SAPS up!

It's Spring again, the sap be risin' and it's a good time for Mark Baynes to review the SAPS modem sharing software kit for Windows, in addition to zapping your networking problems.

At long last I have managed to get the SAPS modem sharing software reviewed, as promised. This is for those among you who were wondering how to share a modem using Windows NT.

Last month, I was having *big* problems with my server, "Pig", and as I write it is languishing in the corner, not sulking but dead. This has meant quite a few problems, as we have been getting up to speed with

our web work and so the use of a server was an imperative.

To get around the problem, I have simply used the most powerful workstation which is running NT Workstation 4.0 as a server, although as it is not a dedicated server, it is really peer-to-peer. However, this has proved not to be too much of a hassle as we are simply sharing files and do not use the "server" for anything else. Anyway, this is unlikely to be the case for much longer as

we get more work in and we just *have* to be able to work more efficiently.

This month, I have had some letters from people who want to get to grips with the very basics of networking, and I have received several others from people asking me to stick with the problems of smaller networks. But don't worry, I will.

For those of you who are concerned about getting started with networking, I would say (a) ignore my cynicism, and (b)

SAPS — SpartaCom Asynchronous Port Sharing kit

■ *The package reviewed here is the SAPS kit containing one server and five client licences.*

The way this product works is that it establishes a modem as a shared resource on the server and is accessed via the addition of a com port re-director on the clients. This version of SAPS supports either a single Windows NT or Windows 95/3.x server and five clients which can be either NT, Windows 95, Windows or DOS. SAPS supports all NetBIOS protocols such as TCP/IP, NetBEUI and IPX. I chose to install the server on a 133MHz Pentium running Windows NT Workstation 4.0 with 64Mb RAM and the client on a 100MHz Pentium running Windows 95 in 32Mb RAM, connected via thin Ethernet.

The first task was to remove the 28.8Kbps US Robotics Sportster which usually runs on the client and install this onto the NT box. Setup is simple apart from having to enter a serial number and software protection key, the only real choice being whether to install the SAPS Server and the SAPS Manager, or just the SAPS Server (I installed both).

Once this has been completed you will be presented with the main SAPS Server screen. Click on the familiar Microsoft share icon at the top of the screen and the Shares window will be displayed. Click New, then enter the new share name and an optional password. I entered Sportster and ignored

the password option. I added the available Com port shown and clicked On. And that's it (see Figs 1 & 2, opposite).

The next task was to install the client. You should check to make sure that the client can see the server over the network before installing SAPS. During installation you will again have to enter a separate serial number and software protection key. You will then be asked for the redirection path that will be connected to your new SAPS port. You can set up pools of modems on an NT server to operate with SAPS (it works with NT's Remote Access Services) but as I was only sharing the one modem, I didn't bother.

Next, you must undertake a standard Windows 95 modem install, making sure that you choose auto-detect. This checked Com 1 and Com 2 and then found the modem on the newly installed Com 4. You are then ready to go, simply specifying the modem on Com 4 for any of your dial-up needs (Figs 4 & 5).

The only problems I experienced were initially naming the shared modem in the NT server setup "USR Robotics Sportster", which SAPS did not seem to like, so I changed this to "Sportster" and all was well. The other glitch was that following the autodetect on the client, which found (as it always does with my Sportster) a "standard modem", I changed this to "USR Robotics Sportster" and, despite being able to undertake a complete diagnostics test of the modem over the network from the client, I

could not connect to the SAPS Server. I re-installed and this time did not change the modem detected from "Standard Modem": SAPS worked fine, and allowed me to connect to the net from my PC in the same way as if it were attached locally rather than via the network.

SAPS is a simple product, with no frills, which does exactly what it is supposed to. More software should be made this way. The documentation is simple and straightforward: it could do with a troubleshooting section, but that is my only minor criticism. I highly recommended it.

PCW Details

Price SAPS One: NT server plus five clients, as reviewed, £195. SAPS Small Office (not NT): one line plus five clients £115: two lines plus five clients £165: two lines plus ten clients £210. SAPS Server for Windows NT: £535 for 256 lines/users. (All prices ex VAT).

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Good Points Simple to install and use.

Bad Points None.

Conclusion The ideal product if you want to share a single modem in a small office with a minimum of fuss. Buy it now and save yourself a lot of hassle.
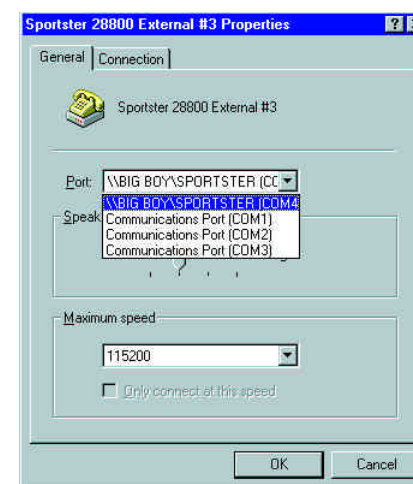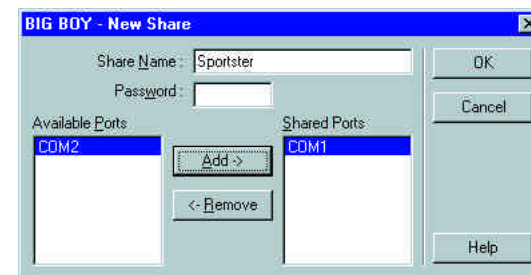
★★★★★

Fig 1 (top) Using SAPS Server Manager to establish a new shared Com port on NT Workstation 4.0
Fig 2 (above) Connecting to the shared modem on the SAPS server from the client workstation

just get on with it. If you are running Windows 95 all you need is the networking hardware (all the essential software is included in the basic product) and this

means a couple of good SMC or 3Com cards and a length of thin Ethernet cable to connect the two together.

If you take things slowly and try not to run before you can walk, then it's not too much of a problem. The main thing to consider when setting up a network card is to make sure that it works properly before you try to do anything with it. There is no point in attempting to use a network card when you know you have an interrupt problem with it. Networks are layers built upon layers and if the foundations aren't right then everything else is going to fall down: I may get a couple of cards and go through the basics of setting them up.
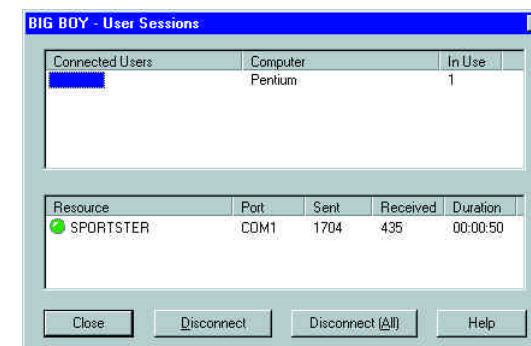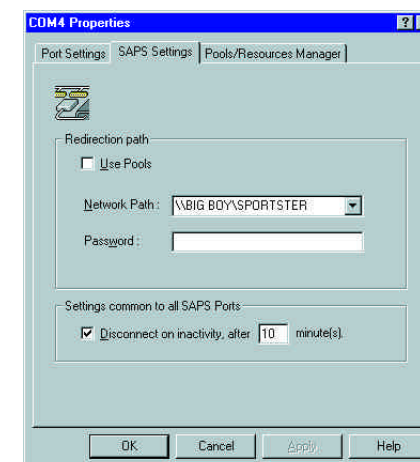
One of the letters I have received this month comes from Barry Phillips who has a small network running but wants to send email to his colleagues. While I was considering his question, it occurred to me that this might be a better way for me and my team to share each others' files at times, rather than simply saying "It's called snigger1.gif in AntWeb\Blue\Test\Final on Big Boy". So I may also go through the basics of setting up a Microsoft Mail PostOffice on our system in the near future and tell you how we get on.

I have most probably

apologised before about spending a lot of time talking about Microsoft products like NT and so on, but the simple fact is that

Fig 3 (below, top) The modem seen as a shared network resource from the client
Fig 4 (below, bottom) The SAPS Server Manager shows the activity of any open sessions

there's a lot of Bill's software out there and it seems sensible for me to write about what you are likely to be using. And, although I occasionally use NetWare for testing, I never, ever touch OS/2 in any shape or form. Sorry.

So last month, having shared the printer using the Intel Netport Express PRO/100 Print Server and then having shared a single modem using SAPS this month, the next may well involve my setting up an internal email system using MS PostOffice and Exchange.

Or, I might just take my dead fileserver, "Pig", down to the beach and set fire to it. We like burning things in Sussex. (Ever been to the Lewes Bonfire Festival? You should go, it's great.) Or there again, I may just change my mind. On the other hand...

Booking in
Q. *"Could point me in the right direction regarding the connection of two PCs I have at home? I know I can use a Null Modem cable (and have successfully done so) but I want to try using network cards and cables. Can you suggest any FAQs or good books on the subject?*

"By the way, is it possible to connect WFWG to a machine with Win95?"

Sanjay Patel

A. A reasonable book is *Nets and Intranets with Win95* by HD Radke (ISBN 1-55755-311-4), published by Abacus. Don't worry about "Intranets" being part of the title; it is much more about basic Win95 networking fundamentals, although you might find something just as good, or better, in your local book store.

I am not too hot on FAQs and newsgroups but a bit of net surfing might reap rewards. But be warned: I have found some stuff on the net which is just plain wrong. And yes, it is possible to connect a WFWG (Windows for Workgroups) machine to a Win95 machine. I do it all the time.

Exchange and start
Q. *"I have a LAN consisting of four computers running Windows 95. We can access one another's hard drive but that's all we can do between us. Is it possible to send memos, etc, to each other? Do we need particular software to do this?"*

Barry Phillips

A. As you will already have gathered, my approach to networking is KISS (which

stands for "Keep It Simple, Stupid") even though the rest of my life seems amazingly complicated, so I would suggest that if you are running Windows 95 you use the basic tools that come with it and see how they work for you. If you really find that you need something more, then start looking around.

Every copy of Windows 95 comes with Microsoft Exchange which you can use for sending email to your colleagues or for sending faxes. However, I must confess that I only use it for the latter because I find it easier and far more satisfying to shout at my colleagues and/or write things down on bits of paper (…and then promptly forget about them!). But seriously, I reckon that you will find Exchange is reasonably easy to install and use.

A simple way to check whether or not Exchange is installed on your machine(s) is to see whether the Inbox icon is on your desktop; if it isn't, then it isn't, if you see what I mean.

It may well be that when you go into Exchange, you can only see Fax services. If this is the case, you will have to go into Control Panel, Add Remove Programs, Windows Setup, Microsoft Exchange and check Microsoft Mail Services.

However, before you do all the Exchange setup, you will have to set up a Microsoft Mail PostOffice. But this is fairly simple to do: go into Control Panel again, choose Microsoft Mail PostOffice and set up a new post office. Of course, the machine with the post office on it will need to be on all the time and will have a slightly heavier load than the other PCs in your organisation, but this shouldn't cause too much of a problem.

Once you have Mail and Exchange up and working, you can set up a Memo template in Microsoft Word (I am assuming that you are using Office like 95 percent of the rest of the world) then simply send these Memos to whoever you like, using the Send or Routing Slip option that you will find on Word's File menu.

As I say, there are other mail programs on the market, but as the Microsoft one is there, why not use it?

PCW Contact

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