

Finding Oracle information on the Internet

The data processing world is increasingly becoming an on-line world. Instead of relying solely on often unresponsive technical support lines or the busy local expert, database professionals can go on-line for answers. This phenomenon is being driven by the Internet. Immediate access to volumes of useful information is readily available via the Internet. Let's examine some of the best places to look for Oracle information on the World Wide Web.

HOW TO ACCESS THE INTERNET

All of the large, commercial, on-line service providers such as CompuServe, America Online, and Microsoft Network, offer access to the Internet. If you are accessing the Internet from home, you will probably access it from one of these servers.

However, most corporations provide Internet access directly via an ISP (Internet Service Provider). If this is the case, you will not have to set yourself up with an on-line service. The best way to find out whether your corporation has an ISP is to do some snooping. Ask your Help Desk, DBA, 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 Oracle nuggets!

THE INTERNET PHENOMENON

When discussing the Internet, most people limit themselves to the World Wide Web. However, there are many components that make up the Internet. For the purpose of this article, I will discuss the three primary components most useful to Oracle database professionals – the World Wide Web, Usenet Newsgroups, and mailing lists.

THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The World Wide Web (WWW) uses a graphical interface and hypertext protocol to display information in a point-and-click environment. Using a Web browser (such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft

Internet Explorer), you can navigate through the Internet, accessing Web pages, and FTP and gopher sites. A vast array of multimedia information (text, audio, video, and more) can be accessed using the WWW.

Having secured access to a Web browser, the first thing to do is to access a Web page. Web sites on the Internet provide a simple address that lets users access their site. That address, known as a URL (or Uniform Resource Locator), can be fed into a Web browser, thereby providing access to the site. The address is always preceded by the following:

`http://`

HTTP stands for HyperText Transfer Protocol – a communication protocol which understands that any document it retrieves contains information about future links 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 can also specify the following:

- `ftp://` – to access an FTP site.
- `file://` – to access a local (or networked) data file.
- `gopher://` – to access a gopher site.
- `mailto://` – to send mail.
- `news://` – to access Usenet Newsgroups.

A Web page is a combination of text and graphics that provides hypertext links to other documents and services. The hypertext links are coded in the standard language known as HTML. An example showing my home page is depicted in Figure 1. The URL, `http://www.platinum.com/craigm`, is shown in the address box.

A page is the basic unit of every Web site. A Web page contains text, links, and images, but can also contain forms, frames, and tables.

Text on most WWW pages is formatted into multiple layered headers and accompanying body text to help organize the information on the page. A link, sometimes referred to as a hyperlink, takes you to another

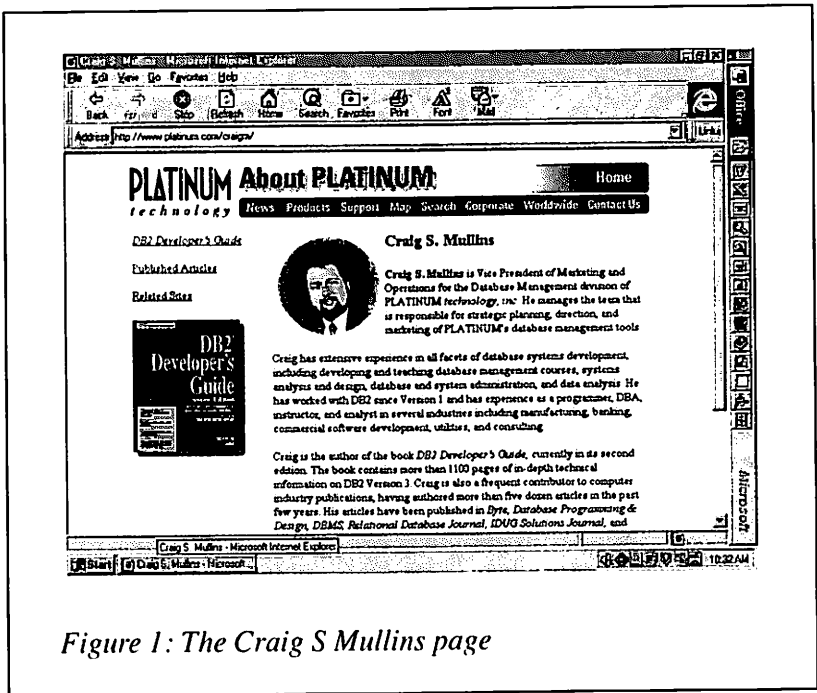


Figure 1: The Craig S Mullins page

page or to a graphic or other related file. Links can be textual or graphical. Textual links are underlined and in colour. When you roll the cursor over a link it will change from an arrow into a pointing finger.

Forms are Web pages that have been organized using input boxes, pull-down lists, and radio buttons, to enable easy data entry by users. Typically, forms are used to accept a user's demographic information or to enter credit card information when buying products over the Web. Frames allow several windows to be shown on a single Web page. The most common usage is to display a table of contents in one frame while the user navigates through the Web site in another frame. Tables display information in formatted rows and columns.

After a Web page is accessed, hypertext links can be pointed to and clicked on, leading the user through layers of information. The Web

browser allows the user to navigate through pages and pages of useful information. The information can be printed, saved to disk, or simply browsed.

There are many Web pages providing useful Oracle information. Foremost, of course, is the Oracle Corporation Web page at <http://www.oracle.com>. From this page, you will be able to access Oracle version and release information, technical information, and the Oracle Store (which sells documentation, education, publications, and related material), and you will also be able to download Oracle software.

There are many other Oracle Web sites that you should visit and bookmark. The International Oracle User Group (IOUG) has a Web site containing many useful Oracle resources. The IOUG Web site is one that every Oracle professional should visit regularly; it can be reached at <http://www.ioug.org>. It contains information on forthcoming conferences, discussion forums, vendor and partner information, and IOUG's Select Magazine on-line. Also, several of the many Oracle user groups have Web sites. These sites contain useful information such as meeting schedules, newsletters, tips, and presentations. Examples of these sites include:

- European Oracle User Group (<http://www.ougf.fi/eoug/eoug.html>).
- Hong Kong Oracle Users Group (<http://www.hk.super.net/~hkoug>).
- Houston Oracle Users Group (<http://www.cois.com/houg>).
- North Carolina Oracle Users Group (<http://sunsite.unc.edu/ncoug>).
- Information on Oracle Open World, the annual conference thrown by Oracle, can be found at <http://www.oracle.com/openworld>.

For fresh Oracle information bi-monthly, take a look at the Oracle Magazine Web site, <http://www.oramag.com>. Two of Oracle's magazines can be found at this site: Oracle Magazine (for users of the Oracle database) and Profit Magazine (for users of Oracle Applications). The most recent issues, as well as past issues of Oracle's magazine, are available on-line.

Many Oracle experts and consultants have their own Web sites that contain useful tips, tricks, and techniques, as well as their speaking schedules and copies of their presentations. One of the best of these sites is the Advanced Information Systems site. It can be reached at <http://www.advanis.com>. Another useful page is the list of links to other Oracle sites at <http://announce.com/~jdunham/oracle.htm>. Additionally, the database tips site that can be reached at <http://www.platinum.com/dbtips> contains many useful Oracle tips, tricks, and guidelines.

The Oracle FAQ is a site that contains answers to the most Frequently Asked Questions about the Oracle DBMS and related issues. Many helpful details about Oracle and how to use it can be found at this site. To access the Oracle FAQ site, point your browser to <http://www.bf.rmit.edu.au/~orafaq>. Finally, most of the third-party Oracle tool vendors also have Web sites that contain information on Oracle and their product offerings.

USENET NEWSGROUPS

Another very 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, pre-determined topic. Newsgroup names usually reflect their focus. For example, `comp.databases.oracle.server` contains discussions about the Oracle database server.

Using most Web browsers or specialized news reader software, any Internet user can access a newsgroup and read the information it contains. Figure 2 shows an example of a newsgroup posting to `comp.databases.oracle.server`.

There are newsgroups available to satisfy just about every interest. There are five primary newsgroups that Oracle users can access for Oracle news and information. They are:

- `comp.databases`

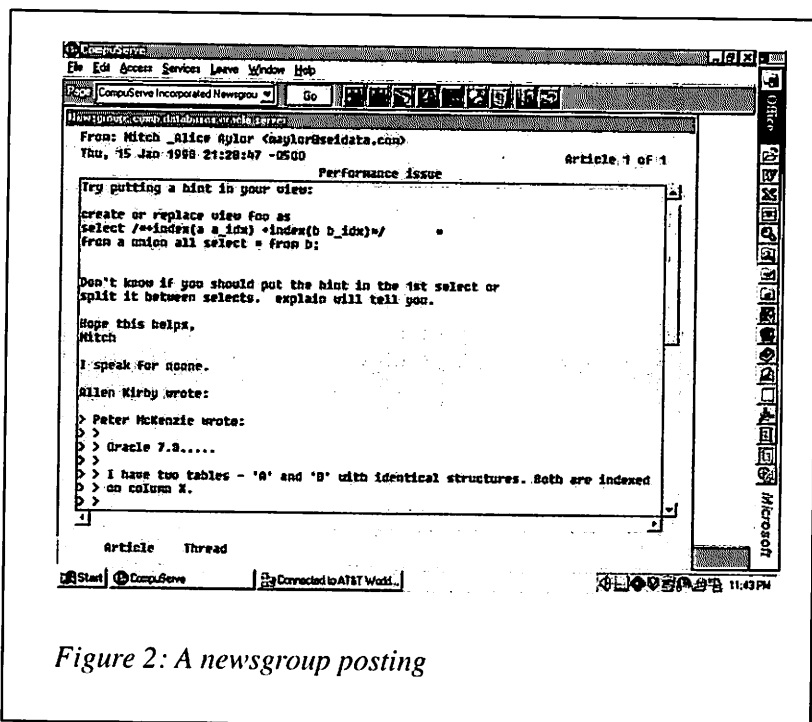


Figure 2: A newsgroup posting

- comp.databases.oracle.server
- comp.databases.oracle.marketplace
- comp.databases.oracle.tools
- comp.databases.oracle.misc.

Generic database information can be found on the comp.databases newsgroup. Some Oracle users post questions, comments, and information to this newsgroup. The other four newsgroups are relatively new. Until about two years ago, there was only a single Oracle newsgroup named comp.databases.oracle. But the newsgroup was too active with hundreds of posts daily. As such, it was difficult to use. The decision was made to break the newsgroup into four separate groups – one for database server-related questions, one for job postings, one for database tools, and a fourth catch-all miscellaneous

newsgroup. This relieved some of the congestion, but comp.databases.oracle.server is still the most heavily used of the four groups, and unfortunately, many users simply cross-post their messages to all four groups. This should not be done. When you use these newsgroups be sure to post your questions, answers, and news into the appropriate newsgroup. This makes using the Oracle newsgroups easier for everyone.

Other Usenet Newsgroups that may be of interest to Oracle professionals are listed in Figure 3.

MAILING LISTS

Mailing lists are a sort of community bulletin board. You can think of mailing lists as equivalent to a mass mailing. There are around 40,000 mailing lists available on the Internet, and they operate using a list server. A list server is a program that automates the mailing list subscription requests and messages. The two most common list servers are Listserv and Majordomo. Listserv is also a common synonym for mailing list, but it is actually the name of a particular list server program.

If you subscribe to a mailing list, information is sent directly to your e-mail in-box. After subscribing, articles will begin to arrive in your e-mail box from a remote computer called a list server. The information that you will receive varies from news releases to announcements, questions, and answers. 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 subscription address requesting a subscription. The Oracle mailing list can be subscribed to by sending a message to the subscription address, **LISTSERV@KBS.NET**. The message should read as follows:

```
SUBSCRIBE ORACLE-L
```

After issuing the preceding command, the list server will send you a message asking you to confirm the subscription. When you do so, information will quickly begin flowing into your e-mail box (perhaps

Newsgroup name	Description
comp.client-server	Information on client/server technology
comp.compression.research	Research on data compression techniques
comp.databases	Issues regarding databases and data management
comp.databases.ibm-db2	Information on IBM's DB2 family of products
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.server	Information on the Oracle DBMS
comp.databases.oracle.tools	Information on tools for the Oracle DBMS
comp.databases.oracle.marketplace	Information on jobs for Oracle professionals
comp.databases.oracle.misc	Miscellaneous Oracle postings
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
comp.sys.hp.hpux	Information on HP-UX
comp.sys.sun.admin	Information on administering Sun systems
comp.unix.admin	Unix administration discussions
comp.unix.aix	Information on IBM AIX
comp.unix.questions	Question and answer forum for Unix novices
comp.unix.solaris	Information pertaining to Sun Solaris
bit.listserv.aix-1	Information pertaining to AIX
bit.listserv.db2-1	Information pertaining to DB2

Figure 3: Useful Usenet Newsgroups

at a much faster rate than you can reasonably digest). Literally, hundreds of messages may be sent to you every week. To sign off the newsgroup, send the following message to the same subscription address:

SIGNOFF ORACLE-L

In addition to a subscription address, mailing lists also have a posting address. This is the address to which mailing list post must be sent. Never send subscription requests to the list's posting address. Correspondingly, never send a post to the subscription address.

The posting address for the ORACLE-L mailing list is ORACLE-L@DBINFO.COM. When a message is sent to this address, it will automatically be forwarded to everyone currently subscribed to the list.

You may also want to consider digesting your Oracle mailing list e-mails. A digest is an accumulation of the day's messages sent as one big e-mail. The benefit of digesting is that instead of receiving multiple daily messages from a mailing list, only one daily digest is sent. Because the Oracle list is usually quite active you may receive dozens of e-mails daily if you do not choose the digest option.

To request digesting, simply send an e-mail to the subscription address requesting a digest. The digest request must be made after you have successfully subscribed to the mailing list.

For the Oracle mailing list, send the following message to the subscription address, LISTSERV@KBS.NET:

SET ORACLE-L DIGEST

The drawbacks to digests are that threads can be hard to follow, it is more difficult to respond to messages, and they can become quite large.

Finally, contributions sent to the Oracle mailing list are automatically archived. The archive can be searched to find e-mails that were posted to the mailing list in the past. You can get a list of the available archive files by sending the following command to LISTSERV@KBS.NET:

INDEX ORACLE-L

The files returned can be ordered using the following command:

```
GET ORACLE-L LOGxxxx
```

SYNOPSIS

Because the Internet provides access to anyone with a computer and a modem, the information received can be less than reliable. It is quite common to post a question and receive multiple, conflicting answers (usually, the answers range from 'yes', to 'no', to 'maybe', to 'that question is not appropriate for this newsgroup'). Always use common sense before trying any posted tip, trick, or technique that seems dangerous. It probably is.

However, you should actively participate in the Oracle mailing list and newsgroups because very insightful and user-tested information is readily available just for the asking on these forums. Likewise, there are literally hundreds of useful Web pages that contain interesting Oracle tips, techniques, products, and information. With your computer and the Internet, Oracle information can be just a keystroke away!

Craig S Mullins

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Oracle-DB2 connectivity – part 2

This month we continue the article looking at ways of connecting Oracle databases (the generally preferred choice in a distributed environment) with DB2 databases (the preferred choice in a mainframe environment).

Oracle Transparent Gateway for DRDA

Prerequisites

The DRDA Gateway allows access to DB2 data from Oracle clients without having to install SQL*Net or any other Oracle product on the DRDA server (see Figure 1).