Fools rush in…

The net is changing fast, so tread warily, warns Nigel Whitfield, or your wallet might suffer.

During the past year there has been plenty of change on the internet, with new domains like .to, .am and .tv creeping into more URLs and the US government finally disentangling itself from the way the net is managed. Laws to keep track of personal data and to regulate spam are starting to crop up. It is becoming cheaper to get online, and, court cases or slanging matches notwithstanding, browsers are becoming simpler and more natural to use.

Sit down for a moment, and you could probably think of some of your own personal milestones for the internet over the past year. Would you include RealPlayer G2, or Dixons' FreeServe, or perhaps the iMac? Or events, rather than technology, such as the Starr Report?

We may live in interesting times, yet this is viewed as something of a curse by many people. On the internet, times are often interesting, and the pace of social and technological change is breathtaking. As always, when it comes to technology, interesting times can be costly, too. Many people may find that out, literally to their cost, over the next year or so.

Hard on the heels of the BT Highway services which, despite the high charges, seem to be quite popular, BT has launched trials of its Interactive Network, which uses a technology called ADSL to deliver speeds of up to 2Mbps over an ordinary copper line. The present trial is limited to a small part of London, but more interesting is the cost: around £30 per month. There's no guarantee that we'll all be able to have high-speed connections to the internet *that* cheaply, but it could make for some interesting shifts in the pricing of net services.

If you were to believe the hype, then 1999, like so many other years, is also likely to be the year in which cable modems finally take off. This time it might even happen, if companies such as Cable & Wireless use digital television as a lever to deliver other services.

This is all good news, of course. However, it's also likely to be extremely annoying for those who have recently signed five-year contracts for such services as ISDN or Kilostream circuits, only to discover that something much faster is just around the corner, and at a much better price, leaving you with penalty clauses to read through while you wait for your downloads to finish. Besides the net itself, it looks as if the way in which we connect could be about to change dramatically in 1999.

What can you do? Just look. Don't rush, and, most important of all, do not commit yourself to a long-term contract. Take the plunge too quickly, and while you might be the first person on your block to connect at 128Kbps, you might also be the *last* person left connecting slowly while everyone else has moved to cable modems.

Interesting times indeed. And for the unwary, or the hasty, a wrong move could prove a costly curse.
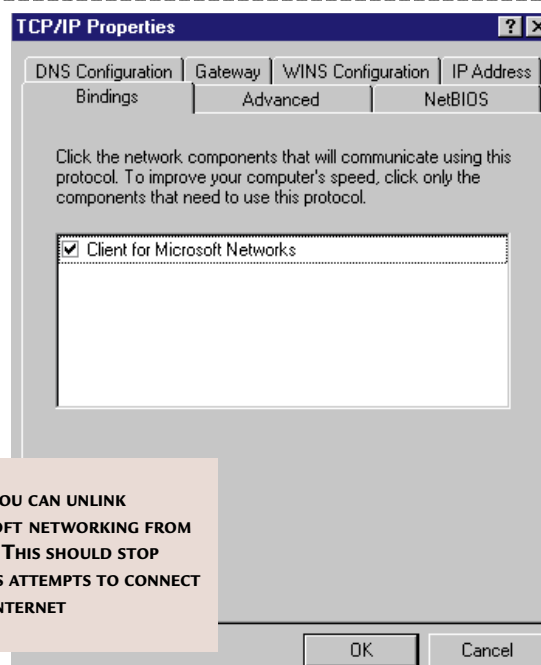
Questions & answers

Q Ever since I upgraded my MS Dial-Up to version 1.2, the "Dial-Up Connection" keeps popping up (uninvited) from time to time. I use Netscape Communicator 4.07. Is there a simple cure?

A *There are two possible causes of this. One is the Netscape Mail Watcher, a small program that checks your mailbox intermittently so you can be quickly alerted to messages. You will see this running* because its icon appears at the bottom right of the screen, in the system tray. You can click on it with the right mouse button to close it. However, unless you have also recently installed or upgraded the browser, this is not the most likely culprit. That's more likely to be Microsoft Networking, which has a rather anti-social habit of sniffing around all the time to discover other systems to which it could connect. Although this is acceptable on a closed network, if you have a link to the rest of the world, either using Dial-Up networking or

▶**Fig 1 You can unlink Microsoft networking from TCP/IP. This should stop spurious attempts to connect to the internet**

Questions & answers

a router with an ISDN connection, you can end up with lots of extra connection attempts and, in the latter case, with a large phone bill since the router will be silently connecting to your ISP while you are unaware. The solution is to tell your system not to use TCP/IP for the Microsoft file and print-sharing services, and to make sure that the Dial-Up adaptor is set only to use TCP/IP. Right-click with the mouse on "Network neighbourhood" and you'll see a list of adaptors and protocols, and various configurations.

● If you want to use Microsoft Networking without TCP/IP, you'll need to make sure you have the NetBEUI protocol installed. Make sure it's linked only to the ethern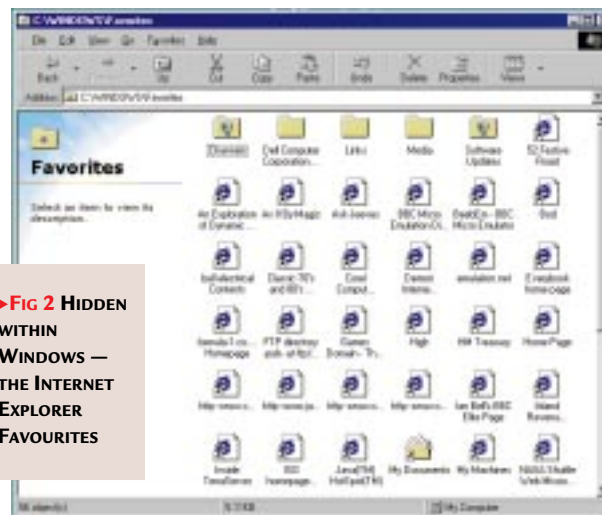et card, if you have one in your PC. Click on the TCP/IP link to the Dial-up adaptor, press the "Properties" button and select the Bindings tab [Fig 1, p245]. If Client for Microsoft Networks is listed, clear the check box next to it to stop the spurious connections.

● If you don't have a network card in your computer, the simplest solution is most likely to remove the Client for Microsoft Networks.

Q My ISP has upgraded its service to shell access to its Unix systems. I know you can set Unix systems to pretend that one page is another (e.g. index .html is really html/front/ index.html). What do you use for shell access? What other commands are available?

a First, the easy bit. Accessing a system for shell access is simple: you need a program which supports the Telnet protocol, and there is one built in to Windows, in fact. All you need to do is choose "Run" from the Start menu and type telnet shellhost.someprovider.co.uk — or whatever is the name of the system on which you have been given an account. It's enough to get you started, but it's also not a very good Telnet program, as it lacks some features and has a vt100 emulation which seems slightly at odds with what some Unix systems expect. Fortunately, there are plenty of other Telnet programs around and you should be able to find one that suits your needs. For Mac users, NCSA Telnet

You need a program which supports the Telnet protocol

will fit the bill. If you want to find out about Unix, the best thing is to refer to one of the simple text books for newcomers: something like O'Reilly's *Unix in a Nutshell* is a good place to start. You should also browse the back issues of PCW if you have the CD-ROM [see p308], where you'll find a brief summary of some basic Unix commands in a previous **Hands On Internet** *column*. Finally, on the subject of how web space interacts with Unix systems, as with most things where Unix is concerned, there's more than one way to do it. Very often, the redirection is handled in the web server itself which means you won't be able to change it. But there's a similar effect that can be gained using links,

▶**FIG 2** HIDDEN WITHIN WINDOWS — THE INTERNET EXPLORER FAVOURITES

or symbolic links, which are just like the shortcuts in Windows or aliases on a Mac. You can create a link on Unix using the ln command. For instance, if I were to type the command

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ln -s /usr/local/
src /home/nigel/src
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a link called /home/nigel/src would be created, which would act as a directory; changing to it would actually put me in the directory /usr/local/src. The —s option makes it a symbolic link; a pointer to a file, which can be on a different disk. Omitting that option creates a hard link which is another directory entry pointing to the same file. In effect, the file has two names, rather than a name and an alias. With a hard link, the file is not deleted until you have deleted all the links to it. With a symbolic link, deleting the file at the end of the link prevents all the links from working.

Q Where are all the files for Outlook Express stored? I want to retrieve email from a backup tape. Also, where do I find the Favourites for Internet Explorer?

a Let's begin by dealing with the Favourites part of your question. Favourites are the easiest to find and you will discover them in the Windows\Favourites folder. Just restore this folder, in addition to its sub-folders, and your old Favourites should reappear [Fig 2]. Outlook and other Microsoft mail programs store messages in a mail file and a personal address book file. The former type of file has the extension .pst and may simply be called Exchange.pst. Or, it may have a name corresponding to a user profile if your system is set up with more than one profile. Your address book is in the corresponding .pab file, so you need to restore both of these from tape and then either use the Import option in your mail program, or the Inbox Setup Wizard, creating a new name and then specifying the files you recovered from tape, in place of the default.

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