Internet Fundamentals

Lecture-11 Outline

- What is USENET news?

- Newsgroup Naming

- How does it work? NNTP?

- How to search your favorite newsgroup?

- Miscellaneous Topics

- Do's and Don'ts

- How to setup a USENET newsgroup?

What is USENET news?

- **Globally distributed discussion forum.**
- **Also known as USENET News.**
- **A collection of special interest groups, called newsgroups.**
- **Each newsgroup is devoted to a certain topic.**
- **There are over 6,000 newsgroups in the news server of CSC, CUHK.**
- **There are over 8,088 newsgroups in the news server of Engineering Faculty, CUHK.**
- **Under each newsgroup, there are many messages called news articles.**

Definitions

- **News administrator** – A person who is in charge of running a news server.
- **News server** – A computer that saves, forwards and manages news articles. Usually, a news server is running in one domain.
- **News reader** – A program that allows user to read/post/subscribe/unsubscribe a newsgroup.
- **Newsgroup** – An on-line forum that allows users from the Internet to join the discussion on a specific topic.
- **Usenet** – A collection of newsgroups

Terminology

- Article
- Post
- Posting
- Follow-up
- Thread
- Subscribe
- Unsubscribe

- Newsreader
- News client
- Expired news
- News server
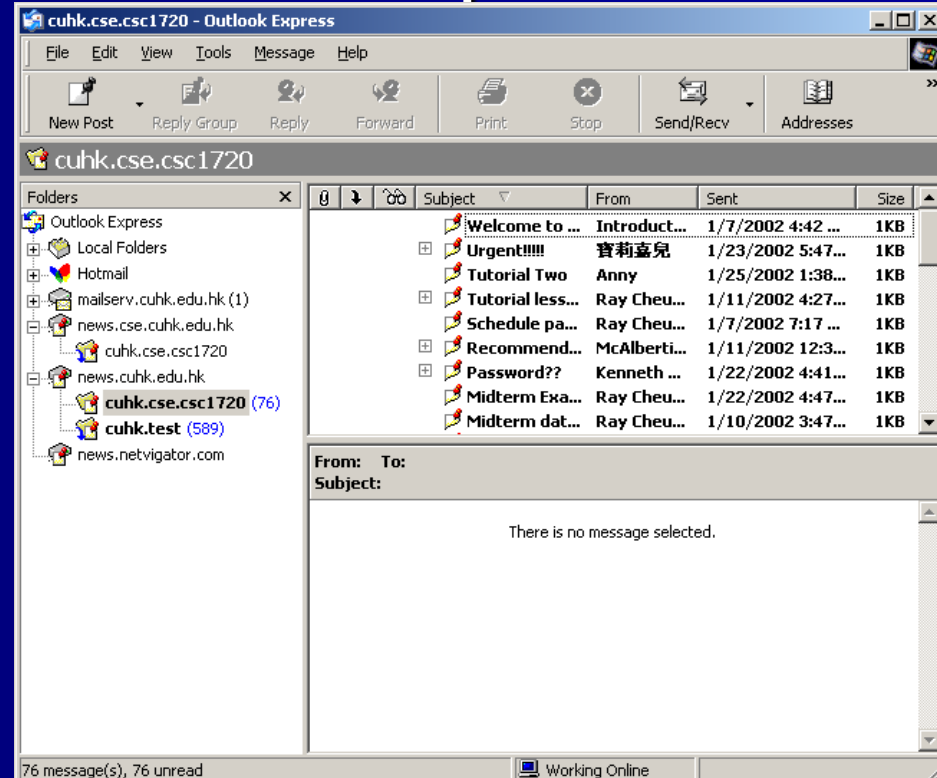- Newsfeed
- Way-station
- NNTP

News reader

- Tin

Outlook Express

Mark Moraes's Explanation

- Usenet is the set of people who exchange articles tagged with one or more universally-recognized labels, called "newsgroups" (or "groups" for short). There is often confusion about the precise set of newsgroups that constitute Usenet; one commonly accepted definition is that it consists of newsgroups listed in the periodic "List of Active Newsgroups" postings which appear regularly in news.lists and other newsgroups. A broader definition of Usenet would include the newsgroups listed in the article "Alternative Newsgroup Hierarchies" (frequently posted to news.lists). An even broader definition includes even newsgroups that are restricted to specific geographic regions or organizations. Each Usenet site makes its own decisions about the set of groups available to its users; this set differs from site to site.

Newsgroup Naming

- **Newsgroups are organized in a hierarchical structure.**

- **With the broadest grouping first.**

- **Followed by an arbitrary number of sub-groupings.**

- **A notation you're probably familiar with:**
  - rec.music.folks
  - cuhk.forum
  - cuhk.cse.csc1720

- **The name of each newsgroup is based on its content and is self-explanatory.**

Network News Transfer Protocol (NNTP)

- The protocol that is used for posting/ distributing/ retrieving USENET news articles among news server.
- Quoted from Requests For Comments - RFC977
  - The news server specified by this document uses a stream connection (such as TCP) and SMTP-like commands and responses. It is designed to accept connections from hosts, and to provide a simple interface to the news database. This server is only an interface between programs and the news databases. It does not perform any user interaction or presentation- level functions. These "user-friendly" functions are better left to the client programs, which have a better understanding of the environment in which they are operating. When used via Internet TCP, the contact port assigned for this service is 119.

ROT13 Encryption

- **Potentially offensive postings should be encrypted.**
- **A common encryption method is rot13.**
- **If you read the content of the news, you may find:**
- **Jrypbzr gur gur pbhefr pfp1720.
  Guvf zrffntr vf rapelcgrq hfvat ebg13.**
- **You may ask your news reader to decrypt it and you will obtain:**
- **Welcome the the course csc1720.
  This message is encrypted using rot13.**
- **Can you figure out how rot13 encrypts text?**
  - **Rotation 13 – letters are rotated 13 positions further down the alphabet.**

Moderated Newsgroups

- Some newsgroups are **moderated**.
- A **moderator** examines the content of a newly posted article first before the article is actually released to the public.
- Posting to a moderated group is no different than posting to any other group.
- News servers know which groups are moderated and who moderates them.
- Your newly posted articles are forwarded to the appropriate moderator automatically.
- How about "unmoderated newsgroups"?

Threading

A thread

News Attachment

Encode a file into printable characters

- Pictures, multimedia files, executable programs can be posted in newsgroups.
  - .MPG, .TXT, .JPG, .EXE, etc.
  - Translate a binary file into a special code that consists entirely of printable characters.
- But we cannot post them directly into newsgroups.
  - Must be specially encoded to be posted.
- UUENCODE – a common scheme.

Cross Posting

- Sometimes, you may want to post the same article in several groups at once.
- This is called cross posting.
- For example:
- You may want to post an article to initiate a discussion on Jacky Cheung's new musical. You think a few newsgroups are related. hk.entertainment, hk.rec.music, hk.general, hk.forsale, alt.music.misc,
- Best specify the Followup-To.

Do's and Don'ts

✗ Don't post *"Hi, I am John."* type of messages.

✗ Don't follow up and email reply at the same time.

✗ Don't post nasty articles.

☑ Do post test messages only to cuhk.test, alt.test, hk.test.

☑ Do think before you crosspost.

☑ Do post only to relevant groups.

☑ Do read news for some time to learn the culture of a newsgroup before posting on the newsgroup.

When you reply a news or email

- How to write effective reply?
  - Quote and trim messages properly
  - Top down formatting
    - Please write reply below the original message
  - HTML/richtext email
    - HTML email is bad, why?
  - Reply length
    - Send a reply to a list with one sentence long?
  - Include your signature

New Comers

- **news.announce.newusers**
  - **This group consists of a series of articles that explain various facets of Usenet.**
- **news.newusers.questions**
  - **This is where you can ask questions about how Usenet works.**
- **news.announce.newsgroups**
  - **Look here for information about new or proposed newsgroups.**
- **news.answers**
  - **Contains lists of "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs) and their answers from many different newsgroups. Learn how to flight jet lag in the FAQ from *rec.travel.air*; look up answers to common questions about MS Windows in an FAQ from *comp.os.ms-windows*; etc.**
- **alt.internet.services**
  - **Looking for something in particular on the Internet? Ask here.**
- **alt.infosystems.announce**
  - **Adding new information services to the Internet will post details here.**

How to start a newsgroup?

- A formal "Request for Discussion (RFD) is posted to "news.announce.newgroup"
- Next, Call for Votes (CFV) is posted to the same newsgroup and the voting period will be 20-30 days.
- At the end of the period, the result are posted.
- The group will be created only if
  - 100 "yes" votes more than "no" votes
  - At least two-thirds of the votes were "yes".

How to start a newsgroup?

Internet Commons

- Flame War
- Spew, Blathers
- Excessive Quote
- Other Denizens
- Excessive Quote
- Netiquette
- Smileys / Emoticons
- Abbreviations

Flame War
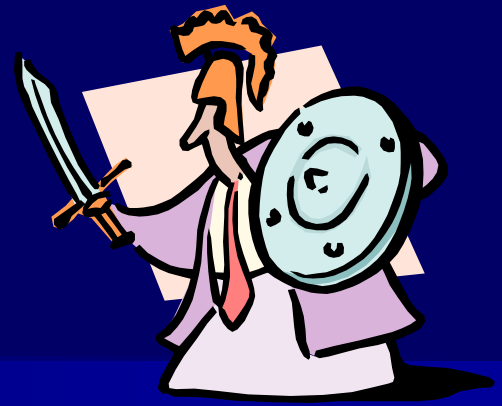
- **A flame is a particularly *nasty*, *personal attack* on somebody for something he or she has written.**

- **Takes up considerable resources.**

- **Flame wars can be tremendously fun to watch at first. They quickly grow boring, though.**

- **THINK! Before you join a flame war.**

Spew

- **Spewers** assume that whatever they are particularly concerned about is of universal interest.

- They send numerous articles to numerous newsgroups about the topic they concerned about.

- If you comment on his/her behavior, you will turn up to receive his/her reply which consists of hundreds of lines to comment you!

Blathers

- **The problem of blathers is that they can't get to the point.**

- **They write out screenfuls of words, when others might sum up in a sentence or two.**

Excessive Quote

- **People afflicted with this include the entire original message in their reply without excising irrelevant portions.**

- **The worst quote a long message and then add a single line:**
 - **"I agree!"**

Other Denizens

- **Net.weenies** - These are the kind of people who enjoy LOWER CASED insulting others.

- **Net.geeks** - People to whom the Net is Life, who worry about what happens when they graduate and lose their free, 24-hour access.

- **Lurkers** - Actually, you can't tell these people are there, but they are. They're the folks who read a newsgroup but never post or respond.

- **Wizards** - People who know a particular Net-related topic inside and out.

- **Net.saints** - Always willing to help a newcomer, eager to share their knowledge with those not born with an innate ability to navigate the Net. They are not as rare as you might think. Post a question about something and you'll often be surprised how many responses you get.

Netiquette

- **Netiquette, which is short for *Internet etiquette*, is the code of acceptable behaviors users should follow while on the Internet; that is, the conduct expected on individuals while online.**
  - Netiquette is all about respect.
  - Keep your messages short and to the point.
  - Watch your grammar and spelling.
  - Be careful with humor. Avoid sarcasm.
  - Be polite. Avoid offensive language.

Netiquette
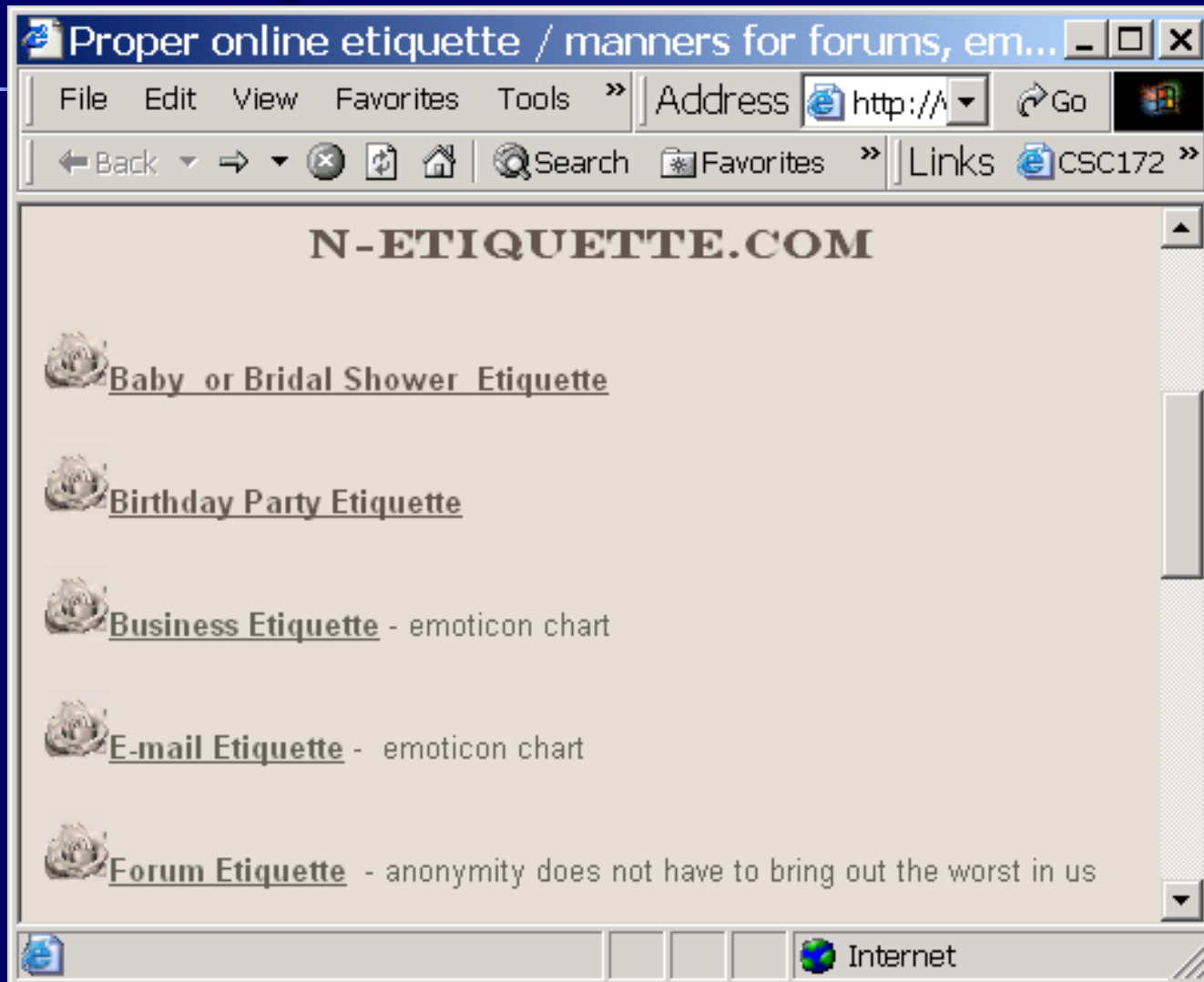
Reference

Netiquette

- **Netiquette**
  - Use uppercase words very sparingly. UPPERCASE TEXT YELLS AT PEOPLE.
  - Never leave your "subject" line blank.
  - Include your email address in the message body (i.e. in your signature file).
  - Avoid sending flames, which are abusive or insulting messages. Never participate in flame war.