

LIS566

Lecture 3

usenet news

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Reading

Usenet Info Center <http://www.ibiblio.org/usenet-!home.html>  
Usenet Newbie Project <http://tgos.org/newbie>

Definitions

Usenet is a collection of user-submitted notes on various subjects that are posted to servers on a worldwide network. Each subject collection of posted notes is known as a newsgroup.

A newsgroup is a discussion about a particular subject consisting of notes written to a networked site and redistributed through Usenet, a worldwide network of news discussion groups.

usenet vs e-mail

article vs message

posting vs sending

collection of articles vs collection of users' addresses

article distributed to usenet servers vs message distributed to list addresses

client/server system

reading/writing usenet articles involves pointing a usenet client to a usenet server

The client provides an interface to list, track and display article.

The server provides for article storage and dissemination services.

peers

Between servers, usenet operates as a peer-to-peer network. there is no central server.

Each usenet server has a finite set of peers.

- peers can act as "outfeeds"

- peers can act as "infeeds"

There are two means which a server can receive news from an infeed / put news to an outfeed

- grabbing

- pushing

### usenet servers

Each usenet server is autonomous. Its administrator decides

- which peers to relay articles to and from
- which newsgroups they carry
- which client addresses may use the server
- which size the articles may have
- which sender to exclude
- which server not to carry articles from
- which articles to remove based on contents
- when articles expire

connecting to usenet

Client software

- built-in clients to most email packages
- there are specific client software packages that have additional features, e.g. free agent for MickeySoft Windows
- Server choice
- ISP provided
- commercial servers
- free servers

web to usenet to web gateways

- <http://groups.google.com>, formerly dejnews
- <http://mailandnews.com>
- <http://newsone.net>

## newsgroup names

- example: foo.bar.foo-foo.whatever
- series of component strings separated by dots. Components
- comprise the letters a-z, digits 0-9 as well as the + and - signs
- start with a letter

The component separation implies a hierarchy.

On the server, the articles live in a directory of this name, this poses restrictions on the name. Each component of a name is in a separate directory.

The benefits of hierarchical naming include

- It allows for better browsing interface than a long list.
- Similar groups can be placed near to each other.
- It allows for a simplified choice of what groups to carry.

## life and death

A newsgroup is born when an individual server issues a special message called "control sequence".

Some groups were created for fun only, example  
alt.swedish.chef.bork.bork.bork

Technically speaking, newsgroups do not die. They may carry no more news and therefore be de facto dead.

Newsgroups are propagated as nntp server administrators add them to the list of groups carried at their server.

## The Big8 hierarchy

- comp.\*
- geek talk
- humanities.\*
- arty-farty talk
- news.\*
- Use net itself talk
- rec.\*
- all sorts of hobby pursuits
- soci.\*
- sci.\*
- brainy talk
- soc.\*
- egghhead talk
- talk.\*
- misc.\*
- anything not covered above

Creating a new group in the big

write to news.groups and propose your group

if people are interested, vote takes place

2/3 of the voters have to be in favor and at least 100 more yes than no votes

the alt newsgroups

exists as a space where there are no voting rules for the creation of newsgroups.

alt stood for "anarchists, lunatics and terrorists" not for "alter-native".

history of Usenet

The idea of network news was born in 1979 when two graduate students, Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis, thought of using UUCP to connect machines for the purpose of information exchange among users. They set up a small network of three machines in North Carolina.

UUCP is "UNIX to UNIX copy" a protocol that is used to copy files between machines running some flavor of UNIX, without the need for IP protocol.

- initially running on shell scripts for a load of two articles per day
- 1980 "A" release
- "B" release by Mark Horton and Matt Glickman in 1982, continuously updated, later versions supported moderated groups
- "C" release is 1987 by Geoff Collier and Henry Spencer

### UUCP to NNTP

- A-C all ran on UUCP
- 1986 NNTP was created, described in RFC 977
- Implies smaller machine loads and propagates faster.
- 1992 Rich Collier implements News Overview (No), an automatic header processing system.
- Numerous client programs:
- rn (by Larry Wall)
- trn
- nn
- tin
- gnus
- trumpet

### standard documents

- RFC 822 specifies the format of messages; RFC 1036 uses this.
- RFC 977 specifies NNTP
- RFC 1123 specifies the format of articles
- RFC 1123 specifies a digest form for moderated groups

problems with usenet

open to all

used by spammers for posting and gathering addresses

steadily decline of quality of contribution?