

Standard sayings

Nigel Whitfield berates Microsoft's **communication problems**, and throws down the gauntlet to BT.

If you're a programmer, or even just a regular user of the Internet, you'll probably understand the benefits of the following phrase: 'Be liberal in what you accept, and strict in what you send.' It's a saying that's often applied to standards – especially the Requests For Comments (RFCs) – which underpin much of the way that the Internet works.

In short, it means that when someone writes a program that's designed to work with the Internet, it's good practice to be a little forgiving of any minor flaws in information that your program receives. At the same time, you should adhere strictly to the standards, making it much more likely your software will work with all the other programs out there.

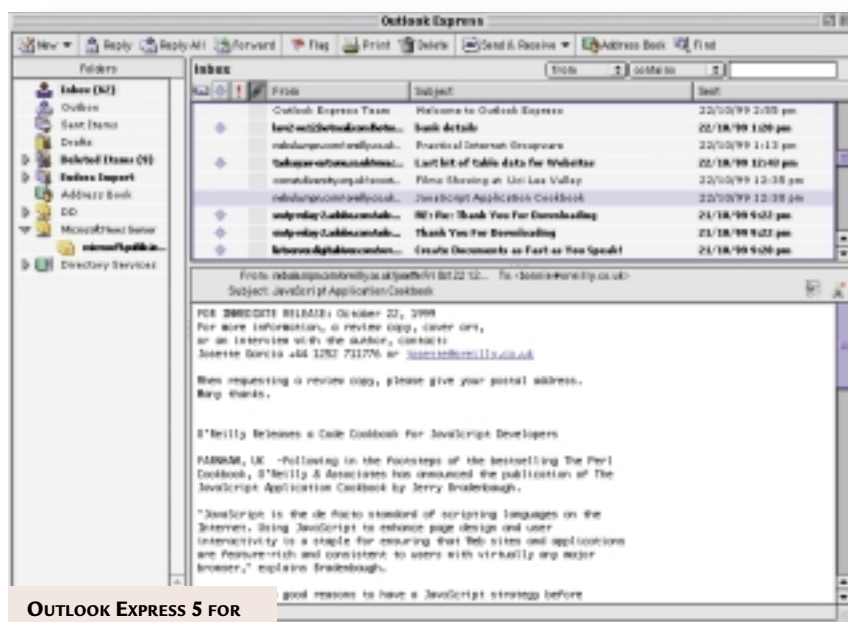
One of the joys of the Internet is that you can take, for example, any email program, and be safe in the knowledge that you can use it with any standard email server.

So it was with a light heart that I decided to download the Macintosh version of Outlook Express 5 (OE5) – especially since it has a 'Test Drive' feature that allows you to run it alongside your existing email program.

OE5 for Macintosh certainly looks like a high-quality program. It has a good-looking interface (although there are some minor irritations), and allows users to synchronise their contacts with a Palm Organiser. The news reading features aren't stunning, but it is primarily a mail program, after all.

And that's why it's surprising that it falls down so badly when it comes to being liberal in what it accepts.

A quick trawl through messages on the microsoft.public.internet.mail.mac newsgroup reveals that I'm not the only one to discover a problem. It seems that Microsoft has managed to produce an email program that is simply not



OUTLOOK EXPRESS 5 FOR THE MACINTOSH LOOKS NICE – IT'S A SHAME IT DOESN'T UNDERSTAND SOME COMMON INTERNET MESSAGE FORMATS

compatible with one of the most widely-used formats for mailboxes on the Internet. A number of users have reported that when they reply to a message, the date is included at the end of the email address!

The problem lies in the way Outlook Express is interpreting message headers. If you've ever looked at the raw mail files on a Unix system, chances are you've noticed that there are two 'From' lines in each message. One – the first line of the

message – gives a return path and a date, and starts 'From', while the other has the real

address for replies and starts 'From:' And Outlook Express for the Mac is completely unaware of this. So, while it may work well in some circumstances, if the mail server that you use returns messages in this two-line format, you're going to have to edit the address each time you hit the Reply button.

Nice one, Microsoft. How about a bit more testing, eh? Doubtless this bug will be fixed in time for the program's full release – in the meantime I'm glad I opted for the test drive. At least I can get back on the main road with Eudora, which happily understands standard mail formats.

■ Timed to die

Could the clock finally be about to stop? As this column is being written, a completely free ISP with 0800 access is set to launch at www.callnet0800.com, AOL is rumoured to be looking at a way to avoid time-based charges for users of its service, and dark mutterings from BT suggest it is looking at ways of introducing a new tariff that might make it cheaper to stay online.

With the Government announcing an initiative that will allow people on low incomes to hire computers cheaply, some movement on call prices is long overdue. Otherwise there'll be houses full of low-cost computers that people can't afford to connect to the Internet.

Instead of increasing ADSL prices at the same time as lowering the speed, how about a little movement

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Questions & answers

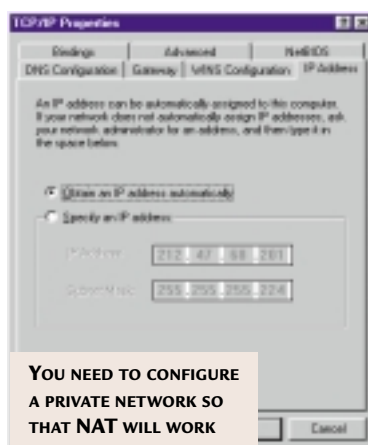
Q I am trying to install Internet access for a very small network (four users) and have a Netgear RM356 V.90 router acting as a server. Because Internet use is likely to be light I wish to use one of the free ISP providers.

I have tried Virgin.net, but although I can get the router to test the connection and it states the connection is fine, I cannot get Explorer to make the connection. If I use Outlook, the connection wizard asks for the POP3 and SMTP servers, and if I then put pop.virgin.net and smtp.virgin.net in these fields it doesn't make a connection.

If I put the DNS server address in these fields the router is activated, it dials the number, attempts to make a connection and then fails with a message regarding the POP3 address. Is it possible to make the connection this way or am I barking up the wrong tree?

a Yes, you can do this, but you'll need to put some effort into the configuration to make everything work.

Essentially, what happens when the router connects to an ISP is that its connection to the rest of the Internet is assigned an Internet address. It also receives information regarding routing and, in some cases, the DNS server to use – although you can specify this manually if you wish.



YOU NEED TO CONFIGURE A PRIVATE NETWORK SO THAT NAT WILL WORK PROPERLY WITH A ROUTER

As far as the network is concerned, you need to configure a private network, using addresses on one of the reserved number ranges, such as 192.168.1.x

Each of the machines on the network needs to be configured separately, which you can do either manually, or via the DHCP server that's built into the router. If you choose the DHCP option, you need to fix the address of the router (perhaps 192.168.1.1), and tell the other systems that it's the DHCP server.

When a connection is established, the router uses Network Address Translation (NAT) to 'hide' the private addresses from the ISP connection, and pass traffic between the different machines and the Internet.

The key is to ensure that everything is set up on the network side, either manually, or via DHCP. Without that, nothing else will work.

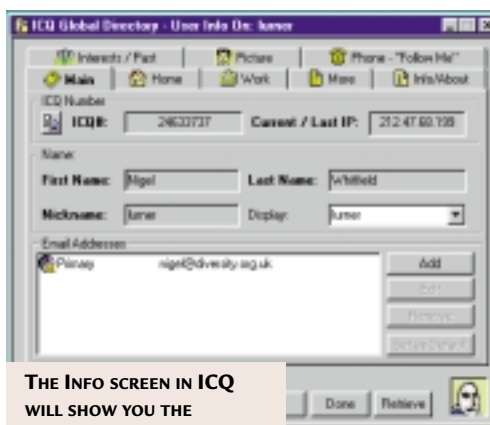
Remember also that although NAT allows you to hide a network of machines

behind a single-user account, you may be breaking the terms of service of some ISPs by doing this. Check the small print first.

Q A friend of mine uses ICQ and received a message from someone who says he has her IP number and can now 'get into' her machine and do all sorts of things – although of

course he says he's not going to. Is this right? What can she do about it?

a Yes, it's possible to find out someone's IP address when you talk to them on ICQ – simply pop up the info screen and you can see their current or last IP address. And, if you know someone's IP address – which can also be found out easily if you see them on IRC –



THE INFO SCREEN IN ICQ WILL SHOW YOU THE CURRENT OR LAST KNOWN IP ADDRESS OF ANOTHER USER

you can, in theory, attack their computer. That's why it's important to take some of the security steps I have mentioned

in previous columns (see November 1999). Windows users should also take a look at last month's issue, which contains a list of suggestions for tools that can help protect your system from attack.

Q I use Windows 95 original build with Internet Explorer 5 installed. I have a folder called c:\windows\java\ containing subfolders and some fairly large .zip archive files, which are taking up over 10MB of space. Assuming that the system cannot be using them in their current form, do you know what I am supposed to do with them, or what they are for? Can I delete them to save space?

a You can delete them if you also turn off Java. These are files that contain Java libraries in a compressed form. If you delete them, then

you won't be able to run Java apps, which are used on a lot of websites. I'd suggest turning off Java in the browser first,

and seeing if you suffer any problems with the websites you usually visit. If you don't, then you're probably OK to delete the files. Alternatively, treat yourself to a bigger hard drive.

from BT. While helping people may not be the firm's strongpoint, a commitment to a wired country would be a millennium present we could all welcome.

Alas, the time has come to say goodbye to this column. Internet issues will be covered in the Hands On Networks section from the next issue of PCW.

PCW CONTACTS

Although this is the last Internet column, you can contact Nigel Whitfield for the remainder of the month at the PCW editorial office or email internet@pcw.co.uk