

Electronic Communication: Shouldn't We Use It More Effectively?

by Dan Baer

The world keeps getting smaller. Every day more information is made available via electronic agents such as the Internet, electronic mail, and the World Wide Web. Are we as M users exploiting these tools as effectively as we could? Is your local M user group utilizing these tools to promote and expand your group, as well as assist other M user groups?

If you are not aware of the comp.lang.mumps newsgroup, or your user group does not have an email address or a website, you are in jeopardy of being "left out" of the information explosion.

For many, networking is an invaluable part of their job as well as their career. It is vital to be able to meet with professionals in your field and discuss issues of concern. Unfortunately, we as a community have failed to effectively use one of the least expensive yet most flexible and useful means of communication. By using these forms of communication, we can share our interests, problems, and insights on M, as well as nurture M to make it stronger and better known.

By using email, comp.lang.mumps, and creating M-related websites, we can share ideas that may help these groups attract and keep more members. Creating stronger user groups and making information about M easily and instantly available to anyone who wants to explore M, would greatly assist in giving M a stronger presence in today's competitive environment.

MUMPS of Georgia (MGA) has begun to use electronic communications to its benefit. We developed a basic website for our organization (<http://www.mindspring.com/~mga/>) and established an email address (mga@mindspring.com). Although the website will be used primarily for the benefit of MGA and its members, we want to supply information that may be of interest to all M users, whether they belong to MGA or not.

In addition to providing web pages specifically for our members, we would like to:

- Show who is using M, what they use it for, and why they chose M over other technologies

- Get reprints of magazine articles that discuss M or the people who use it.

- Link to other M user groups and M vendors and implementors.

(Note: if you would like to be listed, send your information to mga@mindspring.com)

After checking on reprint permission for articles concerning M, we discovered that many publishing houses do not grant permission for reprinting on the Internet. Others have stated that they require substantial reprint fees for their articles. As of now, this goal seems to be unobtainable for MGA.

MGA's site does have some links to M sites, such as InterSystems, MTA, and the MDC. There appears to be a significant lack of information regarding M Technology on the web. Of the many local user groups in the world, MGA is the only LUG that has a website. Very few M vendors have websites, although the number is growing.

There are several inexpensive ways to give your group a presence on the Internet. In large cities, you can choose from a list of Internet Service Providers (ISPs). These accounts give you email and World Wide Web site services. For a minimal fee, you get the benefit of the ISP's equipment and connections. All you need to do is write and upload your web pages. If you have an account with AOL or Compuserve, you probably already have access to their web servers. Both of these services allow you to set up home pages on their servers, usually for little or no extra charge.

With so many inexpensive ways of acquiring space for a user group to start a website, why is there so little M user group activity in this area? Is the process too new? Do people feel it is just a passing fad? Are we too complacent? Do we feel that our members would not benefit? Are the local M user groups running out of steam?

From my limited experience with publishing on the Internet, I will say that creating a website and publishing on the WWW is the fastest, most cost-effective way of getting your message to those you want to reach. There is no reason why a group should not take advantage of it.

However, maybe your group just doesn't want to get involved in a website right now. That's fine. We all have to move at our own pace and judge what our members want. If your group does not have a site, or is not considering opening a site, there is another way to collect and distribute information that the majority of M users and user groups have overlooked: comp.lang.mumps — the USENET newsgroup specifically created for the discussion of M and related material.

Comp.lang.mumps is available to anyone who has access to USENET newsgroups, or that has an email account. If you do not have access to newsgroups, all you need do is send an email message to listserv@uga.cc.uga.edu with the following in the first line of the message: SUBSCRIBE MUMPS-L your first and last names.

In the last few months, there have only been a few messages in comp.lang.mumps pertaining to M user groups and their activities. All the M user groups need to begin participating in the newsgroup by posting messages such as meeting announcements or roundtable discussions concerning previous presenters or programming solutions. Also, any discussions about what these groups find useful for their members would be invaluable information for the other M user groups. We must all begin to communicate openly if we want to continue to grow. Utilizing comp.lang.mumps for user group discussions is a process that we must begin.

Recently there was a discussion in comp.lang.mumps concerning this very subject. The group was debating the usefulness of a naming convention for subject lines of messages from user groups. My proposal was to begin the subject line in a manner similar to:

LUG:LUG Name:Subject where:

LUG is the identifier that this is a LUG message
LUG Name is an abbreviation for the LUG's name
Subject is of course, the subject of the message

(Note: If you have any ideas on this, please post them in comp.lang.mumps, or email them to danbaer@mindspring.com)

As a member of a relatively small user group, I am interested in the potential of M user groups sharing information such as:

- how their particular group is managed
- what their members want
- what types of presentations are most requested
- what kind of training members want

Communication between user groups would not only benefit the groups and their members, but would serve to strengthen the M community. It would be a great asset if we all

directed people or businesses that are interested in M Technology to strong, active user groups.

If your user group does not have a website or email account, talk to a local ISP (See related article on page 10). Many times you can get a group discount if you set up the group, as well as the individual members, with accounts. If you use email but can not get newsgroups, please subscribe to the MUMPS listserver. If you do have access to newsgroups, become active in comp.lang.mumps.

Electronic communication is an extremely powerful tool that we need to learn to use and exploit for our benefit. Hopefully, in the very near future, there will be a plethora of information about M, M user groups, and M Technology available on the Internet as well as in "mainstream" publications. **M**

Dan Baer is an independent consultant and programs in M, Visual M, and Visual Basic. Email: danbaer@mindspring.com
MGA can be reached through their website:
<http://www.mindspring.com/~mga/>

Just a partial list
of the Windows
applications you can
use to get to your
M data.

Access
Crystal Reports
Delphi
English Wizard
ERwin
Excel
Forest & Trees
Infomaker
Intelligent Query
PowerBuilder
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Visual Basic
Visual FoxPro
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KB Systems, Inc.
585 Grove Street
Suite 201
Herndon, VA 20170
Voice (703) 318-0405
Fax (703) 318-0569
www.kbsystems.com



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