



Using Newsgroups

Overview

Newsgroups (sometimes referred to as Usenet) are an enormous collection of active discussion groups involving users from all parts of the globe. These newsgroups are each centred on a particular topic. There are many thousands of newsgroups and it seems that almost every topic is covered. To read the newsgroup articles you will need a program called a newsreader. Some browsers have the newsreader built in, and there are also specialised programs such as Windows Live Mail and Free Agent which can be downloaded from:

<http://www.forteinc.com/agent/download.php>

Setup

Whatever newsreader you decide to use, you must then configure that newsreader by entering in the news server, and the email address is the one you normally use for your email.

Internet Explorer users must open Windows Live Mail. Then click on Tools, Internet Accounts, select News and Add. The essential entry is the Server name that might be news.myisp.com.au.

Mozilla Firefox users have to click on Edit, Preferences, Mail & News, Messages and finally Group Server to enter the news server.

Finally you must do a once off download of all the groups and this can take a few minutes.

You may find some detailed instructions for configuring common newsreaders on the "Common Settings" page (Melb PC Newsgroups have now been replaced by MS Yammer).

General comments

Nobody could possibly read all messages in all groups as 500,000 or more new messages are sent each day, which is well over 6 GB.

This is about one thousand large encyclopaedias per day! Most users subscribe to a few newsgroups. Subscription is free and, once you locate

the newsgroup you want, it usually involves one mouse click. Subscribing means that new message headings in that group are automatically downloaded when you start the newsreader.

The messages in the newsgroups that start with say myisp are only visible to subscribers who are using myisp and cannot be read by users connected to other servers.

You can read all messages and have the option of replying to an individual or to the group. Some groups are very active and contain many hundreds or even thousands of messages. Many of the newsgroups also contain programs or pictures. Taking part is very easy and I suggest that you look at the huge range of available discussions and select some that interest you.

Look at the messages for one or two days before replying to anything to get the flavour of the discussion. This is called Lurking and is used as a means of learning before becoming a participant. When you post a letter, replies can come from all over the world. To illustrate the diversity and activity, I asked about the possible existence of a modification to the undercarriage for a particular make and model of a glider. By the next day I received six replies from four countries, giving me the answer. On another occasion, my son wanted a quotation on racism for a school project. He received over thirty replies within two days.

Internet etiquette or 'Netiquette'

It is important that users of the Internet are aware of Internet etiquette, or Netiquette as it is often referred to. The Internet is in effect a large interactive community and the users have established an unwritten code of behaviour. The best way to learn what is acceptable behaviour is to look around for a while before sending messages. Read FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) relating to your topic of interest. Incorrect or abusive behaviour may cause you to be denied access. Common traps are typing everything in capitals, which is equivalent to SHOUTING and you are likely to be 'flamed', or abused.

When taking part in conferences, take care not to broadcast your reply universally, or cross post to very many conferences, as this may invite such an enormous flood of 'flaming' replies as to clog your ISP's computer completely and may result in the administrator revoking your account. Posting unsuitable material to the Internet community is not appreciated. This does not just refer to X-rated material. Posting questions about say,

pet frogs, in a discussion about cryptography will result in flaming.

Another annoying habit is excessive quoting of the previous message. Never include the original signature when replying, as it is totally redundant. Also cut out the bulk and leave the salient points. This will save bandwidth and time.

Private newsgroups

Some sites maintain a few newsgroups that are for use by subscribers only. They might begin with 'myisp', for example 'myisp.general' which is for any general discussion and 'myisp.computing.misc' for discussing any matter related to computers or asking for help with a computer problem.

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