

What Are USENET Groups?

by Dan Baer

USENET, which stands for Users Network, consists of the thousands of computers that receive Network News which is organized under a set of groupings known as newsgroups. Each newsgroup is devoted to a particular subject, such as cellular biology or the works of William Shakespeare. The topics of newsgroups can be work-related or just for fun.

USENET is actually not part of the Internet or even a separate network, but a set of rules for managing newsgroups. Most computers supporting USENET are also on the Internet, but that does not necessarily have to be the case. The opposite holds true as well; not all computers connected to the Internet provide USENET to their users.

USENET is a means of broadcasting articles (USENET's term for messages) to a large number of computers. Technically speaking, USENET newsgroups are propagated using a store and forward procedure. An article I send to a given host saves it and then feeds the article to other hosts in the USENET network. Using store and forward, an article can usually be distributed widely in a matter of moments.

While most of the newsgroups you will work with are public, there can also be local newsgroups (local to the given Internet site). These newsgroups are then not accessible through other Internet providers.

Newsgroups can be either moderated or unmoderated. In an unmoderated newsgroup, you simply post an article and it is broadcast to all other newsgroup members. In a moderated newsgroup, your article is sent to a moderator which reviews it before making it available publicly. The idea behind moderated newsgroups is to keep the discussion tightly focused on the given subject. Moderated newsgroups tend to have a more manageable number of messages, since non-pertinent and inappropriate messages are filtered out.

Newsgroups are organized in a hierarchical manner. The first part of a newsgroup name is a broad topic and is followed by a one or more subtopics. Each of these levels uses abbreviated names and follows the typical Internet naming convention in which periods are used to separate the topic levels. For example, the comp.lang.mumps newsgroup is a computer-related discussion in the general category of computer languages. The specific language being discussed is MUMPS.

The USENET hierarchy is firmly established. At the top level there are seven different categories.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Issues discussed</u>
comp	Computer (software and hardware) subjects
sci	Scientific(physical and social sciences) topics
soc	Social and cultural issues
rec	Recreational topics
talk	Controversial subjects (debate-oriented groups)
news	Newsgroup, network, and administration topics
misc	Topics which are hard to classify under other categories

There are also newsgroups which are technically not part of USENET, but the USENET is often extended to include these alternative newsgroup as well. Alternative newsgroups are much less structured than the traditional USENET newsgroups.

Comp.lang.mumps: the M newsgroup

Comp.lang.mumps is a USENET newsgroup. Created in mid-1994, it is an unmoderated newsgroup. This means that anyone can post and read messages.

The charter of comp.lang.mumps reads:

The proposed unmoderated newsgroup comp.lang.mumps will be open to discussions on almost all topics related to versions of the M technology and the M language (also know as MUMPS). Appropriate topics would include, but not be limited to:

- advocacy binding to GUI platforms (M Windowing API)
- discussions of commercial products
- object orient extensions
- PC networking issues
- programming techniques
- tools

From September 11, 1995 to December 18, 1995, there were 695 messages posted to the comp.lang.mumps group. This is an average of 7 messages per day. From November 1, 1995 to December 18, 1995 there were 48 messages posted. This is an average of 1 message per day. Message traffic on comp.lang.mumps can be somewhat sporadic. However,

most of the messages are of interest to the M community. Here is a sample of some of the latest subjects:

- Form feeds and blank lines
- ANSI Standard M
- Check digits
- OPEN timeout
- Roll-and-scroll to GUI

Subscribing to comp.lang.mumps

If you already have Internet and USENET access, just use your newsreader to subscribe to comp.lang.mumps.

If you have WWW access, stop by MUMPS of Georgia's website at <http://www.mindspring.com/~mga/> and select the "source of information" link. Toward the middle of this page you will see a link to comp.lang.mumps. If you click on this link, this will check if your service provider has comp.lang.mumps on their server. If it does, you will be able to browse it while online.

If you have email service, but do not have access to USENET, you can gain access to comp.lang.mumps by subscribing to the listserver. This service will email you copies of the messages that are posted in comp.lang.mumps. You also use this service to post messages to comp.lang.mumps. To subscribe to the M listserver, send an email message to LISTSERV@uga.cc.uga.edu. The subject of the message does not matter. The message should consist of only one line:

SUBSCRIBE MUMPS-L your first name and last name

To send messages to comp.lang.mumps via the M listserver, address your email message to:

MUMPS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu

Note that to subscribe, you use the address:

LISTSERV@uga.cc.uga.edu

To send mail to the group, use the address:

MUMPS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu

After you subscribe to the listserver, you will receive an email message detailing how to use the service.

If you subscribe with service providers such as CompuServe, AOL, or Prodigy, these services offer access to USENET newsgroups. Consult your particular service provider on how to access comp.lang.mumps on their network. **M**

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