A/UX: An Example Setup Of UNIX Mail For The Macintosh (9/94)

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TOPIC ---

This article describes a shareware electronic mail development project for UNIX
at the University of Minnesota. The idea was to create a simple system that
would insulate users from having to learn UNIX or VMS. (Most campus
administrators and secretaries at the university fall into this category.)

DISCUSSION --

Because they were already running the CAP AppleShare file server software on a
Sun workstation, they decided to take mail from the UNIX mailer and deposit it
in an AppleShare volume. This means the user's mail is put onto an AppleShare
disk and is readable by their favorite word processing application. Electronic
mail appears as a normal Macintosh document. One configuration has the system
set up so that incoming mail appears as Microsoft Word documents.

Conversely, they set up a folder on the AppleShare volume where any file dragged
into the folder is submitted to the UNIX mailer. To be treated as mail, the file
needs to obey two conventions:

- The first line of the file is the name and address of the receiver.
- The second line of the file is the subject.

A 20-line, C-shell program puts incoming mail into the appropriate AppleShare
volume and mails outgoing mail from the outgoing mail folder. This process gave
them two-thirds of a standard electronic mail system: sending and receiving
mail.

The other third of the system is notification when mail arrives. To cover this
requirement, they wrote a tiny (40K) application called "Nag." Nag runs under
MultiFinder and periodically looks into a folder to see if any new files
arrived. If new files appear in the folder, Nag uses the Macintosh notification
manager to alert the user. If you want to know when mail arrives you can run
Nag. (Nag is small enough to run it and a word processing application under
MultiFinder -- even on a 1MB Macintosh.)

The whole project is called "piece mail," because it is a mail system built
from small pieces:

- AppleShare Server software

- A UNIX machine

- A shell script to move mail into the AppleShare Server volume

- The Nag program to notify users when new mail has arrived

- A word processing application to read and edit mail messages.

Although the school is using CAP AppleShare software on a Sun workstation, running UNIX, this same technique also should work for VMS VAXes with Alisa or Pacer AppleShare Server software. All this substitutes for SMTP mail services on the Macintosh.

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