

In Cyberspace

By Craig S. Mullins

The data processing world is increasingly becoming an on-line world. The days of having only one place to turn for DB2 information (IBMLINK) are most decidedly over. Immediate access to volumes of information is readily available for the asking. This article examines some of the best places to look for DB2 information in "cyberspace."

CompuServe

The oldest, and still one of the most popular on-line services, is CompuServe. A vast array of information is available for the monthly access charge. CompuServe can be accessed in many different ways:

- Using a simple communications package (such as ProComm Plus or Kermit)
- Using the CompuServe Information Manager for Windows (WinCIM) or DOS
- Using the CompuServe Navigator.

Regardless of how you access CompuServe, as a DB2 professional you will want to find the DB2 Family Forum. Forums, sometimes referred to as Special Interest Groups (SIGs), can be thought of as electronic, on-line user groups. A forum has five main components:

- Message boards for posting public messages that can be read and replied to immediately
- Libraries filled with information, files and programs that can be viewed and downloaded
- Conference rooms for immediate, on-line discussion sessions
- Announcements and bulletins from the sysop
- A member directory in which forum members can list their areas of expertise and/or interest.

The DB2 Family Forum contains information about all of IBM's DB2 products. To access the DB2 Family Forum, simply issue the command GO IBMDB2 from any CompuServe prompt.

Once you have accessed the DB2 Family Forum, be sure to check out the message board and library sections. Messages in the message board can be read in threads. A thread is a series of postings and responses that usually read like a "question-and-answer" session. So, by following a thread, you will be able to immediately read any follow-up responses, comments and answers for any posted message. There are quite often many interesting threads that provide a wealth of "hands-on" DB2 knowledge from actual users. "IBMer" also monitor this forum.

The library section is also of interest since it contains many useful nuggets of information. Recent downloadable files have included a SQL course, IBM white papers, DB2 tips and tricks, and IBM product announcements (including DB2 Version 4 and DB2 for OS/2 Version 2).

The Internet

The Internet is a large, international network of interconnected computer systems. A vast wealth of information is available through the Internet. However, it is rather difficult to learn what is available and how it can be accessed.

Most of the large, commercial on-line service providers offer access to the Internet. However, it is probable that your company already has Internet access, and you will not have to set yourself up with an on-line service provider. The best way to find out is to do some snooping. Ask your help desk, DBA and/or manager whether your company is hooked up to the Internet. If so, all you will need is a TCP/IP connection and some basic software to begin "surfing the net" for DB2 nuggets.

Once connected to the Internet, the most useful components will be Usenet newsgroups, mailing lists and access to the World Wide Web (WWW).

A fertile source of information on the

Internet is found in various Usenet newsgroups. Usenet, an abbreviation for "User Network," is a large collection of discussion groups called newsgroups. Each newsgroup is a collection of articles pertaining to a single, specific source of information. Using "News-Reader" software, any Internet user can access a newsgroup and read the information contained therein.

There are newsgroups available to sat-

isfy just about every interest, and DB2 use is no foreigner to Usenet. Generic database information can be found on the comp.databases newsgroup. However, many DB2 users post questions, comments and information to this newsgroup, because for quite some time, the only other option was to use a DB2 mailing list (discussed later).

An alternative newsgroup, bit.listserv.db2-1, is also active with DB2 dis-

cussions and information. Alternative newsgroups differ from mainstream newsgroups only in that many services do not provide access to alternative newsgroups. A relatively new mainstream newsgroup, comp.databases.ibm-db2, was instituted in early 1995 to offload the DB2 traffic from the comp.databases newsgroup. For a listing of other Usenet newsgroups that may be of interest to DB2 users, consult Table 1.

Mailing lists, better known to the Internet-initiated as LISTSERVS, are a sort of community bulletin board. You can think of LISTSERVS as a kind of mass mailing. Simply by subscribing to a mailing list, information is sent directly to your e-mail box. After subscribing to a mailing list, articles will begin to arrive in your box from a remote computer called a "list server." Actually, the information you will receive varies from news releases to announcements to questions to answers. It is similar to the information contained in a CompuServe forum — except that it comes directly to your e-mail box. Users can also respond to LISTSERV messages. Responses are sent back to the list server as e-mail and the list server sends the response out to all other members of the mailing list.

To subscribe to a mailing list, simply send an e-mail to the appropriate address requesting a subscription. The DB2 mailing list can be subscribed to by sending a message to the following address: DB2-L@LISTSERV.AMERI-CAN.EDU. The message should read:
subscribe DB2-L

Information will begin quickly flowing into your e-mail box — perhaps at a much quicker rate than you can reasonably digest. Literally hundreds of messages may be sent to you every week.

A newsgroup can only be viewed using NewsReader software. You just need to point and click with most NewsReaders to view the contents of a newsgroup. A "mailing list" is an e-mail server. Notes are automatically forwarded to everyone on the distribution list. All you have to do is read your e-mail to access the information.

For DB2 users, however, it does not matter which of the two choices you make. You can view bit.listserv.db2-1 or subscribe to the mailing list via e-mail, and you will have access to the same information, because messages are cross-

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Newsgroup Name	Description
comp.client-server	Information on client/server technology
comp.compression.research	Information on research in data compression techniques
comp.databases	Issues and theory regarding databases and data management
comp.databases.informix	Information on the Informix DBMS
comp.databases.ingres	Information on the CA-Ingres DBMS
comp.databases.object	Information on object-oriented database systems
comp.databases.oracle	Information on the Oracle DBMS
comp.databases.sybase	Information on the Sybase DBMS
comp.databases.theory	Discussions on database technology and theory
comp.edu	Computer science education
comp.infosystems	General discussion of information systems
comp.misc	General computer-related topics not covered elsewhere
comp.os.os2.announce	OS/2-related announcements
comp.os.os2.apps	Information on OS/2 applications
comp.unix.admin	UNIX administration discussions
comp.unix.aix	Information pertaining to AIX, IBM's version of UNIX
comp.unix.questions	Question and answer forum for UNIX novices
bit.listserv.aix-1	Information pertaining to AIX
bit.listserv.appc-1	Information pertaining to APPC
bit.listserv.cics-1	Information pertaining to CICS
bit.listserv.candle-1	Information on Candle Corp. products
bit.listserv.dasig	Database administration special interest group
bit.listserv.db2-1	Information pertaining to DB2
bit.listserv.ibm-main	IBM mainframe newsgroup
bit.listserv.os2-1	Information pertaining to OS/2
bit.listserv.power-1	Information pertaining to RS/6000 computers
bit.listserv.sqlinfo	Information pertaining to SQL/DS (DB2 for VSE and VM)

Table 1: Usenet Newsgroups Of Interest To DB2 Professionals

posted between these two services. This is not necessarily true for other similar newsgroups and/or mailing lists.

The World Wide Web

WWW is one of the newest Internet services. The goal of WWW is to provide a single point of access to Internet services in an easy-to-use format. Through the use of software known as "web browsers," anyone can gain access to Internet resources.

There are many popular web browsers available such as NCSA Mosaic, Netscape and IBM's WebExplorer (which ships with OS/2 Warp). Additionally, several of the popular on-line service providers offer web browsing capabilities.

Having secured access to a web browser, the first thing to do is to access a "home page." Web sites hooked into the Internet will provide a simple address that enables users to access their site. That address can be fed into a web browser providing access. It is important that the address always be preceded by the following:
http://

This stands for HyperText Transfer Protocol. HTTP is a communication protocol that "understands" that any document it retrieves can contain information

about future links that can be referenced by the user. Of course, other Internet resources, such as gopher or FTP, can be accessed using a "web browser." For example, instead of typing http://, the user would simply type ftp:// prior to the address that is being accessed.

A web home page is a combination of text and graphics that provides hypertext links to other documents and services. The hypertext links are coded in a standard language known as HyperText Markup Language (HTML).

The address for IBM's home page is <http://www.ibm.com>. Once the home page is accessed, hypertext links can be clicked on to drill down through layers of information. The web browser enables users to navigate through pages and pages of useful information. The information can be printed, saved to disk or simply browsed. There is quite often a wealth of interesting DB2 information that can be found by browsing through the information contained in IBM's home page.

Another interesting DB2 page to access is the DB2 Family page. The address for this page is:

<http://www.torolab.ibm.com/db2/>.

In addition to IBM web pages, most of the third-party tool vendors also provide web pages with information on DB2 and

DB2 add-on software products.

There is a wealth of information available over the WWW that will make the job of a DB2 developer, analyst, system programmer or DBA easier.

Accessing DB2 Over The Net

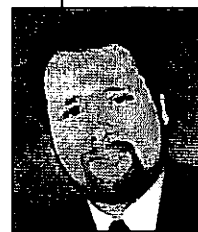
IBM has not stopped at just making DB2 information available over the Internet! Recently, IBM announced that it will enable DB2 customers to access their data through the Internet via WWW. Using a web browser and a new software product named DB2 WWW, companies can use the Internet as a front end to DB2 databases. Using DB2 WWW, data stored in DB2 tables can be presented to users in the style of a web home page. This enables savvy Internet users to quickly "come up to speed" at accessing DB2 data. DB2 WWW includes a procedural language to map between standard HTML and SQL, as well as a full-function graphing engine to return results to the web browser in the form of mixed text and graphics.

General availability of DB2 WWW is targeted first for AIX and OS/2, with MVS, OS/400 and VM in future releases.

Conclusion

The days of relying on only IBM-LINK for DB2 information are long gone. To keep up to date on DB2 in the information age, access to an on-line service is mandatory. And maybe even more important, it is fun! ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Craig S. Mullins is employed by PLATINUM technology, inc. as a senior technical advisor. He is a frequent speaker at computer industry conferences and user

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