



Gorilla Food

Okay, you e-mail Thunder Lizards, here's your raw meat. Read this section and you'll take your place among the e-mail illuminati. Mortals will climb mountains to seek your wisdom; the masses will genuflect as you pass by; your aura will illuminate the northern sky.

Mail-filing Strategies

A while back I mentioned that e-mail to me is like packages on Christmas morning. I look forward to it with great anticipation. I descend into a pit of depression if a voice doesn't say "You've got mail!" when I sign on. Consequently, I have developed a cadre of online friends and correspond with them regularly. This means that I get a lot of mail.

I send and receive 20 or more pieces of mail a day. With that much mail coming in, finding a place to file that mail is critical. I need fast, convenient, electronic access to it. I copy and paste messages frequently, so a paper filing system just won't do. I am also an environmentalist, another reason why paperless e-mail appeals to me. My e-mail filing system is the bedrock of my online activities.

You might be facing the same need. Because of the Christmas-morning quality of AOL's e-mail system, lots of people get lots of mail, and lots of people need to be thinking about a filing system. Now's the time to bring the subject into the open.

Saving Everything as Flashmail

Though I'll discuss FlashSessions in Chapter 19, you've no doubt noted the Save to Flashmail icon in the received mail window (review Figure 4-4, if necessary). If you click this icon, AOL files your mail in a file with your screen name on it. It's normally found in the Online Mail folder inside the America Online folder on your hard disk. There will be a file there for each screen name on your account.

Mail saved this way can be reviewed online or off by choosing Read Incoming Mail from the Mail menu. It remains available for review until you delete it. (AOL adds a Delete button to the reviewed mail's window when mail is accessed this way.)

This method is extremely convenient, but it has a few flaws:

- ▲ It's effective only if you keep a small number of messages on file. Mail stored this way can't be categorized, and the list eventually becomes too long for convenient access (or for the software's 28k limit).



- ▲ While filing mail you've read this way is easy, filing mail you've sent isn't (unless you send carbon copies to yourself).
- ▲ Incoming mail from FlashSessions (I'll discuss FlashSessions in Chapter 19) is filed here, and mixing new FlashSession mail with old mail can become confusing and troublesome.

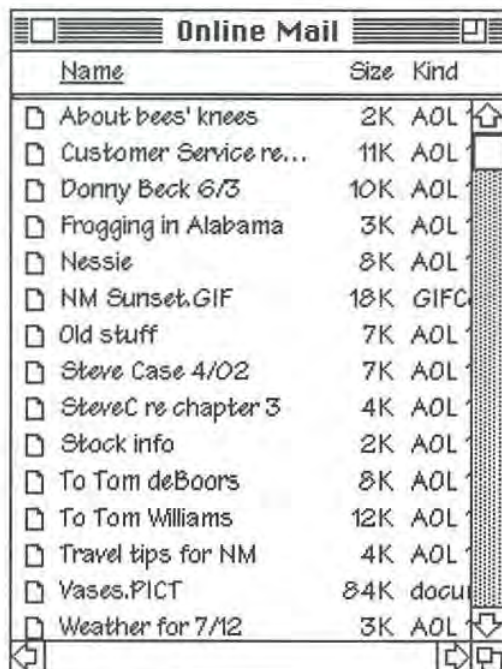
Nevertheless, if you don't intend to file much mail, if you carbon-copy yourself when necessary, and if you don't intend to use FlashSessions, this might be the most convenient method of them all.

The Online Mail Folder

I mentioned the Online Mail folder a few paragraphs back. America Online's Installer program creates this folder on your hard disk when you install the software. This is a potential location for mail storage. It is never more than a folder away from the America Online application itself, so you won't spend much time searching for it, and it consolidates all of your mail into one place for convenient backup.

This folder has to be organized in some way. Probably the simplest strategy is to save all your mail in your Online Mail folder as it arrives, piece by piece. Every time you read a new piece of mail, choose Save As from the File menu and save the mail in the folder. While this might work if you don't get much mail, it regresses to anarchy after a dozen or so files have accumulated. A Finder screen of such a scenario appears in Figure 4-17.

Figure 4-17: A file-based mailing system can become confusing when mail starts to accumulate.





A Single-File Strategy

Note: All of the strategies mentioned from here on require an understanding of the Macintosh Cut, Copy and Paste commands. If you are not familiar with these commands, either review the note on page 87 or buy a copy of *The Little Mac Book*. If you're new to the Mac, this book is invaluable.

If your mail is infrequent, a single file might prove beneficial. Instead of a Mail folder, try a Mail file instead. (Use the New Memo command under AOL's File menu to create a new file.) Each time you receive a piece of mail, read it, then select and copy it. Use the Open command under the File menu to open your Mail file, scroll to the bottom, paste and save. You can store 50 or more pieces of mail this way before the file becomes so large that it's unwieldy. Advantages to this method include the following:

- ▲ Only one file needs to be managed; only one file must be opened to access all your past mail; only one file needs to be backed up.
- ▲ Mail appears in chronological order.
- ▲ Comments and replies appear in context—there's no need to search your disk for the mail that provoked SuzieQ to say "You yahoo! I hope your stack overflows!" If you've been consistent, the offending statement is nearby—probably just above Suzie's malediction.
- ▲ On the other hand, AOL limits the size of text files to about 28k. If your Mail file exceeds this amount, AOL won't be able to store it. This is a severe limitation.



File the Header Too

Most of the filing strategies described here rely on the storage of not only received mail, but mail you've sent as well. All you need to do is copy each piece of mail you send and paste it into the appropriate file. Here's a tip: Choose Check Mail You've Sent from the Mail menu and open the mail to be copied from there. Mail retrieved this way contains AOL's header information—date, time, CCs and blind CCs—the retention of which should be considered a necessity in any mail filing system. If you simply copy text from the message field of a Mail window before you send it, your file won't contain all this information.



A Date-based Strategy

Alternatively, consider a date-based strategy. This method is essentially the single-file strategy with a file for each month of activity. A greater volume of mail can be accommodated this way, and old material can easily be copied to a floppy for archiving (see Figure 4-18).

Figure 4-18: The date-based strategy accommodates a greater volume of mail.

Name	Size	Kind
01/93	7K	AOL
02/93	4K	AOL
03/93	2K	AOL
04/93	8K	AOL
05/93	12K	AOL
06/93	4K	AOL
07/93	4K	AOL
08/93	3K	AOL

A People-based Strategy

I receive too much mail for the single-file method, and I never remember dates. The strategy I use is people-based. Inside my Mail folder are dozens of files, each named after a person with whom I regularly correspond (see Figure 4-19).

Figure 4-19: The list of files in my Mail directory, arranged and sorted by name.

Name	Size	Kind
Arbuthnot, Carey	2K	AOL
Beck, Donny	11K	AOL
Case, Steve	10K	AOL
Cramer, Sue	3K	AOL
deBoors, Tom	8K	AOL
Johnstone, Ralph	8K	AOL
Larson, Victoria	7K	AOL
Lau, Raymond	7K	AOL
Levitt, Jay	4K	AOL
Prevost, Ruffin	2K	AOL
Rittner, Don	8K	AOL
Ryan, Kathy	12K	AOL
Stoll, Cliff	4K	AOL
Williams, Tom	4K	AOL
Woodman, Elizabeth	3K	AOL



Each person's file contains all the messages I've sent to and received from that person in chronological order. Again, I include mail I've sent as well as received, as discussed in the sidebar.



Searching Text Files

At the moment, my Online Mail folder contains over 2mb of data, representing thousands of pieces of mail. Just yesterday, a reader sent me a piece of mail saying, "Thanks, Tom." That's all it said. It was sent by someone with the AOL screen name GeorgeD12. No offense intended, George, but I get a lot of reader mail, and I had no idea why I was being thanked.

I really hate to throw away mail like that. Maybe I did something really nice for George. Maybe George sent the mail to the wrong person. Maybe he meant to tell me to jump in a lake. I had to know.

The solution is a text-searching program. Each text-searching program does essentially the same thing: I tell the program what to look for and where to look and it looks inside of every file for whatever I'm after. Many of them conduct their work in the background while I work on something else. I told my favorite program of this type—Search Files by Robert Morris—to look for the word "George" in my Online Mail folder, and I went back to work on my manuscript. Sure enough, a few minutes later (yes, minutes, not seconds: Most of these programs amble rather than scramble) my Mac beeped and there was a list of all files with the word "George" in them. Sure enough, GeorgeD12 was there in my FANMAIL file. I had forwarded a message for him to a member whose screen name he didn't know. He didn't want me to jump in a lake after all.

A number of these programs are available online at AOL. Use the keyword: FileSearch, then the criterion: Text Search. Pay the shareware fee if you find a shareware program that's useful to you.

A Subject-based Strategy

If your online mail relates better to a number of subjects, this might be a better method for you. Perhaps you use AOL to plan your travels. You might have developed some acquaintances in the Travel Club. You might be receiving confirmations from EAASY SABRE, AOL's travel reservations service. Or you might be clipping articles from Wine & Dine Online, the excellent restaurant, food and wine forum. If this is the case, you might develop a number of files for each of your destinations.



These strategies can be combined, of course, and they aren't the only ones. There are no doubt scores of others. What I'm trying to do is convince you of the importance of filing your mail. Decide upon a method, set it up to your satisfaction, and maintain it faithfully. You'll become a better citizen of the e-mail community if you do.

Formatting Messages

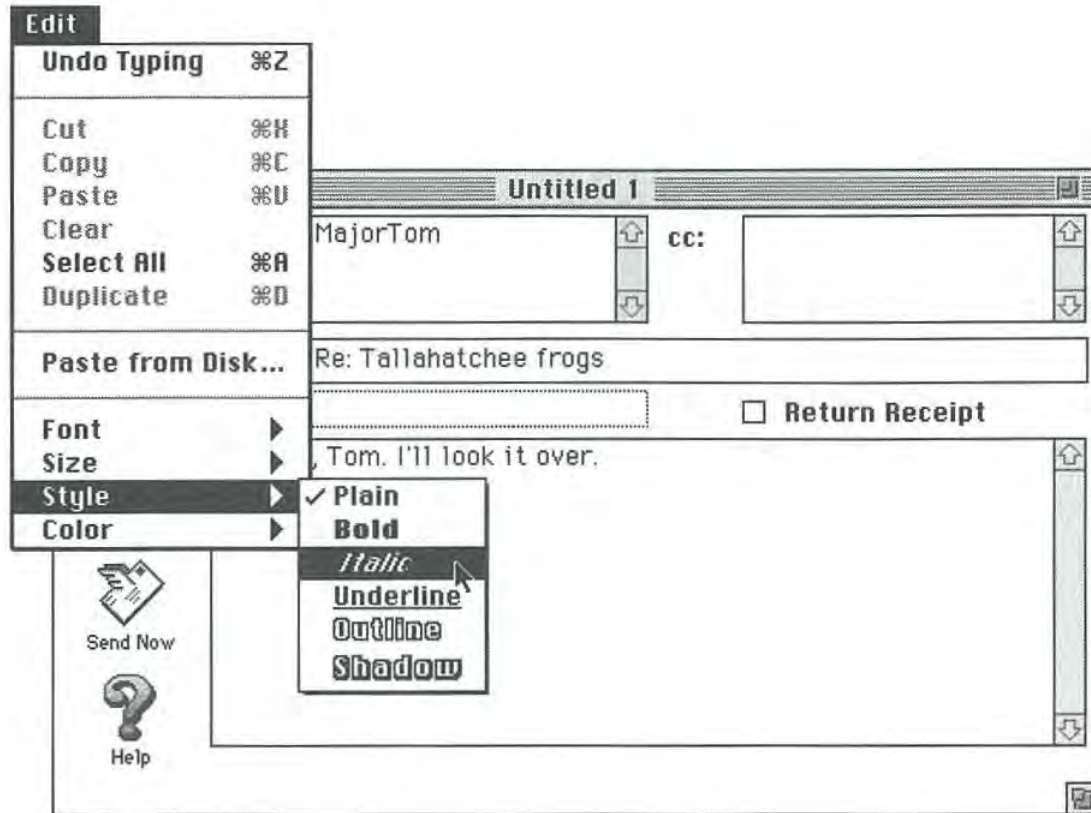
Version 2.0 of the AOL software introduced the ability to format mail messages, including font, size and style, among others. Version 2.5 added color to the list. Prior to that, those of us who were fond of emphasis in our messages had to show it without italics. Traditionally, emphasis was expressed by surrounding italicized text with asterisks. A message like "Yes, I *know* that Billy Joe. *Everybody* knows that. But look: Four wrongs squared, minus two wrongs to the fourth power, divided by 5, *do* make a right" was e-mailed as "Yes, I *know* that Billy Joe. *Everybody* knows that. But look: Four wrongs squared, minus two wrongs to the fourth power, divided by 5, *do* make a right." Somehow, the emphasis was lost in the translation.

Lament no more. Now, assuming both sender and receiver are using Macintoshes, and assuming that they are both using Version 2.0 (or later) of the AOL software, messages can be as emphatic as you like.

To change the typographical attributes of a block of e-mail text, simply select the text and choose the appropriate attribute from the Edit menu (see Figure 4-20).



Figure 4-20: E-mail font, size, style and color can be set with these Edit menu commands, but only for other AOL members using Macs.



Internet Mail

As much as Steve Case and his fellow shareholders would prefer it, not everyone is a member of AOL. Some receive their mail via the Internet (which we'll discuss in Chapter 14, "The Internet Connection"); others prefer AOL's competition (which, as you might suppose, this book doesn't discuss).

We're still 10 chapters away from Chapter 14, so discussing Internet mail is somewhat premature. But this is the mail chapter after all, and e-mail is a big part of the Internet, so an Internet e-mail discussion follows.

For the time being, understand that the Internet is a worldwide interconnected network of networks, each of which is similar to AOL. Something like 30 million people use the Internet, and you can send mail to (or receive mail from) any one of them via AOL.



Common Fonts

The sender and the receiver must not only share Version 2.0 or later of the AOL software (or Version 2.5 if you want to use color), they must also share common fonts. If you include text attributed with the San Francisco font in a message, the recipient's Macintosh must have San Francisco installed as well. If a font is sent that's not available on the recipient's machine, the font will not appear and the effect will be lost.

On the other hand, most Macintoshes have Geneva, Monaco, and Chicago installed. These are system fonts and, for the most part, can't be removed. In particular, Geneva is an excellent font for electronic mail. It's not only easy to read on the screen, but most every Mac has it.

Another consideration is that of font anarchy. A message that's riddled with different fonts in different sizes and different styles is not only hard to read, but it looks more like a ransom note than a message—and you know how people feel about ransom notes.

With that said, go ahead and have fun with fonts. Wax poetic with Chancery or toss in a Dingbat (or a Wingding) for fun. Whisper in 7-point italics; shout in 18-point bold. Purplize your prose; paint your journalistic efforts yellow. Do this with friends, however—friends whose Macs are configured with the necessary fonts (and AOL software that's at least as recent as yours).

For more formal communication, my recommendation is to stick with 12-point Geneva, using 12-point Geneva bold and 12-point Geneva italics where appropriate. You can be pretty sure that your formatting will make it to the recipient's screen (assuming the recipient is using a Mac), your messages will be easy to read, and you won't be mistaken for a felon.

Internet Addresses

To identify an Internet addressee, the format PAUL_WILLIAMS@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU is used. Everything to the left of the at sign (@) in an Internet address is the user's name (PAUL_WILLIAMS, in the example). Internet user names aren't subject to the 10-character limit AOL screen names are, so they can become quite elaborate. Everything to the right of the @ sign is the addressee's domain—the name of the network the addressee is using (OREGON.UOREGON.EDU in the example—a computer network at the University of Oregon). Our domain is AOL, which is known as aol.com on the Internet. My Internet address, then, is the combination of my screen name, an @ sign, and AOL's domain name—or MAJORTOM@AOL.COM. Note that Internet addresses appear in all lowercase letters: That's the way it always is on the Internet.



The Directory of Internet Users

Users come and go on the Internet like nighttime talk-show hosts. There are 30 million of them, after all, and thousands come and go every day. Keeping a directory of them would be nearly impossible.

"So what," you say. "There are well over 30 million telephone users in this country and they're all listed in directories." Your point is well taken, but the telephone system is composed of a number of coordinated authorities (the baby Bells), each charged with the responsibility of publishing phone books. Not so with the Internet. No one's charged with the responsibility of maintaining Internet member directories. Those that exist are produced voluntarily, and these volunteers all have lives beyond their spare-time member directories.

In other words, there's no accurate, up-to-the-minute, all-inclusive Internet membership directory. There are a few online directories, but they're more like a Who's Who of Internet users than a comprehensive directory. In other words, you must have the exact address for someone you intend to address via the Internet. You'll have to obtain those addresses from a source other than AOL or the Internet: There's no Internet membership directory to consult.

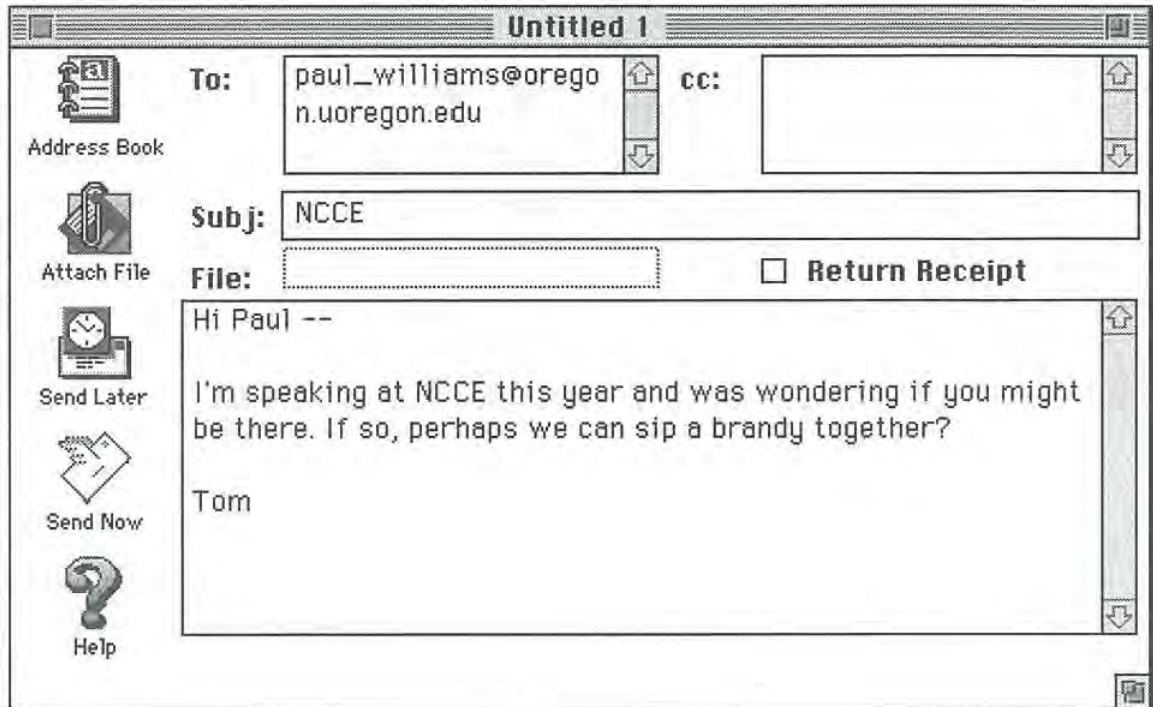
Here's a tip: Keep a written record of your important Internet addresses. Don't just put them in your AOL address book (you might need an address when you're away from your machine, and AOL's software stores your address book on your hard disk), and don't trust them to memory (few people remember the alphabet soup of Internet addresses accurately). If you carry an old-fashioned (hardcopy) address book with you, that's the best place to keep your Internet addresses.

Sending Internet Mail

Internet e-mail is composed and sent conventionally. To address an Internet user, simply place the recipient's Internet address in the To field of the compose mail form (see Figure 4-21).



Figure 4-21: Sending mail via the Internet requires entries in the To, Subject and Message fields. You can't leave any of them blank.



Once you click the Send Now icon (or once you run a FlashSession containing outgoing Internet mail), your outgoing mail is added to the queue of outgoing Internet mail at AOL. America Online uses a “store and forward” strategy for delivering Internet mail: outgoing mail is queued for a period of time, then AOL establishes its Internet connection and sends the mail as a batch. It also receives any incoming Internet mail during the same connection period before it breaks the Internet link.

Undeliverable Mail

Because of the complexity of Internet addresses, you might occasionally misaddress a piece of Internet mail. Fortunately your fallibility has been anticipated in the form of the Internet “postmaster.” Should you include a nonexistent domain or user name, the postmaster will intercede and send the mail back to you. It’s no problem, really, as the postmaster sends back the body of the message as well (see Figure 4-22). All you have to do is select and copy the message text, paste it into a new mail window, enter the proper address and re-send the mail. Your mail won’t end up in some kind of Internet dead letter box: The Internet postmaster always delivers.



Daemons

Look at the sender's address in Figure 4-22. Isn't that a vicious sounding word: daemon? My dictionary defines the word as a "subordinate deity." In this context, however, a daemon (pronounced demon) is an innocuous little Unix program—one that's usually transparent to the user—which is anything but a deity, subordinate or not. Macs have daemons too (though we don't call them that); perhaps the most familiar example is the PrintMonitor—the background program that spools the print output from your applications to your printer.

Figure 4-22: At top, a misaddressed Internet mail message looks as good as any other, but a few minutes later I receive the "User unknown" message pictured in the center window. Note the inclusion of my message's text in the postmaster's message in the bottom window. When I later copy and paste the mail into a new mail window (and fix the address), the mail will be delivered satisfactorily.

Undeliverable Internet Mail

Subj: NCCE
 Date: 94-01-03 10:13:37 EST
 From: MajorTom
 To: pd_williams@oregon.uoregon.edu

Hi Paul --

I'm speaking at NCC might be there. If so

Tom

Though the message at left looks acceptable, the user name is incorrect. The mail is undeliverable.

Subj: Returned mail: User unknown
 Date: 94-01-03 12:06:45 EST
 From: MAILER-DAEMON@mailgate.prod.aol.net
 To: MajorTom

----- Transcript of session follows -----

While connected to oregon.uoregon.edu [128.223.32.6] (tcp):
 >>> RCPT To:<pd_williams@oregon.uoregon.edu>
 <<< 553 unknown or illegal user:
 pd_williams@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU
 550 pd_williams@oregon.uoregon.edu... User unknown

----- Unsent message follows -----

Hi Paul --

I'm speaking at NCC this year and was wondering if you might be there. If so, perhaps we can sip a brandy together?

Tom

A few hours later, the mail is returned from the Internet postmaster. Note that the body of the undelivered message is included in the postmaster's message.

Noting the "user unknown" message, I recheck Paul's address, find the error, and re-send the mail to the proper address.



Sending Mail to Other Commercial Services

To reach a few of the more common Internet-connected commercial services, use the address formats shown in Figure 4-23.

Figure 4-23: Use these address formats to reach users on other commercial services.

Service name	Example
AppleLink	name@applelink.apple.com
AT&T Mail	name@attmail.com
CompuServe	12345.678@compuserve.com
Delphi	name@delphi.com
GEnie	name@genie.geis.com
MCI Mail	name@mcimail.com
NBC Nightly News	nightly@nbc.com
Prodigy	name@prodigy.com
The White House	president@whitehouse.gov, or vice-president@whitehouse.gov

Note: CompuServe addresses must show a period (rather than CompuServe's traditional comma) between the fourth and fifth numbers. That's because AOL separates the addresses of multiple recipients with commas. If AOL encounters a comma in a CompuServe account number, it will try to send the mail to two addresses.



Internet Mail Trivia

Actually, this isn't trivia at all. I was trying to attract your attention with a sidebar. If you're an Internet mail user, this is Really Important Stuff:

- ▲ The maximum message length for outgoing Internet mail is 28k, or about 15 pages of text. If you must send a message longer than that, use a word processor to cut your mail into pieces.
- ▲ If you use a word processor to prepare outgoing Internet mail, be sure to save the file in a text-only format (most word processors offer this option) before using AOL's Address Memo command. The text-only file format will strip all character and paragraph formatting from your message. Don't try to send formatted word processing files as e-mail over the Internet.
- ▲ Don't use any special characters (like copyright symbols or the "smart quotes" offered by some word processors) in Internet mail. If a character requires the use of the Option key, it's off-limits. Likewise, don't use any of the formatting commands under AOL's Edit menu (font, size, style, color): the Internet will strip your message of all formatting before it's sent.
- ▲ Don't use the Attach File button for outgoing Internet mail. The Internet simply doesn't accommodate attachments.
- ▲ Some of the services listed in Figure 4-23 charge their members for Internet mail, both incoming and outgoing. Keep that in mind when sending mail to these people: they might not appreciate the gesture.
- ▲ America Online doesn't charge you anything extra for Internet mail, sent or received. If you're counting your blessings, add that to the list.
- ▲ If you're going to use Internet mail frequently, go to your local bookstore and buy a copy of *A Directory of Electronic Mail !%@:: Addressing & Networks* (see the bibliography). You'll be a better citizen of the Internet community if you do.

Receiving Internet Mail

Internet mail is received like any other AOL mail: it's announced when you sign on and you can read it by clicking the You've Got Mail icon on the In the Spotlight screen. The only way you'll know it's Internet mail is by looking at the sender's address, which will be an Internet address.



You'll also see the Internet "header" at the end of the message. Reading Internet headers is a little like reading the Bible in its original Hebrew: enlightening perhaps, but not requisite to effective use of the medium.

A few notes regarding received Internet mail:

- ▲ If you want to give your Internet address to someone else (it's very impressive printed on your business cards), remove any spaces, change everything to lowercase, and follow it with @AOL.COM. As I mentioned earlier, my Internet address is MAJORTOM@AOL.COM. Steve Case's Internet address is STEVECASE@AOL.COM.

Use Internet Mail Appropriately

Don't send e-mail to fellow AOL members using their Internet address. In other words, don't send mail to majortom@aol.com when you can simply send mail to majortom. Tagging an AOL member's address with "@aol.com" forces the mail to go all the way out on the Internet and bounce around in cyberspace for a couple of hours before it returns. It also makes it difficult for the recipient to reply without doing the same. If the addressee is an AOL member, his or her screen name is the best address for efficient mailing.

America Online's maximum e-mail message length is around 28k. (It's actually more than that but AOL reserves a small overhead space for forwarding comments.) If someone on the Internet sends you a message longer than that, AOL will cut it up and deliver it to you as multiple pieces of mail. Use a word processor to re-assemble the pieces.

America Online offers plenty of help with Internet e-mail, including a message board and an avenue for communication with the AOL Internet staff. Use the keyword: MailGateway to explore this feature.

Attaching Files to Messages

Understand that we've finished our discussion of Internet mail. This is a new topic. As I mentioned a few pages back, you can't attach files to Internet mail.

Also understand that we're not talking in the abstract here: Files are files. On the Mac, files can include text, graphics, data, sound, animation, even programs. Any of these files can be attached to a piece of e-



mail. When mail is received with an attached file, the file is then downloaded in its native format, which is astounding.

File transmission requires elaborate protocols and error checking. Not a single bit, nibble or byte can be displaced. Most other telecommunications services require you to decide upon one of many cryptic protocols with names like XModem and Kermit. You also have to determine the number of data bits, stop bits and the parity setting your system needs. All told, of the 50 or so potential configurations for file transfer, usually only one of them will work in a given situation.

Forget all of that. You need not become involved. America Online handles it all invisibly, efficiently and reliably. If you want to send a file, all you have to do is click the Attach File icon (review Figure 4-1) and AOL will take care of it from there.

Tip: If you're a traveler and you take your PowerBook with you on the road, send e-mail to yourself, attaching important files that you've constructed while away from the office. America Online will hold them for you until your return. If something untoward should happen to your data while you're on the road, you can download your files when you return. It's cheap insurance.

Figure 4-24 follows a telecommunicated file from beginning to end. The journey spans half a continent—from Oregon to Mississippi—but only costs pennies.



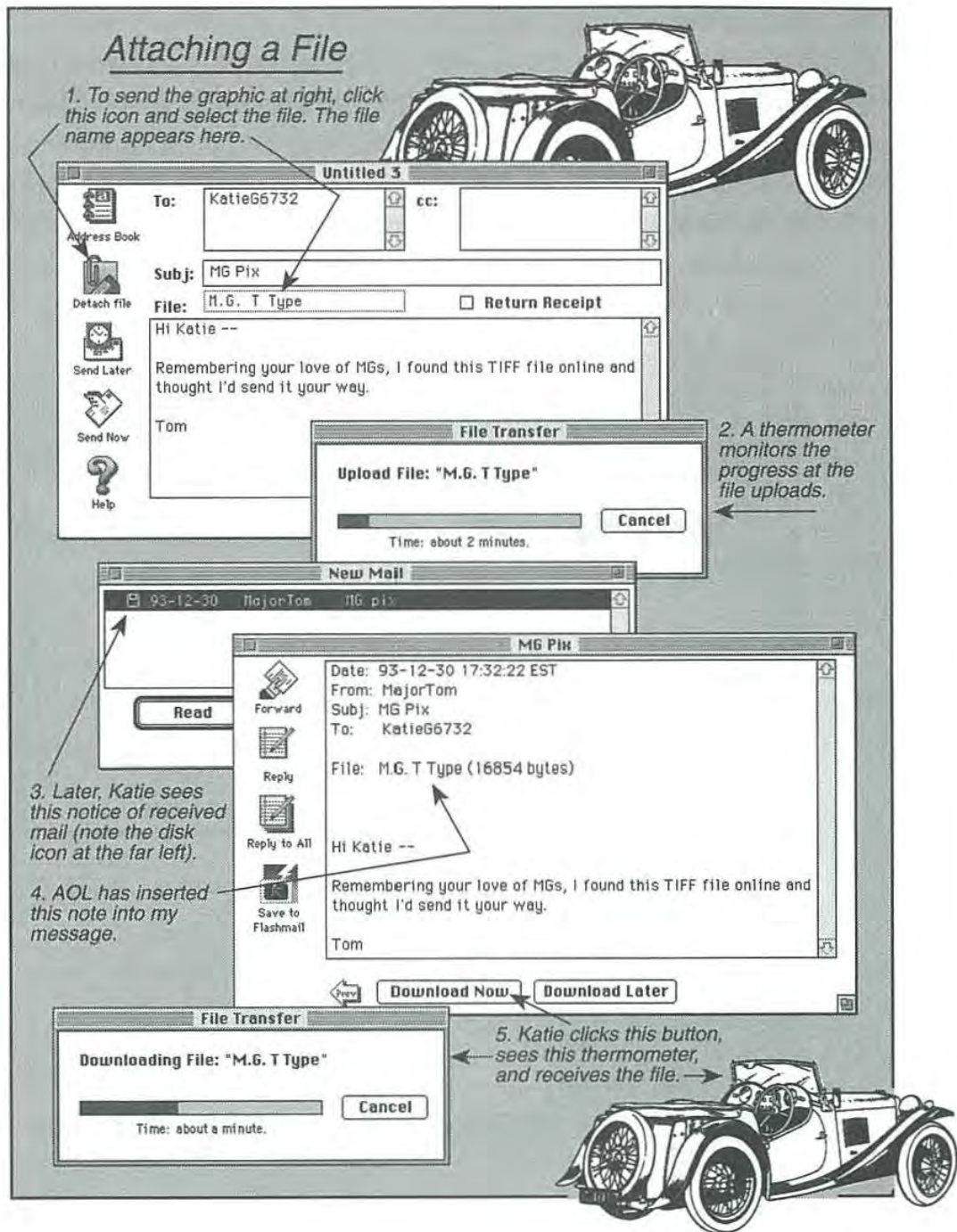
Use Attached Files Appropriately

Before the recipient can do anything with an attached file, it has to be downloaded, saved and (usually) viewed with some kind of program other than AOL itself. This is something of a nuisance for the recipient. In other words, don't send attached files when a simple e-mail message will do.

You might be tempted, for instance, to send a word processing file instead of a conventional message to another member. Perhaps the message is long, or you want to format it, or you just prefer your word processor over AOL's text editor. Resist the urge. America Online can handle e-mail messages up to 28k in length (about 15 pages), no one expects fancy formatting when it comes to e-mail, and you can always send unformatted word processing files by copying them and pasting them into a Compose Mail window. Attached files should never be sent when simple messages will do.



Figure 4-24:
 Sending an MG
 across the country
 is as easy as
 clicking a mouse.
 (Illustration by Rich
 Wald. Keyword:
 File Search, then
 use the criterion:
 Classic Cars.sit.)



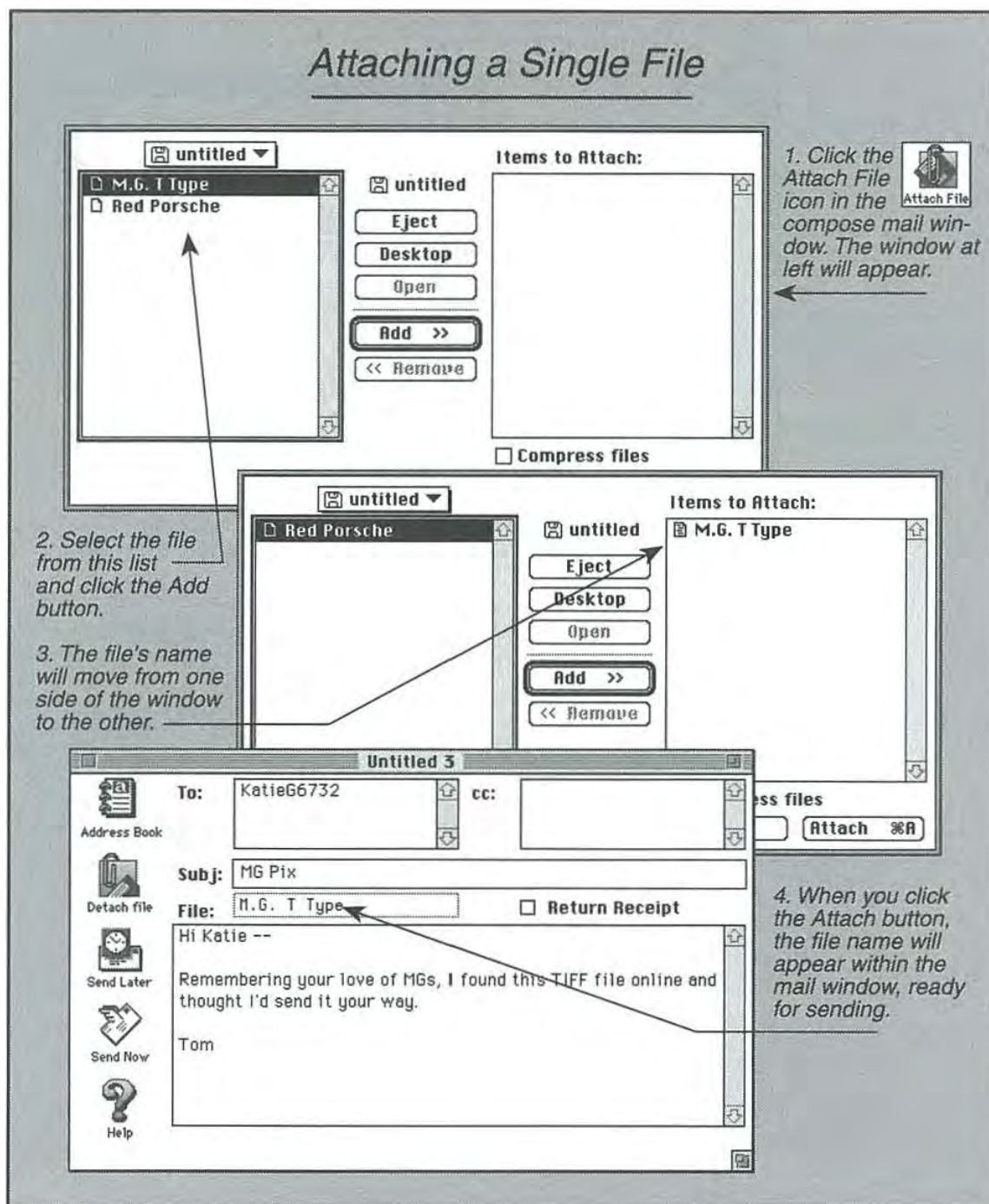


Attaching a Single File

You can attach a single file or multiple files to e-mail messages. Furthermore, you can compress these attached files (I'll discuss file compression in a moment) to reduce transmission time.

To attach a single file to an e-mail message, click the Attach File icon in the message's window. America Online will respond with the sequence of windows pictured in Figure 4-25.

Figure 4-25: Attaching a single file amounts to little more than clicking an icon and locating the file on your disk.





When you click the Send Now icon pictured in the bottom window of Figure 4-25, you trigger the sequence of events pictured in Figure 4-24. America Online will hold the mail and the file until the addressee is ready to read the mail and download the file. If you address the mail to multiple recipients—even if they're receiving carbon copies or blind carbon copies—each will be afforded the opportunity of downloading the file.

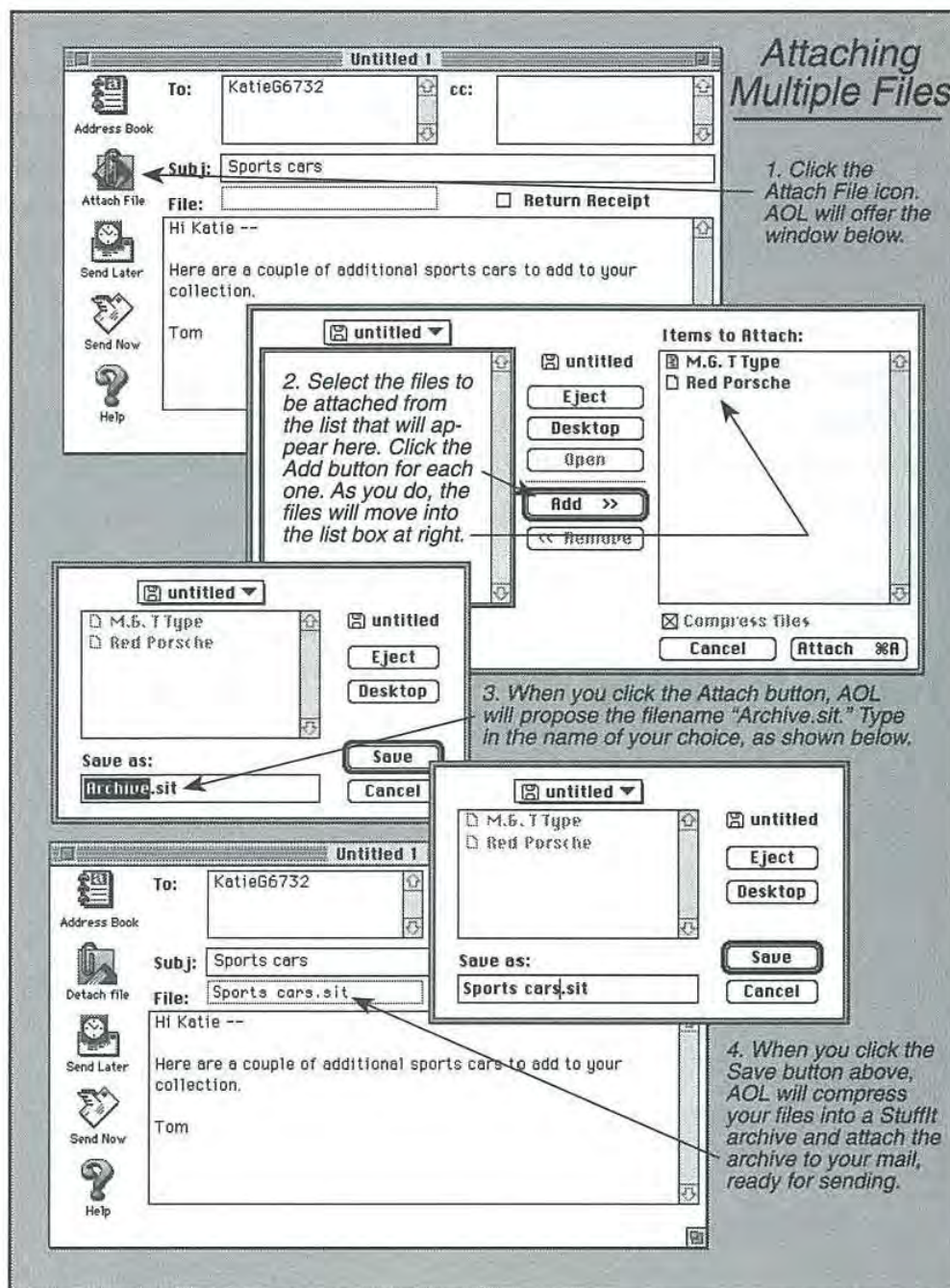
And downloading files attached to received mail is optional. Though the MG Pix window pictured in step 4 of Figure 4-24 offers both Download Now and Download Later buttons, the recipient might elect to ignore them both. (Keep that in mind if you ever receive mail with attached files you don't want.)

Attaching Multiple Files

You can attach more than a single file to an e-mail message if you wish, in the form of a StuffIt archive. StuffIt (discussed in detail in the next chapter) is a tool for compressing (and decompressing) files. Your AOL software is capable of unstuffing files that have been compressed using StuffIt, and it's capable of stuffing files as well (see Figure 4-26).



Figure 4-26: By stuffing multiple files into a single Stuffit archive, AOL can attach multiple files to one e-mail message.



The events pictured in Figure 4-26 all occur within the AOL software: You don't need additional software to create the archive or to unstuff it.



Not All Computers Are Macs

The feature that provides for the attachment of multiple files depends on StuffIt, which is Macintosh software. While StuffIt archives are commonplace in the Macintosh universe, they're black sheep everywhere else.

If the recipient isn't using a Macintosh, don't use the multiple-file attachment feature, and don't compress single files. Send your files one at a time, without compression. This will take more effort and no doubt more online time. While you're waiting for the upload to conclude, use the time to reflect on your wisdom in choosing Macintosh.

The important concept to understand is that your AOL software makes an intermediary file—the StuffIt archive (with the .sit extension) pictured in step 4 of Figure 4-26. Remember that StuffIt archives may contain multiple files. The archive is the (single) file that's actually sent; it isn't broken out into its individual components until the recipient downloads and unstuffs it. It's a bit like mailing a number of Christmas presents in a single box: when the recipient opens the box each present emerges independently, but until then it's a single package.

The AOL software unstuffs (decompresses) files attached to e-mail with the .sit filename extension automatically. The software usually makes a new folder and places the individual (unstuffed) attached files within that folder, leaving the recipient with both the StuffIt archive and the folder on his or her disk.

This is much harder to explain than it is to do. Before you actually send multiple files to another member, find a couple of small (under 10k) files on your disk, attach them to a piece of mail, then send the mail to yourself. Participate in the process from start to finish, walking through the steps pictured in Figure 4-26. This will all make sense when you do.



You Can Stuff a Single File Too

If you look carefully in the top window of Figure 4-25, you'll note a little check box labeled "Compress files." Though this box is automatically checked when you select multiple files, you might want to turn it on if you're selecting just one.

In fact, you should compress every file you send, unless it's small—say, under 5k—or if it's headed for a machine that's not equipped with AOL's Macintosh software. Compressing files cuts down on uploading and downloading time. Compressing files not only benefits you, but the recipient as well.



E-mail Alternatives

The world is not a perfect place. No one can always correctly predict the weather, computers don't always address envelopes reliably, and some people still aren't online. What if you want to communicate with these heathens? You could write them a letter, but that requires paper, an envelope, a stamp and a trip to the mailbox. You could phone them, but an answering machine will probably take the call (and your money as well, if it's long distance). You could try telepathy or ask Scotty to beam you there, but these are emerging technologies and you know how reliable they are (remember *The Fly*?).

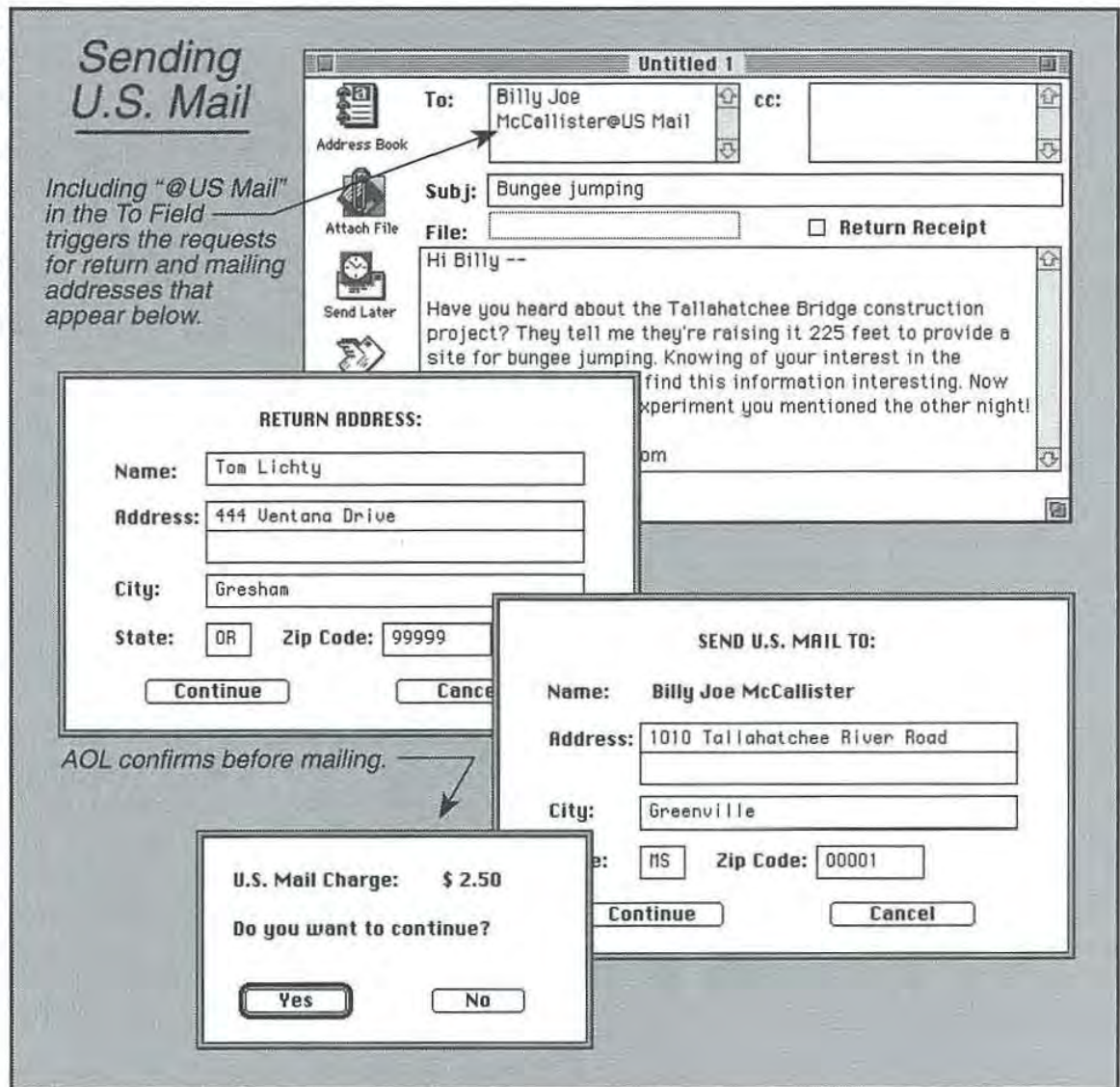
Paper Mail

Instead, use AOL to send 'em a letter. All you have to do is prepare normal e-mail and include a special address (see Figure 4-27). A few days later, a real paper letter in a real paper envelope will arrive at your specified destination, looking for all the world like you typed it yourself. The cost for this service is somewhere between the cost of a first-class stamp and a long-distance phone call; and it's no more difficult than sending e-mail. This brings such a convenience to communicating that it almost eliminates procrastination.

Speaking of procrastination, when was the last time you wrote your mother?



Figure 4-27:
Sending a message
via US Mail
involves
completing return
and mailing
address forms
before
confirmation.



Note that the only difference between sending regular e-mail and sending US Mail is the address. If AOL sees @usmail in an e-mail address, it automatically triggers the address request dialogs you see pictured in Figure 4-27.

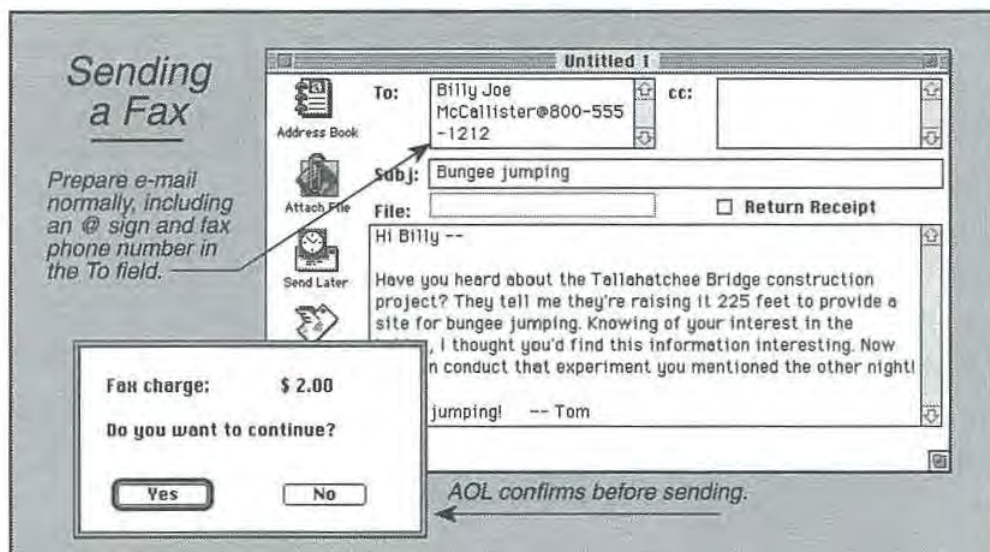
Note: Zip codes are required, and AOL verifies that they match the cities in both the return and mailing addresses. If they don't, you will receive an "invalid US Mail address" error and be sent back to the offending entry.



Sending a Fax

Perhaps your mother owns a fax machine (doesn't everyone?). You can save a few cents and a few days over paper mail by sending her a fax instead. Again, AOL stands ready to serve, even if you don't own a fax machine yourself. The process is no more complicated than sending paper mail—or e-mail for that matter (see Figure 4-28). Again, an @ sign in an address triggers the dialog. Within a few minutes of sending fax mail, AOL sends e-mail to you confirming the transmission of the fax message.

Figure 4-28: Fax mail differs little from normal e-mail.





The Fine Print

Fax and paper mail can be sent to multiple addresses. Complete the To field just as you would for e-mail, separating the recipients' names with commas. You'll be charged for each address, however.

- ▲ All charges are billed to your AOL account.
- ▲ Paper mail requires zip codes.
- ▲ Fax addressee names cannot exceed 20 characters, including spaces and punctuation. Paper mail addressee names are limited to 33 characters.
- ▲ You can't attach files to fax or paper mail messages. Both services are plain text only.
- ▲ Both fax and paper mail messages wrap to 70 characters on a line. Fax pages contain a maximum of 60 lines. Paper mail messages contain 40 lines on the first page (to make room for the address) and 53 lines on all others.
- ▲ Forced page breaks may be declared: Type ">>> PAGE BREAK <<<" (without the quotes) on a line by itself. This works for both fax and paper mail.
- ▲ Paper mail is limited to four pages. Fax mail is limited to 24k.
- ▲ Include your real name (not your screen name) in the text of both fax and paper mail.
- ▲ In either case, you'll receive a confirmation identifying all charges before AOL sends your mail (refer again to Figures 4-27 and 4-28). If, after reviewing the charges, you decide you don't want to send the mail or the fax, you can cancel at that point. You will also receive a confirmation (via e-mail from AOL) that your fax has been transmitted a few minutes after you click the Send button.

Moving On

As it has been described, AOL's e-mail facility is impressive work. It holds your mail for you, even after you've read it. It allows you to send courtesy copies. It provides access to the Internet, fax and the US Post Office. Best of all, it rarely costs you any more than your monthly AOL membership fee.



Jay Levitt

Fully one-third of AOL's business is e-mail. AOL handles *half a million* pieces of mail a day—few post offices have that volume—and we all simply assume that each message will make it from sender to receiver without a hitch.

Which it does, thanks to Jay Levitt. Jay is AOL's Mail Guy. Few people are more pivotal to the service than the person in charge of the mail. Jay Levitt is so important that his screen name is "Jay." Even Steve Case doesn't have a first-name screen name. Jay does. In a little office less than 10 feet from the "engine room" of AOL, he sits surrounded by computer screens: a Mac, a PC, an HP workstation, a terminal and two PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants: palmtop computers that many feel will become e-mail's hingepins in the upcoming years). He plays these terminals like a keyboard musician at a rock concert—the fingers of his left hand a blur as they tap out commands to display instantaneous mail volume, while the right hand tickles one of the two mainframes that are dedicated to his imperative. All the while he carries on a conversation with me, popping witticisms like Victor Borge on a good night.

The rock musician analogy isn't far off the mark (though I doubt that you'd ever find him in leather and chains), for Jay Levitt is in his early 20s. *Just a kid!* Kid or not, he's a scholar, a prodigy and a gentleman. Most of all, he's one of the finest friends I made at AOL. Few could do as well.

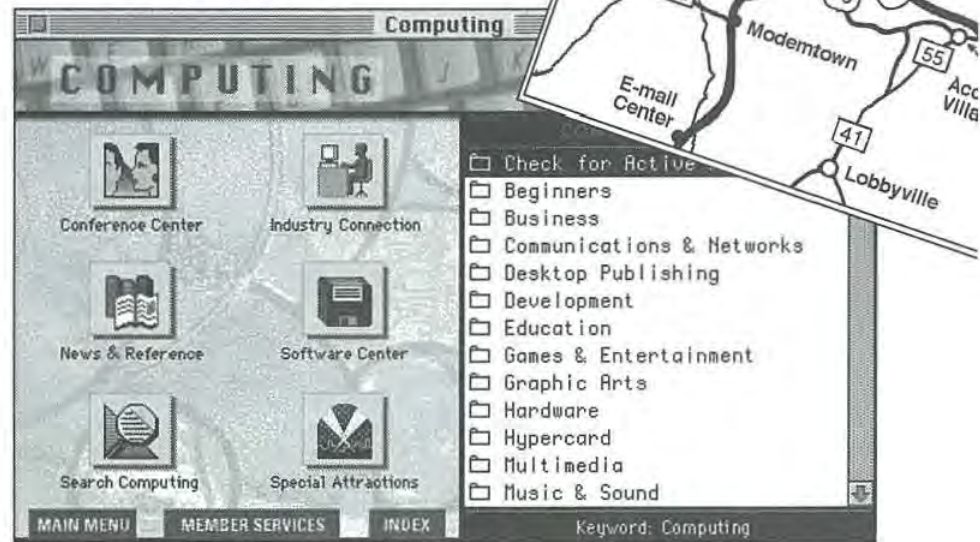
But e-mail isn't everything AOL has to offer. America Online is also composed of departments—14 of them to be exact. We'll begin our departmental exploration with the Computing Department, the subject of the next chapter.

The Colossus of Memnon was erected in the 14th century B.C. by the Egyptian king Amenhotep III. The Colossus is composed of two seated stone figures each measuring 38 feet high. If they ever stood up, they would tower over every structure in Washington, DC, including AOL's four-story office building a few miles away. While King Kong was satisfied with only one Faye Wray in the palm of his hand, it would take six Faye Wrays to fill a Colossus hand—and there are four of them.

In size, the colossus of departments at AOL is Computing & Software. All other departments pale in comparison—mere King Kongs, pebbles in the sandals of a colossus like the Computing Department. Exploring a colossus takes a while, but that's what we'll do when you turn the page....

Computing

CHAPTER 5



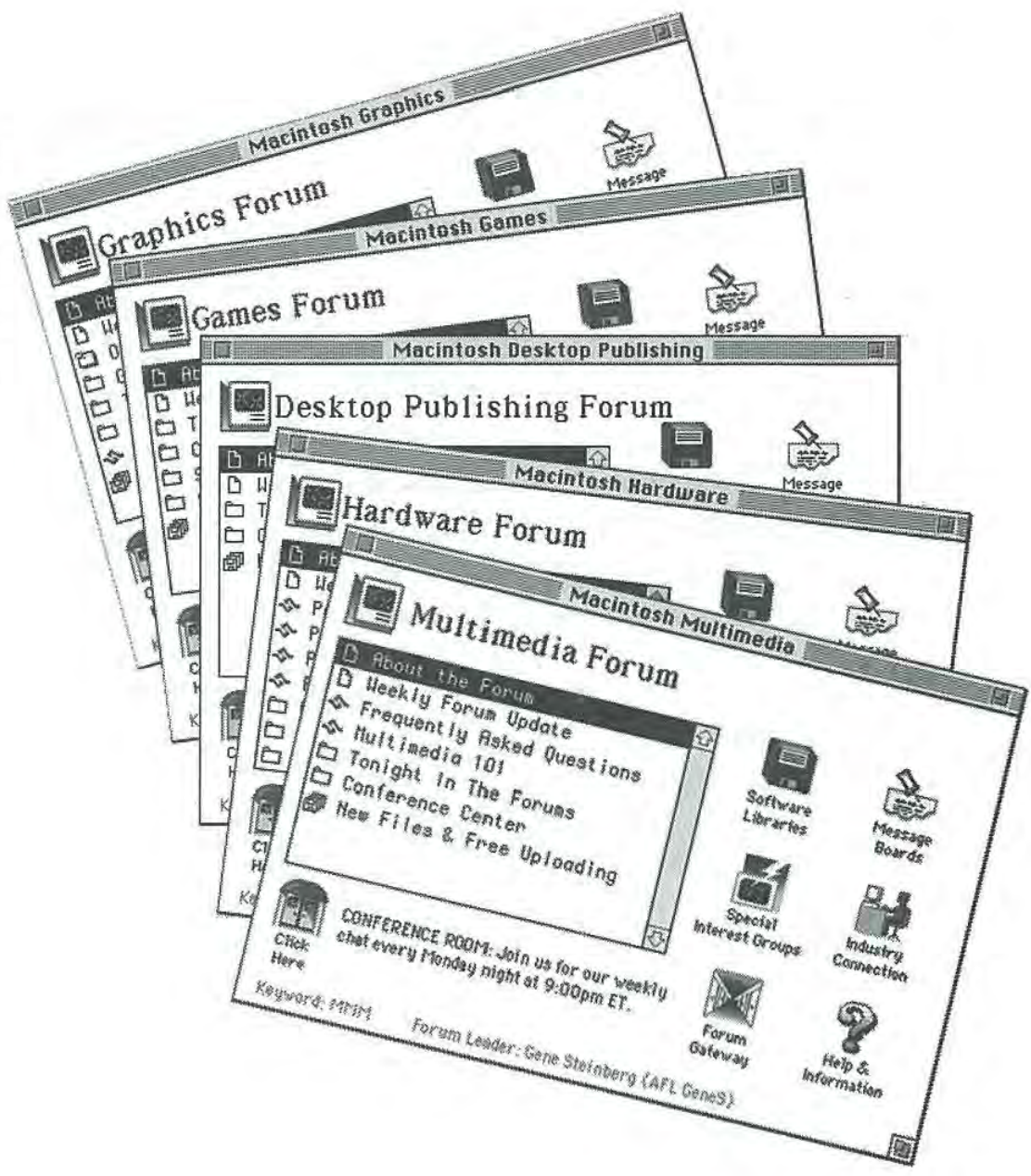
If you love your Macintosh, if it beckons with an alluring radiance whenever you're in the same room with it, and if you needlessly optimize your hard disk and reorganize your folders, you're going to love this department. The Computing Department is the consummate carnival for Macintosh maniacs. It's an opiate, a tabernacle, a jubilation. You'll spend a lot of time here.

In fact, even if you're *not* a Macintosh fanatic, The Computing Department might still become one of your mainstays. There are thousands of files here—fonts and graphics in particular—that will appeal to even the casual Macintosh user. If you need help with either your Mac or the software you run on it, The Computing Department is ready to oblige. And there are some invigorating forums here, ranging from the fundamental to the existential. This place is as rife with opportunity as a sunny Saturday in August, and you can enjoy it any day of the year.

The Computing Department's main window serves as this chapter's frontispiece graphic. To reach the Computing Department, use the keyword Computing.



Figure 5-1: The ultimate Mac software toy store: The Computing Department offers a boundless universe of resources.

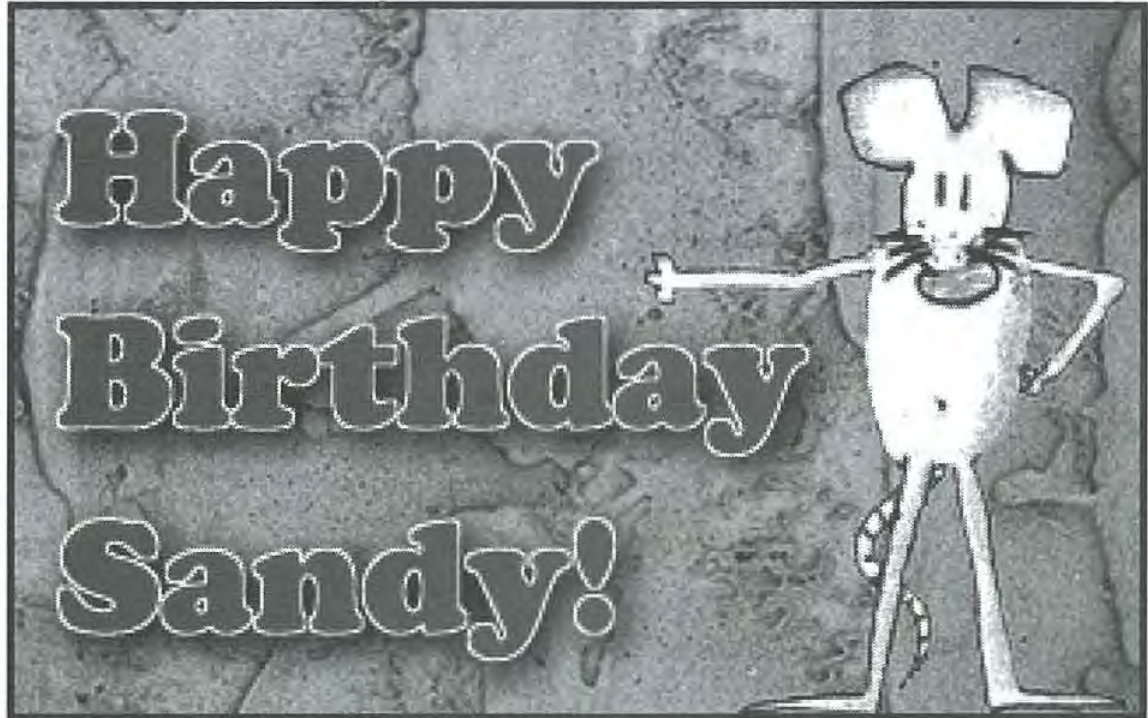


The Beginners Forum

There's so much great stuff here, it's hard to know where to begin. I suppose starting at the beginning is appropriate, and the beginning, in this case, is the Beginners Forum (keyword: Beginners). The Beginners Forum offers a Handy-Dandy Help Manual, text "maps" of AOL (updated monthly), many step-by-step help files, and the forum's Handy-Dandy Chart of Command-key shortcuts. Also included are uploading and downloading instructions and all of AOL's online help files in text format.



Figure 5-2: One of the practice files available for downloading in the Beginners Forum. Explicit instructions are available in the forum for the downloading and viewing processes. (Shameless self-promotion courtesy of the forum leader.)



Need more? A section called Frequently Asked Questions is full of (what else?) frequently asked questions (and the answers). Message boards offer an opportunity to ask questions of the forum's staff and get personalized step-by-step help. There's a library of files hand-picked for the beginner, and a section called Help Me I'm Lost! that stands ready to help anyone who's feeling overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the service.



Life's Ups & Downs

If you like to laugh, check out "I Laughed So Hard I Cried," featured in the Beginners Forum. Forum leader Sandy Brockmann posts her personal library of Funny Stuff here, much of which is her own. Consider the following example:

BRICKLAYER'S ACCIDENT REPORT

Gentlemen:

I am writing in response to your request for additional information in block #3 of the accident reporting form. I put "poor planning" as the cause of my accident. You said in your letter that I should explain more fully and I trust that the following details will be sufficient.

I am a bricklayer by trade. On the day of the accident, I was working alone on the roof of a new six-story building. When I completed my work, I discovered that I had about 500 pounds of bricks left over. Rather than carry the bricks down by hand, I decided to lower them in a barrel using a pulley, which was attached to the side of the building at the sixth floor.

Securing the rope at ground level, I went up to the roof, swung the barrel out and loaded the bricks into it. Then I went back to the ground and untied the rope, holding it tightly to ensure a slow descent of the 500 pounds of bricks. You will note in block #11 of the reporting form that my weight is 155 pounds.

Due to my surprise at being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rather rapid rate up the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the third floor I met the barrel, which was now proceeding in a downward direction...

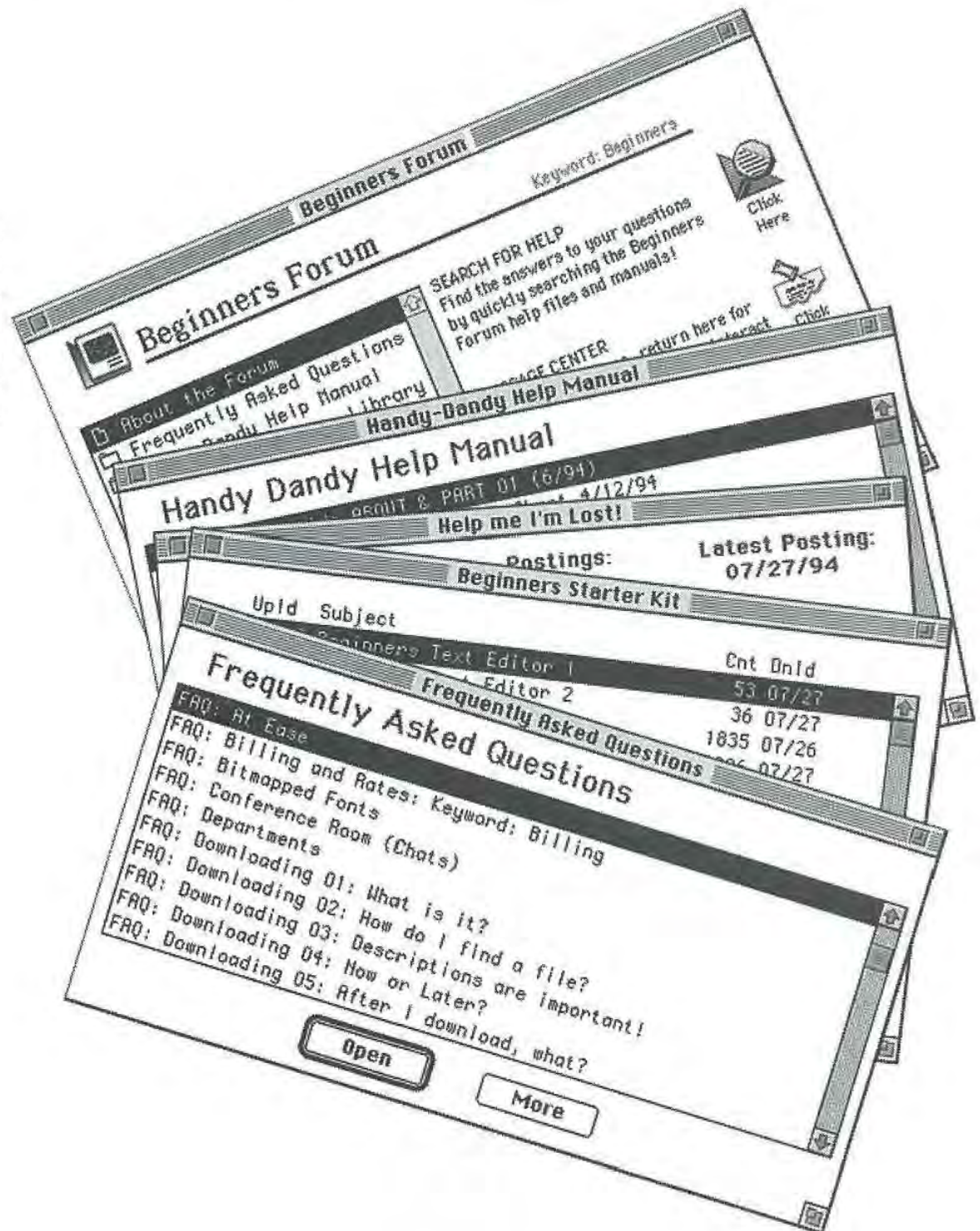
Well, you get the idea. I cut the story off because I want you to visit the forum. Find the story for yourself (it's #7 in the series) and read the whole thing. Keep smiling! :-)

Forum Leader Sandy Brockmann (AFL SandyB) expresses the forum's credo this way: "Most of all, though, the Beginners Forum is a place to get warm, caring, efficient help. There is no question that can't be asked in the Beginners Forum. We know what it's like to be new online; we know that to most it feels like a chasm just waiting to swallow us up. Yet we're told it's a new and exciting world—a world full of friends, fun and information. But still there's that chasm we're facing



and (almost) to the person, the newcomer online faces that fear of feeling dumb. The Beginners Forum acknowledges those feelings and helps each user through them—with warmth and information.”

Figure 5-3:
Whenever people ask me where to begin on AOL, I tell them to begin their journey at the Beginners Forum.



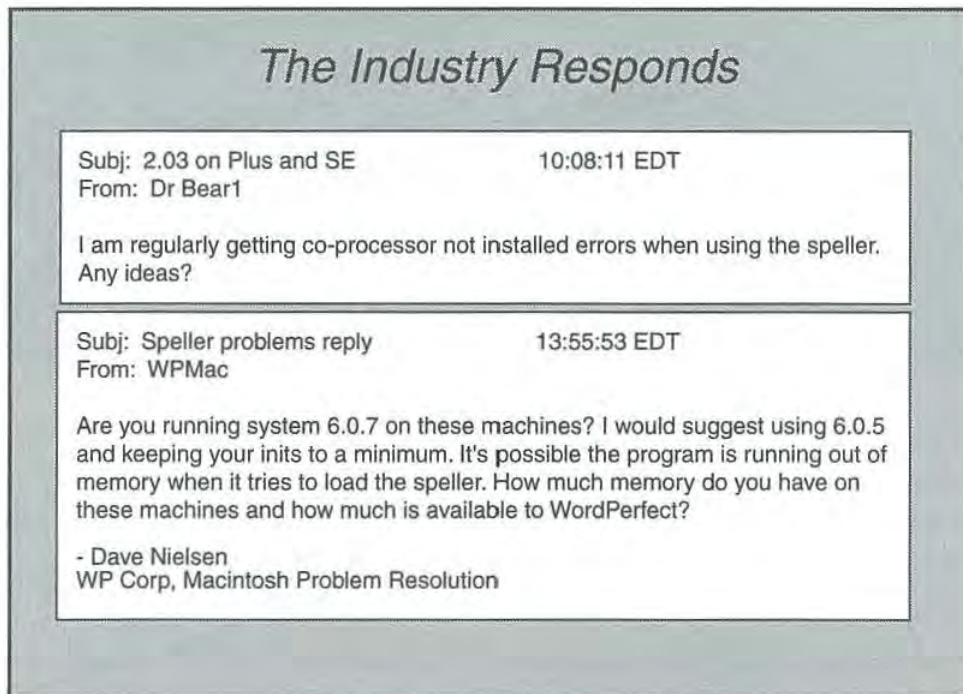


Industry Connection

Even hairy-chested Macintosh users need help with their software or hardware now and again. There are a number of methods:

- ▲ Worry at the problem, trying solutions as they come to mind. This usually solves problems within a week.
- ▲ Look up the solution in the manual (if you remember where you put it). This usually takes half a day.
- ▲ Call the customer support line that's offered by the publisher or manufacturer. This usually involves 20 minutes on hold (listening to a bad radio station playing commercials for stores in a city 3,000 miles away), then a call back, which usually gets through within a couple of days.
- ▲ You could sign on to AOL, type in the publisher's keyword, and post your question. Within 24 hours, you will not only receive a response from the vendor you're trying to reach (Figure 5-4), but two or three others from fellow users who have had the same experience.

Figure 5-4: Dr Bear had a problem Wednesday morning. By two that afternoon he had a response.





No Place for Vilification

Look again at Dr Bear's question in Figure 5-4: He identifies the software version he's using, the model of machine and the specific wording of the error message. This is accomplished in a two-sentence, 14-word posting. He is concise, specific and nonantagonistic.

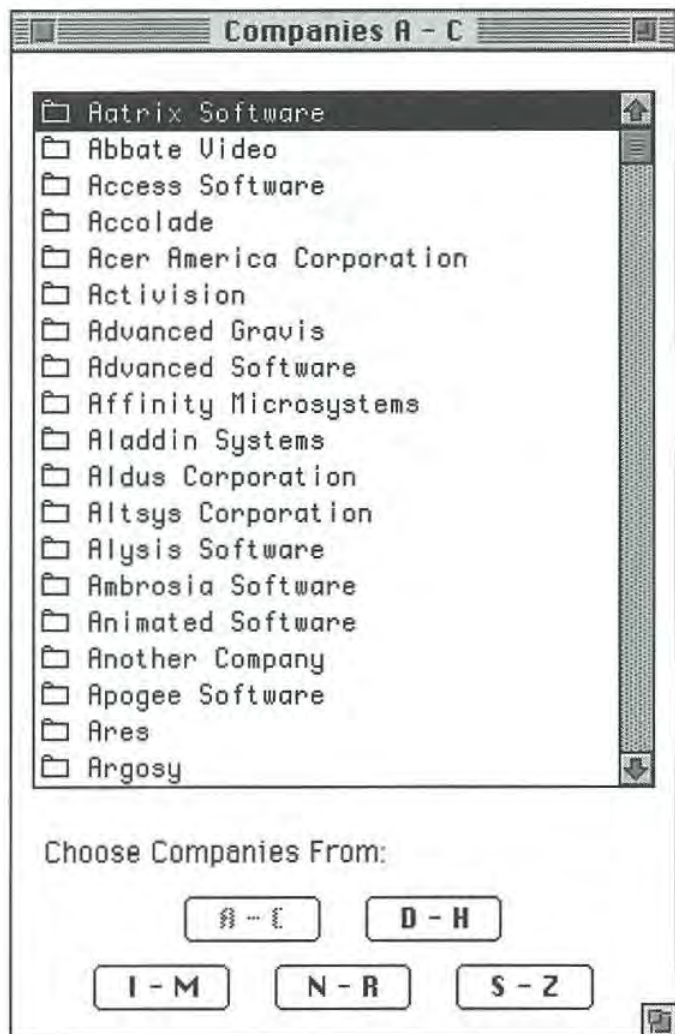
If we all communicated problems—no matter how frustrating and agonizing—this effectively, we might always receive prompt, courteous responses like Dave Nielsen's. Requests for industry support are not the place to demonstrate theory or try to prove expertise; nor are they opportunities for vilification.

Prepare your question in advance, before you sign on. Spend a few moments scrutinizing it for brevity and courtesy. Sign on and post your message only after it has passed this kind of inquisition. You can prepare a message off-line, away from a message board, by choosing New Memo from the File menu (or press Command-N). Then, after signing on and finding the message board you want, just copy the text of your new memo and paste it into the form used for posting messages on the board.

The service that provides this solution is AOL's Industry Connection (Figure 5-5). Hundreds of vendors currently maintain message boards on AOL, and every one of them is checked every day—often more frequently than that—by the appropriate vendor. Not only is excellent vendor support to be found here, but so is peer support, libraries of accessories and updates, announcements from the industry and tips from other users.



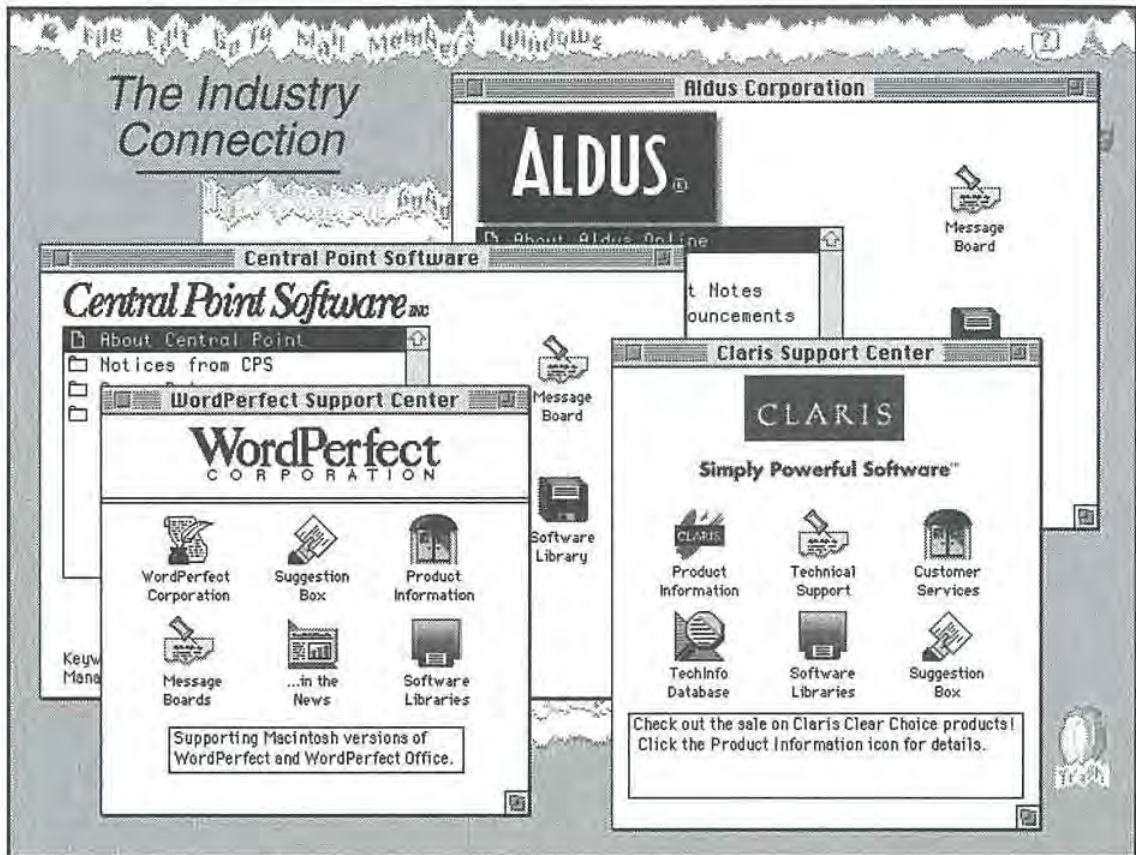
Figure 5-5:
Hundreds of
companies offer
support via
America Online.
These are a few of
the companies
beginning with A.



Allow me a few examples. The Berkeley System's library of files, for instance, offers more than 40 modules for its popular After Dark screen saver. Most of these modules are free, a few are "postcardware" (send the author a postcard from your city), and the rest are shareware costing less than \$10. A screen saver is a utility that darkens or alters your screen after a certain period of time has elapsed. The Aldus and Quark Forums stand ready to serve desktop publishing users. The Claris Forum had four libraries of files the last time I checked, each containing more than 30 entries. WordPerfect Corporation even offers a suggestion box. Microsoft has recently expanded its online support—always a superior alternative to calling Redmond long distance. There are no surcharges for these services. They're yours for the cost of the connect time only.



Figure 5-6: Here are four of the major vendors offering online support for their products. In the background is “Mr. Melty,” an After Dark screen saver module that I downloaded from the Berkeley System’s Forum. It “melts” my screen until the image completely disappears.



In the days when I was active as a computer consultant, I used to tell my clients that online support is the best kind of support money can buy (perhaps that’s why I’m no longer a consultant). Humbling as it might seem, no matter how complex or peculiar your problem, someone else has probably experienced it before. Chances are, someone reading the boards will see your posting and reply. This is peer support—people helping people—almost the definition of the online community. Contribute to that community: Post questions when you’ve got them, and post replies when you have answers.

The Forums

Perhaps the busiest forums on AOL are in the Computing Department. This industry is a moving target, and those who try to keep it in their sights seek information with eagerness that borders on the fanatic. The Computing Department offers forums for every level of computer enthusiast, from beginners to developers, and those forums are extremely popular.



I think it's appropriate, then, that we steal a peek at a few. I want you to see the breadth of this department, to expand your horizons. Perhaps you'll discover something that interests you in the process.

The Music & Sound Forum

What good is a Macintosh if it doesn't make sounds? How long does it take to tire of Simple Beep and Wild Eep? And isn't it time you changed the "Welcome" sound that greets you whenever you sign on to AOL?

Whether you're a professional musician, a sound hobbyist, or just curious, the Macintosh Music & Sound Forum (keyword: MMS) is always rewarding. Guests, files and a wealth of MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) tracks await the explorer here.

One area of significant activity is the sound library, where TV and movie sounds abound, and replacement sounds for your AOL software are among the most popular downloads (see Figure 5-7).



Figure 5-7: You can change your America Online sounds whenever you please. There are scores of alternatives in the Macintosh Music & Sound Forum.

Changing the AOL Sounds

1. Use the keyword: MMS to reach the Music & Sound Forum.

2. Choose Sound Samples from the main forum window.

3. Specify America Online Sounds (but do explore the others!).

4. Select a sound file that interests you.

5. Download and install it: AOL will never sound the same!

Upld	Subject	Cnt	Dnld
07/22	Babylon 5 AOL	72	07/28
07/02	"Altered" AOL sounds!	187	07/27
06/13	America Online Sounds ASRC	310	07/27
06/13	AOL 2.1 sounds! ---NIN---	166	07/27
06/13	HISpeed AOL Sounds!! AOL	101	07/27
06/12	Cool new AOL sounds U2.1	492	07/28
06/02	AOL Juvenile Pack AOL	72	07/25
05/22	Cleaned-up AOL Sounds AOL 2.0/2.	225	07/27
05/14	AOL sounds U2.1	342	07/27
05/14	Prisoner AOL U2.1	180	07/26



SndPlayer

Once you've downloaded a sound from the Music & Sound Forum, you'll want to hear it and (if you like what you hear) install it in your system. For that you need a utility, and the utility most Macintosh users use is SndPlayer by David Lambert of Dejal Userware in Auckland, New Zealand. This utility not only plays Macintosh sound files but sound files formatted for the PC as well. It's relatively inexpensive shareware and available in the MMS libraries. Find it quickly by using the keyword FileSearch, then specifying the criterion SndPlayer.

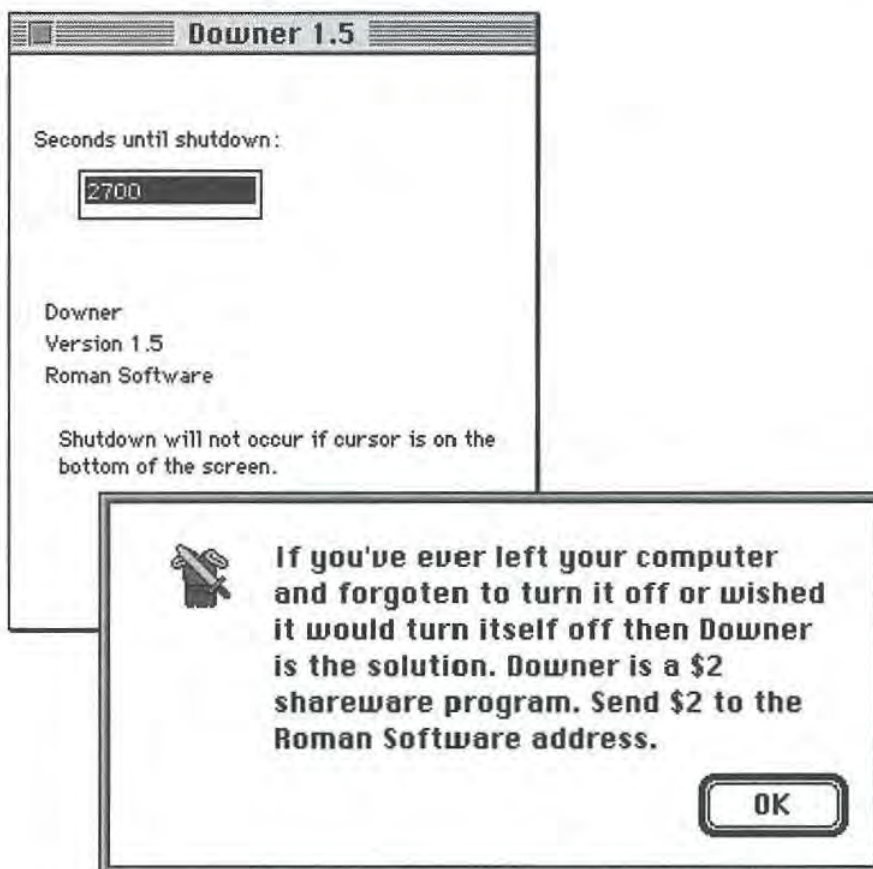
The Utilities Forum

Macintosh Thunder Lizard users are fond of the bumper sticker that reads, "He who dies with the most utilities wins!" Thunder Lizard users collect Control Panels, Function Keys, INITs and Extensions like baseball cards, and they do most of their collecting here. The forum meets formally every Saturday at 11 P.M. (Eastern time).


Just the other day I discovered a little program that automatically issues the Macintosh "Shut Down" command after a predetermined amount of inactivity (Figure 5-8). In Chapter 19 (where we'll discuss FlashSessions and the Download Manager), it becomes readily apparent that once a FlashSession has concluded (usually some time in the middle of the night), it would be nice if someone (or something) would turn off the Mac. This little utility does just that.



Figure 5-8: I found this little shutdown utility in the Utilities Forum. The utility is called Downer, by Roman Software in Corvallis, Oregon (all the good stuff comes from Oregon). It's a shareware (\$2) Control Panel device, and it takes about two minutes to download.



These kinds of programs aren't readily available for sale through traditional retail channels. The wealth of shareware and freeware programs found on AOL offers you bargains, productivity enhancements, honest-to-goodness application software (for a fraction of what a commercial program would cost) and fun and games (see sidebar). The Utilities Forum is an ideal vehicle for the distribution of shareware and freeware. To get there in a hurry, use the keyword MUT.



What Is Shareware?

Two major channels exist for the distribution of computer programs and data. The traditional commercial channel involves publishers, distributors and retailers. Each must make a living, thus each adds a bit to the cost of the product. There's a considerable distance between the people who use the material and the people who actually create it.

The alternative distribution method is referred to as *shareware*. The shareware method is usually a direct connection between the user and the person who created the program. Shareware programs and data are posted on telecommunications services like AOL where they can be freely downloaded whenever we, the users, please. Shareware can also be distributed among individuals or through users' groups without fear of incrimination. Every piece of shareware I have ever seen avidly encourages this kind of distribution.

Shareware is usually complete. If you download a shareware program, you get the complete program—not a "crippled" version—and (usually) documentation as well. You can try it out for a few weeks before you decide to buy. If you decide to keep it, the author usually requests that you send money. Since the money is sent directly to the author—no publishers, distributors or retailers are involved—shareware can theoretically cost much less than commercially distributed software. The author's share is all you pay for shareware, and the author's share is a very small portion of the total cost of the software distributed through commercial channels.

The shareware model also provides a direct channel for communication between user and author. If you have a complaint or a suggestion for improvement, send e-mail to the author. Chances are you'll get a reply. This is a significant feature: To whom do you send mail if you think your car or your refrigerator can be improved? And do you really think they will ever reply?

While most shareware authors request financial remuneration, a few others simply give their material away (freeware), or request a postcard from your city or town (postcardware) or a donation to a favored charity.

The shareware concept only works if users pay, and payment is voluntary. Sadly, only about 10 percent of the people who use shareware programs actually pay for them. This is undoubtedly the biggest fault in the shareware concept. The potential that shareware offers is especially rewarding for us the users, but only if we honor the honor system that's implicit in the shareware concept. In other words, if you use shareware, pay for it, and encourage others to do the same.



The Graphic Arts Forum

Where would the Mac be without graphics? It stands to reason, then, that the Graphic Arts Forum is one of the most popular Macintosh forums available on AOL. This is the place for discussions of Art, Graphics, Design, 3D, Animation, Video, Architecture, Engineering, Computer-Aided Design or Drafting, and all related topics. To get to the forum, use the keyword MGR.



The Online Home Companion

Everyone has a favorite forum. Mine's the Online Home Companion, nestled comfortably (where it's been for years) in the Macintosh Graphic Arts Forum. The Companion is a place for onliners who are looking for the eclectic, the humorous and the comfort of friends.

Any topic is welcome at the Online Home Companion, as long as the topic *isn't* computers. When it was originally created, the forum's founders said, "This is a coffee break, a lunch break, the office party, happy hour. It's a place to play, to laugh, to think and to share. It's a park bench, a blanket under a spreading tree—a place to be free."

But it's not a place for computer talk.

The forum defies description, but I guarantee it's worth the visit. Use the keyword MGR, then double-click the Online Home Companion entry in the list box.

Discussion's one thing; the graphics themselves are another. And this forum is rife with them—more than 10,000 at last count—ranging from aeronautics to zucchinis. Most are color; many are 24-bit, resplendent in more than 16 million colors per image. Best of all, they're all free: All you pay for is the connect time required to download them.

The Online Graphics Viewer

The Graphic Arts Forum is also a showcase for AOL's new online viewer technology. Appearing first in Version 2.5 of AOL's Macintosh software, the online viewer allows you to not only see your graphics as you download them (I'll discuss downloading in a moment), it also allows you to preview them *before* they're downloaded (see Figure 5-9).

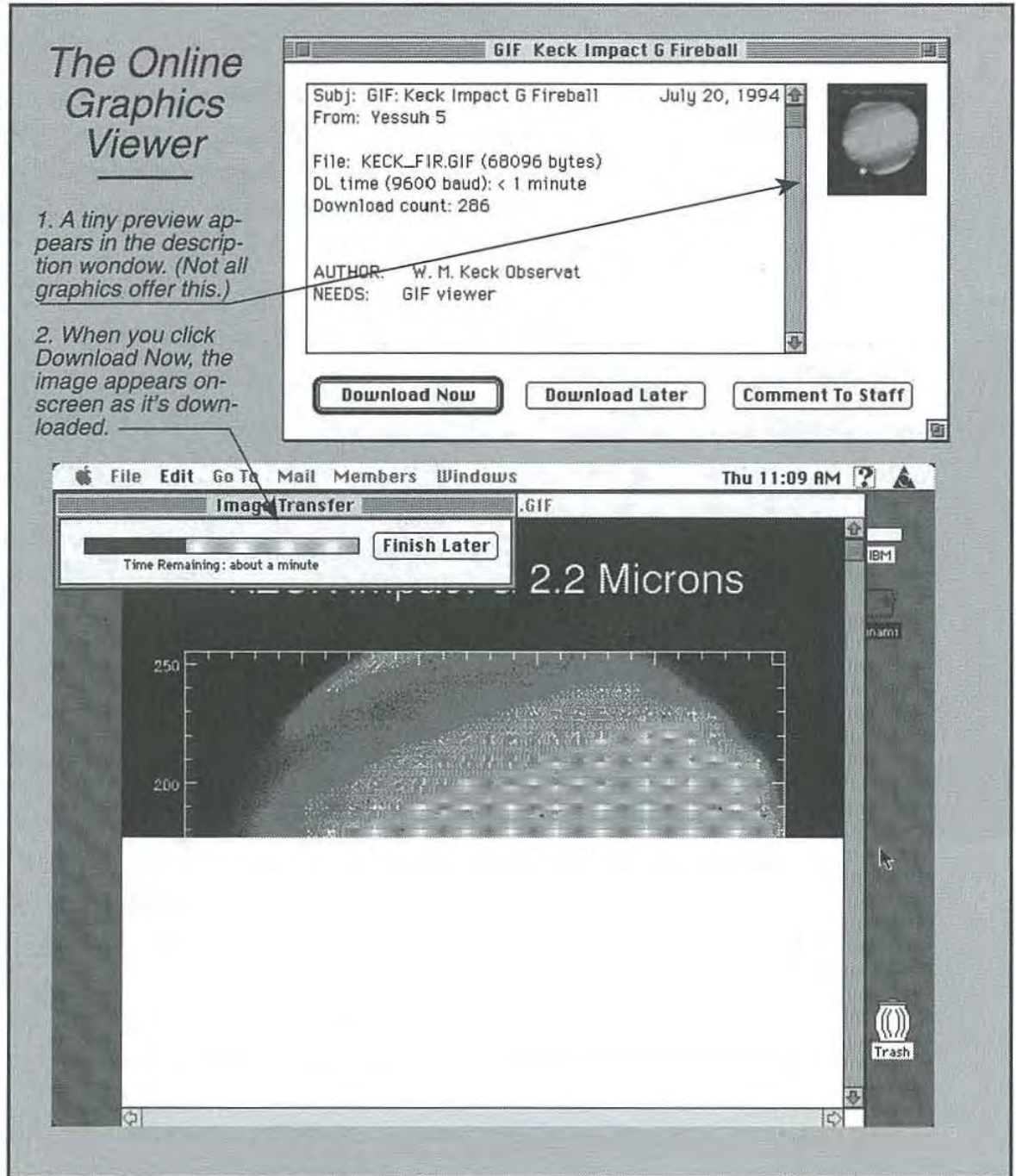


Figure 5-9: The online graphics viewer lets you preview images before you elect to receive them, then observe their progress as they're downloaded. (The image is of the planet Jupiter just after the comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 impacted the planet in July 1994.)

The Online Graphics Viewer

1. A tiny preview appears in the description window. (Not all graphics offer this.)


2. When you click Download Now, the image appears on-screen as it's downloaded.





The preview function is a godsend. The tiny image that's sent while you're reading the file description is usually enough for you to determine whether you want to spend time downloading the image or not. Though it's not available for all images (more images offer it each day), when it is available, it's exactly what you'll need.

Even if a preview isn't available, the online viewer exposes the image in stages as it's downloaded. Should you decide you don't need the image, simply stop the download (there's always a button on the screen for that) and move on to something else.



Downloading Preferences

Enough can't be said in favor of the online graphics viewer, but it does have one flaw: It slows downloads somewhat. Not much if you have a fast Mac, but just a bit nonetheless.

If the viewer isn't to your liking, you can always turn it off. Choose Preferences from the Members menu, then choose Graphics Viewing Preferences and turn Auto-View Graphics off.

Not all graphics respond to the viewer, by the way. Occasionally you'll find one that not only won't preview, but it won't display as it's being downloaded either. Don't fret, the graphic will no doubt be accessible later, though you might need a graphics viewing program other than AOL to view it.

The graphics viewer isn't just for use online. It will open any ART (AOL's proprietary graphics format), PICT (the Mac's native graphics format), JPEG (more about JPEG later) or GIF (graphic interchange format) file on your disk. Just choose Open from the File menu. It will save in these formats as well, regardless of the file's original format. Just choose Save As from the File menu.

There are a number of other forums in the Computing Department. Check out the Business, Desktop Publishing, Hardware and HyperCard Forums. The Macintosh Games Forum (keyword: MGM) is a big favorite: The *RoboWar* strategy game that I'll discuss in a moment is found there. The Computing Department is a feast for the Macintosh appetite. If you ever get the hunger, there's a forum here waiting to sustain you.



Tim Barwick

Tim Barwick gazes at the woods outside his window, just a few minutes from downtown Washington, DC. Red squirrels scamper up deciduous trees, reveling in the springtime sunshine. The forest's contrast to the rush hour chaos on Route 7 a half-mile away somehow reflects Tim's contrast to the hubbub at AOL. Originally a member, then a forum leader, then the Department Head of the Computing Department, now the Manager of the Product Development team, Tim personifies contrast. The contrast is heard rather than seen: a native of England, Tim speaks with an old-world elegance that hardly conforms to the frenzied, neological industry he helps shape.

As Manager of Product Development, Tim serves as liaison between the members and the people who write the software that's installed in our computers. Tim, in other words, is the staple in the customer-satisfaction recipe.

Tim's old-world heritage is reflected in his management philosophy: he is champion for the rank and file. His philosophy is reflected in today's AOL software. "I know it's corny," Tim says, "but customer satisfaction is paramount. We listen to our users, and many of the features we now offer are the result of end-user suggestions." The shape, the feel—the spirit of the service didn't result from a white paper drafted by directors or advisory committees. AOL is our progeny. Tim Barwick sees to that.

Downloading Files

The most popular aspect of the Computing Department is its extensive collection of software. All it takes is a browse through the libraries: the number of times a file has been downloaded is shown beside each file's name, and most of those numbers exceed 100. Let's say there are 60,000 files in the Computing Department. A hundred downloads for each of 60,000 files equals 6,000,000 downloads. *Six million!* But that's just the Computing Department. More than 20,000 files reside elsewhere within AOL, spread across the service like flowers in a meadow. Members graze this meadow, downloading bouquets of files and smiling. People must be on to something here. It might be appropriate, then, to spend a few pages discussing downloads: what they are, where they are and how to get one for yourself.



What Is Downloading?

Simply put, downloading is the process of transferring a file from AOL's host computer to a disk in your computer. Files can be programs, Control Panels (the Downer utility pictured in Figure 5-8 is a Control Panel), fonts, graphics (many of the graphics in this book have been downloaded), sound, animation and, of course, text. In fact, this whole book has been downloaded: Using attachments to AOL's electronic mail, I uploaded the manuscript to AOL (more about uploading later), and the publisher downloaded it. (Attachments and e-mail are discussed in Chapter 4.)

A Downloading Session

Perhaps the best way to explain downloading is to download a file for you and explain the process as it's happening. With all this talk about 60,000 files, how do you find the good stuff? Frankly, the best strategy is to buy a copy of *The Mac Shareware 500* (see sidebar) and refer to it when you're in the mood for something new. The book comes with enough shareware on disk to pay for itself, and it's *the* reference for Macintosh shareware.

The Mac Shareware 500

The trouble with shareware is there's so *much* of it. If you downloaded every utility, graphic and font that sounds interesting, you would spend the rest of the century online. Even reading descriptions can become laborious.

We need to know what's good and what's better; we need to know what's compatible with our machines; we need to know where to find shareware online; and we need to know what the shareware fees are. What we need is a guide. Someone who has seen it all and is willing to share opinions with us.

Would I bring it up if such a service wasn't available online? The Mac Shareware 500 Forum is based on the book of the same name by Ruffin Prevost and Rob Terrell. As the title suggests, the book lists 500 shareware packages available online, ranks each one, specifies their prices, and identifies things like compatibility, version numbers and the authors' names and addresses.

The forum serves as an adjunct to the book. It offers message boards (so you can hear what others have to say), new additions, opportunities to meet the authors online, and a library containing all 500 packages featured in the book. If you download shareware, this is the place to start. Use the keyword Mac500.

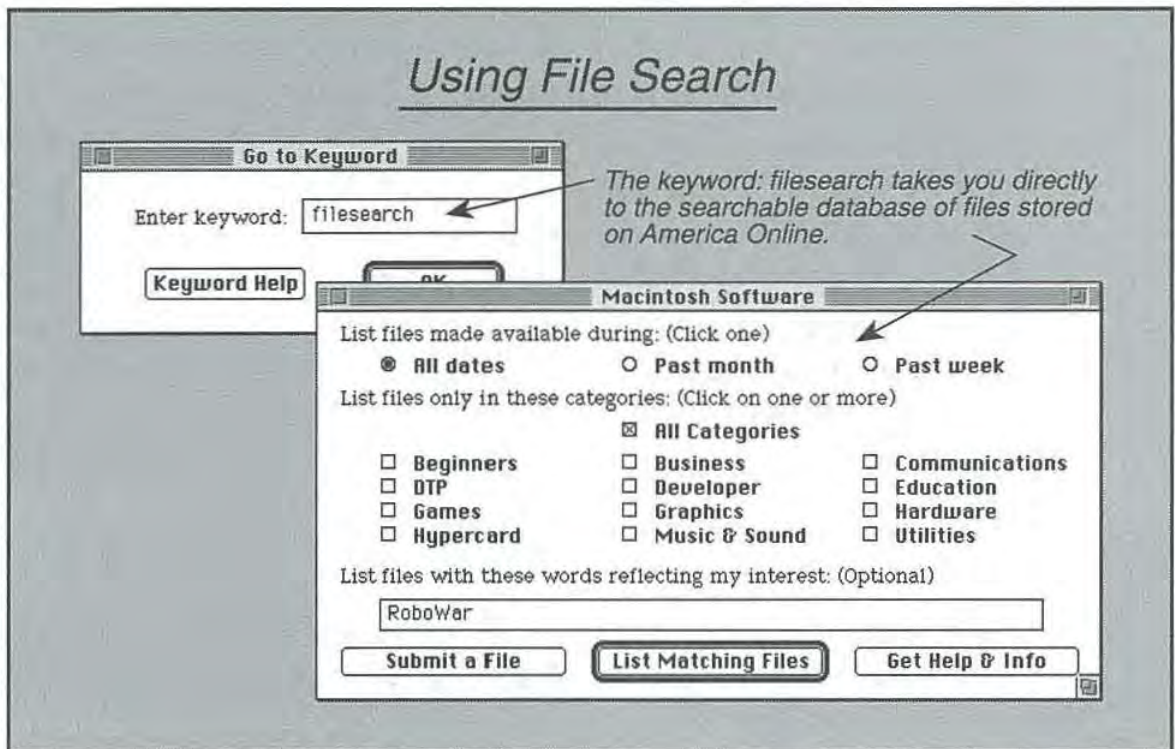


Finding a File

Before you can download a file, you've got to find it. This could be a horrendous task were it not for AOL's searchable database of online files. The database is only a keyword away.

- ▲ Begin by typing Command-K (for keyword) and entering the keyword FileSearch (Figure 5-10). There are lots of other ways to find files for downloading on AOL, but this is the best.

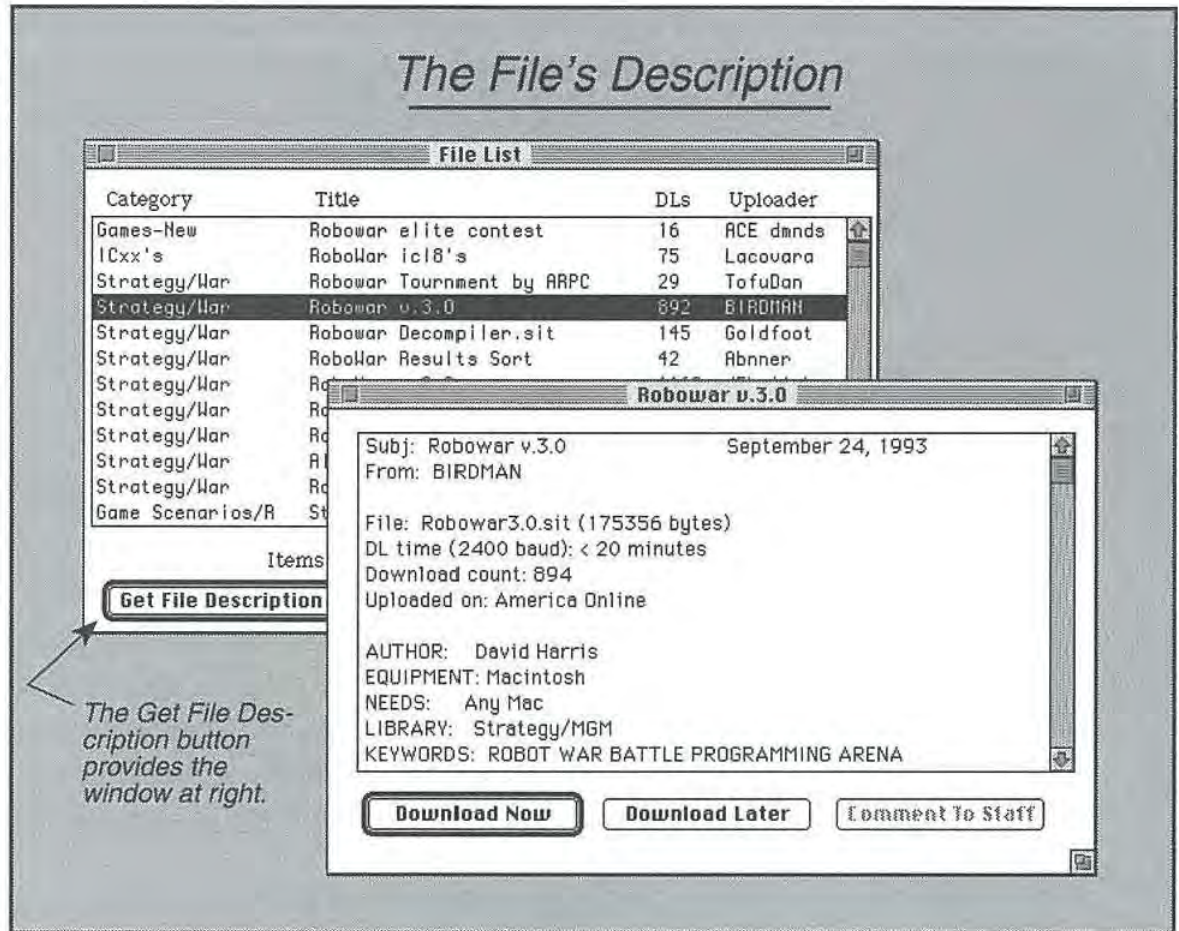
Figure 5-10: The keyword FileSearch takes you directly to a database of files stored on America Online. There, criteria can be entered as described in the text.



- ▲ Lots of references emerge once the search is completed (Figure 5-11). *RoboWar* is a popular game. If you want to search for RoboWar, use the criteria "RoboWar AND Harris" (programmer David Harris wrote the game). That will filter out most of the supporting RoboWar files.



Figure 5-11: I can read a file's description before I download it.



- ▲ When I click the Get File Description button, AOL provides a complete description of the file (see Figure 5-11). This intermediary step is critical. There are lots of things I need to know about this file before I choose to download it.

The Online File Database

Use of the keyword FileSearch is a convenient way to search all of AOL's libraries with one command. The keyword cuts across forums and departments to provide access to all the files currently available online. This method also assigns the file-searching task to the host computer rather than to your Mac, and the host computer searches very quickly—rarely taking more than a few seconds to search the more than 60,000 files available.

Look again at the Macintosh Software dialog box pictured in Figure 5-10. Two categories of check boxes are provided, allowing you to specify only those files that have recently been uploaded (the “past week” option is great for finding only new files), or only those files that fit certain criteria.



More important, a text box is also available within the Macintosh Software dialog box. Here you can specify your own criteria. Words entered here are matched against key search words appearing in the following areas:

- ▲ The person who uploaded the file.
- ▲ The file's name.
- ▲ The subject line.
- ▲ Keywords assigned to the file.

There are three special words you can use in a match phrase: *and*, *or* and *not*. Each of these words modifies how the next word in the phrase is used. I might receive dozens of matches to the search phrase "clock," most of which would be clock graphics, not desk accessories. The search phrase "clock *and* DA," on the other hand, narrows the search. (The *and* modifier is the default. By the way, whenever more than one word appears in a search phrase, AOL assumes there's an *and* between them. Thus the phrase "clock and DA" is the same as the phrase "clock DA.")

Perhaps I want a calendar as well as a clock. Here's where the *or* modifier comes in. The phrase "clock *or* calendar" finds either one.

The *not* modifier excludes material matching the following criterion and narrows the search. The phrase "clock *not* graphics" would provide a listing of all clock files that aren't graphics.

Combining modifiers can be unclear. The phrase "clock or calendar and DA" is ambiguous. Do I mean "clock, or calendar and DA," or do I mean "clock or calendar, and DA?" The solution is found in the use of parentheses. The phrase "(clock or calendar) and DA" says "look for a clock or a calendar, excluding everything but desk accessories from either category." It pays to be specific.

- ▲ When the File Search dialog box opens, I enter my criterion: "RoboWar" (refer to Figure 5-10). In this case, I know the name of the file I want to find. That's not always the case, and AOL can accept myriad search criteria to deal with the alternatives.



Reading a File Description

Let's look at RoboWar's file description in its entirety (Figure 5-12).

Figure 5-12: A wealth of information is found in file descriptions.

```

Subj: Robowar v.3.0                September 24, 1993
From: BIRDMAN

File: Robowar3.0.sit (175356 bytes)
DL time (2400 baud): < 20 minutes
Download count: 894
Uploaded on: America Online

AUTHOR: David Harris
EQUIPMENT: Macintosh
NEEDS: Any Mac
LIBRARY: Strategy/MGM
KEYWORDS: ROBOT WAR BATTLE PROGRAMMING ARENA
-----

RoboWar 3.0 Instructions
c 1993 David Harris

I. Introduction

Welcome to RoboWar. In this game, you will pit armored robots against each other in
gladitorial combat or build your own robots to vie for championship in the arena! Only
clever design and skillful implementation will bring your robot to the top. May victory
go to the strongest!

Features of RoboWar include animated combat, sound effects, a unique program-
ming language (RoboTalk) with an assembler and interpreter, color graphics on Macs
with color monitors, and a complete robot development factory with a Drafting Board,
Hardware Store, Icon Editor, and Recording Studio.

+++++
Found virus free using CP AntiVirus (w/ 22 Apr 93 Sig) - AFL Rod

```

- 🔍 The Subject, From and File lines are all searchable criteria. If I wanted to see all the files submitted by Birdman, I could specify "Birdman" in the search phrase pictured in Figure 5-11. This is especially valuable when you want to find all the files submitted by your favorite graphic artist. Note that the File line not only includes the file's name, but its version number and size as well.
- 🔍 The file date is used when you specify "Past month" or "Past week" in the Macintosh Software dialog box.



- ▲ The download time is AOL's best guess as to how long it will take to download the file. This time is estimated based on the baud rate at which you're currently connected. If you're connected at 9600 baud, the estimate is based on that baud rate. *This number is only an estimate.* If you signed on during a peak usage period (around 9 P.M., Eastern time, is a peak usage period), this number might be slightly optimistic. If you're signed on at 4 A.M., this number will be pessimistic. I downloaded *RoboWar*, which AOL estimates as a 20-minute download, in 17 minutes during a mid-morning session at 2400 baud.
- ▲ The download count is a rough indication of the file's popularity. While this might not be too significant for a new posting like *RoboWar 3.0* (at least it was new at the time I downloaded it), it's an indication of the popularity of files that have been around for a while. If you're looking for a graphic of a cat, for instance, and 40 files match your search criteria, you might let the number of downloads (review Figure 5-11) direct you. Often, however, the number of downloads is more reflective of the catchiness of a file's name or description than of its content.
- ▲ The Equipment and Needs lines are critical: If your Mac isn't up to the task, or if you need special software, it's nice to know *before* you download the file. For instance, you will need System 7 (or later), a movie player and the QuickTime Extension to view any of the scores of QuickTime movies posted on AOL, and the Equipment and Needs lines inform you of this.
- ▲ Keywords are those that provide matches when you enter your own search criteria. Read these. They offer valuable insight as to how to word your search phrases. *Note:* In this context, a keyword is a word assigned to a shareware file that is used to help categorize and describe it for easy search and retrieval. These are separate from and can't be used by AOL's navigational keyword function (accessed by typing Command-K or choosing Keyword from the Go To menu), which lets you move quickly from one place in AOL to another.



- ▲ The description itself is provided by the person who uploaded the file. RoboWar's description, for instance, indicates that the game includes sound, graphics, a programming language and more. (It *doesn't* indicate that RoboWar also includes a complete user's manual, which appears as part of the program's extensive help files.)
- ▲ Before being posted, each file uploaded to AOL is checked for viruses by one of the forum's personnel. File descriptions not only tell you what virus detection software was used to check the file, but also which version of that software was used.
- ▲ File descriptions can be saved for later reference. Simply choose Save from the File menu before you close the description window. America Online will ask where you want to store the description, which it will store in ASCII text format. All the text that you read on your Mac's screen is formatted this way, and it can be read off-line (after you've saved it to a separate file) on any word processor or the AOL software itself (just choose Open from AOL's File menu).



Using the Fastest Local Access Number

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, AOL employs the services of a variety of long distance services. When you first sign on to AOL, the host computer consults its database of telephone numbers in your locale and assigns one of them as your primary AOL calling number. It will also assign you an alternate number in case the first number is busy or having problems.

The most effective way to judge downloading efficiency is to use a modem with indicator lights. One of them should be marked "receive data" or "RD." This light will stay continuously lit or almost so during an efficient download. Inefficient downloads are indicated when this light flashes on and off like a digital clock that needs to be set. Usually this condition is caused by a heavy load on the host computer. Calling back at a different time of day usually solves the problem.

If calling back at a different time of the day doesn't solve the problem, try the alternate number. Here's how:

- ▲ If the sign-on screen isn't showing, choose Set Up & Sign On from the Go To menu.
- ▲ Click on the button marked Setup.
- ▲ Two major segments dominate the Setup screen, marked First Choice and Second Choice. If these two numbers are rated at the same speed (9600 baud, for example), try reversing the numbers and services. *Be sure to reverse them both!* Failure to swap both numbers *and services* (if they're different, and be sure to reverse them—along with the numbers—if they are) is one of the most common errors people make when they fiddle with this screen.
- ▲ Sign on again and try out your setup.

Remember, the description's downloading time is an estimate. However, if your downloads reliably exceed this estimate, you might have a problem. If neither calling back at a different time of day nor swapping services improves your downloading time, send an e-mail message (I discuss e-mail in Chapter 4) to Customer Support. Sometimes they're aware of a service problem in your area and can set your mind at ease.

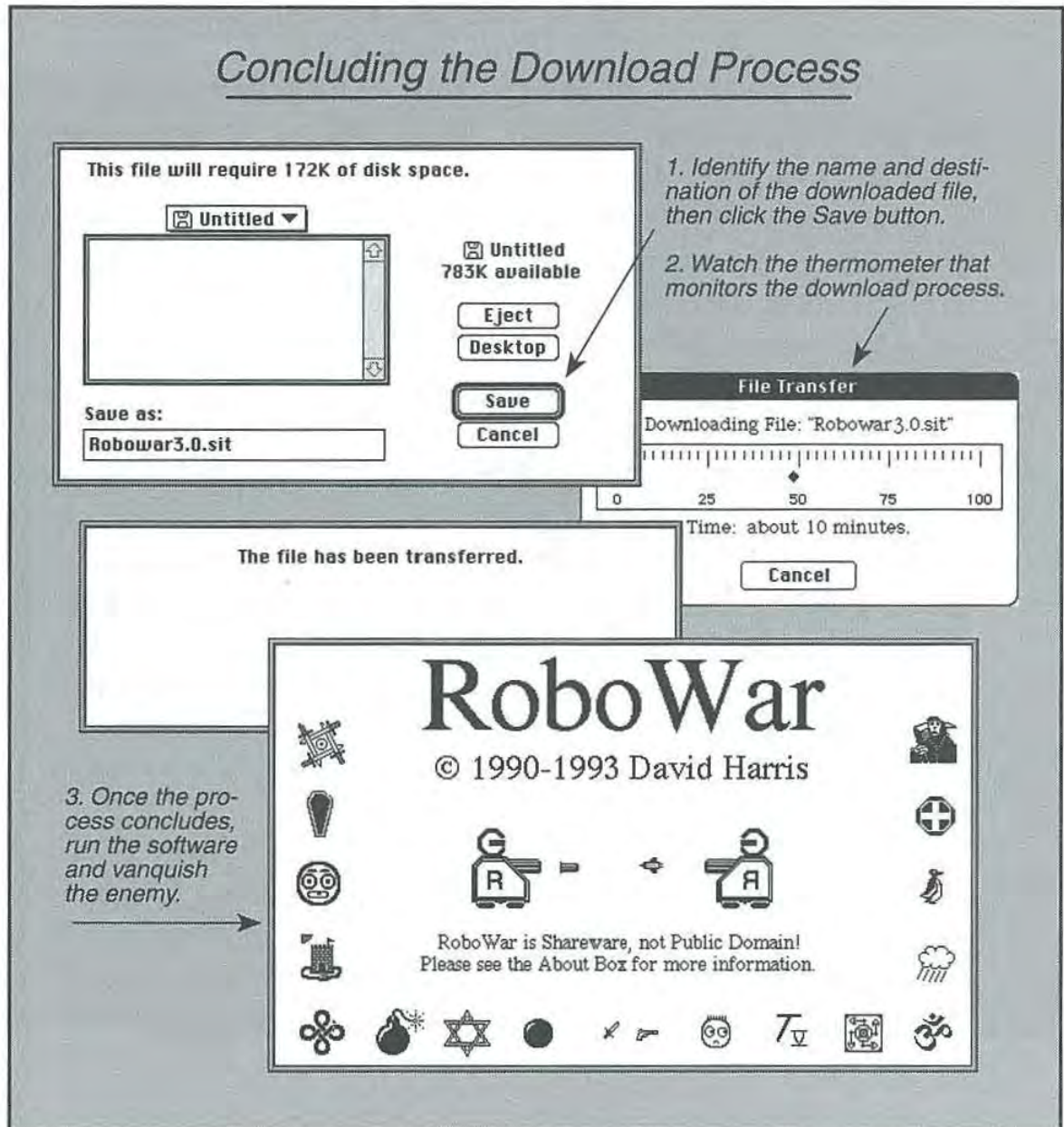
The Downloading Process

Once you've read a file's description, you might decide to download it. This is the easy part: all you have to do is click on the Download Now button. (The Download Later button is discussed in Chapter 19, "FlashSessions & the Download Manager.")



- ▲ Remember that downloading is the process of transferring a file from AOL to a disk in your computer. In other words, you're going to have to decide where to put the file. The destination can be either a hard disk or a floppy, and that's the next decision you'll be asked to make (Figure 5-13). Choose a disk and a folder, then click on the button marked Save.

Figure 5-13: The download process is automatic once you've determined the file's name and destination.





- ▲ When you click on the Save button, the downloading process progresses predictably, monitored by the onscreen thermometer pictured in Figure 5-13. When the download is completed, you'll be notified both aurally ("File's done!") and visually (see the message pictured in the third window from the top in Figure 5-13).

File Names & Destinations

Look again at Figure 5-13 and note the proposed file name. If you want to use a file name other than the one proposed, all you have to do is select the proposed name (if it isn't selected already) and start typing. I don't recommend this, unless the proposed file name conflicts with one already on your disk. The file's documentation, for instance, might refer to the file by name; if you change the name, the reference might be unclear. Forum discussions might refer to the file's original name; and if you go searching for an update to the file, you'll need to refer to it by its original name. Some programs, especially fonts, Control Panels and Extensions (most anything stored in the System Folder), require that their names not be changed for any reason. So use the original name unless you have a good reason not to.

I also recommend you download to floppy disks rather than your hard disk. Have a few formatted floppies at your side, and specify one when you encounter the dialog pictured at the top of Figure 5-13. I suggest this strategy for two reasons related to safety: (1) Downloaded files might conflict with your Mac. It's very rare, but these conflicts could corrupt the disk that contains the file. (2) Downloaded files could contain a virus. As I mentioned a moment ago, AOL's files are checked for viruses before they're posted, but new viruses are dreamed up every day, and one could conceivably sneak through. Though this potential is also remote, it's better to be safe than sorry. I'll show you how to find virus-detection software online in a moment.

Saving to floppies imposes only a slight penalty on downloading time. Though floppy disks are slower in reading and writing than hard disks, the primary limiting factor by far during the downloading process is baud rate. The additional time required to download RoboWar to a floppy—a 175k file—is about 10 seconds.



File Formats

The number of potential file formats for downloaded files is staggering. Fortunately, some standards and conventions relieve the situation.

File name extensions are the realm of DOS files (files used by IBM-PCs and clones). Nearly every DOS file name consists of up to eight characters, a period and a three-character file name extension, such as RoboWar.sit. Though this is stifling (eight characters is hardly enough for a properly descriptive file name), the three-character extension is particularly useful. All you have to do is look at a DOS file's name to see what kind of file it is. DOS file names ending in .PM5 are PageMaker files; those ending in .TXT are text files; and those ending in .TIF are TIFF graphic files.

This convention is finding its way into the Macintosh community as well, and for good reason: Unlike DOS files, Macintosh file names don't identify their formats. Though this might not seem significant when you're viewing file icons on the Mac, there are no file icons when you're reading file descriptions online. That's why most online file names include extensions, even if they're Mac files.

The chart pictured in Figure 5-14 identifies some of the common Macintosh file name extensions and their meanings. File format compatibility differs from program to program. PageMaker, for instance, reads nearly all these formats. Excel, on the other hand, can only read TXT and Excel formats. Read your software documentation to determine which formats are of use to you.



Figure 5-14: File name extensions for some of the most common Macintosh file formats you'll find on America Online.

<u><i>Filename Extensions</i></u>	
Textual formats	
TXT	Unformatted ASCII text
MW	MacWrite
DOC	Microsoft Word
Graphic formats	
TIFF	Tagged-image file format
GIF	Graphic interchange format
PAINT	MacPaint (also PNT)
PICT	Macintosh PICT
EPS	Encapsulated PostScript
Compressed formats	
SIT	Stuffit (AOL unstuffs automatically)
JPEG	Joint Photographic Experts Group
SEA	Self-Extracting Archive
ZIP	PK Zip (primarily IBM)
Other formats	
PM5	PageMaker version 5
XLS	Excel worksheet
XLC	Excel chart
QT	Macintosh QuickTime (multimedia)

File Compression & Decompression

Look again at Figure 5-14. Three compressed formats are identified there and they require further explanation.

Why compress files? There are three good reasons: (1) Compressed files are much smaller than their uncompressed counterparts and thus take significantly less time to download; (2) Compressed files require less storage on a disk; (3) Compressed files are often stored in an "archive," a collection of several files all compressed into a single file (the archive). Archives are a convenient way of grouping multiple files for storage and downloading.



Amazingly, compressed files can be as small as 20 percent of the original; yet when they're decompressed, absolutely no data is lost. I don't know how they do that. Smoke and mirrors, I suppose.

Figure 5-15: The original image on the left measures 21,394 bytes. The image on the right was compressed to 9,111 bytes (43 percent of the original), then decompressed for printing. No data was lost; both pictures are identical. (Graphic enhancement by David Palermo using Adobe PhotoShop.)



Figure 5-15 indirectly identifies a problem common to all compressed images: They're useless until they are decompressed. The compressed image in Figure 5-15 couldn't be included in the illustration until it was decompressed. In other words, you must have decompression software before you can use compressed images. That's the bad news. The good news is that you already do: It's part of the AOL software in your Macintosh.



StuffIt

A shareware program called *StuffIt* is responsible for a great deal of the file compression encountered in the Macintosh environment. StuffIt can compress (“stuff”) a single file or a multitude of files into a single file—the archive. StuffIt archives are identified by a .sit file name extension.

Like all archives, StuffIt archives must be decompressed (“unstuffed”) before use, and incredibly, that happens automatically when you use AOL. If stuffing is done with smoke and mirrors, automatic unstuffing must be done with smoke and mirrors and eyes of newt. Whatever the technique, it works, and we’re the beneficiaries.

When your AOL software downloads a file with .sit at the end of its file name, it makes a note to itself to unstuff the file immediately after you sign off. When the unstuffing process concludes, the original .sit file remains on your disk (probably in a separate folder), along with all the files (and folders, if there are any) that comprise the archive. An *unstuffed* copy of the file will also appear on your disk, ready for use.

To Stuff or Not to Stuff

The automatic unstuffing feature can be disabled if you want. As mentioned before, you might prefer to download to a floppy disk rather than your hard disk. Automatic unstuffing might create files that exceed the floppy’s capacity. To avoid that problem, you can override automatic unstuffing and do it yourself later. To disable automatic unstuffing, choose Preferences from the Members menu, then choose Downloading Preferences. You can also use the same command to configure your Mac to automatically delete .sit (stuffed) files after they’re unstuffed. Preferences are discussed in Appendix E.

The Preferences command also allows you to configure AOL’s software to automatically delete the original archive. Though you might want to activate this preference in deference to disk space, I recommend leaving it turned off. Once the download is complete (and once the AOL software has decompressed it), copy the archive to a floppy and store the floppy somewhere, *then* delete the archive from the disk to which it was downloaded. This strategy provides an archived backup of your downloaded data, ready for recovery should something catastrophic happen to the working copy on your Mac.



America Online not only gives you the unstuffing part of StuffIt, it gives you the stuffing part as well. You can use your AOL software to unstuff any file with the .sit file name extension: Just choose Open from AOL's File menu, find the file on your disk, and "open" it. If you want to stuff your own files, follow the directions in Chapter 4 that describe attaching files to e-mail. You can do this while you're off-line. It makes no difference who you identify as the e-mail recipient, because after AOL stuffs the file, simply *don't send the mail* (just close its window and say No when AOL asks you if you want to save it).

You're also welcome to acquire a copy of StuffIt for yourself. It's available online: Use the keyword FileSearch, then search for "StuffIt." You'll find a number of files meeting the criteria; the one you want is named *StuffIt Lite*. StuffIt Lite is shareware: If you like the program, pay the person who wrote it and you can use it indefinitely with a clear conscience.

A more elaborate version of StuffIt—StuffIt Deluxe—is available commercially from Aladdin Systems, Inc. StuffIt Deluxe offers more features and better support, but StuffIt Lite remains available as shareware. It's nice to have the choice.



Raymond Lau

StuffIt author Raymond Lau wrote the program in 1987 when he was 16 years old. Ray writes, "A friend, who had both a PC and a Mac, asked me one day why, with PackIt III, then standard [for the Mac], you couldn't easily skip files when decompressing like you can with the IBM programs. StuffIt was originally written as a utility for our own use... Its name, as well as its original trash chute icon, was meant as a play on words and images."

Only Ray Lau knows how many shareware copies of StuffIt have been registered, but you can be sure that it's in the tens of thousands. Courtesy of his StuffIt royalties, Ray is now finishing up his undergraduate work at MIT, where he plans to continue graduate studies in—naturally—computer science.



Compact Pro

This wouldn't be a democracy without competition, and StuffIt's primary shareware competition is *Compact Pro*, by Bill Goodman. Compact Pro archives can span multiple floppies (making it an effective alternative to backup software) and support data encryption (in the versions distributed in North America). If you're going to invest in compression software for the Macintosh, don't neglect to include this software in your library.

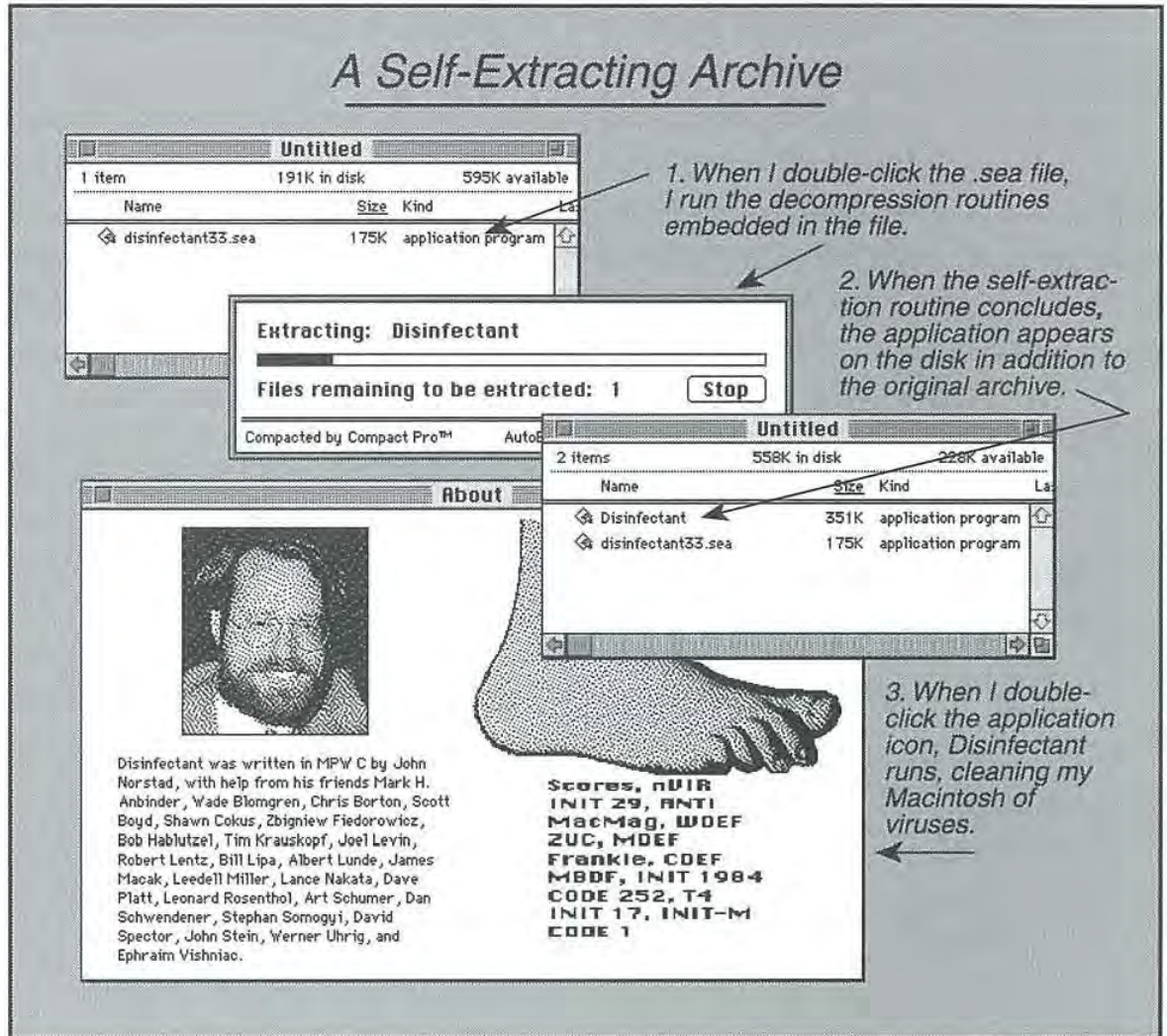
Self-Extracting Archives

There are other forms of file compression, the most common of which is the *self-extracting archive*. A prime example of a self-extracting archive is *Disinfectant*, by John Norstad. Disinfectant is virus protection freeware, intended to detect and (optionally) disinfect your Mac of any computer viruses. You should have this software. To locate it online, use the keywords File Search, then the criterion Disinfectant. Once you have it, use it.

Look at the top window in Figure 5-16. I've just downloaded Disinfectant33.sea to a blank floppy disk and you're seeing that disk's window. Note that the file name concludes with the .sea extension. Files with this extension are self-extracting archives. Rather than depend on software on your disk for decompression, .sea files decompress themselves. Disinfectant uses Compact Pro for this; others use StuffIt. Either brand of compression software can be used to create a self-extracting archive. Normally, AOL's software will automatically decompress .sea files at sign-off. If it doesn't, all you have to do is double-click the .sea file's icon to decompress it manually.



Figure 5-16: The Disinfectant self-extracting archive decompresses itself when I double-click its icon. The decompression software is embedded in the archive; no local decompression software is required.



Note the two Untitled windows pictured in Figure 5-16. The top one shows a single file—the archive Disinfectant33.sea—on my floppy. After the archive is decompressed, two files appear on the same floppy: the original (compressed) archive and the (decompressed) Disinfectant application. Note the *size* of the files pictured in Figure 5-16. The original archive measures 175k. The decompressed Disinfectant application measures 351k, more than twice the size of its original archive.

PKZIP

While StuffIt is the file compression standard for Macintoshes, a program called PKZIP is the standard for IBM-PCs and clones. Instead of being stuffed and unstuffed, .zip files are “zipped” and “unzipped.” A number of files that are suitable for use on either platform—graphics, mostly—were originally constructed on a PC and are zipped rather than stuffed. (This is beginning to sound like a recipe for baked turkey:



“First stuff, then zip the carcass, then bake at 350 degrees for four hours....”)

Zippered files won't decompress themselves automatically, nor are they self-extracting archives. You have to unzip them before you can use them. Amazingly, the Mac AOL software can probably do that. Just choose Open from the File menu, find the zipped file on your disk, and double-click its file name. Not all zip files decompress this way, but most do.

JPEG

The newcomer on the block of graphics file compression formats is JPEG, formulated by the Joint Photographic Experts Group to establish a “lossy” compression standard. All of the other file compression methods I have mentioned are “loss-less,” meaning no loss in information is encountered in the compression process. *Lossy* formats lose some data in the compression process, which is never regained.

Lossy compression would never do for text: dropping a character or two here and there would be catastrophic. On the other hand, lossy compression for bit-mapped graphics (the kind produced by scanners, in particular) isn't much of a problem. After all, who will notice of a bit of information $\frac{1}{300}$ inch across is light blue or dark blue? In fact, most files subjected to lossy compression techniques are hard to tell from the original.

If you're willing to accept some minor data loss, you can achieve compression levels much higher than loss-less compression. While GIF compression, for example, might reduce a given file's size to 30 percent of the original, JPEG compression could reduce it to 10 percent—even less if you're willing to accept slight visible distortion.

Your AOL software will open JPEG files. Just choose Open from the File menu. It will save graphics files in this format too (but read the sidebar).



Once Is Enough

Your AOL software will save graphics in the JPEG format as well as open them. Since some loss of information is involved, however, you don't want to repeatedly open, then save JPEG files. If you intend to make changes to a graphic, make them all *before* you save the graphic using the JPEG format. A JPEG save should be your last save for any particular image.



Uploading Files

With all this talk about downloading, it's easy to forget that before a file can be *downloaded*, it first must be *uploaded*. Pursuant to its community spirit, AOL depends on its members for most of its files—members like you and me. Uploading isn't the exclusive realm of AOL employees and forum staff, nor is it that of the supernerds. Most of the files you can download from AOL—I'd guess over 90 percent—have been uploaded from members, using Macintoshes just like yours.

Earlier I defined downloading as "the process of transferring a file from AOL's host computer to a disk on your computer." Uploading is just the reverse: the process of transferring a file from a disk on your computer to AOL's host computer. Once received, it's checked for viruses and the quality of its content, then posted. The process rarely takes more than a day: Upload a file on Monday and you'll probably see it available for downloading Tuesday morning.

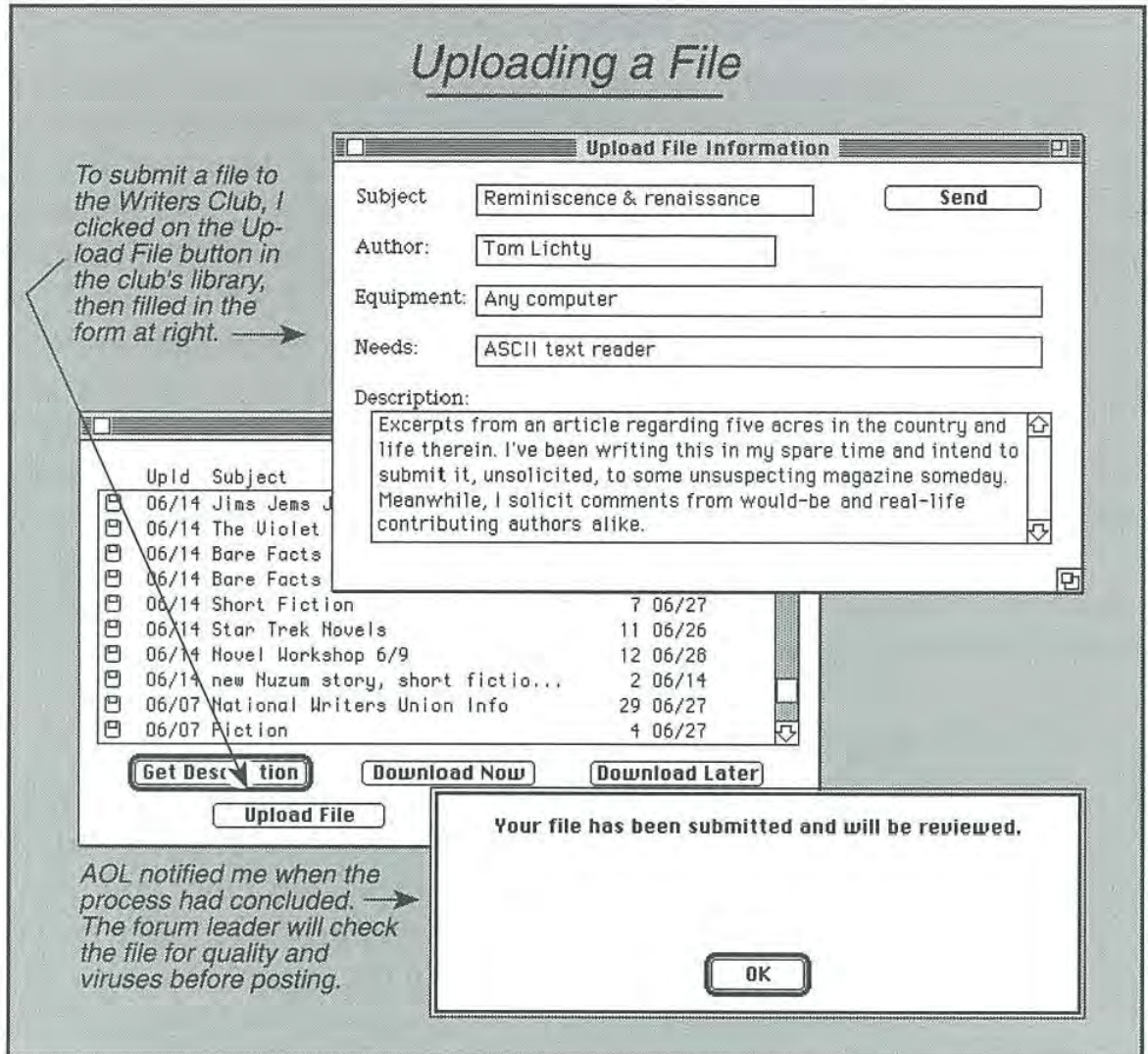
The Uploading Process

Begin the uploading process by visiting the forum where your file seems to fit. If it's a graphic, post it in the Graphic Arts & CAD Forum. If it's poetry, post it on the Writers Club. Once you're in the forum, select the library that's the most appropriate place for your file (if there's more than one library in the forum) and click on the Upload File button. (Some forums have an icon marked Submit a File; use this icon if it's available.)

Recently, I uploaded a magazine article to the Writers Club. When I clicked on its Upload button, I received the Upload File Information form pictured in Figure 5-17. You'll encounter this form every time you upload a file to AOL.



Figure 5-17: You'll be asked to fill out the Upload File Information form for every file you upload to America Online.



The Upload File Information Form

All too often, uploaders fail to complete the Upload File Information form adequately. After all, this form "sells" your file to other members, and what you have to say about it determines whether a member will take the time to download it. Here are some hints for creating accurate, useful and compelling descriptions of files you upload:

- ▲ The Subject field should be (1) descriptive, and (2) catchy, in that order. Look at the window in the foreground of Figure 5-17. Do you see how the subjects are listed there? The subject line is your headline: If you want members to read your story, hook 'em with a really great subject line.



- ▲ The Equipment line should identify any special equipment required to access the file. A color graphic requires a color Macintosh; Mac Pluses and SEs won't do.
- ▲ The Needs line is where you specify the particular software application or program that's required to access your file. A GIF file, for instance, requires some kind of GIF conversion program.
- ▲ The Description field is where you get specific. Here you differentiate your file from others that might be similar. If you're submitting a program, you should include the version number. Be specific and persuasive: you're selling your file here. Think about what you would want to read if you were considering downloading the file. Make it sound irresistible.

If you're submitting a number of related files, or if your file's size exceeds about 20k, stuff it using StuffIt. This saves downloading time and is the polite way to offer your material. Archives should generally be smaller than 800k, so they'll fit on a single floppy disk. America Online only accepts StuffIt archives for Macintosh files. As I mentioned before, StuffIt is available online.

Concluding the Uploading Process

America Online's by-now familiar thermometer will keep you entertained while the upload is underway, followed by the dialog box pictured at the bottom of Figure 5-17.

The time spent uploading your file will be credited back to you. Though you might not see the credit before you sign off, it will appear soon thereafter. To check your billing information, click on the Departments button in the sign-on window, click on Members Online Support, click on Billing Information, then click on Check Current Bill (or simply type the keyword Billing). There you should see a note crediting your account with any time you have spent uploading files. The billing area is free, so you won't be charged for whatever time you spend online checking your account's billing information.



Tips From Tim

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned Tim Barwick, the AOL staffer charged with the responsibility of maintaining the Computing Department. A few weeks ago, I sent him a message asking if he had any tips for uploaders. His response appears below. He's quoting my questions ahead of his replies; my questions are surrounded by chevrons (<< >>).

Date: 16:58:01 EDT

From: Tim Barwick

Subj: Uploading

To: MajorTom

Tom, in answer to your uploading questions.

<<Any hints? Specifically, any hints about keywords, descriptions, titles, etc.? Any hints about file size?>>

In general, keywords, descriptions and titles will be adjusted by the online staff. They'll bring them into line with the forum's look and feel. Any tips about functionality or especially neat features are very helpful.

<<The member stuffs, right?>>

Yes the member stuffs the file before uploading. We accept both StuffIt and StuffIt Deluxe archives.

<<Once the file is sent, does the Forum Leader look it over before it's added to the library? Is this process standardized? How do you check for viruses? Do you always check for them?>>

Every file is checked for viruses before being released. The program that was used to check the file is listed at the bottom of the file description.

<<What does the uploader get out of the deal?>>

Credits [to screen names] are given for uploading. We also feature the best uploads in the Software Center so the member gets recognition from their peers of having contributed a 'top' file.

<<When are files removed? Under what conditions?>>

Files are removed when an update is issued. We'll also remove files if the uploader requests we do so. Let me know if you have any other questions on uploading, Tom.

:D-Tim



Moving On

This has been a long chapter steeped in technicalities. We've explored the largest department on the service and peeked at a few of its forums. We've downloaded files, archived files, unstuffed files and uploaded files. We've even explored criteria phrases for the searching of online databases. For making it this far, you deserve a gold star.

You also deserve a break from technicalities—a break that I offer in the next chapter. We're about to explore Today's News, another extremely effective use of the online medium.

Best of all, you won't have to wait for "film at 11," or the morning paper, or even news on the hour: AOL's news is available whenever you want it, and it's never stale. It's as current as news can be, and it's only a page away....



APPENDIX C

Modems, Localities & CCL Files

America Online's custom software is not only user-friendly, it's also modem-friendly. The first time you sign on to America Online, the software asks you several questions as part of the initial installation process. Your answers determine such things as modem speed and type, local access telephone numbers to use and so on. This information automatically configures your America Online software to connect effortlessly. However, you may need to modify this information: for example, if you change your location, upgrade your modem, or discover that your non-standard modem needs special configuration. This appendix will show you how to create and save multiple setups and how to modify your configuration. Modem files and CCL scripts as they relate to successful America Online connection are also covered.

Localities

Your America Online software allows you to create and store multiple sets of modem setup and connection information. These sets of information are called "Localities," and while they are handy for folks who move from location to location, they are also very useful for those who like to stay put. You can store configurations for different connection speeds as well as access numbers for various locations.

Think of localities as coats. If you live in a temperate region of the country, you may only own one light windbreaker. On the other hand, if you call a more diverse climate your home, you may collect an entire wardrobe of coats for any weather condition. Localities are no different: they allow you to successfully step out into the world of America Online, regardless of where you are or what modem you are using. Best of all, creating and choosing your locality before signing on is easier than purchasing and deciding which coat to wear.

New localities are simple to create. Launch the America Online software and instead of signing on as you normally would, choose New from the File menu and select Locality from the submenu to the



right. In the new, untitled Connection Settings window that appears, enter your setup information (described below in “Changing Your Setup”). When you’re finished, save your new locality by clicking the Save button in the lower right-hand corner of the window. When you’re prompted to name the locality, choose a title that reflects the function of the new information, such as “Ann Arbor” (for a different location) or “9600 Access” (for a different connection speed). To use the locality you’ve just created, click the Locality pop-up menu in your Sign On window and select it. The next time you sign on, your software will use the setup information in the chosen locality.

Changing Your Setup

To create or modify localities, you need to change your setup options. Creation is simple, as described earlier in this appendix. To modify a locality, click the Setup button in the Welcome window, then choose the locality you wish to alter from the Network and Modem Setup list. Finally, click the Setup button at the bottom of the Sign On window (see Figure C-1). In either creation or modification, your software displays a window titled “Connection Settings” with a number of options. Be sure to make a note of your current settings in case you need to return to them. You can use this screen to change any of a number of options, all described below.

Figure C-1:
Working off-line,
click the Setup
button in the Sign
On window to
access your setup
information.

The screenshot shows a window titled "Home - 9600" with a sub-window titled "Connection Settings". The window is split into two columns: "First Try" and "Second Try".

First Try:

- Connection File: SprintNet
- Connection Speed: 9600 bps
- Phone Number: 295-0337
- To reach outside line, dial 9,
- To disable call waiting, dial 1170,
- TouchTone
- Hardware Handshaking
- Connection Port: Modem Port
- Modem Type: Intel 14.4 EX

Second Try:

- Connection File: SprintNet
- Connection Speed: 2400 bps
- Phone Number: 241-0496
- To reach outside line, dial 9,
- To disable call waiting, dial 1170,
- TouchTone
- Hardware Handshaking
- Connection Port: Modem Port
- Modem Type: Intel 14.4 EX

At the bottom of the window are three buttons: "Help", "Cancel", and "Save".



Connection File

This pop-up menu is used to select which phone carrier handles your calls from the local access node to America Online's host computer. SprintNet is the most widely used carrier for America Online in the US; Datapac is used in Canada. You can use the Connection File pop-up menu to select the appropriate network as specified for your access number. (The keyword *Access*—available only when you're online—lists all of AOL's access numbers.)

Connection Speed

You'll most likely need to change only this if you get a new modem with a speed different than your usual modem, or if you're currently using a local access node that doesn't take full advantage of your modem's speed capabilities. For instance, you may use a local access number that can only handle 2400 baud. But if you later switch to a different number that can serve 9600 baud modems and you have a 9600 baud modem, you need to change the baud rate setting that your America Online software uses. Use the Connection Speed pop-up menu to set the baud rate to the highest speed your modem and node can handle.

Phone Numbers

The *First Try* and *Second Try* fields contain the phone numbers your America Online software uses to connect with the host computer. The *Second Try* number is used only if the *First Try* number is busy or does not respond properly. You will need to change these numbers if you're moving to a new area, if you're traveling or if you want to try a different local access number.

You can find local access numbers for America Online by using the keyword: *Access*. If there is only one number for an area, use that as both your *First* and *Second Try* numbers to allow for automatic redialing should the number be busy the first try. If you don't want to dial a second number, leave the *Second Try* number blank.

Tip: If you use a 9600-baud number for your *First Try*, list a slower (probably 2400 baud) number for your *Second Try*. High-speed access is occasionally capricious; 2400-baud access is not.



Another tip: In some areas you may need to dial an area code, even for a local call. If you normally need to do this when you place voice calls, you will need to do it for America Online access as well.

Note: Remember, any long-distance charges you incur reaching the America Online access number are your responsibility. They're not included as a part of your monthly America Online fee. If you have to dial the number 1 before you can reach AOL's nearest access number, you're no doubt incurring long-distance charges.

Outside Line Prefix

Some telephone systems, particularly those in hotels, offices and schools, require that you dial a "9" or other prefix to get an outside line. To enable the outside line prefix, click the check box. Enter the number you want America Online to dial; then enter a comma. The comma tells the modem to wait two seconds before dialing the next number. If it takes longer than two seconds for your phone system to access an outside line and generate a dial tone, you might want to add a second comma just to be sure.

Disable Call Waiting

When you're connected to America Online and someone tries to call you, he or she would normally get a busy signal. If you have Call Waiting, however, the caller hears a normal ring and your modem hears the beep that normally lets you know you've got a call waiting. As you can imagine, this tends to confuse your Mac (not to mention the AOL host computer). That which is a convenience for voice communications is an interference for telecommunications and will cause your modem to disconnect from America Online. To configure your software to turn off Call Waiting whenever you dial America Online (but not any other time), all you have to do is click this check box. If you use Call Waiting, you can (and should) temporarily disable it on most phone systems by entering a code such as "1170," or "*70," before dialing America Online. Be sure to include the comma after the string of numbers: it tells the modem to wait two seconds before dialing the next number. Note that the America Online software has already entered "1170," for you in the Disable Call Waiting field. If you aren't sure what numbers you should enter to disable Call Waiting, check with your local telephone company or look in the front section of your local phone book, under Call Waiting.



TouchTone

Touch-tone phones are standard equipment today in homes and hotels. However, there are still a few local phone exchanges (or homes) that do not support tone-dialing. If your America Online software seems to be having trouble when first dialing the local access number, disable the TouchTone option by clicking this box to remove the check.

Hardware Handshaking

This check box is used to turn the hardware handshaking features of your modem on or off. Hardware handshaking requires the use of a special cable. Very few modems come with a hardware handshaking cable. Hardware handshaking is necessary to fully utilize modem speeds over 9600 baud. Consult your modem manual to see if your modem supports hardware handshaking. Note that if you wish to use this option, you must check this box for both the First and Second Try numbers. Some older Macintosh modem cables cannot support hardware handshaking; if you are experiencing problems with this option enabled, turn it off.

Connection Port

This tells the software where to look for the modem's physical connection to your computer, with the default being the modem port. If you want to use a modem connected to your Mac's printer port rather than the modem port, use the Connection Port pop-up menu to make your selection. If you have and use a Geoport, the option "Geport" should appear.

Modem Type

This pop-up menu allows you to designate the type of modem you are using, enabling proper setup for connection to America Online. If your modem is not listed, you can use a generic modem (such as Hayes Basic for 2400 baud and below or Hayes Extended for faster speeds) or use a custom modem file (described below in "Modem Files").

Once you've customized your locality setup, be sure to save your changes. To save, choose Save from the File menu. However, if this locality setup includes a different modem, configuration or location than what you generally use, you may want to use Save As to give it a unique name and keep the original settings intact. (Make sure you save



the file to the Online Files folder.) Once saved, you can use your new locality setup by selecting it from your Locality pop-up menu on your Sign On window before initiating your connection.

Tip: If you use both 2400 and 9600 baud access to connect to AOL, set up a locality for each along with the appropriate numbers and even modem files, if necessary. This will allow you to choose between 2400 and 9600 baud connection before signing on at the click of the mouse.

Modem Files

For the majority of members, America Online has made it unnecessary to worry about such things as data bits, stop bits or parity. All your connection information is collected when you initially run America Online. Should you need to change your modem setup for any reason, follow the steps below:

- ▲ Click the Setup button at the bottom of the Welcome window.
- ▲ America Online's user-friendliness doesn't stop there, though. They've gone the extra step of allowing you to customize your modem setup should you need it. If you use a modem that's not included in America Online's preconfigured modem settings, you may need to create a custom modem file. A modem file is simply information that allows your modem and the America Online software to work together smoothly. It tells the modem how to set itself up for dialing out, how to place a call and how to behave once it is connected. Fortunately, you hardly ever need to alter your modem file, but the option is available on those rare occasions when it is necessary. In these cases, a number of simple solutions are available.
- ▲ If you are able to sign on, drop by the free Tech Live area online (keyword: TechLive), available both weekdays and weekends. An America Online representative will guide you through the process of configuring the software for your modem.
- ▲ If it is after hours for Tech Live (and you're able to sign on), you may be able to find a preconfigured file for your modem already available. Go to keyword HELP, enter Members' Online Support, click the Technical Help icon and then the Modem Help icon. The well-stocked Modem Drivers library is very likely to contain what



you need. If you find a file for your modem, download it to your Online Files folder. After you've downloaded the file, sign off and click Setup in the Welcome window (actually, it'll be the Goodbye window if you've just signed off) and your modem type will appear in the pop-up menu for selecting.

- ▲ If you are unable to sign on, call America Online Technical Support at 1-800-827-3338. Like the Tech Live area, this service is available seven days a week and the representatives can offer considerable guidance.
- ▲ If you are an advanced user, you can create a custom modem file suited to your own needs. Please note that even as an expert telecommunicator, you are advised to consult your modem's manual or technical support line for the features you can enable or disable before making changes. If you'd like to give this option a go, read on!

Customizing Your Modem File

To customize your modem file, choose Open from the File menu To customize your modem file, follow the steps below:

- ▲ Working off-line, choose Open from the File menu.
- ▲ Find the Online Files folder that's in your America Online folder.
- ▲ Select a pre-configured modem file from those that appear in the Online Files folder. Use the one that's closest to describing your modem make and model.
- ▲ Make a copy of this file by choosing Save As from the File menu and giving your file a distinctive name.
- ▲ You can also create a new modem file by choosing New from the File menu and selecting Modem file. Whether it's a new file or one you're about to modify, a modem-file modification form appears (see Figure C-2).



Figure C-2:
America Online
offers a built-in
editor to create or
modify a custom
modem file.

Untitled

Modem Configuration

PLEASE NOTE: This area is designed for advanced modem users only! Please consult your modem manual BEFORE making any changes. You may customize your modem configuration by editing the appropriate commands below.

Attention:

Enable Hardware Handshaking:

Initialization:

Disable Hardware Handshaking:

Configuration:

Future Use String #1:

Reset:

Future Use String #2:

Attention

This command precedes all others that are sent to your modem. Normally, this string of characters is "AT" for Hayes-compatible modems. These attention characters communicate to your modem the speed, format and parity used by your computer.

Initialization

This is only needed if you must initialize your modem into the Hayes Command Mode. This box is usually left empty.

Configuration

This command is used to optimize your modem settings for connection to America Online. This string varies, depending on which modem type you're using for your connection. New modem users can add "X4" to allow the modem to detect a busy signal quicker.

Reset

This restores your modem to the settings it was using before signing on to America Online. The character "Z" is the default for this string.

Enable Hardware Handshaking

This is used to configure the hardware handshaking features of your modem. Consult your modem's manual to see if your modem supports hardware handshaking, and which codes are to be used if it does.



Disable Hardware Handshaking

Again, consult your modem's manual to see if your modem supports hardware handshaking, and which codes are to be used if it does.

Future Use String #1 & #2

These two strings are reserved for future enhancements to the America Online software and should be left empty.

Tip: Be sure to save an unmodified copy of your modem file or make a note of the modem strings as they are before you change them. This will allow you to restore your modem file to its previous settings if need be.

Solving Common Modem Problems

Here are some common modem problems and solutions:

Modem Won't Dial

America Online's software requires echo off, verbose mode, and responses on. To verify that these are enabled, open the modem file you've designated in Setup with the Open option under the File menu. Add "Q0V1E0" to the Configuration string. If something similar is in your Configuration string, your modem file is already set correctly.

Modem Dials but Won't Connect

If your connection fails at some point between the high-pitched carrier tone and the Welcome window, or if it fails after the first thing you try to do online, flow control (XON/XOFF) is probably the culprit. Make sure that it's disabled: adding "&K0" to your Initialization string should do the trick.

Modem Disconnects on Call Waiting

Sudden disconnections can also be caused by Call Waiting. The click that indicates a call is waiting on the line sounds like a "break" (disconnect immediately) signal to the modem, which obligingly hangs up. If this is a problem, you should disable Call Waiting when you connect to America Online. You can disable it off-line by selecting the Setup button in the Sign On window and clicking in the check box marked "To disable call waiting, dial..." The input field to the right of this line contains the pulse code to disable Call Waiting, which also works for touch-tone users in most areas. In some areas, you may need to change the default of "*70," to "1170," for touch-tone use. Include a comma



after the code: it tells the modem to wait two seconds before dialing the next number. If you aren't sure what numbers you should enter to disable Call Waiting, check with your local telephone company or look in the front section of your local phone book under Call Waiting.

Modem Disconnects Frequently

If you have problems with line noise (static on your phone line while signed on to America Online), the result may be file-transfer errors, strange characters on the screen or occasional disconnections from America Online. One step you can take to cut down on line noise is to temporarily set your baud rate to a lower speed. Try the speed one step down from your current setting. You can also try another local access number (if available).

Another common cause of frequent disconnects is a phone cord with a bad connector (or jack) on one or both ends, or a faulty wall jack. If you hear lots of static when you're talking on the phone, odds are that the same amount of static (line noise) is present when you use America Online. Check with your telephone company or an electrician to find out what can be done to improve your line quality.

Modem Speaker Stays On

To disable your modem speaker, open your modem file and add "M0" (the letter M and a zero) to the Configuration string. If there are already characters present, add "M0" at the end. Alternatively, "M1" will enable the speaker until a connection is made, and "M2" will keep the speaker turned on after a connection has been established.

CCL Files

The dysfunctionally curious will note AOL's ability to save a file created with the New command as a "CCL File." A CCL file (Communication Control Language) is a modem "script" that allows your modem to talk to certain communication systems. Your America Online software comes with CCLs for networks like SprintNet, Tymnet and Datapac, enabling them to work with America Online. CCL scripts are written in a programming language and can be modified with a simple text editor. The CCLs come preconfigured and already in place; you needn't do anything to take advantage of these other than verify that the appropriate CCL for your access number is selected in the Connection File pop-up menu on the Setup screen. Additionally, it is unlikely that you will need to alter a CCL script, as modem files can handle virtually all of your needs.

APPENDIX D

On the Road

Your access to America Online need not end where your wanderlust begins. Whether you travel across the country or use your PowerBook at work and at home, AOL is only a phone call away. This appendix gives you tips for calling AOL while traveling, finding local access numbers, and signing on with a computer other than your own.

Using America Online on the Road

Using AOL when you are traveling is easy with these few preparations and helpful hints:

- ▲ Inexpensive kits are available that help in setting up your modem when traveling. It's also a good idea to travel with an extra length of standard phone line with modular (RJ-11) jacks on each end, and also a phone splitter. These items are available at many phone or electronics store.
- ▲ If you're going to be staying in a hotel, ask for a "computer-ready" room: one with an extra phone jack for your modem. If the hotel doesn't have phones set up for computer users, you can usually remove the phone cable from its phone jack and connect your modem cable.
- ▲ If you need to dial a long-distance access number and want to avoid the hotel's long-distance charges or charges on a friend's phone bill, you can use your calling card. Edit your locality setup (detailed in Appendix C) by inserting the following in the Phone Number field:

<Long distance carrier number, if needed> + 0 + <area code> + <access number> + ,, , , , + <calling card number> + PIN (personal identification number, which may be optional)

For example: 10333-0-313-665-2900,,, , , ,12312312341234#

Those five commas cause AOL to wait ten seconds while your long-distance carrier comes on the line and asks for your calling-card number.



- ▲ Note that your long-distance carrier number might be needed to override the default carrier for the phone you are calling from: AT&T is 10288 and Sprint is 10333. Call Waiting might cause problems with this procedure, so disable Call Waiting if you are having difficulties.
- ▲ Use AOL to back up your work while traveling. Send mail to yourself and attach the file you want to save. If you need to restore the file, you can read the mail and download the saved file. If you lose your work while you're on the road, or even after you return, you'll have a backup waiting online when you get home.
- ▲ In your travels, you might find yourself using AOL in places where loud sounds could be disruptive to others around you, such as a friend's guest room or a waiting room. In these situations, you can disable your AOL sounds (check your System Preferences under the Members menu) or turn your modem speaker off (refer to Chapter 20, "Ten Best," or check your modem manual).
- ▲ Look up the local access numbers (by using the keyword Access) for the area you'll be visiting. Do this before you leave: it's much easier. Create individual localities (discussed in Appendix C) for your most frequent destinations and name them appropriately. When you need to sign on you can simply select your location, say, Work, Branch Office, Home or Cottage, from the Locality pop-up menu of the Sign On window, and you're ready!

Tips for travelers and general help signing on are all available in the AOL software by selecting Help under the File menu.



Finding Local Access Numbers Off-Line

If you discover that you need a new access number while you're on the road, but you are unable to get online to search the number directory, you aren't alone. Many others have traveled down this path and a variety of options have opened up:

- ▲ Sign on with the Get Local # option in the Locality pop-up menu of the Welcome (sign-on) window. With this option enabled, AOL will automatically call a toll-free number and present you with a list of access numbers to choose from.

Note: If you are calling from a hotel and need to dial an outside line prefix, like an "8" or a "9," select that from Setup before selecting the Get Local # option. The Setup button is grayed out once the Get Local # option is selected.

- ▲ Call AOL's Customer Service Hotline at 1-800-827-6364 (in the US) or 1-703-893-6288 (from Canada or overseas), open Monday through Friday from 9 A.M. to 2 A.M. and weekends from 12 P.M. to 1 A.M. (Eastern time).
- ▲ Phone the carrier network: Tymnet can be reached at 1-800-336-0149; SprintNet at 1-800-877-5045 ext. 5, and SprintNet's automatic access number listings at 1-800-473-7983.
- ▲ If you have a fax modem or access to a fax machine, call AOL's FAXLink service at 1-800-827-5551 and request that a list of access numbers be faxed to you. An automated voice menu will guide you through the choices.
- ▲ If you're within the United States, you can connect to SprintNet's Local Access Numbers Directory with a standard telecommunications program. To access, simply dial any SprintNet node directly, and once connected type "@D" and press the Return key twice. At the @ prompt, type "c mail" and press Return, then type "PHONES" for the user name and "PHONES" again for the password. You can look up any local SprintNet number available.



Signing On as a Guest

In your travels you are likely to visit others who have AOL on their computers. While your screen names won't appear in their software, you can still use their machine to sign on with your account. Just select the "Guest" screen name from the pop-up menu of the Welcome (sign-on) window and then click the Sign On button. (The "Guest" name always appears in the list of screen names, no matter whose machine you're using or what kind of computer it is.) The software will dial the local access number and connect to AOL.

After you've made the connection, you'll see a dialog box that asks for your screen name and password. America Online will connect using your account. Charges (other than long-distance charges, if any) you accrue during the session will be billed to your account rather than your friend's.

Note: Data such as your Address Book and FlashSession information is stored locally in your AOL software rather than on the AOL host computer. As a result, you will not be able to see this information when signed on as a Guest on another computer. You are also unable to edit your screen names while signed on as a Guest.

To sign off from a Guest session, simply choose Sign Off from the Go To menu as you normally would.

Glossary

This glossary was prepared by Jennifer Watson (screen name: Jennifer) and George Louie (screen name: NumbersMan) of the America Online staff (to whom I express my heartfelt thanks for a job very well done). It's updated regularly and posted online. To find it, use the keyword FileSearch, then search with the criterion VirtualLingo.

access number — A phone number (usually local) your modem uses to access America Online. To find an access number online, go to keyword: ACCESS. If you aren't signed on to AOL, there are a number of ways to get access numbers:

- ▲ Sign on with the "New Local#" (WAOL) or "Get Local#" (Mac AOL 2.1 or higher) option in the "Set Up & Sign On" window.
- ▲ Delete all your numbers in Setup; AOL will automatically call the 800 number and let you choose from the list of access numbers.
- ▲ Phone the network: Call SprintNet at 1-800-877-5045 ext. 5 or SprintNet's automatic access number listings at 1-800-473-7983; call Tymnet at 1-800-336-0149.
- ▲ Dial up SprintNet's Local Access Numbers Directory: Using a general telecommunications program, you can call in to a SprintNet node directly. Once connected, type "@D" and hit the Enter key twice. At the @ prompt given, type "c mail" and hit Enter, then type "PHONES" for the username and "PHONES" again for the password. You can look up any local SprintNet number available.
- ▲ Call America Online's Customer Service Hotline at 1-800-827-6364 (within U.S.) or 1-703-893-6288 (from Canada or overseas), open from 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. ET, Monday through Friday and 12 noon to 1 a.m. ET on weekends.
- ▲ Call AOL's FAXLink service at 1-800-827-5551 and request that a list of access numbers be faxed to you. An automated voice menu will guide you through the choices.
- ▲ Dial up AOL's Customer Service BBS with a standard telecommunications program at 1-800-827-5808 (settings: 8 data bits, no parity, 1 stop bit, up to 14.4K).

If you don't have a local access number, read the information in the Access Number area (keyword: HELP) on how to obtain one. See also Datapac, SprintNet, Tymnet and node.



Address Book — An AOL software feature that allows you to store screen names for easy access. Your Address Book may be created, edited or used through the Address Book icon available when composing mail. You can also create or edit them with the Edit Address Book option under your Mail menu. See also e-mail and screen names.

afk — Common shorthand for “away from keyboard.” It’s most often used in chat and IMs when it’s necessary to leave the keyboard for an extended length of time. See also shorthands, abbreviations and chat.

America Online, Incorporated (AOL) — The Vienna, Virginia-based parent company of the three online services—America Online, PC-Link and Q-Link. PC-Link and Q-Link are going offline fall 1994, however. Formerly known as Quantum Computer Services and founded in 1985, AOL has grown rapidly in both size and scope. AOL has over 900,000 members and dozens of alliances with major companies. America Online’s stock exchange symbol is AMER. To contact AOL headquarters, call 1-800-827-6364. See also AOL.

analog — Information composed of continuous and varying levels of intensity, such as sound and light.

AOL — Abbreviation for America Online, Inc. Occasionally abbreviated as AO. See also America Online, Incorporated.

AOLiversary — A date celebrated yearly on which a member first became an active on America Online. Considered an accurate yardstick by some to determine their state of addiction. See AOLoholic.

AOLoholic — A member of AOL who begins to display any of the following behaviors: spending most of their free time online; thinking about AOL even when off-line (evidenced by the addition of shorthands to non-AOL writings); attempting to bring all their friends and family online; and/or thinking AOL is the best invention since the wheel. A 12-step plan is in development. Many, but not all AOLoholics, go on to become remote staff. See also member and remote staff.

archive (ARC) — (1) A file that has been compressed smaller with file compression software. See also file, file compression, PKZIP, and StuffIt. (2) A file that contains message board postings that may be of value, but have been removed from a message board due to their age, inactivity of topic, or lack of message board space. These messages are usually bundled into one document, and placed in a file library for retrieval later. See also file and library.

article — A text document intended to be read online, but may be printed or saved for later examination offline. On MacAOL, the limit is 25k; if longer it will scroll off the top of the window (the “More” feature is not available on MacAOL). See also document.



ASCII — Acronym for American Standard for Computer Information Interchange (or American Standard Code for Information Interchange). ASCII is the numeric code used to represent computer characters on computers around the world.

Ask the Staff button — See Comment to Staff button.

asynchronous — Data communication via modem of the start-stop variety where characters do not need to be transmitted constantly. Each character is transmitted as a discrete unit with its own start bit and one or more stop bits. AOL is asynchronous. See also synchronous.

attached file — A file that hitches a ride with e-mail. Be the file text, sound or pictures of your hamster “Bruno,” it is said to be attached if it has been included with the e-mail for separate downloading by the recipient (whether addressed directly, carbon copied, forwarded or blind carbon copied.) See also archive, download, e-mail and file.

auditorium — Auditoriums are specially equipped online “rooms” that allow large groups of AOL members (up to 300–500) to meet in a structured setting. Currently, there are four auditoriums: The Coliseum, a.k.a. Center Stage (for special and general events), Rotunda (for computing-related topics or computing company representatives), the Odeon (for Information Providers) and Tech Live (for questions and help on AOL — this is in the free area). The auditoriums are divided into two parts: the stage, where the emcee and the guest speaker(s) are located, and the chat rows, where the audience is located. More information on auditoriums can be found at keyword: SHOWS or ROTUNDA. See also emcee, OnlineHost, Coliseum, Odeon, Rotunda and Tech Live.

bandwidth — A measure of the amount of information that can flow through a given point at any given time. To use a popular analogy, a low bandwidth is a two-lane road while a high bandwidth is a six-lane super-highway.

baud rate — A unit for measuring the speed of data transmission. Technically baud rates refer to the number of times the communications line changes states each second. Strictly speaking, baud and bits per second (bps) are not identical measurements, but most non-technical people use the terms interchangeably. See also bps.

BBS (Bulletin Board Service) — A system offering information that can be accessed via computer, modem and phone lines. For more information online, go to keyword: BBS.

blind carbon copy (bcc) — A feature of the AOL e-mail system that allows you to send e-mail to a member or members without anyone other than you being aware of it. See also e-mail.



board — An abbreviated reference to a message board or bulletin board service (BBS). See also message board and BBS.

bps (bits per second) — A method of measuring data transmission speed. Currently, 1200, 2400 and 9600 bps are supported on AOL. 14,400 may be available in larger cities, but unreliably as it is still in testing. See also baud.

brb — Common shorthand for “be right back.” It is used by AOL members when participating in chat/conference rooms or talking in IMs (Instant Messages). See also shorthands, abbreviations and chat.

browse — To casually explore rather than examine in detail. Typically used in reference to message boards and file libraries.

btw — Common shorthand for “by the way.” It is used in IMs, chat/conference rooms, e-mail and message postings. See also shorthands, abbreviations and chat.

bulletin board — See message board and BBS.

carbon copy (cc) — A feature of the AOL e-mail system that allows you to address e-mail to a member for whom the e-mail is not directly intended or is of secondary interest. See also e-mail.

CCL (Communication Control Language) — A script that allows you to control your modem. CCL scripts are most useful when the connection process is more complicated than can be handled by a modem file. See also modem files.

Center Stage — See Coliseum.

chat — To engage in real-time communications with other members. See also Instant Message, chat room, conference room and auditorium.

chat rooms — Online areas where members may meet to communicate and interact with others. There are two kinds of chat areas — public and private. Public chat areas can be found in the People Connection area (keyword: PEOPLE) or in the many forums around AOL. Public rooms may either be officially-sanctioned rooms or member-created rooms (which are listed separately). All public rooms are governed by AOL’s Terms of Service (TOS) and are open to anyone interested. See also private room, chat, host, Guide, TOS and People Connection.

chat sounds — Sounds may be played and broadcast to others in chat areas by selecting “Chat Sounds...” under the “Chat” menu. You can also play them by typing: {S <sound>} and sending it to the chat area. Be sure to type it exactly as shown and insert the exact name of the sound you wish to play where <sound> appears in the example. See also chat room and library.



CIS — Short for CompuServe Information Service. May also be abbreviated as CI\$. See also Compuserve.

client — A computer that requests information from another.

close box — The small box in the upper-left corner of your window. Clicking on this box closes the window. Not to be confused with a shoe box, boom box or even clothes box. See also window.

club — See forum.

Coliseum — Previously known as Center Stage, The Coliseum is an auditorium located in People Connection or via the keyword: SHOWS. See also auditorium and emcee.

Command key — Usually located near the Spacebar, you'll find printed on it either an open Apple symbol or a clover-leaf symbol (or both). Holding down the Command key while another key is pressed will often activate a special function. See also Option key and Open-Apple key.

Comment to Staff button — A button available in file libraries that will allow you to send a note to the managers of the library. See also download and library.

CompuServe (CIS) — A large, established commercial online service similar to America Online. While CompuServe Information Service (CIS) has more databases available, their service is priced higher and is less user-friendly than AOL. CIS is owned by H&R Block. May be referred to as "CIS" or "CI\$" in shorthand during chat.

conference room — A specific kind of chat area found in forums all around AOL where members can meet, hold conferences and interact in real-time. Conference rooms can hold up to 23 or 48 members at any one time (depending on location), and are located outside of the People Connection. See also host, moderator and protocol.

corporate staff — Members who are usually company or IP (information provider) employees and work at the corporate offices of the company. In-house AOL, Inc. staff is often referred to in this manner as well. See also in-house and IP.

CS Live — See Tech Live.

Customer Relations — America Online's Customer Relations Hotline is open from 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. Eastern time Monday through Friday, and noon to 1 a.m. on weekends. Call 1-800-827-6364 during these hours. See also Tech Live.



cyberpunk — First used to designate a body of speculative fiction literature focusing on marginalized people in technologically-enhanced cultural “systems.” Within the last few years, the mass media has used this term to categorize the denizens of cyberspace. Cyberpunks are known to cruise the information landscapes with alacrity, or lacking that, eagerness.

cyberspace — An infinite world created by our computer networks. Cyberspace is no less real than the real world—people are born, grow, learn, fall in love and die in cyberspace. These effects may or may not be carried over into the physical world. America Online is an example of cyberspace created through interaction between the energies of the members, staff and computers. See also online community.

daemon — An automatic program that performs a maintenance function on AOL. For example, a board daemon may run at 3 A.M. and clean up old posts on a message board.

database — A collection of information, stored and organized for easy searching. A database can refer to something as simple as a well-sorted filing cabinet, but today most databases reside on computers because they offer better access. See also Directory of Services, Member Directory and searchable.

Datapac — A packet-switching network operated by Bell Canada that provides local access numbers for Canadian members at an extra fee. See also packet-switching network and access number.

Delete — An AOL e-mail system feature that allows you to permanently remove a piece of mail from any and all of your mailboxes. See also e-mail and Status.

demoware (demonstration software) — These are often full-featured versions of commercial software, with the exception being that the Save or Print features are often disabled. Some demos are only functional for certain periods of time. Like shareware, demonstration software is a great way to try before you buy.

department — This is the broadest category of information into which America Online divides its material. There are 14 departments, corresponding with the departmental organization of this book.

digital — Information that is represented by two discrete states (either 1 or 0) and also referred to as binary information. Most information in the real world is not digital, but must be converted into this form to be used by computers.



Directory of Services — A searchable database that allows AOL members to quickly locate AOL's available services. This is available at keyword: SERVICES. See also database and searchable.

document — An information file, usually relating specific details on a topic. See also article and file.

DOD — Abbreviation for Data On Demand, a method of receiving artwork updates. AOL is unique in that as it grows and new areas are added, the custom artwork associated with new services and areas can be added on the fly. At the time of this writing, DODs are only available on the Mac AOL and WAOL platforms; PC/GEOS users receive artwork updates via UDOs.

download — The transfer of information stored on a remote computer to a storage device on your personal computer. This information can come from AOL via its file libraries, or from other AOL members via attached files in e-mail. See also archive, attached file, file, library, download count and download manager.

download count — The download count (often abbreviated "Cnt" in a library window) refers to the number of times that file has been downloaded. This is often used as a gauge of the file's popularity. See also file, library and download.

download manager — An AOL software feature that allows you to keep a queue of files to download at a later time. You can even set up your software to automatically sign off when your download session is complete. You can schedule your software to sign on and grab files listed in the queue at times you specify. See also download and file.

e-mail — Short for electronic mail. One of the most popular features of online services, e-mail allows you to send private communications electronically from one person to another. See also attached file, carbon copy, blind carbon copy, return receipt, Keep As New, Delete, Status, e-mail address and gateway.

e-mail address — A cyberspace mailbox. On AOL, your e-mail address is simply your screen name; for folks outside of AOL, your address is yourscreename@aol.com. For mail outgoing from AOL, check out the Internet Center (keyword: INTERNET) for more information. See also e-mail and screen name.

echo — A rare AOL system bug that rapidly repeats a person's chat over and over in a chat or conference room. Also known as a system scroll. If this occurs, you should leave the room immediately and page a Guide using keyword: GUIDEPAGER.



emcee — A member who has been trained to moderate and host events held in auditoriums. See also auditorium.

emoticons — Symbols consisting of characters found on any keyboard which are used to give and gain insight on emotional states. For example, the symbol :) is a smile — just tilt your head to the left and you'll see the : (eyes) and the) (smile). A brief list of emoticons is available at keyword: SHORTHANDS. See also shorthands and chat.

eWorld — Apple Computer's newest online service. Based on AOL's client system, eWorld is expected to be a popular service with its stylized graphics and Apple support. eWorld opened to the public on June 20, 1994.

FAQ — Short for "Frequently Asked Questions." FAQs may take the form of an informational file containing questions and answers to common concerns/issues. See also message board and library.

fax (facsimile) — A technique for sending graphical images (such as text or pictures) over phone lines. While faxes are usually sent and received with a stand-alone fax machine, faxes may also be sent to or from computers using fax software and a modem. You can also send a fax through AOL at keyword: FAX.

file — Any amount of information that is grouped together as one unit. On AOL, a file can be anything from text to sounds and can be transferred to and from your computer via AOL. See also download, library and software file.

file compression — A programming technique by which many files can be reduced in size. Files are usually compressed so that they take up less storage space, can be transferred quicker and/or can be bundled with others. See also file and download.

file name extensions — These are usually three-character codes found suffixing a file name, and are primarily used for PC files.

flame — Made popular on the Internet, this means to chat, post messages, or send e-mail about something that is considered inflammatory by other members, and may cause fires among those who read and respond to it. Harassment and vulgarity are not allowed on America Online, and if you see this occurring, you may report the occurrence at keyword: TOS. See also chat, message board, e-mail and TOS.

flashmail — On the Mac, this is a feature of the AOL software that allows you to save your outgoing e-mail to disk to send at a later time, or save your incoming e-mail so you can look at it later, online or off-line. These e-mails are stored in your flashbox, and the outgoing files are sent with FlashSessions. See also e-mail.



folder — Groupings of messages by topic within message boards are termed “folders” on America Online. See also message and message boards.

form — A window for an area online—usually comprised of a text field, a list box (scrollable), and one or more icons. See also icon and window.

forum — A place online where members with similar interests may find valuable information, exchange ideas, share files and get help on a particular area of interest. Forums (also known simply as areas or clubs) are found everywhere online, represent almost every interest under the sun, and usually offer message boards, articles, chat rooms and libraries, all organized and accessible by a keyword. Forums are moderated by forum hosts or forum leaders. See also form and keyword.

freeware — A file that is completely free and often made available in libraries of online services like AOL for downloading. Unlike public domain files, you are not able to modify it and the author retains the copyright. Since the author or programmer usually posts freeware and the user downloads it, distribution is direct and nearly without cost. See also file, shareware and public domain.

gateway — A link to another service, such as the Internet, EAASY SABRE or StockLink. Gateways allow members to access these independent services through AOL. See also Internet.

GIF (Graphic Interchange Format) — A type of graphic file that can be read by most platforms; the electronic version of photographs. GIFs can be viewed with a GIF viewer utility, which are located at keyword: GALLERY.

Gopher — A feature of the Internet that allows you to browse huge amounts of information. The term implies that it will “go-pher” you to retrieve information. It also refers to the way in which you “tunnel” through the various menus, much like a gopher would. See also WAIS and Internet.

GUI — Graphical User Interface. Some examples of GUIs include the Mac Operating System, OS/2 and Windows. See also operating system, system, OS/2 and Windows.

Guide — Experienced AOL members who have been specially chosen and trained to help other members enjoy their time online. All on-duty Guides wear their “uniforms”—the letters “Guide” followed by a space and a two- or three-letter suffix in all caps. See also Guide Pager, Lobby and uniform.

Guide Pager — A feature of AOL that allows you to page a Guide when there is a problem in a chat or conference room. Simply go to keyword: GUIDEPAGER, and you will be presented with a simple form to complete regarding the problem. See also Guide and TOS.



hacker — Not to be confused with hamsters, hackers are self-taught computer gurus who take an unholy delight in discovering the well-hidden secrets of computer systems. Blighted by a bad reputation of late, hackers do not necessarily denote those who intend harm or damage. There are those, however, who feed upon the pain inflicted by viruses. See also virus.

hamster — Unbeknownst to most users, AOL's host computers are actually powered by these small, efficient creatures with large cheek pouches. They are notorious for being temperamental workers. When things slow down or troubles mount online, it is a sure sign that an AOL employee forgot to feed the hamsters.

help room — Online "rooms" where members can go to get live help with the AOL software/system as well as assistance in finding things online. See also Guide, Help, MHM and Tech Live.

host — (1) The AOL computer system. (2) An AOL member who facilitates discussion in chat rooms. You can find hosts all over the system, and they will often be wearing "uniforms" — letters in front of their names (usually in all caps) to designate the forum they host for. See also Guide, chat room, conference room and uniform.

hot chat — A safe, euphemistic term which means to chat about (read "flirt") and engage in the popular online dance of human attraction and consummation. Virtually, of course. And usually in private rooms or IMs.

icon — A graphic image of a recognizable thing or action that leads to somewhere or initiates a process. See also keyboard shortcuts.

ignore — (1) Chat blinders; a way of blocking a member's chat from your view in a chat/conference room window. Ignore is most useful when the chat of another member becomes disruptive in the chat room. (2) An AOL e-mail system feature that allows you to ignore mail in your New Mail box, causing it to be moved to your Old Mail box without having to read it first. See also e-mail and Status.

in-house — Used to describe those employees that actually work at AOL in Vienna, Virginia. May also be referred to as corporate staff. This is contrasted with remote staff, many of whom are actually volunteers and work from their homes. See also corporate staff and remote staff.

IP (Information Provider) — A person or party supplying material for use on AOL's services, and/or responsible for the content of an area on America Online's services. See also corporate staff and remote staff.

interactive — Having the ability to act on each another. AOL is interactive in the sense that you can send information and, based upon that, have information sent back (and vice versa). The chat rooms are an excellent example.



insertion point — The blinking vertical line in a document marking the place where text is being edited. The insertion point may be navigated through a document with either the mouse or the arrow keys.

IM (Instant Message) — AOL's equivalent of passing notes to another person during a meeting, as opposed to speaking up in the room (chat) or writing out a letter or memo (e-mail). Instant Messages (IMs) may be exchanged between two AOL members signed on at the same time and are useful for conducting conversations when a chat room isn't appropriate, available or practical.

Internet — The mother of all networks is not an online service itself, but rather serves to interconnect computer systems and networks all over the world. The Internet is managed by the National Science Foundation (NSF). AOL features an Internet Center which includes access to e-mail service to and from Internet addresses, USENET Newsgroups, and Gopher & WAIS Databases, among other features. FTP and Telnet access will be offered within 1994. AOL has even provided "Net Guides" who rove among the areas helping members out. To receive mail through the Internet gateway, you need to give others your Internet mailing address which consists of your AOL screen name (without any blank spaces) followed by the "@" symbol and "aol.com" (i.e., jennilynn@aol.com). To obtain more information about the Internet, use the keyword: INTERNET to go to the Internet Center. For information about TCP/IP access to America Online, see TCP/IP. See also gateway, gopher, newsgroups and WAIS.

Keep As New — An AOL e-mail system feature that allows you to keep mail in your New Mail box, even after you've read or ignored it. See also e-mail.

keyboard shortcuts — The AOL software provides us with keyboard command equivalents for menu selections. For example, rather than selecting "Send Instant Message" from the menu, you could type Command-I on the Mac or Open-Apple-I on the Apple II. For a complete list of these keyboard shortcuts, see the Keyboard Shortcuts Chart included as a supplement to the VirtuaLingo Glossary.

keyword — (1) A fast way to move around within America Online. To use a keyword, type Command-K on the Mac and then the keyword, followed by the Enter key. Keywords are communicated to others in a standard format: Keyword: NAME. An updated list of all public keywords is available in the AOL file libraries by searching for "keyword surf" (don't include the quotes) at keyword: FILESEARCH. (2) A single word you feel is likely to be included in any database on a particular subject. A keyword is usually a word that comes as close as possible to describing the topic or piece of information you are looking for. Many of AOL's software libraries can be searched for keywords.



library — An area online in which files may be uploaded to and downloaded from. The files may be of any type: text, graphics, software, sounds, etc. To search libraries available for your platform, go to keyword: FILESEARCH. See also file, download, upload, search and browse.

line noise — Extraneous noise on telephone lines that is often heard as clicks or static. While line noise is usually only a nuisance to voice communications, it means trouble for data being transmitted through modems. If you are having problems remaining connected, it may be the result of line noise. Signing off, redialing and getting a new connection will often help this problem.

Lobby — Often seeming more like the Grand Central Station of AOL rather than a sedate hotel foyer, the Lobby is the default chat room of the People Connection. See also chat, chat room and Guide.

LOL — Shorthand for “Laughing Out Loud,” often used in chat areas and Instant Messages. Another variation is ROFL, for “Rolling On Floor Laughing.” See also shorthands, abbreviations and chat.

lurk — To sit in a chat room or read a message board, yet contribute little or nothing at all. Hamsters are known lurkers. See also chat and conference room.

Mac AOL — The Apple Macintosh version of the AOL client software. The current version is 2.5. May also be referred to as MAOL.

macro — A “recording” of keystrokes or mouse movements/clicks on a computer that allows you to automate a task. Macros are usually created with shareware and commercial software and can be initiated with a single key.

megabyte — 1,048,576 bytes of data.

member — An AOL subscriber. The term “member” is embraced because AOLers are members of the online community. See also Online Community.

Member Directory — The database of AOL member screen names that have profiles. To be included in this database, the member only needs to have created a Member Profile. The Member Directory is located at keyword: MEMBERS. See also member, Member Profile, database and searchable.

Member Profile — A voluntary online information document that describes oneself. Name, address information, birthday, sex, marital status, hobbies, computers used, occupation and a personal quote may be provided. This is located at keyword: MEMBERS or PROFILE. See also member and Member Directory.



message — A note posted on a message board for others members to read. A message may also be referred to as a post. See also message board.

message board — An area where members can post messages to exchange information, ask a question or reply to another message. All AOL members are welcome and encouraged to post messages in message boards (or boards). Message boards are occasionally called bulletin boards. See also message, folder, thread and Message Center.

message board pointer — An automatic place-marker for message boards. AOL keeps track of the areas you have visited by date, allowing you to pick up where you left off upon your return. Once you've visited a message board, clicking on the "Find New" button will show you only the new messages that have been posted since your last visit. The pointers are updated each time you return. These pointers stay in effect for 60 days after your last visit.

Message Center — A collection of message boards in one convenient area. See also message board.

MHM (Members Helping Members) — A message board in the free area where America Online members can assist and get assistance from other members. Located at keyword: MHM.

modem — An acronym for modulator/demodulator. This is the device that translates the signals coming from your computer into a form that can be transmitted over standard telephone lines. A modem also translates incoming signals into a form that your computer can understand.

modem file — An information file which stores your modem settings for connecting to AOL. As modems differ, you often need to use a modem file configured specifically for your modem. See also CCL.

moderator — Typically a host who facilitates a discussion during a conference. The moderator usually manages protocol, if used. See also host, conference room and protocol.

MorF — Acronym for Male or Female. To ask another member their sex. This happens frequently in Lobbies and chat rooms in the People Connection, but it is considered ill-mannered by most seasoned onliners. BorG (Boy or Girl?) is another manifestation of this virus that seems to infect some members. See also Lobby, chat room and People Connection.



netiquette — ‘Net manners. Cyberspace is a subculture with norms and rules of conduct all its own—understanding of these will often make your online life more enjoyable and allow you to move through more smoothly. Online etiquette includes such things as proper capitalization (don’t use all caps unless you mean to shout). Basically, the most important rule to keep in mind is one we learned offline and in kindergarten of all places: Do unto others as you’d have them do unto you (a.k.a. The Golden Rule). See keyword: SHORTHANDS for a primer in AOL etiquette.

Network News — AOL maintenance broadcasts and feedback that are displayed in a small window. Network News can be enabled or disabled with the AOL software (select Preferences under the Members menu).

newbie — Affectionate term for a new member (under six months). The New Member Lounge in the People Connection is a popular haunt for the newly initiated.

newsgroups — Internet’s version of a public message board. Available on AOL at keyword: NEWSGROUPS. See also Internet.

node — A single computer or device accessible via a phone number and used by one or more persons to connect to a telecommunications network, such as AOL. See also packet-switching network, access number, Datapac, SprintNet and Tymnet.

Odeon — An auditorium which focuses on conferences for media providers online, such as OMNI Magazine Online or NBC Online. The Odeon is accessible through individual forums or through keyword: ODEON. See also Auditorium.

online — The condition of a computer when it is connected to another machine via modem.

online community — A group of people bound together by their shared interest or characteristic of interacting with other computer users through online services, BBSes or networks. Because of the pioneer aspects of an online community, established onliners will welcome newcomers and educate them freely, in most cases. See also cyberspace.

OnlineHost — The screen name of AOL’s host computer used to send information and usually seen in chat rooms, conference rooms and auditoriums. See also chat room, conference room and auditorium.

Open-Apple key — A special function key on the Apple II series keyboard. Usually located near the Spacebar, with an outline of the Apple Computer Logo on the key. Holding down the Open-Apple key while another key is pressed will often activate a special function. See also Command key, Option key and keyboard shortcuts.



OS (operating system) — The software that is used to control the basic functions of a computer. Operating systems are generally responsible for allocation and control of a computer's resources. Some common operating systems are: System 7, MS-DOS, UNIX, and OS/2. See also System, UNIX and Windows.

Option key — A special function key commonly found on Mac keyboards. Usually located on the bottom row of keys and labeled "Option." Holding down the Option key while another key is pressed will often activate a special function.

OS/2 — IBM's 32-bit operating system which offers a Macintosh-like interface for IBM PC and compatible machines. The current release of OS/2, version 2.1, runs Windows 3.1, Dos and OS/2 specific applications. See also operating system and Windows.

P* — shorthand for Prodigy Service. See also Prodigy Service.

packet-switching network (PSN) — The electronic networks that enable you to access a remote online service by dialing a local phone number. See also access number, node, Datapac, SprintNet and Tymnet.

palmtop — See PDA.

parental chat controls — Parental Control enables the master account holder to restrict access to certain areas and features on AOL (such as blocking IMs and rooms). It can be set for one or all screen names on the account; once Parental Control is set for a particular screen name, it is active each time that screen name signs on. Changes can be made by the master account holder at any time. To access controls, go to keyword: PARENTALCONTROL.

PDA — Short for Personal Digital Assistant. A hand-held computer that performs a variety of tasks, including personal information management.

People Connection (PC) — The AOL department dedicated to real-time chat. Many different rooms can be found here: Lobbies, officially-sanctioned rooms, member-created rooms, private rooms, the Center Stage auditorium and PC Studio. You can access this area with keyword: PEOPLE. Feel free to surf PC, but please obey hamster crossing signs. See also department, chat room.

PKZIP — A compression utility for PCs to compress one file, or multiple files, into a smaller file (called an archive), which will make for shorter up/downloading. The latest version is 2.04g. See also archive, download, file, file compression, archive and Stuffit.



post — (1) The act of putting something online, usually into a message board. (2) A message in a message board. See also message board and message.

private — The state of being in a private room. It is considered taboo by some members to be “seen” in a private room because this is often the communication channel of choice for “hot chatters.” In reality, however, private rooms are a convenient way to meet with someone when IMs would get in the way. See also private room and hot chat.

private room — A chat room which is created by a member via an option in People Connection where the name is not public knowledge.

Prodigy — An information service founded as a joint venture between IBM and Sears. It is currently one of the larger competitors that AOL faces. Prodigy is marred by continuous online advertising, screening of messages before they’re allowed to be posted, and other quirks. For all it’s drawbacks, Prodigy still has a enormous subscriber base. For those members who defected from Prodigy to AOL, there is a Prodigy Refugees Forum online (keyword: PRODIGY). See also P*.

profile — AOL allows each screen name to have a “profile” attached to it. A profile tells a bit about who you are, where you live, what your interests are — anything you want others to know about you. A profile can be created or updated at keyword: PROFILE. See also member, Member Directory and screen name.

protocol — A system used in conference rooms to keep order and facilitate a discussion. When you have a question, you type “?”, when you have a comment, you type “!” and when you are finished, you type “/ga” A queue of those waiting with questions and answers is displayed at regular points throughout the conference, and members will be invited to speak by the moderator or host. It is considered impolite and a breach of protocol to speak out of turn. See also conference room, host and moderator.

public domain — A file that’s completely free, uncopyrighted, and typically posted on services like AOL for distribution (via downloading) directly to the user. Since the producer (or programmer) usually posts this and the user downloads it, distribution is direct and nearly without cost.

punt — The act of being disconnected from AOL often as a result of difficulties at AOL or interference on your node (such as line noise). See also node and line noise.

punt pillows — Virtual “pillows” given, via chat or IMs, to cushion the posterior of a member who was punted. Often depicted as () () () () or [] [] [] [] (the harder, concrete variety). See also chat, IMs and punt.



'puter — An affectionate abbreviation for one's computer; often employed by enthusiasts and AOLoholics.

Q-Link — AOL's service for Commodore 64 and 128 users.

Q-Pons — Points Q-Link members may win through participation in special events. These may be accrued and "traded in" for free time or collectibles (5000 Q-Pons are the equivalent of one free hour of online access on Q-Link). There is no equivalent on America Online or PC-Link. See also Q-Link.

quoting — To include parts of an original message in a reply. One or two greater-than characters > is the standard method for setting off a quote from the rest of the message. They are usually placed to the left of the sentence, followed by a space, but may also be placed on the right as well.

release — To make something available to the general public, such as a file in a file library. See also file and library.

remote staff — AOL members who staff the various forums and areas. They usually work from their homes, not AOL headquarters, hence "remote." Often these are Guides, Hosts, Forum leaders/assistants/consultants, etc. See also IP, corporate staff, in-house, Guide and host.

return receipt — A feature available with the Mac AOL software that returns a piece of e-mail acknowledging that mail you sent to another AOL member (or members) has been received. To enable this function, you must check the "Return Receipt" box on the e-mail window before it is sent. See also e-mail, carbon copy, blind carbon copy and status.

revolving door — A chat or conference room has a "revolving door" when members are quickly moving in and out of the room. Lobbies and many popular chat rooms in the People Connection will often have "revolving doors." See also chat room, conference room and Lobby.

Rotunda — An auditorium that features conferences with companies or areas in the Computing & Software department. Accessible via keyword: ROTUNDA. See also auditorium.

screen name — The names—pseudonyms, more often than not—that identify AOL members online. Screen names may contain no fewer than three and no more than ten characters, must be unique, and cannot contain vulgarity or vulgar references. Also, some combinations of letters are reserved for online staff (such as "Guide" or "OMNI"). Screen names may not start with a number. See also member and e-mail address.

scroll — (1) Refers to the movement of incoming text and other information on your computer screen. See scroll bar. (2) The act of repeatedly typing similar words on screen, or spacing out the letters of a word. See keyword: TOS for more information.



scroll bar — The bar on the right hand side of a window which allows you to move the contents up and down, or on the bottom of a window for moving things to the left or right. The area on the scroll bar between the up and down arrows is shaded if there is more information than fits in the window, or white if the entire content of the window is already visible. See also scroll (1).

search — Typically used in association with libraries and other searchable databases, the term search refers to a specific exploration of files or entries themselves, rather than a causal examination done line by line. See also searchable, database, file and library.

searchable — A collection of logically related records or database files which serve as a single central reference; a searchable database accepts input and yields all matching entries containing that character string. The Members Directory is an example of a searchable database. See also search, database, Directory of Services and Members Directory.

self-extracting archive — A compressed file that contains instructions to automatically decompress itself when opened; the software that decompressed it originally is not needed. On the Mac, these files can be decompressed simply by double-clicking on the icon. Self-extracting archive files are usually identifiable by the “.sea” extension. See also file compression and Stuffit.

shareware — A fully-functional file that is distributed with the promise of “try before you buy.” Made available with the downloader’s good conscience in mind, the authors of shareware ask that if you continue to use their product, you pay the fee requested in their documentation. See also file.

ShrinkIt — A compression utility for Apple IIs to compress one or more files into a smaller file, called an archive. See also archive, file, file compression, archive, PKZIP and Stuffit.

shorthands — The collective term for the many emoticons and abbreviations used during chat. These devices were developed by members over time to give information on the writer’s emotional state when ASCII text only is available. A brief list of these is available at keyword: SHORT-HANDS. See also emoticons, abbreviations and chat.

sign-on kit — The free software, registration codes and directions for creating a new AOL account. There are a number of ways to obtain sign-on kits. Online, go to keyword: FRIEND and follow the directions there to have kit sent via snail mail. Off-line, you can always find a “free offer” card in a magazine, particularly those magazines which have online forums like



OMNI Magazine. You may also find the sign-on kits themselves bundled in one or more newsstand magazines, such as *MacWorld*, or with commercial software, modems and computers. Sign-on kits can also be ordered via phone (1-800-827-6364, ext. 7776). Of course, you can always purchase *The Official America Online Membership Kit & Tour Guide* from your local bookstore; a sign-on kit is included in the back of the book. If you simply need new AOL software but not an entirely new account, you can download the latest software for your platform at keyword: UPGRADE or use the AOL Support BBS (see the access number entry for information regarding the AOL Support BBS).

simulchat — A chat held simultaneously with a radio call-in broadcast. Online chat participants listen to the broadcast and discuss the same topics being discussed on the air. The radio broadcast takes questions and comments from the online chat as well as from callers. See also chat.

smileys — See shorthands and emoticons.

snail mail — Mail that is sent via the U.S. Postal Service. Not meant as derogatory, but to point out the difference between nearly instantaneous e-mail versus the delivery of tangible packages. See also e-mail.

snert — Acronym for Sexually Nerdishly Expressive Recidivistic Trolls. A member who is disruptive or annoying.

software file — A file available in an AOL software library. Often, a software file online is actually multiple files (a program, its documentation, etc.) which are compressed together for shorter uploading or downloading. Every file posted online for download must meet AOL's Terms of Service standards and be checked for functionality and viruses. See also archive, file, file compression, library, TOS, virus, ARC, PKZIP, ShrinkIt and StuffIt.

sounds — See chat sounds.

Spam — A luncheon meat produced by the Hormel Foods Corporation. Spam is frequently the butt of many online jokes originally due to Monty Python's use of Spam as the topic of some of their skits. Lately, Spam jokes have taken on a life of their own online and you may see references to it in chat rooms or message boards. Fortunately, hamsters consider Spam a delicacy. See chat, chat rooms and message boards.

SprintNet — Formerly known as Telenet, SprintNet is a packet-switching network that provides members with 1200, 2400 and 9600 bps local access numbers to America Online. SprintNet networks are owned and operated by US Sprint. See also packet-switching and access number.



Stuffit — A popular compression program for the Apple Macintosh currently published by Aladdin Software and written by Raymond Lau. Stuffit is the standard method of compressing Mac files for uploading to AOL's file libraries. See also archive, file compression, self-extracting archive, download and shareware.

Status (of e-mail) — An AOL feature that allows you to check if e-mail has been read yet and, if read, when. The status for an e-mail message will be either "(not yet read)," "(ignored)," or will show the precise date and time when the mail was read. See also e-mail, carbon copy, blind carbon copy and return receipt.

surf — To cruise in search of information not readily evident in the hope of discovering something new. Usually paired with another word to describe the type of information being sought.

synchronous — Data communication technique in which bits are transmitted and received at a fixed rate. Used to transmit large blocks of data over special communications lines. Much more complex than asynchronous communication, this technique has little application for most personal computer users. See also asynchronous.

sysop — Abbreviation for system operator. The individual who operates and maintains a computer service — usually including a message board, a library or collection of libraries, and a chat room. Pronounced "sis-op." See also forum.

system — Short for operating system, this refers to the software that controls the basic operations of a computer. System can also refer to the collection of components that have a functional existence when combined. Some examples of this include your computer system, the telephone system, or the AOL system. See also operating system, OS/2 and Windows.

TCP/IP — Acronym for Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol. The protocol language that Internet machines use to communicate. AOL announced that they are testing a version of the AOL client software that allows users to use TCP/IP to sign on to AOL. To get this beta software, apply at keyword: TCP on AOL, or get it from ftp.aol.com. Note that beta software is not supported by AOL's Technical Support Staff. See also Internet.

Tech Live — Also known as CS Live, this is a free area where you can ask questions of AOL staff live. The Tech Live Auditorium is open from 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday, and 12 noon to 1 a.m. Saturday and Sunday. Here you can get live help from experienced Customer Relations staff working in-house at AOL headquarters. This service is



available in the Free Area through keyword: CSLIVE. You can get to Tech Live without entering the Free Area if you are on a Mac or PC; simply go to keyword: PEOPLE, click on Rooms, go to the Members Rooms list and create a room called "Tech Live" — you'll be taken to the Tech Live auditorium. See also Customer Relations.

thread — In general terms, a discussion that travels along the same subject line. More specifically, a thread refers a group of posts in a message board under the same subject and (hopefully) topic. See also message board.

thwapp — To hit someone upside their screen name; a virtual slap. For example you may be ::thwapped:: for requesting an age/sex check in a chat room.

timeout — (1) What happens when you've got two computers connected online and one gets tired of waiting for the other (i.e., when the hourglass [PC] or beachball [Mac] cursor comes up and the "host fails to respond"). (2) The result of remaining idle for a certain amount of time while signed on to AOL. This timeout time is usually thirty minutes, but may vary with different modems. In this case, AOL's computers are tired of waiting for you. It's also protection against staying signed on all night when an AOLoholic falls asleep at the keyboard.

title bar — The portion of a window where the name of the window is displayed. On the Mac the title bar also may include the close box and the zoom box. See also close box, window and zoom box.

TOS — Short for America Online's Terms of Service—the terms of agreement everyone agrees to when registering for and becoming a member of America Online. These terms apply to all accounts on the service(s). The areas covered include General Information, Payment Information, Third Party Sales and Service, Termination Information, Disclaimer and Liability Notices, Online Conduct, America Online Software License, Copyright Notices, Information Supplied By Members, Electronic Mail, Other Provisions. You can read these terms at keyword: TOS. Also included are avenues of reporting TOS violations to AOL. See TOSAdvisor and TOS warning.

TOSAdvisor — In days of olde, this was the screen name to which all TOS violations observed by members are sent to. These days, if you feel something violates TOS, you should go to keyword: TOS to report it (with the exception of Apple and PC-Link members — they still e-mail TOSAdvisor). The Terms of Service Staff area can also be reached at keyword: PCSTUDIO > Terms of Service/Parental Controls > Write to Terms of Service Staff. See TOS, TOS warning and OSW.



TOSsable — The state of being likely to receive a TOS warning. For example, a TOSsable word is one which a TOS warning could be given to if typed online. See TOS and TOS warning.

TOS warning — An on screen warning given by a trained Guide or Host for violating AOL's Terms of Service. These warnings are reported to AOL who takes action (or not, depending on the severity of the breach). See TOS.

Tour Guide — Short for *The Official America Online Membership Kit & Tour Guide*—this book.

troll — An online wanderer that often leaves a wake of disgruntled members before crawling back under their rock. It is unclear why trolls find AOL a popular watering hole, but it could be because they consider hamsters a delicacy. See also snert.

Tymnet — A packet-switching network that provides members with 1200 and 2400 bps local access numbers to America Online. Tymnet networks are owned and operated by BT Tymnet. To find Tymnet local access numbers, go to keyword: ACCESS or call 1-800-336-0149. See also packet-switching network and access number.

typo — (1) A typographical error. (2) A dialect that many onliners have mastered with the advent of keyboards and late nights.

UDO — A method of receiving updates to the AOL software. Upon signing-on to AOL, the UDO sends all the necessary updates to your computer before you can do anything else.

uniform — The screen name that's often "worn" by a staff member, either in-house or remote, when working online. The screen name usually consists of a identifiable prefix and a personal name or initials. See also Guide and Host. Some current uniforms include:

AFL	Apple/Mac Forum Leader
AFA	Apple/Mac Forum Assistant
AFC	Apple/Mac Forum Consultant
CNR	CNN News Room staff
CSS	Company Support Staff
GLCF	Gay and Lesbian Community Forum staff
Guide	General system guide
GWRep	GeoWorks Representative
IC	Industry Connection



NPR	National Public Radio Outreach staff
OMNI	OMNI Magazine Online staff
PC	PC Forum Leader
PCA	PC Forum Assistant
PCC	PC Forum Consultant
PCW	PC World Online
PS1	PS1 Connection staff
Teacher	IES Teacher
TECHLive	Tech Live representative
VGS	Video Game Systems staff
WCC	Chicago Online/Windy City Chat staff

UNIX — An easy-to-use operating system developed by Ken Thompson, Dennis Ritchie and coworkers at Bell Laboratories. Since it also has superior capabilities as a program development system, UNIX should become even more widely used in the future. AOL does not currently have software for the UNIX platform. See also operating system.

Unsend — An AOL e-mail system feature that allows you to retrieve mail that has been sent but not yet read. See also e-mail.

upload — (1) The transfer of information from a storage device on your computer to a remote computer, such as AOL's host computer. This information may be uploaded to one of AOL's file libraries or it may be uploaded with a piece of e-mail as an attached file. See also file, file compression and library. (2) The file or information which is sent or uploaded.

virus — Computer software that has the ability to attach itself to other software or files, does so without the permission or knowledge of the user, and is generally designed with one intent—to propagate themselves. They *may* also be intentionally destructive, however not all virus damage is intentional. Some benign viruses suffer from having been poorly written and have been known to cause damage as well. Virus prevention software and information may be found at keyword: VIRUS (on the Mac platform) or keyword: MCAFEE (on the PC platform).

WAIS — (Wide Area Information Server) A database that allows you to search through huge amounts of information on the Internet, similar in some respects to a Gopher. WAIS databases are now widespread through the Internet. See also Gopher and Internet.



WAOL — The PC platform's Windows version of the AOL client software. The current version is 1.1 — rev. 38.

weeding — (Yes, that's "weeding" as in a garden of bliss.) An online wedding. Often held in the People Connection chat rooms like Romance Connection or in the LaPub. Nuptial announcements and well-wishes can be found in The Que message board at keyword: QUE.

window — A portion of the computer screen in which related information is contained, usually with a graphical border to distinguish it from the rest of the screen.

Windows — A graphical extension to the DOS operating system used on IBM PCs and compatibles. Developed by Microsoft, the Windows environment offers drop-down menus, multitasking and mouse-oriented operation. See also system and UNIX.

ZIP — see PKZIP.

zoom box — The zoom box is the small box in the upper-right corner of the window. Clicking on the zoom box will cause a reduced window to zoom up to fill the entire screen; clicking on the zoom box of a maximized window will cause it to zoom down to its reduced size.