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FYI on Questions and Answers  
Answers to Commonly asked "New Internet User" Questions

Status of this Memo

This FYI RFC is one of two FYI's called, "Questions and Answers" (Q/A), produced by the User Services Working Group of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). The goal is to document the most commonly asked questions and answers in the Internet.

This memo provides information for the Internet community. It does not specify any standard. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

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1. Introduction

New users joining the Internet community have the same questions as did everyone else who has ever joined. Our quest is to provide the Internet community with up to date, basic Internet knowledge and experience, while moving the redundancies away from the electronic mailing lists so that the lists' subscribers do not have to read the same queries and answers over and over again.

Future updates of this memo will be produced as User Services members

become aware of additional questions that should be included, and of deficiencies or inaccuracies that should be amended in this document. An additional FYI Q/A will be published which will deal with intermediate and advanced Q/A topics.

The Q/A mailing lists are maintained by Gary Malkin at FTP.COM. They are used by a subgroup of the User Services Working Group to discuss the Q/A FYIs. They include:

quail@ftp.com	This is a discussion mailing list. Its primary use is for pre-release review of the Q/A FYIs.
quail-request@ftp.com	This is how you join the quail mailing list.
quail-box@ftp.com	This is a write-only list which serves as a repository for candidate questions and answers. It is not necessary to be on the quail mailing list to forward to the quail-box.

## 2. Acknowledgements

The following people deserve thanks for their help and contributions to this FYI Q/A: Vint Cerf (CNRI), Ralph Droms (Bucknell), Tracy LaQuey Parker (UTexas), Craig Partridge (SICS), Jon Postel (ISI), Joyce K. Reynolds (ISI), Karen Roubicek (BBNST), Marty Schoffstall (PSI, Inc.), Patricia Smith (Merit), Gene Spafford (Purdue) and James Van Bokkelen (FTP Software, Inc.).

## 3. Questions About the Internet

What is the Internet?

The Internet is a large collection of networks (all of which run the TCP/IP protocols) that are tied together so that users of any of the networks can use the network services provided by TCP/IP to reach users on any of the other networks. The Internet started with the ARPANET, but now includes such networks as NSFNET, NYSERnet, and thousands of others. There are other major wide area networks, such as BITNET and DECnet networks, that are not based on the TCP/IP protocols and are thus not part of the Internet. However, it is possible to communicate between them and the Internet via electronic mail because of mail gateways that act as "translators" between the different network protocols involved.

Note: You will often see "internet" with a small "i". This could refer to any network built based on TCP/IP, or might refer to networks using other protocol families that are composites built

of smaller networks.

I just got on the Internet. What can I do now?

You now have access to all the resources you are authorized to use on your own Internet host, on any other Internet host on which you have an account, and on any other Internet host that offers publicly accessible information. The Internet gives you the ability to move information between these hosts via file transfers. Once you are logged into one host, you can use the Internet to open a connection to another, login, and use its services interactively (this is known as remote login or "TELNETTING". In addition, you can send electronic mail to users at any Internet site and to users on many non-Internet sites that are accessible via electronic mail.

There are various other services you can use. For example, some hosts provide access to specialized databases or to archives of information. The Internet Resource Guide provides information regarding some of these sites. The Internet Resource Guide lists facilities on the Internet that are available to users. Such facilities include supercomputer centers, library catalogs and specialized data collections. The guide is published by the NSF Network Service Center (NNSC) and is continuously being updated. The Resource Guide is distributed free via e-mail (send a note to resource-guide-request@nnsf.net to join the e-mail distribution) and via anonymous FTP (in nnsf.net:resource-guide/\*). Hardcopy is available at a nominal fee (to cover reproduction costs) from the NNSC. Call the NNSC at 617-873-3400 for more information.

How do I find out if a site has a computer on the Internet?

Three good sources to consult are "%@: A Directory of Electronic Mail Addressing and Networks" by Donnalyn Frey and Rick Adams; "The User's Directory of Computer Networks", by Tracy LaQuey; and "The Matrix: Computer Networks and Conferencing Systems Worldwide", by John Quarterman.

In addition, it is possible to find some information about Internet sites in the WHOIS database maintained at the DDN NIC at SRI International. The DDN NIC (Defense Data Network, Network Information Center) provides an information retrieval interface to the database that is also called WHOIS. To use this interface, TELNET to NIC.DDN.MIL and type "whois" (carriage return). No login is necessary. Type "help" at the whois prompt for more information on using the facility. WHOIS will show many sites, but may not show every site registered with the DDN NIC (simply

for reasons having to do with how the program is set up to search the database).

#### 4. Questions About TCP/IP

What is TCP/IP?

TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) [4,5,6] is the common name for a family of over 100 data-communications protocols used to organize computers and data-communications equipment into computer networks. TCP/IP was developed to interconnect hosts on ARPANET, PRNET (packet radio), and SATNET (packet satellite). All three of these networks have since been retired; but TCP/IP lives on. It is currently used on a large international network of networks called the Internet, whose members include universities, other research institutions, government facilities, and many corporations. TCP/IP is also sometimes used for other networks, particularly local area networks that tie together numerous different kinds of computers or tie together engineering workstations.

What are the other well-known standard protocols in the TCP/IP family?

Other than TCP and IP, the three main protocols in the TCP/IP suite are the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) [8], the File Transfer Protocol (FTP) [3], and the TELNET Protocol [9]. There are many other protocols in use on the Internet. The Internet Activities Board (IAB) regularly publishes an RFC [2] that describes the state of standardization of the various Internet protocols. This document is the best guide to the current status of Internet protocols and their recommended usage.

#### 5. Questions About the Domain Name System

What is the Domain Name System?

The Domain Name System (DNS) is a hierarchical, distributed method of organizing the name space of the Internet. The DNS administratively groups hosts into a hierarchy of authority that allows addressing and other information to be widely distributed and maintained. A big advantage to the DNS is that using it eliminates dependence on a centrally-maintained file that maps host names to addresses.

What is a Fully Qualified Domain Name?

A Fully Qualified Domain Name (FQDN) is a domain name that

includes all higher level domains relevant to the entity named. If you think of the DNS as a tree-structure with each node having its own label, a Fully Qualified Domain Name for a specific node would be its label followed by the labels of all the other nodes between it and the root of the tree. For example, for a host, a FQDN would include the string that identifies the particular host, plus all domains of which the host is a part up to and including the top-level domain (the root domain is always null). For example, PARIS.NISC.SRI.COM is a Fully Qualified Domain Name for the host at 192.33.33.109. In addition, NISC.SRI.COM is the FQDN for the NISC domain.

## 6. Questions About Internet Documentation

What is an RFC?

The Request for Comments documents (RFCs) are working notes of the Internet research and development community. A document in this series may be on essentially any topic related to computer communication, and may be anything from a meeting report to the specification of a standard. Submissions for Requests for Comments may be sent to the RFC Editor, Jon Postel (POSTEL@ISI.EDU).

Most RFCs are the descriptions of network protocols or services, often giving detailed procedures and formats for their implementation. Other RFCs report on the results of policy studies or summarize the work of technical committees or workshops. All RFCs are considered public domain unless explicitly marked otherwise.

While RFCs are not refereed publications, they do receive technical review from either the task forces, individual technical experts, or the RFC Editor, as appropriate. Currently, most standards are published as RFCs, but not all RFCs specify standards.

Anyone can submit a document for publication as an RFC. Submissions must be made via electronic mail to the RFC Editor. Please consult RFC 1111, "Instructions to RFC Authors" [10], for further information. RFCs are accessible online in public access files, and a short message is sent to a notification distribution list indicating the availability of the memo. Requests to be added to this distribution list should be sent to RFC-REQUEST@NIC.DDN.MIL.

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