

Although this book primarily focuses on networks, many of the topics are also important in distributed systems. For more information about distributed systems, see Tanenbaum and Van Steen (2007).

1.1 USES OF COMPUTER NETWORKS

Before we start to examine the technical issues in detail, it is worth devoting some time to pointing out why people are interested in computer networks and what they can be used for. After all, if nobody were interested in computer networks, few of them would be built. We will start with traditional uses at companies, then move on to home networking and recent developments regarding mobile users, and finish with social issues.

1.1.1 Business Applications

Most companies have a substantial number of computers. For example, a company may have a computer for each worker and use them to design products, write brochures, and do the payroll. Initially, some of these computers may have worked in isolation from the others, but at some point, management may have decided to connect them to be able to distribute information throughout the company.

Put in slightly more general form, the issue here is **resource sharing**. The goal is to make all programs, equipment, and especially data available to anyone on the network without regard to the physical location of the resource or the user. An obvious and widespread example is having a group of office workers share a common printer. None of the individuals really needs a private printer, and a high-volume networked printer is often cheaper, faster, and easier to maintain than a large collection of individual printers.

However, probably even more important than sharing physical resources such as printers, and tape backup systems, is sharing information. Companies small and large are vitally dependent on computerized information. Most companies have customer records, product information, inventories, financial statements, tax information, and much more online. If all of its computers suddenly went down, a bank could not last more than five minutes. A modern manufacturing plant, with a computer-controlled assembly line, would not last even 5 seconds. Even a small travel agency or three-person law firm is now highly dependent on computer networks for allowing employees to access relevant information and documents instantly.

For smaller companies, all the computers are likely to be in a single office or perhaps a single building, but for larger ones, the computers and employees may be scattered over dozens of offices and plants in many countries. Nevertheless, a sales person in New York might sometimes need access to a product inventory

database in Singapore. Networks called **VPNs (Virtual Private Networks)** may be used to join the individual networks at different sites into one extended network. In other words, the mere fact that a user happens to be 15,000 km away from his data should not prevent him from using the data as though they were local. This goal may be summarized by saying that it is an attempt to end the “tyranny of geography.”

In the simplest of terms, one can imagine a company’s information system as consisting of one or more databases with company information and some number of employees who need to access them remotely. In this model, the data are stored on powerful computers called **servers**. Often these are centrally housed and maintained by a system administrator. In contrast, the employees have simpler machines, called **clients**, on their desks, with which they access remote data, for example, to include in spreadsheets they are constructing. (Sometimes we will refer to the human user of the client machine as the “client,” but it should be clear from the context whether we mean the computer or its user.) The client and server machines are connected by a network, as illustrated in Fig. 1-1. Note that we have shown the network as a simple oval, without any detail. We will use this form when we mean a network in the most abstract sense. When more detail is required, it will be provided.

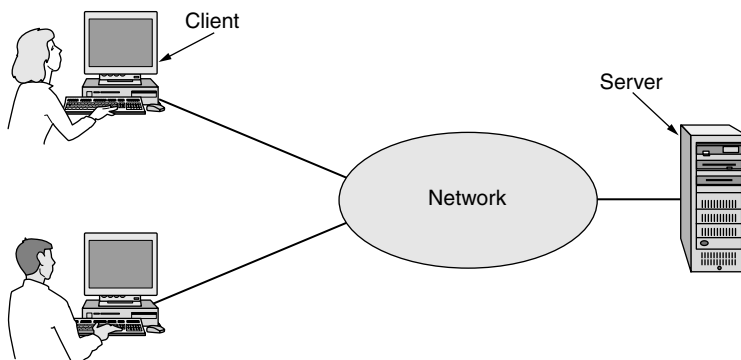


Figure 1-1. A network with two clients and one server.

This whole arrangement is called the **client-server model**. It is widely used and forms the basis of much network usage. The most popular realization is that of a **Web application**, in which the server generates Web pages based on its database in response to client requests that may update the database. The client-server model is applicable when the client and server are both in the same building (and belong to the same company), but also when they are far apart. For example, when a person at home accesses a page on the World Wide Web, the same model is employed, with the remote Web server being the server and the user’s personal

computer being the client. Under most conditions, one server can handle a large number (hundreds or thousands) of clients simultaneously.

If we look at the client-server model in detail, we see that two processes (i.e., running programs) are involved, one on the client machine and one on the server machine. Communication takes the form of the client process sending a message over the network to the server process. The client process then waits for a reply message. When the server process gets the request, it performs the requested work or looks up the requested data and sends back a reply. These messages are shown in Fig. 1-2.

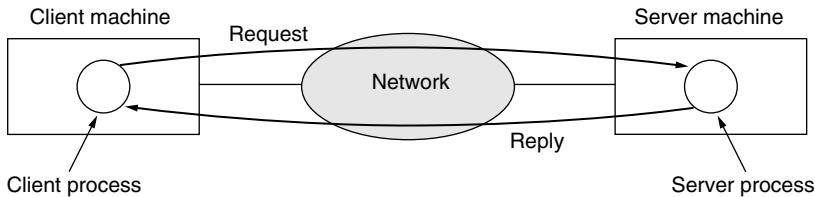


Figure 1-2. The client-server model involves requests and replies.

A second goal of setting up a computer network has to do with people rather than information or even computers. A computer network can provide a powerful **communication medium** among employees. Virtually every company that has two or more computers now has **email (electronic mail)**, which employees generally use for a great deal of daily communication. In fact, a common gripe around the water cooler is how much email everyone has to deal with, much of it quite meaningless because bosses have discovered that they can send the same (often content-free) message to all their subordinates at the push of a button.

Telephone calls between employees may be carried by the computer network instead of by the phone company. This technology is called **IP telephony** or **Voice over IP (VoIP)** when Internet technology is used. The microphone and speaker at each end may belong to a VoIP-enabled phone or the employee's computer. Companies find this a wonderful way to save on their telephone bills.

Other, richer forms of communication are made possible by computer networks. Video can be added to audio so that employees at distant locations can see and hear each other as they hold a meeting. This technique is a powerful tool for eliminating the cost and time previously devoted to travel. **Desktop sharing** lets remote workers see and interact with a graphical computer screen. This makes it easy for two or more people who work far apart to read and write a shared blackboard or write a report together. When one worker makes a change to an online document, the others can see the change immediately, instead of waiting several days for a letter. Such a speedup makes cooperation among far-flung groups of people easy where it previously had been impossible. More ambitious forms of remote coordination such as telemedicine are only now starting to be used (e.g.,

remote patient monitoring) but may become much more important. It is sometimes said that communication and transportation are having a race, and whichever wins will make the other obsolete.

A third goal for many companies is doing business electronically, especially with customers and suppliers. This new model is called **e-commerce (electronic commerce)** and it has grown rapidly in recent years. Airlines, bookstores, and other retailers have discovered that many customers like the convenience of shopping from home. Consequently, many companies provide catalogs of their goods and services online and take orders online. Manufacturers of automobiles, aircraft, and computers, among others, buy subsystems from a variety of suppliers and then assemble the parts. Using computer networks, manufacturers can place orders electronically as needed. This reduces the need for large inventories and enhances efficiency.

1.1.2 Home Applications

In 1977, Ken Olsen was president of the Digital Equipment Corporation, then the number two computer vendor in the world (after IBM). When asked why Digital was not going after the personal computer market in a big way, he said: “There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home.” History showed otherwise and Digital no longer exists. People initially bought computers for word processing and games. Recently, the biggest reason to buy a home computer was probably for Internet access. Now, many consumer electronic devices, such as set-top boxes, game consoles, and clock radios, come with embedded computers and computer networks, especially wireless networks, and home networks are broadly used for entertainment, including listening to, looking at, and creating music, photos, and videos.

Internet access provides home users with **connectivity** to remote computers. As with companies, home users can access information, communicate with other people, and buy products and services with e-commerce. The main benefit now comes from connecting outside of the home. Bob Metcalfe, the inventor of Ethernet, hypothesized that the value of a network is proportional to the square of the number of users because this is roughly the number of different connections that may be made (Gilder, 1993). This hypothesis is known as “Metcalfe’s law.” It helps to explain how the tremendous popularity of the Internet comes from its size.

Access to remote information comes in many forms. It can be surfing the World Wide Web for information or just for fun. Information available includes the arts, business, cooking, government, health, history, hobbies, recreation, science, sports, travel, and many others. Fun comes in too many ways to mention, plus some ways that are better left unmentioned.

Many newspapers have gone online and can be personalized. For example, it is sometimes possible to tell a newspaper that you want everything about corrupt

politicians, big fires, scandals involving celebrities, and epidemics, but no football, thank you. Sometimes it is possible to have the selected articles downloaded to your computer while you sleep. As this trend continues, it will cause massive unemployment among 12-year-old paperboys, but newspapers like it because distribution has always been the weakest link in the whole production chain. Of course, to make this model work, they will first have to figure out how to make money in this new world, something not entirely obvious since Internet users expect everything to be free.

The next step beyond newspapers (plus magazines and scientific journals) is the online digital library. Many professional organizations, such as the ACM (www.acm.org) and the IEEE Computer Society (www.computer.org), already have all their journals and conference proceedings online. Electronic book readers and online libraries may make printed books obsolete. Skeptics should take note of the effect the printing press had on the medieval illuminated manuscript.

Much of this information is accessed using the client-server model, but there is different, popular model for accessing information that goes by the name of **peer-to-peer** communication (Parameswaran et al., 2001). In this form, individuals who form a loose group can communicate with others in the group, as shown in Fig. 1-3. Every person can, in principle, communicate with one or more other people; there is no fixed division into clients and servers.

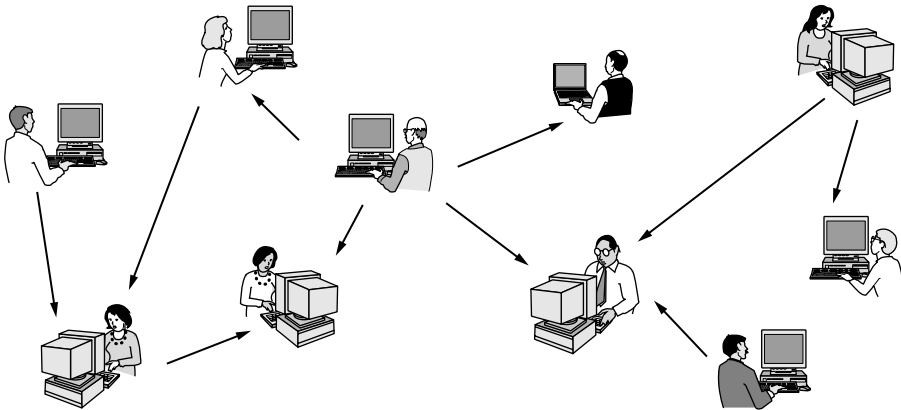


Figure 1-3. In a peer-to-peer system there are no fixed clients and servers.

Many peer-to-peer systems, such as BitTorrent (Cohen, 2003), do not have any central database of content. Instead, each user maintains his own database locally and provides a list of other nearby people who are members of the system. A new user can then go to any existing member to see what he has and get the names of other members to inspect for more content and more names. This lookup process can be repeated indefinitely to build up a large local database of what is out there. It is an activity that would get tedious for people but computers excel at it.

Peer-to-peer communication is often used to share music and videos. It really hit the big time around 2000 with a music sharing service called Napster that was shut down after what was probably the biggest copyright infringement case in all of recorded history (Lam and Tan, 2001; and Macedonia, 2000). Legal applications for peer-to-peer communication also exist. These include fans sharing public domain music, families sharing photos and movies, and users downloading public software packages. In fact, one of the most popular Internet applications of all, email, is inherently peer-to-peer. This form of communication is likely to grow considerably in the future.

All of the above applications involve interactions between a person and a remote database full of information. The second broad category of network use is person-to-person communication, basically the 21st century's answer to the 19th century's telephone. E-mail is already used on a daily basis by millions of people all over the world and its use is growing rapidly. It already routinely contains audio and video as well as text and pictures. Smell may take a while.

Any teenager worth his or her salt is addicted to **instant messaging**. This facility, derived from the UNIX *talk* program in use since around 1970, allows two people to type messages at each other in real time. There are multi-person messaging services too, such as the **Twitter** service that lets people send short text messages called "tweets" to their circle of friends or other willing audiences.

The Internet can be used by applications to carry audio (e.g., Internet radio stations) and video (e.g., YouTube). Besides being a cheap way to call to distant friends, these applications can provide rich experiences such as telelearning, meaning attending 8 A.M. classes without the inconvenience of having to get out of bed first. In the long run, the use of networks to enhance human-to-human communication may prove more important than any of the others. It may become hugely important to people who are geographically challenged, giving them the same access to services as people living in the middle of a big city.

Between person-to-person communications and accessing information are **social network** applications. Here, the flow of information is driven by the relationships that people declare between each other. One of the most popular social networking sites is **Facebook**. It lets people update their personal profiles and shares the updates with other people who they have declared to be their friends. Other social networking applications can make introductions via friends of friends, send news messages to friends such as Twitter above, and much more.

Even more loosely, groups of people can work together to create content. A **wiki**, for example, is a collaborative Web site that the members of a community edit. The most famous wiki is the **Wikipedia**, an encyclopedia anyone can edit, but there are thousands of other wikis.

Our third category is electronic commerce in the broadest sense of the term. Home shopping is already popular and enables users to inspect the online catalogs of thousands of companies. Some of these catalogs are interactive, showing products from different viewpoints and in configurations that can be personalized.

After the customer buys a product electronically but cannot figure out how to use it, online technical support may be consulted.

Another area in which e-commerce is widely used is access to financial institutions. Many people already pay their bills, manage their bank accounts, and handle their investments electronically. This trend will surely continue as networks become more secure.

One area that virtually nobody foresaw is electronic flea markets (e-flea?). Online auctions of second-hand goods have become a massive industry. Unlike traditional e-commerce, which follows the client-server model, online auctions are peer-to-peer in the sense that consumers can act as both buyers and sellers.

Some of these forms of e-commerce have acquired cute little tags based on the fact that “to” and “2” are pronounced the same. The most popular ones are listed in Fig. 1-4.

Tag	Full name	Example
B2C	Business-to-consumer	Ordering books online
B2B	Business-to-business	Car manufacturer ordering tires from supplier
G2C	Government-to-consumer	Government distributing tax forms electronically
C2C	Consumer-to-consumer	Auctioning second-hand products online
P2P	Peer-to-peer	Music sharing

Figure 1-4. Some forms of e-commerce.

Our fourth category is entertainment. This has made huge strides in the home in recent years, with the distribution of music, radio and television programs, and movies over the Internet beginning to rival that of traditional mechanisms. Users can find, buy, and download MP3 songs and DVD-quality movies and add them to their personal collection. TV shows now reach many homes via **IPTV (IP TeleVision)** systems that are based on IP technology instead of cable TV or radio transmissions. Media streaming applications let users tune into Internet radio stations or watch recent episodes of their favorite TV shows. Naturally, all of this content can be moved around your house between different devices, displays and speakers, usually with a wireless network.

Soon, it may be possible to search for any movie or television program ever made, in any country, and have it displayed on your screen instantly. New films may become interactive, where the user is occasionally prompted for the story direction (should Macbeth murder Duncan or just bide his time?) with alternative scenarios provided for all cases. Live television may also become interactive, with the audience participating in quiz shows, choosing among contestants, and so on.

Another form of entertainment is game playing. Already we have multiperson real-time simulation games, like hide-and-seek in a virtual dungeon, and flight

simulators with the players on one team trying to shoot down the players on the opposing team. Virtual worlds provide a persistent setting in which thousands of users can experience a shared reality with three-dimensional graphics.

Our last category is **ubiquitous computing**, in which computing is embedded into everyday life, as in the vision of Mark Weiser (1991). Many homes are already wired with security systems that include door and window sensors, and there are many more sensors that can be folded in to a smart home monitor, such as energy consumption. Your electricity, gas and water meters could also report usage over the network. This would save money as there would be no need to send out meter readers. And your smoke detectors could call the fire department instead of making a big noise (which has little value if no one is home). As the cost of sensing and communication drops, more and more measurement and reporting will be done with networks.

Increasingly, consumer electronic devices are networked. For example, some high-end cameras already have a wireless network capability and use it to send photos to a nearby display for viewing. Professional sports photographers can also send their photos to their editors in real-time, first wirelessly to an access point then over the Internet. Devices such as televisions that plug into the wall can use **power-line networks** to send information throughout the house over the wires that carry electricity. It may not be very surprising to have these objects on the network, but objects that we do not think of as computers may sense and communicate information too. For example, your shower may record water usage, give you visual feedback while you lather up, and report to a home environmental monitoring application when you are done to help save on your water bill.

A technology called **RFID (Radio Frequency Identification)** will push this idea even further in the future. RFID tags are passive (i.e., have no battery) chips the size of stamps and they can already be affixed to books, passports, pets, credit cards, and other items in the home and out. This lets RFID readers locate and communicate with the items over a distance of up to several meters, depending on the kind of RFID. Originally, RFID was commercialized to replace barcodes. It has not succeeded yet because barcodes are free and RFID tags cost a few cents. Of course, RFID tags offer much more and their price is rapidly declining. They may turn the real world into the Internet of things (ITU, 2005).

1.1.3 Mobile Users

Mobile computers, such as laptop and handheld computers, are one of the fastest-growing segments of the computer industry. Their sales have already overtaken those of desktop computers. Why would anyone want one? People on the go often want to use their mobile devices to read and send email, tweet, watch movies, download music, play games, or simply to surf the Web for information. They want to do all of the things they do at home and in the office. Naturally, they want to do them from anywhere on land, sea or in the air.

Connectivity to the Internet enables many of these mobile uses. Since having a wired connection is impossible in cars, boats, and airplanes, there is a lot of interest in wireless networks. Cellular networks operated by the telephone companies are one familiar kind of wireless network that blankets us with coverage for mobile phones. Wireless **hotspots** based on the 802.11 standard are another kind of wireless network for mobile computers. They have sprung up everywhere that people go, resulting in a patchwork of coverage at cafes, hotels, airports, schools, trains and planes. Anyone with a laptop computer and a wireless modem can just turn on their computer on and be connected to the Internet through the hotspot, as though the computer were plugged into a wired network.

Wireless networks are of great value to fleets of trucks, taxis, delivery vehicles, and repairpersons for keeping in contact with their home base. For example, in many cities, taxi drivers are independent businessmen, rather than being employees of a taxi company. In some of these cities, the taxis have a display the driver can see. When a customer calls up, a central dispatcher types in the pickup and destination points. This information is displayed on the drivers' displays and a beep sounds. The first driver to hit a button on the display gets the call.

Wireless networks are also important to the military. If you have to be able to fight a war anywhere on Earth at short notice, counting on using the local networking infrastructure is probably not a good idea. It is better to bring your own.

Although wireless networking and mobile computing are often related, they are not identical, as Fig. 1-5 shows. Here we see a distinction between **fixed wireless** and **mobile wireless** networks. Even notebook computers are sometimes wired. For example, if a traveler plugs a notebook computer into the wired network jack in a hotel room, he has mobility without a wireless network.

Wireless	Mobile	Typical applications
No	No	Desktop computers in offices
No	Yes	A notebook computer used in a hotel room
Yes	No	Networks in unwired buildings
Yes	Yes	Store inventory with a handheld computer

Figure 1-5. Combinations of wireless networks and mobile computing.

Conversely, some wireless computers are not mobile. In the home, and in offices or hotels that lack suitable cabling, it can be more convenient to connect desktop computers or media players wirelessly than to install wires. Installing a wireless network may require little more than buying a small box with some electronics in it, unpacking it, and plugging it in. This solution may be far cheaper than having workmen put in cable ducts to wire the building.

Finally, there are also true mobile, wireless applications, such as people walking around stores with a handheld computers recording inventory. At many busy

airports, car rental return clerks work in the parking lot with wireless mobile computers. They scan the barcodes or RFID chips of returning cars, and their mobile device, which has a built-in printer, calls the main computer, gets the rental information, and prints out the bill on the spot.

Perhaps the key driver of mobile, wireless applications is the mobile phone. **Text messaging** or **texting** is tremendously popular. It lets a mobile phone user type a short message that is then delivered by the cellular network to another mobile subscriber. Few people would have predicted ten years ago that having teenagers tediously typing short text messages on mobile phones would be an immense money maker for telephone companies. But texting (or **Short Message Service** as it is known outside the U.S.) is very profitable since it costs the carrier but a tiny fraction of one cent to relay a text message, a service for which they charge far more.

The long-awaited convergence of telephones and the Internet has finally arrived, and it will accelerate the growth of mobile applications. **Smart phones**, such as the popular iPhone, combine aspects of mobile phones and mobile computers. The (3G and 4G) cellular networks to which they connect can provide fast data services for using the Internet as well as handling phone calls. Many advanced phones connect to wireless hotspots too, and automatically switch between networks to choose the best option for the user.

Other consumer electronics devices can also use cellular and hotspot networks to stay connected to remote computers. Electronic book readers can download a newly purchased book or the next edition of a magazine or today's newspaper wherever they roam. Electronic picture frames can update their displays on cue with fresh images.

Since mobile phones know their locations, often because they are equipped with **GPS (Global Positioning System)** receivers, some services are intentionally location dependent. Mobile maps and directions are an obvious candidate as your GPS-enabled phone and car probably have a better idea of where you are than you do. So, too, are searches for a nearby bookstore or Chinese restaurant, or a local weather forecast. Other services may record location, such as annotating photos and videos with the place at which they were made. This annotation is known as "geo-tagging."

An area in which mobile phones are now starting to be used is **m-commerce (mobile-commerce)** (Senn, 2000). Short text messages from the mobile are used to authorize payments for food in vending machines, movie tickets, and other small items instead of cash and credit cards. The charge then appears on the mobile phone bill. When equipped with **NFC (Near Field Communication)** technology the mobile can act as an RFID smartcard and interact with a nearby reader for payment. The driving forces behind this phenomenon are the mobile device makers and network operators, who are trying hard to figure out how to get a piece of the e-commerce pie. From the store's point of view, this scheme may save them most of the credit card company's fee, which can be several percent.

Of course, this plan may backfire, since customers in a store might use the RFID or barcode readers on their mobile devices to check out competitors' prices before buying and use them to get a detailed report on where else an item can be purchased nearby and at what price.

One huge thing that m-commerce has going for it is that mobile phone users are accustomed to paying for everything (in contrast to Internet users, who expect everything to be free). If an Internet Web site charged a fee to allow its customers to pay by credit card, there would be an immense howling noise from the users. If, however, a mobile phone operator its customers to pay for items in a store by waving the phone at the cash register and then tacked on a fee for this convenience, it would probably be accepted as normal. Time will tell.

No doubt the uses of mobile and wireless computers will grow rapidly in the future as the size of computers shrinks, probably in ways no one can now foresee. Let us take a quick look at some possibilities. **Sensor networks** are made up of nodes that gather and wirelessly relay information they sense about the state of the physical world. The nodes may be part of familiar items such as cars or phones, or they may be small separate devices. For example, your car might gather data on its location, speed, vibration, and fuel efficiency from its on-board diagnostic system and upload this information to a database (Hull et al., 2006). Those data can help find potholes, plan trips around congested roads, and tell you if you are a "gas guzzler" compared to other drivers on the same stretch of road.

Sensor networks are revolutionizing science by providing a wealth of data on behavior that could not previously be observed. One example is tracking the migration of individual zebras by placing a small sensor on each animal (Juang et al., 2002). Researchers have packed a wireless computer into a cube 1 mm on edge (Warneke et al., 2001). With mobile computers this small, even small birds, rodents, and insects can be tracked.

Even mundane uses, such as in parking meters, can be significant because they make use of data that were not previously available. Wireless parking meters can accept credit or debit card payments with instant verification over the wireless link. They can also report when they are in use over the wireless network. This would let drivers download a recent parking map to their car so they can find an available spot more easily. Of course, when a meter expires, it might also check for the presence of a car (by bouncing a signal off it) and report the expiration to parking enforcement. It has been estimated that city governments in the U.S. alone could collect an additional \$10 billion this way (Harte et al., 2000).

Wearable computers are another promising application. Smart watches with radios have been part of our mental space since their appearance in the Dick Tracy comic strip in 1946; now you can buy them. Other such devices may be implanted, such as pacemakers and insulin pumps. Some of these can be controlled over a wireless network. This lets doctors test and reconfigure them more easily. It could also lead to some nasty problems if the devices are as insecure as the average PC and can be hacked easily (Halperin et al., 2008).