

Surfing the Net

Kim Bunter and Terry Stewart

Introduction

When you have a computer on farm, you have at hand one of the main tools required to 'surf the net'. For those unfamiliar with this phrase, surfing the net probably sounds like a pretty frivolous occupation. However, when you consider that the net is an information source, 'surfing' it may be no more frivolous than going to the library or obtaining reference material from other sources. The net may be a particularly valuable source of information for geographically isolated people who do not have easy access to reference material. It can be almost guaranteed that just about anything you could be interested in will be somewhere on the net - you just need to know how to find it! This document is a VERY brief introduction to the Internet and some of the sites of interest for pig breeders. We hope to show you some of these sites in our workshop. I have also listed a couple of books which may be of use to you.

What is the Internet?

The Internet (or World Wide Web, or even web) is effectively a series of computers with 'addresses' which can freely communicate packets of data (called an Internet Protocol packet). The philosophy is that every computer on the network can talk, as a peer, with any other computer (Krol, 1992). Consequently, packets of data on one system can be transferred to or accessed by another computer with the appropriate software (Internet applications) and address knowledge.

Having an Internet connection enables you to have facilities such as electronic mail, connect to a chat site or discussion group, and have access to the myriad of information stored on various servers (computers) all around the world. It is just as easy (although it may be slower) to connect to a desired site in America/Germany/New Zealand as one in Australia, and generally at the same cost. This is fortunate, because many of the better sites currently are in fact overseas - Australia has been a little slow to catch onto the Internet! This is at least true for sites of interest to pig breeders. Facilities like electronic mail and transfer of data files are provided by specialist software (eg. Eudora for email and FTP software for file transfers). In this document, we are more interested in introducing you to information sources on the internet, which can be accessed using Internet software (eg. Netscape).

Information on the Internet

Information accessible through the internet is stored in special files written in a Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). Typically, different servers for the web contain one or more of these files called home pages. Home pages often literally appear as just one page, introducing the viewer to some of the material available from the home page. Usually

there are links to other files containing further information or graphics. Surfing the net literally means jumping from page to page, in one or several different sites.

Home pages are located on various servers and are owned and maintained by independent people/companies/organisations/research groups etc. This is both a strength and weakness of the Internet. For example - there can be large variation in the quality of sites and/or home pages you may wish to visit. Further, sites and links may disappear with the removal of a computer from the internet, or deletion or removal of a file from its known path. It also means that there can be a lot of information to wade through - so you have to be fairly efficient in how you search for information. On the other hand, information can be updated very frequently, making the Internet one way of obtaining the latest information. There are also often connections between sites for related topics of interest, making a large body of information available from some key sites or homepages.

How to get started

In order to play on the internet you need a computer with appropriate internet software, a modem, and a service provider.

1. Internet software and browsers are automatically provided with Windows 95. For other operating systems, various non-graphical (eg. Lynx) and graphical (eg. Mosaic, Netscape Navigator) browsers are available both commercially and free of charge. The graphical browsers are more desirable than non-graphical browsers (so you can see all the pretty pictures), and many home pages are specifically developed to take advantage of graphical browsers for presenting their material.
2. Modems range in price depending on how much information they can send/receive in a given time interval. If you set a minimum baud rate required of 28 800, modems which meet this requirement can be purchased from around \$150. Higher baud rate modems are desirable if you have a stable telephone line. Faster transfer of data means you don't have to wait so long for the information to come up on your screen.
3. Service providers are available in many of the major country service centres (eg. Dubbo, Toowoomba, Moree, Wagga, Armidale etc.). It pays to get a local service provider so that you aren't paying for your telephone connection to your service provider on STD rates! Service providers should be able to provide you with all the information and help you require to get onto the net. It will probably cost you to register (eg. around \$50). Thereafter, charges are based on the amount of time you spend connected to your service provider. For example, current charges of Northnet (a commercial service provider in Armidale) vary from \$1.75 to \$3.50 per hour depending on how many hours you elect to connect for. If you pre-pay, or are a great negotiator like Terry, you may get charges as low as \$1 per hour.

Once you have these three key elements, you are ready to get started. If you are interested - track down your local service provider. They should be able to give you the information you need and a free demonstration!

Some sites to remember!

The following are a few web sites to wet your appetite. Many of these sites have excellent links with other sites of interest! Some sites also have search engines which allow you to look up topics of particular interest on their own or other sites.

For your information:

HTTP=Hypertext Transfer Protocol (the protocol by which information is transferred)

HTML=Hypertext Markup Language (a language for the Internet)

Sometimes you will get the address of a specific homepage. For example: Susanne Hermesch's homepage is **<http://metz.une.edu.au/agbu/~skahtenb/homepage.html>**

AGBU - of course you want to know about us! Information on many of the staff at AGBU are accessible from this home page.

<http://ansc.une.edu.au/agbu/>

Canadian Genetic Evaluation Site.

<http://www.ccsi.ca/>

Information site for the 6th World Congress on Genetics Applied to Livestock production - there will be several Swine Geneticists attending and presenting papers at this conference.

<http://www.une.edu.au/~6wcgalp/>

National Pork Producers Council (American)

<http://www.nppc.org/>

National Swine Improvement Federation - an American group dedicated to scientifically based genetic improvement systems.

<http://jah.asci.ncsu.edu/NSIF/>

Netvet - contains numerous web pages of Veterinary and animal resources including the electronic zoo - a listing of sites for as many different species as you can think of. A great jump off point for other sites - including pig sites. (Over 1 million logins to this site since June, 1995). Written and motivated by an American Vet.

<http://netvet.wustl.edu/>

Pig Disease Information Centre - held at the University of Cambridge in the UK, with lots of information on diseases, breeding and fertility, etc.

<http://www-pdic.vet.cam.ac.uk/>

PRDC Home Page. Developed by a commercial group - many of the links are still down but it will pick up!

<http://www.sheppnews.com.au/pignet/>

Search Sites - 'Yahoo' and 'Excite' search engines

<http://www.yahoo.com/>

<http://www.excite.com/>

Swine Testing and Genetic Evaluation System (STAGES). Information on the Stages program (Purdue University, USA) and across herd results for different breeds etc.

<http://www.ansc.purdue.edu/stages/>

References

Krol, Ed (1992) 'The Whole Internet User's Guide and Catalog', O'Reilly and Associates Inc., USA.

Taylor, Dave (1995) 'Creating Cool Web Pages with HTML', 2nd Edition, IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., USA.