The Haves and the Have-Nets

Sean Pert surfs the Internet.

As a student at Manchester Metropolitan University I was lucky enough to have access to the Internet. I found to my surprise, not a horrifically complicated computer system, nor the answer to all my information needs...but something useful and fun too.

The Internet has generated a great deal of media attention which reflects the almost explosive rise in the number of people who have access to it. Originally designed as a research and educational tool, the Internet has mushroomed in the last five years into a vast resource of information. It is also a discussion forum and an extremely powerful mass communication system. It allows computers all over the world to communicate with each other in a common language via a telephone line. This means that whether you are using a terminal at an educational establishment, your own personal computer, an Apple Macintosh, an Amiga or some exotic machine at a company headquarters, you can exchange information with other people connected to the Internet. A personal link requires a computer with a modem, a telephone line and an account with an Internet provider. Many colleges and universities are already wired and will give you access and your own E-mail address.

Anyone who is familiar with Windows will find one of the common Internet viewers easy to use. A viewer is a program that allows you see all the text and graphics (and even listen to accompanying sound). It also allows you to download interesting files such as documents and photographs. Even entire computer programs can be transmitted to your computer. These Internet programs all follow the 'point and click' system you will be familiar with.

There are several pages that are of interest to speech therapists and students. There are also discussion groups and forums. The following are some sites I've visited and found useful. If you can't find the sites through the addresses at the end, use the search facility on the Internet viewer and at least one key site should come up.

SITES

Judith Kuster's Homepage at Mankato State University is an excellent start. This page has links to many other pages covering topics such as augmentative communication, Parkinson's disease, voice disorders and stammering resources.

A similar site which also guides you to other sites is Scott Bradley's "Ten interesting sites in speech-language pathology and audiology".

Several pages allow you to make your own contributions and comments, either by E-mailing the author(s) or by typing a response directly into a text box supplied. One such site is the Massachusetts General Hospital - Department of Neurology HomePage: Neurology Forum. Set up as "an attempt to start an interactive, online discussion about various neurology-related topics" it certainly seems to be achieving its goal. Many people with ongoing difficulties have dropped in to ask questions or leave comments and a good idea of how the treatment of certain client groups is evolving can be gleaned from this forum.

Due to the interest in computer speech recognition there is a great deal of information on phonetics. The International Phonetic Alphabet and how to cope with it on an ASCII keyboard is the subject of David Prager Branner's pages. Here, active discussion is to be found on the development of the alphabet, commonly used transcriptions, and details of software and computers that can give full and accurate transcript characters.

The Journal of Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics can also be found on the net, with E-mail addresses for the editors and a full listing of contents of the back issues.

The important and exciting aspect of using the Internet is that it is a two-way communication. Using other Internet programs (such as Internet Relay Chat, or IRC) you can type messages in real time and exchange computer files at the same time. The E-mail utility allows you to do the same thing and is perhaps one of the most frequently used functions of the Internet.

THE FUTURE

The Internet is expanding rapidly and becoming easier and cheaper to use. Both the student and practising therapist could potentially benefit from this vast information resource. Links with other professionals world-wide can be achieved, while electronic conferencing and long-distance research collaboration are now possible. The Internet is also an ideal way to raise awareness of communication difficulties, as is already happening on the Stuttering home pages. In the near future, the Internet could be used directly to serve the profession and people with communication difficulties in this country by means of a homepage for the College and more information pages included on University and Hospital Internet space.

I hope the computer jargon used so frequently with the Internet doesn't put you off trying it out. If you're interested you can try reading one of the many beginner's guides available from bookshops, several of which come complete with software and a trial connection. A modem (the thing that connects your computer to the telephone) is the most costly add-on you need, so be sure to try out the net from a friend's computer or a University that has a link already. Happy 'Net-surfing' and E-mailing!

Reading List

---Pike, Mary A. (1995), *Using The Internet (Second Ed)*, QUE Corporation

There are many beginner's guides - See your bookshop assistant or try a review in one of the magazines below.
The Internet Magazine .net, Future Publishing
Internet and Comms Today, Paragon Publishing Ltd
NetUser, Paragon Publishing Ltd
Internet, Emap Computing Ltd

Some Internet Site Addresses

Scott Bradley's Ten Interesting Sites in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Department of Communicative Disorders.
http://www.uww-edu/commdis/cdlinks.html

Judith Kuster, Communication and Speech Pathology Related Pages at Mankato State University.
http://www.mankato.msus.edu/dept/comdis/depthp/MSU_Dept_ComDis.html

Stuttering Home Page
gopher://Gopher.Mankato.MSUS.EDU:70/1D-1%3A7042%3A.stuttering

Massachusetts General Hospital - Department of Neurology HomePage : Neurology Forum.
http://dem0nmac.mgh.harvard.edu/neurowebforum/neurowebforum.html

David Pager Branner's International Phonetic Alphabet
http://wwots.let.ruu.nl/ipa.html

International Clinical Phonetics and Linguistics Association
http://tpowel.comdis.lsumc.edu/icpla/icpla.html

Journal of Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics
http://tpowel.comdis.lsumc.edu:80/icpla/clp/EDBRDCLP.htm

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NB. Readers interested in phonetics and the Internet may be interested to try out a British site, NETPhon. Their URL is: http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/netphon

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