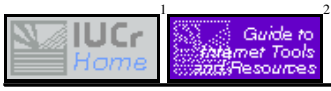

Future Possibilities for the Newsgroups

History and Current Situation

The international academic research network (the Internet) was intended to create a revolution for science and academia. However, in the case of the Internet newsgroups, this revolution has not yet occurred for the benefit of mainstream science. (Though biological science applications have fared much better due to the committment of the bionet[3] newsgroup network). Even now, the newsgroups are mainly promoted in the mainstream media as a toy for the purile, for various pornographic applications, the bizarre, and the bored with a spare lifetime to browse and play around. The limited range of scientific newsgroups can be attributed to the failings of the academic and government funding agencies who funded much of the hardware and infrastructure, but did not bother in systematically setting up mainstream academic applications of this technology. The present mainstream culture of fun and games thus reflects on the type of people who had plenty of time to exploit this technology for their own personal private pursuits. The relative lack of scientific usage is not only quite visible in the relatively small number of scientific and academic newsgroups, but also in the limited scope and usage of scientific newsgroups. The situation is improving, but at a very slow pace.

Despite a trivial–pursuits culture that surrounds the vast majority of Internet newsgroups, serious scientific usage is possible. As implied from above, serious professional usage of this newsgroup communications technology is not a mainstream application of the Internet newsgroups. However, special scientist–friendly newsgroup networks especially setup to assist academics and researchers, such as the bionet[4] (and the proposed scinet[5]) are helping scientists to have a user–friendly and productive entry into this powerful communications technology.

What's the Future of the Internet Newsgroups? | top[6]

If one was to be cynical or realistic(?), and base a response of past and present trends, the answer to the above question, would be; less quality usage; more pornography; more trivia, more *stream of consciousness drivel* for the privileged few who are able to afford entry into the Internet. However, it is possible to fantisize about the future of the newsgroups, keep it upbeat and rated G!

Presently the international newsgroups on the Internet system are very much biased towards computer users who can touch type; read/write English; and explain ideas and concepts in plain ASCII text.[7] The future of the newsgroups will be for inherently user–friendly multi–media news systems and software that do not discriminate between race, creed, colour, religion – and the computer illiterate. Perhaps this could be best described as the equivalent of what the *World Wide Web* did to upgrade *gopher*.

This implies news systems and software where users neither need to type or read/write/speak English. In the network news systems of the future, users should be able to speak into a computer microphone, talk into a computer video camera, scribble on an electronic note pad (all in their native languages!); and the news software will take care of the rest – translation and presentation world wide in an efficient and equally user–friendly manner. This could involve a variety of possibilities including translation into plain text, providing video, audio and graphics on demand in a resolution and quality that takes into account, the variable quality and usage of Internet links around the world. Parts of this technology are evident but have not been introduced to the mainstream Internet user. The present mainstream Internet development seems to be devoted on developing the World Wide Web and providing user–friendly multi–media, static information, not user–friendly, convenient, multi–media interactive global

[1] http://www.iucr.ac.uk/iucr–top/welcome.html
[2] int.index.html
[3] int.news.gen.html#bionet
[4] int.news.gen.html#bionet
[5] int.news.gen.html#scinet
[6] #top
[7] int.news.use.html

communication.

With the present trend for making the World Wide Web[8] interfaces slicker, it is unlikely this future for the newsgroups will happen in the very short term. Commercial Internet interests, while each proclaiming they will implement the future of the Internet, seem more interested in adding on minor modifications to World Wide Web software. It would not be surprising if a dynamic multi–media future for interactive world wide communications (based on the newsgroups) was due to a not–for–profit ideas of a few creative and motivated individuals. (As was not only the origin of the Internet newsgroups, but also the origin of the World Wide Web[9] that created the present stage of the Internet revolution.)

With the present commercialization of the Internet, many large corporations are trying to convince the public that their company holds the vision and future of the Internet. In practice, most of these companies have a history of generating their large growth and profits by quickly following the inventors of this computer technology, not creating and quickly acting on radical new technology they develop themselves. However the Internet is still such that an individual or small group of individuals can make a difference in not only the creation of new resources on the Internet such as newsgroups, but of entire new protocols and technology. This has been the case in the past, and can be achieved with quite modest computer facilities and average Internet links, other qualities not so easily purchased such as vision, motivation, appropriate knowledge and technical skills are also required.

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8 http://www.w3.org/vl/Overview.html
9 http://www.w3.org/vl/Overview.html
10 int.index.html
11 http://www.unige.ch/crystal/stxnews/stx/volnteer.htm
12 http://www.unige.ch/crystal/stxnews/newsgrp/newsfutr.htm