

# Internet, the Ultimate Computer Bulletin Board Service

by Tom Fermanian, University of Illinois

I read with extreme interest an article by Roger Stewart in a recent **Bull Sheet** describing computer bulletin board services (BBS) for golf course superintendents. For many of you, communicating through a computer is still a foreign activity, possibly an activity far in the future. For others, especially those who have already acquired computers, communicating with fellow superintendents through BBS might not be quite so unusual.



In fact, several Midwest superintendents "chat" regularly on BBS. Mr. Stewart's article last May provided excellent information to help others get started in using these communication tools. TURFTALK, a local BBS, and TURFBYTE, both provide a great way of obtaining information from golf course superintendents and others in the turf management business. I would certainly suggest your first venture into exploring computer BBS be with one of these two excellent systems.

If you would like to go even further into the area of computer-based communication, there are many other opportunities. You might have read in the newspaper or heard on the radio recently of Vice President Al Gore's plan for the federal government to build a communication super highway in the United States.

---

## *Vice President Al Gore's plan for the federal government to build a communication super highway in the United States.*

---

Mr. Gore is referring to an expansion of an established computer network called the Internet. The Internet is currently a combination of various types of connections to over 200,000 computers throughout the world. It has grown from a small research project supported by the U.S. Department of Defense to a truly international communication network. The Internet is extremely complex and comprehensive. Its services can be summarized in three main areas. Individuals connected to the Internet can send and receive **electronic mail**. Secondly, an individual connected to the Internet might transfer files, programs, pictures, sounds or other kinds of materials by the **File Transfer Protocol (FTP)**. And lastly, individuals can directly connect to any one of the machines of the Internet and log into that machine utilizing its services through a system called **Telnet**.

We are very fortunate at the University of Illinois to have a direct connection to the Internet which provides access to all machines on campus and throughout the Internet. Through this connection, we can browse the catalogs of many libraries, send mail to colleagues around the world or transfer files from any number of computer software archives. While the Internet was developed initially for University and Federal scientists to communicate results of their research, it is now expanded to many other uses. One of these recent expansions has been a development of access to the Internet through commercial firms

to individuals through monthly or annual subscriptions. Information on how to get started with a connection to Internet will be given at the end of this article. What value is the Internet to golf course superintendents? Let's explore each of the three major activities.

**Electronic mail (E-Mail).** Most turfgrass scientists have either a direct or indirect connection to Internet and Internet mail. Phone books for various universities are found in directories on the Internet called "PH". If this fails, a direct phone contact with an individual will probably generate the correct E-mail address. My E-mail address is t-fermanian@uiuc.edu. Many commercial BBS provide E-mail access to the Internet. An E-mail connection exists for such commercial services as Prodigy, Genie, America On-Line, CompuServe, and many others.

**File transfer protocol (FTP).** While a large archive of turf information is not currently available on the Internet, plans for providing TGIF and other turfgrass databases through Internet are being considered. I have placed my lecture notes for "Hort 236 Introduction to Turfgrass Management" on a machine "kbml.plant.uiuc.edu". These files can be accessed through an "anonymous FTP" connection on the Internet. In the near future, additional archives of turf information should be available. Many different archives of computer software and information are available through anonymous FTP. Many databases on the Internet allow you to connect to them under the name "anonymous" giving you access to these materials.

**Telnet.** Telnet is a system for individuals to directly connect to computers on the Internet. Telenet connections are the same as local connections. While this might be the least used feature of the Internet for golf course superintendents, it represents a great future opportunity for superintendents to connect to larger central computers.

**How Do I Get Started?** Accessing the Internet can be both simple or complex depending on the type of activities you are interested in. One of the simplest ways to access the Internet is through public access dial-up bulletin boards. An example of one of these bulletin boards is vpnet currently running in the Chicagoland area. To get started with vpnet, simply dial 708-833-8126 and follow the instructions on screen. This bulletin board runs at 1200-9600 baud and has access to mail, selected news, and other services. Several other public access bulletin boards in the area are at 312-338-0632 and 312-248-0900. The last phone number has an online charge.

This brings up a second method of accessing Internet. You can also reach the Internet through commercial hourly charge services. One of the largest and most comprehensive of these services is the Delphi Service in Cambridge, Massachusetts. You may join Delphi by dialing 1-800-365-4636 and answering the information on the screen. Users receive five hours of free access to explore the Delphi system. A Delphi service representative may also be reached at 1-800-695-4005.

I encourage any of you with an interest in exploring the Internet to simply give one of these connections a try. Most of the systems are reasonably documented and provide some type of help by voice if you get stuck. In addition to the three major services, an active news group system is maintained on Internet with over 2,000 topics of interest. Who knows, someday one of the topics might focus on turf management.