

## Technical Priorities

### Summary of the discussions on technical priorities

Once the work on the 386 port is finished, the question of where our technical priorities lies arises again. I would suggest that they lie in three main areas.

#### Admin tools:

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The admin process needs to be automated. The existing tools we have need to be integrated into simple menus and new tools added. Some, but hopefully few, of these tools may result in throwing the user into a edit, others would use the online forms package that David is putting together. The aim should be to:

a) Make the system-admin and user-support process take less time

b) Make as much of it as possible require a lower skill-level so that new networks and/or volunteers can take it on. the goal (probably unachievable) should be that a Unix prompt is not needed for ANY system management stuff.

c) There should be no need for a network to have to have another computer other than the 386 running the APC software. This helps us keep node-startup costs down and makes our environment more portable.

d) Enable us to keep better track of the users - for example if a user calls on the phone we should be able to pick up, from any terminal, a database with info on their name/address, their computer, their usage of the system, previous problems etc. This would also allow us to spread the user support function around among the staff which would put all the staff better in touch with the realities of being a user.

Tools that come in this area include, Userlist edits and updates, rmusr & mvgrp, billing, backup, uucp maintenance, dealing with the "problem-log".

#### Networking:

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We are rapidly developing a distributed network, however the only tools that work well accross the network are mail and conference reading and writing. We need to tidy up our tools so that they work better across a multiple-host environment. For example we should be able to enter was "gn:fred" or "yet igc:jim" on any node. Also our Userlists need to be run effectively in parrallel.

We also need to generalise a lot of the tools for multiple host environments, for example choosing where to network a conference to. How often to link to a particular host and which conferences need to go hourly, which daily. (important for a host that is expensive to call during the daytime). Quite a bit of the

software has gn adm igc and sfmt hard-coded into it and this makes it hard to distribute.

We also need to make our networking more cost-effective, for example messages shouldnt be sent twice to a host when there are two recipients on that host, ideally they should also be compressed and transferred as a batch.

Another major task is putting together software to keep the software in check between the nodes. This was discussed over a year ago, and the lack of such a tools means that some things just dont port across between nodes - For example GreenNet doesnt have "yet" in conferences or the new "was", nor does it have databases, IGC lacks the local:xxxx tools (till I ported them this week), it doesnt have GreenNets admin menu which partly does the work of the first section, nor does it have our "was" and "who" that recognises and decodes DNICS into countries.

Connecting the above two areas, many admin tasks have to be run on both machines, (e.g. conference addition and networking). We need to hack these tools so that they dont require duplication of work at all APC nodes.

Other tools that come under this heading are: yet, was, conference facilitation.

#### Cleanup

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The final area is cleanup. A lot of our software is highly quirky. How to handle those quirks has been passed on from Scott to Steve and Jeremy but should really be programmed out if we are to minimise the burden of supporting and bringing up to steam new nodes. For example, the shell scripts for changing a user's group that leave lock files on etc etc. We need a fairly massive cleanup of all the little annoying quirks.

#### Summary

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Summarising this, I am suggesting that as soon as the 386 port is finished there should be a moratorium on big projects and the priority should be to get the little projects up to date, i.e. the above stuff. This means that some of the bigger development projects - like multi-lingual interface and text search and supporting front-ends should take a lower priority till our system is fairly clean.

Mail?