An Electronic Roadmap to SAS Discussion and Support

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Abstract: This paper will explain entry to INTERNET facilities via a common on-line service (PRODIGY). Other facilities will be explained, including SAS-L, TSNEWS, EMITS, and SIBBS. Over the past several years, SAS users have been "hit" with a barrage of electronic services and facilities to help solve and report problems, exchange information, and perform other tasks formerly done by telephone and direct human contact. There are so many new facilities and so many ways to access these facilities that many users are understandably confused.

The presentation will meet the following objectives: First it will introduce a structured way of looking at the various facilities to better understand attendant functions and to identify those which overlap or are redundant. Second, the talk will present a roadmap to using available on-line services and INTERNET to access SAS Newsgroups and a World Wide Web Browser. Finally, access to SAS information on the SAS Institute Bulletin Board System (SIBBS) via a direct dial line is presented. While an interactive demonstration is not a part of this discussion, a sample walk through of some of the windows will be shown.

Categorization: Groups of Information and Methods of Access. One of the reasons that this topic is so confusing is that there are so many "pieces" of information available about SAS. These "pieces" change or are augmented so rapidly, that they cannot be clearly documented in a single location. This confusion is compounded by the fact that each "piece" of information can be accessed in several ways.

Perhaps one way of grasping all that is available is to try to categorize the information "pieces" and to identify the methods that are available to access each "piece." Specifically, this paper will divide information into three major areas and cross these areas with access methods to build a matrix. Sample information "pieces" or sources are shown with associated methods of access.

There are many ways that we might try to “bucket” information into major information categories. This paper defines three groups:

I. Data Interchange / Discussion.

II. Technical Support Information.

III. Problem Analysis and Tracking.

The Data Interchange / Discussion Group (I. above) includes bulletin boards, electronic information subscriptions, and newsgroups. Many of these are traditional "INTERNET" type services. However, it is important to note that the information area does not necessarily dictate the method of access. This particular group of data is defined as those "pieces" that are a general user information exchange that is not specifically supported by the SAS Institute or that are supplied to the user in a passive manner.

The Technical Support Information Group (II. above) includes such things as an "up to date" SAS Notes file and a history of TSNEWS. We might define this as SAS information that the user must actively pursue, but requires no specific reply by SAS Institute.

The Problem Analysis and Tracking Group (III. above) consists of methods for exchanging information, fixes and other data with the SAS Institute. It could be argued that this is true technical support or a subgroup of II above. However, we distinguish it from II by its function of logging and solving specific problems.

Each of these areas only has meaning when looking at specific examples or "pieces" of information and how these "pieces" are accessed. The access or retrieval methods can also be placed into three groups:

A. E-MAIL

B. Bulletins / Global Postings

C. SAS Institute Bulletin Board System (SIBBS)
Separating the method of access from the information seems a bit confusing on first sight. For example, we will see how SIBBS is a system that has many “pieces” of information as well as being an access method. However, SIBBS type information can be accessed using other facilities. It is only by trying to separate the retrieval method from the information “piece” that can make these concepts a little clearer.

In order to explain the relationship of the information with the retrieval methods, we may build the following matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information / Retrieval Matrix.</th>
<th>A. E-MAIL</th>
<th>B. INTERNET</th>
<th>C. SIBBS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval Methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Data Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Tech Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Problem Tracking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. Data Interchange / Discussion:
We defined this segment of information as including bulletin boards, electronic information subscriptions, and newsgroups. Some examples and usage of this segment are shown in the table below.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval Methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info I. Data Interchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSNEWS-L</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWSUG-L</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS-L</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TSNEWS-L and MWSUG-L can be subscribed to so that information is received via E-MAIL. TSNEWS-L is maintained by SAS and contains information about “nasty” problems and important solutions to “nasty” problems. MWSUG-L is for the Midwest SAS users group to post local questions and exchange information. In order to subscribe to these, the user must send an E-MAIL via INTERNET using his E-MAIL address (company, institution, or service, such as PRODIGY or CompuServe.)

For TSNEWS-L:

To: LISTSERV@VM.SAS.COM
From: your internet id
Subject: whatever you want

SUBSCRIBE TSNEWS-L <firstname lastname>  

For MWSUG-L:

To: LISTSERV@CMSUVMB.CMSU.EDU
From: your internet id
Subject: whatever you want

SUBSCRIBE MWSUG-L <firstname lastname>

Several items should be noted with respect to this retrieval method. First, in this implementation, information is obtained passively. That is, once the user subscribes to this information, he will receive notification of any changes to those boards. Secondly, although not shown here, E-MAIL can be used to actively retrieve information from one of the information groups. However, other means of obtaining information is preferred. Finally, only two “subscription” type interfaces are shown. Others certainly exist, such as the “Electronic Mail Interface to Tech Support” (EMITS). In addition, NEWGROUPS may be subscribed to, so that you are posted by E-MAIL every time an entry is placed in the NEWGROUP. A sample NEWGROUP, SAS-L, is explained below.

SAS-L is an INTERNET NEWGROUP. This is a facility that allows SAS users to ask questions, present solutions, or generally discuss SAS with other SAS users around the globe. The user can pose questions or make an announcement by placing an entry in SAS-L. Questions may be answered privately to the “requester” or posted for all to see.

Setting up to be a user of SAS-L will vary from service to service and will depend on your interface to INTERNET. Below is an example of adding SAS-L to your personal NEWGROUP list under PRODIGY, followed by a sample of normal usage.
On first entry, the user must follow the script below...

**SAS-L Setup (first entry):**
1. PRODIGY: Click on NET button on the bottom
2. Click on “Explore Newsgroups” hypertext.
3. Click on “Search Newsgroups for the text below”, and enter “SAS” in the text area.
4. Click on: comp.soft-sys.sas
5. Add SAS-L to your NEWSGROUP List

Subsequent entry in this NEWSGROUP would consist of the following script:

**SAS-L...Subsequent Entry**
1. PRODIGY: Click on NET button on the bottom
2. Click on “Explore Newsgroups” hypertext.
3. Click on: comp.soft-sys.sas
4. Pick articles
   - Read
   - Post (pose own questions).
   - Reply / aid / answer.
   - Caution: May be habit forming.

II. Technical Support Information

This element of information is defined as that data provided by SAS to aid in Technical Support and other user support facilities. This area, by definition, excludes information interchange for direct problem analysis and tracking, which is handled as information group III. As is shown in the matrix below, nearly all of this information is available using any of the three access methods, though some methods are better for this purpose than others.

<table>
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<th>B.</th>
<th>C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval Methods</td>
<td>E-MAIL</td>
<td>INTERNET</td>
<td>SIBBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info II Tech Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS Notes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSNEW-L archive</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMITS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WEB Browser Entry / Usage Script:

1. PRODIGY: Click on WEB button on the bottom of the page.
2. Click on “Browse the WEB” hypertext.
3. Click on NAVIGATE drop down
4. In NAVIGATE drop down, click on Get URL
5. In entry window, enter:
   http://www.sas.com/
   (can also be placed in your URL Hotlist)

Your instructing is a usage script.
6. Click on Support Services.
7. Click on Technical Support
8. Click on one of many
   SAS Technical Notes
   then on searchable database.
   then back.
9. Click on FTP Access
   then additional info on FTP...
   then back.
10. Click on TSNEW-L
    then on history.
    then back.
11. Click on EMITS
    SAS Notes
    then on searchable database.
    then back.

III. Problem Analysis / Tracking
This information area is also an area of Tech Support. It is distinguished from II, above, in that it involves responses and discussion with SAS to track and solve a particular problem. The matrix below shows samples of functions categorized in this group.

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Info III</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem tracking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report / review</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upload logs, etc</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download fixes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests, orders</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of this information group is tied closely to SAS Institute’s direct dial line and the SAS Institute Bulletin Board System (SIBBS). Because of this, it is difficult to discern what is the information provided by SIBBS, versus how it is accessed. The fact is that SIBBS provides more than problem reporting and tracking facilities and crosses all three information areas. In addition, nearly all of the information group III elements are now available from E-MAIL or the WEB PAGE (INTERNET).

Following is an explanation of how to get on “SIBBS”. In addition, a sample script is show on how to get into a few of the areas. The menus are very straightforward, and it is suggested that you “walk around” to get the feel of this facility.

SIBBS - Direct Dial to SAS
1. Setup: Procomm or similar package.
   9600-N-8-1         VT100       1-919-677-8155
2. MAIN Menu        enter “S”
3. SAS Tech Support Forum enter “U”
4. SAS Notes         enter “A”
5. SAS Version 6.xx  enter “S”
6. Search Usage Notes
Summary and Conclusions
There is an incredible amount of information available electronically about SAS and from SAS. In addition, there is a number of ways to retrieve, peruse or access this information. If there is a problem in all this, it is that there is simply too much to easily understand. Each SAS user has unique requirements and must determine what type of data he requires (data interchange, tech support, problem resolution), and how to access it (E-MAIL, INTERNET, SIBBS).

In closing, note the following observations. If cost is a major consideration of access, one must weight the price of INTERNET and the World Wide Web, against SIBBS long distance. The World Wide Web access to SAS is “pretty” and easy to use. SAS-L is fun to use and could be a valuable tool in solving a problem or helping others solve their problems. SIBBS can be very useful in accelerating the Institute’s handling of your report problem.

If all else fails, one might consider the initial electronic method for dealing with SAS problems and questions. That script goes something like this:

Lift receiver......dial 1-919-677-8008.

References for: An Electronic Roadmap to SAS Discussion and Support


“ORANGE / YELLOW SHEETS”


“Telephone Support” TS102 09/94.

“SAS Institute Electronic Support Services” TS104 09/94.

“Reporting Problems Electronically” TS105 09/94.

“Receiving Information Electronically” TS106 09/94.

“Electronically Searching the SAS Notes” TS108 03/95.