                    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
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   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@nnsc.nsf.net to join the e-mail
distribution) and via anonymous FTP (in nnsc.nsf.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

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        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

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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.

      The online files are copied by interested people and printed or
      displayed at their sites on their equipment. (An RFC may also be

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