To menu include *Business Week* magazine (keyword **BW**), the New York Public Library Online Reference Books (keyword **Desk Reference**), the Star Wars simulation area (keyword **Star Wars**), and the multiplayer space game Federation (keyword **Federation**). If you're a fellow fan of Pinky and the Brain, save a spot on your menu for the Warner Brothers kids area (keyword **KidsWB**). Dave Barry fans should include the Mercury Center (keyword **Mercury**) for quick online access to his weekly columns.

Here's how to customize the Go To menu with *your* Favorite Places:

1. **Find something that you want to add to the menu, and get its keyword and name.**

Make sure that the keyword is correct; otherwise, the menu option won't work (and the programmers of the world don't need *any* help in developing software that doesn't work).

2. Choose Go To→Edit Go To Menu.

This command displays the Favorite Places dialog box.

3. Decide which key you want to use for the new item, and click the Menu Entry box for that key.

If the box already has an entry, press your Backspace or Delete key to remove it (see Figure 5-3).

4. Type the name of the item in the Menu Entry box.

Whatever you type appears in the Favorite Places menu, so keep it kinda short — one to four words at most.

5. Press Tab to move to the Keyword box.

If you're replacing an existing entry, press Backspace or Delete to remove it.

6. Type the keyword for your new menu item in the Keyword box (see Figure 5-4).

Double-check your typing to make sure that the keyword is correct.



| Favorite Places | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Key | Menu Entry | Keyword |
| 1 | Discover America Online | discover |
| 2 | What's Hot | hot |
| 3 | Top News | top news |
| 4 | | events |
| 5 | Stock Quotes | stocks |
| 6 | Sign on a Friend | friend |
| 7 | AOL Store | aolstore |
| 8 | | |
| 9 | | |
| 10 | | |
| Save Changes | | Cancel |

Figure 5-3:
Making
room for a
new item
in slot 4.

7. Click the Save Changes button to make the new entry part of your Go To menu.

If you have a sudden desire to forget that you ever considered changing the menu, click Cancel in Windows or close the window on a Macintosh.

8. Open the Go To menu and choose your new item from the Favorite Places section (see Figure 5-5).

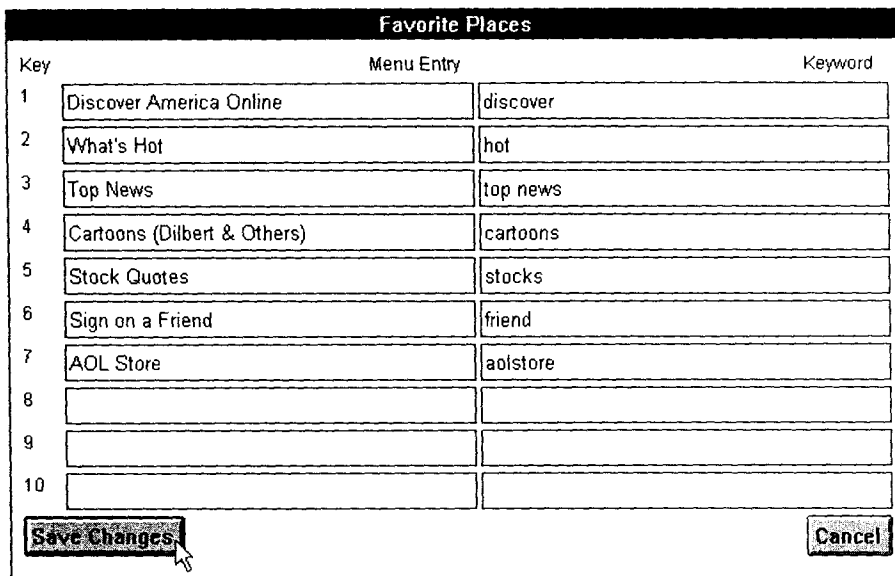


Figure 5-4:
The new item is in place and ready to save.

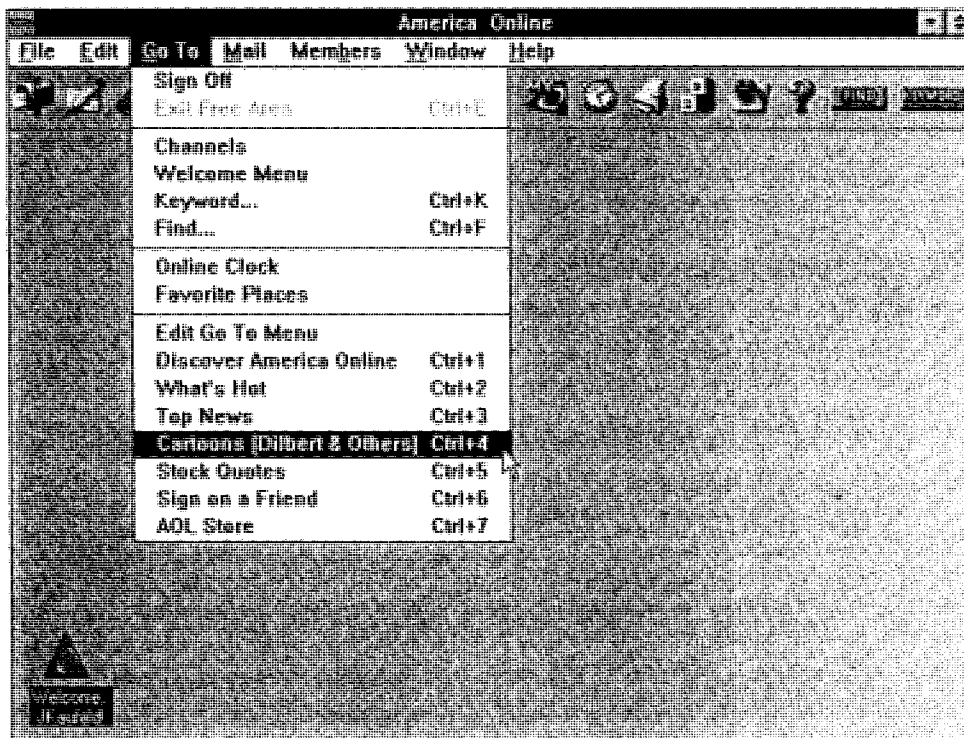


Figure 5-5:
So far, so good. Time to try it.

If something that looks like the dialog box shown in Figure 5-6 pops up after you try your new menu item, go back to step 6 and check the Keyword entry; it's probably a little spelling-challenged.

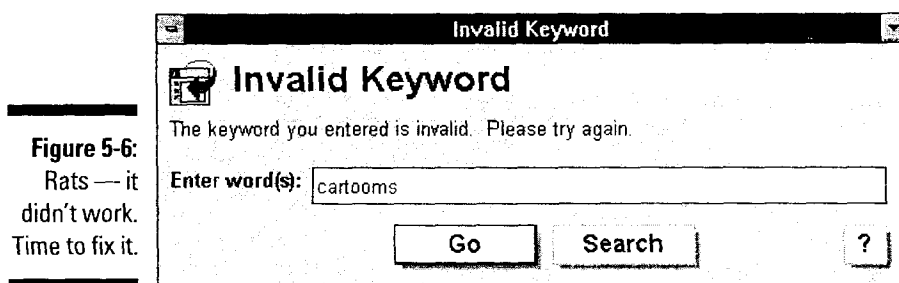


Figure 5-6:
Rats — it
didn't work.
Time to fix it.

Organizing the Places of Your Heart

There's a new button in town — and it's appearing on a Toolbar near you. Say hello to Favorite Places and its sidekick, the Favorite Places window — both of them riding hard to organize the online areas you know and love.

The new Favorite Places system won't bring any law into your digital life (hopefully Congress won't either), but it promises a *lot* of order. Instead of having just ten favorite places, you can have *as many as you want!* Is that just too cool or what?

Figure 5-7 shows a hard-working Favorite Places window in action. The heart entries link to services within America Online or World Wide Web pages and Gophers on the Internet. The item highlighted in Figure 5-7 is in the Mercury Center on America Online. The entry right above it, Intertext, is a Web page. Manila folders (such as Support Areas, Gaming, and Fun Spots) apply some order to the impending chaos.

- ✓ To use the new Favorite Places system, you must have Version 2.5 or later of the America Online access software for Windows. The older software just isn't this cool.
- ✓ You're not limited to the folders shown in Figure 5-7. I created those myself to meet my exceedingly peculiar needs. You have the freedom — yes, even the *right* — to create equally peculiar folders for yourself.

Using folders and favorite places

This thing is so obvious that I almost forgot to mention it. Luckily, two of my brain cells, spurred into action by the caloric heat of a half-digested Oreo, reminded me that double-clicking is the key to using the Favorite Places window:

- ✓ To open a folder, double-click it.
- ✓ To close the folder when you're done with it, double-click the folder again.
- ✓ To take off for a favorite place, double-click it.

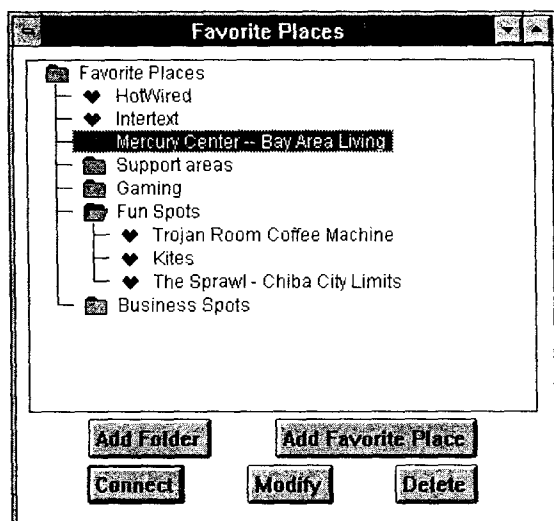


Figure 5-7:
The tip of
my Favorite
Places
iceberg.

Adding a favorite place

Including a new favorite place is a cinch. You can do so in two ways: the Easy Way and the Other Way. This section tells you how to handle them both.

The Easy Way is for areas inside America Online or Internet-based Web pages and Gophers that you've browsed your way into. Here are the steps:

1. Display an area that you're fond of, either inside America Online or on the Internet.
2. Click the little heart document icon in the window's upper-right corner (see Figure 5-8).

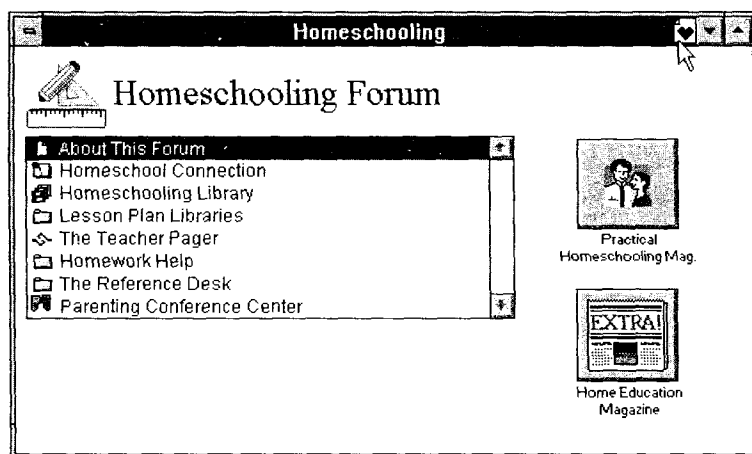


Figure 5-8:
It's just one
click away
from
membership
in my
Favorite
Places club.



A dialog box appears, demanding to know if you're serious about adding this window to your Favorite Places list.

Not every window in America Online has one of those cute little heart document icons. It's unfortunate, but true. If the window you're looking at *doesn't* have one, you can't add it to the Favorite Places list.

3. Click OK in the Add this window to Favorite Places dialog box.

Your new entry takes up residence at the bottom of the Favorite Places window, just like Figure 5-9.

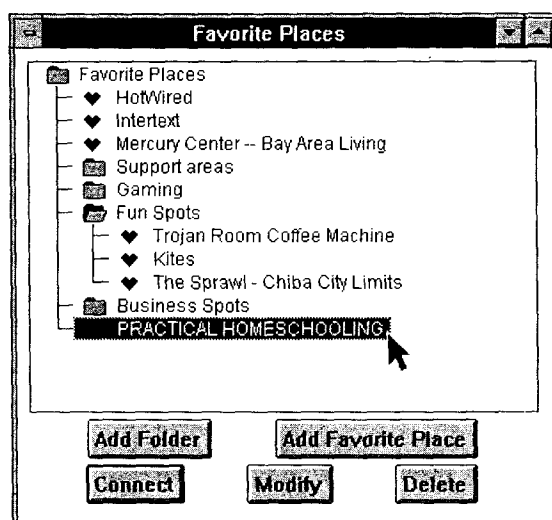


Figure 5-9:
My new entry lands at the bottom of the list.

Use the Other Way when someone dashes up and says, "I just found the neatest Web page — you've *gotta* check it out!" The Other Way assumes that you have the address of a Web page or an Internet Gopher and want to manually include it in your Favorite Places. Here's how it's done:



1. Click the Favorite Places button on the Toolbar.

The Favorite Places window appears.

2. Click the folder in which you want to store the new item.

If you don't know where to put the item, click on the Favorite Places folder at the top of the window. That's as good a place as any — and you can always move the entry somewhere else later.

3. Click Add Favorite Place.

The Add Favorite Place dialog box (designed by the Use No Articles Programming Team) appears.

4. Type a name for this entry in the Enter the Place's Description box, press Tab, and then type the entry's address in the Enter the Internet Address box.

Figure 5-10 displays a finished entry, ready to be saved for posterity.

5. Click OK to add the entry to your Favorite Places window.

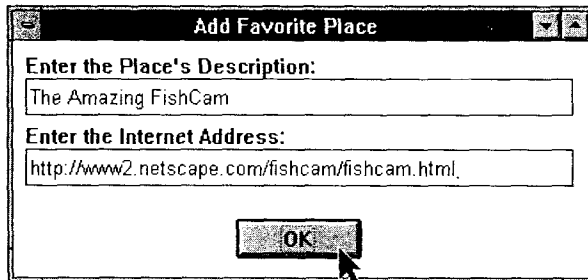


Figure 5-10:
The
completed
FishCam
entry.

Adding a folder

Adding all kinds of favorite places to your system is great, but you need some organization to keep everything in order. That's why those clever America Online programmers included folders.

Folders can live in the Favorite Places area or inside other folders (see Figure 5-11). Either way, creating a folder is easy. Here's how (assuming that you already have the Favorite Places window open):

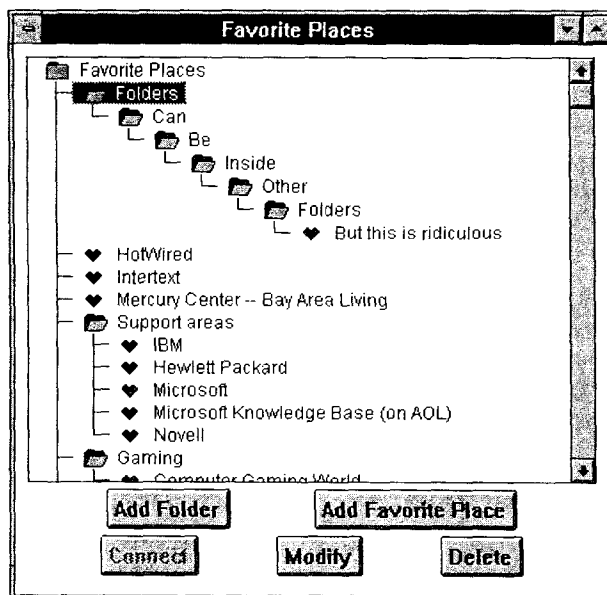


Figure 5-11:
An example
of folder
creation
run amok.

1. Click the Favorite Places button on the Toolbar.

The Favorite Places window pops to attention.

2. Click the Favorite Places folder at the top of the window.

The Favorite Places folder is highlighted (this is a good sign).

3. Click Add Folder.

A long, thin New Folder dialog box appears on your screen (yet another good sign).

4. Type the name of your new folder and then click OK (see Figure 5-12).

Your new folder appears at the bottom of the Favorite Places list, just like Figure 5-13.

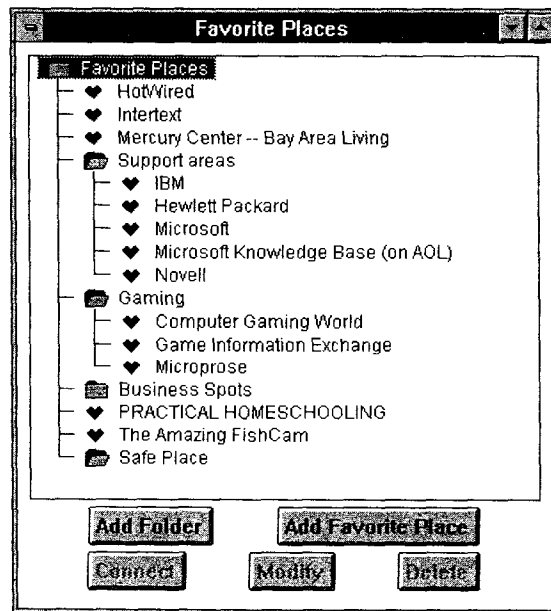
5. Move the folder wherever you want it in the list.

If you're not sure how to move the folder, look in the next section.

Figure 5-12:
Now there's
a safe place
for my stuff.



Figure 5-13:
The new
folder
proudly
takes its
place in the
window.



Moving folders and favorite places

Creating folders and favorite places is one thing, but organizing them is another. The little buggers tend to land wherever the America Online software feels like putting them. Moving them around is easy, though, once you get the hang of it.

The technique is the same for both folders and favorite places. After you open the Favorite Places window, here's what to do:

1. **Decide which item you want to move and where it's headed.**
2. **Put the mouse pointer on the chosen item, and then press and hold the mouse button.**

The technical term for this maneuver is *click and drag*, but there's no reason to mention it, so I won't.

3. **While holding the mouse button down, move the item to its destination (see Figure 5-14) and then release the mouse button.**

The item settles down, safe and sound in its new home (see Figure 5-15).

To move something to the very bottom of the list, drop it onto the Favorite Places folder (the first item in the list). To put an item into a folder, either drop it onto the folder or put it directly into the list, as shown in Figure 5-16.

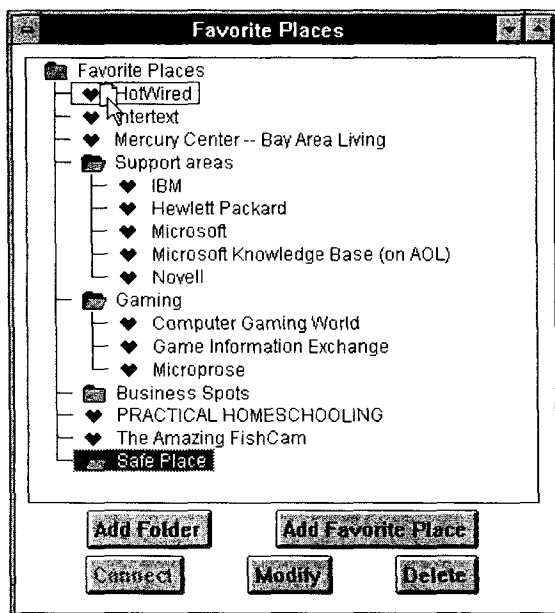


Figure 5-14:
The Safe Place folder on the move.

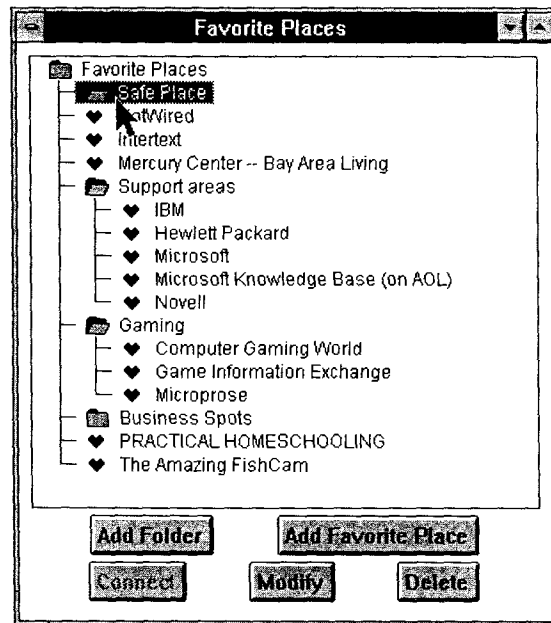


Figure 5-15:
Coming in
for a perfect
landing.

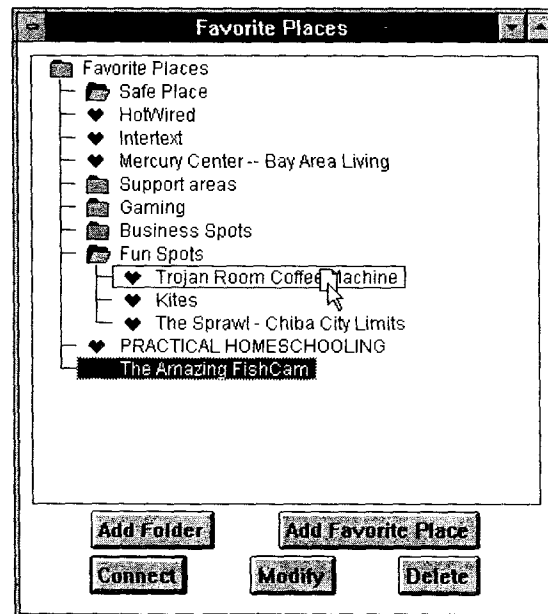


Figure 5-16:
Moving the
FishCam
into an
appropriate
place.

Modifying folders and favorite places

There comes a point in every life when it's time to make some changes. When *that time* in the life of your Favorite Places window arrives, have no fear. Although change is never fun, at least it's easy in the Favorite Places window. Open the Favorite Places window and then follow these steps:

1. Click the folder or favorite place and then click Modify.

For a folder, the Rename dialog box appears. For a favorite place, the description and Internet address dialog box appears.

2. Make your changes (usually to the name of the item) and then click OK.

If you change your mind and don't want to make any changes, double-click in the upper-left corner of the box.

Deleting folders and favorite places

Favorite places entries, like other impetuous flashes in the dark sky of fading youth, have a limited life span. When it's time to delete one, just do the deed and go on as best you can. Solemnly open the Favorite Places window and then morosely proceed through the following:

1. Click the item you want to delete.

2. Click Delete and then OK in the pop-up dialog box.

The entry is no more. Remember, ask not for whom the Delete button clicks — it clicks for thy once-Favorite Place.

Taking a Shortcut (Key)

I'll keep this section short; after all, that's the point. Shortcut keys get you there fast. I mean *now*. I'm talking speed. Press the shortcut key, and you're there. Think *zoom!* Think *whoosh!* You get the picture. Table 5-2 has all the details.

| Group | Function | Macintosh | Windows |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Editing | Cut | ⌘+X | Ctrl+X |
| | Copy | ⌘+C | Ctrl+C |
| | Paste | ⌘+V | Ctrl+V |
| | Undo | ⌘+Z | Ctrl+Z |
| Mail | Compose New Mail | ⌘+M | Ctrl+M |
| | Read New Messages | ⌘+R | Ctrl+R |
| People-related | Locate someone | ⌘+L | Ctrl+L |
| | Get Info (user profile) | ⌘+G | Ctrl+G |
| | Send an Instant Message | ⌘+I | Ctrl+I |

(continued)

Table 5-2 (continued)

| Group | Function | Macintosh | Windows |
|------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Navigation | Go to a Keyword | ⌘+K | Ctrl+K |
| | Custom Go To menu items | ⌘+1 to ⌘+0 | Ctrl+1 to Ctrl+0 |
| Documents | Stop incoming text | ⌘+. (period) | Esc |
| | Save a document | ⌘+S | Ctrl+S |
| | Print a document | ⌘+P | Ctrl+P |



The key (word) to getting there fast

Almost every forum and service in America Online has a *keyword*—a special identifier that allows you to jump directly to that area without slogging through all the menus between where you are and where you want to be.

Finding keywords is easy. In most forums and services, the keyword is displayed prominently in the window, cleverly identified by the notation *Keyword*. If a keyword isn't listed in the window, the name of the service itself is the keyword. The keyword for the Directory of Services, for example, is **DirOfServices**.

When you find a service or forum that you particularly like, write down the keyword and use it when you access that area. Using the keyword is *much* faster than going through all those menus—and that translates into less money spent (or more money available to spend, depending on your point of view).

See the "Know thy Keywords" section in Chapter 38 for secret instructions to get a complete list of all the keywords (but don't tell anyone I told you).

Chapter 6

Your Windows on the World

In This Chapter

- ▶ They don't call it the Welcome window for nothing
- ▶ Driving up to the service windows
- ▶ Joining the discussion
- ▶ Browsing titles in the File Library
- ▶ Dealing with documents
- ▶ Chatting away the hours in lecture halls and other places

Everywhere you go in America Online, you're faced with windows. Windows for news, windows for mail, windows for chatting, windows for menus. Spring cleaning around here must be a *total* nightmare.

Although the windows are a little confusing at first, they make America Online the special place that it is. Unlike other online services, America Online was *designed* with the Macintosh and Microsoft Windows graphical way of life in mind. And it shows.

This chapter introduces and explains all the basic America Online windows. It's designed to make you comfortable with the service's look and feel. The details of the services come later, in Part III. For now, sit back, grab a bottle of spray cleaner, and head for the windows.

The Welcome Window

Every time you sign on to America Online, the Welcome window hops right up and offers a great big *Hiya* — *welcome to the system*. This window is like an electronic version of the Wal-Mart door greeter, only better. The greeter doesn't just wish you well; it even knows the news *and* keeps tabs on your e-mail box. Not even Californians have it this good.

Figure 6-1 shows the Welcome window on an average day. It's a pretty straightforward affair with three different areas: Highlighted services, Latest news, and the Navigation buttons.

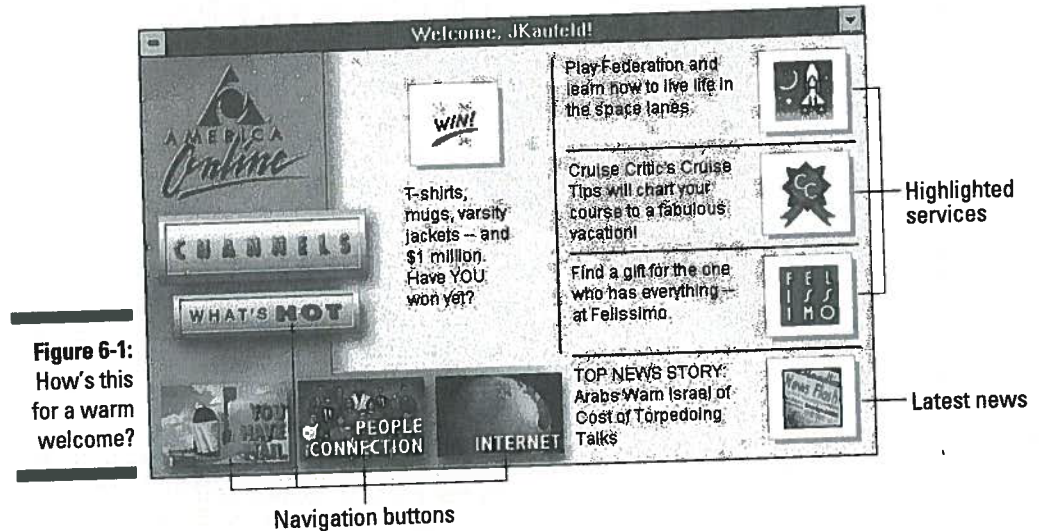


Figure 6-1:
How's this
for a warm
welcome?

Along the top and right sides of the window are brief descriptions of the *highlighted services*, along with graphical buttons that take you to each service. These entries change all the time, so don't worry if your screen doesn't show exactly the same items as Figure 6-1.

Hanging out in the lower-right corner of the window is the *latest news* button. Click the newspaper button to hop directly into the Today's News window, America Online's link to the world's newswires. See Chapter 24 for the news about, well, News.

Clustered in the lower-left side of the window are the *navigation buttons*, your shortcuts to the rest of America Online. Channels displays the Channels window (discussed in the next section). What's Hot takes you to a listing of the newest stuff on the system. People Connection and Internet take you to those respective areas, the same as clicking their buttons in the Channels window. Finally, the mailbox button way down in the corner tells you whether You have mail or not. Clicking this button either opens your mailbox or sends you on a jaunt to the Mail Center (depending on whether you have unopened e-mail).



In Windows, you *can't* make the Welcome window go away — ever. The best you can do is minimize it, so instead of being an annoying window in the middle of the screen, it's only an annoying *icon* cowering in the corner. To do this in Windows, click the down arrow button on the right side of the window's title bar (where it says Welcome and your screen name). The window pops down to the lower-left corner of the screen, never to bother you again.

The Channels Window

If you're looking for the right place to start your online expedition, it just doesn't get better than the Channels window in Figure 6-2. From here, any of America Online's 21 channels is a quick jump away. And Find, Member Services, and several other useful spots are only a hop and a skip away as well.

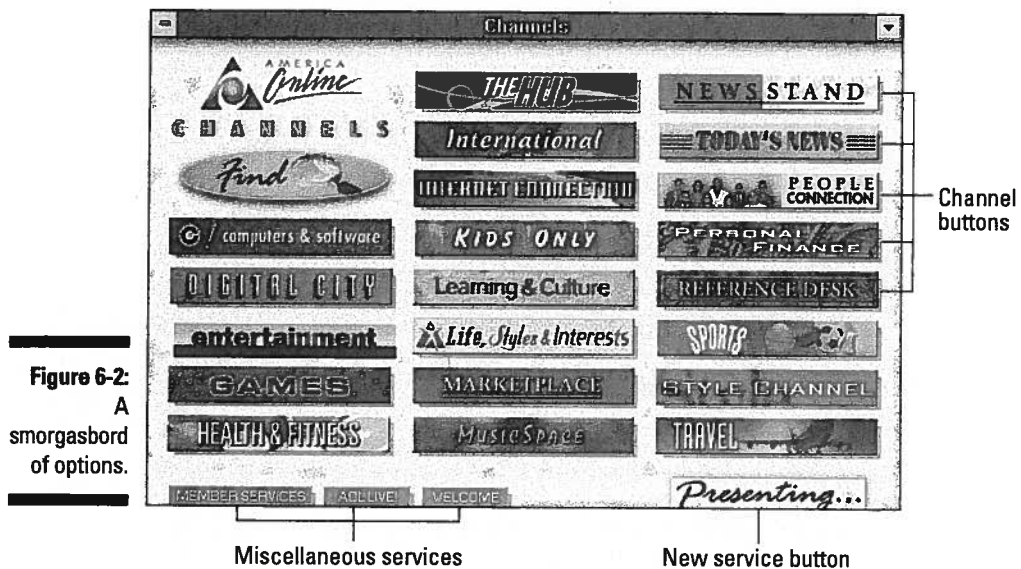


Figure 6-2:
A
smorgasbord
of options.

Occupying most of the window are the *channel buttons*, offering single-click connections to the 21 content channels in America Online, plus the Find window, that all-seeing, all-knowing Oracle of the Online World. Each button (with the exception of the People Connection button) leads you to a menu of services available in the area. The People Connection button, which just *has* to be a little different, ushers you into a randomly assigned chat room.

In the lower-right corner of the window is the *new service button*, which leads to the Presenting window. This window highlights various America Online service areas in a blatant effort to interest you in visiting them. This button is a great one to click when you're a little bored and want to try something different.

Finally, covering along the bottom of the window from shame at their somber appearance, you find the *miscellaneous services* buttons. When you're looking for help, click Member Services and take a quick trip to the online help area (and flip ahead to Chapter 37, too). A quick mouse attack on AOL Live! sends you to the live events area for some online fun with your favorite celebrities (and even me). Finally, the Welcome button returns you to the relative comfort of the ever-present Welcome window.



Getting back to the Channels window is never hard. Just click the Channels button on the Toolbar and (poof!) you're there.

You can also get to the Channels window from the Welcome window, thanks to the cleverly named *Channels window* button (but you probably knew that already).



If your Channels window only has 14 items or fewer and is called the Main Menu instead, you're not using the newest software. Refer to Chapter 1 for more about the whole software thing.

The Service Windows

All America Online services have a main window of some kind. It's how things work around here. This section looks at the two basic kinds of service windows lurking out there for your viewing pleasure: channel services and individual services.

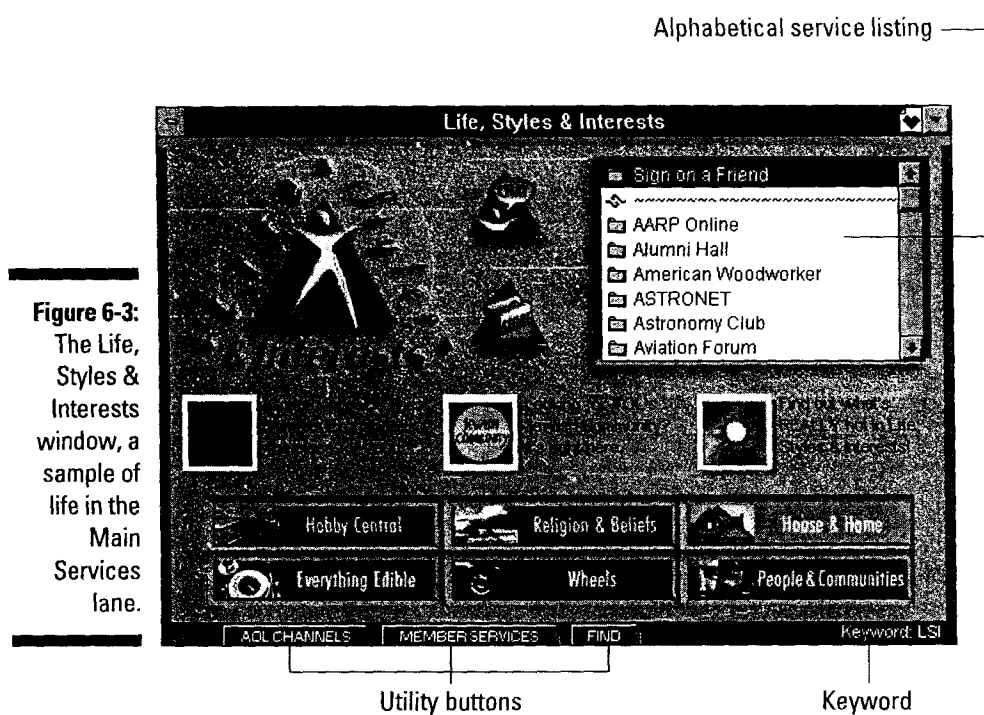
Channel services

Every button on the Channels window (except for the People Connection button, but more about that later) takes you to a big, bold, option-covered window. Thankfully, the America Online programmers took pity on us, the vaguely confused of the world, and made all these powerful windows look basically the same. Figure 6-3 shows the Life, Styles & Interests window, a sterling example of Channels windowdom.






On the right of the window is an *alphabetical list of services* available in this particular area. Next to each service name is an icon telling you what kind of thing this service is. Table 6-1 shows the icons and what they mean. To use a service, just double-click its entry in the list.

In the lower-right corner of the window is the *keyword* for this particular area. See the sidebar "Psst — what's the keyword?" later in this chapter for more about these useful little thingies.

Along the bottom of the window are three *utility buttons*. Every channel service window has the same three buttons as shown here: AOL Channels, Member Services, and Find. *AOL Channels* takes you back to the Channels window (no surprises there). *Member Services* sends you into the free Member Services window. The Find button brings up America Online's Find-it-all-here window.



Finally, large, colorful icon buttons designate *individual services* or *service groups* (depending on exactly which channel you're in). These buttons point you toward the biggest and best individual services (particularly in the Newsstand) or groups of related services (in Entertainment or Life, Styles & Interests).

| Icon | Name | Meaning |
|---|-------------|--|
|  | File Folder | This item leads to an individual service window. |
|  | Document | This is a document explaining something about the service. |
|  | Open Book | This is a searchable database (mostly in the Reference section). |
|  | Disks | This is a software library. |
|  | Special | This can be just about anything — it defies description. |

Every now and then when you call up a particular channel, America Online tosses in a free bonus: a Spotlight window. Figure 6-4 shows a Spotlight window caught in the midst of accosting an innocent America Online member. These windows announce special events, new services, and other fascinating things. Whenever one pops up on your screen, gather your wits about you and see what the window is crowing about.



Psst — what's the keyword?

Almost every service in America Online has a *keyword*. It's like a magic carpet that whisks you wherever you wish to go. Using keywords saves you time, and that saves you money.

To use a keyword, press Ctrl+K in Windows or ⌘+K on a Macintosh. Doing so brings up the Keyword dialog box. Type the keyword

and then click OK. If everything is working as it should, you'll immediately jump to that keyword's window.

Jot down the keywords for your favorite services on the Cheat Sheet in this book and then use that list as a memory jogger or to plan your online sessions.

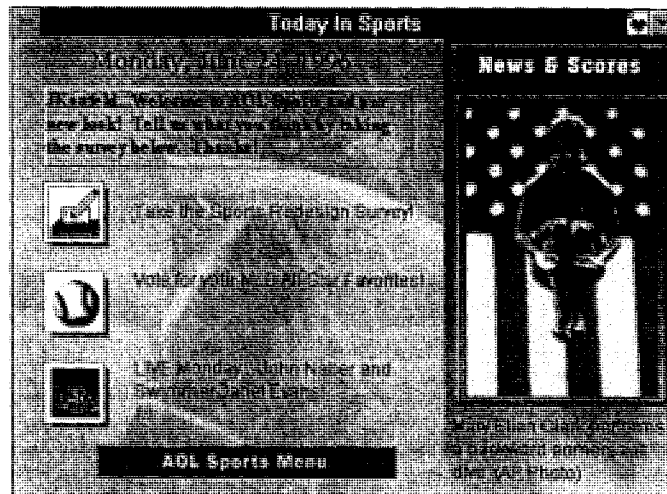


Figure 6-4: Cool stuff is happening tonight in the Sports area.

Individual services

The digital foot soldiers of America Online are the individual services. Hundreds of them are out there and each one has its very own interface window. Some of the windows have lots of artwork and feature buttons (like Figure 6-5). Others are plain to the point of being utilitarian (see Figure 6-6 for a to-the-point example). Both do basically the same things, except the fancy ones do it with more panache.

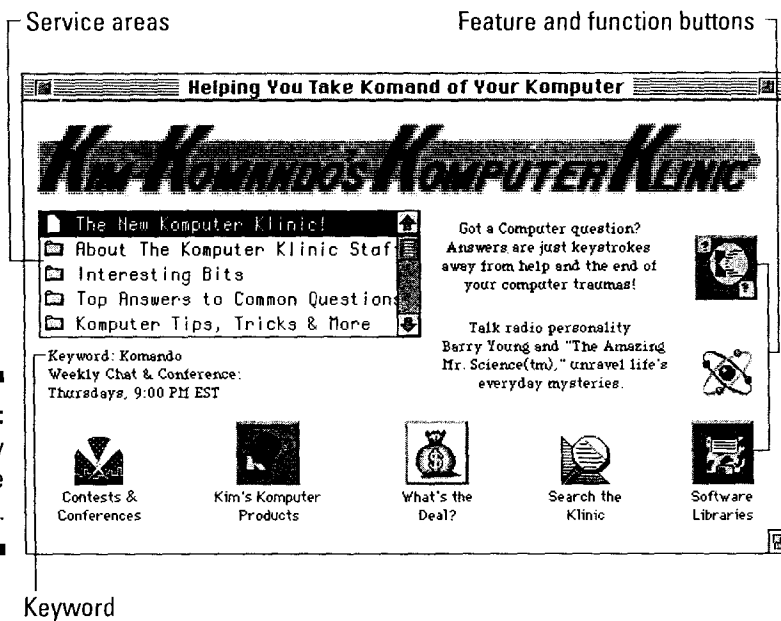


Figure 6-5:
A truly fancy
service
window.

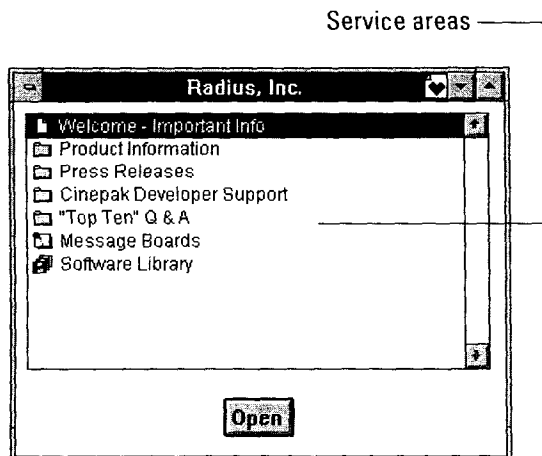


Figure 6-6:
The
essence of
service
simplicity.

A fancy service window always contains some *feature and function buttons*. These graphic buttons lead you to special parts of the service, help you search the service's archives, or otherwise do something truly fun for you. Read the button descriptions carefully — don't rely too much on the picture to tell you what the button does.

Somewhere on the window (sorry I can't be more specific — it migrates all over the place) is the service's *keyword*. If you're not familiar with keywords, you should be. Look in the preceding sidebar for more information.

Last on the tour is the *list of service areas*, the only item that both kinds of service windows contain. The list is in whatever order the service feels like using (in other words, it's probably *not* alphabetical). To get into an area, double-click the entry in this list.

- ✓ In addition to the icons in Table 6-1, individual services add two more: the bulletin board icon, which looks like a piece of paper tacked to the wall with a push pin, and the meeting room icon, which looks like two people talking. (Ingenious, aren't they?)
- ✓ Don't expect every service to look just like every other service. Some are very plain; others are quite fancy. Just relax and go with the flow — you're doing fine.

Windows on a Discussion

You can't turn around on America Online without running into a discussion. Whether you want to write about music, mayhem, or something in between (like the Grateful Dead and their traveling entourage), America Online has a place for you somewhere.

After you find your place, the next step is joining the fray. Discussions are organized into *folders*. Each topic has its own folder. All the messages on one topic are entered (or *posted*) in the appropriate folder. Along the way, you deal with two kinds of windows: *folder windows* (which help keep the whole sordid thing organized) and *message windows* (the meat of the matter).

Discussion folders

Before you can join a discussion, you have to find one. Cruise around in your favorite services and look for an item with a bulletin board icon (in the service list) or button (on a fancy service window) — those are strong clues that you've found a discussion area.

After you find a place for your talk to call home, the first window you see gives you an overview of everything in the discussion area (see Figure 6-7). Not every discussion area has a window like this, so don't panic if instead you end up with something that looks more like Figure 6-8. If that's the case, skip ahead to the discussion about that window.

At the top of the window is *general information* about the discussion. It gives you some statistics about this corner of the world — the number of folders (topics) in the area, the total number of messages, and when the last message was posted. This stuff's nice to know but doesn't really *do* much except show how active the discussion is.

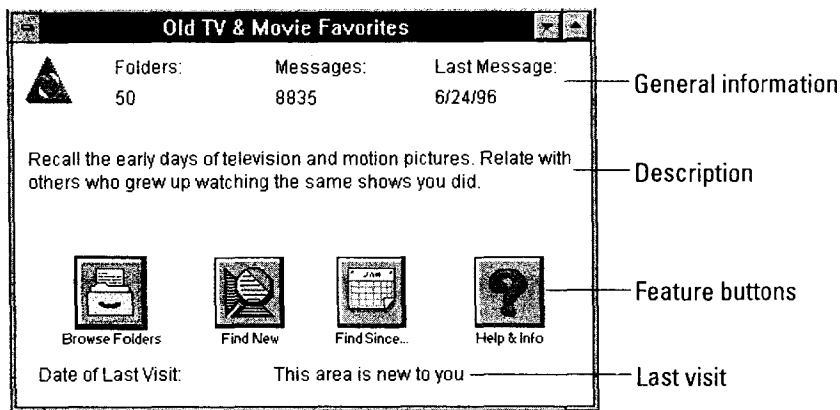


Figure 6-7:
The first
stop in a
discussion
area.

A brief *description* of what people talk about here is in the middle of the window. Think of it like those little signs out on the highway that say “Welcome to Gnaw Bone, population 117” — they don’t give you a *lot* of information, but at least you know if you’re going in the right direction.

Below the description are the *feature buttons*. You usually see four of them: Browse Folders, Find New, Find Since. . . , and Help Info. *Browse Folders* takes you to the folder list so you can find a topic and begin exercising your right to an online opinion (more about that a little later). *Find New* lists all the folders with messages posted since your last visit. *Find Since. . .* lets you see messages that were created in the last few days (you specify the exact number of days). *Help & Info*, of course, gives you general help and information. No surprises there.

The *Date of Last Visit* area tells when you last came by and browsed around the area. (If it says *This area is new to you*, this is your first time here.) This area is handy when you’re monitoring discussions all over America Online and then start to lose track of trivial details like when you were here last (and where *here* is, for that matter).

Your next stop is a window like Figure 6-8. These are the topic folders themselves — you’re almost in the discussion!

Like the other window, this one begins with a *description* of what kind of discussion goes on here. If the description isn’t quite what you expected, you may be in the wrong place. In that case, close the window and look elsewhere.

The center of the window contains the *discussion folder list*. If more topics are covered than can fit in the window (a common occurrence in America Online), a scroll bar appears on the right side of the list to help you see everything. When you find an interesting topic, double-click its entry to open the folder and show the first discussion message window (covered in the next section), or single-click and use one of the feature buttons to get more information about the folder.

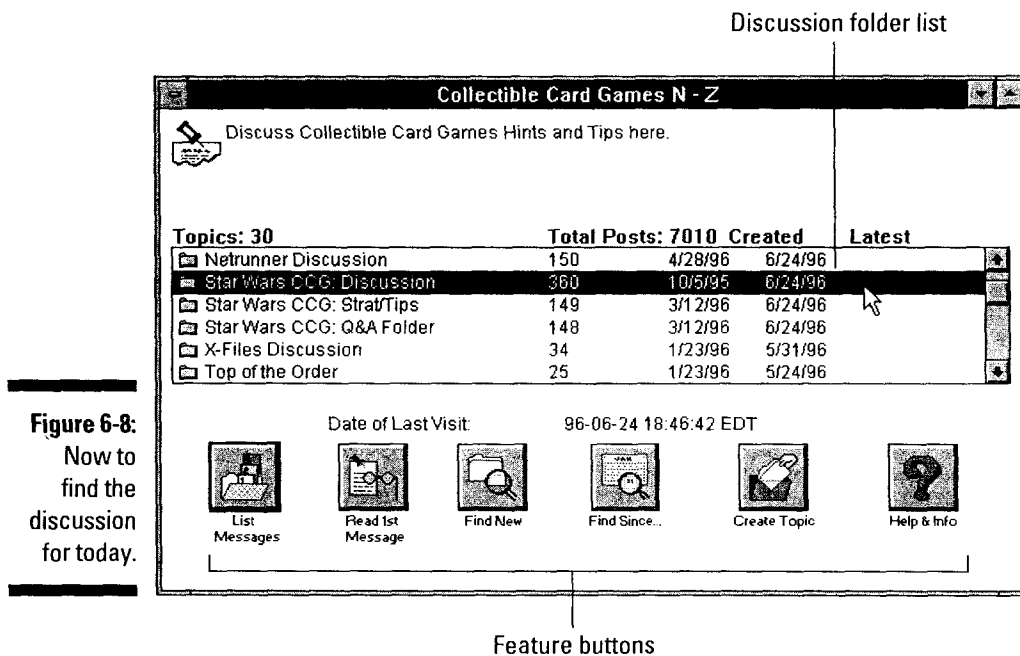


Figure 6-8:
Now to
find the
discussion
for today.

The *feature buttons* along the bottom of the window let you do all sorts of fascinating things. *List Messages* does the same thing as double-clicking the folder name: It puts you in the discussion message window (which is covered at length in the next section). *Read 1st Message* displays the very first message in the folder, which usually explains the folder's existence. *Find New* and *Find Since...* work just like they do in the other window, except here they display only matching messages from whichever folder you highlighted (so click the folder you're interested in *before* clicking Find New or Find Since...). *Create Topic* is your ticket to making a *new* folder dedicated to whatever you jolly well want (is that ultimate power or what?). Finally, the ever-present *Help & Info* button offers its two cents' worth.



- ✓ Don't fret if you click Read 1st Message and America Online replies with a terse message saying This message is no longer available. That just means that the message was posted so long ago that it was erased to make room for new ones. Remember: Old messages never die — they just scroll off the system.
- ✓ After your first visit to a folder, save time by using the Find New and Find Since... buttons. That way, you don't have to wade through everything you've already read while the online clock keeps ticking your dollars away.

Discussion messages

Now that you have an online home for your thoughts, you're ready to see what everyone else has to say. One way or another (usually by double-clicking an entry in the discussion folders window), you're looking at the messages in a particular folder (see Figure 6-9). America Online always shows you the oldest messages first, probably in an effort to keep you online longer. (Did I say that?)

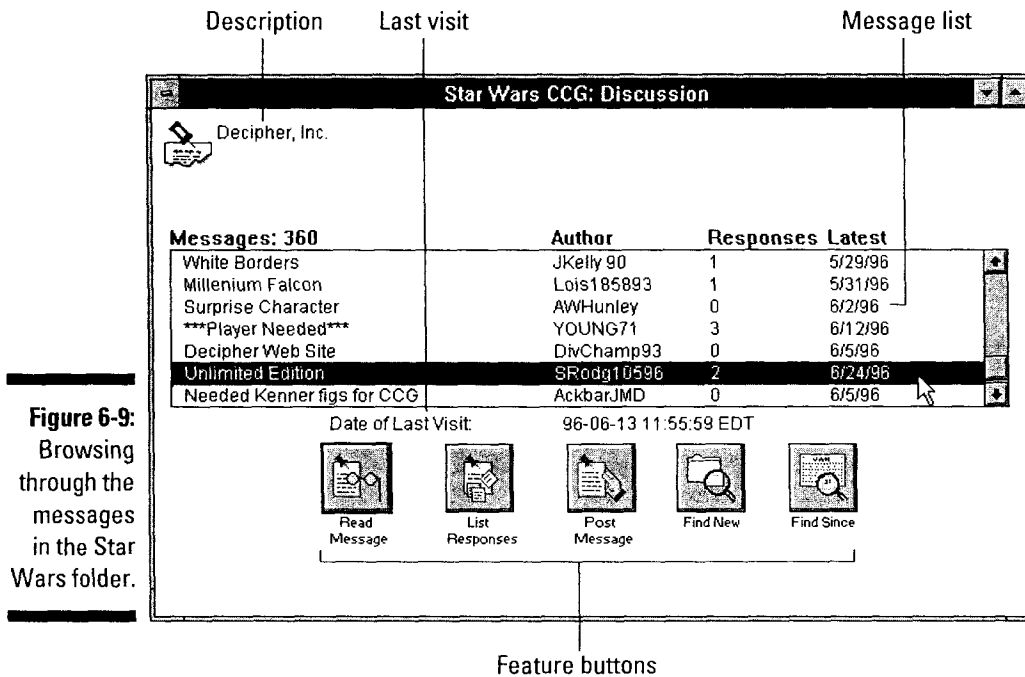


Figure 6-9: Browsing through the messages in the Star Wars folder.

Like every other window dealing with the discussion areas, this window starts with a brief (often *very* brief) *description* of the topic at hand. So much for that.

In the middle of the screen is the *message list*, displaying the first 40 or so messages. It displays (starting from the left) the message subject, the author's screen name, the number of responses, and when the last response was posted. To see a message, double-click its entry in this list, or click it once and then click Read Message.

Below the message list are the time and date of your *last visit* here. Use this feature to remind yourself when you were where and what on Earth you've been doing since then.

Depending on the number of messages in the folder, either two or three *feature buttons* are at the bottom of the window. *Read Message* does just what it says: displays the highlighted message so you can read it. *List Responses* shows you a list of the replies and lets you choose which ones you see. *Post Message* is your digital paper and pencil, available for sharing your comments with the world. The *Find New* and *Find Since* buttons work the same way they do in the previous windows. The *More* button gets the award for “button that disappears most often,” because it only appears if more messages are available than you have in your list. If you get to the bottom of the message list and the *More* button is available, click it to see what’s out there.

When you double-click a message (or highlight one and click the *Read Message* button), the message appears in a window like Figure 6-10. After all that effort, this window is surprisingly easy to use.

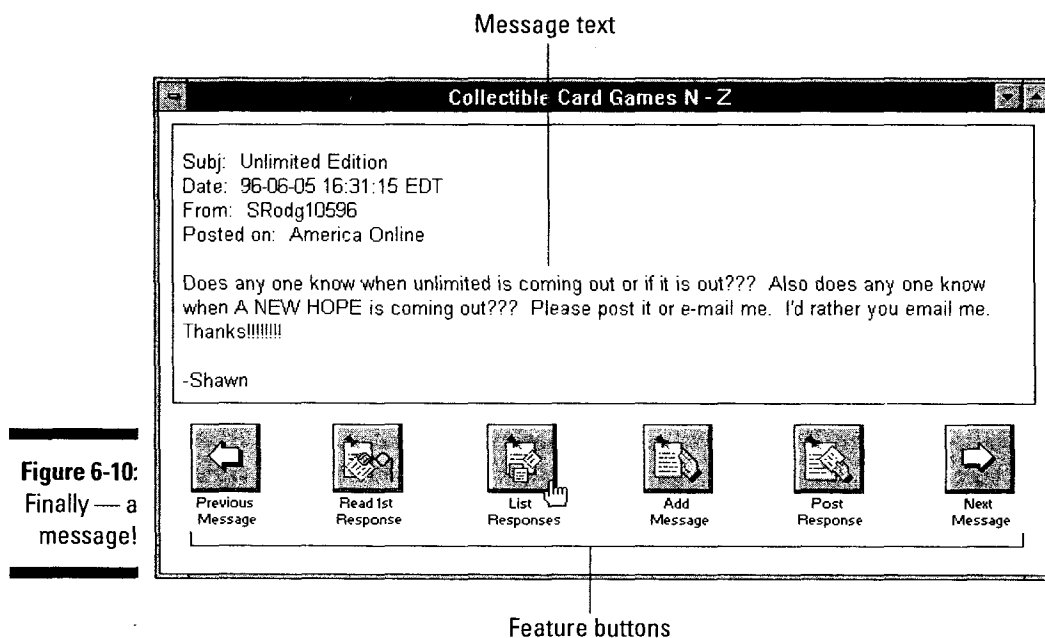


Figure 6-10:
Finally — a
message!

The *message text* dominates the windows (as it should — after all, that’s why you came). Every America Online message begins with a brief header giving the message’s vital statistics: subject, posting date, author, and a reminder that you’re reading this message in America Online. The message itself follows.

Along the bottom are a whole raft of *feature buttons* that do just about anything your heart desires. *Previous Message* and *Next Message* move you through everything in the topic folder. *Read 1st Response* brings up a screen for browsing *all* the replies to this particular message. *List Responses* does just what it does in the previous window. Use *Post Response* to add your thoughts to this group (or *thread*) of messages. *Add Message* starts a new message thread (instead of adding a reply to someone else’s message).



- ✓ If you click Read 1st Response, a *new* window appears. At that point, you're reading only responses to the original message, *not* the main messages in the folder. To get back to the items in the message folder, you have to close the reply window (on a Macintosh, click the box in the upper-left corner of the window; for Windows 3.1, double-click in the upper-left corner of the window; and for Windows 95, click the X box in the upper-right corner of the window).
- ✓ Some discussion area windows can't handle the *reply* thing and have only three *feature buttons* at the bottom: Previous Message, Add Message, and Next Message. No, I don't know why — that's just how it is.

Fiddling with Files

In addition to everything *else* that America Online is, it's also an amazing electronic library of programs, pictures, fonts, sounds, and just about anything else that can survive on a computer disk (probably including some forms of alien life). All this stuff is waiting patiently in software libraries all over America Online, anxious for you to discover it and take home a copy for yourself.



Almost every service in America Online has a software library of some kind. Every library offers something a *little* different, depending on the needs and such of the service that sponsors it. Explore your favorite services and see what amazing files you can find therein.

When you find a library and go in, you're usually faced with something like Figure 6-11. This is the main catalog window of an online library. This particular screen is from the Windows Software Libraries area (keyword **Windows**).

Taking the bulk of the window's space is the *file listing*. The listing shows a brief description of the file, the date it was uploaded, the number of times it has been downloaded, and the date of the last download — all in all, a pretty informative display. You can find information about downloading files later in this chapter.

Along the bottom are the ever-popular feature buttons. *Get Description* coughs up all the details on the highlighted file. *Download Now* tells America Online that you want the file sent to your computer *right now* (and that it's not open for discussion). *Download Later* inserts information about this file into the Download Manager, your handy-dandy file assistant. The *Upload File* button tells America Online to listen carefully because you're sending in a file of your own. Finally, *More* is available if too many titles are available to list on your screen (a perpetual problem).

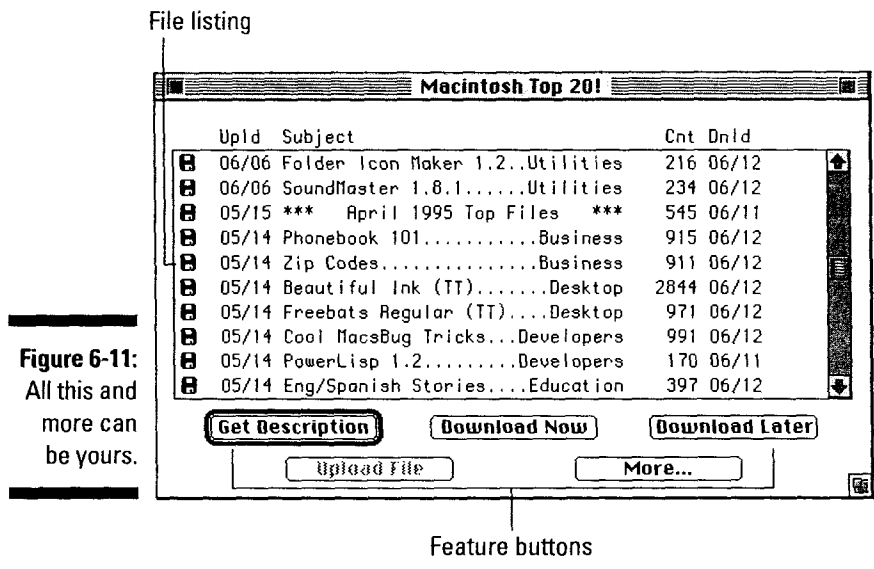


Figure 6-11: All this and more can be yours.

Seeing a file's name rarely provides you with enough information to decide whether you want it, so I recommend looking at the file details. To get the details of a file, double-click the file's name in the list, or single-click the file entry to highlight its name and then click Get Description. Regardless of which one you do, a new window pops up (see Figure 6-12 for an example).

This simple window contains the file description, including the exact filename, file size, approximate time it would take to download to your computer, and what you need to use the file. After you waded through all that stuff, you find a nice description of the file itself.

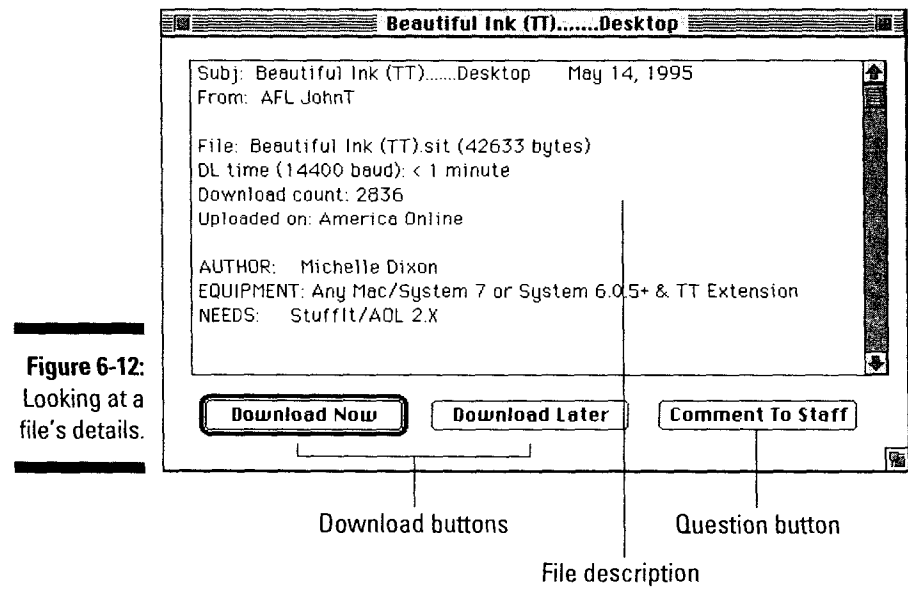


Figure 6-12: Looking at a file's details.

If you decide that you like the file, you have two *download buttons* anxious to help. *Download Now* pulls the file down right away. *Download Later* makes a note in the Download Manager about this particular file.

If you need more information about the file or have a question about it for the service's library staff, click the Comment/To Staff *question button*. Explain your question or concern in the message dialog box that pops up, and then click Send. The staff replies to you as soon as possible, but allow at least 24 hours before you get worried.



- ✓ Pay close attention to the Needs section of the file description. This section tells you what kind of hardware and software you need to use the file (*very* important information, particularly for programs and graphics files).
- ✓ Some libraries (like the Windows library in this example) are so incredibly large that an extra window (or two) lists the different library areas you can choose from. If you bump into something like that, just double-click interesting library names until you bring up a window like that shown in Figure 6-11.
- ✓ You can't upload files everywhere in America Online. If the Upload File button is dimmed (as it appears in Figure 6-11), you must contribute your file elsewhere — this library isn't accepting donations.
- ✓ For more information about uploading and (more important) downloading files, see Chapter 8.

Document Windows

Whenever you need to read something, America Online puts it into a simple document window. And *I do* mean simple. Figure 6-13 gives you an idea of what I'm talking about. Look at that window — no special buttons, no funky icons, nothing but plain text.

That's okay, though. After all, it's *just* a document.



These windows *do* have a secret power: You can save whatever you see as a text file on your computer. When you're looking at the window, choose File⇨Save and then type a filename. All the text is saved for your offline viewing (and reviewing) pleasure.

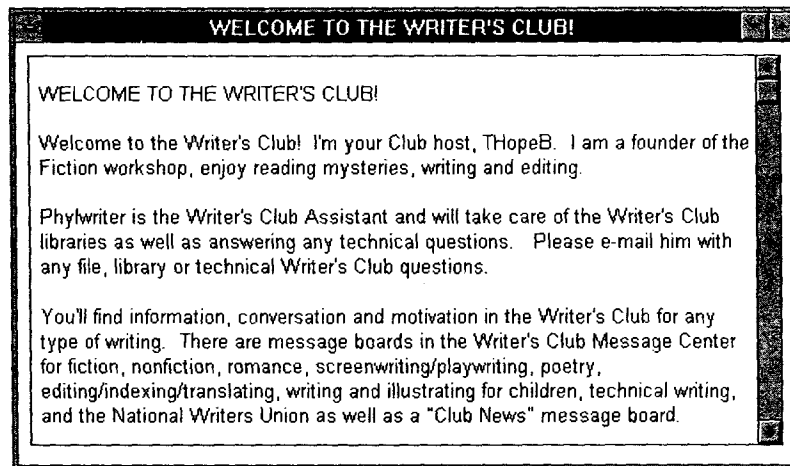


Figure 6-13:
A simple window with a simple message.

Chats, Meeting Rooms, and Online Auditoriums

Meeting people live and digitally in person is one of America Online's truly amazing features. In addition to the chat rooms (where freewheeling discussion is the rule of the day), you find special club meeting rooms and big, huge, *really* large online auditoriums for formal lectures and special presentations.

All the rooms work basically the same way. Figure 6-14 shows a normal Windows chat room screen (if *any* chat room can be called normal). The screens for meeting places and the large theaters use almost the same layout.

Because a chat room wouldn't be the same without all the people infest . . . er, um, attending it, a scrolling window in the upper-right corner contains the *screen name list*. This list has the screen names of everyone currently in the room. If a person isn't listed, she's not here.

The middle of the window is the ever-scrolling *chat text*, the lines of conversation in this zany, electronic room. You have to watch carefully because the conversation doesn't ever stop.

Along the bottom of the screen is an open box. This is the *outgoing message area*. You type a message here, and then press Enter or click Send to share it with the chat group. After a moment, your message appears on the whole chat group's screens. (Yes, it's a little intimidating the first few times.)

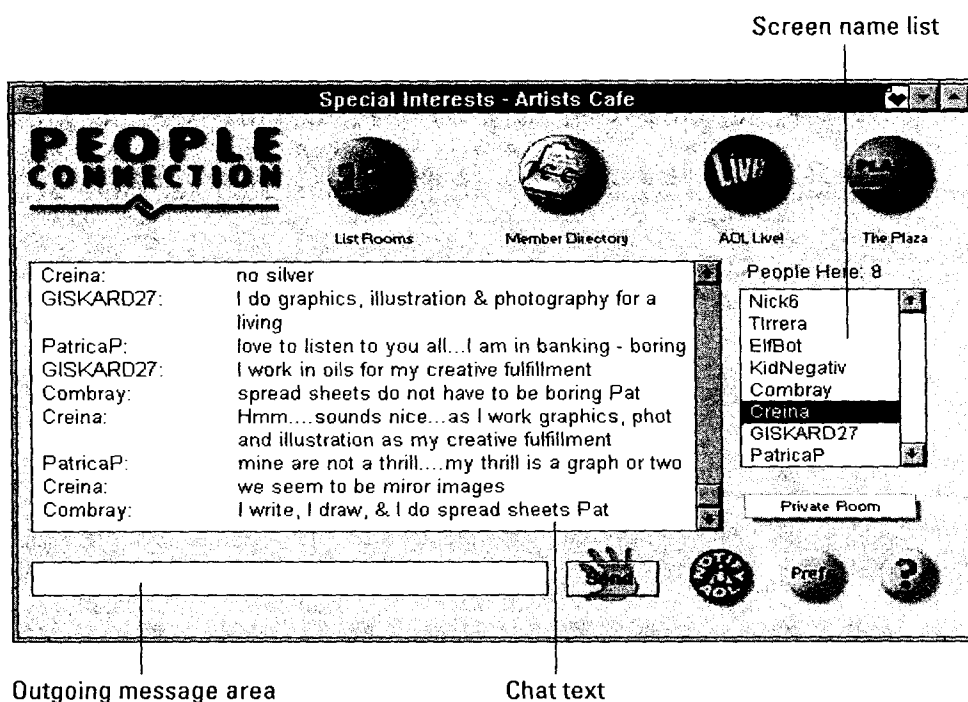


Figure 6-14:
It's wild, it's
weird, it's a
chat room.

Across the top are the chat room control buttons. *List Rooms* is your ticket to move from room to room. *Member Directory* opens up the Member Directory window, where you can find out interesting things about the other people in the chat room (provided that they filled out an online profile — more about that back in Chapter 3). *AOL Live!* sends you to the information kiosk for America Online's big interactive presentation halls. *The Plaza* offers links to other interactive areas of the system and also throws in some help and feedback buttons for you as well.

In the bottom-right corner of the window are several other control buttons. *Private Room* lets you jump directly into a private chat room within the People Connection, provided that you know the room's name. *Notify AOL* is your panic button to report problems in a chat room (which, unfortunately, happen from time to time). *Prefs* sets the Chat room preferences, just like clicking the Chat preferences button in the Preferences window (choose **M**embers ⇨ Preferences from the main menu for that). And finally, the big question mark in the corner brings up the People Connection help window, a great place to look for answers to your most esoteric chatting questions.



- ✓ To get into a chat room, click the Chat Room button on the Toolbar.
- ✓ Club meeting rooms are sprinkled everywhere in America Online. Browse through your favorite channel and see what you can find.

- ✓ If the large theaters are more your thing, go there directly with keyword **AOL Live**.
- ✓ For more about the whole People Connection thing (trust me — there's a *lot* more), see Chapter 25.

Chapter 7

Communicating with Everyone (One Way or Another)

In This Chapter

- ▶ Keeping your address book
- ▶ E-mailing in 33 flavors
- ▶ Reading and replying to incoming mail
- ▶ Saving time and money with FlashSessions
- ▶ Sending quick notes with Instant Messages
- ▶ Chatting over digital coffee

In the world of America Online, the word *communicating* means lots of things. Some are kinda obvious, like sending an e-mail message or dropping an Instant Message on a person's head. But how about sending a fax? Or sending an e-mail by *real* mail to your cousin in Arkansas who still thinks computers are "a fad"?

Surprise, surprise — America Online can do that and a few other tricks besides. This chapter tells you all about electronic communication from America Online's point of view. I think you'll like what it says.

Catching People with Your Address Book

You start meeting people right away in America Online. Join a discussion, drop in for a chat, or attend a live presentation, and suddenly you have online friends. You also have a problem: How do you keep track of your newfound social club's screen names?

Time to invoke the familiar refrain, "Luckily, the America Online programmers thought of that." Yup, those clever folks from Virginia have done it again. Step right this way and meet the America Online Address Book (see Figure 7-1).

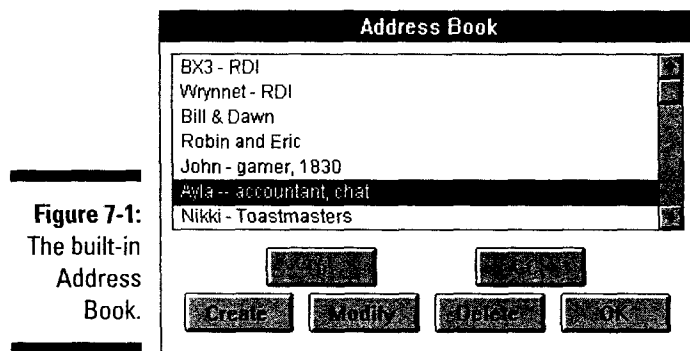


Figure 7-1:
The built-in
Address
Book.

As address books go, this one's pretty simple. It can handle entries for single screen names or big, honking mailing lists (assuming that you're into large, noisy name collections). Each entry consists of two things: a brief description and one or more screen names. It's easy to use, too, but that's what you find out in the next section (and I don't want to spoil the surprise).

Adding Address Book entries

Before you can use the Address Book, though, you have to put something in it. With that thought in mind, here's how to add new Address Book items:

1. **Open the Address Book by choosing `Mail`⇨`Edit Address Book` or clicking the Address Book button on a new mail message.**

The Address Book window pops up, all bright and cheery.

2. **Click Create.**

A blank Address Group dialog box appears. Even though the instructions in the dialog box are geared toward mailing lists, you can still use it for single-person addresses (goodness knows that's what most of my entries are).

3. **Type a description for this entry in the Group Name box.**

The description can be anything you want — anything at all. Letters, numbers, and just about everything else on the keyboard are legal in the description, so have fun with it.



Be creative with your descriptions. If it's an entry for a new acquaintance, put something in the description to remind yourself of how or where you met. For instance, I include the word *chat* for everyone I meet in a chat room. Because the Address Book doesn't have a long description area, you have to make the best of what you're given.

4. Press Tab to move the blinking cursor into the Screen Names box. **Carefully type the screen name — watch your spelling!**

Capitalization *doesn't* count here, so you can enter my screen name any way you want (**J**Kaufeld, **J**kaufeld, **j**kaufeld, or **j**KaUfEID all count), and America Online figures out that you mean me. At this point, your screen should look something like Figure 7-2.

5. If you're creating a group entry (for a mailing list), press Enter and type another screen name. Repeat the process for the rest of the screen names.

You can put a lot of people in a group — and send a mail message to all of them at once. Pretty cool, eh?

6. Click OK to save the new entry. Click Cancel if you were just kidding and wouldn't send mail to this person if your life depended on it.

The Address Group window vanishes, and you're back at the Address Book window.

Figure 7-2:
Adding
another
person
to my
collection.

Deleting Address Book entries

So now you have an Address Book full of stuff and it's getting unwieldy — plus you can't remember who half these people are. No problem — that's what the Delete button is for. Deleting is a quick and painless process. Here's how to do it:

1. Start the Address Book (if you haven't done that already) by choosing **Mail⇨Edit Address Book**.

Of course, you can also click the Address Book button in the e-mail message window if that's where you happen to be when the inspiration hits.

2. Scroll through the Address Book list until you find the entry that you want to dispose of.
3. Click the description once to highlight it and then click Delete.
4. When the software wrings its little hands and asks if you're *serious* about this deletion business, click Yes.

If you just wanted to see what the Delete button did and how the program would react when you used it, click No. Apologize to your software for even *thinking* of tricking it like that. Shame on you.

Changing Address Book entries

Since things change at a ridiculous pace, particularly in the online world, keeping your Address Book up-to-date is important. That's why your Address Book has a Modify button.

Here's the scoop on changing an existing Address Book entry:

1. Open the Address Book (if it's still closed) by choosing **Mail⇨Edit Address Book** from the menu bar or by clicking the Address Book button in a brand new mail message.

2. Click once on the entry you need to change.

This highlights the entry.

3. Click **Modify**.

The Address Group window comes back. It's the same window you used to create the entry originally.

4. Make your changes to the Description and Screen Name List.

Everything is open for change, so make whatever modifications you must. If you're working with a list, you can freely add and delete screen names as you desire.

All the standard Macintosh and Windows text editing tricks work here: highlight, delete, insert, click and drag, and the rest. Edit (and play) as much as you want.

5. After you're done with the changes and are pleased as punch with them, click **OK** to save your work. Click **Cancel** to abandon your carefully wrought editing and keep the record the way it was before.

Whichever button you click, the Address Group dialog box vanishes, and you're back to the Address Book screen.





Finding people like you

It doesn't matter if you like to dress up as Ben Franklin and fly kites during rainstorms or meditate in front of the TV considering Zen and its effects on game show hosts. With more than 6,000,000 members, it's very likely that people just like you are out there somewhere in America Online. The trick is finding them — or being found yourself.

First, fill out your online profile. If you haven't done so yet, sign on to America Online, choose **Members** → **Member Directory** from the menu bar, and then double-click **Create or Modify your Profile** (or use the keyword **Profile**), mark your place in this book, and fill out the profile dialog box. When you're done, click **Update** to save your profile information and then come back to the book (yes, I'll wait for you). Now that your profile is done, you're part of the Member Directory. Congratulations.

Next, try searching the Member Directory for friends-to-be. Choose **Members** → **Member Directory** or use the keyword **Members** to bring up the Member Directory dialog box. Double-click the **Search the Member Directory** option and type in something that you like in people: a hobby you enjoy, the city you're from, your occupation, or whatever else you can think of. Click **Search** to see who you can see. If America Online reports that it can't find anyone, check your spelling or search for some other unique characteristic. If everything works, the dialog box overflows with possible new friends. (Okay — it doesn't *really* overflow, but that's poetic license for "there are so many entries that a scroll bar appears next to the list.")

Double-click anyone who looks interesting. Jot down the screen name (or add it to your **Address Book**), write a "Hi, how ya doing?" e-mail message, and see where it goes from there.

E-Mailing the World, One Mailbox at a Time

In my humble opinion, e-mail is *the* communications medium of the '90s. It seems like everybody has an e-mail account at the office, at home, or both. Messages travel quickly, arrive safely, and are rarely delayed by any of the obscure national holidays that shut down the post office every time you're waiting for an important letter.

Through America Online, you can send e-mail to virtually anyone on the planet. (No, I'm not kidding — I'm not even exaggerating.) One way or another, one medium or another, your e-mail message flies on the wings of technology from your online mailbox to its destination. And that destination can be another America Online e-mail box, an Internet mail address, any fax machine in the world, or even a letter in the postal mail!

This section tells you how it's done. But enough talk — time to hit the keyboard and start e-mailing!



✓ Don't sign on to America Online and *then* begin writing a long e-mail message. Instead, write the message offline (when you're not paying the computers in Virginia to watch you type) and use a FlashSession to send it. All the details about FlashSessions are later in this chapter in the section "Doing E-Mail the Cheap Way."

✓ Please don't type your messages in one huge paragraph. That makes them *really* hard to read. Press Return a couple of times every now and then to break the behemoth into smaller, more digestible chunks.



✓ Writing e-mail messages is a little different than any other kind of communication. Good e-mail takes a bit of care, the right words, and a willingness to type until the message is clear. If you're new to e-mail, don't panic — I was new once, too. That's why Chapter 4 in this book exists. If you haven't read that chapter yet, take a minute to go through it. Future e-mail recipients will thank you.

✓ America Online automatically keeps copies of all your outgoing mail for about 30 days. To review these old messages, choose Mail→Check Mail You've Sent from the menu bar.

Sending e-mail to an America Online subscriber

Because you're surrounded by these people every time you sign on, odds are that you'll send at least a few messages to other America Online subscribers. Because that's what the mail system was designed for in the first place, doing so is pretty easy. The mail system also has some special features (like *unsend*) that are only available when you're writing to another America Online person. (If that sounds interesting, check out the "Stupid mail tricks" sidebar for more information.)



Before you can send e-mail to someone, you must know the person's screen name. Upper and lowercase doesn't matter, but spelling *does*. For example, you could enter my screen name as **JKaufeld** or **jkaufeld** and the mail would still go through. But if you try **JKaufield**, don't expect a reply — at least not from me.

To send a mail message, follow these steps:

1. If you're signed on to America Online, sign off now.

Unless you're a really good typist, need to send a very short message, or just don't care how high your America Online bill is this month, don't compose messages online. Doing so is a serious money-waster.



2. Create a new mail message by clicking the Compose Mail button on the Toolbar or by pressing ⌘+M on the Macintosh or Ctrl+M in Windows.

A blank e-mail window mystically appears on-screen.

3. Type the recipient's screen name.

To send the same message to more than one screen name, keep typing screen names into the To box and separate them with commas (see Figure 7-3).

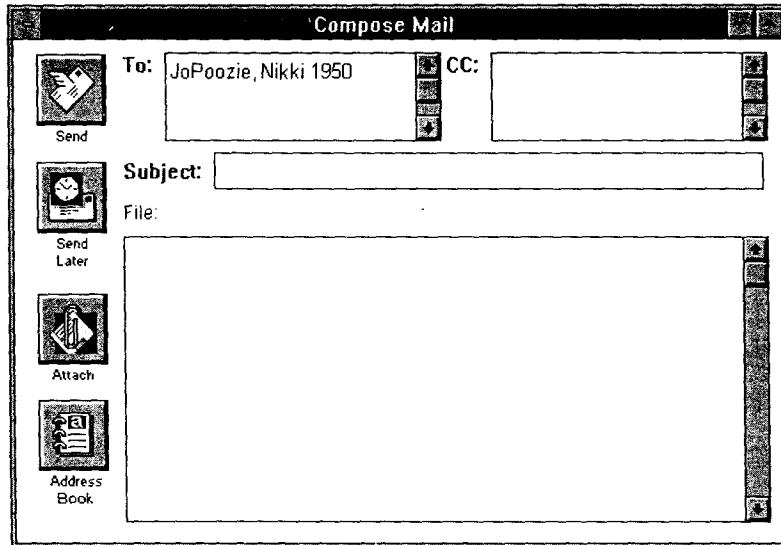


Figure 7-3:
The message begins.

If the screen name is in your Address Book, click the Address Book button and then double-click the entry for that person or group. When you're done choosing addresses, click OK to make the Address Book go away.

4. Press Tab to move the blinking cursor into the CC: box. Enter the screen names of people who should get a copy of the message but should not be listed as a main recipient.

Odds are, you won't ever use the CC feature, but I had to mention it anyway. It's just the kind of guy I am.



Don't bother putting your own screen name in the CC area. You automatically get a copy of every message you send. Choose **Mail**→**Check Mail You've Sent** to see them. Copies are only kept for about 30 days, so if the message is *really* important, print it out and keep the paper.

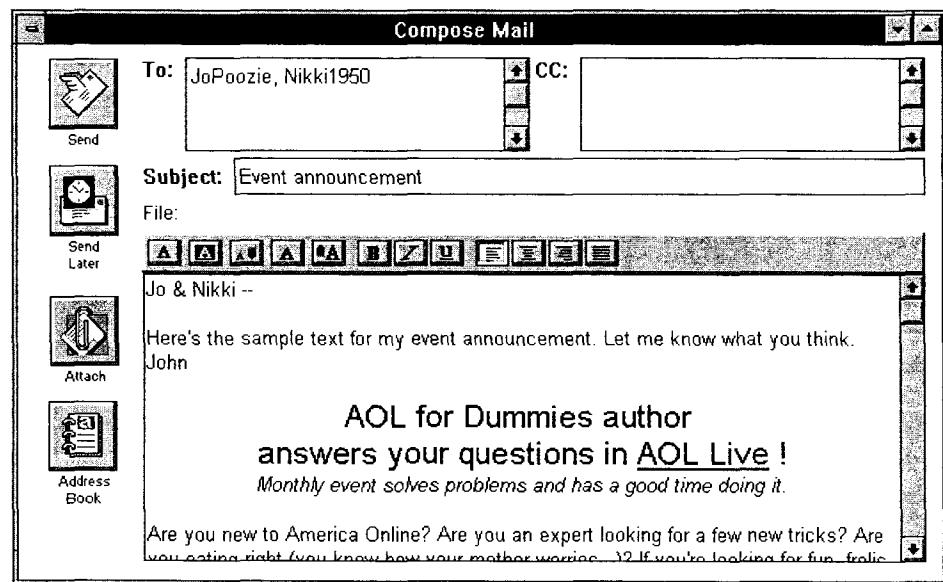
5. Press Tab again to put the cursor in the Subject box. Type a brief (32 characters or less) description of the message.

Write your message subjects so the other person can tell what it's about right away. If the message is *really* important, write **IMPORTANT!** as the subject to get the reader's attention. Your reader may have 35 other messages to look at, so make the subject descriptive to help her figure out which one to check first.

6. Press Tab once more to get into the message area in the bottom of the screen. Type your message text in here.

Enter the text as if you're using a word processor (for example, *don't* hit the Return key at the end of every line). Press Return a couple times every now and then to break the message into easy-to-read paragraphs (see Figure 7-4).

Figure 7-4:
Press Return a couple of times to keep the body readable.



To really jazz up your messages, add some cool formatting or live links to your favorite Web sites. For all the details, flip ahead to “E-Mailing with Panache” later in this chapter.

7. If you're sending a file, click **Attach**. In the **Attach File** dialog box, find the file you want to send and double-click it (or highlight it and click **OK**, as shown in Figure 7-5).

The Attach File dialog box vanishes. The name of the attached file appears above the message text in the Compose Mail window.

If you change your mind about attaching the file, click the **Detach** button (it's where the Attach button used to be — what a strange coincidence).

8. If you're signed on to America Online, click **Send** to mail the message. If you aren't signed on right now (good for you!), minimize the mail window (click the down arrow in the window's upper-right corner) and then sign on. When you're in, double-click the mail message icon (it's probably in the lower-left corner of the screen) and then click **Send**.

“Doing E-Mail the Cheap Way,” later in this chapter, explains the Send Later button and why it's the coolest thing since, um, well, they started tracking cool stuff.

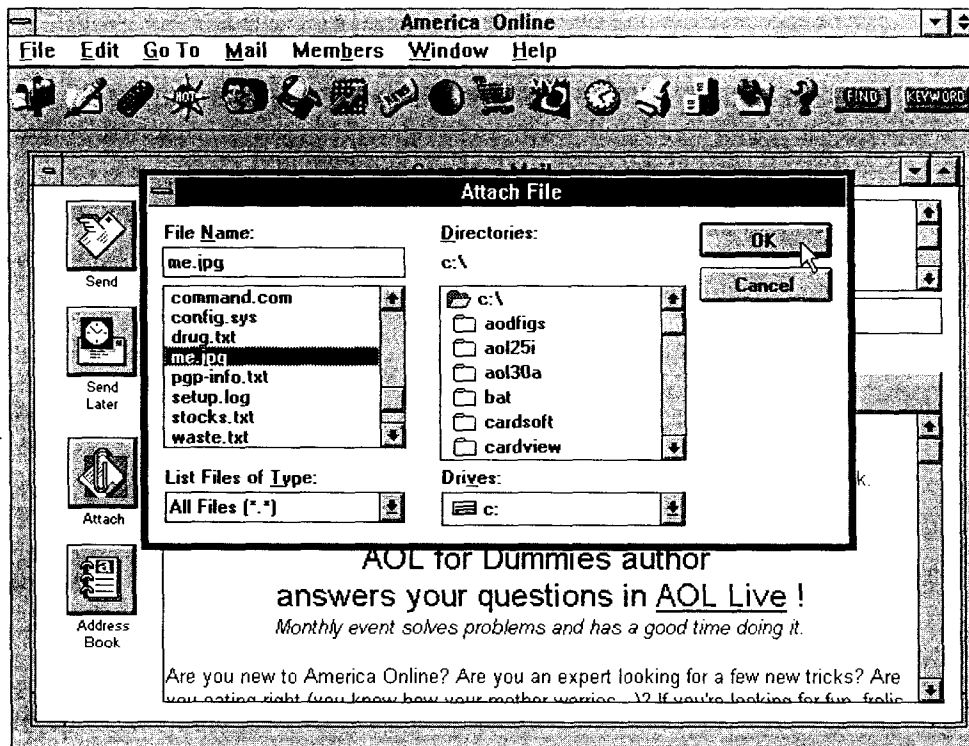


Figure 7-5:
Attaching a
file to the
message.



Stupid mail tricks

As if it weren't enough that you can send e-mail to anyone in America Online, those zany programmers threw in some extra features designed to make your mind do loops. Both of these options are available in the Outgoing Mail dialog box. To bring it up, choose **Mail**→**Check Mail You've Sent** from the menu bar.

Show Status: Want to see if your buddy hasn't read the mail lately or is just ignoring you? Click the mail message you sent and then click **Show Status**. America Online returns a dialog box with the screen name of the person who read the letter and the time and date it was read. If it's still in

unread limbo, the time and date are replaced with (not yet read).

Unsend: If you send a message that you quickly regret, America Online lets you reach through the system and pretend the message never happened—provided the other person hasn't read it yet. To unsend a message, click the message you're embarrassed about and then click **Unsend**. If the message hasn't been read yet, America Online yanks it out of the other person's e-mail basket and throws the message away. If it's too late and the person read the message, it's truly too late—**Unsend** won't work now.

Sending Internet e-mail

Using America Online as your e-mail link to the Internet is really easy. In fact, you can pretend you're just sending mail to another America Online user, except the person has a very weird screen name.

To send mail through the Internet, you go through the same steps you did to send a message to another America Online user. There are only two differences: how to address the message and how to attach files.



The key to sending Internet e-mail is getting the address right. Most Internet mail addresses look a little bizarre to uninitiated human eyes, but that's not an issue — in a moment, you'll be initiated. Instead of being simple, straightforward things like **JKaufeld**, Internet mail addresses look like **71303.3713@compuserve.com**. The part on the left of the @ is the person's ID (the Internet term for screen name). The other half is the address of the computer they use for e-mail (in this case, its one of those *other* online services). Put the whole thing together, and you get an Internet mail address.



These addresses get *really* complicated sometimes (the one for a friend of mine in France contains about 50 letters, numbers, and various punctuation symbols). One way to get the address *just right* is to have your friend send a message to you first. When it arrives, carefully copy the address into your Address Book. Now you don't have to worry about the gory, technical address stuff anymore — just pick the entry from your Address Book and you're done.

Because you're on America Online, you have an Internet e-mail address too; it's your screen name with @aol.com glued onto the end. If your screen name is Have Fun, your Internet e-mail address is havefun@aol.com. The Internet address doesn't use the space or the capital letters in the screen name — it just ignores them.

Here's a brief recap of the steps to send an Internet e-mail message:

1. **To start a new mail message, click the Compose Mail button on the Toolbar or press ⌘+M on the Macintosh or Ctrl+M in Windows.**

A new e-mail window pops onto the screen.

If you're signed on to America Online, sign off *before* writing your message.

2. **Type the highly technical Internet mail address.**

If you type the address by hand, go slowly and be very careful. Double-check the address when you're done. As before, if you want to send the message to more than one person, keep adding addresses (either Internet addresses or America Online screen names — you can freely mix and match the two), separating them with commas.



Whenever possible, use your Address Book. Click the Address Book button and then double-click the entry for that person or group. After you finish, click OK to continue working on the message.

- 3. Press Tab to get into the CC: box. Enter the mail addresses of anyone who needs a copy of this message.**
- 4. Press Tab to move the blinking cursor into the Subject area. Type a descriptive subject for the message.**

You have only 32 characters to use for the subject, so use them well.

- 5. Press Tab again to move the cursor into the message area itself. Type your message.**

Feel free to spruce up your message with the new e-mail formatting tools or drop in some links to your favorite Web sites. Don't send links to areas inside America Online because your friends can't access them. For more about these new tools, see "E-Mailing with Panache" later in this chapter.

- 6. To send a document, program, graphic, or other binary file with your message, click Attach. When the Attach File dialog box pops up, find the file you want to send and double-click the name.**

If this step looks familiar, that's because it is. Thanks to the ever-vigilant programmers at America Online, sending a file through the Internet (which used to be on par with pushing a hardback copy of *Gone with the Wind* through the eye of a needle) is just like sending a file to another America Online member. In short, it's easy. America Online performs all the complex *book-through-the-needle's-eye* gyrations behind the scenes — you don't need to worry about them at all.

On the other end, the person receiving the file needs a mail program that understands *MIME* (Multimedia Internet Mail Extensions) file attachments. That shouldn't be a problem, though, because MIME is quite popular on the Internet. (You always suspected that the computer knew what those hand gestures meant — now you know for sure.)

- 7. Minimize the message window (click the down arrow in the window's upper-right corner), and then sign on to America Online. After the Welcome window appears, double-click the mail message's icon (now hanging around the lower-left side of the screen) and click Send.**

The money-saving FlashSessions work with Internet e-mail, too, so look ahead to "Doing E-Mail the Cheap Way" for more info about keeping your mail bills low.

Faxing your e-mail

When is e-mail not e-mail? When it's a fax! Yes, you can *fax* your message directly from America Online to whomever you want. Isn't technology grand?



To turn your mail into a fax, you need the recipient's name and fax number. The only limitation is that the name must be 20 characters or fewer. (Don't programmers choose the silliest things to annoy you with?)

To create your communication masterpiece, go through the steps for an Internet e-mail message. To address this as a fax message instead of Internet mail, type the recipient's name and fax number into the To area as follows: **name@fax-number**. To send a fax to Paul Politano at 800-555-1212, for example, you'd type **Paul Politano@800-555-1212**.

- ✓ Did I mention that this service isn't free? No, unlike regular and Internet e-mail, faxed e-mail costs money. As of this writing, faxing your mail messages costs \$2 per address. For instance, to send a fax message to one person costs \$2. To send the same message to five people costs \$10. Given those examples, how much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?
- ✓ Sorry about that last bit with the woodchuck. It's very late and I'm a little loopy.
- ✓ Each fax page is 60 lines long, so keep an eye on the length of your message.
- ✓ Remember, you're dealing with a fax machine here, so attached files are *utterly* out of the question. A fax machine won't be able to make any sense of your Microsoft Word document. Period.
- ✓ Fax mail also doesn't understand any of the e-mail formatting features. Your fax messages come through in a plain, boring, fixed-pitch, left justified, monospaced font. Yuck.
- ✓ To force a new page in your fax (instead of letting America Online decide on its own), type >>> **PAGE BREAK** <<< wherever you want the break to be.
- ✓ You *can* send a single e-mail to fax addresses, Internet addresses, and America Online screen names at the same time by putting all the addresses in the To: and CC: areas of your message. And you can store fax addresses right alongside real e-mail addresses in your Address Book.

Strapping your note to a snail

Sit down — I have something ugly to share with you. Thanks to another unfortunate case of technology run amok, it's possible to turn an e-mail message — that fleet-of-foot electronic messenger you know and love — into (gasp!) a regular piece of post office-delivered mail. It's an ugly thought, isn't it?

To send your schizophrenic e-mail/postal mail message, follow the instructions for sending Internet mail. In the To section, type the person's name (maximum of 33 characters) and then **@usmail**. To address a postal mail message to Angelica Irwin, for example, you'd type **Angelica Irwin@usmail**. After you click Send, America Online prompts you for the postal address details.

- ✓ You can send the same message to more than one postal address at a time, but you *can't* put a postal address and any kind of electronic address (screen name, Internet ID, or fax number) together. To send the same message both ways, you have to send it twice: once to all the electronic people and then again to all the postal-mail folks.
- ✓ As with faxing (and perhaps a little more so), neither text formatting or file attachments work in a postal mail message. No surprises there.
- ✓ Sending paper mail costs money. You're charged \$2.50 per address (at least that was the cost when I wrote this).

E-Mailing with Panache

With the new America Online 3.0 software, e-mail and Instant Messages are more powerful and flexible than ever. In addition to text, now your messages can include live links to America Online areas and Web pages. And speaking of text, the e-mail and Instant Messages systems now offer formatting controls that make an everyday e-mail message look like a wonder of modern word processing.

The following sections explain and explore these cool features. Check them out and then bid boring messages a fond farewell!

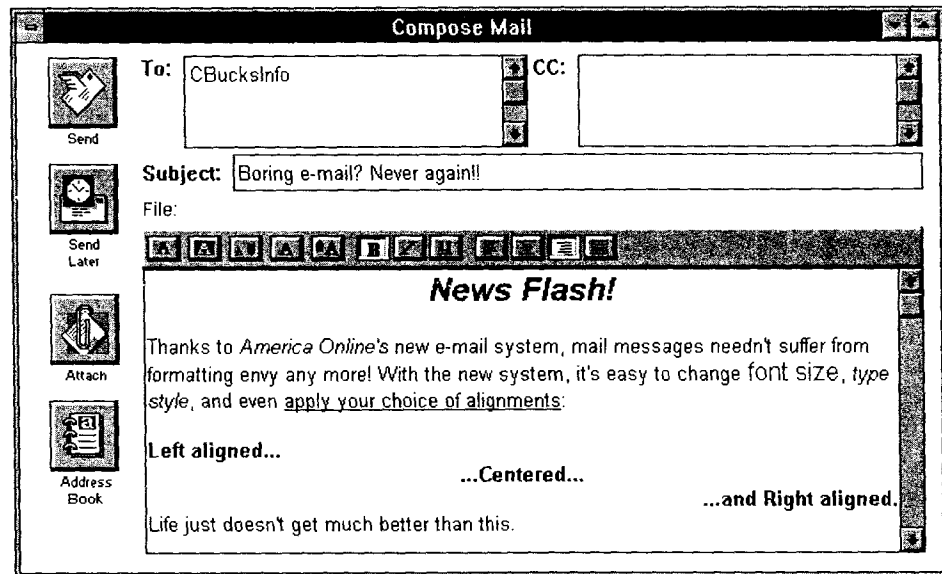
Formatting for beauty

The new formatting buttons put you in charge of the text size, style, alignment, and even color while creating Instant Messages. Figure 7-6 samples the possibilities (but I hope your design skills are better than mine).

The buttons just above the message area control the formatting magic. They're grouped into four sets by what they do. Here's a quick rundown of the sets, from left to right:

- ✓ The first set handles *text color*. Change the color of the text itself with the first button. Use the second to change the background color of the *entire* message (not just a small portion of it). And remember that blue text on a blue background doesn't show up very well!
- ✓ The second set is in charge of *text size*. The three buttons, in order, choose a smaller font, the normal font, and a larger font (but you probably figured that out by the arrows).

Figure 7-6:
The possibilities are endless (as are the prospects for a truly ugly message).



- ✓ The third set does *text formatting*. These are the bold, italic, and underline buttons, as their labels demonstrate.
- ✓ The fourth set covers *text alignment*. Like any good word processor, the America Online e-mail system understands left, center, and right justification, plus so-called newspaper justification, which is even on both sides. This final option isn't available in Instant Messages. (I guess they aren't smart enough to handle it.)

To format new text, click the buttons for your choices and start typing. The software applies the formatting you chose to the text. To format text that's already in the message, click and drag the mouse across the text you want to change, and then click the formatting buttons. Presto — the old text looks new! Likewise, to remove some formatting, highlight the text in question and click off the format options you don't want.

Linking with ease

Almost every time I wander America Online or surf the Web for a while, I run across something that's really neat and worth sharing with my friends. In the past, I laboriously copied the Internet address or America Online keyword into a mail message — and sometimes messed it up in process. Today, though, I never miss an address because I let the America Online software include the link for me.



Before trying this, you need to understand how the Favorite Places area works and what it does for you. If you're not familiar with Favorite Places, flip back to Chapter 5 and find out more about them before attempting this link thing.

When you want to include a keyword or Internet address link in an e-mail message or Instant Message, follow these steps:

1. Add an entry for the America Online area or Web page to your Favorite Places list.

Doing so is easy — just look at the window and click the heart-in-a-page icon in the window's upper-right corner. When America Online asks whether you want to add the window to your Favorite Places, click Yes.

2. Create a new mail message by choosing Mail ⇨ Compose Mail or pressing Ctrl+M. Type the address and subject just like always, and then press Tab to move the cursor into the message area.

So far, so good — you definitely have a mail message under construction. Now the fun begins.



3. In the message area, type some kind of brief introduction to the link you're sending, and then put the cursor exactly where you want to insert the link. When you're ready, click the Favorite Places button on the Toolbar.

The Favorite Places window appears, partially covering the e-mail window.

4. Aim the mouse pointer at the item's entry in Favorite Places, and then click and drag the mouse pointer into the mail window (see Figure 7-7).

As you move the mouse, the arrow changes into an arrow holding a page.

5. When the pointer is hovering somewhere in the mail window, let up on the mouse button.

Believe it or not, that makes the link. Pretty cool when technology works *with* you, isn't it?

Feel free to add as many links as you want. You're also free to include both Web addresses and America Online keyword areas in the same message.

6. Close the Favorite Places window, and then finish and send the mail message.

The link shows as colored, underlined text. Although Figure 7-8 is in black and white, you can probably pick out the link in the middle of the message.

By the way, if you want to try out the Evil Little Brother Excuse Generator for yourself, it's at <http://www.dtd.com/excuse>. (Pity I can't put links in my book!)

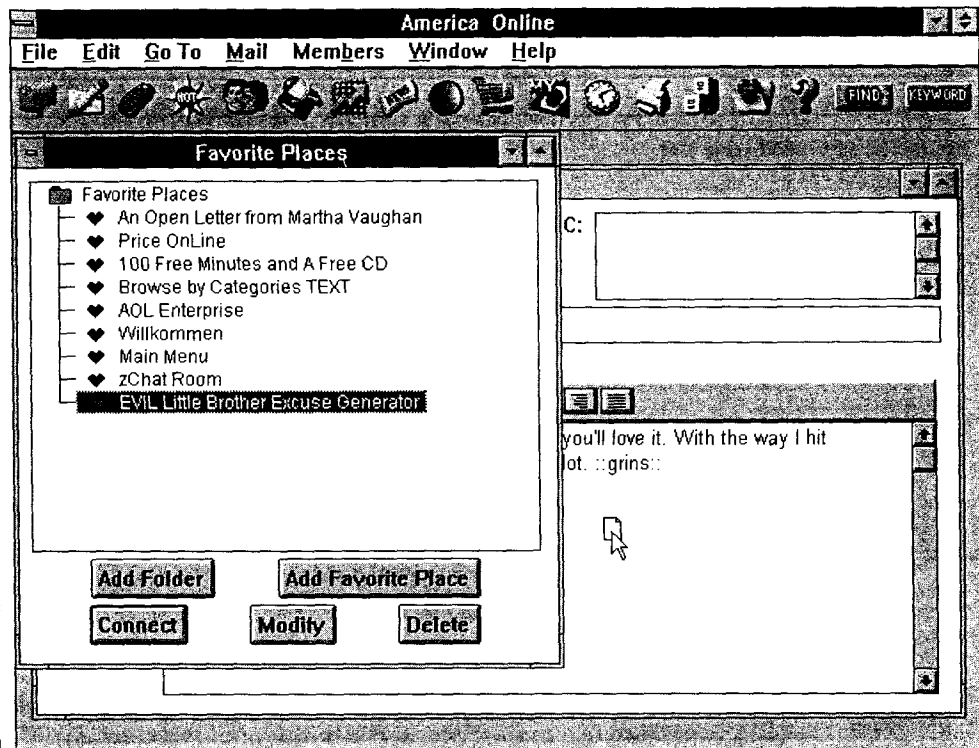


Figure 7-7:
The link is on its way.

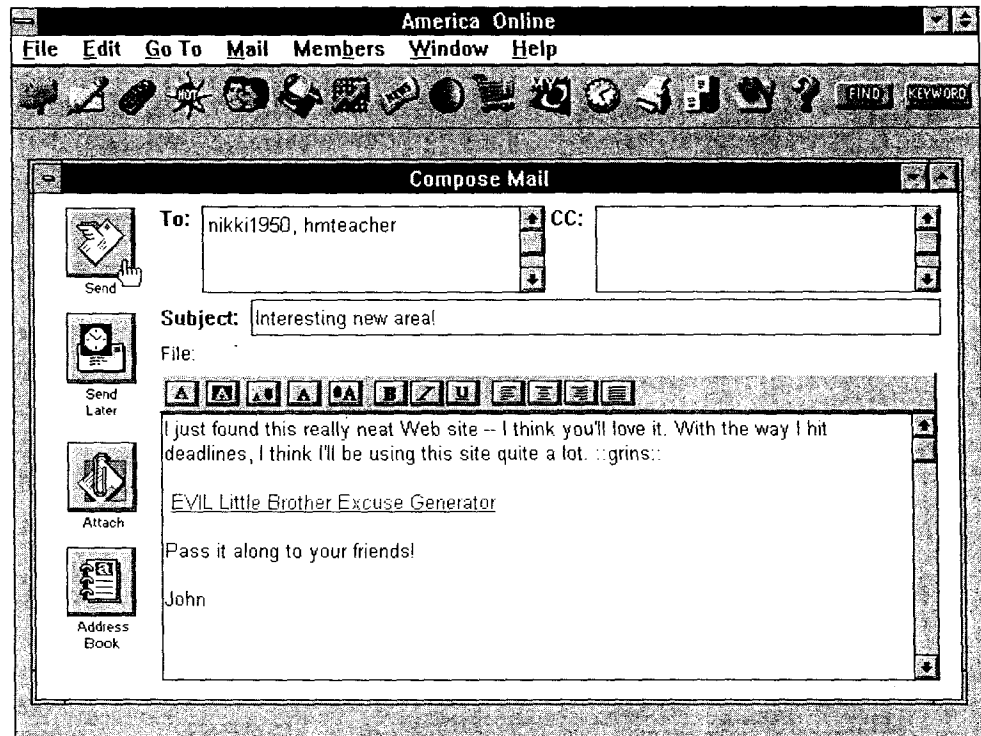



Figure 7-8:
There's the link — and it's guaranteed to be right.

Incoming Missive, Sir!

Sending mail is only half the fun. After you send something, you get a reply! If you think a mailbox full of junk mail is a lift, just wait until you sign on to America Online and find a message or two in your e-mail box. Someone out there cares!

 You have two ways to see your new mail. One is pretty obvious, as shown in Figure 7-9, but the other isn't. The obvious one is the big picture button of a jam-packed mailbox, emblazoned with the subtle notation *You Have Mail*. (I have seen *obvious* before, and it looked a lot like this.) The other clue is the first button on the left of the Toolbar: an icon of a mailbox with some letters hanging out. A single click on either the big picture or the Toolbar button whisks you away to the New Mail window (see Figure 7-10).

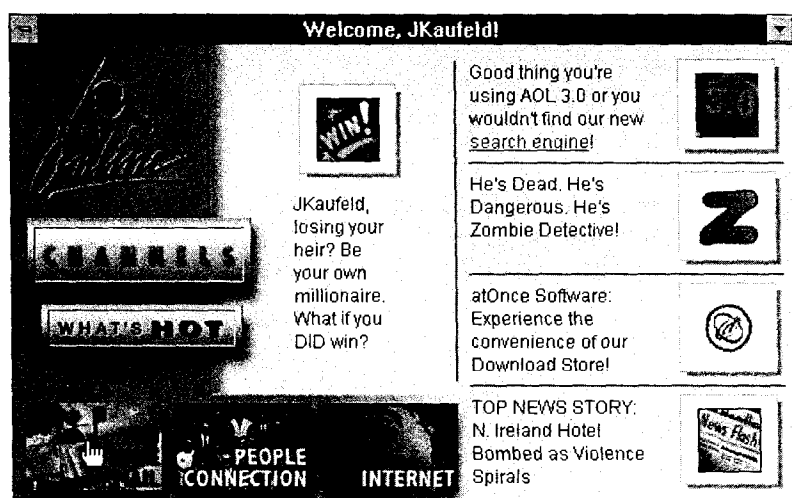


Figure 7-9:
I have mail
— yes!

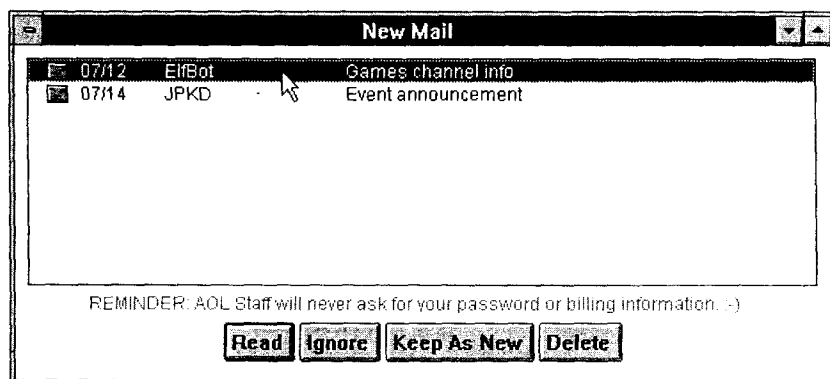


Figure 7-10:
The
electronic
inbox.

To read a message, either double-click the message in the New Mail window or click it once and then click Read. Your message hops up into its own window. To reply only to the person who sent the message, click Reply. To share your comments with the sender *and* everyone else who received the message, click Reply to All. To send a copy of the message to someone else (even out to the Internet, but not to a fax or postal mail address), click Forward. After you're done with the message, close the window by double-clicking in its upper-left corner.



- ✓ To keep a message in your inbox after you read it, click the message in the New Mail window once and then click Keep As New. Unread messages live in your America Online inbox for 30 days after arriving. After that, they turn into very small pumpkins and are shipped to your local grocery store, never to be seen or heard from again.
- ✓ To save an important message, either print it out or save it as a text file in your computer. To print, click the Print button (it looks like a page coming out of a printer) on the Toolbar. To save it as a text file, choose File⇨Save As from the main menu, type a filename for the information, and then click OK. The text is now safe and sound on your disk drive.
- ✓ Mail you've read hangs out in the Old Mail area for about seven days after you first read it. To reread an old message, choose Mail⇨Check Mail You've Read from the menu bar. Doing so brings up the Old Mail dialog box. Double-click the message you want to read.

Doing E-Mail the Cheap Way

“Do you want to save money? Do you want to save time? Well, then, step right up, folks, step right up and see the working man's miracle, a technological time-saver: the America Online FlashSession. This little beauty lets you type your e-mails offline, that's right, *offline*, folks, not signed on at all — step back, son, you bother me. Save yourself some money right then and there. But it doesn't stop with that, no siree. It doesn't want to save you a *little* money, folks; it wants to save you a *lot*. That's why it au-to-matically gets your new mail when it's sending the old stuff off. Read your messages, write your replies, and then tell the little fellow to go do it all again. Every time you use it, you can't *help* but save money. Like money in the bank, folks, that's a FlashSession for you.”

Okay, so America Online probably *didn't* use old-time carnival barkers to announce FlashSessions, but they sure could have. This technology is incredibly useful, and it's built right into your America Online access software. There's nothing else to buy; no salesperson will call.

To work with FlashSessions, choose **Mail**⇒**Set up FlashSessions** from the menu bar. The FlashSessions dialog box pops up in the middle of your screen, just like Figure 7-11. For all its power and usefulness, the FlashSession thing is pretty easy to set up and use.

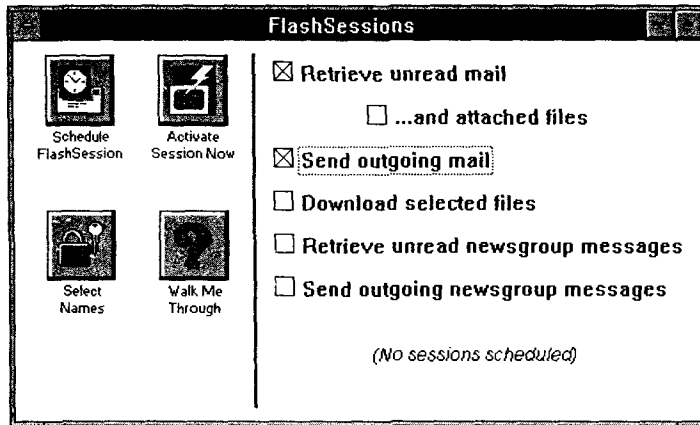


Figure 7-11:
The FlashSessions dialog box zips in for an appearance.



You don't have to be signed on to do this — in fact, it's probably a good idea if you aren't.

Here's what FlashSessions do for you:

- ✓ Sign on in one, a few, or all of your screen names and gather new mail for offline review.
- ✓ Send outgoing mail that you wrote offline and saved with the Send Later button.
- ✓ Automatically download files attached to mail messages (or not, depending on your preference).
- ✓ Post your comments to those same newsgroups.
- ✓ Download files marked in the Download Manager.
- ✓ Perform all these actions at regular intervals (every half hour, hour, two hours, and so on) or whenever you tell the program to do so.

FlashSessions are pretty flexible, so you can do whatever you want. For instance, your FlashSession can retrieve new mail, leave attached files online, send outgoing mail, and not mess with the Download Manager at all. And you can change the settings at your whim whenever you want.

You can choose from two ways to set up a FlashSession: either click the Walk Me Through button (which asks you questions and does the settings based on your answers) or follow the steps below. Do whichever is more comfortable for you. Heck — do them both if you want to.

Here's how to set up a FlashSession by yourself:

1. **If you haven't already done so, sign off America Online.**
2. **Choose Mail ⇨ SetupFlashSessions from the menu bar.**

Doing so accesses the FlashSessions dialog box that you saw in Figure 7-8.

3. **Click Select Names.**

The Select Screen Names dialog box appears.

4. **Click the check box next to each screen name you want to use with the FlashSession. Enter the password for each screen name you choose. Click OK after you're done (see Figure 7-12).**



Type the passwords *carefully*. If a password is misspelled, the FlashSession won't work correctly (and you don't want *that* to happen, do you?).

5. **Tell the software what actions this FlashSession should do.**

Table 7-1 has a brief breakdown of the settings, what they do, and how I suggest you set them.

6. **After all your settings are completed, close the window by double-clicking in the upper-left corner (Macintosh users click once in the same place).**

Congratulations — your FlashSession is ready to go.



You may have noticed that I ignored the Schedule FlashSession button. Although I think that this feature is interesting, I don't want my computer deciding on its own that it's time to call America Online and check for mail. If automating the process sounds like a hot fudge sundae to you (it sounded like asparagus to me), look in the America Online access software help menu for help setting the scheduling options.

I left out two other settings as well, namely the ones relating to Internet newsgroups. Using FlashSessions with newsgroups is a slightly complex process (much like assembling a child's tricycle on Christmas Eve — if you're a parent, I know you can relate). For details about using FlashSessions and newsgroups, see the newsgroups section of Chapter 17.

Figure 7-12:
Choosing
screen
names
for the
FlashSession.

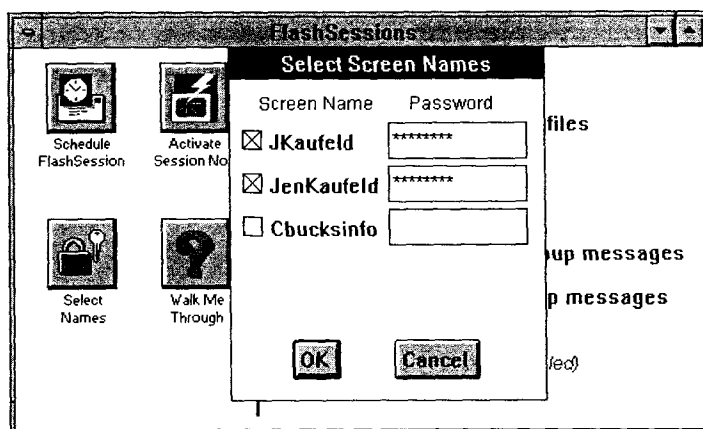
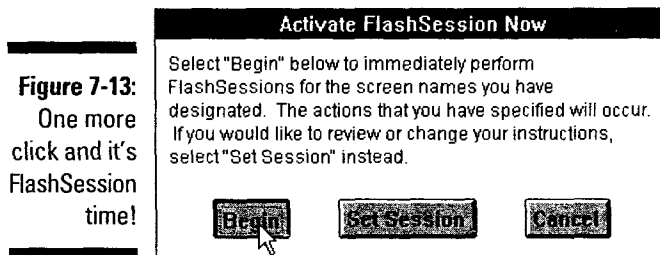


Table 7-1 FlashSession Activities

| <i>Setting</i> | <i>Recommendation</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Retrieve unread mail | Turn it on | Copies new mail messages from America Online to your computer so you can read them offline. <i>Definitely</i> use this option — it's a money-saver. |
| ...and attached files | Turn it on | Automatically downloads files attached to mail messages. If you get a <i>lot</i> of files by e-mail, this feature is useful. Go ahead and turn it on. |
| Send outgoing mail | Turn it on | Sends any mail messages you wrote offline and saved with the Send Later button. Another <i>must-have</i> feature of FlashSessions. Use it. |
| Download selected files | Leave it off | Invokes the Download Manager and gets any files you have marked. FlashSessions really shine for immediate things like e-mail messages. Use the Download Manager when you're around to supervise it. |
| Retrieve unread newsgroup messages | Learn more | Retrieves new messages from your "read offline" list of Internet newsgroups. Refer to Chapter 17 for details. |
| Send outgoing newsgroup messages | Learn more | Posts replies to your "read offline" list of Internet newsgroups. See Chapter 17 for more information. |

Using a FlashSession is even easier than setting it up. To start your FlashSession, choose **Mail**→**Activate FlashSession Now** from the menu. The Activate FlashSession Now dialog box appears (see Figure 7-13). If you're happy with your settings, click **Begin**. If you want to briefly review things, click **Set Session** instead. An information window pops up to give you the blow-by-blow commentary of the FlashSession in progress. When it's done, close the FlashSession Status dialog box.



To read incoming mail, choose the appropriate screen name from the main America Online window and then choose **Mail**→**Read Incoming Mail** from the menu bar. You can read, reply, and do whatever else you wish with the messages. After all your replies are done, set off another FlashSession to send them on their way.



If your teenagers have their own screen names, they probably *won't* want to be part of your money-saving FlashSession. That's because you don't need to type in a password to read mail that came in through a FlashSession — you select the screen name, hit the **Mail** menu, and you're knee-deep in potentially private e-mail (at least from your kids' point of view — and I probably agree with them).

Organizing Your E-Mail Mess(ages)

If you're using the Windows version of America Online, it's *your* turn to look smugly at the Macintosh folks. Versions 2.5 and later of the Windows software has a really cool feature that's not available in stores, can't be purchased with American Express, and *isn't* included on the Macintosh. It's the Personal Filing Cabinet, your one-stop tool for tracking e-mail, Flashmail, file downloads, and favorite places.

Figure 7-14 shows the Personal Filing Cabinet in one of its quieter moments. The file folders along the left side of the window represent different storage areas. Some of them you already use, like the Favorite Places window and the Download Manager. Others are new, such as the Mail Archives.

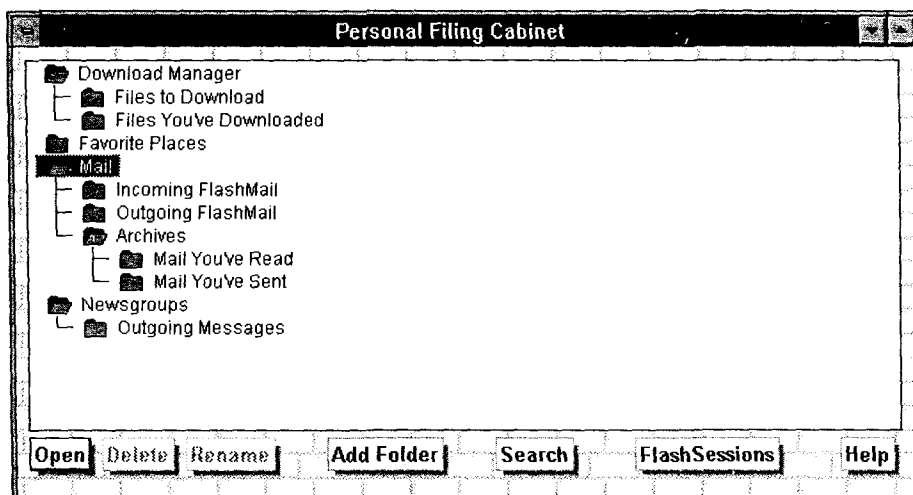


Figure 7-14:
The
Personal
Filing
Cabinet.

There's a lot to work with here, but this area is easiest to understand when you play with it. Before I turn you loose, here are some basic ideas about how the Filing Cabinet works:

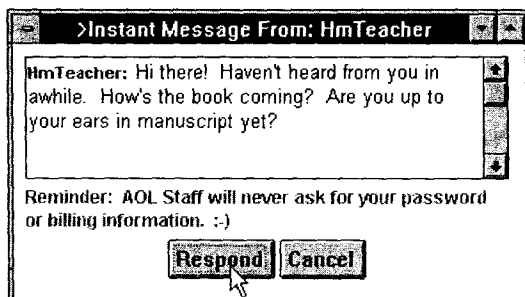
- ✓ Folders can be inside other folders, just like in the real world.
- ✓ Although you can work with the entries in your Favorite Places area from here, I recommend making changes directly to the Favorite Places window itself.
- ✓ To open a folder, double-click it. To close it, double-click again. When you open a folder, the software displays all the items the folder contains (which can be a lengthy list sometimes). Don't be surprised if you have to scroll up and down to see everything in a folder.
- ✓ To view something inside a folder (be it a document or a Favorite Place entry), double-click it. Doing so displays documents and sends you careening off toward Favorite Places (provided that you're signed on to America Online at the time).
- ✓ To create a new folder, click the top folder of the area (like Mail, for instance) and then click Add Folder. Type a name for the new folder and then click OK. The new folder appears underneath the top folder. Isn't automated organization amazing?
- ✓ Moving things from one folder to another is easy. Just point at the item you want to move, hold down the mouse button, and drag the item to its new home. When the mouse arrow is pointing to the item's destination, release the mouse button. The Personal Filing Cabinet gently puts the item in place.
- ✓ If you misplace an e-mail message, click Search to have the Personal Filing Cabinet ferret it out. You can search on the item titles or the full text of messages. Pretty spiffy, eh?

✓ In the Mail option of the Preferences (Members⇨Set Preferences and then click the Mail button), you can tell America Online to automatically make copies of all the mail you send and receive. These messages are stored in the Mail Archive folder of the Personal Filing Cabinet. Personally, I think this idea is really cool, but it *can* take a lot of disk space. Try turning this feature on and see if you like it.

Online Telepathy with Instant Messages

Sometimes, you just want to drop a quick “Hi!” to someone you happen to bump into online. That’s what the America Online Instant Message feature is for. It’s an easy way to have a quick conversation with someone regardless of whatever else either of you are doing at the time (see Figure 7-15). Instant Messages are completely private, too — only you and your correspondent know what’s passing between you.

Figure 7-15:
An Instant Message appears.



Using these little text bombs is easy — here’s how:

- 1. To see if someone is currently online, either check your Buddy List or use the Locate command.**

The Buddy List system is a great tool for tracking your friends online. To find out more, see “Who’s Your Buddy?” later in this chapter.

To find someone with Locate, either press Ctrl+L or choose Members⇨Locate a Member Online. When the Locate dialog box hops onto the screen, type your friend’s screen name and press Enter. After a moment, America Online tells you whether the person is online and whether or not he’s in a chat room. (If he’s yakking away in a public chat room, the Locate dialog box also offers you a Go button that whisks you away to join your buddy.)



You can send Instant Messages only to someone who's signed on *and* has Instant Messaging turned on in the America Online Parental Control (keyword **Parental Control**).

2. Having found your target — er, friend — press Ctrl+I.

The Send Instant Message dialog pops up.

3. Type the person's screen name in the To box and then press Tab to move the blinking cursor into the text area. Type your message.

Keep Instant Messages short. If you have something *long* to say, use e-mail.

If you're *really* in an Instant Message mode, skip step 1 entirely and use the Available? button in the Instant Message dialog box. Type the person's screen name and then click Available? to see if he's out there. That action gets the same results as step 1's Locate Member Online command.

4. After you finish typing the message, click Send.

If the person is signed on and accepting Instant Messages, America Online replies that your Instant Message was sent. Otherwise, it moans to you about whatever went wrong.

When your friend gets the message, she can reply by clicking the Reply button. Her message then appears on your screen, and you can start a running dialogue.



If someone you don't know sends you an Instant Message asking for your password, credit card number, or anything else like this, report the person *immediately* with keyword **Guidepager**. This is a scam — period. Whether the person claims to be from the America Online billing department, a credit card company, or Mars (which is where he *should* be), he lies. You can find out more about this in Chapter 25, along with detailed instructions for nailing — er, reporting — these scammers.

Who's Your Buddy?

Collecting a whole group of friends and acquaintances around America Online doesn't take long. In fact, you may find yourself awash in people in no time at all. To keep track of your burgeoning social register, put America Online's Buddy List to work.

The Buddy List tells you at a glance which of your friends are online and where they are. It even organizes your buddies into groups, making the task of discerning the office crowd from the gang at last week's online Jell-O diving competition an easy one. (After all, the difference may be important.)

Building a Buddy List is a snap. Here's how to do it:

1. Choose **Go To⇒Keyword** from the main menu or press **Ctrl+K**. In the **Keyword dialog box**, type **Buddy** and press **Enter**.

The Buddy List window appears on-screen.

2. Click **Create** to make a new buddy list.

The Create a Buddy List window hops onto the screen, looking bright and chipper as ever.

3. In the **Buddy List Name** box, type a short name (16 letters or fewer) for the new list, and then press **Tab**.

The cursor jumps down to the Enter a Screen Name area.

4. Type the screen name of your buddy, and then press **Enter**.

Your buddy's screen name takes its place in the Buddies on List area, just like Figure 7-16.

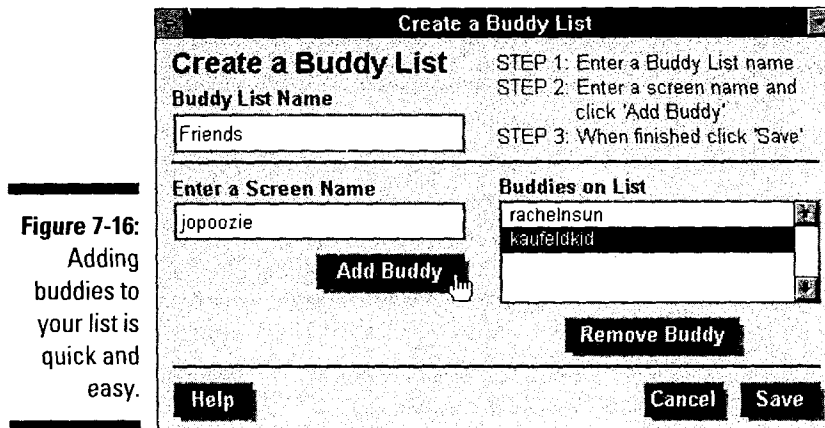


Figure 7-16:
Adding buddies to your list is quick and easy.

5. Repeat step 4 until all your buddies are in there. When you're done with the list, click **Save**.

To prove that it was listening this whole time, America Online replies that your list is saved. The Buddy Lists dialog box then returns in triumph, proudly displaying an entry for your new list (see Figure 7-17).

6. To create another list, go back to step 2. To put your Buddy List into action, click **View**. When you're done, close the Buddy List window by double-clicking in the window's upper-left corner.

That's it — your Buddy List is done.

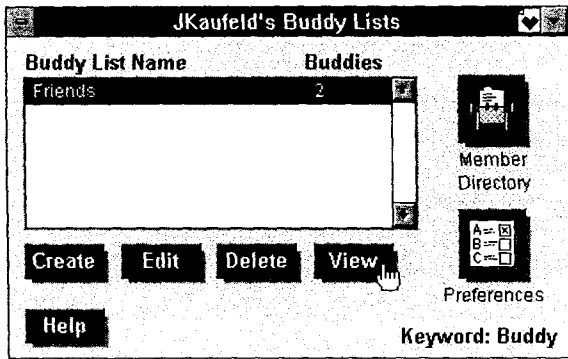


Figure 7-17:
Cool — there's my new list.

Every time you sign on to America Online, your Buddy List jumps into action, hanging out on the side of your screen much like Figure 7-18. As your buddies sign on and off the system, the list updates itself automatically.



If for some reason you don't want people to track your screen name with a Buddy List, that's easy to set up. In the Buddy List window, click Preferences. To completely block yourself from Buddy Lists all over America Online, click Block all members from adding me to their lists. To either allow or prevent a few people from tracking you on their Buddy Lists, click either Allow only the members below or Block only the members below, and then put the specific screen names in the box at the bottom of the dialog box. When you're done, click Save.

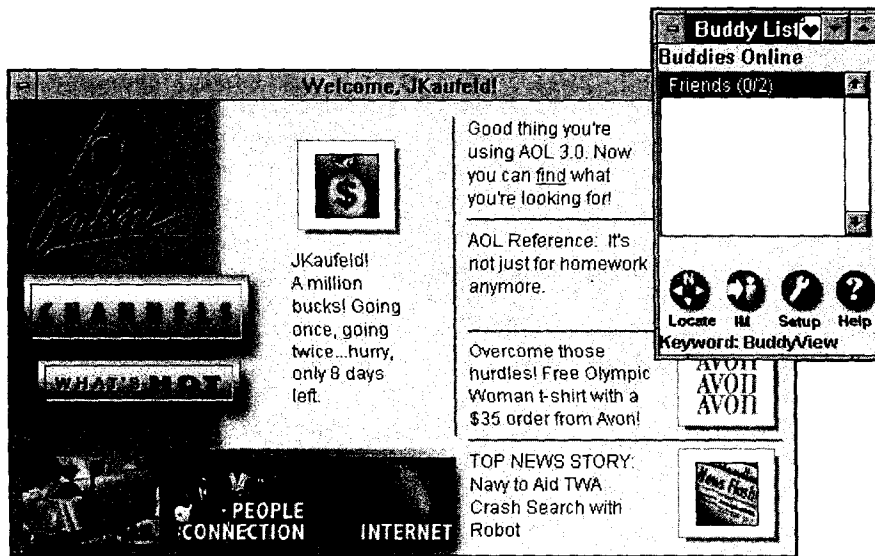


Figure 7-18:
Your buddies can't escape you now.

Typing the Night Away in a Chat Room

Finally, if interactive communication is your thing, check out America Online's famous chat rooms. This is the height of interactivity. You're typing away in a group of up to 23 people. And it's a blast.

Rather than have me retell all the details here, check out Chapter 25. It covers chat rooms, meeting rooms (big chat areas), and the online auditoriums (for *really* big functions).

Chapter 8

Loading Up, Loading Down, and Zipping All Around

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding things to download
 - ▶ Downloading a file
 - ▶ Using the Download Manager
 - ▶ Zipped, stuffed, and other ways that files arrive
 - ▶ Uploading your donations
 - ▶ Logging everything you see
-

I imagine a Wal-Mart where everything is free and you pay a flat rate for the time you spend shopping and carrying your purchases out to the car. Some items also require a small payment directly to the manufacturer, but most don't. Sounds like heaven, right? (Well, heaven probably would be a computer superstore set up this way, but I digress.)

The scenario that I just described already exists, except that it's not a Wal-Mart except for the — hundreds of file libraries in America Online work this way. Find something that interests you; pay for the time it takes to download the file to your computer; and then, if it's a shareware program, pay a small fee to the author because you love the program so much.

Sounds too simple, right? There must be a catch. Well, it *is* pretty simple, and there really *isn't* a catch. This chapter is your guide to getting a share of this digital bonanza. Read on and find out about finding stuff to download, how the download process works, sharing stuff you love by uploading it, and much more.

Welcome to Software Heaven. Come right on in.

Locating Likely Candidates

You're ready to storm the digital gates, eager to get your share of the software fortunes within. But where do you start? Geez — *hundreds*, maybe *thousands*, of places exist for you to look through. Nothing like having too many options to keep your mind spinning in circles, eh?



Start with one or two forums that you particularly like. If you're looking for a certain kind of file (such as fonts or clip art), use the Software Library Search feature to see what's out there. The following sections explain both of these options.

Forum and service libraries

Almost every forum has a file library. Libraries usually are marked with the disk icon that you see in Figure 8-1 or, in fancier service areas such as the one shown in Figure 8-2, with a disk button. Both elements ultimately lead to a file-list window (see Figure 8-3).

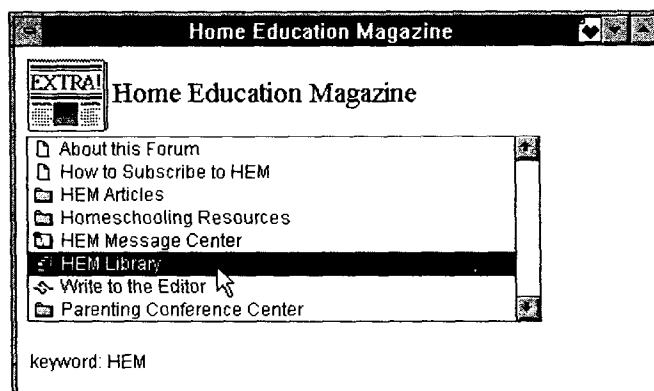


Figure 8-1:
A simple file
library.

✓ To learn more about a file, double-click its entry in the forum library window (or single-click the entry and then click the Read Description button). A page of information about the file appears, including its name, size, author, and a complete description (or as complete a description as the person contributing it provides). Incidentally, if you're using a session log, all the file descriptions that you view are saved there automatically. For more information about session logs, see the last section of this chapter.

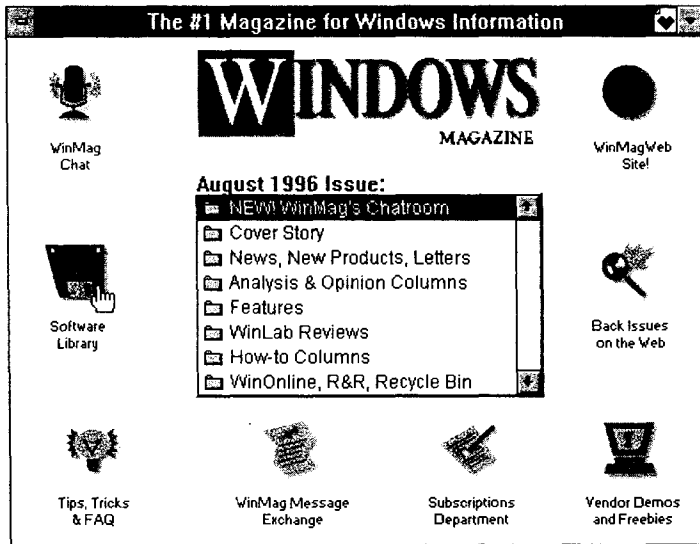


Figure 8-2: A fancier file library.

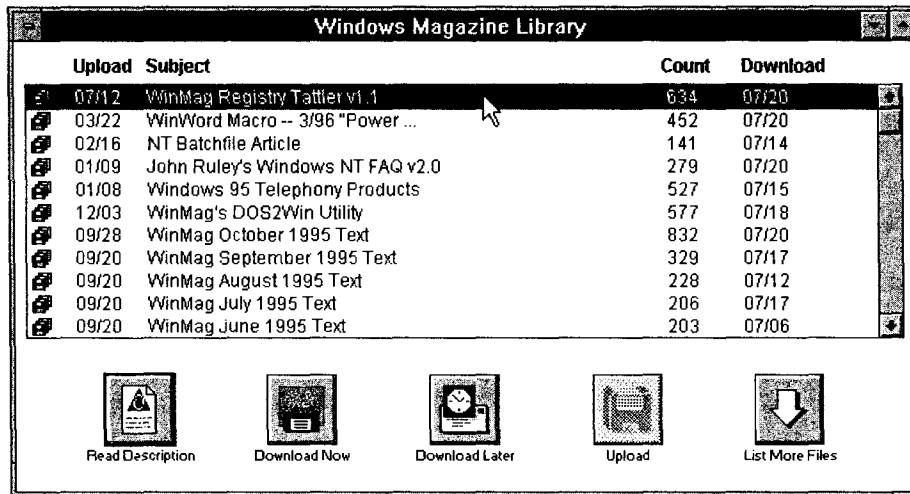


Figure 8-3: All roads lead to a file-list window.

- ✓ Downloading is a breeze with the Download Now and Download Later buttons (covered in the next section).
- ✓ Most libraries have lots of files, but only the first 20 are displayed. That's why a List More Files button usually appears in the lower-right corner of the forum-library window. Click this button to display more files in the window.
- ✓ If you want general information about the file list and other forum windows, see Chapter 6.



For leads on good downloads, read the forum's discussion areas to see what people are talking about, or post a message that describes your interests and asks for recommendations. Also look for files that are popular. The Count column in the file-list window is a good popularity gauge; this column tracks the number of times that a file is downloaded.

File Library Search

If you're looking for something more general, or if you just like knowing *all* your options before you start, try the Software Library Search feature. This feature browses through all the libraries in America Online, looking intently for whatever you tell it to look for.



You must be signed on to America Online to use the Software Library Search system. Sorry, but that's just how life goes.

Here's how to do a search:



1. Click the File Search button in the Toolbar.

The File Search dialog box pops up.

2. If you want to limit your search to a particular period (the past week, past month, or since time began), click the appropriate radio button.

Unless you have a burning need, leave the time frame set to All dates. When the file list appears, it's sorted by category and date anyway, with the newest files listed at the beginning of each category.

3. Unless you're looking for something *very* specific, click the All Categories check box to tell America Online that you're open for just about anything.

When you feel comfortable with the search function and the kinds of files that are out there waiting for you, try experimenting with these settings to see what you can find.

4. Type a few descriptive words about what you're looking for (see Figure 8-4).

5. Click the List Matching Files button (see Figure 8-4).

After a moment or two, the File Search Results dialog box appears, looking somewhat akin to Figure 8-5.

The File Search Results dialog box is a whole lot like the forum's file-list window, right down to the buttons along the bottom. At this point, you're ready to do some downloading!



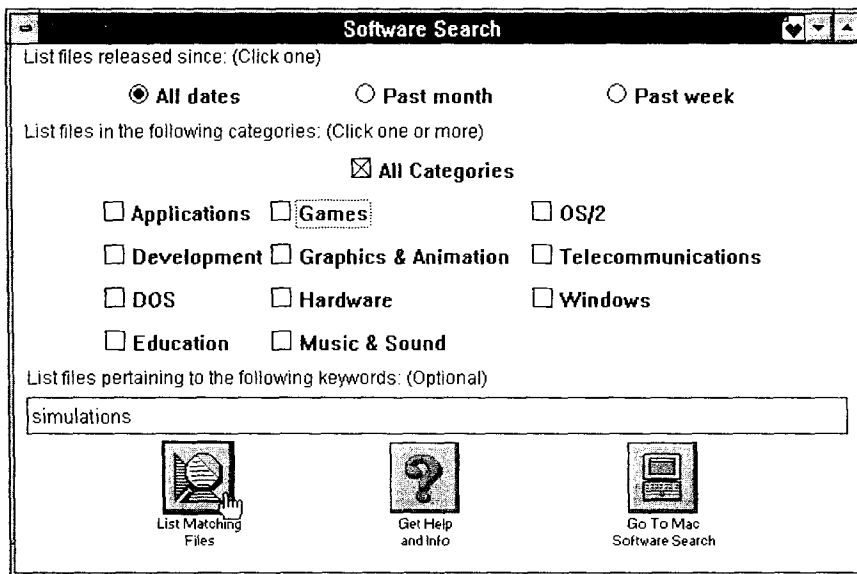


Figure 8-4:
The search
begins.

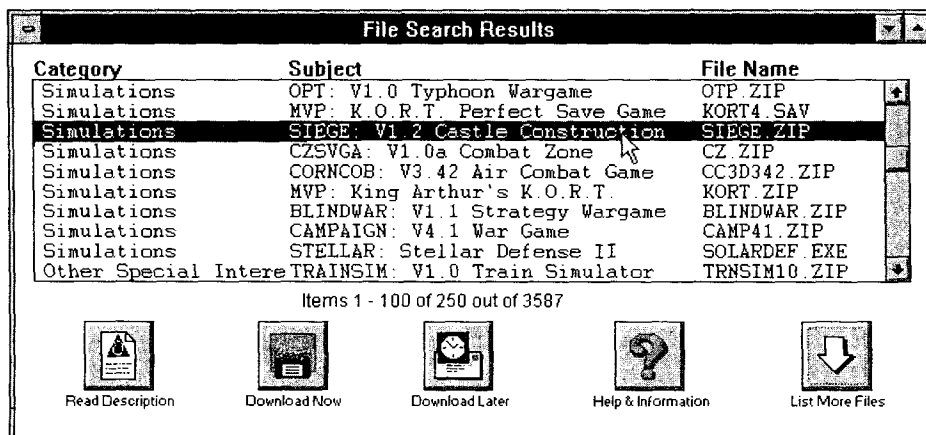


Figure 8-5:
The results
are in!

Downloading a File Right Now

You finally found a promising file, checked its description, and decided that you simply *must* have a copy. Cool with me. You're ready to do the dirty deed, then — time to download a file.

Here's the procedure:

1. Click the name of the file that you want to download and then click the Download Now button (see Figure 8-6).



If you're in the file-list window, Download Now is a square button with a cool graphic of a disk "beaming down" as in *Star Trek*. In the file-description window, the button is simply labeled (you guessed it) Download Now.

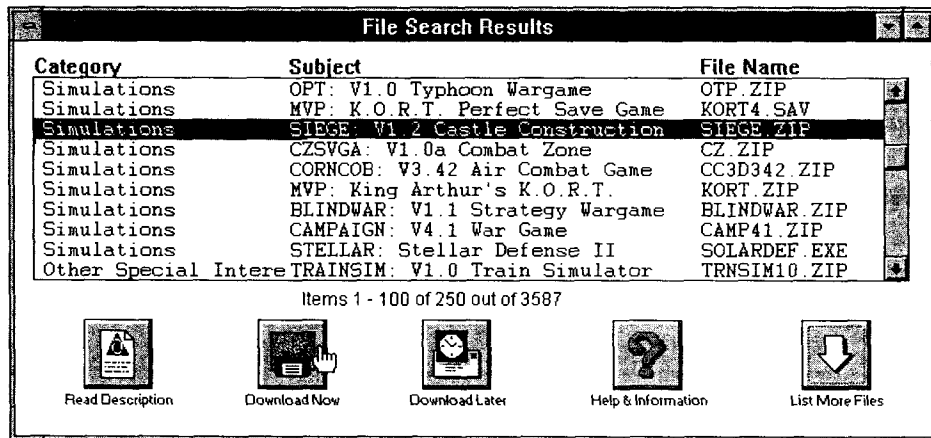


Figure 8-6:
Ready to download, Captain.

Clicking this button accesses the Download Manager's filename dialog box (but not the whole Download Manager itself — that's covered in the next section of this chapter).

The file's name is displayed in the File Name box (see Figure 8-7).

2. If you want to change the file's name or the directory where it's going to land, go right ahead; after you finish, choose OK.

Clicking OK starts the download. To keep you updated on its progress, America Online displays a bar chart.



The dialog box also has two control buttons: Finish Later and Cancel. If you suddenly need your computer for something more urgent than downloading this file, click Finish Later. America Online remembers that you already received part of the file, so when you're ready to pull down the rest, the download picks up wherever you stopped the first time. Cancel, on the other hand, is the abort button. Click it if you come to the conclusion that downloading this file is a terrible mistake.

After the download is complete, a little dialog box pops up to gleefully announce the news.

3. Click OK to make the dialog box go away.



If something goes horribly wrong (for example, the download gets stuck for some reason) and you burned up a bunch of online time for nothing, go to keyword **Credit** and ask for a refund. Fill out the form, complete with the time, date, and minutes lost and then click Send Request. The America Online Credit Elves should reply to you within a few days.

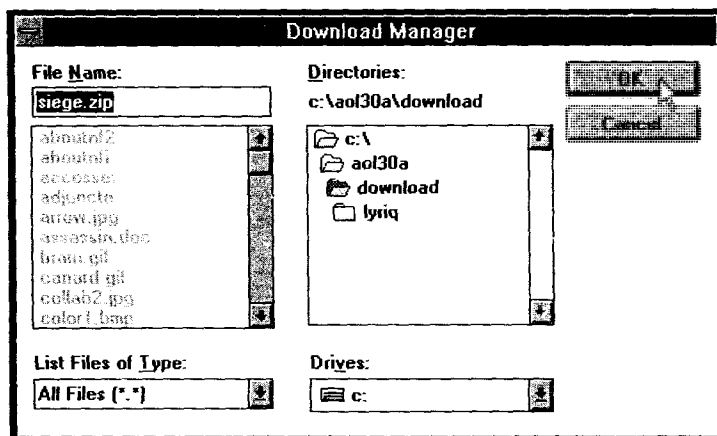


Figure 8-7:
Name the
file, and it's
on the way!

After you get the hang of the America Online file libraries, check out the Internet Connection's FTP (File Transfer Protocol) feature. FTP is your link to millions of files available on the Internet. If instant access to file libraries all over the world already has you salivating, flip to Chapter 17 for details.

How Do You Manage This Many Downloads?

What if you find not one, not two, but about 47 fascinating files? Well, you can spend a lot of your copious free time watching the computer draw download-progress bar charts (how exciting!). Or you can use the Download Manager to automate the whole sordid process.

The Download Manager's main goal in life is to help you download *tons* of stuff from America Online. Really — that's it. Using the Download Manager is a two-stage process: You mark the files that you want to download and then you tell the Download Manager to get all of them. The best thing is that you don't need to be there for the second step of the process; your computer gleefully sits and catches all the files you want while you're off doing something *really* fun.

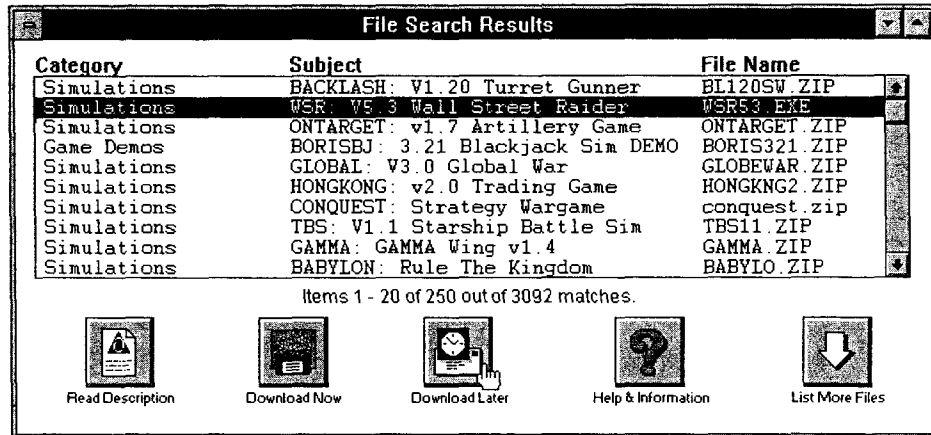
Here's how the process works:

1. Click the name of a file that you want to download and then click the Download Later button (see Figure 8-8).

The file hops into the Download Manager's queue.

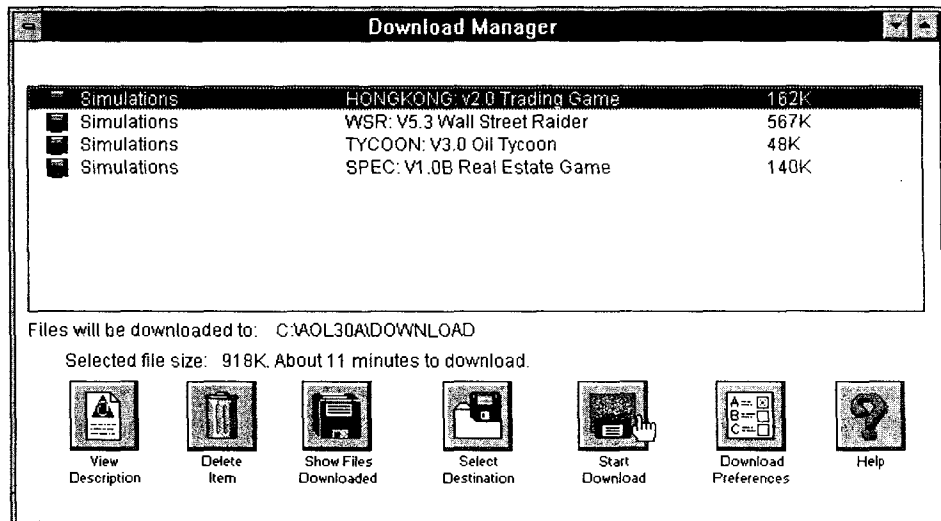
2. Repeat step 1 for all the files that you want to download.
3. Open the Download Manager by choosing File⇨Download Manager.

Figure 8-8:
Just leave it in the queue; I'll pick it up later.



The Download Manager window appears, looking vaguely like the one shown in Figure 8-9.

Figure 8-9:
I found a few things that I couldn't live without.





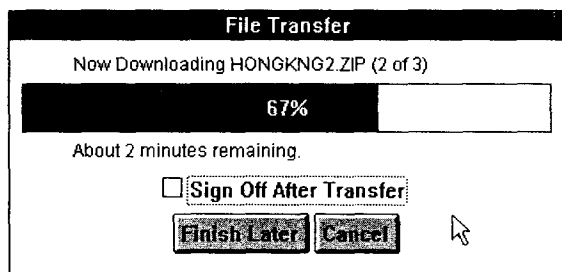
To see the file description one more time, double-click the filename in the Download Manager window. The description appears, just as it did in the file-list window.

If you have sudden second thoughts about a file and decide that you don't want to download it, click its name in the Download Manager list and then click Delete Item. Repeat the process as many times as you want.

4. Click the Start Download button to put the Download Manager to work.

Two windows appear on-screen. One window shows the overall status of your massive download. The other window displays a progress bar chart for the file that's downloading right now (see Figure 8-10).

Figure 8-10:
A download caught in the midst of the process.



If you have a *lot* of files to get, click the Sign Off After Transfer check box. That option tells the Download Manager to go ahead and sign you off America Online after the last file arrives. This feature is really handy (and makes sure that you don't waste a lot of online time if the download finishes before you expect it to).

Remember that FlashSessions work with the Download Manager. You can mark a bunch of files and download them in the middle of the night, when America Online is the least busy. Chapter 7 explains FlashSessions, but you need to check the Help menu for details about scheduling them.

The Joys of Stuffing and Zipping

Many files in America Online's various and sundry file libraries end in ZIP or ARC. These letters don't mean that they're fast or that they date from the time of Noah; rather, they indicate that the files were *compressed* so they'd take less time to download (and less space inside America Online's computers). Before you can use a compressed file, you have to decompress it.



For you Macintosh folks in the studio audience, the most common kind of Macintosh compression is a SIT file, created by Stuffit.



Well, now it's yours — sort of

Three kinds of programs exist in the world: freeware, shareware, and commercial software. If this sounds like horribly dry, technical drivel, you obviously aren't a lawyer (I knew that I liked you). Please bear with me (and stay awake) while I explain further.

Freeware, shareware, and commercial software are the three most common ways in which a program is licensed for use. Freeware costs nothing; the author graciously donated it to the public. Shareware is software that you can download, try, and pay for if you like it. Commercial software is what you buy at the local computer superstore from companies such as Borland, Lotus, Microsoft, and Novell.

Following are a few basic rules regarding the three kinds of software:

- ✓ **Freeware:** Download it, use it, give a copy to your friends. Isn't freeware great?
- ✓ **Shareware:** Download it and give it a try. If you don't like the program, don't pay for it. If you think it's great, get out your checkbook and send in the registration fee. Whatever you do, don't keep using an unregistered shareware program because you don't think that you should have to pay for something you downloaded from America Online. That would be like stealing a book from the library and then saying that it's OK because the library doesn't charge for books anyway. Shareware is often high-quality work and well worth the minimal registration fee.
- ✓ **Commercial software:** Never, under any circumstances, upload or download something that claims to be a commercial program. If you like WordPerfect, that's fine — just don't show your admiration by giving copies of it to your friends. I won't get on my "pirated software" soapbox, I promise. But I will say this: If you like a program, buy your own copy. OK?

Luckily, the America Online access software automatically unpacks compressed files when you sign off of the system. (I tell you, those programmers amaze even me sometimes.) To make sure that this setting is on, choose **Members**⇨**Set Preferences**. Click the **Download** button to open the **Download Preferences** dialog box. Make sure that Xs appear in the two check boxes next to **Automatically decompress files at sign-off** and **Delete ZIP and ARC files after decompression**. Then leave the decompressing to America Online.

Of course, the Macintosh access software offers the same automatic unpacking feature. To turn on the setting, choose **Members**⇨**Set Preferences** from the menu bar (or press ⌘+=). Click the **Download Preferences** entry and then make sure that the **Auto-Expand files** option is turned on.

Installing programs on your computer involves a lot of little niggling details — too many, unfortunately, for me to go into here. I won't leave you high and dry, though (I'd never do that to you!). Take a look at these resources for more about both downloading and installing programs:

- ✓ For a distinctly America Online view of the whole download and install thing, try keyword **Download 101**. This step-by-step tutorial guides you through the whole process in good detail. Pay particular attention to *How do I use downloaded files* (step 4) and *Troubleshooting, Tips, and Tricks* (step 5), because they cover the toughest parts of the download experience.
- ✓ If the mere thought of folders, directories, and software installation makes you pass out on the floor, put some soft blankets down there to cushion your impending arrival. When they're safely in place, pick up a copy of *Windows 95 For Dummies*, *Windows 3.11 For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, or *Macs For Dummies*, 4th Edition (all from IDG Books Worldwide, Inc.), hit the blankets, and catch up on your reading.

Donating Your Own Efforts

Most file libraries not only offer files for your downloading pleasure but also accept *uploads* — files donated by other America Online members. After all, the library files had to come from *somewhere*, so why not let members chip in things that they like?

To upload a file, you need to know the file's name and location on your computer. You also have to find a potential home for it in America Online. Look for a place that accepts uploaded files (this step's a must) and that has other files like the one you're sending. If you're sending a game, utility, or other program, use your anti-virus software to be extra sure that you're not donating a computer virus, too.

- ✓ Not every file library accepts uploads. If you're looking at a file list and the Upload button is dimmed, that's a pretty good sign that you're reviewing a read-only library.
- ✓ Only public domain, freeware, shareware, or items of your own creation can be uploaded to America Online. If you aren't sure about the appropriateness of something that you want to upload, post a message to one of the forum hosts (you can usually find their screen names in a "welcome to this forum" type of document in the forum's main screen). Describe your file and get the host's opinion about your uploading it. Check out the sidebar earlier in this chapter for a little more information about the whole freeware, shareware, and commercial software issue.
- ✓ Don't upload something on your first day in America Online. Wait a little while. Get involved in a forum or two, meet some people, post some messages, and generally get a feel for what goes on before you upload anything to a library.



At this point, you're ready to upload the file. Here's what to do:

1. Display the file-list window of the file library to which you want to upload.

Get there through whatever combination of keywords, menus, and mouse clicks works best for you.

2. Click the Upload button at the bottom of the file-list window.

The Upload File dialog box appears.

If the Upload button is dimmed, this file library doesn't accept uploaded files. Sorry.

3. Carefully fill out all the information boxes in the Upload File dialog box.

Be as specific as you can. The more that people know about this file, the more likely they'll be to download it.

4. Click Select File to display the Attach File dialog box; double-click the name of the file that you want to upload; then choose OK to close the dialog box.

5. Double-check all the text you typed; after you're happy with it, click Send.

Don't be surprised if your uploaded file doesn't immediately appear in the file library. Most, if not all, America Online forums check uploaded files for viruses before setting those files free in the library.

Logging Isn't Really Downloading, but It's Close Enough

Sometimes, you want a record of where you were and what you saw. If you didn't, most of the photo film and developing market (as well as a large chunk of camcorder sales) wouldn't exist.

In America Online terminology, what you're looking for is a *session log*: a file that stores the contents of every document that you touched during a particular online period. The session log grabs every e-mail, news story, and bulletin board posting and stuffs them into one long text file.

To start a log file, follow these steps:

1. **Sign on to America Online.**
2. **Choose File⇨Log Manager.**

The Logging dialog box appears.

3. **In the Session Log section, click Open to start a new log file or Append to add to an existing file, and then enter the name for the log file in the Open Log window. Click OK after you finish.**

NOTE



Two kinds of log files exist: Chat Logs, which capture the text of a chat room; and Session Logs, which catch everything that comes close, possibly including family pets that stray too near the modem.

4. **Go on about your online work, comfortable in the knowledge that your log file is recording every document that you see.**

Only documents that you actually look at on-screen are saved. Just looking at a list of articles *doesn't* put the text of all the articles into the log file; you still have to double-click each one individually. However, when the article appears in a window and the cursor changes from an hourglass to an arrow, the article text is captured in the log file, and you can close the document window.

5. **When you finish reading, choose File⇨Log Manager and then click the Close Log button in the Session Log part of the window.**

This step explains to your computer that you're done adding text to the file and want to let your newest addition rest for a while.

6. **Sign off America Online.**

After a moment or two, you're part of offline America (and, best of all, the billing clock comes to a grinding halt).

7. **To read your log file, choose File⇨Open from the main menu and then double-click on the log file's name.**

The file appears on-screen in its own window. Kick back for a relaxing (and free-of-connect-time-charges) browse through the articles.

TIP



If a text window *doesn't* appear after the File⇨Open command, your file is too big for America Online to open. (It can't just come right out and admit failure — nooooo. Instead, it ignores the command and pretends you didn't say anything. Isn't that just like a computer?) To view the file, start your favorite word processor and use it to open your log file. If you aren't sure how that's done, check the word processor's help file for information about *opening text files*.

Part III

Flipping through the Channels

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I don't mean to hinder your quest for knowledge, however it's not generally a good idea to try to download the entire Internet."

In this part . . .

Cable TV is a fixture of modern life. These days, people expect to sink into their favorite couch, chair, or yoga position (ouch!) and flip aimlessly among 763 different channels of mindless programming. Thank goodness society hasn't set its sights too high.

The 21 channels are America Online's version of cable TV (and a mighty nice substitute it is, too). The channels are the main structure of the whole system — they sit at the heart of America Online.

In keeping with their central position, this part devotes an entire chapter to each channel. It explains how to get there, what you see when you arrive, a little about all the forums and services the channel contains, and my picks for *don't miss this* stuff in each area. It's truly the informational surfing experience. Now, where's my remote control?

Chapter 9

Find

In This Chapter

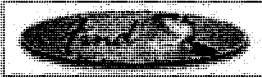

- ▶ Looking for Find
 - ▶ Seeking (and finding) that particular something
 - ▶ Traipsing through the tabs
 - ▶ Browsing the channel guide
-

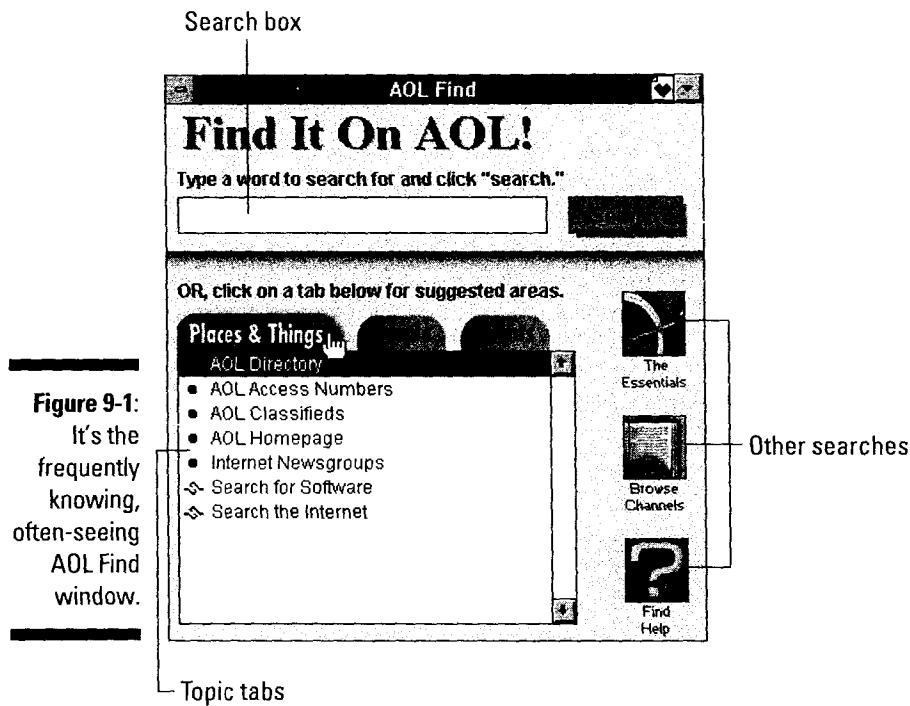
If I could have a nickel for every time someone asked how to find things on America Online, I'd ask for a dollar instead. (A nickel doesn't buy *anything* these days.) Whatever the payment, I would be up to my eyeballs in money. That's because tracking stuff down on America Online is (ahem) challenging — or at least it *was* challenging before those clever programmer types invented the super-cool Find system.

Whether you want something specific or feel like browsing aimlessly for a while, start your hunt at AOL Find. This chapter reveals the online oracle's mystic secrets. From the Search area, to the topic tabs, to the Channel browser, AOL Find is the searchable index you always wanted.

Quest 101: Looking for Find

Start your quest for knowledge by opening the AOL Find window. The programmers made it an easy destination to reach — Table 9-1 offers up the details. When you arrive, the compact window in Figure 9-1 hops up to meet you.

| Table 9-1 Finding Find (An Alliterative Task) | |
|--|---|
| <i>To Get There with</i> | <i>Use This</i> |
| Channels window |  |
| Toolbar button |  |
| Keystroke | Ctrl+F |
| Keyword | Find |



For all it does, the Find window isn't very big or complicated. The *search box* occupies the top third of the window. Below it, the *topic tabs* serve up links to other America Online and Internet-based directories. The three buttons on the right represent *other searches*, plus some Find system help and tips. The following sections cover this stuff in detail.



An essential stop on your information quest

If one place in the whole Find window deserves a spot in your Favorite Places list, it's The Essentials. This window links you to the four most-needed search systems on America Online — it's a supermarket of searching. Thumb through the America Online service directory, look for friends in the Member Directory, track down some new programs in the Software Library search, or browse the Internet through the

Search page on America Online's Web site. They're all waiting here, just a mouse click away. Start your trip by clicking The Essentials button on the main Find screen. There's no keyword to jump directly into the window (at least there wasn't when I wrote this), so that's why I recommend adding The Essentials to your Favorite Places. After you arrive, click the button for your favorite search system — you're off and running!

Searching the Subjects

Do you ever sit in front of your computer, staring at the America Online screen, knowing that what you want to know just *has* to be in there somewhere? If only you knew where to look . . . (insert wistful sigh here).

The next time that feeling strikes, fire up AOL Find and try a Search. The Search option takes any word you type (like **homework**, **finances**, or **photography**) and looks for that subject among America Online's forums and services. The system lists everything that relates to your subject. From there, you can double-click whatever it found, see more information about the area, and then click the Go button and zip directly there.

To search the subject list, sign on to the system and follow these steps:

1. Using one of the techniques in Table 9-1, open the AOL Find window.

The AOL Find window pops up, ready for some aerobic activity.

2. In the box at the top of the window, type the word you're looking for and then click Search (see Figure 9-2).

After a moment, the results window pops onto the screen. If AOL finds more than 20 matches, the window shows only the first 20. To see the rest, click the More button at the bottom of the window.

If the only entry in your Search Results window says something like *Search the Internet*, America Online failed to find *anything* about your topic and suggests that the Internet, in its worldwide glory, may contain *something* of interest.

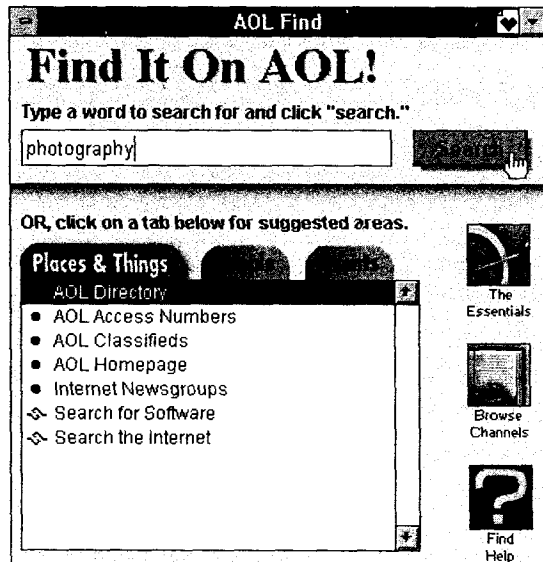


Figure 9-2:
Pursuing a hobby with the AOL Find system.

- 3. Browse through the Search Results window to see what America Online found for you. To find out more about something on the list, double-click its entry.**

When you double-click an item in the Search Results list, a new window appears with all the details about that particular area, just like Figure 9-3. In addition to general information, the window also offers to show you a related area (read: *the channel window where this area lives*), add this area to your Favorite Places list, or even take you directly there. Pretty cool, eh?

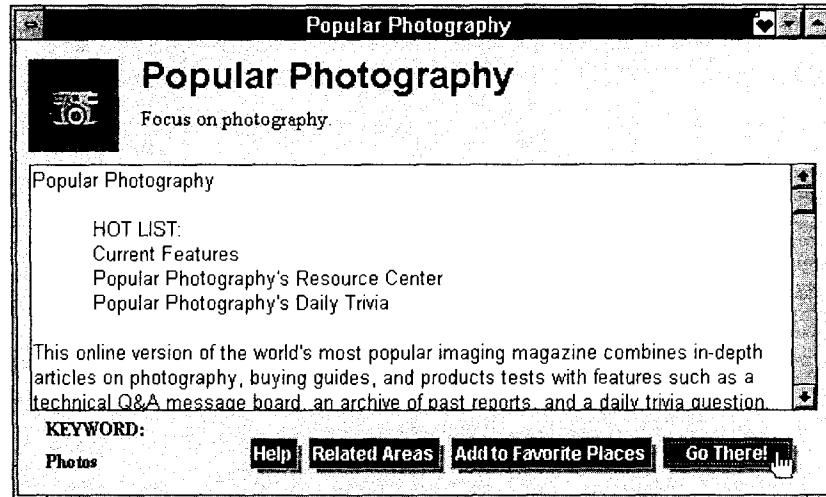


Figure 9-3:
Hey — this one looks good.

- 4. When you're done with the window, close it and go back to the Search Results to look for other items of interest.**

If you get lost on the way back to the results window, use the Window menu to jump directly there.

- 5. To start another search, go back to the AOL Find window and start over at step 2.**

If you don't feel like looking for anything else right now, feel free to close all the search-related windows. (There's no penalty for tidiness.)



New information areas come online all the time, so search for your favorite subjects regularly. Doing so is a great way to keep up with the latest stuff.

Trying the Tabs

The tabs aren't really search systems themselves — instead, they *point* to various searchable places all over America Online. Most of the areas in here have their own keywords (such as **AOL Live**, **Classifieds**, and **Buddy List**) or menu selections (like **Members**→Member Directory), but having everything together makes life a little easier.

Although the tabs are somewhat self-explanatory, Table 9-2 gives a quick run-down of what you can find under each one. When the AOL Find window comes up, the stuff behind the Places & Things tab automatically appears. To choose a different tab, just click it. (And you thought computers were hard!)

| Table 9-2 | What's behind Tab #1? |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Tab</i> | <i>Sample Contents</i> |
| Places & Things | System directory, access numbers, classifieds, newsgroups, software search, Internet search |
| People | Personals, Buddy Lists, member directory, national white pages |
| Events | AOL Live!, contests, auditorium events, daily chat list |

Surfing through the Channels

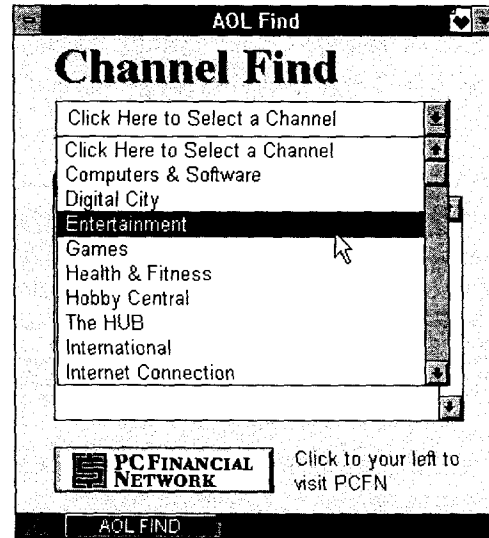
The 21 channels sit at the very heart of America Online. Everything in the system lives in a carefully selected channel. Forums, online areas, Web links, chat rooms, and all the other stuff all hang out inside one or more channels. That organization makes the channels an easy way to find online information, particularly when you have the Channel Find window available.

Channel Find lives behind the Browse Channels button on the main AOL Find window. A quick click on that button rouses the window into action. To see a channel list, select the channel of interest from the drop-down list at the top of the window (see Figure 9-4). After a tense moment of waiting, the window fills with entries for every area in the channel. Unlike the list from the main Search function (flip back a few pages for the details about that), when you double-click something in here, America Online sends you straight to the area — no questions asked.



To see the list in straight alphabetical order, click the A-Z tab. For a list by topic, click the By Topic tab. To change channels, see the instructions that came with your cable tuner. Whoops — sorry about that. I meant to say that you click the arrow in the drop-down list and pick a different channel from there.

Figure 9-4:
If it's in a
channel, it's
in these
lists.



Chapter 10

Computers & Software

.....

In This Chapter


- ▶ The computing basics
 - ▶ Checking out the buttons
 - ▶ Consistency is a virtue
 - ▶ A tour of the groups
-

When computers made their first appearance in the 1940s, they were an incomprehensible morass of wires, tubes, huge boxes, and cooling fans. Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, the computer of the '90s bears little resemblance to its long-antiquated counterpart. Today, computers are an incomprehensible morass of boards, chips, little boxes, and cooling fans. Fills you with hope for the future, doesn't it?

Whether or not you comprehend the morass, you still need a place to go with your questions, concerns, and general complaints. In America Online, look no further than the Computers & Software channel. It covers all your computer woes from hardware to software, from laptops to palmtops. Gather up all those computer questions you have lying around, wade into the Computers & Software area, and demand answers.

The Basics

Like all the channels, Computers & Software is nearby no matter where you happen to be in America Online. Table 10-1 shows you how to get there. When you arrive, the friendly, colorful window in Figure 10-1 pops up to meet you.

| Table 10-1 Getting to the Computers & Software Area | |
|--|---|
| <i>To Get There with</i> | <i>Use This</i> |
| Channels window |  |
| Keyword | Computers & Software |

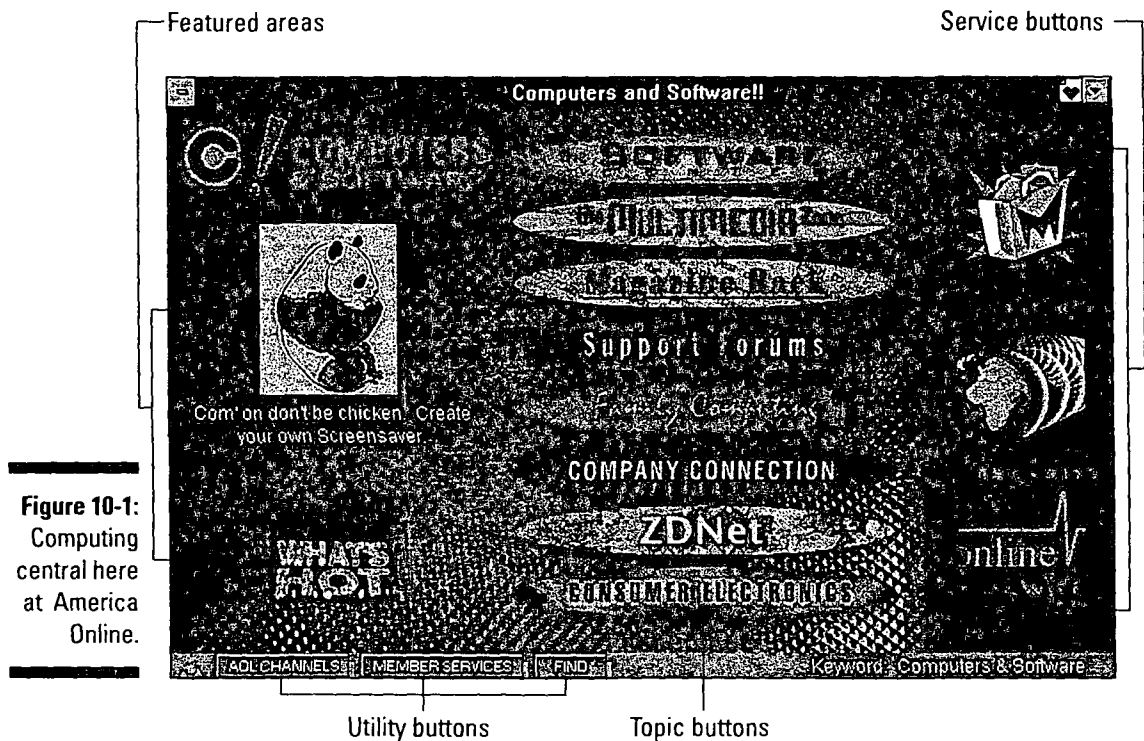


Figure 10-1: Computing central here at America Online.

Stacked through the middle of the window (and darn hard to miss) are the Computers & Software *topic buttons*. Like literary genres, each button leads to a discussion focusing on a particular aspect of computing. On the left of the topic buttons sit the *featured areas*. These areas may change from time to time, depending on the season, amount of rainfall, and vacation schedule of the person in charge of the area. Arrayed up the right side of the window are the *service buttons*, offering quick links to shopping, the Web, and computer industry news. Finally, the *utility buttons* line the base of the window, ready to sweep you into the Channels window, Member Services area, or the Find dialog box.

Pushing the Topic Buttons

The big, friendly buttons on the Computers & Software channel's main window are great places to start your quest for truth, beauty, and the reason your Macintosh crashes every time you hold the mouse near the floor and say, "Here, kitty kitty." Each button leads to a screen full of special interest forums, discussions, and Internet sites. Either click them one by one or use the keywords to get there fast.

- ✓ When you want answers to those sticky hardware and software problems, try the Company Connection button (keyword **Company Connection**). If you aren't sure where to start, check one of the more focused support

areas like Kim Komando's Komputer Klinik (keyword **Komando**) and Craig Crossman's Computer America (keyword **Crossman**). They may not be completely alliterative, but how much art should you expect from a nerd?

- ✓ For tips and ideas about involving the whole family in computing, check Family Computing (keyword **FC**). For that matter, try keyword **Family Computing**, which offers up not one, not two, but *five* (count 'em — five!) different resources for the online household.

Following are some other cool places to check out:

Consumer Electronics

Multimedia Zone

Forums (Support Forums)

Software Center

Magazine Rack

ZD Net

Consistency Is a Virtue

Most of the Computers & Software channel is somewhat unique in America Online. Of course, if any one area simply *had* to be different than the others, it would probably be the one about computers, now wouldn't it?

So what makes it different? Most of the main forums share a common window format — they look and work in basically the same way. Figure 10-2 shows one of these cookie-cutter windows (in this case, the PC Applications Forum).

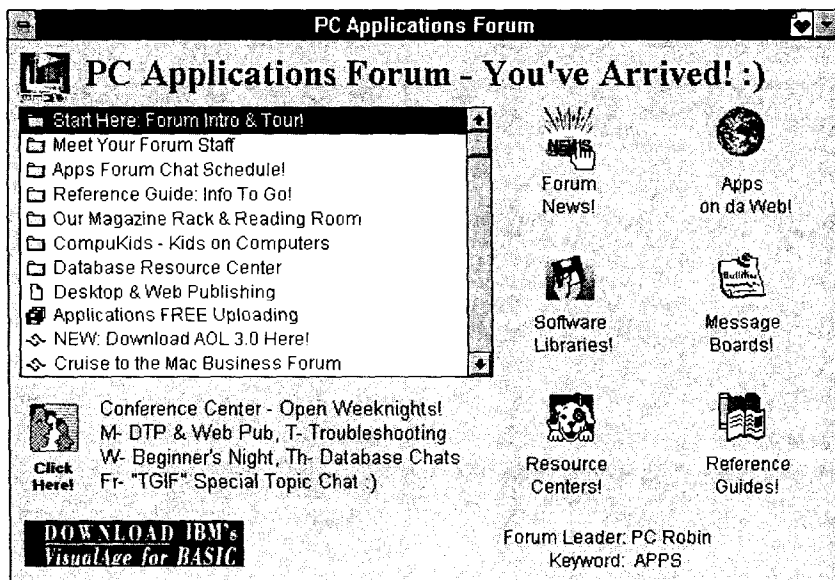


Figure 10-2:
The PC Applications Forum looks just like all its brethren.

The list area offers general information, forum announcements, and whatever else the forum operators get around to putting there. The Help & Information button explains where to post your questions so they get answered.

The bottom four buttons on the right side of the window (Software Libraries, Message Boards, Resource Centers, and Reference Guides) are the same throughout the Computers & Software forums. The other two buttons (in this case, Forum News and Apps on da Web) change function depending on which forum you're in.



- ✓ All the choices in the Computers & Software window use the common window layout, except for Check for Live Discussions and the Apple Computing Forums. These two options bring up simple list windows.
- ✓ The other minor exception to the common window layout rule is the User Groups window, which decided to put its buttons a little out of order.
- ✓ Check out the Resource Centers buttons in all the computing forums that you use. The Resource Centers gets you to the various manufacturers' support forums, where you can ask *really* specific questions.
- ✓ The software libraries in here are *definitely* worth checking out. Find utilities, examples, shareware, and more, all yours for the downloading.
- ✓ Every Computer Software forum has a conference area for regularly scheduled interactive discussions. Check Start Here: Forum Intro & Tour information for times and topics.



Special stuff you don't want to miss

You can find good stuff just about anywhere you turn in America Online, and the Computers & Software channel certainly upholds that fine tradition. Here are some of the highlights:

ZD Net (keyword ZD Net): What can I say about an area that offers tips, tweaks, and troubleshooting, plus one of the best software libraries in town? Go there now — that's what! If you haven't seen ZD Net, you haven't, um, well — done it. What are you waiting for?

Rotunda (keyword Rotunda): It's not every night of the week that Bill Gates, Andy Grove, and a host of other industry big shots drops by your house for a quick chat. (And if it is, they oughta pay for some of the drinks.) The Rotunda is your number

one stop for computer-related presentations and discussions. Check the Box Office (click Box Office on the Rotunda main window) for upcoming events, and then mark them on the calendar. Also watch the Archives (click Archives on the Rotunda main window) for transcripts of previous shows.

Software Center (keyword Software Center): If your hard drive is long on space and short on fun, take a few minutes to rummage through the Software Center. There's no surer way to bring a smile to a morose storage device. You can't go wrong with the huge selection of both Macintosh and Windows programs. Grab a few items and give them a try.

Chapter 11

Digital City

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ The basics of the electronic cityscape
 - ▶ Finding your way around
-

According to the wise old sage (who probably moonlights at the automobile club), “Getting there is half the fun.” Thanks to the cool stuff in America Online’s Digital City channel, though, you may think that *not* getting there is almost *all* the fun.

Digital City chaperones you through a slew of cities all over the United States. Big cities, small towns, and quaint burgs await your virtual visit. Each town offers the best in tourist information, city maps, travel tips, and hot sightseeing spots, all available without leaving the comfort of your home. Who could want more?

Ease on your shades, adjust the mirrors, and rev up your easy chair for a cruise down the virtual highway. Your favorite Digital City awaits!

Taking a Basic Tour

Traveling to the Digital City channel isn’t much of a sightseeing trip. All it takes is a keyword or quick mouse click (both of which are detailed in Table 11-1), and you’re there. No time for a snack along the way! As you top the crest of that last online hill, the Digital City in Figure 11-1 spreads out before you.

| Table 11-1 Traveling the Digital Cities | |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>To Get There with</i> | <i>Use This</i> |
| Channels window | DIGITAL CITY |
| Keyword | Digital City |

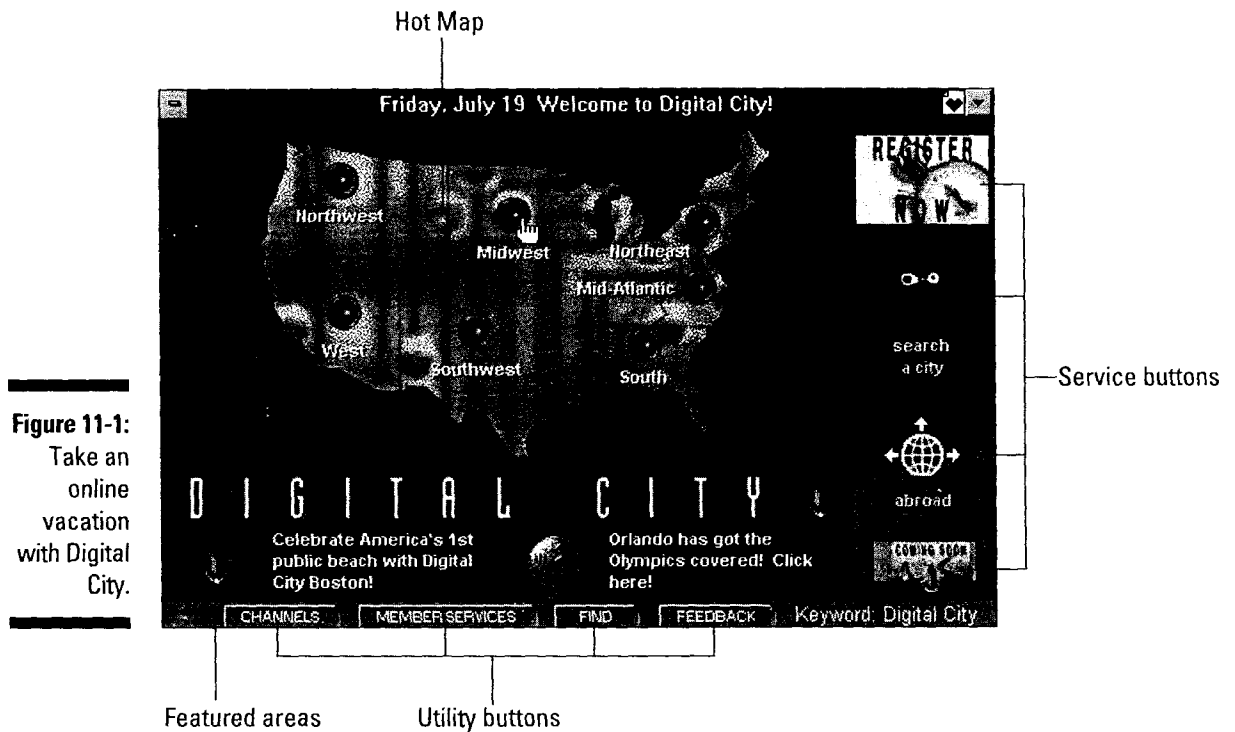


Figure 11-1:
Take an
online
vacation
with Digital
City.

Occupying most of the window is the *HotMap*, my own highly technical term for the clickable U.S. map image. To the right of that are the Digital City *service buttons*, with their links to the search area, International channel, and still more.

Below the map are the ever-changing *featured areas*, which may or may not actually relate to travel. Supporting the featured areas (and getting slightly stepped on in the process) are the *utility buttons*, which link you to the Channels window, the Member Services area, and the America Online Find system. This window also sports a Feedback button to capture your questions and suggestions.

Wandering the Urbs

In keeping with the map motif, everything in the Digital City channel is organized by region. To see what's available in a particular part of the country, click the region's big red button in the HotMap. After a moment, the regional window appears, just like in Figure 11-2. To jump here directly, use one of the following regional keywords:

DC MidAtlantic

DC Northwest

DC West

DC Midwest

DC South

DC Northeast

DC Southwest

Figure 11-2: Even though Indianapolis is missing, there's still plenty to see in the Midwest.



Cities marked with buttons (like Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and the others in the figure) have their own special online areas. To take a quick digital road trip, click the city's button, and then get ready to ride. After only a few moments of travel (or *travail*, depending on your voyaging companions), the locality's special Digital City window pops up (see Figure 11-3). It's the hub of online urban activity, featuring local news and weather, discussion boards, and chat areas. If you're *really* visiting the city, check out the mini-tour, an online stroll through the shopping, sites, and entertainment awaiting you. When I wrote this chapter, each of the following keywords led to full-fledged Digital City areas.

Figure 11-3: Nothing like a quick trip to the Twin Cities.



NOTE



You may notice that Alaska is one of the *cities* on the keyword list. I know that Alaska is a state, but apparently the folks at Digital City haven't heard that yet. (Maybe they decide by population or something.) Anyway, I just wanted to clarify that point of geographic trivia. Thanks.

| | | |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| Alaska | Honolulu | Phoenix |
| Atlanta | Houston | San Diego |
| Boston | Los Angeles | San Francisco |
| Chicago | Miami | Seattle |
| Cleveland | Minneapolis | Tampa |
| Dallas | New York | Toronto |
| Denver | Orlando | Washington |
| Detroit | Philadelphia | |



If your city isn't on the map, don't give up hope! To look for other cities, follow these steps:

1. Click the Search a City button.

The Find Your City dialog box hops into action.

The Search a City button shows up on just about every window in Digital City. Look for a kinda goofy picture of a blue-faced guy holding a magnifying glass. (It's hard to miss.) If you can't find it, use keyword **Digital City** to bring up the main window and click the Search a City button on the right side of the screen.

2. Type the name of your favorite city, and then press Enter.

If your city has its own little corner of the online world, a Search Results dialog box appears. If nothing remotely like the name you entered exists on the system, America Online sadly reports that *no articles were found*. In that case, check your spelling or try a different city. Sorry, but such is life sometimes.

3. To look at the city's online area, double-click the city name in the Search Results dialog box.

Without further ado, the city's window pops into view.

NOTE



To simply browse through a list of all available cities, click the List of Cities button on any regional window (keywords **West**, **South**, **Northeast**, and so on).



Chapter 12

Entertainment

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ The entertainment basics
 - ▶ A quick tour of the channel
-

If you take America's top three entertainment capitals (New York City, Hollywood, and Branson, Missouri) and digitally roll them into one place, toss in a computer game or two, season the concoction with a touch of Las Vegas in the summer, and then hang Christmas tree lights on it, you'd be *close* to the flavor of the America Online Entertainment channel. Close, mind you, but still not *quite* there.

This area simply *is* entertainment. It doesn't matter what you're into, because it's all here (within the bounds of good taste, of course — no accordion players need apply). Movies, theatre, music, sports, trivia, entertainment news, online games, and even places to mix and mingle with new people — the Entertainment channel is all that and more.

Geez, why bother to go *out* on Friday? Go *in* to America Online instead and head for the Entertainment zone.

The Entertainment Basics

After you're into America Online, the Entertainment channel is only a step or two away. Table 12-1 outlines the two easiest ways to get there. As you pull up to the Entertainment area in your chauffeured access software, the window in Figure 12-1 greets you.

| Table 12-1 Getting to the Entertainment Window | |
|--|----------------------|
| To Get There with | Use This |
| Channels window | entertainment |
| Keyword | Entertainment |

On the right, you have an alphabetical *service list* covering all the forums, groups, and services in the Entertainment area. On the left of the window and above and below the service list (just behind the photographers and a little to the side of the TV cameras) are the *featured groups and forums* items, leading you, with a single click, to some fascinating places. And at the bottom of the window, nipping at your heels like autograph hounds, are *utility buttons* for quick access to the Channels window, the Member Services *help-I-think-I'm-going-to-faint* window, and the Find button.

- ✔ Some entertaining things can be found in the Newsstand as well, such as the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Orlando Sentinel Online*, and *Stereo Review* magazine. If things ever get a little quiet here in Entertainment, try the Newsstand for a change of scenery.
- ✔ I say it in other chapters, and I'll say it again here: The Find function is a nice idea, but it's not *always* up to date. Go ahead and try it, but don't get all bent out of shape if something you're interested in is missing.

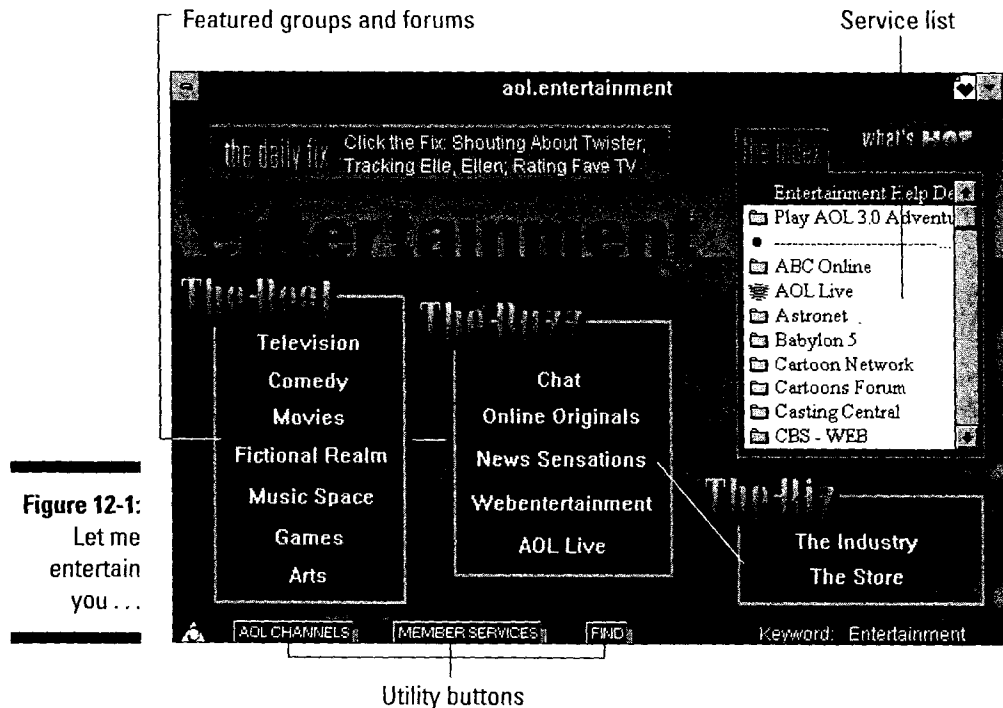


Figure 12-1:
Let me entertain you ...



Special stuff you don't want to miss

Like any tourist attraction, you absolutely must visit some things before you're allowed to claim you went there at all. Here are the required stops in the Entertainment area:

Cartoons (keyword Cartoons): Get a dose of humor in your day with Dilbert (yea, Dilbert!), CompuToon (keyword **Computoon**), and other popular syndicated cartoons. You can even print out your favorites for the bulletin board.

LaPub (keyword LaPub): Meet, chat, and do the most amazing things you've ever dreamt of (like a double back flip into a gelatin-filled hot tub *online* — kids, don't try this at home). If you're looking to meet and be met, check out LaPub after 8 p.m. any night of the week.

Online Gaming Forums (keyword Gaming): Whatever your taste in gaming, there's probably something for you in here. From the wild creativity

of the Free Form Role Playing Forum to the fascinating (if sometimes esoteric) intricacies of the Game Designers Forum, it's just a fascinating place to be.

EXTRA (keyword Extra): It's the online extension campus of the television show by the same name and definitely worth the time to check it out. Take a survey, read interviews with the stars, and download video clips of your favorite stars. It's one-stop entertainment shopping.

NTN Trivia (keyword NTN Trivia): There's nothing like a good trivia game, particularly when you're playing against about 37,481 of your closest friends. Test your trivial recall in live, interactive, nationwide games against other America Online subscribers and lots of partially plotzed people in bars across the country (no, I'm *not* making this last part up).

Homes of the Stars — Get Your Maps Here

It's time to take a swing through the whole Entertainment area, from A (*ABC Online*) to Z (*Zombie Detective*). This section is your self-guided tour through the main groups and forums that Entertainment has to offer.

Everything in this section is grouped under larger topic headings. If you're interested in music, check out forums under the Music and TV topic. Likewise, for those of you who think the universe revolves around the movie industry, have a look at the Media and movies entries. I admit to making up the groupings myself in a valiant effort to make the forums and groups list a little more useful. Alphabetical lists only do so much for comprehension, you know.

Remember that some of these options take you directly to service areas, while others (like Movies and the Online Gaming Forum) throw you into another menu. Don't panic if the options behave a little differently sometimes — it's just how they are.

Games and gaming

Want to have some online fun? Do you like interacting with other people, experiencing boundless adventure, or winning big (albeit play) bucks? If so, try out the following forums and groups. For interactive play with other America Online members, try out Neverwinter Nights (keyword **AD&D**), RabbitJack's Casino (keyword **Casino**), and the Games Parlor (keyword **Parlor**). Look in the Online Gaming Forums for board gaming, game design, interactive role playing, and much more.

- ✔ Use keyword **Download games** and then select AD&D Online. Choose the Neverwinter Nights Information option for all the details. Although this software used to cost, it's now free to download. And I *do* mean free — you don't even pay for the time to download it.
- ✔ You need special software for RabbitJack's Casino, but it's also free for the downloading. To get the software, use keyword **Casino** and then click the AOL Games Download Center button. Follow the instructions and enjoy yourself!

AD&D

Horoscopes

Casino

Trivia

Games

Star Wars

Gaming

Starfleet

Magazines and newspapers

They don't call it the *entertainment industry* for nothing. It's a big business, with a *lot* going on at any given moment. To keep up with the latest entertainment news — and to just read for fun — browse through these online publications. Several of these, like the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New York Times*, carry a variety of articles in addition to entertainment-oriented features.

Atlantic

Omni

Columnists

SOD (*Soap Opera Digest*)

Disney Magazine

Spin

Entertainment Weekly

Times

Extra

Media and movies

If you're the person who knows the details on every new movie, what all the stars are up to, and which book just hit number one on the nonfiction chart, I know your secret: You hang out in these eight forums on America Online. And if you're *not* that person but aspire to be that way, here's your information gold mine. Start digging!

AEN (American Entertainment Network)

Books

Critics

Hollywood

Movies

NTN Trivia

Playbill

Radio

Music and TV

For the music fans out there, America Online offers some truly, well, eclectic forums. If the TV is more to your liking, check out the online areas of ABC and NBC for scheduling, special events, and information on joining the live studio audience of your favorite show. You can even let the studios know what you think about their shows. (And the experts say that interactive television is years away. I say the experts just don't know where to look.)

ABC

Cartoon Network

Comedy Central

Comedy Pub

Court TV

Cyberserials

Discovery

E Entertainment

Dead (Grateful Dead)

Rockline

Rocklink

SciFi Channel

SPIN

TV

TV Gossip

TV Spoofs

TV Viewers

VH1

(continued)

MTV

Videos

Nick at Nite

Warner

Not NBC

WB

Other entertaining things

As with most groups, some things just don't quite fit. These last few forums are out on the edge of the bell curve, expressing their unique individuality to such a degree that I just about had a hairy conniption trying to figure out what to do with them. But they're fun just the same.



To fully experience LaPub, use keyword **LaPub**, go to the LaPub Cellar folder, and then select LaPub Sounds. Read the "About LaPub Sounds" information and download the "Special Events Sounds" file (in Macintosh or Windows sound format, depending on your computer). Install these puppies and *then* check out LaPub. You'll be glad you did.

Cartoons

HO (Hecklers Online)

Casting

LaPub

Celebrity Circle

Parascope

Center Stage

Premier Dining

DC Comics

Soundbites

Follywood

Treasures

Each DC Comics press area offers previews of the coming weeks' cover art, plot overviews to whet your appetite, a discussion board to swap shop talk, and a download library filled with your favorite heroes and villains.

Chapter 13

Games

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Game channel basics
 - ▶ Peeking at the game genres
 - ▶ Sharing a few of my favorites
-


Many years ago when I was a little nerdlet, I discovered the family Monopoly set. I immediately fell in love. Those cool little playing pieces, the crisp feel of the multicolored money, and the tasty little houses (okay, so I ate one — I was really little) forever hooked me on gaming. If playing games ranks among your true loves, join me for a jaunt through the ultimate gamer's candy store: America Online's Games channel.

Whatever your pleasure, this channel covers it. Drop in for a dogfight between classic World War II fighters, match wits and drinks with a few dozen ogres in the local inn, race to remember the name of Dudley Do-Right's horse in a national trivia challenge, engage a new friend in a friendly game of chance, and then download the Doom patch that turns the monsters into Homer Simpson look-alikes. Hmm — not bad for your first 15 minutes!

This chapter explores the channel, shines light into the murky depths of the various game areas, and even divulges my favorite gaming spots. This stuff is too good to miss!

Playing the Basic Game (and Saving the Advanced Stuff for Later)

Getting into the channel is easy; deciding what to do first is the challenge. Take this one step at a time and work on simple arrival for now. (Content comes later in the chapter.) To join the fun, use the map disguised as Table 13-1. After a brief trek through the digital wilderness, the Games channel bursts onto the scene, looking a lot like Figure 13-1.

| Table 13-1 Getting to the Games | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| To Get There with | Use This |
| Channels window |  |
| Keyword | Games |

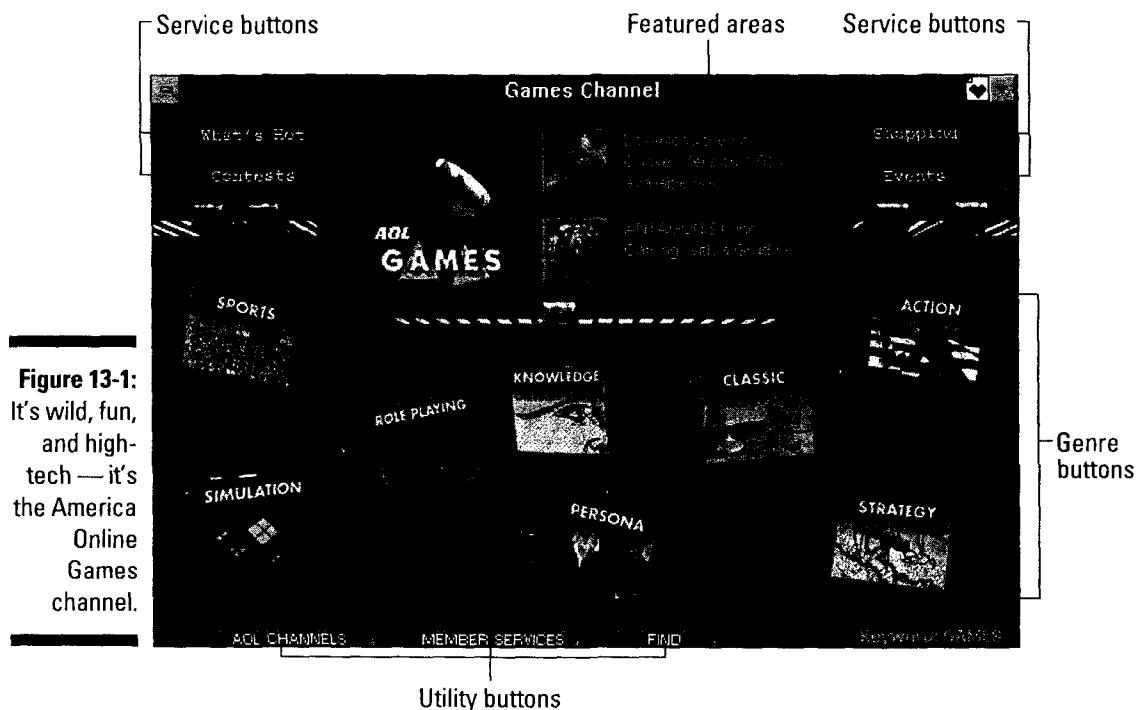


Figure 13-1: It's wild, fun, and high-tech — it's the America Online Games channel.

Front and center in the Games channel window are the current *featured areas*. These areas change at the whims of someone who can't seem to make up his mind, so don't worry if your screen doesn't show the same options as Figure 13-1. The *service buttons* flank the featured areas on both sides, providing quick links to information-oriented areas scattered throughout the channel.

The ever-cool, always-important *genre buttons* fill up most of the window. Each button leads to a window focused on a particular facet of gaming. (And if you think that *sounds* cool, just wait until you see it in action.) Quietly enjoying themselves, but available nonetheless, the *utility buttons* round out the window's complement of tools. If returning to the Channels window, popping off to Member Services, or flipping through the Channel Find window ever sound interesting, head south to the appropriate utility button and give it a click.



Great games make for great times

All the myriad choices in the Games channel may make your head spin. Granted, that may entertain your significant other, but it's not much fun for you. In an effort to increase your entertainment time (and minimize your entertainment value for everyone else in the room), here are a few suggestions for your first foray into the Games channel. Also take a look at the "Games (and Other Places) of My Heart" section later in this chapter for still more hot gaming picks.

Fantasy League Simulations (keyword Fantasy League): Once upon a time, fantasy leagues meant football or baseball. Thanks to advances in modern technology (plus the fact that fantasy leagues are so darn much fun), leagues now cover everything from auto racing to hockey. Put that sports knowledge to work and

guide your own dream team to victory in the online fantasy league.

Star Wars Sim Forum (keyword Star Wars): Watching *Star Wars* is great, but actually joining Luke, Leia, and Ben in their struggle against the Dark Lord of the Sith blows right off the end of the entertainment scale. Take your stand among the brave pilots of the Rebellion or enlist with the Evil Empire in this forum's many weekly simulations. (And hoist a drink in the Cantina for me, okay?)

Games channel newsletter (keyword GC Hot, and then click Newsletter): With America Online's constant changes, you never know what might appear next. For the inside scoop on Games channel action, check the newsletter regularly.

Genre, Genre — Who's Got the Genre?

Remember when the game universe consisted primarily of playing cards and Monopoly sets? Time, creativity, and computers changed all that. Today, hundreds of games target the most specific tastes. That's why the Games Channel window greets you with eight genre areas — to make finding your favorites that much easier.

Each genre area includes its own forums and chat rooms, plus links to the companies that produce the games. And of course, each area includes games, games, and more games for your playing enjoyment.

To see a genre window, click one of the big TV-looking buttons strewn across the lower half of the Games Channel window, or use the following specific keywords. Both methods summon the genre window of your choice. It arrives on-screen, much like the Action Games window in Figure 13-2. Although their layouts differ a bit, every genre window includes buttons for games, chat, forums, and company areas. When you click a button, the list area changes to show a new collection of entries. From there, browse through the list and double-click whatever looks interesting.



Don't forget the four quiet little buttons socked away down in the corner. The About button explains what the genre area covers (and what it doesn't). Software displays the voluminous Games channel software library screen, with enough software and add-on products to fill up both your hard drive *and* your free time. The Events button directs you to the Events window (keyword **CG Events**) for a schedule of chats and other online happenings. And because the Games channel exists for the joy and fulfillment of its members, the Feedback button carries your missives of encouragement, support, and occasional outrage to the channel staff.

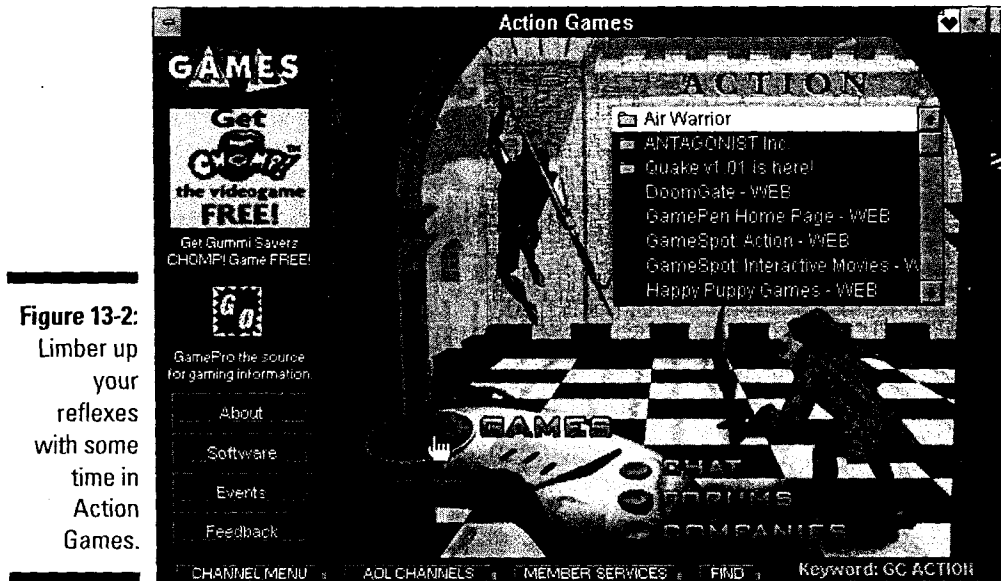


Figure 13-2: Limber up your reflexes with some time in Action Games.



Even though it's not *actually* one of the game zones, the Hot Games area (keyword **GC Hot**) earns a special mention for being so darn useful. Use its Top Picks buttons to see the latest Games channel goodies, check out the free newsletter behind the Newsletter button, and make the commercial sponsors happy by trying the Web links.

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| GC Action | GC RPG (Role Playing Games) |
| GC Classic | GC Simulation |
| GC Knowledge | GC Sports |
| GC Persona | GC Strategy |

Games (and Other Places) of My Heart

Although I truly love almost every kind of game on the planet (a trait that my wife considers to be an attention-deficit issue), I always have a few favorites. The following keywords lead to the games and game-related areas of America Online that stole my heart. You'll find a little bit of everything in here, including the Air Warrior multiplayer action game, the Federation space business simulation, several crossword areas, and the new love of my life, collectible card games.



Feel free to pencil in your own additions to the list. And if you find something particularly cool, send me an e-mail about it (my screen name is JKaufeld). I'm always game for something new!

Air Warrior

ANT (Antagonist Trivia)

Atlantic Monthly Word Games
(keyword **Atlantic**, and then click
the Word Games button)

CCGF (Collectible Card Games
Forum)

CGW (Computer Gaming World)

Crosswords (*NY Times*
Crosswords)

Fantasy League

Federation

Game Parlor

Game Pro

GIX (Gaming Information Exchange)

NTN Trivia

Red Dragon Inn (keyword **People
Connection** in the Arts and Entertain-
ment area)

Star Wars Sim

Trivial Pursuit

Xwords (Crosswords America)

Chapter 14

Health and Fitness

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Covering the basics
 - ▶ Looking for links
 - ▶ Fitness is where you find it
 - ▶ Answering your health questions
 - ▶ Sharing with people who understand
-

When you need answers to tough health questions, or just want some information about keeping fit as the seasons change, the Health and Fitness channel is the place to go. This chapter explores America Online's Health and Fitness area. Get ready to feel better — it's Health and Fitness to the rescue!

The Basics

The Health and Fitness channel is a quick hike from wherever you happen to be online. Table 14-1 points out the easiest ways to get there. When you arrive, flush from the aerobic exertion of the journey, settle into your chair and get ready to explore the Health and Fitness window, shown in Figure 14-1.

| Table 14-1 Getting to the Health and Fitness Channel | |
|---|---|
| <i>To Get There with</i> | <i>Use This</i> |
| Channels window |  |
| Keyword | Health and Fitness |

Like other channel windows, this one offers a variety of information and connections. Across the middle of the window are the *featured areas*, advertised with buttons and big, splashy descriptions. The *Highlights list* sits quietly in the lower-right corner of the window, pointing you toward still other interesting resources. The options in these two areas change all the time, so don't worry if your screen looks different than the one in the figure. Opposite the Highlights

list are buttons for the Health and Fitness *service groups*. These buttons lead to tons of related America Online areas and World Wide Web pages. Along the bottom of the window are the *utility buttons*, which return you to the Channels window, send you off to Member Services, and fire up the Find system.

The rest of the chapter lists various forums and services inside Health and Fitness. Enjoy your journey toward better health!

Links, Links Everywhere

What's the claim to fame of the following areas? That's easy: They're loved for their links. These areas are like interactive indexes, listing site after site, with live links to each one. They're great places to go when you're in a browsing mood.

Better Health

Children's Health

Health

Health Resources

Health Web

Hot Health (What's Hot in Health)

Men's Health

Men's Health Web

Mental Health

Mental Health Web

PEN (Personal Empowerment Network)

Self-Help

Women's Health

Women's Health Web

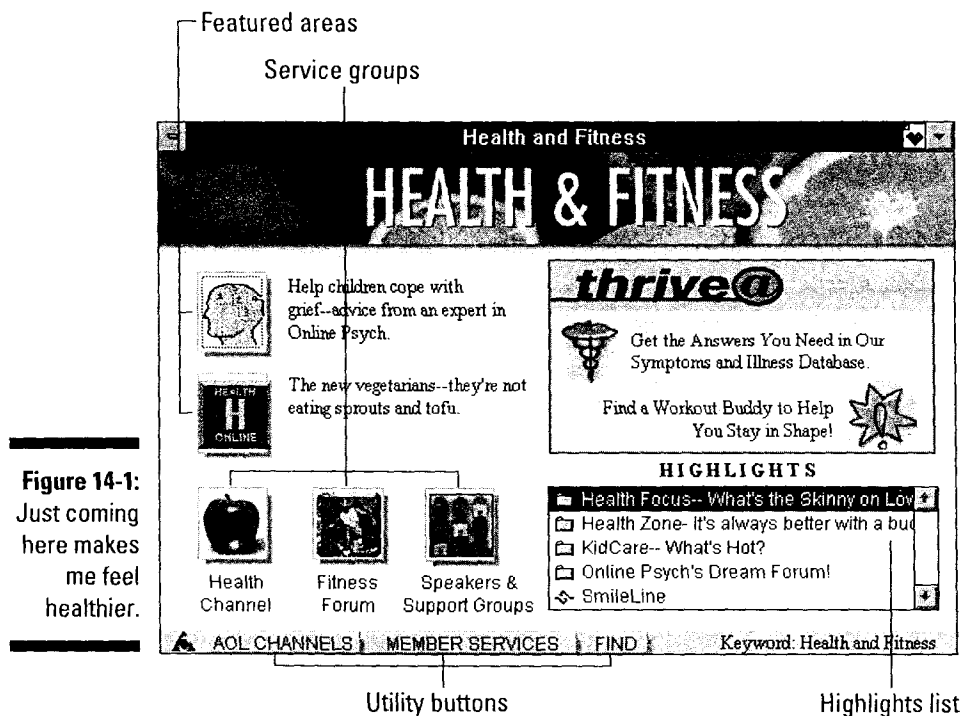


Figure 14-1:
Just coming here makes me feel healthier.



Special stuff you don't want to miss

Every area in here is valuable, but some go above and beyond the call of duty. Here are the ones you shouldn't miss:

Health (keyword Health): This area has links galore to all kinds of health-related areas and discussions.

Health Zone (keyword Health Zone): This area is just odd enough to earn a *Defies Rational*

Explanation certificate to decorate its cyber walls. Although you can find some great stuff in here, the material is aimed at parents and other adults.

Personal Empowerment Network: (keyword PEN): The king of the catch-all area, this area offers information, discussion, chat, and links for darned near any health topic you can think of. It even includes a software library.

Getting in Shape the Online Way

When it comes to fitness, my favorite exercises are cola pumping and aerobic reading. I'm getting better, though — I watch what I eat, drink more water, and *really* started working out. If you want to join me in the Quest to See Our Feet, you're ready for a trip to the fitness-related areas in Health and Fitness.

Your first stop should be the Fitness Forum itself (keyword **Fitness**), shown in Figure 14-2. The links in here cover fitness-related information available all over both America Online and the Internet.

ARFA (American Running & Fitness Association)

Backpacker

Better Health

Bicycling

Fitness

Health Zone

Running

Skiing

Cyberian, Heal Thyself

Everybody wants to know more about how to be healthy. But *finding* good information about health topics is next to impossible sometimes. Oh sure, you can ask your doctor, but those answers aren't cheap.

When the answer to your question is somewhere between prime time's latest hospital drama and a professionally intelligible specialist who's not part of your health plan, try some of the following sites. I particularly recommend the references and links of Better Health (keyword **Better Health**) as a place to start. The Physician On Call area of Columbia (keyword **ColumbiaNet**) earns a special mention as well. That's the place to ask your general health questions and get answers from real health care professionals.



Figure 14-2:
There's a lot to the fitness thing — and this is the place to find it all.

Alternative Medicine

Better Health

ColumbiaNet

Health Live

Health Zone

IMH

Mental Health

PEN (Personal Empowerment Network)

Psychology

Self-Help

Understanding Is the Best Medicine

Just as medicine heals the body, so words soothe the soul. When you're awash with pain and looking for someone who understands, check out these areas. One of the best in the bunch is the Speakers and Support Groups list at keyword **Healthlive**. This window maps out the scheduled support group chats and expert presentations in the whole Health and Fitness area. This spot is *definitely* one to watch.

Cancer

Cerebral Palsy

Dependency

Diabetes

Health Live

IMH (Issues in Mental Health)

Mental Health

Multiple Sclerosis

NMSS (National Multiple Sclerosis Society)

NAMI (National Alliance of the Mentally Ill)

Self-Help

Chapter 15

The Hub

In This Chapter

- ▶ Basic Hub stuff
 - ▶ Taking a quick look around
-

The Hub *is*. Yes, I can say with certainty that it does, in fact, exist. Quite so. Unfortunately, going beyond that level of description may be tough. More than any online area I've ever played with, The Hub defies rational explanation. Of course, that won't keep me from trying anyway.


In an online world of information and education, The Hub's goal is entertainment. How well it succeeds in that goal depends on your point of view. And, of course, you can't have an informed point of view without actually giving the place a try. With that tortured train of thought firmly entrenched in your mind, take a (hopefully) entertaining meander through the following pages and find out what's cooking at The Hub.



One word of caution before you start: The Hub is geared toward teens and adults, not kids, so some parts of the service have a distinctively mature flair. Don't say I didn't warn you.

It Doesn't Get More Basic Than This

Because The Hub is one of America Online's main channels, finding it is really easy. Table 15-1 contains all the directions you need. Once you arrive, The Hub's main window leaps to the screen, looking a whole lot like Figure 15-1.

| Table 15-1 | Going to The Hub |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>To Get There with</i> | <i>Use This</i> |
| Channels window |  |
| Keyword | Hub |

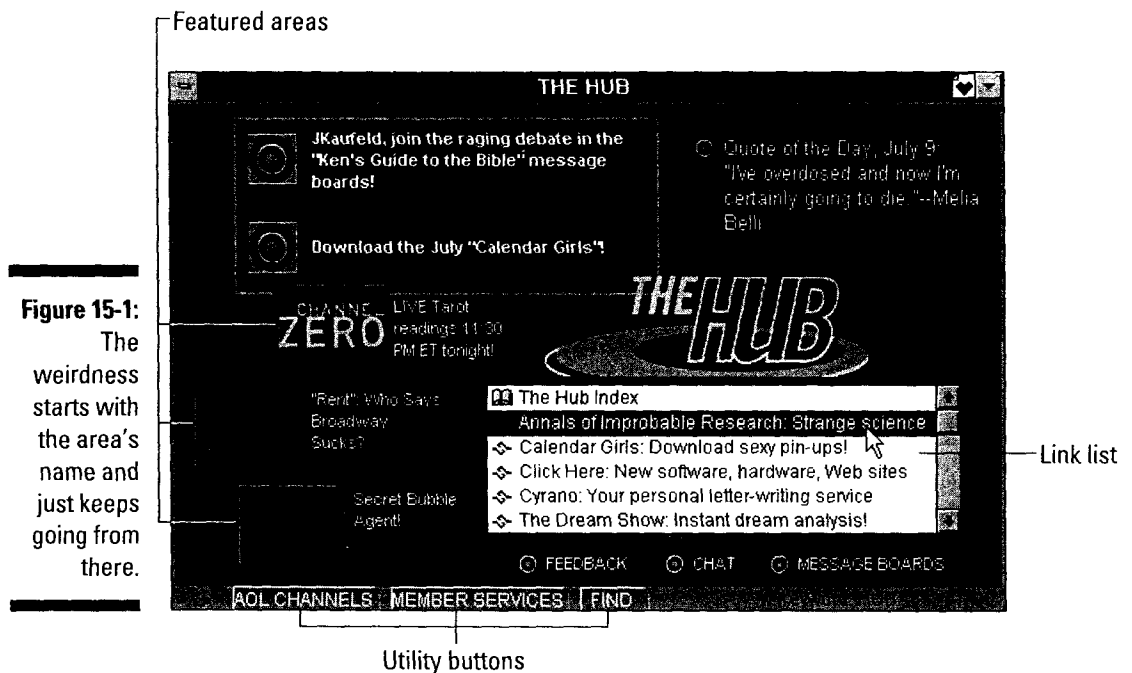


Figure 15-1:
The weirdness starts with the area's name and just keeps going from there.

Scattered up and down the left side of the window are the *featured areas* — the sub-Hubs of interest. These areas change periodically, so don't fret if your screen doesn't match Figure 15-1 precisely. The big box in the window's lower-right corner is the *link list*, a menu of The Hub's different offerings. Not all of The Hub's areas have keywords, so this list is the only way to get there.

Along the bottom of the window are the standard *utility buttons*. AOL Channels displays the Channels window. Member Services works just like keyword **Help** — it brings up the Member Services information window. Finally, Find summons the new Find dialog box.

Exploring the Sub-Hubs

When you hit The Hub, keep the term *diversity* uppermost in your mind. That's the best word to describe the incredible mix of things waiting for you in here. Some of the areas are deep and thought provoking; others, well, *aren't*. Two places I highly recommend trying are Global Worldwide Pictures International (keyword **GWPI**) and the Annals of Improbable Research (keyword **Improb**). Both of these are interactively entertaining, a mix that's still hard to find in the online world.



Some things are just too good to miss

The Hub has some interesting destinations for teens and adults (even those of us over 30). Here are my picks — give 'em a try!

Useful Things (keyword Hub, then double-click Useful Things in the link list): The most useful and downright fun things in here are the two Picking a Screen Name entries. Because choosing a screen name is often such a trauma (or perhaps because they were bored), the Hublets put together a list of several thousand ten-letter words as possible screen names. They followed this list with another featuring random five-letter words glued together to form ten-letter words. Check these out before choosing that new screen name.

Heaven (keyword Heaven): This place isn't *exactly* the one with angels playing harps, but it's still worth the visit. I particularly like the Harass Your Congressman section, which is filled with downloadable letters for your representatives in Washington. The letters cover both sides of most major controversies (for example, you'll find both *please save the environment* and *don't save the environment* letters).

Cyrano (keyword Cyrano): Because I'm on a prewritten letter kick already, the Cyrano area deserves a mention as well. These letters cover the more mundane things in life like noisy neighbors, messy roommates, and dropping out of college. If you're looking for just the right words to either end a fight or start one, look in Cyrano's Poison Pen section first.

The following keywords are some of the other areas I suggest visiting in The Hub. Two items on the list, The Other News and What Should I Wear?, have no keywords. To see them, use keyword **Hub**, scroll through the link list on the lower-right side until you find each area, and then double-click the area's entry on the list. Enjoy!

Channel Zero

Cyrano

GWPI (Global Worldwide
Pictures International)

Heaven

Improb (Annals of Improbable
Research)

Konspiracy

Sourcerer

The Other News (on the link list)

What Should I Wear? (on the link list)