RadStats and the Internet

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At this years AGM I volunteered to investigate the possibility of setting up an electronic bulletin board or mailing list for the Radical Statistics Group. This seemed exciting as members could communicate with other, swap ideas and gossip - all in the comfort of their own home or office. (Providing they have a PC, a modem and telephone, some software and an e-mail account, of course). It looked as though this might have great potential for bringing the organisation together and stimulating developments. Perhaps an example might help demonstrate its value to those of you who have had no experience of electronic mailing lists. You read in the paper that the government is changing the basis of the unemployment figures again - what's happening you wonder. You send a question to the RadStats mailing list - this takes all of five minutes and goes to everyone who subscribes. If you are lucky, a few days later five people will have replied giving you lots of information, ideas, or suggestions where to look.

There are basically three ways of going about this:

1. Use the academic network (JANET). Access to this is not restricted to those with academic addresses and anybody with an e-mail address could take part. However the person I spoke to at MAILBASE (who administer the lists) was a bit "iffy". He thought on balance an organisation like RadStats would be accepted but we would have to, first, demonstrate that many of our members were academics , secondly undertake not to make any money out of it and thirdly, they would need a named individual who had a full-time fairly permanent academic contract to act as the list owner. This person would be required to keep the system tidy and generally sort out any problems. The MAILBASE facility is free but of course those dialling with non academic e-mail addresses would have to pay the usual fees to whoever they "rent" their mailbox from. MAILBASE keeps a list of lists, so any academic browsing through this might become interested in Radstats and join in.

2. Use a commercial organisation. The two main network access providers which deal with voluntary agencies are POPTEL, which handles many trade unions and other lefty organisations such as Shelter and the London Hazards Centre and GreenNet. I am still discussing things with POPTEL but if they can't accommodate us then GreenNet can. GreenNet is involved in the support of many environmental and human rights organisations and is the UK member of the Association for Progressive Communications. The latter is a " world-wide partnerships of member networks dedicated to providing low-cost computer communications for individual and non governmental organisations working for environmental sustainability, universal human rights and social and economic justice." This seems to be in tune with RadStats aims ! GreenNet would also want some-one to be responsible for the list and undertake some administration but this could be anyone who is willing and has the necessary technology i.e. PC, modem etc. It is difficult for them to estimate exactly how much this would cost RadStats but a rough estimate would be in the region of £300 a year. Enrolling with this organisation might be quite exciting as anyone who does not have an e-mail account through work and decided to open account with GreenNet would have some access to all t...s other political activity, with the obvious potential for cross fertilisation of ideas.

3. The DIY option. This would require a standalone computer, a dedicated telephone line and probably would need to set up and taken charge of by a computer enthusiast who had the necessary interest and time to maintain and operate the system.

If you have any strong feeling about which option we should take or would like to volunteer to be the key individual in any of these option, please let me know. My phone number is 0181-452-0740. I would also like to hear from anyone who wants to be involved in helping me set it up. A number of decisions will have to be made and its better that a group of people rather than just me is involved.