

SECOND EDITION

THE OFFICIAL

AMERICA ONLINE[®]

for MACINTOSH MEMBERSHIP KIT & TOUR GUIDE

NEW! VERSION 2.5



Everything You Need To Begin
Enjoying The Nation's Most
Exciting Online Service

WITH DISK!

20
Hours Online
FREE!
For New Members

TOM LICHTY

Foreword by America
Online founder Steve Case

VENTANA PRESS





**The Official America Online[®]
for Macintosh[™]
Membership Kit & Tour Guide**

SECOND EDITION

Version 2.5

Tom Lichy



**VENTANA
PRESS**

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*Tom Lichty
Gresham, Oregon*

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Starting the Tour

CHAPTER 1



I'll never forget my first visit to the San Diego Zoo. I took the whole family. The cabby who drove us there told us to take the tour bus immediately upon arrival. After that, he reasoned, we would have an idea of how the zoo was organized and know what exhibits we would want to visit. We took his advice and hopped on the bus first thing.

The San Diego Zoo's buses are of the double-decker variety, and we sat on the top deck, baronially surveying the fauna below. The tour guide—wise San Diegan that he was—sat down below, out of the sun and away from the family of miscreants who shared the top deck with us, littering it with profanity, malcontent children and various artificially sweetened beverages. We never saw the tour guide, but we heard him. In anticipation of the *Odious Family Robinson*, the zoo had installed a megaphonelike loudspeaker on the top deck that immersed us in tsunamis of sound capable of drowning out not only the complaints of small children, but the bellows of elephants and screeches of orangutans alike. We left the tour at the first stop, wondering if our insurance covered auditory prosthetics.

With that preamble, allow me to welcome you to *The Official America Online Tour Guide*. I have good news: You won't encounter any orangutans, megaphones or tickets on this tour. You won't even see a bus. No signs will warn you to keep your hands and feet inside, and artificially sweetened beverages are permitted.

Frontispiece graphic: "Fantasy AOL Spheres," by Gwydian (Mike Wiseman). Use the keywords File Search and then the criterion AOLSPHER.GIF.



You can take this tour without ever leaving home or fraternizing with miscreants; and though I'm a tour guide, I'm here for your singular employ. I will endeavor to inform, entertain and enlighten—forever vigilant and always *sotto voce*. When the tour has concluded, you're welcome to explore on your own, secure in your familiarity with the territory and the attractions therein.

Best of all, the territory we're about to explore is every bit as diverse and wondrous as the San Diego Zoo. It's always at your fingertips, and about the most threatening creature you'll find here is a mouse.

What Is America Online?

This question isn't as easy as it seems. A term like "America Online" doesn't give many clues as to its composition. We can safely deduce its country of origin (it's in America, all right: Vienna, Virginia, to be exact—just outside Washington, DC; see Figure 1-1). But what's this "online" business? The word's not even in the dictionary.

Figure 1-1:
America Online
nestles snugly in
this office
building in the
Virginia forests
just outside
Washington, DC.





You can define America Online in many ways. It is, after all, a great many things. It offers abundant resources: the latest news, weather reports, stock quotes, movie and book reviews, databases to research things as diverse as wine or hardware prices, online discussions of everything from politics to system software—even a service for reserving airline tickets, rental cars and hotel rooms.

America Online (AOL) is also an electronic mail (e-mail) service. You can use AOL to exchange e-mail with nearly anyone who uses e-mail, regardless of whether they are a fellow AOL member. If they don't use e-mail, you can use AOL to send them a fax. If they don't use fax, you can use AOL to send them printed mail via the US Postal Service.

America Online is an Internet gateway. The Internet is a vast superset of AOL itself, incorporating thousands of other communications systems from around the world similar to AOL. The extent of a thousand AOLs is almost incomprehensible, but that's what the Internet is, and AOL offers an elegant way of getting there.

America Online is also a community. In Chapter 9, "Entertainment," I compare AOL to the small Oregon town where I live. People are friendly here. They say hello when they pass you on the street, they invite you to their house for a chat, and they go out of their way to be of assistance. AOL does all these things: Instant Messages allow people who are online at the same time to say hello and hold "passing on the street" conversations; Chat Rooms are electronic "rooms"—public or private—where groups of members hold real-time conversations about subjects of their choosing; and Members Helping Members is a message board where members help one another with questions regarding AOL.

But how does all this communication take place? I can recall when I bought my first CD player. It offered more features than a 1973 Cadillac, and it sounded like the Boston Symphony on the bridge of my nose.

At first I was enamored with its technology. CDs were new to me. The player's booming bass and crisp treble commanded my respect; its aurora borealis of indicator lights illuminated my curiosity, and its scores of controls rivaled those of the Starship Enterprise. In the end, however, it's the music I enjoy. Mozart, Haydn, Vivaldi—these are my companions, and I treasure their company the most.

America Online is much the same. At first, ignoring the technology is difficult, but AOL is people—and in the end, you will treasure their company the most.



I am going to pursue the definition of AOL much as one might pursue any new technological acquisition. Over the next few pages, we'll allow its technology to dazzle us, but in the end it will be the community—the people who await us on AOL—who are the true reward.

It's a Telecommunications Service

Now there's a polysyllabic mouthful: "telecommunications." As the term is used here, telecommunications refers to two-way communications via telephone lines. A phone call, in other words, is a form of telecommunicating. Telephone lines are good for things other than phone calls. Fax machines use telephone lines to transfer documents; video phones use them to transmit pictures; and *modems* use them to transfer computer data (more about modems in the next chapter). I'm not talking about expensive, dedicated telephone lines here—I'm talking about the very same telephone lines that are already in our homes and offices.

Now we're getting somewhere. If you have a computer and I have a computer and we each have modems, we can use our existing telephone lines to connect our computers to one another. Once connected this way, our computers can exchange data: text, graphics, sounds, animation—even other computer programs.

Of course, you have to be at your computer and I have to be at mine—at the same time—and we have to know how to make our computers talk to one another, and we have to check for errors encountered in the transmission, and I'm just me and you're just you, and there's only so much computer data two people can exchange with one another before the whole thing gets to be pretty dull.

What we need is a *service* that will store our data so that we don't have to be at our computers at the same time. Instead of calling your computer, I have my computer call the service and store my data and messages there. When you're ready for that data, you can instruct your computer to call the service and retrieve the data at your convenience.

As long as we're imagining a service, we might imagine it to automate all the electronic technicalities as well. If we imagine it right, the service can mediate communications between the two computers, check for errors (and fix them when they're encountered) and even dial the telephone.



And who's to say that you and I should have the service all to ourselves? We can let everyone else with a computer in on it as well, regardless of the type of computer they own. Carried to its extreme, this scenario might result in hundreds of thousands—millions, actually—of people utilizing the service, exchanging and storing thousands of computer files. Most of this data can be public rather than private, so the exchange becomes multilateral.

Which is precisely what telecommunications services—and AOL—are: a vast network of “members,” each of whom uses a computer, a modem and a telephone line to connect with a common destination—to “go online.” Members can exchange public and private files; they can send and receive e-mail; and members who are online at the same time can “chat” in real time—they can even play online games with one another.

And what does this service cost? The economies of scale allow expenses to be distributed among the members. Moreover, even though AOL is near Washington, DC, few members pay for long-distance calls. America Online has local telephone numbers in more than 800 cities in the contiguous United States. Even if you live in the sticks, chances are you can find a local number you can call, or one that's a “short” long-distance call away.

It's One Big Thunder-Lizard Computer

Another way of defining AOL is by describing its hardware. Coordinating thousands of simultaneous phone calls and storing tens of thousands of files requires one Thunder Lizard of a computer complex. No little Stegosaurus will do. We're talking Brontosaurus here, a beastie who relocates continents whenever he gets the urge to sneeze. Forget prefixes like kilo and mega. Think giga and terra. When they turn on the power to this thing, lights dim all along the Eastern seaboard.

Open Architecture

I hate to disappoint you, but America Online isn't a single Brontosaurus-sized mainframe; it is, in fact, a number of refrigerator-sized computers, each having more in common with the adaptable Velociraptor than a leviathan as benign as the Brontosaurus.



Figure 1-2: A few of the many systems that comprise the heartbeat of America Online. A number of manufacturer's products are represented here, each selected on the basis of its suitability to a specific task. The homogenization factor is open architecture, which allows all of these diverse systems to work in concert.



By employing a technique called open architecture, AOL is able to utilize hardware, software and communications systems from a variety of manufacturers, each optimized for a specific task. America Online's open architecture permits it to use the most powerful hardware running the fastest software. The open communication architecture runs on the fastest local area and the most powerful wide area networks. The open architecture is AOL's key to the scalability it needs to keep up with its meteoric growth and the unpredictable mutations of the telecommunications industry.

Common Carriers

If you wanted to send a package to a friend across the country, you could probably hop in your car and drive it there yourself. Compared to the alternatives, driving across the country would be a perilous journey and would cost a fortune.

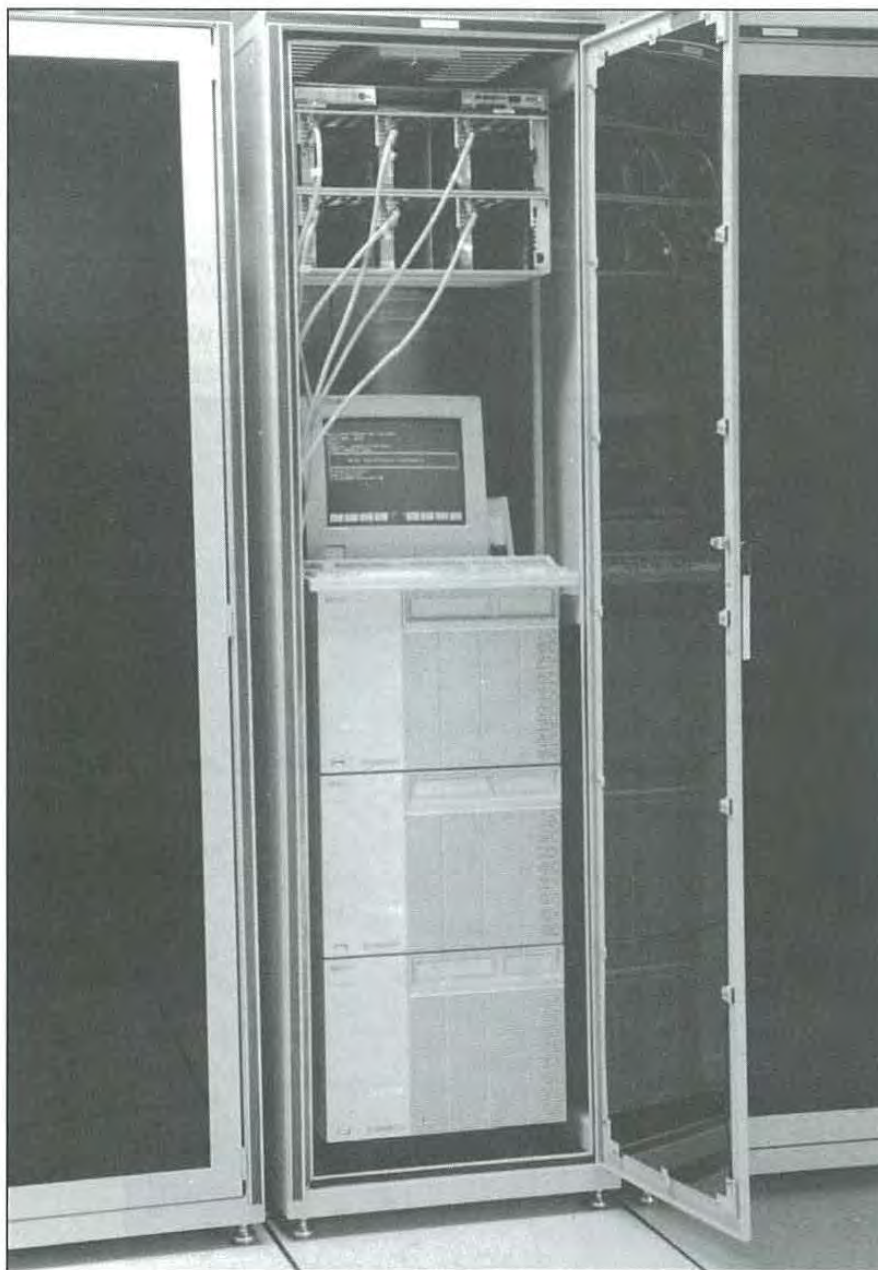
More likely, you'd hire a *common carrier*—a service such as United Parcel Service or Federal Express—to deliver the package for you. For a fraction of what it would cost you to do the job yourself, common carriers can do it more reliably, less expensively and much more conveniently.

For much the same reason, AOL hires common carriers to deliver goods to its members. And typical of AOL, it hires multiple common



carriers to ensure reliability. SprintNet, a service of US Sprint, is the common carrier AOL most often uses in the United States. (Figure 1-3 shows SprintNet equipment at AOL.) Datapac, a subsidiary of Bell Canada, serves Canadian members. These common carriers offer *nodes*—local telephone numbers—in most cities in North America. They charge AOL for phone calls (placed or received) just as Federal Express would charge you to deliver a package.

Figure 1-3:
High-speed
telecommunications
equipment in use
at America Online
Headquarters.

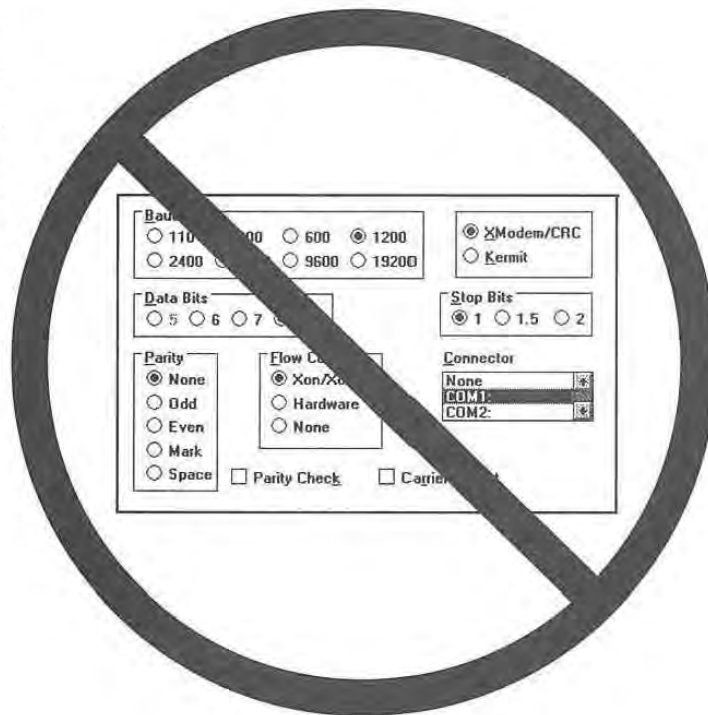




That's more like it. The software you use on your Mac to sign on to AOL more accurately represents the personality of the service than anything we've discussed so far. It makes noises, it's resplendent with windows and icons, and it automates those tasks and procedures that formerly were responsible for excluding most semi-normal people from using an online service.

Here's what I mean. Nearly every telecommunications program assumes you know how to set certain arcane but necessary attributes and protocols such as data bits, stop bits, parity or flow. Frankly, although I've used telecommunications software for years and though I have adjusted my data bits and parity, I have no idea what they are, and I have always been kind of nervous about shooting in the dark like that. America Online, on the other hand, uses its own custom software at both ends of the line. After you install the software on your Mac (a simple process I describe in the next chapter), all the technicalities are coordinated by the AOL host computer and your Mac. They simply talk things over and make adjustments as required. This is as it should be. People shouldn't be asked to do these things; that's why we have machines. America Online's software simply has no controls for setting data bits, stop bits, parity or flow (see Figure 1-5). It's all taken care of for you.

Figure 1-5:
America Online's
software never
asks you to set (or
even think about)
data bits, stop
bits, parity or flow.



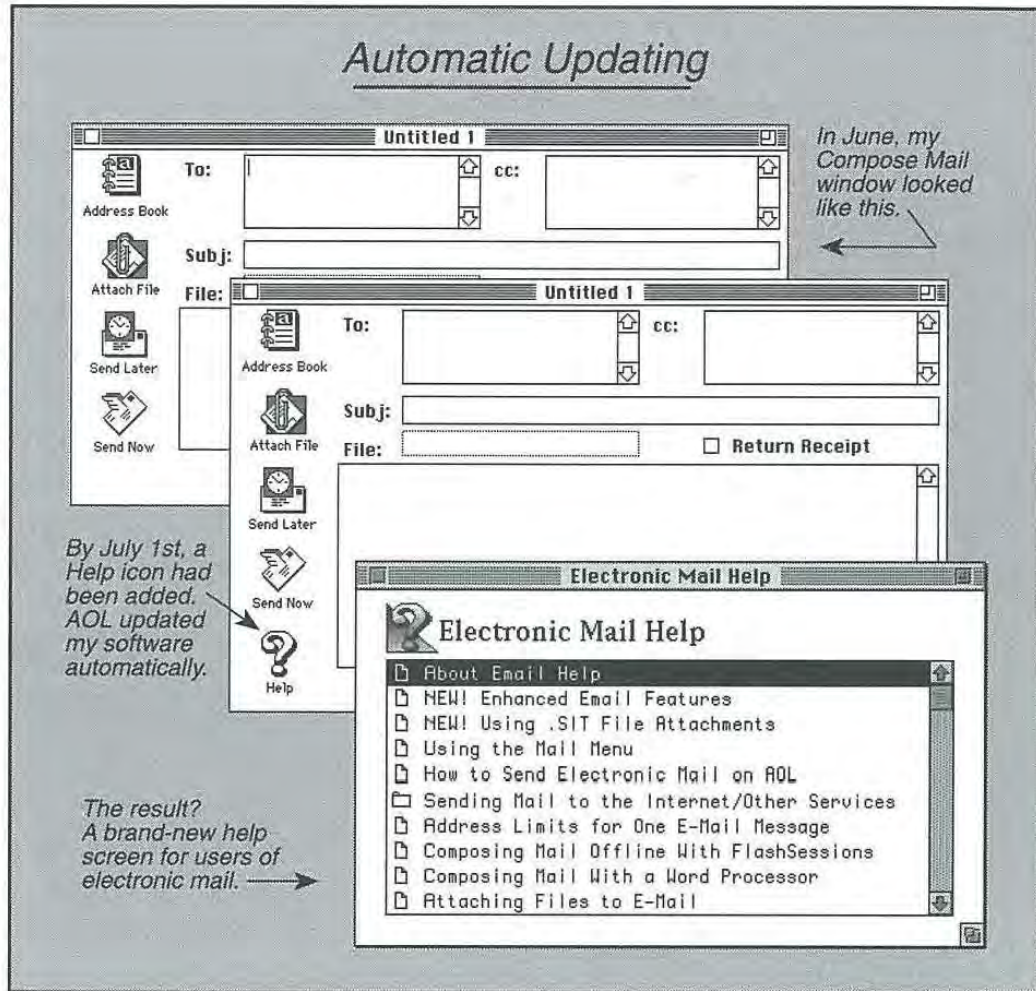


Amazingly, the software is self-configuring. Whenever you sign on, a behind-the-scenes dialog transpires between your Mac and the AOL host computer. In effect, your Mac says, "Hey! Do you have any new features I should know about?" If new features are available, your Mac requests them from the host and adds them to its version of the local software (the copy of AOL that resides on your hard drive). This capability is significant: At any point, AOL can add features to the service and incorporate them immediately. No new software releases have to be sent out. No interminable decimal places have to be added to the version number. That convenience means the AOL staff can add features whenever they please. No disk duplication and mass mailings are required. Upgrade costs to you are nonexistent, and they hardly amount to anything at AOL either. America Online's staff operates in an environment that encourages, rather than stifles, improvement. Perhaps best of all, you don't have to lift a finger to take advantage of whatever changes or additions AOL makes to its service. Just sign on as usual, and you immediately have the most recent version available. (See Figure 1-6.)

Note: I'm discussing minor upgrades here. Major upgrades—from version 1 to version 2 for example—are handled with disk duplication and mass mailings. Minor upgrades are usually handled as described above; often members aren't even aware of them when they occur.



Figure 1-6: In July 1992, midway through the first edition of this book, America Online added a help icon to the Compose Mail window. The update took place automatically and online. No disks were sent out. No costs were incurred. America Online simply got better.



We're getting closer to the mark. The phrase "user-friendly" is properly used to describe this service. America Online's Mac software is real Mac software: familiar, predictable and comfortable. The File menu says Open, Save, Close and Quit. Its windows have title bars and close boxes. It even takes advantage of all those esoteric Mac commands you've come to know, such as Copy, Cut and Paste.

Another unique aspect of the AOL for Mac software is its interface and communication strategy. Though it's highly graphical, none of those graphical elements are transferred to your Mac online. Transferring graphics online takes time—much more than transferring text, for instance—which could make the service as sluggish as a hound in July. Instead, all of AOL's graphical components are stored on your hard disk. Only text is transferred. This capability makes AOL much faster than other graphically oriented services and saves you money in connect-time charges.



Here's the point: AOL is an advanced and aggressive telecommunications service that grows daily and contains the features necessary to accommodate that growth. The software features I described previously reflect a progressive attitude, and that attitude is a better way of defining AOL.

It's a Resource

News, sports, weather—sure you can get them on radio and television, but not necessarily when you need or want them. You can get them in a newspaper, too; but it's going to cost the environment a tree or two, the pictures are fuzzy, and about all you can do with a newspaper you've read is throw it away (consult the Environmental Club—clubs are described in Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests"—for recycling information). America Online offers the news, sports and weather as well, available at your convenience and without sacrificing any trees. It's in electronic form, too; so you can file it, search it and include it in documents of your own.

This past winter, I kept tabs on China's nuclear testing in Today's News (discussed in Chapter 6), tracked the meager investments in my portfolio (discussed in Chapter 10, "Personal Finance") and monitored the progress of the Israeli/Palestinian peace accord while browsing the Newsstand (discussed in Chapter 7). I researched the purchase of a new hard disk for my computer in the Marketplace (discussed in Chapter 17) and actually bought that hard disk using Comp-U-Store. I booked both airplane and auto rentals for a trip to New Mexico using EAASY SABRE (discussed in Chapter 11, "Travel"). I constantly search the online video reviews before I rent a tape (the Entertainment Department is discussed in Chapter 9), and I check Wine & Dine Online (Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests") for recommendations before I hazard the racks of wines at the shop down the street. Past issues of *MacWorld*, *National Geographic* and *Smithsonian*, and even *CNN*, are online for my review, as is *Comptons Encyclopedia* and the *Gray Lady: the New York Times*. I recently sold my old car after consulting AutoVantage (described in Chapter 17). As a professional member of the desktop publishing community, I constantly collect graphics (AOL has thousands of files online—described in Chapter 5, "Computing"; also see Figure 1-7), fonts (see Figure 1-8) and utilities, and the Desktop Publishing Forum is one of my favorite haunts.



Figure 1-7: Just a few of the thousands of graphics available in America Online's file libraries. ("Lise2," by David Palermo; "Dragonfly," from the Graphics Forum; and "High Tech Laurel & Hardy," by Lou Moccia.)

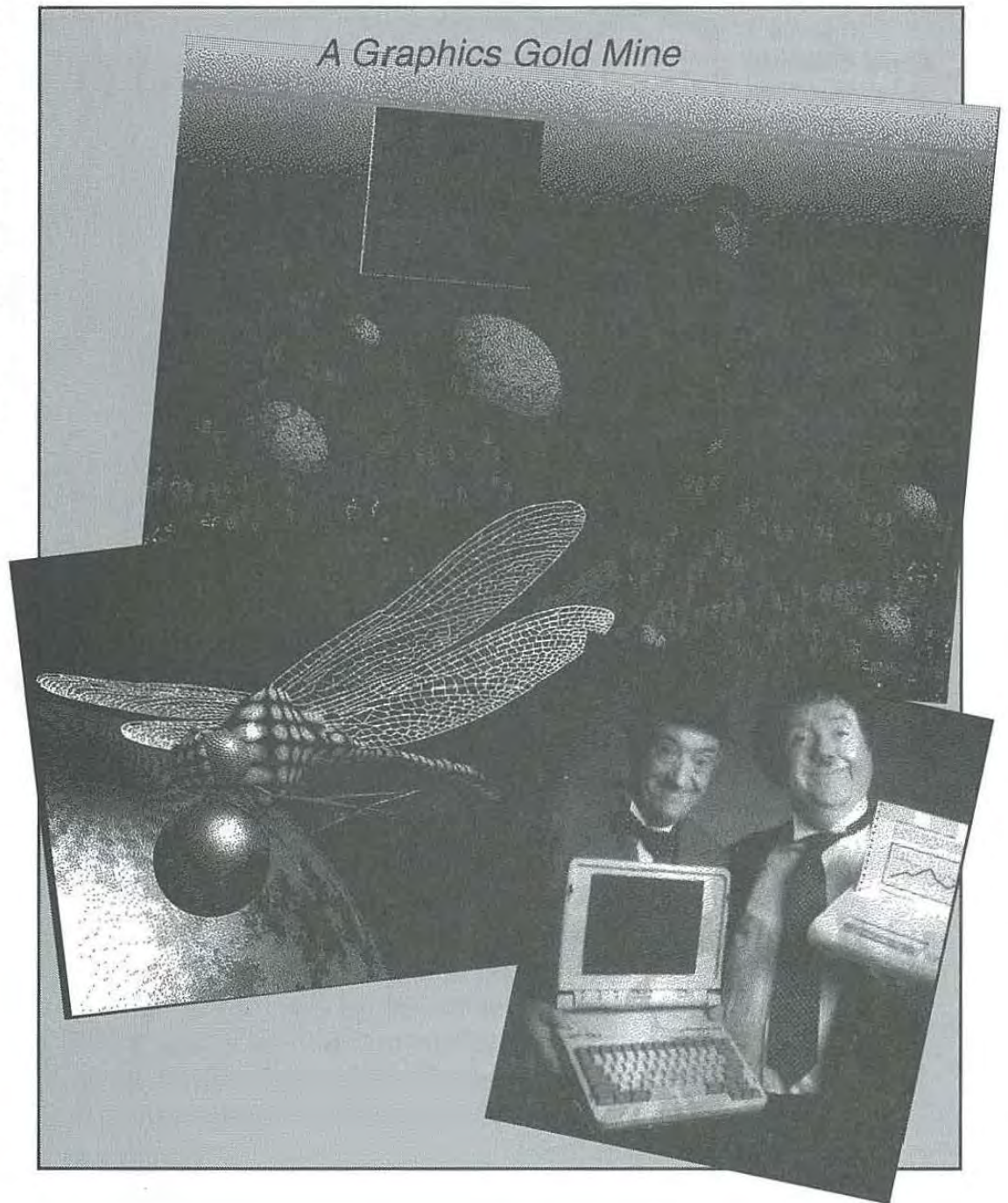
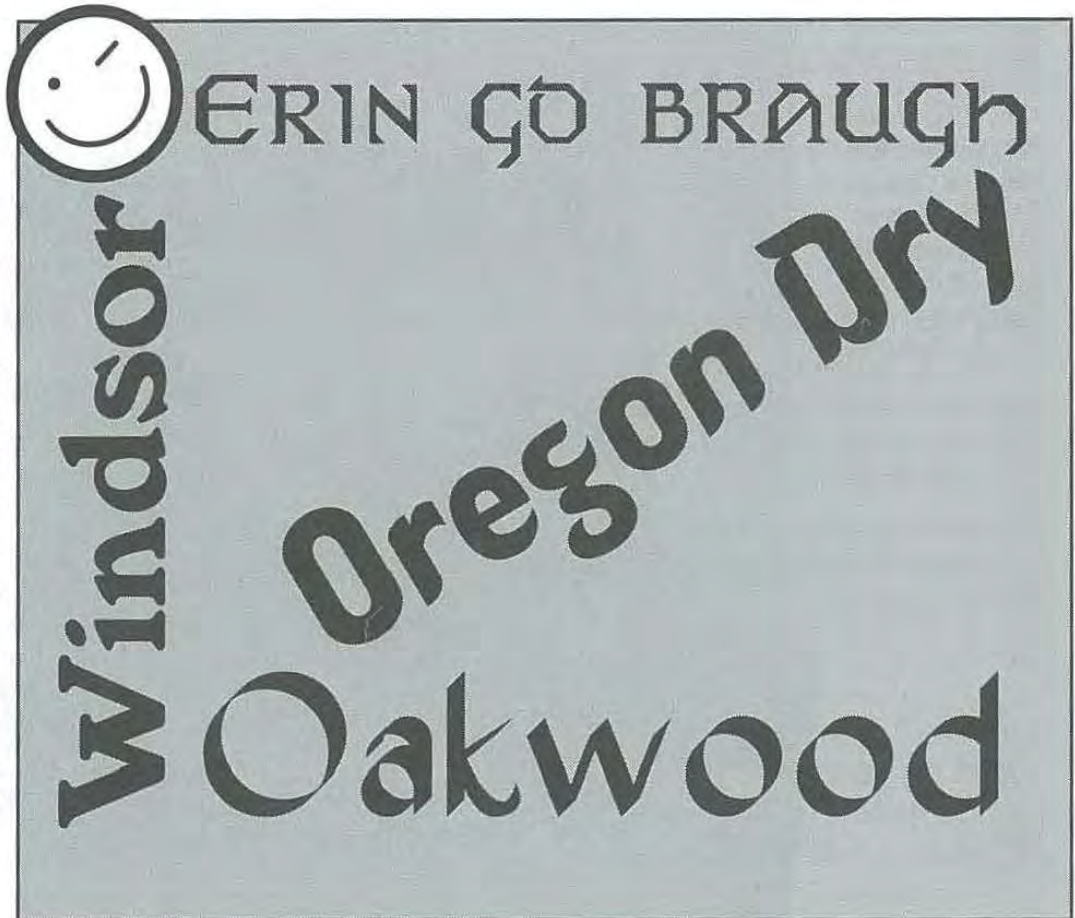




Figure 1-8: A quintet of fonts, all downloaded from the Desktop Publishing Forum. At top, *Eire* is by Paul Glomski; *Oregon Dry* is by Pat Snyder; Jim Pearson's *Oakwood ProFont* is particularly elegant; Brian Hendrix's *Windsor* is a traditional, Old World font; and Jonathan Macagba's *Smiley Face* is great for illuminating e-mail. Most are shareware and cost about \$5 each.



In other words, you could describe AOL as a resource of almost infinite potential. You don't have to drive anywhere to use it; it's continuously maintained and updated; and it's all electronic—available for any use you can imagine. Many members find the resource potential alone ample justification for signing on to AOL, but to limit your participation this way would be a disservice to AOL and to yourself. Above all, AOL is people: friends, associates, consultants—even lovers. It's a resource all right, but it's also a community, and therein lies its greatest value.


It's a Community

I've taken the easy way out. Yes, AOL is a telecommunications service. Yes, it's the host computer. Yes, it's software in your Mac; and yes, it's a resource. But that's like saying that Christmas is just another day of the year. There's much more to it than that. Christmas is reverence and good things; but for many of us, Christmas means people: family,



friends and community. What really defines AOL is its people, as well. America Online is a *community*. My dictionary defines community as, "A social group sharing common characteristics or interests," and that is the best definition I can imagine for AOL.

As members, we have common interests, we all have computers, and we love to share. *That's* what AOL is all about. After a few weeks, the novelty of interconnection and graphical images wears off. After a few weeks, we stop wondering about the host computer and data bits. After a few weeks, we all discover the true soul of AOL, and that soul is its people.



Steve Case

I have never asked AOL President Steve Case where he lives. It would surprise and disappoint me to learn that he doesn't live in the suburbs: Steve Case is a character study of the suburban next-door neighbor. He's a clean-cut, casual guy. He wears rumpled chinos, cotton sportshirts and no tie. He looks as if he's about to mow the lawn. He took me to lunch at the Ringmaster's Pub in the Barnum and Bailey building next door. (America Online's building is next door to the world headquarters of the Ringling Brothers Circus.) We had iced tea and sandwiches. That's Steve's idea of a business lunch.

Steve's personality is reflected everywhere at AOL. I've never seen a necktie or a closed office door during my visits there. More important, the people in the AOL offices reflect the spirit of community. They never use titles. No one wears ID badges, not even guests. Everyone calls everyone else by his or her first name. Conferences happen in hallways.

Steve's eyes sparkle when the conversation turns to community. He sends e-mail to every new member and hopes for a reply. He's the president of the company, yet he spends as much time conversing with members as he does with his staff. Everyone calls him Steve.

With Steve Case steering the ship, AOL remains, foremost, a community. All corporate decisions are based on that concept; every change benefits the community. That's the way Steve wants it to be. If he could have his way, he'd have us all out to Virginia for a barbecue on the green. You'd know who he was the moment you got there: he'd be the one turning burgers on the grill. You couldn't ask for a better neighbor.

When I first signed on to write this book, community was the last thing on my mind. I have been a telecommunicator for years. I thought I'd seen it all. Now, however, I spend as much of my online time corresponding with friends—new friends in every part of the coun-



try—as I do conducting research. In Chapter 4, I admit to getting despondent if I don't hear the familiar mail notification when the In the Spotlight screen comes up. Throughout this book, I'll offer little tips on how to make friends online; follow these tips, and you'll become as much a part of this community as I am.

You really couldn't do much better.

How to Use This Book

The America Online Tour Guide serves two purposes: (1) It's the official documentation for the use of America Online; and (2) it's a guidebook for the explorer. As documentation, the book should be thoroughly indexed, strictly organized and pithy. As a guide, the book should offer entertainment, insight and advice. These goals are somewhat disparate, but not necessarily incompatible.

Fortunately, the people at AOL have an altruistic attitude toward the documentation for their service. *The America Online Membership Kit & Tour Guide* is a book, not a manual. I'm an independent author, not a staff technical writer. And AOL chose a traditional publisher—Ventana Press—to produce and distribute this book; it's not an AOL production. I therefore have the autonomy and elbow room to explore the subject with you independently, thoroughly and candidly. The people at AOL are to be commended for their courage in choosing this path. It could be perilous. Confidence in their product, however, emboldens them, and rightfully so.

How to Use This Book as Documentation

As you no doubt already know, documentation can be dull. Few people take a software manual to the hammock for a lazy afternoon of reading. The universe of technical documentation is far from the universe AOL inhabits. America Online is diverse, abstract and personable—hardly documentation material. Nonetheless, I've included a number of organizational and reference tools to serve the documentation need.

Finding Answers

I want you to be able to turn to *The America Online Tour Guide* whenever you have a question about AOL. I want you to be able to find the answer to your question with a minimum of effort, no matter how many different places the subject may appear in the book. Pursuant to that, a number of tools are at your disposal:



- ▲ The *table of contents* lists titles, section heads and subheads for every chapter. When you need information on a specific subject, turn first to the table of contents. Nine times out of ten, it will be all you need.
- ▲ A thorough *index* appears at the end of the book, with references to subjects, procedures and departments. If the subject you're after doesn't appear in the table of contents, turn to the index.
- ▲ A listing of primary *keywords* is the first appendix item. Keywords are the interstate highway system at AOL. If you want to get somewhere in a hurry, use a keyword. As you discover places that appeal to you, grab your yellow pen and highlight the keyword corresponding to that location. Eventually, you'll commit a number of keywords to memory (or place them on your Go To menu, a process described in Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests"), and the keyword appendix will have served its purpose.
- ▲ A *listing of Command-key combinations* follows the keywords list. Few people memorize every Command-key combination for every program they use, but most people memorize some. If you're an occasional (or frequent) user of Command keys (or if you'd like to learn a few shortcuts that will cut down on mouse use), refer to Appendix B of the book.
- ▲ A *glossary* of terms used in the book follows the appendices. The glossary is especially thorough in its inclusion of telecommunications terminology. I may never define "parity" in the text—with AOL, you never have to bother with it—but I want you to be able to find out what it means if you're curious.

Departmental Listings

Starting with Chapter 5, each chapter explores a department available online at AOL. If Entertainment is your game (forgive the pun), read Chapter 9. If you're interested in the Computing Department, read Chapter 5. America Online is infinitely too large and diverse to explore these departments thoroughly. Instead, I've attempted to capture the personality of each department with glimpses into a few areas of particular interest. Wherever possible, I offer insight into the department's features: where to find the really good stuff.



Subject Listings

Departments are also vehicles for exploring specific subject areas. In Chapter 13, I introduce the concept of the forum; in Chapter 5, we explore the subject of downloading. These subjects can be complex, and to document them without some relief could be as dry as white bread. Instead, I've made a sandwich of each technical subject, flavoring the presentation with the diversity of a department. This approach, I hope, will make for more effective documentation: If you're enjoying yourself, you'll learn more about the subject. Associating subjects with departments also provides a context that's practical rather than theoretical; learning by doing is always more effective than listening to a lecture.

A Documentation Strategy

My personal strategy for the use of software documentation is to first spend a half-hour browsing. With no specific need and in no particular order, I just thumb through the manual, trying to get a feeling for its contents and organization. I look for organizational signposts (chapter titles, icons, sidebars, heads and subheads); I peek at the index; I read a paragraph or two from sections that strike my fancy. This kind of random orientation buoys my confidence and orients my perspective.

If you're a new member and haven't yet installed the software or signed on, read Chapter 2, "Making the Connection," next. It's a "hand-holder," documenting every step of the installation and initial sign-on process. The chapter includes a suggested initial online session.

From then on—perhaps once a week—pick a department and tour it with me at your own pace. While we're there, we'll explore a procedural subject as well as the department itself. Each chapter should take about an hour. When we're finished, you will not only be familiar with the department, you'll learn about a feature that will make your online experience more productive and fun.

How to Use This Book as a Book

I would be flattered if you would read this book for the pleasure of it. As I spend time on AOL, I'm struck by its diversity. Last night I spent an hour contemplating the universe on the Online Home Companion (my favorite forum—forums are described in Chapter 13). This afternoon I visited the Lobby for some companionship. Tonight I plan to attend a Rotunda event (which we explore in Chapter 12, "People

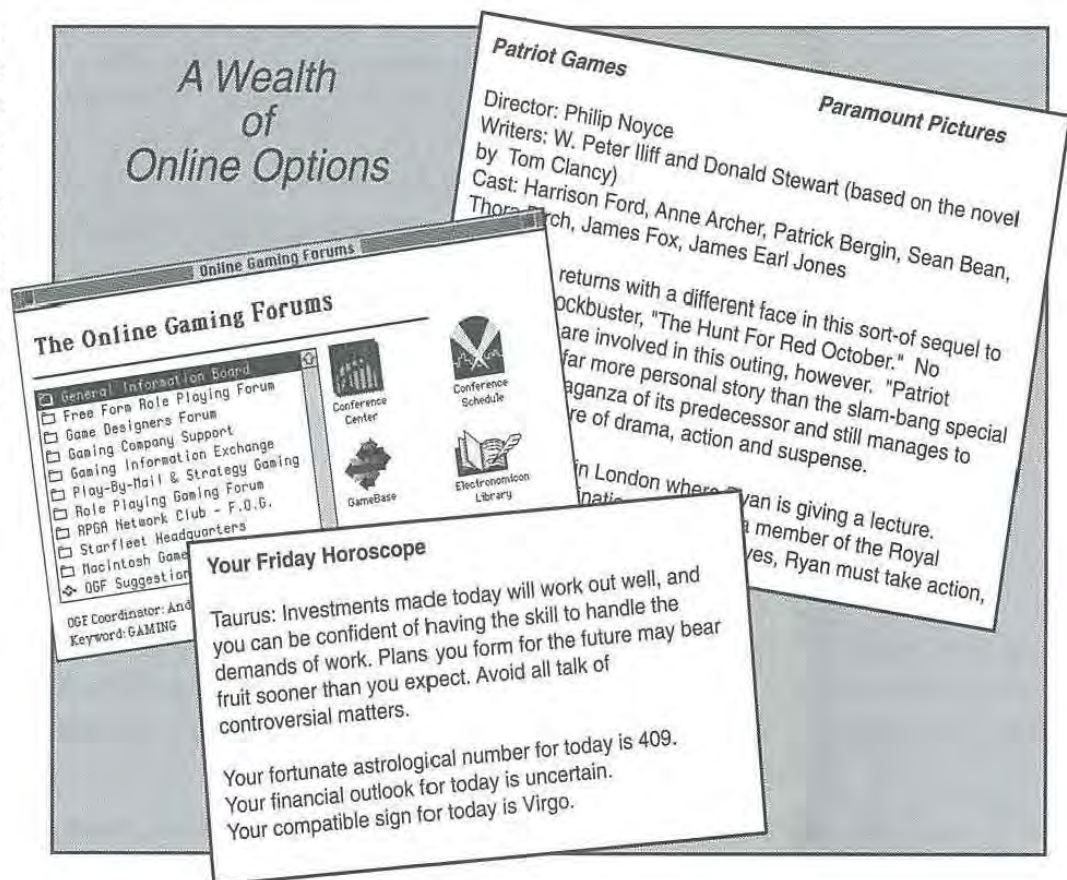


Connection"). Online visits are often unstructured. Your rhythm is syncopated and your interests wander.

I have tried to organize this Tour Guide in much the same fashion. I have liberally splashed gobbets of material throughout the book, often with no other intention in mind than to relieve the page of textual tedium. I want your thoughts to wander; I want to pique your curiosity; I want to delight and provoke and intrigue you (see Figure 1-9). That's what AOL does: it discourages linearity and encourages randomness. It demands your regard and rewards your return.

I hope this book does the same.

Figure 1-9: A video review, the title screen for the Online Gaming Forum and a daily horoscope. These examples are just a tiny slice of the spectrum of opportunity that awaits you on America Online.





Moving On

Are you comfortable? Our journey is about to begin. Reach into that pocket in the seat in front of you and pull out the program. Here's where we're about to go:

- ▲ Chapter 2, "Making the Connection," walks you through the setup and initial sign-on process. Just as it relieves you from worrying about the complexities of most of the other technical aspects of telecommunications, AOL automates most of the process of getting started as well, so Chapter 2 isn't too technical. You'll be up and running in no time.
- ▲ Chapter 3, "Online Help & the Members," serves as an introduction to the AOL software—especially all of its offers of help. We'll pull down menus and peek at dialog boxes. We'll do most of this work off line, but you'll need your Mac (and a modem) handy. Eventually we'll sign on, visit the Lobby and get to know an online guide. Guides are usually there, waiting to help. We'll examine the members' directory and see if we can make a friend.
- ▲ Chapter 4 will teach you everything you need to know to master AOL's e-mail feature. We'll put some names into our Address Book, send (and receive) some mail, and attach a file to be uploaded to a friend.
- ▲ Chapter 5 goes for the heart: the Computing Department. We'll visit the Mac Operating System Forum, look over *MacWorld* magazine, catch up on the latest computing news and opinion, and solicit some assistance from a software vendor. Along the way, we'll explore the process of downloading files. We'll download a few for ourselves, decompress those that require it and perhaps upload a file in return.
- ▲ Chapter 6, "Today's News," reveals AOL's new news feature, including not only news, but business, entertainment, sports and weather. You can search them to find the stories of interest to you, and they're all updated on a continuing basis. We'll keep a log of our visit for review later, when we're off line and rested.



- ▲ Chapter 7 discusses the Newsstand. America Online features alliances with a number of contemporary magazines and newspapers, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Bicycling*, *Car & Driver*, *Consumer Reports*, *Chicago Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Road & Track*, *Popular Photography*, *WIRED* and dozens of others. The Newsstand is where you'll find them all. You can search these articles too (including back issues), talk with the editors, and in many cases download the graphics that accompany the stories.
- ▲ Chapter 8 is dedicated to sports fans. In addition to baseball, basketball, football, hockey, tennis and golf, there are even games you can play yourself.
- ▲ Chapter 9, "Entertainment," is simply for the fun of it. We'll read a few movie reviews, peek at a cartoon or two, have a (virtual) beer at LaPub and play a game or two.
- ▲ Chapter 10 explores AOL's extensive Personal Finance Department. There we'll start our portfolio of investments (cash optional), consult Morningstar and Hoover's financial profiles, and consult Real Estate Online.
- ▲ Chapter 11 offers a break from the workaday world, as we visit the Travel Department. We'll consult the experts (and fellow travelers) before we plan our dream vacation, then we'll book our reservations and set up correspondence with other members before we leave.
- ▲ Chapter 12 explores People Connection. We'll wipe the sweat from our palms, walk into the Lobby and say hello. We'll check out a few of AOL's Chat Rooms and see who we can find there. Perhaps we'll visit the Center Stage and participate in a game show.
- ▲ Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests," explores AOL's clubs. Perhaps we'll try Wine & Dine Online, the Environmental and Star Trek Forums, and BikeNet. We'll learn about forums, read a few messages and post one of our own.



- ▲ Chapter 14 introduces the Internet and AOL's "Internet Connection." In the telecommunications industry, AOL is to Walla Walla what the Internet is to the universe. Over 30 million people visit the Internet every day, downloading files, exchanging mail, and acquiring data. America Online is your key to this universe, *if* you know enough to keep from getting stuck in orbit. This chapter is your official Internet primer.
- ▲ Chapter 15 reveals one of the newest departments: "Kids Only." Prominent among the offerings is KOOL (Kids Only OnLine), but Disney is here, and KIDSNET, and games, and TIME for Kids.
- ▲ Chapter 16 is devoted to education. *Comptons Encyclopedia* is here, of course, but so is the Online Campus. Perhaps we'll enroll in a class, or enroll in a correspondence course through the International Correspondence Schools. We'll make a special visit to the Library of Congress as well.
- ▲ Chapter 17 introduces The Marketplace, where you can buy or sell anything from computers to cars. And *Consumer Reports* magazine—past issues and present—ensures an informed decision.
- ▲ The Reference Desk is the subject of Chapter 18. The Career Center is here, along with Barron's Booknotes, the Bible and the CNN Newsroom.
- ▲ Chapter 19 explores FlashSessions and the Download Manager. This chapter covers the heavyweight stuff, but it's also some of the best telecommunications software ever offered. Even if you never use it, you've got to read this chapter just to appreciate two of the high-end features AOL offers.
- ▲ Chapter 20 offers my ten best ten-best lists—the ten best tips for using AOL, the ten most frequently asked questions of the AOL customer support team, the ten best files for downloading—that kind of thing. You'll be among the online illuminati after you've finished this chapter.



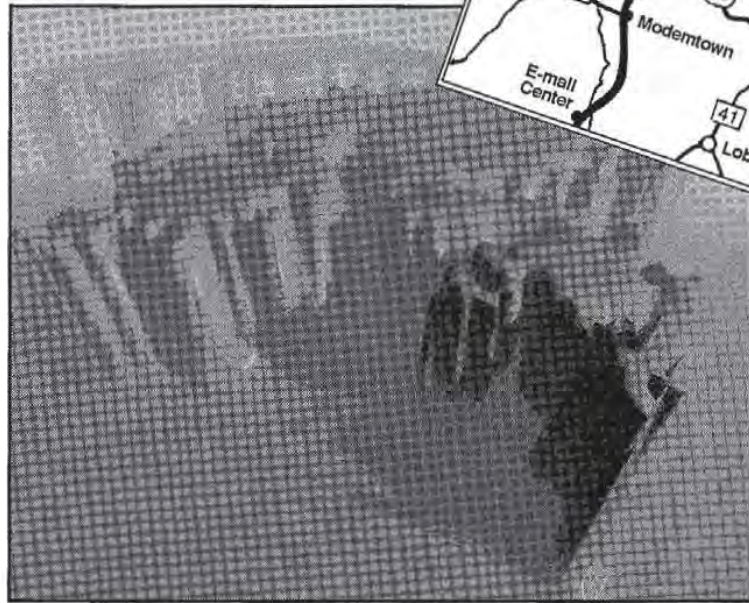
- ▲ Five appendices conclude the book. A keyword listing offers warp-speed navigation through the AOL universe. The Command-key reference helps you Get It Done Fast; the “Modems, Localities & CCL Files” appendix is for the digitheads among us; an on-the-road reference serves those who take AOL to remote locations; and the “Preferences” appendix shows you how to configure AOL just the way you want. At the end of the book, an extensive glossary defines all those cryptic terms that have become requisite adjuncts to the telecommunications lexicon.

You'd better fasten your seat belt. Sometimes the ride gets a little bumpy, and when I get to talking, I forget to steer—hand gestures and all that, you know. Don't worry: I haven't lost a passenger yet. Have your camera ready, you have lots of stuff to see. And relax. Smile a bit. You're five years old again and Christmas morning is only a turn of the page away....



Online Help & the Members

CHAPTER 3



Sounds like a heavy-metal band: “Online Help & the Members.” Dressed in black leather, with chains draped around their waists, Online Help & the Members take the stage accompanied by waves of cacophony and pandemonium. As in a jailbreak, spotlights sweep the auditorium, illuminating a mass of writhing supplicants below. The spotlights converge on Online as he wrests the microphone from its stand. An expectant hush fills the air. In a voice amplified by 2,000 transistors the size of hubcaps, he speaks: “America Online Customer Relations! May I help you?”

Getting Help

Much to my delight, software publishers have recently placed notable emphasis on providing users with help. The version of Microsoft Word I use, for instance, includes a help file measuring 1.8mb—larger than Word itself. The help file is right on my hard disk. All I have to do is tap on a couple of keys and there’s the help I need: convenient, comprehensive and clear.

Frontispiece graphic by Chuck Carter/Cyan. The graphic was created in Infini-D using Phong shading with shadows. Keywords: File Search; use the criterion: “Phong shadows.”



America Online is no different. Like all good software, AOL's help is always a simple keystroke away. America Online, however, has a unique advantage: since a good portion of AOL's help resides on the host computer, it can be updated any time. This means that AOL's help can be particularly responsive. If members are having trouble with a specific area, AOL can rewrite the help files to address the source of confusion. It's as if a Microsoft representative came to my home with a new help disk every time Word's help files needed to be changed.

There's a flaw in the plan, however. In order to access online help, I have to be online. While this isn't much of a restriction—online is the time I usually need help, after all—there are occasions when I would like to get help without signing on. What if I *can't* sign on? What if I'm traveling and need help finding an alternative number?



Getting Help: A Methodical Approach

If you have a question about AOL and require help, *don't write to me!* I'm just a writer, and everyone knows that writers don't know nuttin'.

Rather, I suggest you use the methods described below, in the order in which they appear. All of the topics mentioned are explained in detail later in this chapter.

1. Look up the topic in the index of this book to see if your question is answered here. I'd like to think that most of your questions will be answered this way.
2. Run the AOL software and choose Help from the Apple menu. In this chapter I refer to this kind of help as *off-line* help, since it's available when you're off-line (even though it's available online as well). Off-line help offers a searchable list of over 20 topics and will often answer your question, especially if it has to do with the most commonly asked AOL questions.
3. Go online, press Command-K (which is how you prepare AOL to accept a keyword—we'll discuss keywords later in this chapter) then type Help. Click the OK button and click the second OK button in response to the "Are you sure..." message. This will take you to AOL's Online Support Center, a particularly comprehensive (and free) resource.
4. Go online and use the keyword: MHM. This will take you to AOL's Members Helping Members bulletin boards. Post your question in the appropriate folder there. Within a day or so you will have a response to your question from another member. Peer help is often the best help you can find.





5. Go online and use the keyword: TechLive. This will take you to Tech Help Live, where you can consult AOL's Technical Support staff. This feature is free and open from 9 A.M. to 1 A.M. (Eastern time) weekdays, and from 12 P.M. to 1 A.M. weekends.
6. Ask a Guide. Sign on, choose Lobby from the Go To menu, and once you arrive, look around for someone with the word "Guide" in their name. Guides are a particularly friendly form of help, and they're on duty weekdays from 9 A.M. until 6 A.M. (Eastern time), 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
7. Send e-mail to Customer Relations. Sign on and use the keyword: Help. In the Help window, click the "Email the Staff" button. You'll hear back from them in a day or two.
8. Call Customer Relations at 800-827-6364. They're open from 9 A.M. to 2 A.M. (Eastern time) Monday through Friday, and 12 P.M. to 1 A.M. Saturday and Sunday. It's a toll-free call in the continental U.S., and there's never any charge for support from AOL.

Altruistically, AOL offers *both* online and off-line help. One set of help files resides on your hard disk available at any time regardless of whether you're online. The other set of help files resides on the host computer. This set is the one that's constantly being updated. It's not just comprehensive, it's downright monumental. It's available whenever you're online, and—incredibly—it's free. Whenever you access AOL's online help area, the clock stops and you aren't charged for your time there.

Off-line Help

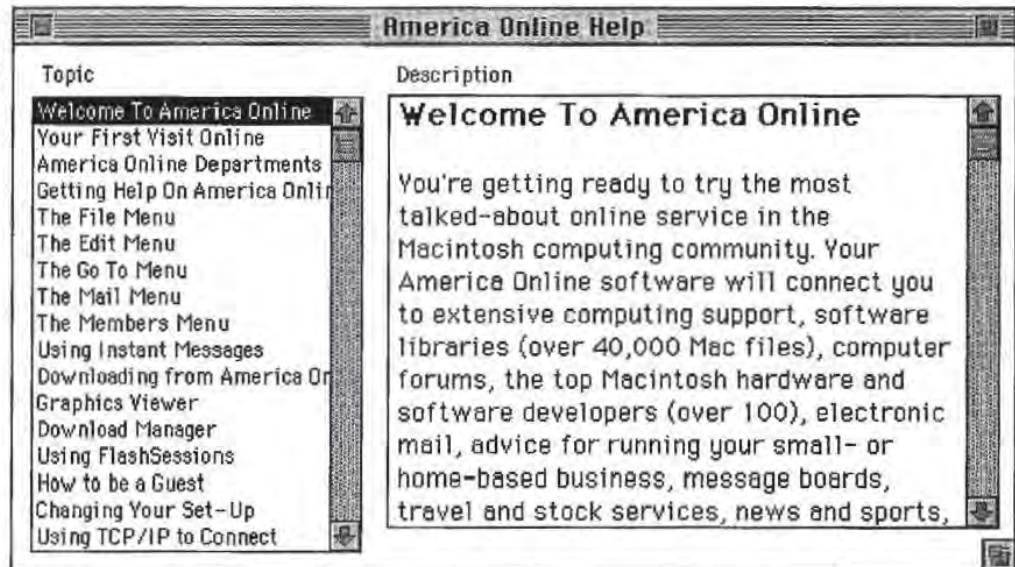
Let's talk about off-line help first. America Online's off-line help is especially configured to answer the kind of questions you'll encounter when you're disconnected from the service. How do I connect when I'm away from my usual location? What's the Customer Relations telephone number and when are they on duty? How do I sign up my friends?



Choosing Help From the Apple Menu

There are two ways to access off-line help. Perhaps the most obvious one is to choose Help from the Apple menu. The list of topics that results is extensive (Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1: Off-line help is always available. Just choose Help from the Apple menu.



As is always the case with items under the Apple menu, Help can be chosen at any time, whether you're online or off. These help topics are stored in a file on your hard disk, and as such don't require that you go online in order to access them; you just need to launch the AOL program and pull down the Apple menu.

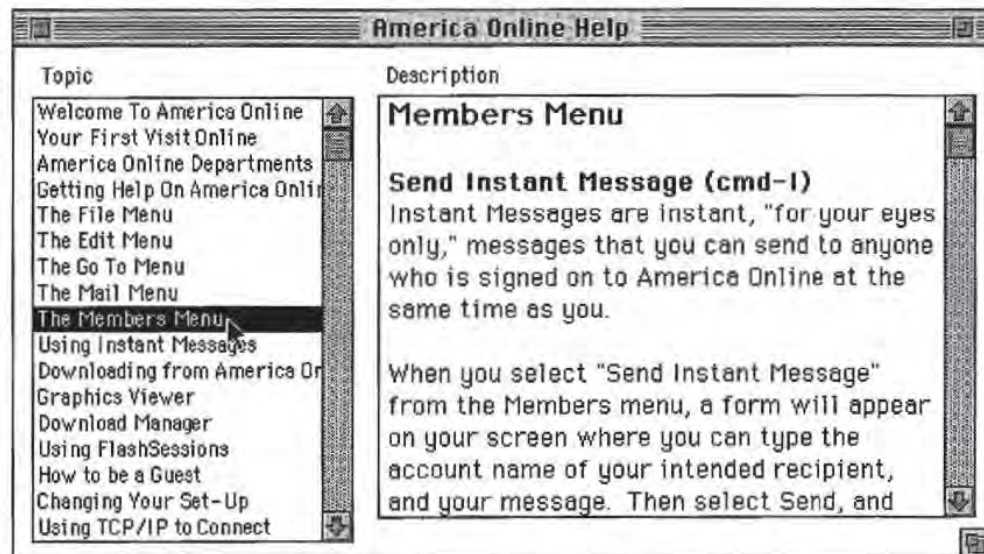
Look carefully at the list of help topics in Figure 3-1. Some of them are specifically for first-time users. Others are primarily for members on the road: Changing Your Setup, Access Outside the Continental USA and so on. The other help topics are oriented toward AOL's menu bar: the File menu, the Help menu, the Go To menu and so on right across the menu at the top of AOL's screen.



Using Command-slash

The reason so many of the topics pictured in Figure 3-1 relate to the menu bar is because AOL's off-line help is also intended to serve you as you explore the program off-line. To access AOL's off-line help, type Command-slash at any time (the Command key is the one with a cloverleaf or Apple symbol on it), especially when you're exploring the program off-line. Wondering about Preferences? Press Command-slash. From the Help screen's Topic menu, choose The Members Menu. Help with Preferences is available by selecting The Members Menu in the scroll box on the left, then scrolling down to that topic in the Description box at the right side of the window (Figure 3-2). (For a complete discussion of Members Preferences, see Appendix E.)

Figure 3-2: Help with the Preferences command is found under the topic The Members Menu.





The slash—/—is used because its key is also the question-mark key, and the question mark just seems appropriate for help. This has become something of a universal Macintosh keystroke convention for software help.

My wife is a medical student. She learned a long time ago that it's an impossibility to memorize all of the things she has to know to become a successful practitioner. The sheer magnitude of the task was dragging her down until she realized that all she really had to know was *where to look for information*, not all of the information itself. She has a well-organized library and knows which books discuss which topics. When she needs assistance, she goes to her library and gets help.

You should do the same. Don't worry about memorizing all of the petty details—for any computer program. Instead, learn how to use help. It will take 20 minutes and it will be the most productive 20 minutes you'll ever spend with your computer.

Online Help


America Online's online help is especially comprehensive. Moreover, since the online help file is stored on the host computer (and not on your hard disk) only one file needs to be updated when the online help files require changing. In addition to the help you get using the online files, AOL staff and members stand ready to help you as well. This is world-class help and its breadth is unique to AOL.



Member Services

To access Member Services, choose Member Services from the Go To menu or use the keyword: Help. You must be signed on for this: Online help isn't stored on your hard disk, it's on AOL's host computer.

Just before you enter the Member Services area, AOL flashes the message pictured in the middle of Figure 3-3. Unprovoked dialog boxes like this often spell trouble, I know, but not this one. America Online is trying to say that you're about to pass through the "free curtain" (to use the AOL vernacular) and that you won't be charged for the time you're about to spend in Member Services. That's a comforting thought: Online help is free. You can spend all day perusing online help and AOL will never charge you a dime.



Random Acts of Help

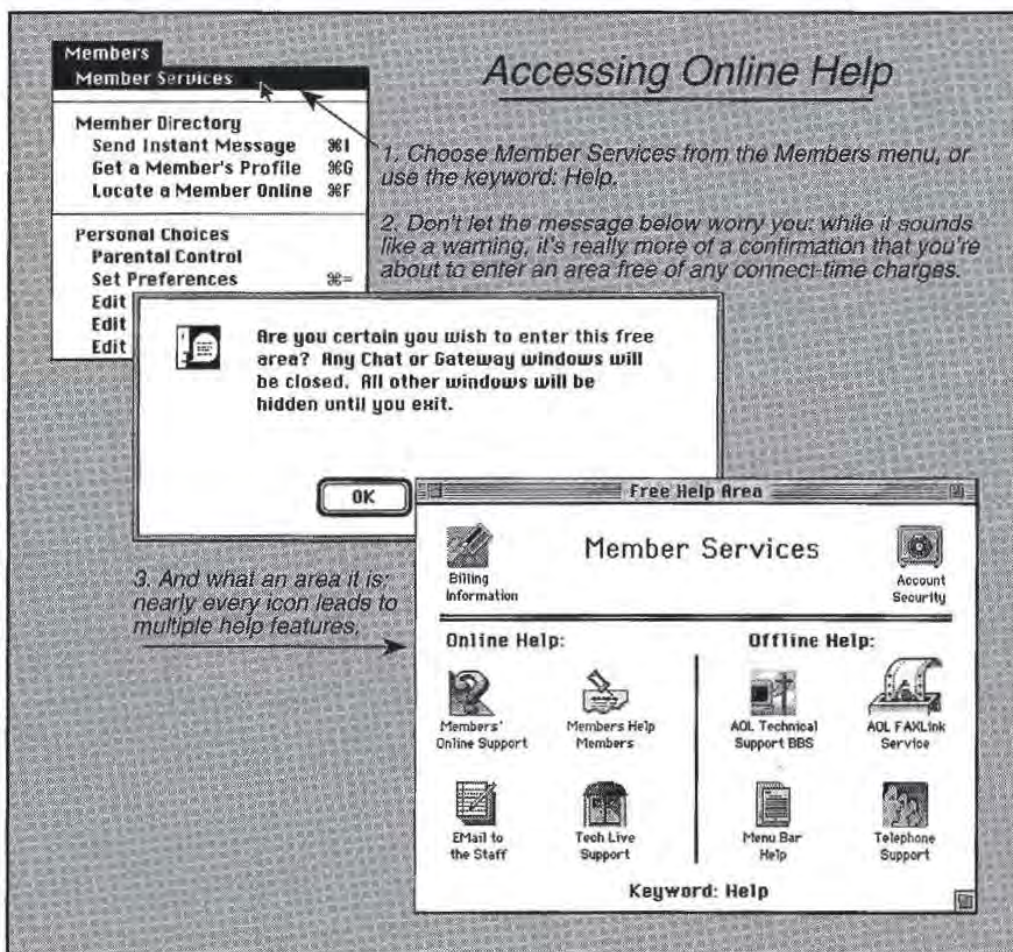
The next time you sign on to AOL, click on Member Services from the Main Menu. This will take you to AOL's online help area.

Once you're there, relax (the clock's not running) and explore this area casually. Poke around as you would at a flea market. Don't try to memorize anything. Get the feel of the place. Get to know what's there and where it's found. Consider this an exploratory mission without any particular agenda. After 20 minutes or so, move on to something else.

You will be amazed at what this kind of unstructured behavior can do for you. You will acquire a familiarity with the layout of the place, and you will gain confidence in the use of online help. Most importantly, the next time you need help, you won't hesitate to use the keyword. And that, in the long run, is perhaps the most productive attitude you can adopt toward the use of AOL.



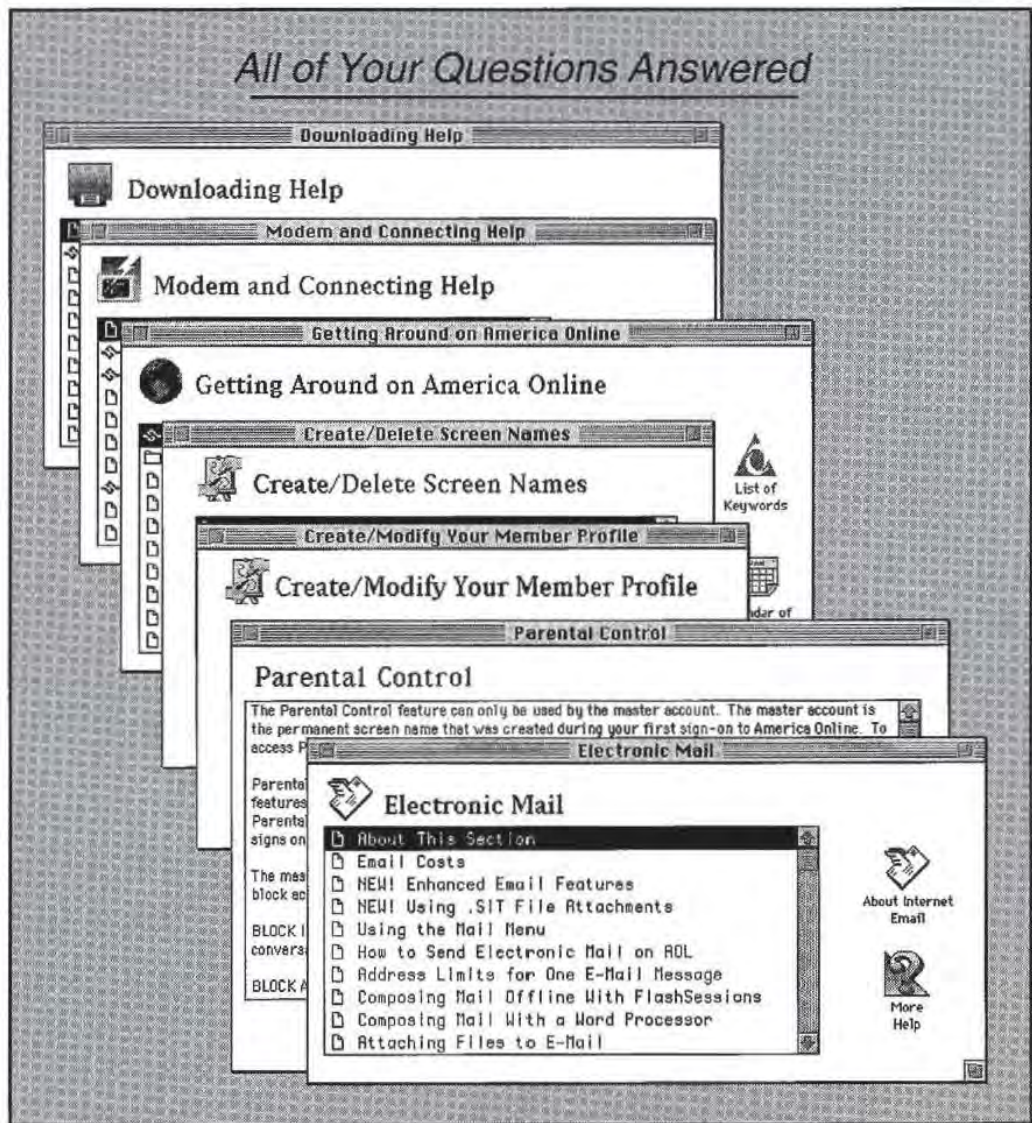
Figure 3-3: Online help is available whenever you're online, and it's absolutely free.



The subjects pictured in the list box on the left side of Figure 3-3's lower window offer immediate answers for nearly anything you encounter while online. Each of these help topics can be saved, printed or both. While the list of topics is extensive, the detail offered within each topic is bountiful (see Figure 3-4).



Figure 3-4: A few of the help topics available in the Member Service area.



**Help Grab-bag**

Nearly every online help feature discussed in this chapter is available via the keyword: Help. It's a free area, so get to know it well.

Saving Help

Though AOL's online help screens are primarily intended for you to read while you're online (there's no charge for the service, after all, so you can take your time), you might want to save a help topic or two on your disk. Doing so provides you with a text file that can be combined with other help files using a word processor, for instance, to create a comprehensive help manual.

To save a help topic that's on your screen, simply choose Save (or Save As—they're the same command in this context) from the File menu. America Online asks you what you want to name the file and where you want to save it. Provide the information it needs, and that help topic will be stored on your disk, ready for any purpose you might have in mind.

Printing Help

More likely, you'll want to print a help topic for ready reference. As you might expect, all you have to do is choose Print from the File menu. Printing from AOL works about like printing from any other Mac application. You'll receive the print dialog box associated with the printer you've selected via the Chooser (the Chooser is under the Apple menu). Configure this dialog as you please and print. By the way, you can print just about any text file you read online, not just the help files. If you run across a file description or news article you want to print, just choose Print from the File menu—AOL will print whatever text is in the front-most (active) window.

The Directory of Services

Look again at Figure 3-3. In the scroll box of the Members' Online Support window, you'll find a folder representing the "Directory of America Online Services," a searchable database of information on all the services offered by AOL. Information for each service includes the following:



- ▲ The service's name.
- ▲ Any keywords associated with that service (see sidebar).
- ▲ A menu path for access to that service.
- ▲ A description of that service.
- ▲ A button to take you there.

Figure 3-5: The Directory of Services offers a method of searching all the services America Online has to offer.



Keywords

Keywords are shortcuts to specific destinations within AOL. Without keywords, accessing the Microsoft Knowledge Base, for example, via menus and windows requires that I click the Computing button on the Main Menu, click the Industry Connection, click "Companies Listed A-Z", click the "I-M" button, then double-click the "Microsoft" folder. *Whew!* There's gotta be a better way.

And there is: keywords. The keyword for the Microsoft Knowledge Base is Knowledge Base. Once I know the keyword, all I have to do is choose Keyword from the Go To menu (or type Command-K) and enter "Knowledge Base" into the area provided. Instantly, AOL takes me directly to the Knowledge Base, bypassing all the steps in between.

A list of keywords is available in Appendix A of this book, or within the Directory of Services (which we will discuss in a moment), or by typing Command-K, then clicking the Keyword Help button.



Searching the Directory of Services

One of the most helpful features of AOL's online help is the Directory of Services. This is AOL's answer to the question: "I wonder if they have anything that addresses my interest in..." Are you interested in model airplanes? Search the Directory of Services. How about music, poetry or fine food? Use the Directory of Services.

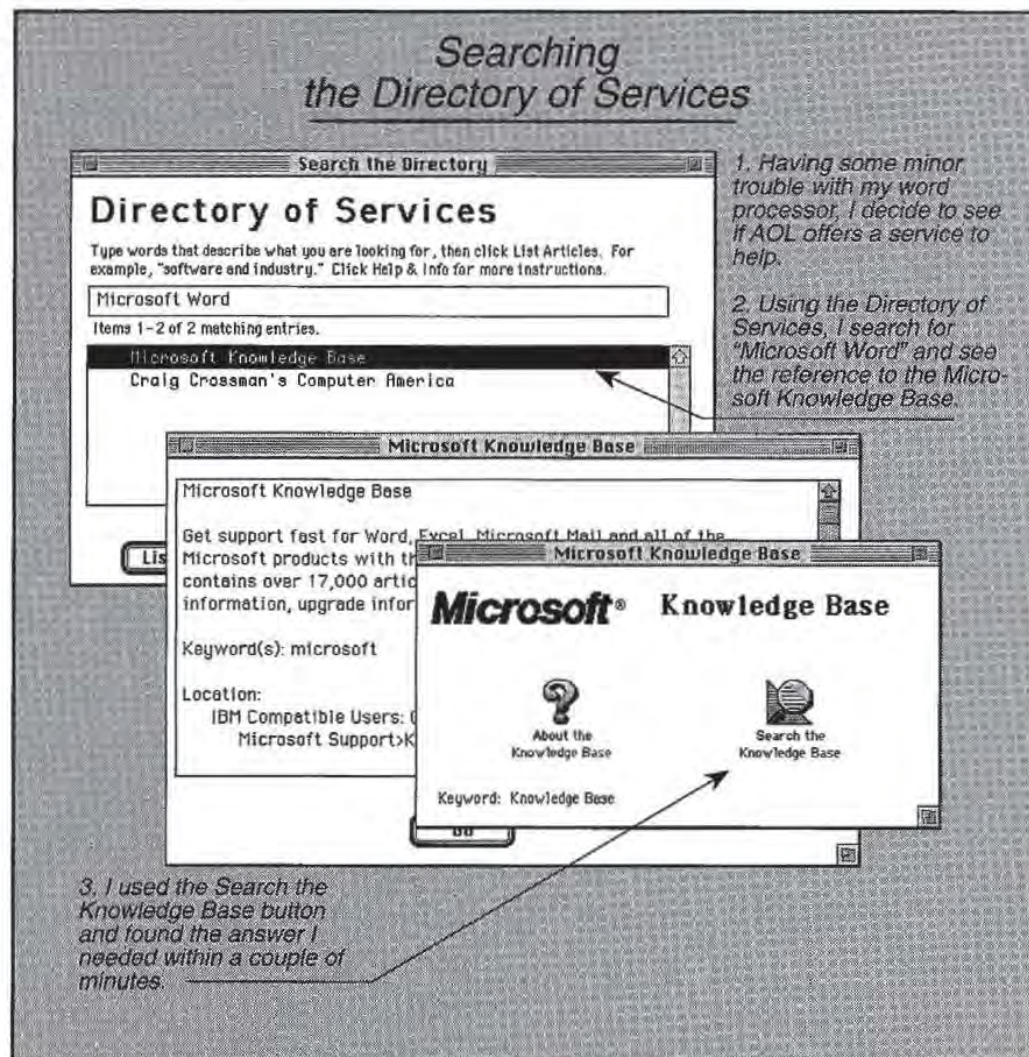
I was having trouble with Microsoft Word the other day. Couldn't get it to do things I knew it was capable of doing. What to do? Call five friends on the phone and get their voice mail? Call Microsoft long distance and wait as they play bad Seattle radio while I'm on hold?

None of the above. I simply signed on and consulted the Microsoft Knowledge Base. The Knowledge Base is the summation of nearly everything Microsoft knows about its products, including answers from their technical support staff. It's updated periodically and released on CD-ROM. You can subscribe if you wish (if you have a CD-ROM player)—it's only \$295 a year.

Or you can use AOL. America Online subscribes to the Knowledge Base and posts it online, complete with a search mechanism to find what you're after. If you forget Microsoft's keyword, use the Directory of Services to find it for you. That's just what I did the other day, and my question was answered within a few minutes (see Figure 3-6).



Figure 3-6: The Directory of Services found the Microsoft Knowledge Base for me, and the Knowledge Base had my answer.



Note that the middle window in Figure 3-6 offers the keyword(s) for the Knowledge Base, its location (the menu path that gets you there) and its description. If it isn't what I need, the description saves me the trouble of going there. If it *is* what I need, the keyword and location tell me how to get there quickly.



Locating the Directory of Services

There are at least four ways to get to the Directory of Services. As shown in Figure 3-3, you'll find the directory's listing in the Members' Online Support window. Since you passed through the free curtain to get to Members' Online Support, accessing the Directory of Services via Online Support is free. It's also in the "Discover AOL" area (keyword: Discover, or click the "Discover AOL" button on the Main Menu).

Alternatively, you can choose Directory of Services from the Go To menu, or use the keyword: Services. If you're not in the free area at the time, accessing the Directory via the Go To menu or via its keyword is on your dime, not AOL's. It's a little faster and more convenient than passing through the curtain, however, so you might wish to use it when you plan to spend only a moment or two there.

Tech Help Live

Let's talk about *rooms* for a moment. At AOL, a room is a place where a number of people gather to talk about a subject of common interest. There are classrooms, for instance, where you'll find a teacher and students (the Online Campus is discussed in Chapter 16, "Education"). There's the Lobby where people go to mingle and meet other people. In fact, AOL offers scores of rooms, and we will explore a number of them in Chapter 12, "People Connection."

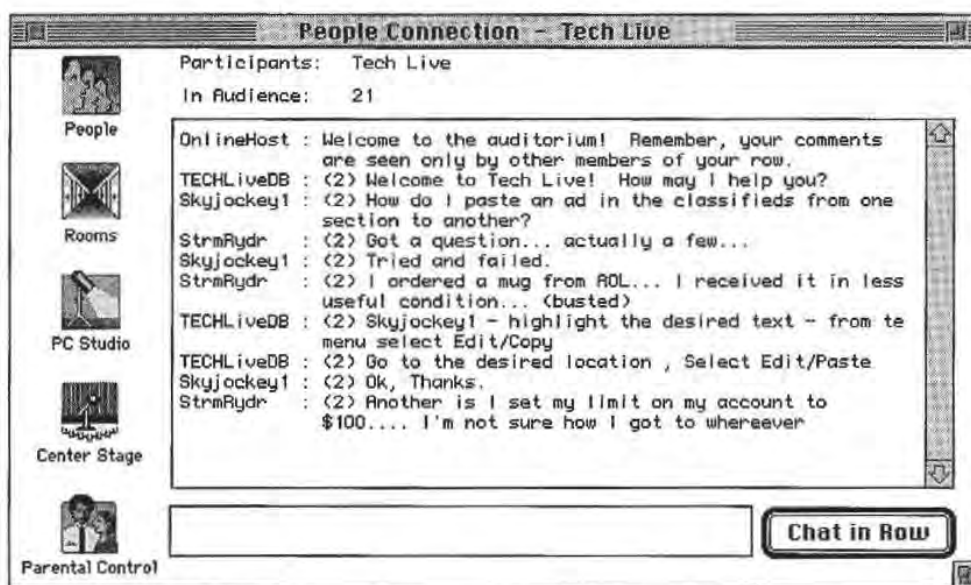
Look again at Figure 3-3. Do you see the button marked Tech Live Support? If you click that button, you'll eventually find yourself in a room with at least one Customer Service representative and probably a number of other members, all with questions regarding the service. Conversations in the room are real-time: you don't have to wait for replies. This isn't mail and it's not a message board; it's a room, and like real rooms in real buildings, people in rooms can hold real-time conversations.

There's a lot to be learned here. Not only do you receive answers to your questions immediately, you can "eavesdrop" on questions from other members as well—all at AOL's expense (don't forget that you're still in the free area).

Tech Live help is available weekdays from 9 A.M. to 1 A.M. weekdays, and from 12 P.M. to 1 A.M. weekends. If you need an immediate response, this is the place to find it.



Figure 3-7: A glimpse of the Tech Live service. To get there, use the keyword: TechLive.



Members Helping Members

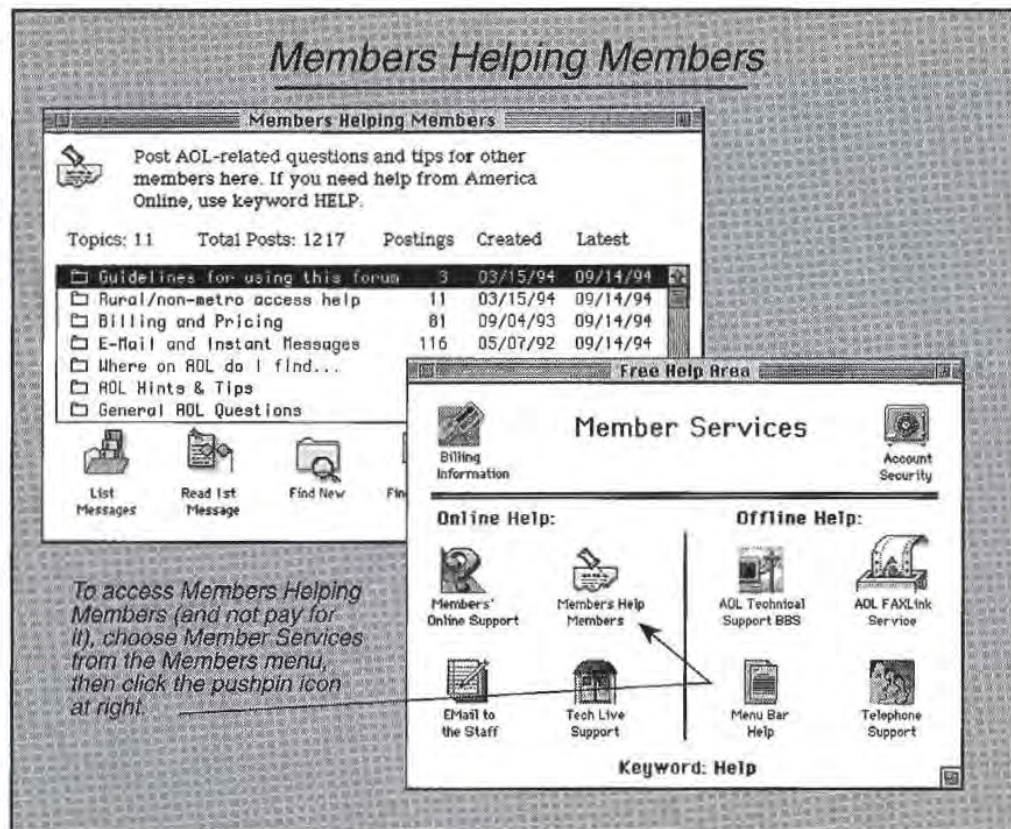
On my IRS 1040 form, right there next to the word *Occupation*, it says "educator." I write books, teach classes and do some consulting. As an educator, I attend a number of conferences. Most of these conferences are academic, each featuring a number of speakers and seminar leaders.

Reflecting back on those conferences, I must admit that the greatest value I receive from them is not from the speakers or the seminars, it's from the other people attending the conference. My education occurs in the hallways and at lounge tables. People talking to people—peer to peer—that's where I find the Good Stuff.

America Online is no different. Some of the best help online is that received from other members. America Online knows that; that's why it provides Members Helping Members—a formalized version of peer support (Figure 3-8).



Figure 3-8: To access Members Helping Members, click the push-pin icon in the Member Services window, or use the keyword: MHM.



To access Members Helping Members, either click the push-pin icon in the Members' Online Support window, or use the keyword: MHM. Unlike the Directory of Services, you'll pass through the free curtain regardless of how you choose to access this feature. In other words, it never costs you a dime to use Members Helping Members.

Message Boards

Members Helping Members is a *message board*. Though we'll discuss message boards in Chapter 13 ("Clubs & Interests"), the subject is worth a brief mention here as well.

Throughout AOL you'll see little push-pin icons. This is AOL's way of identifying message boards. A message board is analogous to the bulletin boards you see hanging in the halls of offices and academic institutions. People post things there for other people to see: postcards, lost mittens, announcements and messages. America Online's message boards are exactly the same (though you might not see lost mittens on AOL's boards...).

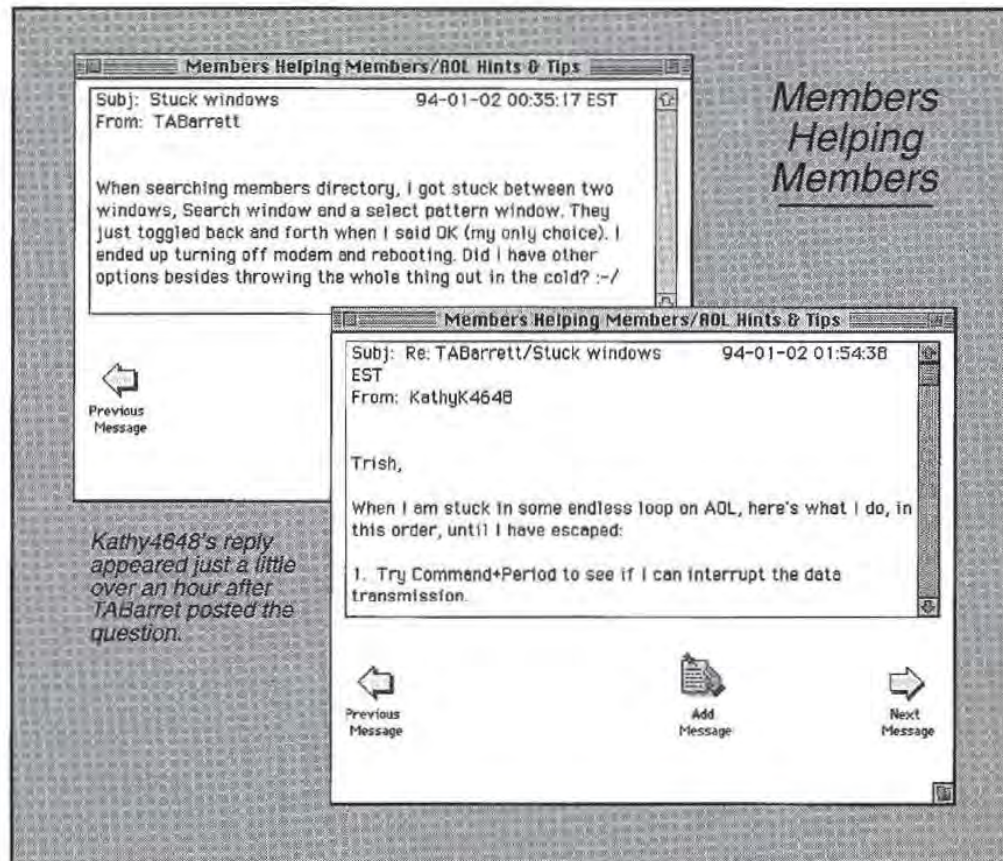


Look again at Figure 3-8. Note how AOL's boards are organized by using folders. The bulletin board analogy weakens a bit here, but AOL's boards get a *lot* of messages (the Members Helping Members board pictured in Figure 3-8 has 1,313). Unless they're organized in some fashion, 1,313 messages posted on a single board would be chaotic and overwhelming. The solution is folders.

You can read all the messages in a folder, browse through them (viewing only their subjects, rather than the messages themselves), or specify only those messages that have been posted since a specific date. This is a very convenient message-reading system and is described in detail in Chapter 6.

For the time being, let's select a folder and read its messages. I chose the AOL Hints & Tips folder and found the series of messages pictured in Figure 3-9.

Figure 3-9:
TARbarrett needed help with her stuck windows. Kathy4648 was there to help.

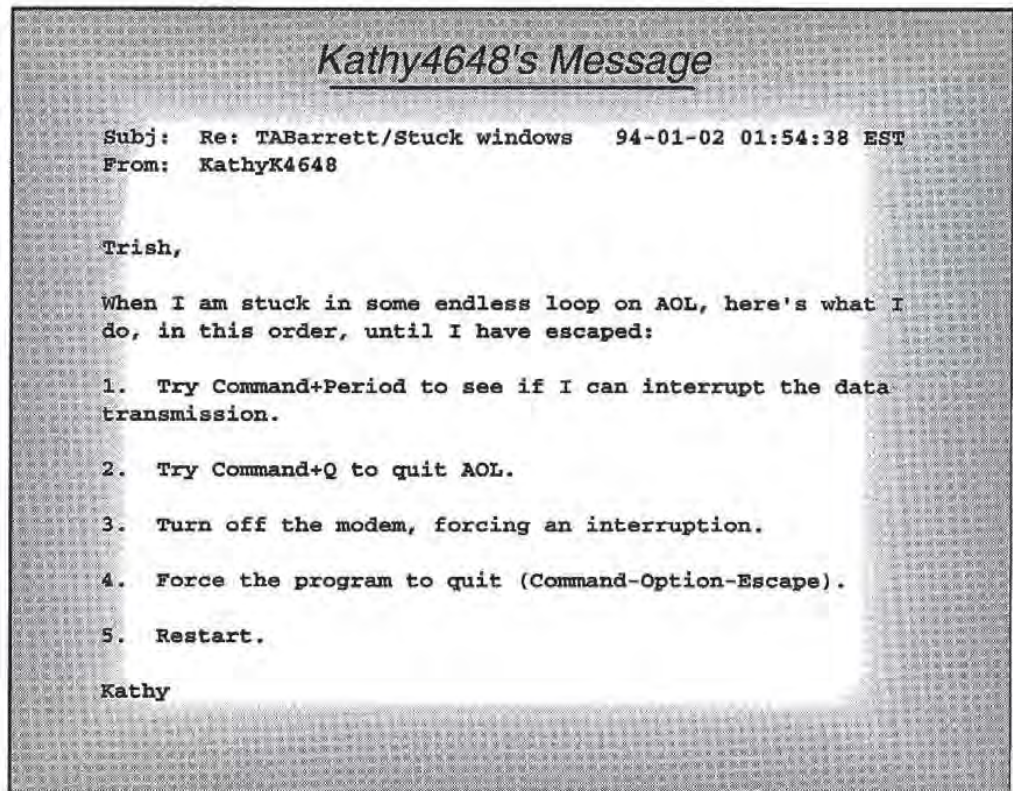




The Value of Member Help

Look at the last message pictured on Figure 3-9. Not only does Kathy4648 offer a solution to TABarrett's problem, Kathy offers four other solutions as well. This is superb help, and it came from another member. The full text of the message from Kathy4648 appears in Figure 3-10.

Figure 3-10:
Kathy4648 offers
not one, but five
solutions to a
problem.



Note another small detail: Kathy4648 must have looked up TABarrett's profile, as she addresses her message to "Trish." That's a nice touch. Kathy didn't have to do that, but it makes her message all the more personable.

I'm reminded of community again. Visiting a big city a few months ago, I was struck by the isolation that seemed to surround everyone I passed on the street. Perhaps it's a defense mechanism for dealing with high population density, but it seemed that everyone was in a cocoon, oblivious to everyone else. No one smiled. No one ever looked anywhere but straight ahead. Thousands of people jostled together yet none were talking. An incredibly lonely place.



On the other hand, in the little Oregon town where I live, there are no strangers. People stop on the street and say hello, swap some gossip and perhaps offer advice.

America Online is more like my little Oregon community. I spent years on other services and never felt like I belonged. I never got mail, I never contributed to a message board, and I never knew where to find help. It was like a big city to me and I was always anxious to leave. At AOL I'm walking the street in a small town on a sunny day and everyone is smiling. The first day I arrived at AOL, I got a letter from Steve Case. People like Kathy4648 go out of their way to offer assistance. This is my kind of place. I'm at home here.

Guides

Guides are members chosen by AOL to serve as real-time assistants. Guides are like Members Helping Members, except there's no waiting. Have a question? Ask a Guide.

I recall an art gallery in Amsterdam. There were a number of Rembrandts there, hanging on the wall just like any other picture. No glass cases or protective Lexan—just those radiant Rembrandts, emancipated and free. A gentleman in uniform stood near. He wasn't a guard; the uniform wasn't that severe. He was a guide. He was a volunteer. He got to spend his days in a room full of the Rembrandts he loved and at the same time share his interest with other people. He explained the Rembrandts to us in a fatherly way, exhibiting a proprietorial regard for his fellow countryman's legacy.

Which is precisely what AOL's Guides are. They're members just like the rest of us—experienced members, with particularly helpful online personalities—but members all the same. They remain politely in the background, leaving us to our own explorations, silent unless spoken to. If we need help, however, Guides are always nearby, ready with friendly advice and information. If you have a question—any question at all—about AOL, its services or its policies, ask a Guide.

Like the guide in Amsterdam, you can identify Guides by their appearance: their screen names have the word "Guide" in them. If Figure 3-9's Kathy4648 was to be a Guide (she should be), she would probably be "Guide Kathy," or something like that.



Figure 3-11: A stop by the Lobby for some help from Guide MO.

A Night in the Lobby

```

7/24/92 3:19:37 PM Opening "Chat Log 7/24/92" for recording.
MajorTom      : Hi all!
Guide MO      : Hey MajorTom :)
Lthrneck     : :::getting out ostrich feather::::
Guide MO      : Nononononono!!!
Lthrneck     : :::TICKLE, TICKLE::::
Guide MO      : ::giggling::
Guide MO      : Hey Antoni!! :)
Antoni       : Hi MO!
Guide MO      : Hiya NyteMaire :)
NyteMaire    : Hiya MO :)
CountStixx   : Maire!!!! {}{}{}{}{}{}
NyteMaire    : {{{{{{Count}}}}}} **
LovlyVix     : Nyte {}{}{}{}{}{}{}{}{}{}{}{}
NyteMaire    : {{{{Vix}}}}
LovlyVix     : How are you Nyte?
NyteMaire    : Getting crazy, and you? ;)
LovlyVix     : Pretty good Nyte :)
MajorTom     : Anybody know of a utility to convert JPEG to TIFF?
Guide MO     : Let me check the libraries for you, T :) I always use Photoshop :)
PC Kate      : <--trying to type while holding ice pack on face. :)
Lthrneck     : ACK Kate, what happened?
Guide MO     : Kate :( Dentist??
AFC Borg     : Is the ice pack inside or outside the paper bag?
PC Kate      : Lthr, had 3 hours of oral and sinus surgery yesterday.
              They say I should be able to eat again next Friday.
GWRepSteve   : Alchemy would probably be the converter to use, MajorTom...
Lthrneck     : Ouch! Kate!! {}{}{}{}{}{}{}{}
Deel23      : aww Kate. * to make it better....
LovlyVix     : <--needs to go to dentist for Kates new diet :)
PC Kate      : Vix, works real well... lost just under five pounds in 2 days. :)
LovlyVix     : Perfect ...that would put me just where I want to be, Kate :)
Guide MO     : MajorTom - I 'm sorry - I don't see what you need offhand,
              though I know we must have it here :/
Guide MO     : I'll check later and email you, if that's any help.
MajorTom     : Thanks Guide. Appreciate it. I have a Plus. Can't run PhotoShop.
Guide MO     : Ok - I just wrote a note to myself -
              I'll check for you when I get off shift at 9 and email you :)
MajorTom     : Great! Thanks for the help. G'Night all!
Guide MO     : Night MajorTom :)

```

To help you follow what's going on, my part of the conversation appears in bold.

These are hugs for a new arrival in the Lobby.

The asterisk is a kiss.

Chagrin.

I got an answer the next day.

Figure 3-11 is a little hard to follow if you're not used to AOL's so-called "chat rooms." Though chat rooms are discussed in Chapter 12 ("People Connection"), a little explanation seems in order here as well. Twenty-one people were in the room when I visited. Many were just watching (lurkers), but others seemed to be old friends. The room was full of "smileys" (turn your head counterclockwise 90 degrees and :) becomes a smile) and hugs. Smileys are discussed in Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests," and Chapter 20, "Ten Best." The entire illustration is a "chat log" (see your File menu for the Logging command).

Chat rooms can be intimidating to the first-time visitor. Don't be shy. Jump right in with a Hello, look for the Guide's name, and ask your question. More important, note that I received one immediate answer



to my question (from GWRepSteve, a member) and another the next day from Guide MO. I got just what I needed (*Alchemy* worked perfectly, and it's available online), and it only took 10 minutes.

Guides are on duty from 9 A.M. until 6 A.M. (Eastern time), 7 days a week, 365 days a year. To find a Guide, choose Lobby from the Go To menu, type Command-L, or select the People Connection icon from the Departments screen. If you need a Guide quickly, use the keyword: GuidePager.

Members

All of this talk about Guides and Members Helping Members might give you the impression that members play a significant part in the operation of AOL, and you're right. Members are much more than AOL's source of income: they're contributors (most of the files in the data libraries discussed in Chapter 5, "Computing," are submitted by members), they're assistants, and, of course, they are the heart of the online community.

Since members play such an important role at AOL, it behooves us to spend a few pages discussing them: how to find them, the member profile and how to be a better member yourself.

The Member Directory

America Online offers you the opportunity to post a voluntary member profile. Though I'll talk about profiles in a moment, the operative term in the previous sentence is "voluntary." America Online values the individual's privacy, and if you wish to remain secluded in the online community, you may do so. Those members who have completed a profile are listed in the Member Directory.

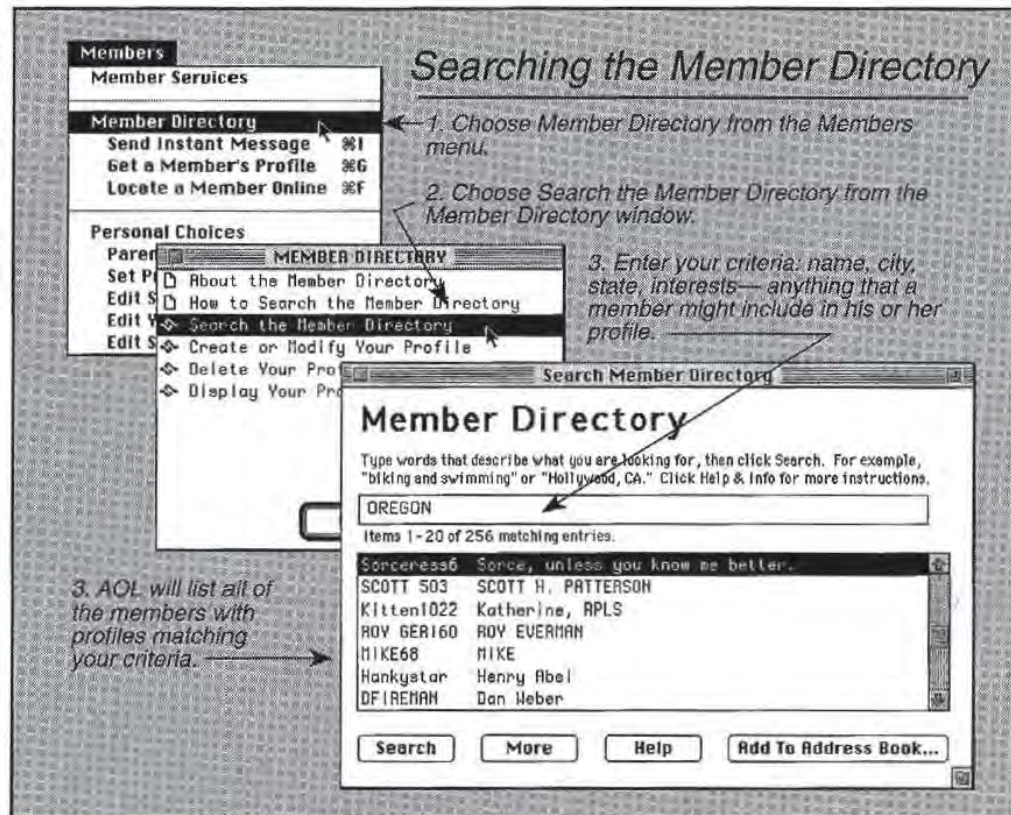
You can search for a member by real name, screen name or profile. You might see a screen name online and wonder who is behind it: Search the directory. You might wonder if a friend is signed up with AOL: Search the directory.

One of the more interesting things you can do with the directory is to search for people with interests similar to yours. Once you've found them, you can send them mail (I discuss electronic mail in Chapter 4) and, perhaps, strike up a friendship. It's all part of the electronic community.



I, for instance, enjoy the beauty of my state. I live just 13 miles from the Mount Hood National Forest, where hundreds of square miles of virgin forest, lakes, trails and meadows await the explorer. Thinking I might find someone to share my interest, I search the Member Directory for members in my locality by using Oregon as my criterion (Figure 3-12).

Figure 3-12: Much to my delight, 256 other Oregonians have posted their profiles. I'll send them some mail and see if they want to explore the forest someday.



Actually, Figure 3-12 is misleading. My search for "Oregon" omitted those members who used the state's two-character abbreviation ("OR") in their profiles. It also didn't include those members who have elected to omit their profiles. My guess is that there are thousands of AOL members from Oregon, many more than pictured in Figure 3-12. To access the Members Directory, choose Members Directory from the Members menu, then double-click Search the Members Directory option.



Member Profiles

As I mentioned a moment ago, member profiles are optional. If you elect not to complete a profile, your name won't show up in searches like the one described above.

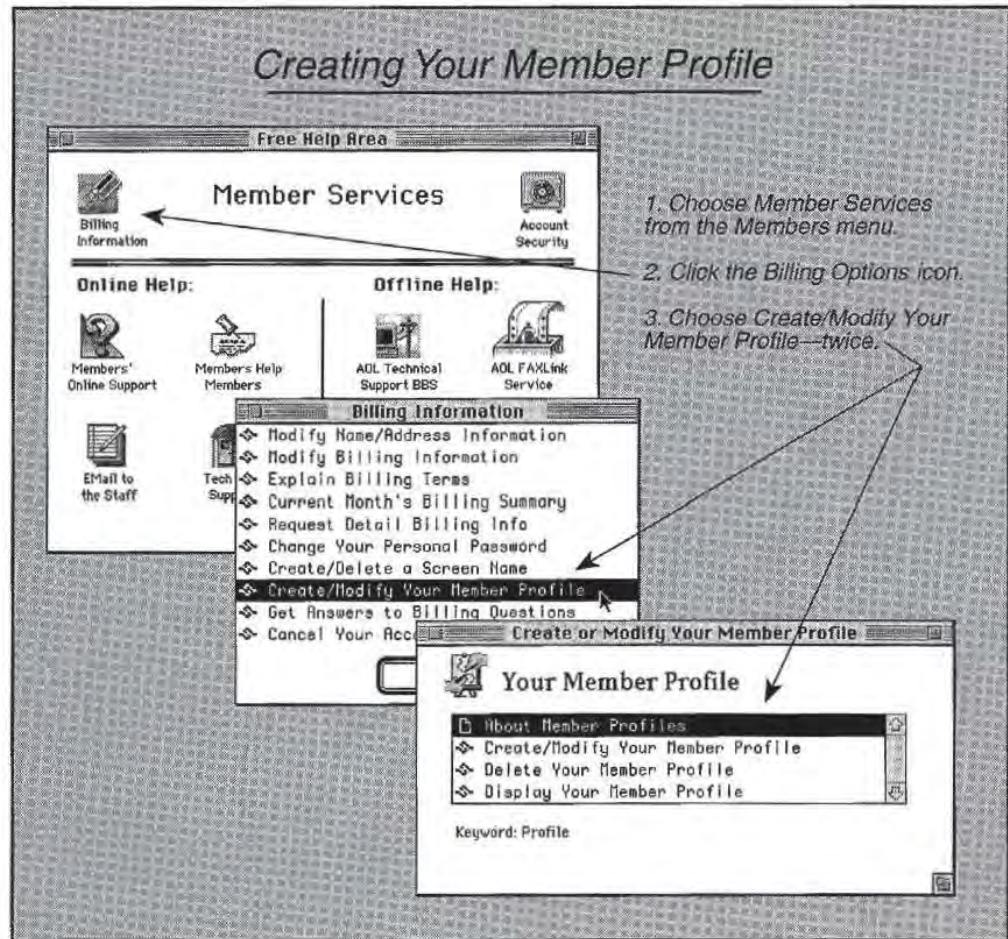
If that's your preference, you cut yourself out of a number of opportunities to become involved in the online community. If you elect to post a profile (or if you're already posted a profile and want to edit it), AOL provides a couple of ways for you to do so.

Look again at the menu pictured in Figure 3-12. Note that one of the options listed there is "Edit Your Online Profile." While this is one way to get the job done, a better way is to go through Member Services. You've got to be signed on in either case, but Member Services is free and choosing Edit Your Online Profile from the Members menu is not. Moreover, the Member Services route offers a few options that aren't available from the Members menu. You can also use the keyword: Profile. Both routes pass through the free curtain.

Once you choose either one of these methods, you'll see the window pictured at the bottom of Figure 3-3. Note the button labeled Accounts & Billing. Click it and follow the path identified in Figure 3-13.



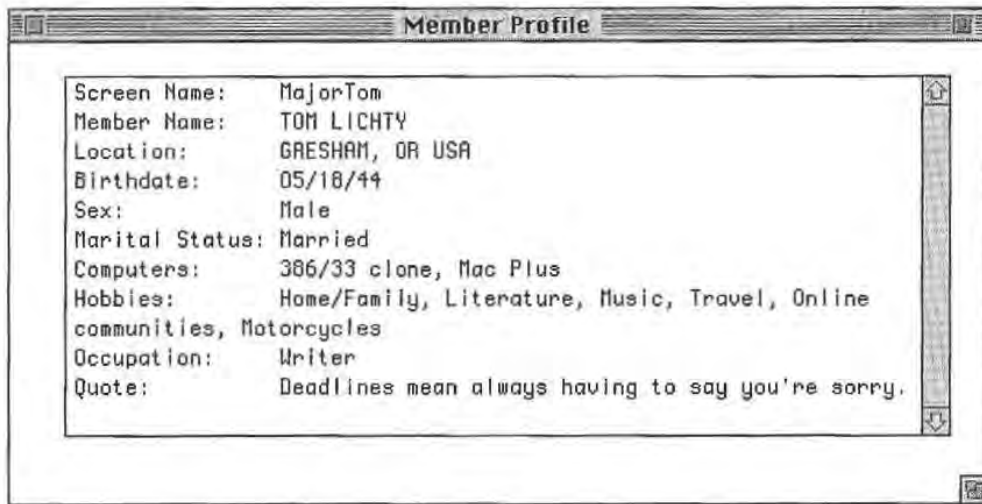
Figure 3-13: You can access your member profile by using the keyword: Profile; by choosing Edit Your Online Profile from the Members menu; or by using Member Services (keyword: Help).



The profile inquiry consists of four screens, each with a few questions about you. Take your time answering these (it's free, after all), and soon you'll have a profile as sterling and poetic as mine (Figure 3-14).



Figure 3-14:
MajorTom's profile
reveals all of my
secrets.



Moving On

We've come a long way since the heavy-metal band took the stage at the beginning of this chapter. I hope your journey has been confidence-building for you. America Online offers more help—and more *kinds* of help—than any software I've known. It's online, it's off-line, it's Jay Levitt and the Customer Relations Department, it's Members Helping Members, and it's Guides. Everyone at AOL—members included—helps someone else sooner or later. That's comforting. Not only is AOL a community, it's a *considerate* community, where no one remains a stranger for long.

And now's the time to become a member of that community. The best way to do that is to send electronic mail to someone. Mail is the heart of the AOL community, and we'll explore it thoroughly in the next chapter.



People Connection

CHAPTER 12



People Connec-

tion is the real-time headquarters of AOL. This is not the home of message boards and e-mail: communication here is as immediate as a telephone conversation. Unlike telephone conversations, however, with People Connection any number of people can be involved. There's never a long-distance toll to pay, and half the people you talk to are strangers—but never for long.

People Connection is the heart of the AOL community. It is here you make the enduring friendships that keep you coming back, day after day. Here, in a "diner," you can order a short stack and a cup of coffee, and talk over the weekend ahead. You can also sip a brew in a "pub" after a long day on the job. There are "events" here as well, where you can interview eminent guests and hobnob with luminaries.

Doesn't that sound like a community to you? This isn't couch-potato entertainment, this is *interactive* telecommunication—where imagination and participation are contagious and the concept of community reaches its most eloquent expression.

It sure beats reruns.

Proving that AOLers do exist in real life, a photo of seven members at the Las Vegas AOL gathering in January 1994. Top row (L to R): Trevayne, NealJanet (2 people). Bottom row (L to R): WaterLily, CaNurse, Vrroom, Kunphuzed.

This photo (along with thousands of others) appears in the Gallery, a feature of People Connection. To get to People Connection, click the People Connection button in the Main Menu window.



A Haven for Shy People

America Online is a haven for shy people. Shy people usually like other people, and they're likable themselves; they just don't do well with strangers. Most shy people want to make friends—and all friends were once strangers—but they aren't very adept at doing it.

This is why shy people like AOL. Nobody can see them online, nobody seems to notice if they don't talk much, and if they're uncomfortable, they can always escape at any time—just by signing off. Perhaps best of all, if you're a shy person, you can use a *nom de plume* and no one will even know who you are. There's a bit of masquerade ball in People Connection: you can wear the mask of a different screen name and be whatever or whomever you want. There's something comforting yet exciting about those possibilities.

Shy people can begin the AOL journey in a "safe" place like a forum, where no one's the wiser when they read a few forum messages or download a file or two. The next step would be to make an online friend and exchange some mail. Regardless of the path taken, it takes some time to work up the courage to venture into People Connection, since that invariably means ending up in a room full of strangers. This is not where shy people feel their most comfortable.

The irony is that shy folks love People Connection once they become acquainted with it. It's the perfect outlet for years of pent-up sociability. I'm a shy person. It took me months to work up to People Connection. Yet now it's one of my greatest rewards. I go there whenever I have time. You will too, once you get the hang of it.

The Lobby

Unlike the other departments we've explored, a visit to People Connection requires first passing through the "Lobby." The Lobby is one of AOL's so-called *chat rooms*, where real people communicate in real time. No messages are left here. There are no files to download.

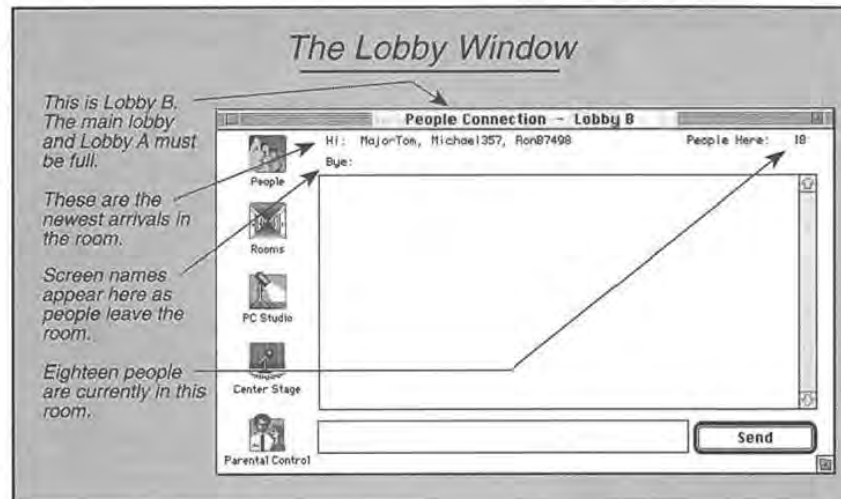
America Online's Lobby is similar to the lobby of a hotel: it's an area people pass through, often on their way to some other destination. Every so often, people bump into an acquaintance, or just sit there a moment to rest.

Entering the Lobby

To begin our People Connection adventure, choose People Connection from the Department screen, choose Lobby from the Go To menu, use the keyword Lobby, or press Command-L. No matter which method you use, you will soon find yourself in the Lobby (see Figure 12-1).



Figure 12-1: The Lobby screen seems empty just after I enter.



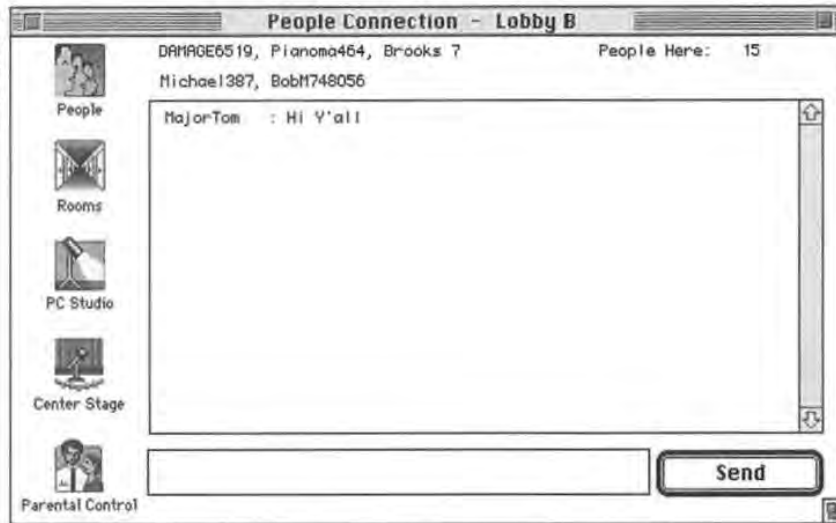
Note that the chat room window pictured in Figure 12-1 says that you are in Lobby B. When I entered the Lobby, AOL routed me to Lobby B. This happens whenever traffic on the system is heavy. When the main Lobby reaches capacity (rooms are considered filled when they contain 23 members), AOL places people in the secondary lobby—Lobby A. It too must have filled by the time I arrived, so I got placed in Lobby B. Note that it was also approaching capacity, so new arrivals were about to be routed into yet another lobby. This isn't uncommon. There are often a dozen or more lobbies in operation at any one time. America Online will run out of letters in the alphabet if this keeps up.

People in a room can see when others enter it by watching the text at the top of the window following the word "Hi." Since mine is the first name on the list, I was the most recent arrival. Departing members' names appear after the word "Bye." I just got here; no one has left since I arrived.

Finally, note that there is no text in the main (conversation) portion of the window other than the announcement telling me where I am. The only true conversation appearing here occurs after my arrival, and I have just walked in the door. That situation changes the moment I speak (see Figure 12-2).



Figure 12-2: No matter how shy you're feeling, say hello when you enter a room.

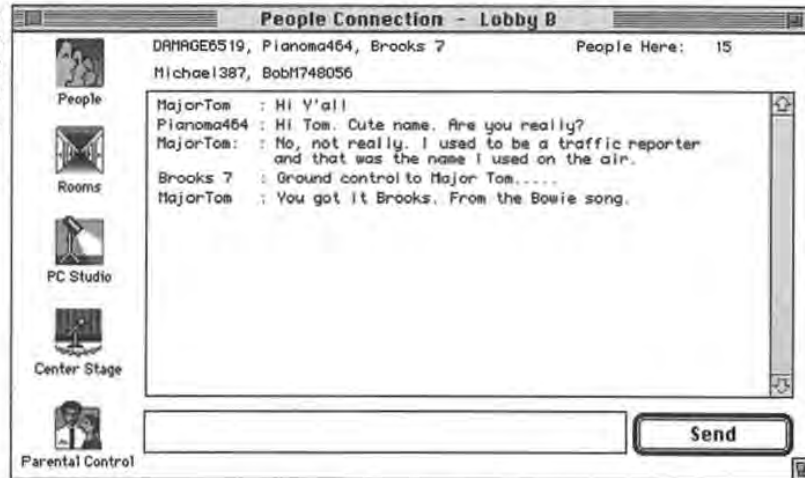


Look again at Figure 12-2. This lobby is active today. People are rushing through it with hardly a pause. By the time I've said hello, in a matter of seconds, three more people have arrived and six have left. America Online's lobbies are something like a hotel lobby just after a large meeting has let out: people are scurrying everywhere. (This is particularly true during periods of heavy usage. The session pictured occurred on a Sunday morning. America Online is almost always busy on the weekends.)

Seconds later, a conversation has begun (see Figure 12-3).



Figure 12-3: Catchy screen names come in handy when you first enter a room.



Though I became immediately involved in a conversation, don't feel obligated to do so yourself. It's perfectly all right to say hello, then just watch for a while. In fact, I recommend it: it gives you a chance to adapt to the pace of the conversation—to get to know who is in the room and what they're like. Lobbies are good for this. They're lobbies, after all. It's perfectly natural for people to sit in a lobby and watch other people.

Guides

To carry my hotel lobby analogy a bit further, you might find a "con-cierge" there—a *Guide*—to answer your questions. Like a real-life hotel concierge, AOL's Guides are chosen for their knowledge of the territory and their friendly personalities. Watch the conversation for a while. No doubt you'll soon see someone with the word "Guide" in his or her screen name. More likely, a Guide will welcome you to the room.

Take a moment to look back at Figure 3-11. Do you see the Guide there? She welcomed me the moment I walked into the room and went out of her way to be of assistance. This is the way all Guides tend to be.

Guides are on duty from 9 A.M. to 6 A.M. (Eastern time), seven days a week. Since I already discussed them in Chapter 3, "Online Help & the Members," I won't go over their function again. But if you would like to review that section, turn back to that chapter (see page 67).



Exploring Other Public Rooms

As is the case with hotel lobbies, you won't want to stay in AOL's lobbies indefinitely. Lots of other rooms await you, where conversations are more focused and residents less transitory. These rooms can be great fun; all you have to do is find the one that suits you best.

The Event Rooms Guide

Room exploration should not be done randomly. The method I recommend is to become familiar with the event rooms before you enter them. To do this, click the PC Studio icon. It's the "spotlight" icon pictured in Figure 12-3. The PC Studio window opens with its selection of options. Double-click What's Happening This Week, then double-click Event Rooms Guide (see Figure 12-4).

Figure 12-4:
Become familiar
with the Event
Rooms Guide
before you spend
time in People
Connection.

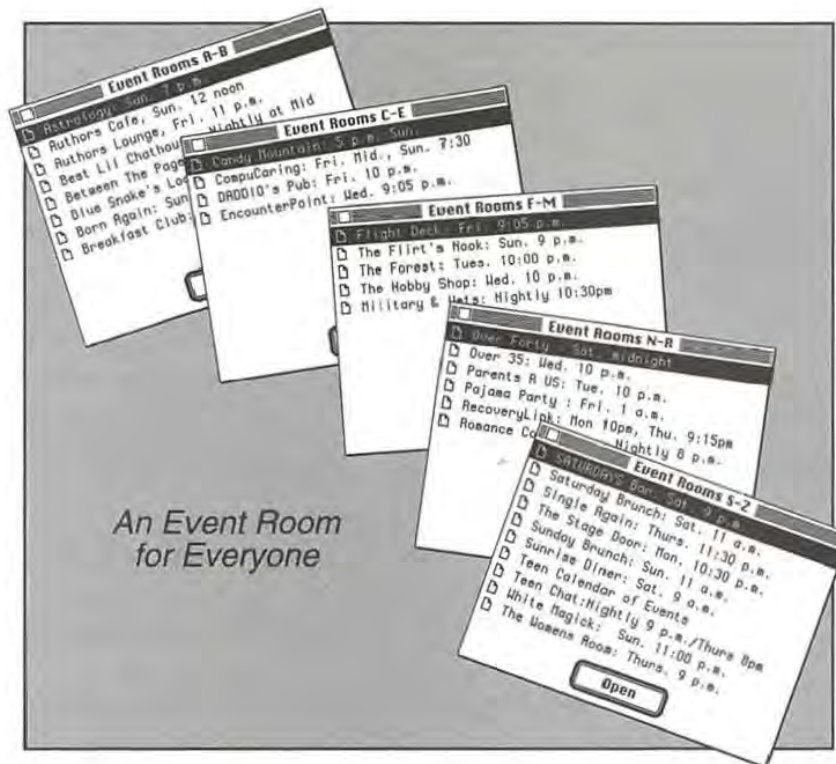


Many of the rooms available on AOL at any particular moment are spontaneously created by members. While spontaneous rooms can sometimes be entertaining and fun, they lack the focus found in the regularly scheduled event rooms. Event rooms are populated by hosts



and regulars—people who have developed an online camaraderie and whose patter is familiar and neighborly. Hosts keep the conversation on track and offer a familiar “face” to anyone who visits. Hosts and regulars aren’t cliquish, however; you’re never made to feel unwelcome in one of AOL’s event rooms. At this writing, 33 event rooms are listed (a number that’s sure to change), ranging from the Best Lil Chathouse to Parents R US (see Figure 12-5). Shall we drop in on one?

Figure 12-5: Thirty-three event rooms are scheduled this week. Double-click any one for a description.



One of my favorites is the Authors Cafe, which meets every Saturday at 1 P.M. (Eastern time). You never know who’ll turn up—familiar writers visit it regularly. America Online is a favorite haunt for writers, partly because of the Writers’ Club (keyword: Writers) and partly because of its unique chat rooms such as the Authors Cafe. The morning I visited, Tom Clancy dropped by, unscheduled and unannounced.



The log of his appearance appears below. Typical of a chat room, smileys and shorthand abound. The symbol :) is a smile and :(is a frown (turn your head 90 degrees counterclockwise); and "LOL" means "laughing out loud." These can be modified with semicolons (winks) or D's (open-mouth smiles).

D P Gumby: Hi Tom!! :)

Tom Clancy: Good morning, Gumby

Tom Clancy: and Rosey

D P Gumby: Hey Tom..... you should think about joining us at the Allentown Bash!

Tom Clancy: when's the party?

D P Gumby: We've got about 100 onliners coming to the Bash.... it's gonna be a blast! :)

D P Gumby: August 21-23.... in Allentown PA!

Tom Clancy: busy then—doing something with Johns Hopkins

Tom Clancy: their summer camp for kids with cancer

ROSEY DAWN: Got any new books close to being released, Tom???

Data Dump3: <— showing a prospective customer the service :D

Tom Clancy: sorry, Rosey, no. I just came to terms with Putnam for #7, which I now have to write :(

Gleeful: Hiya Prospective Customer..:D

Data Dump3: Mornin' Tom :D

D P Gumby: I'll be first in line for it, Tom! :)

ROSEY DAWN: Oh well, anticipation makes it even better!

Tom Clancy: hello, Dump

Gleeful: lol Tom...you sold it and you haven't written it yet?? :D

Tom Clancy: that's normal

ROSEY DAWN: Heck, Glee—I'd *buy* it too — just knowing Tom is going to write it

Tom Clancy: the advance money is the literary equivalent of a gun to the head

Gleeful: Tom...doesn't that put a lot of pressure on you tho???

D P Gumby: I think, based on past performance...we can assume it'll be a good investment on behalf of the publisher

Tom Clancy: pressure....what do you think?

Tom Clancy: they pay you \$XM, and you have to deliver a product, from inside your head, that's worth \$XM



ROSEY DAWN: What's in your head, Tom, is worth at least \$XXXXX

D P Gumby: Or more! :)

Tom Clancy: thanks, ma'am, I'd like to think so

Gleeful: awww Tom...You'll be just fine...just ask us..we know..D

Data Dump3: Sheesh Tom, I would hate to run around w/ a price on my head....let alone in it!!! ;D

Tom Clancy: don't worry, all writers are scared at this stage

Tom Clancy: we're SUPPOSED to be insecure, but not as badly as actors are

D P Gumby: That's a good point, Tom.. i do a lot of theater.. and it's awfully frightening sometimes!!

Tom Clancy: I speak a lot, and I always get stage fright

D P Gumby: they say the best of them do, Tom...

Tom Clancy: there's no dishonor in it, it happened to Olivier, too

Tom Clancy: it's a thoroughly crummy way to earn a living, but you do it because you love it, and because you have to do it

Gleeful: Have to Tom??

Tom Clancy: yeah, it's my mission in life, it's what I do

Rich OO: Money is a great motivator. :)

Gleeful: Tom...do you give a lot of talks??

Tom Clancy: quite a few, yes

Rich OO: Tom..I always draw a blank til the speech is over,,,I have no idea what I've said. :)

Gleeful: Are books usually the subject or something else, Tom?

Tom Clancy: me, too, Rich

Tom Clancy: Glee, I just get up there and ramble

Tom Clancy: All my speaking money goes to my kids' school

Gleeful: Good place for it to go.;D

ROSEY DAWN: Will you run for President, Tom????

GATEWAY: You have my vote, Tom!

Tom Clancy: Rosey, do I LOOK that STUPID?????

Gleeful: See ya'll later!! I have an appt to keep.;D

Gleeful: Tom...it was nice to meet you..:D

AFC Doug: <— off to jump out of an airplane. :D

Tom Clancy: don't forget the chute, pal

D P Gumby: Time for me to run... see y'all later! Take care, Tom!



The Event Rooms Schedule

The Event Rooms Schedule is posted in the PC Studio along with the Event Rooms Guide. Look again at the center window in Figure 12-4: do you see the schedule there? Double-click it to view it. The week's schedule is pictured in Figure 12-6.

Figure 12-6: The seven-day Event Rooms Schedule. Use this schedule along with the Event Rooms Guide to plan your visits.

The Event Rooms Schedule			
Day	Time	Event	Host
Mon.	8:00 PM	Romance Connection	RCLisa,RCKoala,RCDreanier
	9:00 PM	LaPub Happy Hour	PubTend EM
	9:00 PM	Teen Chat	
	9:00 PM	POWs Let Behind	Vets Jerry
	10:00 PM	RecoveryLink	SuziPool, GabeCT
	10:30 PM	The Stage Door	Dale Lyles
	10:00 PM	LaPub	PubTend BB
Tue.	12:00 AM	Best Lil Chathouse	MadamLyn
	12:00 AM	LaPub Late Nite	PubTendAnn
Tue.	8:00 PM	Romance Connection	RCSothe,RCdeLuna,RCLovebig
	8:00 PM	Teen Chat	SweetTeen, Monopoly8
	9:00 PM	LaPub Happy Hour	PubTendWAR
	9:00 PM	New Member Lounge	NML Cactus
	10:00 PM	The Forest	Alendra
	10:00 PM	Parents R US	Fore-er-mom
	10:00 PM	LaPub	PubTend RS
	11:00 PM	Between The Pages	MizChiz
	11:00 PM	Blue Snakes Lodge	Blue Snake
	12:00 AM	Best Lil Chathouse	MadamShena
Wed.	8:00 PM	Romance Connection	RC Lucy,RC Suzie,RCAnore
	8:00 PM	Teen Chat	DrCatalyst
	9:00 PM	The Drom	OdysseyII
	9:00 PM	LaPub Happy Hour	PubTendAla
	9:05 PM	EncounterPoint	HealsIovr
	10:00 PM	Hobby Shop	Grashopper
	10:00 PM	Over 35	Taniia
Thu.	10:00 PM	LaPub	PubTend WD
	12:00 AM	Best Lil Chathouse	MastSofy
	8:00 PM	Teen Chat	WendyTD,Avrille
	8:00 PM	Romance Connection	RC Lucy,RC Johnny
	8:00 PM	LaPub Happy Hour	PubTend T
	9:00 PM	The Womens Room	EvaS
	9:00 PM	New Member Lounge	NML TJ
Fri.	9:15 PM	RecoveryLink	SuziPool & GabeS
	10:00 PM	LaPub	PubTendSen
	11:00 PM	Movie Madness	MizChiz
	11:30 PM	Single Again	Faceba
	12:00 AM	Best Lil Chathouse	Mast Trev
	8:00 PM	Romance Connection	RCWidDr,RC Sothe
	8:00 PM	LaPub Happy Hour	PubTend Mo
Sat.	9:00 PM	Teen Chat	Vaporok,Orca13
	9:05 PM	Flight Deck	MistHigh
	9:00 PM	New Member Lounge	NML Lisa
	10:00 PM	LaPub	PubTend LS
	10:00 PM	Deddis Pub	Deddis
	11:00 PM	Authors Lounge	SlawGiles
	12:00 AM	LaPub Late Night	PubTend Aeo
	12:00 AM	Best Lil Chathouse	MastV,Goqth,MastShaw
	12:00 AM	CompuCerng	HealsIovr
	1:00 AM	Pejama Party	PJ Johnny
9:00 AM	Saturday Brunch	LalifeI	
Sun.	12:00 PM	Authors Cafe	MizChiz
	8:00 PM	Romance Connection	RCShaw,RC Lisa
	9:00 PM	Saturday's Bar	TomwI8
	9:00 PM	New Member Lounge	NML Denise
	9:00 PM	LaPub Happy Hour	PubTend TD
	9:00 PM	Teen Chat	Esprit,DrCatalyst
	10:00 PM	LaPub	PubTend GF
	11:00 PM	Best Lil Chathouse	MastDreagh, MadamTiggy
	12:00 AM	LaPub Late Night	PubTend Aeo
	12:00 AM	Over Party	JoI848X
Sun.	9:00 AM	The Breakfast Club	Open
	11:00 AM	Sunday Brunch	WendyI
	5:00 PM	Candy Mountain	OdysseyII
	6:30 PM	Bible Chat	Fet Sounds
	7:00 PM	Astralogy	Jo Bringa,Edic
	7:30 PM	CompuCerng	HealsIovr
	8:00 PM	Romance Connection	RC FIF,RCWidDr,RC Lucy
	8:00 PM	New Member Lounge	NML Igvane
	9:00 PM	Bom Again	Patoby
	9:00 PM	LaPub Happy Hour	PubTend Mo
9:00 PM	Teen Chat	OdysseyII, DesW190	
9:00 PM	The Pints Nook	The Fin	
10:00 PM	LaPub	PubTend Fox, PubTend WD	
11:00 PM	White Magic	Caridwyn	
11:00 PM	Best Lil Chathouse	Mast BOO, MademeRose	
12:00 AM	LaPub Late Nite	PubTend AV	

There are three things I need to mention about the schedule in Figure 12-6:

- ⚠ This schedule is subject to change. By the time you read this book, the schedule you see in Figure 12-6 will probably be out of date. Check it for yourself. Print it if you wish (choose Print from the File menu when the schedule is on the screen). Don't rely on Figure 12-6 as the final word.



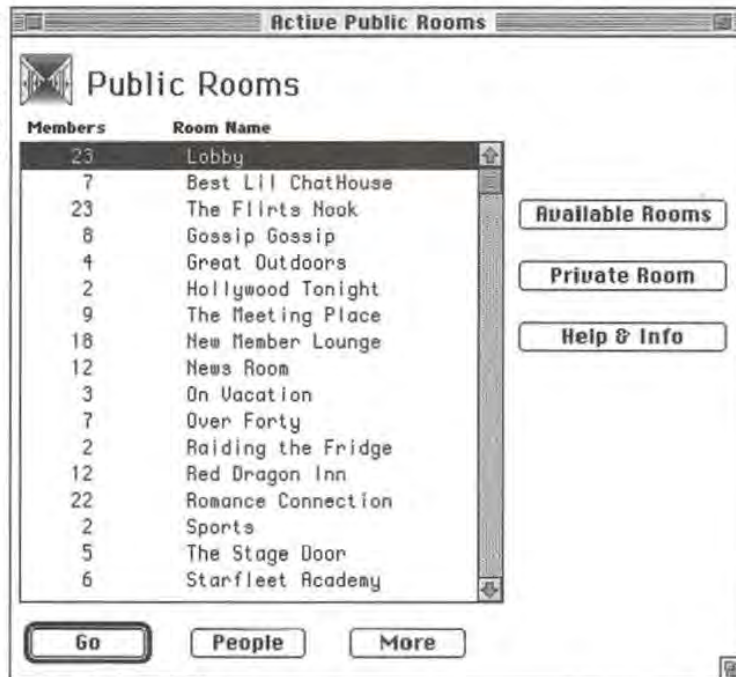
- ▲ No matter how current it might be, the Event Rooms Schedule lists only those events in the People Connection Department and not those scheduled by individual forums or clubs. The Ten Forward Lounge, for instance, is the Star Trek Club's chat room, and it isn't mentioned in the Event Rooms Schedule at all. Consult individual clubs (see Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests," for a discussion of clubs) for their chat rooms and schedules, or use the keyword TITF (Tonight in the Forums) to see what's about to happen.
- ▲ Note the names of the hosts in Figure 12-6. Each of the Event Rooms is hosted, and that is a matter of significance. The hosts' duties include keeping the conversation going, selecting topics, aiding members who have questions (not to the degree that the Guides do, but aid nonetheless), and making sure all members have an enjoyable time—including the shy ones. Events rooms are sponsored by AOL; each room and its host have to go through a trial period before the room is added to the schedule. Though a number of rooms are simply opened by members (and don't appear on the schedule), you can be assured of certain standards of behavior when you visit an event room, and most of the credit for this goes to the host.

Finding Other Rooms

You can always tell which other rooms are available at any particular moment by clicking the Rooms icon at the left side of any chat window (review Figure 12-2 for Lobby B's window). When you click that icon, you'll see the window pictured in Figure 12-7.



Figure 12-7: A Public Rooms list appears whenever you click the Rooms icon in a chat window.



Seventeen rooms are listed in Figure 12-7 and the More button (at the bottom of the window) is active. In fact, more than 35 rooms were available when I visited. Note that the lobby is filled to capacity (again, 23 is the maximum for a room: must have something to do with the fire marshal), so there must be other lobbies hidden beneath the More button. I can go into any room by double-clicking it, or I can get a list of all the people in a room (without going in) by selecting the room, then clicking the People button at the bottom of the screen.

The Active Public Rooms window in Figure 12-7 only lists the *active* public rooms—rooms with people in them. Often, public rooms are available and no one is in them. A listing of these rooms is available by clicking the Available Rooms button (see Figure 12-8).



Figure 12-8: The Available Public Rooms window lists only those available rooms that are currently unoccupied.



Three Kinds of Rooms

People who are new to AOL often have trouble understanding the three kinds of rooms AOL has to offer. Each serves a different purpose. Entering one without an understanding of what's inside is a bit like opening meeting room doors in a large hotel: some might welcome you enthusiastically, others might make you feel unwelcome, and still others might be engaged in conversations that are of no interest to you whatsoever.

- Public rooms** are created and named by AOL to reflect their conversational focus. Some of these are hosted; some are not. So far, public rooms are all we've discussed.
- Private rooms** are created and named by members. Their names never appear on any of the lists you can see. I'll discuss private rooms in a few moments.
- Member rooms** are named and created by members (see Figure 12-9). Member rooms are rarely hosted, though Guides might occasionally visit them. Conversations in member rooms are usually unmonitored and topics range from the sublime to the scurrilous.



Figure 12-9: Member rooms are created by members and are not hosted. You can create one of your own whenever you wish using the Create Room button.



Note that Figure 12-9 contains a Create Room button. Anyone who wishes can create a member room—to talk about a specific topic, or no particular topic at all. You can create your own member room (in which case its title will appear in the window pictured in Figure 12-9), or, if an existing member room topic appeals to you, highlight the room and click the People button (see the bottom of the window in Figure 12-9). You can tell a lot about a room by seeing the names of the people who are there.

Parental Control

We've discussed it before: AOL is a community. On a political level, communities range from socialism to anarchism. But in this country we think of something in between. There is a government, after all, but it's not authoritarian; people do pretty much as they please, within certain bounds.

Our politics are reflected in our families: we seek a balance between despotic authority and profligate anarchy. Parents struggle with this balance: equanimity is elusive. Nowhere is this more evident than in matters of censure.

Every parent adopts a personal level of censorship: that's as it should be. Recently, however, the media have offered their assistance: all motion pictures are rated, many





television cable companies offer selective channel blocking, a rating system is emerging for video games, and AOL offers a feature called *Parental Control* (keyword: Parental Control).

Parental Control can only be used by the master account. The master account is the permanent screen name that was created during your first sign-on to AOL. Parental Control enables the master account holder to restrict—for other names on that account—access to certain areas and features available online. It can be set for one or all screen names on the account; and once it is set for a particular screen name, it is active each time that screen name signs on. Changes can be made only at the master account level, and therefore, only by the person who knows the master account's password.

Figure 12-10:
Using my master
account—
T Lichty—I am
able to control
access to
selective areas
within the
service for all
my other
accounts.

Screen Name	Block Instant Messages	People Connection		Block Conference Rooms
		Block All Rooms	Block Member Rooms	
T Lichty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MajorTom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Refer to Figure 12-10: the master account holder can set any or all of the following four Parental Control features:






- 🔒 *Block Instant Messages* turns off all Instant Messages to and from the screen name. (We'll discuss Instant Messages later in this chapter.)
- 🔒 *Block All Rooms* blocks access to People Connection.
- 🔒 *Block Member Rooms* only blocks access to the member-created rooms within People Connection.
- 🔒 *Block Conference Rooms* blocks access to the special-interest rooms found throughout AOL, such as the classrooms in Learning and Reference, the technical forums in Computing and Software, and the NeverWinter Nights role-playing game in Games and Entertainment.

The Parental Control feature is an elective, not an imperative. Use it if you want; ignore it if you wish. That's a level of intervention that accommodates any parental attitude, and that's the way most of us prefer to have it.



The New Member Lounge

If you're new to chat rooms, you should start at the New Member Lounge. It meets every evening at 9:00 P.M. (Eastern time). Before you enter this or any room, however, it helps to know some of the basic protocol.

- 
 If you intend to stay in a room for a while, say hello when you enter.
- 
 Don't type in uppercase. That's shouting.
- 
 Speak when spoken to, even if you say nothing but "I don't know."
- 
 Use a screen name containing your first name or a nickname. Talking to "TLic7563" is like talking to a license plate. "MajorTom" allows people to call me "Major," "Tom" or "T."
- 
 Keep a log of your first few chat room visits by choosing Logging from the File menu (logs are discussed in Chapter 6, "Today's News"). Review the log off-line when your session has concluded. You'll learn a lot about chats this way.
- 
 Learn your shorthands and smileys, if for no other reason than to figure out what people are doing when they type something like "(((((((((((((((**))))))))))))))" or "ROFLWTIME." To find shorthands online, choose Online Shorthands from the What's Happening This Week window pictured in Figure 12-4. Smileys are also discussed in Chapter 4, "Electronic Mail," and in Chapter 20, "Ten Best."
- 
 There are no stupid questions. Guides, hosts and members love to help. If you're made to feel stupid or unwelcome in a room, visit another.

Private Rooms

Private rooms are the same as public rooms except that they don't appear in any of the rooms windows. Private rooms can hold as many as 23 people and are established by members. There's no way to see a list of private rooms. You'll never know about a private room unless you create one of your own or someone invites you into theirs.



Look again at Figure 12-9. The Private Room button pictured there allows you to create or visit a private room. When you click this button, AOL asks you for a room name. If you enter a name and the room already exists, AOL takes you into that room. If it doesn't exist, AOL creates it and takes you there. If you create a room, the only people who can enter it are those who know its name.

Online Conference Calls

Consider the private room as an alternative to the conference call. We don't tend to think of them that way; but private rooms are essentially mechanisms whereby people from around the country can hold real-time conferences. America Online's private rooms are much less expensive than the phone company's conference calls, and participants can keep a log of the conversation for review once the conference has concluded (see Chapter 6, "Today's News," for a discussion of logs). Conferences are often more productive when participants have to write what they say (makes 'em think before they speak) and when vocal inflections don't cloud the issue.

To hold a private-room conference call (or to simply meet some friends for a chat in a private room), tell the participants the name of the room and the time you want to meet beforehand, then arrive a few minutes early and create the room. Instruct the participants to enter the Lobby (Command-L gets you there in a hurry) when they sign on, click the Rooms icon, click the Private Room button, then type in the name of your room. Try it: it's in many ways superior to a conference call—and cheaper to boot.

Chat Room Technique

It's easy to participate in an online chat. All you need to do is read other members' comments and type your responses, then press the Enter key (or click the Chat window's Send button) when you want to send your own comment. But if you plan to spend a lot of time chatting online, here are a few techniques that might come in handy while you're visiting a chat room.

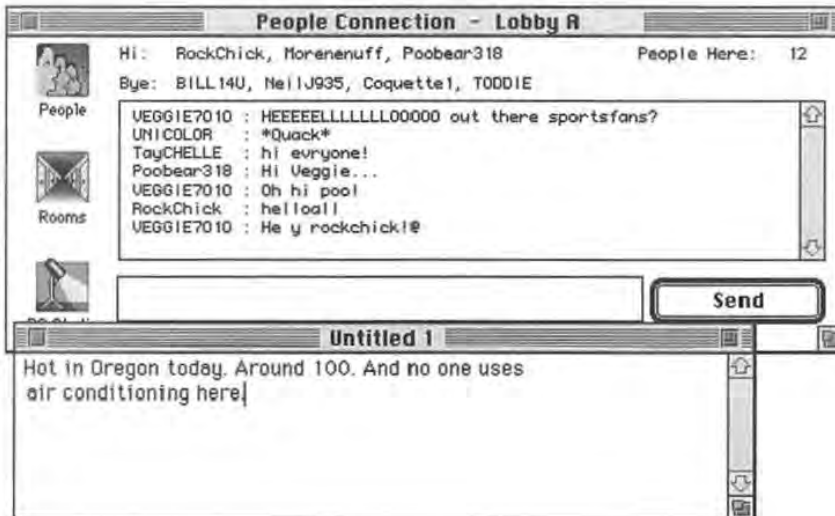
Cut & Paste

Remember that AOL's windows can be resized and relocated anywhere on the screen. First, size the chat window down to leave a small open area on your screen. Now choose New from the File menu and size the resulting Untitled window to fit the open area (see Figure 12-11). Use



the Untitled window as a scratch pad. Make notes and jot responses there. If you want to send a note as a chat comment, copy it from the Untitled window, paste it into the comment box and click Send.

Figure 12-11: Two windows on my screen: at top, Lobby A; below, Untitled 1, where I'm scribbling notes that can be copied later to the top window. I can also use the Untitled window to paste material copied from Lobby A for saving later to disk.



Getting Information About People in a Room

You can find out about anyone in a chat room by clicking the People icon in the upper left corner of the room's window (review Figure 12-3 for this icon). The People in this Room window will open to list—you guessed it—all of the people in the room (see Figure 12-12).

Figure 12-12: Want to know who's in your room? Click the People icon.





If you want to know more about a specific person, select the name and click the Get Info button pictured in Figure 12-12. If that person has completed a profile (discussed in Chapter 3, “Online Help & the Members”), everything they want you to know about them will appear on your screen.



The Gallery

If you want to know even more about a person, check out the Gallery (keyword: Gallery). Members can send their photographs to a scanning service and the electronic result is posted in the Gallery, or they can post scans of their own. There's a search button, so you don't have to look through long listings. Steve Case is there; so am I. Printed gallery photos make great trading cards: “I'll trade you one Steve Case for two MajorToms....”

Sending an Instant Message

Look again at Figure 12-12. See the button marked “Message”? If I wanted to send an Instant Message to MizChiff, I could click that button. Only MizChiff would see it; the other people in the room would be none the wiser. This feature is especially handy, since you will often want to “whisper” privately to someone in a chat room. We'll discuss Instant Messages in a few moments.

Highlighting & Ignoring Members

Investigate the Hilite and Ignore buttons pictured in Figure 12-12. When rooms become full and everyone is talking, it can be difficult to follow what's going on. Often, three or four conversations are going on at the same time. If you wish to exclude a member's comments (or those of all the members in a conversation in which you're not interested), select the member's name in the People in this Room window and click the Ignore button. From then on, that member's text will not appear on your screen.

Conversely, if you want to emphasize a specific member's comments, select the member's name in the People in this Room window and click the Hilite button (note how I've Hilited MizChiff in Figure 12-13). These two buttons are a real boon when chats get busy, yet not every member is aware of them.




Figure 12-13: MizChiff is the operator of the Authors Cafe and I don't want to miss any of her comments. To emphasize her text, I clicked on the Hilite button, pictured in Figure 12-12.



Chat Room Sounds

As long as we're talking about little-used commands, note that a new item—Chat—appears on your menu bar when you're in a chat room. The Chat menu allows you to change your chat room preferences and send chat room sounds. You can send these sounds just as you send text; people in the room will hear the sound just as they would read the text. All you have to do is double-click the sound from the Select a Sound window. That's the good news. Here's the bad news:

- Only Macintoshes can send and receive chat room sounds. Members using other types of machines will only see the sound's name in the chat room window. (Look again at Figure 12-11: Do you see the word *Quack* there? That's a sound.)
- Both the person sending the sound and those who want to hear it must have the sound installed in their Online Sounds file. America Online doesn't transmit the sound file when you send a sound—sending the actual sound itself would take too long using a modem—but rather a *notification* to play the sound. Members' Macs will play the sound only if they have the sound on file.



Finding & Installing Sounds

Hundreds of sounds are posted in the Macintosh Music and Sound Forum (keyword: MMS). To find them quickly, use the keyword FileSearch, then specify "Chat sound" as your search criteria. Remember, sound files are large—usually at least 5k per second—so they may take a while to download.

If you want to add a sound to your Online Sounds file, use the appropriate utility. I'm fond of Riccardo Ettore's *Sound Mover*, which is included in the Sound Manager shareware package available on AOL. It comes with instructions, or you can contact the author of the program on AOL—his screen name is "REttore." To find Sound Manager, use the keyword FileSearch, then specify "Sound Manager" as your search criteria.

Instant Messages

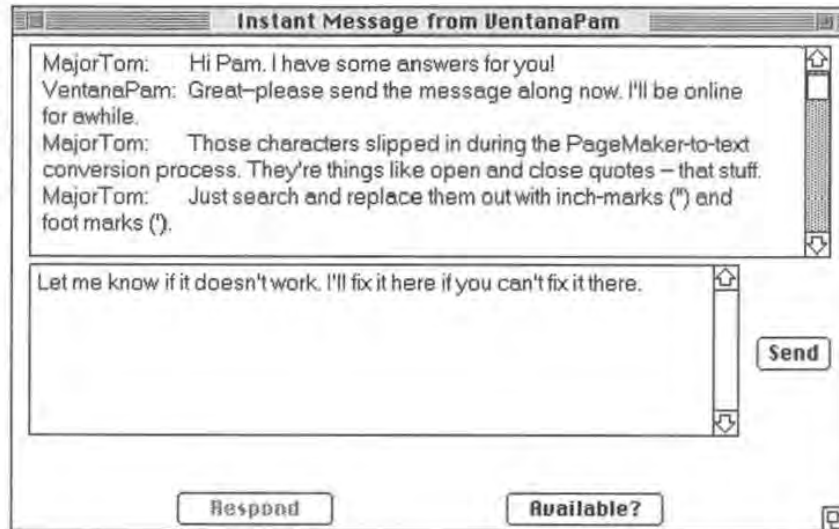
An *Instant Message* is a message sent to someone else online. Don't confuse Instant Messages with e-mail. Unlike e-mail, both the sender and the recipient have to be online at the same time for Instant Messages to work.

As I mentioned earlier, an Instant Message sent to someone else in a chat room is something like whispering in class, though you'll never get in trouble for it. You'll probably encounter Instant Messages most often when you're in a room. It's then, after all, that other people know you're online. Instant Messages aren't limited to chat rooms, however: they work whenever you're online, wherever you might be.

A moment ago, I suggested a private room as an alternative to conference calls. You might also consider Instant Messages as alternatives to long-distance phone calls. Pam Richardson (my primary contact at Ventana Press) and I need to have a number of discussions nearly every day. Unfortunately, Pam is in North Carolina and I am in Oregon—we're about as far away from one another as we can be without being in different countries. Instead of making long-distance telephone calls across the country and four different time zones, we have agreed on mutual times to go online, and now we "talk" without worrying about the cost. All we pay is our normal connect-time charge. A conversation we had the other day appears in Figure 12-14.



Figure 12-14: The Instant Message window contains a running log of our conversation in the upper text box along with the response I'm composing in the lower one.



To send an Instant Message, choose Instant Message from the Members menu or type Command-I. Enter the recipient's screen name and your message where appropriate and click Send. After that, a running log of the conversation is maintained in the Instant Message window, as pictured in Figure 12-13.






- Before you send an Instant Message, use the Available? button, pictured in Figure 12-14, or the Locate a Member Online command under the Members menu. If the recipient isn't online when you send an Instant Message, AOL tells you and you'll have to wait for another opportunity. (If a member is not available online, consider sending e-mail instead. Electronic mail is discussed in Chapter 4.)
- You can send sounds in Instant Messages just as you can in a chat room. Use the sound-broadcasting format described earlier, and be sure that the recipient is using a Mac.



Available or Locate?

The Available? button in the Instant Message window does the same thing as the Locate a Member Online command under the Members menu. I prefer the button. Most of the time, if a member is online you're going to want to say hello, right? If you discover the member online via the Locate command and want to say hello, you have to call up the Instant Message dialog box anyway; but in the period of time it takes to produce that box, you might lose your opportunity.

OK, it's a small matter, and locating members online isn't like locating pike: they aren't liable to disappear in a matter of seconds. Nonetheless, it's one less command to learn, and every time you don't use the Available? button, you'll wish you did.

- 
 Figure 12-14's window has been enlarged from the default. Like all of AOL's windows, the Instant Message window can be sized as you please. If you want to change the size of a window permanently, choose Remember Size from the Windows menu after you have sized the window to your satisfaction.
- 
 You cannot receive or send Instant Messages while in a free area such as the Members' Online Guide. America Online closes any open Instant Message windows when you enter a free area.
- 
 Determine where the intended recipient is before sending an Instant Message by clicking the Available? button in the Instant Message window. This feature tells you if the recipient is online, and if so, whether he or she can receive Instant Messages. It also tells you if a member is in a chat room, in which case you might want to go to that room rather than send an Instant Message.
- 
 If the recipient is online but in a free area, in the process of downloading or in some other way unable to receive an Instant Message, AOL tells you—after it unsuccessfully tries to deliver the message.
- 
 Instant Messages are accompanied by a "tinkerbell" sound and the Instant Message window becomes the frontmost window on your screen. The Preferences command under the Members menu allows you to change these options, but most people prefer the high degree of priority Instant Messages receive without changing their preferences.



- ▲ You can log Instant Messages (handy for “phone call”-style Instant Messages such as those I exchange with Pam) by choosing Logs from the File menu.
- ▲ If you don’t want to be disturbed by Instant Messages, you can turn them off at any time by sending an Instant Message to “\$im_off” (without the quotation marks, with the dollar sign, and always in lowercase). Include a character or two as text for the message; otherwise AOL will respond with a “cannot send empty Instant Message” error. A single character will do. To turn Instant Messages back on, send an Instant Message to “\$im_on.”

Virtual Romance

Robin Williams writes wonderful little books for computer users. Her book *The Little Mac Book* (published by Peachpit Press) should be on every Mac user’s shelf. Robin is the penultimate romantic: she’s charmed by the Byronic, the poetic, the courtly. She writes:

“There was a letter in my mailbox. I didn’t recognize the name of the sender. The letter quoted MacBeth, ‘Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time....’ The writer complained of a gloomy evening in Atlanta, wet and dark and lonely. I realized this person had probably done a search for users who mentioned an interest in Shakespeare in their bios. So I sent a letter back, which included, ‘Hey, lighten up. MacBeth’s dysfunctional. I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlips and the nodding violet grows.’

“We exchanged several other short letters. He was a 24-year-old son of a minister. I was a 37-year-old single mother of three, pure heathen. It was easy to be friends because neither of us expected anything from the other.

“One late night I was hanging around in the lobby. I had only been connected to America Online for about a month, so I was still learning the etiquette and the conventions of online socializing. I heard a tinkling sound, as if someone threw fairy dust at me. On the screen was my first Instant Message, and it was from my friend. We sent a few messages back and forth, then he suggested we go to a private room. I had no idea what a private room was at that time, nor was I aware of what private rooms are generally used for. So I innocently tripped along with him to a room.

“I remember the feeling that night so clearly because it gave me a brief glimpse into the power of virtual reality. Meeting him in the lobby that night was as if I saw him across the

More 



floor of a crowded room. He winked at me, nodded his head toward the hallway, and we snuck out and met in the corridor. We tiptoed down the hall and slipped into an empty room. It was very innocent; we chatted about our lives, history, philosophy, religion. I was so involved in this conversation that took place in the computer's nether world of digital bits and analog streams that when my neighbor walked into my room I jumped. I felt like she had intruded on a very personal moment, as if I had been caught in a dimly lit room, holding hands.

"Somehow, over the months, this unlikely relationship took an unexpected romantic turn. When I received a letter telling me how he had reached up with his left hand, reached into his fantasy, and pulled me down beside him, when he said, 'I would trade my loneliness for the warmth of her laughter; she would trade her nightgown for the cloak of a young man's affection,' when I found emotions raging in me that fought between my brain and my heart, I realized there were facets to human nature that this new medium of communication was going to expose in new and different ways. It was going to be an interesting summer."

Center Stage & Rotunda

America Online offers two special chat rooms called *Center Stage* and *Rotunda*. This is the format AOL uses to present special guests or to offer "game shows" for members to play.

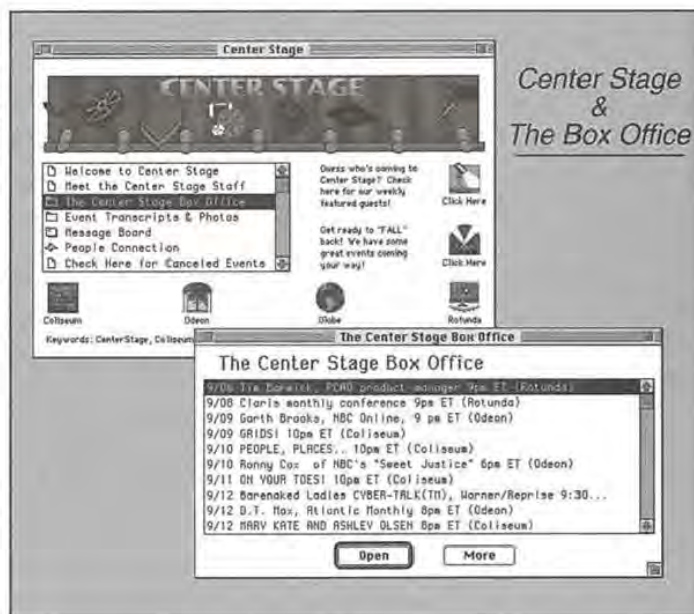
Typically, members attending a Rotunda or Center Stage event sit in "rows" of seats in the audience. Each row has a limited number of seats. This is how AOL accommodates a large audience of members without exceeding its own 23-member room capacity. Your chat window contains the text of everything that's happening on stage, along with comments from other members in your row (but not from members in other rows). You can change rows if you like, as long as there's an empty seat in that row, and you can turn off the comments of members in your row if they're distracting.

Provision is usually made to submit questions or comments to the people onstage. The event's host receives your message and (optionally) delivers it to the guest for a response.

Center Stage and Rotunda schedules are posted each day and are available by using the keyword: Center Stage or the keyword Rotunda (see Figure 12-15). There are many other "large-room" events sponsored by individual forums as well. To see their schedules, use the keyword TITF (Tonight in the Forums).



Figure 12-15: The Box Office lists all upcoming Center Stage events. Double-click any one for details.



Rules for the Center Stage game shows are available by opening the Game Show Rules folder pictured in Figure 12-15. Read them before you take part in a game. Game shows are often profitable: winning contestants are awarded free connect time.

The person in charge of Center Stage—AOL's "theater district"—is Amy Arnold. Another team player who has come up through the ranks, Amy recruits the guests who have filled her four auditoria to capacity recently—something that rarely happened before she took over.

As I mentioned a moment ago, the Center Stage feature is often used to present special guests to members. One of those recently featured was Guy Kawasaki. Kawasaki is the former Director of Software Product Management at Apple Computer, and as such was one of the key players in the success of the Macintosh personal computer.

Guy left Apple in 1987 to start his own software company. An author, he's written *The Macintosh Way*, *Selling the Dream*, *Database 101*, and *The Computer Curmudgeon*. Formerly he was a columnist for *MacUser* magazine. Portions of his Center Stage transcript appear below.

Marge Hawk: Hi Guy! Welcome to Center Stage!

Mac Way: Hi all!



Marge Hawk: Do you plan on writing a biography?

Mac Way: Who would care about my biography?

Mac Way: I am just a Diligent Oriental who did okay in Silicon Valley.

Mac Way: Not like I am Bill Gates or Steve Jobs.

Question: What would be one thing you would like to change in the computer industry?

Mac Way: Good question. Let me think... Several things come to mind 1) Level of compensation for Apple execs. Nah, too obvious. 2) Software piracy. Nah, too greedy. 3) Assumption that you have to have lots of money to start a company. This is it. I want everybody out there to have the courage and masochism to start new companies and not listen to the prevailing cr** that it takes lots of (vc) money.

Question: Guy, do you recommend living in the Silicon Valley area to young people trying to get into the computer industry?

Mac Way: It is not really necessary. I think the place to start in the business is in field sales. That way you can learn about rejection and what customers want. If you work in the Valley, in the headquarters of companies, you tend to lose touch with customers because you live in the "Tower."

Question: I am an avid PC user and I have recently read your book. Can you give me one good reason why I should buy an Apple?

Mac Way: Sure. You can never have too fast a car, too many silk blouses, or too easy a computer to use. How many apps do you really use? I bet a Macintosh owner can use more.

Question: Guy, Do you think Apple has sold out Mac evangelism and religion in favor of market share, "strategic" alliances and business footholds?

Mac Way: Another good question. I don't think Apple "sold out." I think it just "leased" it for a while. When they need good, ole evangelism for the next computer, they'll get back the feelings. Toward the end of the Apple II, there wasn't much "evangelism" for it either.

Question: Do you think there will ever be an end to the Windows/Macintosh "debate?"

Mac Way: Never. What else do the press and analysts have to write about? You can say you heard it here first. The world can be divided into two groups: 1) those who can do, and 2) those who can't. Those who can't and can write, become



press. Those who can't and can't write, become analysts. The best way to make money is to do the opposite of what the press and analysts say. End of sermon.

Question: What are the most underaddressed areas where we need new software?

Mac Way: Telecommunications for mere mortals.

Question: What curriculum/activity would you recommend to someone who wants to develop Mac multimedia software?

Mac Way: A course in personal bankruptcy would help. I just don't believe in MM yet. I think John Sculley read too many issues of Nova. MM is a solution in search of a need, IMHO.

Question: Guy, Many PC users continue to claim that the Mac is underpowered and erratic in its design and short on customer support. Do you think Apple has addressed these challenges with the recent changes at the company?

Mac Way: Yes, but who cares what PC users think? Why should eagles worry about what pigs think of the sky?

Ahem! On that note, perhaps it's best if we wrap up this chapter.

Moving On

Many of those who are new to AOL sidestep People Connection at first. Perhaps it's too intimidating. Perhaps they're shy. Whatever the reason, it's a shame. People Connection is the heart of the AOL community. It is here that you finally stop thinking of AOL as an electronic service and begin thinking of it as people. In the search for community, People Connection is where you find the bounty.

Speaking of bounty, do you have a hobby? Perhaps you have an interest: cooking comes to mind, or bicycling. Hobbies and interests are best enjoyed when there are others around with the same penchant: you can share your ideas with them and hear of theirs.

The trouble is, people with similar interests are sometimes hard to find—but not if you look around AOL. There are nearly a million of us here now, and with numbers like that, there's bound to be a few who share your interests.

The place to investigate is the Clubs & Interests Department, and it's coming up next.

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 VirtualLingo 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.