

GreenNet

Global Computer Network for Peace, Environment and Human Rights

What is GreenNet and how does it differ from other online services?

GreenNet is a computerised communications and information exchange service created with the objective of providing the Environment, Peace and Human Rights Movements with a communications capability as good as that available to the government, military and multinationals. Together with IGC, its sister network in the US (PeaceNet and EcoNet) it has over 3000 subscribers (representing about 1000 organisations). Most use GreenNet on a daily basis to exchange information around the world. GreenNet is not a campaigning organisation itself. Its reason for existence is to provide a support service for other progressive groups.

One way to answer this question is by describing what this state-of-the art computer network may do for some 'typical users' on a 'typical day'. For example:

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

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.

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 writer in Frankfurt asks for the address of a small Nicaraguan support group in Washington, within hours a user in Washington has volunteered to pass on messages.

A co-ordinator 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 in London 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 this GreenNet user is a highly diverse type. 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 described here working together to create a world of cooperation. These networks are their electronic tools.

GreenNet's online facilities

When a user signs on he or she finds access to electronic mail, computer, conferences, data bases and a variety of support services.

Electronic Mail

Electronic Mail (E-mail) facilities include a keyword searchable user directory; gateways for sending messages to users on more than twenty commercial, academic and non-profit networks; and fax and telex capabilities.

E-mail enables organizations to maintain rapid-response relationships with local groups 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 Friends of the Earth. 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 favourite anecdotes comes from the writing of the funding proposal that gave birth to PeaceNet. Eight people representing four organizations in four cities had 3 days to write a 50 page proposal. We posted drafts three or four times a day and produced 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 turn-round of information is invaluable in planning the content and logistics of conferences, demonstrations, and other events.

Conferences

The IGC and GreenNet systems also provide public and private conferencing. Conferences are electronic noticeboards. 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 (50 pages) long, or shorter responses and questions to topics.

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

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

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 Salvador, Honduras, and other Central American countries provide a parallel service for this area (*carnet.nicanews* etc)

Several news services or news clipping services are available. For example a Greenpeace conference, *gp.press* brings us daily updates on key peace and environmental news stories from around the world. A weekly service from CRIES, *cries.actualidad*, brings summaries from Managua of events in that region.

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 GreenNet. Just as swiftly countries violating human rights receive telegrams and letters from Network users.

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 the ozone hole and other atmospheric problems, (*en.climate*) sustainable agriculture (*nwag.news*) and environmental threats to the oceans (*en.marine*) and forests (*ran.tropic timber*).

Some conferences directly facilitate action. A notable example was during the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament where a delegate to the session from the National Peace Council sent daily updates and requests for action (*un.ssd3*) while another entered summaries of each nations speeches and proposals, (*worldfed.ssdiii*).

Databases

Up to now conferences have provided an informal database 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 databases will include:

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

Nature Centre Database — directory of names and addresses of 1100 nature centres.

Africa database — covering African resources.

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

Television Trust for the Environment's database of video resource materials.

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. GreenNet's non-commercial status provides a leveraging of information that in some cases will play a vital role in peace, development, and environmental issues.

We are interested in hearing from organisations that would like to make databases they have on their own computers available to others.

Association for Progressive Communications.

Both GreenNet and IGC had chosen 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 created the system.

It also led to a willingness to cooperate with other networks and in 1987 IGC set a valuable precedent by contributing its software and technical support to GreenNet. GreenNet was donated a mini-computer and has since November 1987 been running an identical system linked to PeaceNet and EcoNet hourly, with inter-communication for users of the systems. The networks together formed the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) as an umbrella group to link and support non-profit networks world-wide. Working together with hourly updates between the networks, the APC networks link an unequalled variety of activists, researchers, and organizations working on the future of our planet. The existing networks will soon be joined by other networks to extend the connections within the activist world. Networks in the process of joining the association are located in Canada, Sweden, Brazil, Nicaragua and Kenya.

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