



GreenNet

**Global Computer Network for Peace,
Environment and Human Rights**

“WHY THE ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS IS DIFFERENT”

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1. GUIDING THOUGHTS

How are the APC networks (GreenNet, EcoNet and PeaceNet) different? Let me begin answering that by describing what this state-of-the art computer network may do for some 'typical users' on a 'typical day'.

A Beyond War member in Atlanta gets technical details on a satellite downlink of a US-Soviet space bridge he is coordinating for the local chapter.

A peace researcher in Cambridge works on a mutual security strategy paper for presidential candidates, collaborating with activists in Boulder, Colorado and Menlo Park, California.

An organizer for an environmental group in Edinburgh consults computer conferences on toxic and nuclear wastes to gather information for a new citizen campaign.

A coordinator for a major peace organization in Washington D.C. that has just merged with another group communicates with all of her local chapters — getting their input to the transition.

A film maker in Toronto arranges with her host in Africa for a visit to a local development project in Kenya.

A newsletter editor for Southscan receives newsletter article submissions online, eliminating the need to key in the accepted articles herself.

An investor in Falls Church, Virginia compares her portfolio with a list of military contractors on an ethical investment computer conference.

A solidarity group in London update themselves on the events in Nicaragua of the last few days (in English or Spanish).

A local group in Hannover ask an energy campaigner in London for facts to be used in a local radio interview.

Typical? Well, as you can see its a highly diverse type, this APC network user. Perhaps the central characteristic is commitment to a future for the planet that works a lot better than the present. Peace is more than the absence of war. It is the sort of people I've been describing working together to create a world of cooperation. these networks are their electronic tools.

A quick scan of any online directory would help to set a context for this discussion. We would find there countless online commercial services offering data bases of business, academic, government and news information. DIALOG, World Reporter, Data Star. Reuters, Dow Jones. You can easily spend up to \$130 (£70) an hour on these services. (GreenNet costs its users £5.40 an hour, PeaceNet costs \$10 an hour peak - half at night or weekends)

Then there are the information supermarkets — The Source or Compuserve in the US, Telecom Gold in the UK— offering electronic mail, stock market information,

and conferencing to the general public.

Finally, there are the non profit academic and special interest networks — Bitcom, Janet, Usenet, MetaNet.

All of these data bases and networks — except the last group — are owned and operated for profit by large corporations. DIALOG is owned by Lockheed, The Source by Reader's Digest, Telecom Gold by British Telecom. Many are exclusively devoted to the commercial applications of information access. A number of the online services play a key role in the communications of the 'defense' industry.

How are the APC networks different? They are a telecommunications service closely linked to citizen action. They are non-profit computer networks connecting over 3000 users and 300 organizations working for the future of our planet. They enables immediate, cost-effective exchange of information between people in 70 countries — people working on peace, environmental, economic development, and social justice issues. Their present operation, history, and future development have no real parallels in the communications industry.

2. PRESENT OPERATION OPERATION

PeaceNet, along with EcoNet, is operated by the Institute for Global Communications, a division of the Tides Foundation in S.F. (EcoNet was founded by Farallones Institute and acquired by IGC in June, 1987.) The online user finds one system linking the peace, economic development and environmental movements.

GreenNet is an independant non-profit limited company.

ELECTRONIC MAIL

When a user signs on he or she finds access to electronic mail, computer, conferences, data bases and a variety of support, services. Email facilities include a keyword searchable user directory; gateways for sending messages to users on more than twenty commercial and academic networks; and telex capabilities.

Electronic mail enables organizations to maintain rapid-response relationships with chapters and individual members. Online mailings prove a cost-effective means of sending out newsletters and legislative or action alerts to computer-using members of such groups as Physicians for Social Responsibility or Greenpeace. The members are, in turn, able to respond rapidly to requests for input to strategic planning in their organizations.

E-mail also enables individuals to work together more readily across organizational, national and issue boundaries. One of our favorite anecdotes along this line comes from the writing of the funding proposal that gave birth to PeaceNet. We had eight people representing four organizations in four cities doing a 50 page proposal in three days. Drafts were whipping around the circuit, three or four rounds a day. We wound up with a document that brought in the first development funding

and had complete agreement from all eight authors and four organizations. Everybody participated and everybody owned it. The total telecommunications cost was around \$50!

The same rapid turnaround of information proves quite valuable in planning the content and logistics of conferences, demonstrations, and other events.

CONFERENCES

The IGC and GreenNet systems also provide public and private conferencing. Over two hundred conferences with an amazing diversity of subject matter are open to all users. These include news, calendars, alerts to situations calling for action, discussions of strategy, organizational newsletters, investment monitoring, and briefings for forthcoming meetings.

Some conferences are open only to members of an organization or working group but most are open to all users. Unless a conference is only for dissemination of news, one can enter topics up to 100K long, or shorter responses and questions to topics. The Gary Hart campaign last year used the interactive nature of conferences to invite responses to a draft white paper on U.S.-Soviet relations.

Friends of the Earth and other organisations used the conferences at Christmas to coordinate responses to the widespread arrest of Environmental activists in Malaysia - actions which subsequently led to the release of most of them.

Users can scan legislative update conferences maintained by at least three organizations: Council for a Livable World, Committee for a New Foreign Policy, and Sane/Freeze. This variety helps activists see the Washington scene from multiple points of view.

Conferences also help users gain information not otherwise available to them. One of the best examples is sscan.news which provides detailed weekly reports on life and politics in South Africa and the surrounding states. Southscan presents the pattern of government repression, detention, and terrorism and the depth of black determination to overcome apartheid. The anti-apartheid movements here and abroad stay informed of developments in South Africa at a depth and timeliness far beyond other media. The CARNet conferences on events in Nicaragua, El Salvadore, Honduras, and other Central American countries provide a parallel service for this area.

A Greenpeace conferences, gp.press brings us daily updates on key peace and environmental news stories from around the world.

Amnesty International's online conference enables users to participate in their Urgent Action Network concerning human rights abuses. The central office swiftly disseminates action requests over PeaceNet. Just as swiftly countries violating human rights receive telegrams and letters from the Network.

The Christic Institute's conference, chr.contragate,

offers a comprehensive picture of the Institute's activities. The progress of their current federal lawsuit, which implicates the contras and private contra supporters in drug and gun smuggling, is fully documented.

>From frontline news we take a leap to conferences reflecting long-term developments. There are conferences on Star Wars and alternative peaceful uses of space technology by the Institute for Security and Cooperation in Outer Space. en.climate explores the ozone hole and other atmospheric problems. And back down to Earth, EcoNet includes conferences on sustainable agriculture, and environmental threats to the oceans and forests.

Some conferences directly facilitate action. A notable example was Beyond War's use of computer conferencing as the primary means of communications for organizing their national satellite meeting this year. Every downlink location across the country was coordinated through access to PeaceNet. Without delay, organizers received all details on technical aspects of which satellite and transponder would be used, suggestions on putting together a flyer to advertise the downlink, and the time and content of the program. PeaceNet enabled Beyond War to coordinate 420 downlinks - a record number for the organization.

DATABASES

Up to now conferences have provided an informal data base capacity. But the first fully functioning data bases are now online in a testing mode on PeaceNet. In one of the first, users can quickly check the voting records of their Congresspeople, as well as a variety of fields giving background and areas of interest. This information helps voters individualize their communications to improve impact.

Other early data bases will include:

Peace Research Abstracts Journal database - the largest and oldest set of abstracts of the peace movement.

Nature Center Database — directory of names and addresses of 1100 nature centers.

Africa database — covering African resources.

Consortium of Aquariums, Universities, & Zoos database people in the field classified according to their specific taxonomic interests.

It is hoped to start offering databases from European organisations on GreenNet as soon as some more funds.

A critical difference from commercial data bases here is the way the Association for Progressive Communications enables small organizations' databases to be accessed. A commercial service would want to make at least £10,000 per year per database, income impossible on small, special interest collections. APC's non-commercial status provides a leveraging of information that in some cases will play a vital role in peace, development, and environmental issues.

All of this begins to suggest how the APC networks are different in the present. I'd like to conclude with a look at our unique history and plans for the future.

3 HISTORY

3a. HISTORY of PeaceNet and EcoNet

In 1963 student activists in Berkeley set an anti-computer tone to movement politics when they wore "Do not fold, spindle, or mutilate" signs on their foreheads. For the next two decades computers were seen as a tool more for oppression than for activism. But the story of PeaceNet's founding provides the transition.

PeaceNet was spawned by four organizations: Foundation for the Arts of Peace, Ark Communications Institute, Community Data Processing, and the Center for Innovative Diplomacy. From the first, PeaceNet's founders saw it as an organizing tool for social activists. What these groups shared was a dedication to helping progressive social change organizations improve their communication and effectiveness through the use of computer resources.

They chose non-profit status to indicate partnership with the groups who would be served rather than a vendor-client relationship. This collaborative approach invited deep dedication from the system designers, programmers, and other technical and management people who built the system.

Grants from the MacArthur Foundation, Ploughshares Fund, C.S. Fund, W. Alton Jones Foundation, and several other foundations combined with thousands of hours of low rate and volunteer labor funded one of the most cost-effective technical investments ever made.

By late 1985, the first test version was up on the Ontyme system of Tymnet, providing email communication to several dozen organizations and hundreds of individuals. The present PeaceNet system and software went online September 1, 1986 via Telenet.

The Institute for Global Communications (IGC) was created in early 1987, as a project of the Tides Foundation. In July of '87 IGC acquired EcoNet. This environmental and appropriate development network operates in complete parallel with PeaceNet. Users of one have full access to messaging and conferences of the other. With this acquisition, IGC links an unequalled variety of activists, researchers, and organizations working on the future of our planet.

3b HISTORY OF GreenNet

In December 1985 GreenNet was founded to provide a professional computer communications capability to organisations working for a better world. A small grant enabled it to be setup on a commercial network - GeoNet. During this first year it was funded by cross-subsidy from commercial contract work. In October 1986 GreenNet started looking for a permanent home. GreenNet briefly moved into office space with Earthlife - an environmental charity, but when they went bankrupt GreenNet started looking again ending up in

October 1987 renting office space from Friends of the Earth.

Through all these changes GreenNet remained organisationally independent and growing rapidly, doubling in size roughly every four months.

3c HISTORY of APC

In 1987 IGC set a valuable precedent by contributing its software and technical support to GreenNet. GreenNet was donated a mini-computer and is now running an identical system linked to PeaceNet and EcoNet hourly, with inter-communication for users of the two systems. This precedent will be followed with other networks to extend the connections within the activist world.

4. THE FUTURE OF APC

The future of this unique communication system includes recruitment of new realms of users supported by powerful technical enhancements. A new MacArthur Foundation grant is funding study of the technical changes needed to provide international access at the lowest possible costs. These changes include establishing linked computer nodes to serve different geographic or interest areas; creating more effective gateways with other networks; and overall increases in the speed of the system. The linked nodes will not necessarily be owned by IGC or GreenNet. As with IGC and GreenNet, the Association of Progressive Communications will expand to provide inter-connection of services, software and technical support to independent networks.

Recruitment will focus on bringing whole, dispersed communities of researchers, practitioners, and activists online. Examples would be researchers and development workers in the field of sustainable agriculture; or activists, researchers, and negotiators creating the mutual security systems needed to support the course of disarmament.

The future of PeaceNet, EcoNet, and, GreenNet, will be a deepening and spreading of the resource that now exists. Our commitment is to truly global communication — communication available to the social inventors, the grassroots activists, and the organizational leaders creating a future that works for everyone. That's the difference that makes a difference.