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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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Support Information Services

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