

# Revitalizing Usenet

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Tristan Miller

<https://www.big-8.org/>



**Usenet Big-8**  
Management Board



**Austrian**  
**Research Institute for**  
**Artificial Intelligence**

- **The present: Centralized and proprietary**
  - Owned and operated by large media companies
  - Top-down influence on participants and topics
  - Users exploited for commercial gain

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- **The future:**
  - How did we get from there to here?
  - Where are we going?
  - What does this teach us about (offline) societies?



# Social media today

The image shows a screenshot of a Mozilla Firefox browser window displaying the Facebook 'Log In or Sign Up' page. A 'Sign Up' modal form is centered on the screen, overlaid on the background page. The browser's address bar shows 'https://www.facebook.com'. The background page features the Facebook logo and the text 'Connect with friends and... around you on Facebook'. The 'Sign Up' modal has a title 'Sign Up' and the subtitle 'It's quick and easy.' Below this, there are several input fields: 'First name' and 'Last name' (two separate boxes), 'Mobile number or email', and 'New password'. There is also a 'Birthday' section with three dropdown menus for month (set to 'Jul'), day (set to '23'), and year (set to '2021'). Below the birthday section is a 'Gender' section with three radio button options: 'Female', 'Male', and 'Custom'. At the bottom of the modal, there is a green 'Sign Up' button. A small disclaimer at the bottom of the modal reads: 'By clicking Sign Up, you agree to our Terms. Learn how we collect, use and share your data in our Data Policy and how we use cookies and similar technology in our Cookies Policy. You may receive SMS Notifications from us and can opt out any time.'

Facebook - Log In or Sign Up — Mozilla Firefox

Facebook - Log In or Sign Up | x +

← → ↻ 🏠 🔒 https://www.facebook.com ☆ 🔍 Search 📧 ☰ ☰ ☰

**Sign Up** ✕

It's quick and easy.

First name Last name

Mobile number or email

New password

Birthday ⓘ

Jul 23 2021

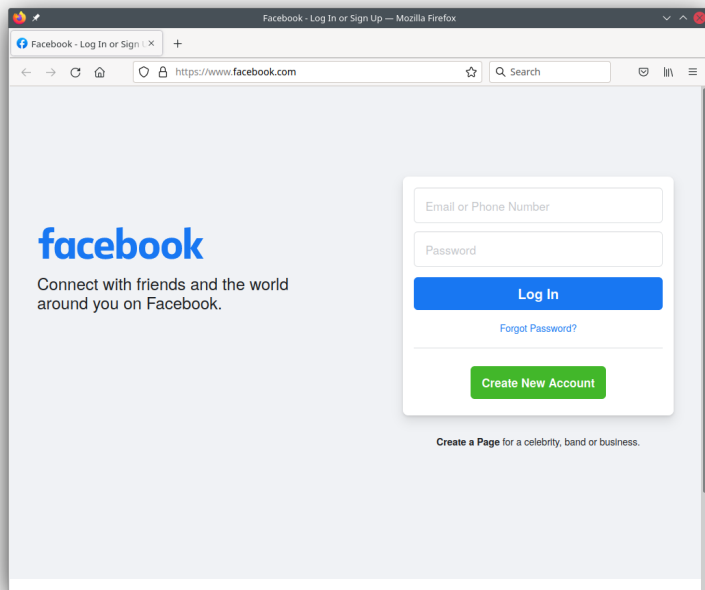
Gender ⓘ

Female Male Custom

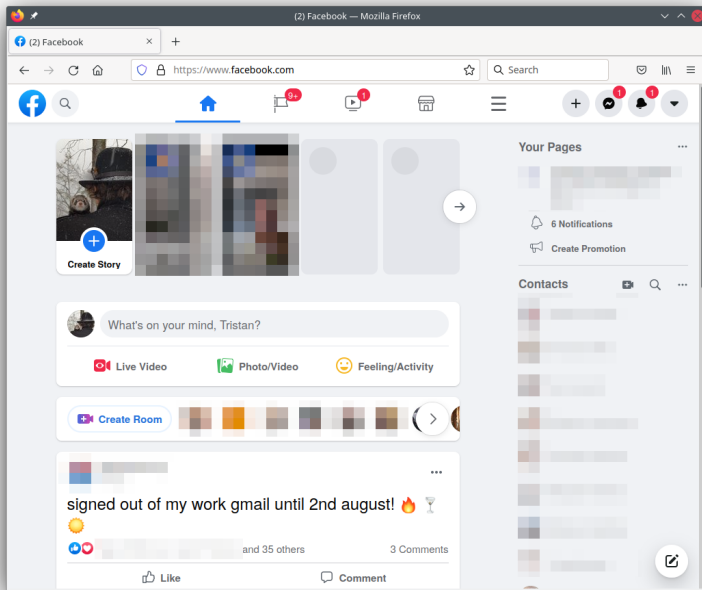
By clicking Sign Up, you agree to our [Terms](#). Learn how we collect, use and share your data in our [Data Policy](#) and how we use cookies and similar technology in our [Cookies Policy](#). You may receive SMS Notifications from us and can opt out any time.

**Sign Up**

# Social media today

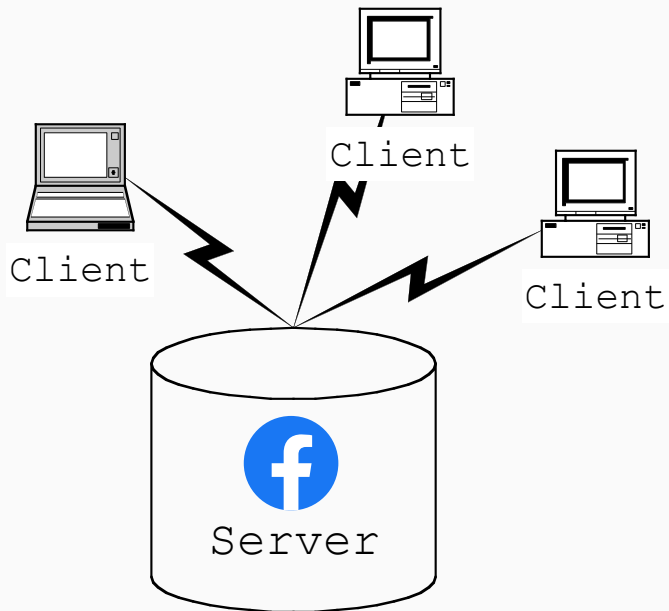


# Social media today

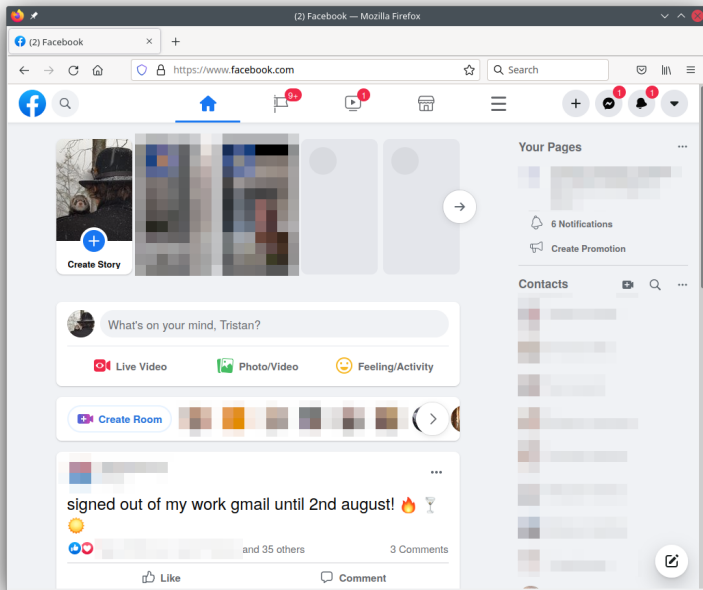




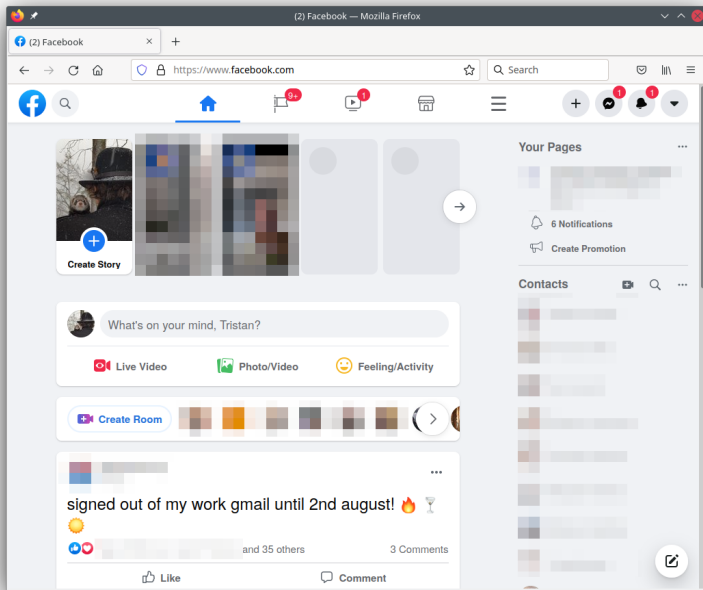
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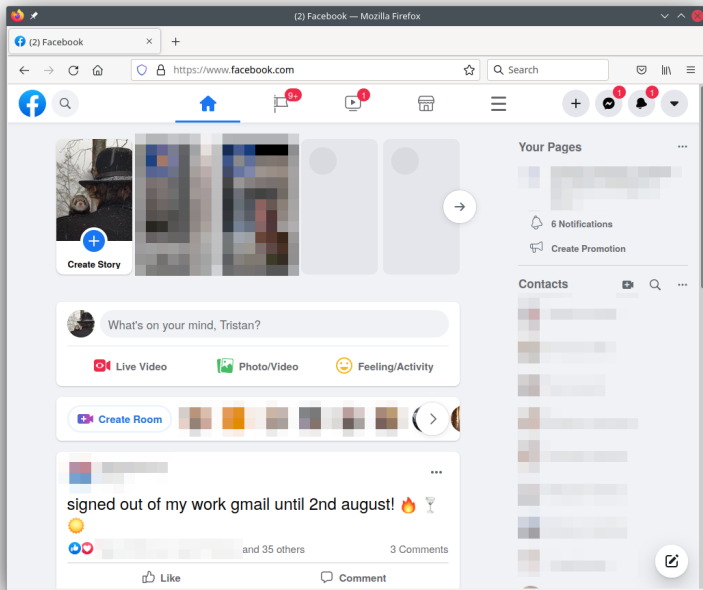
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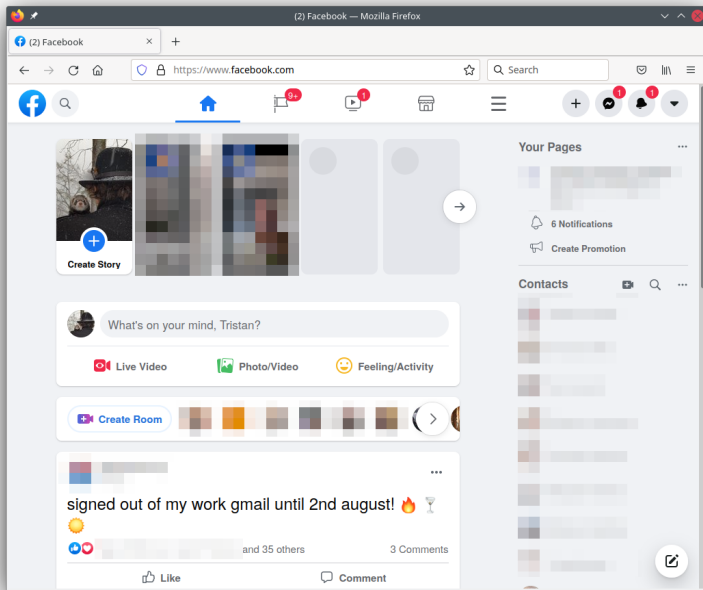
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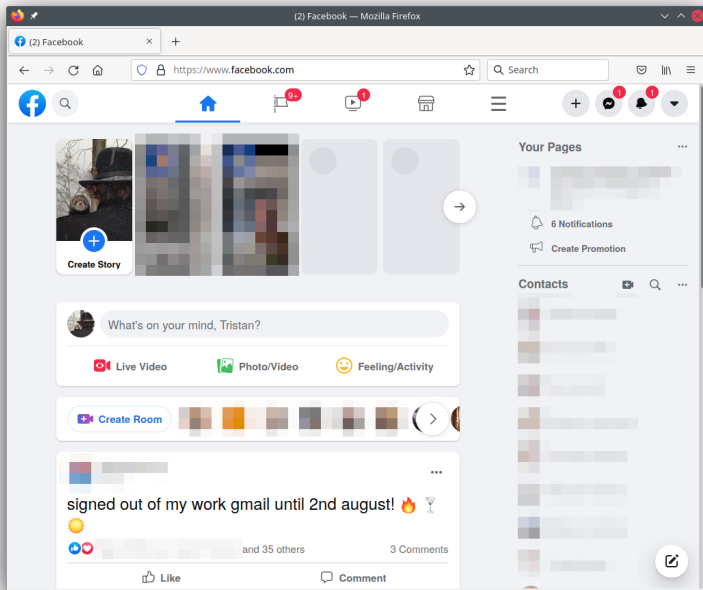
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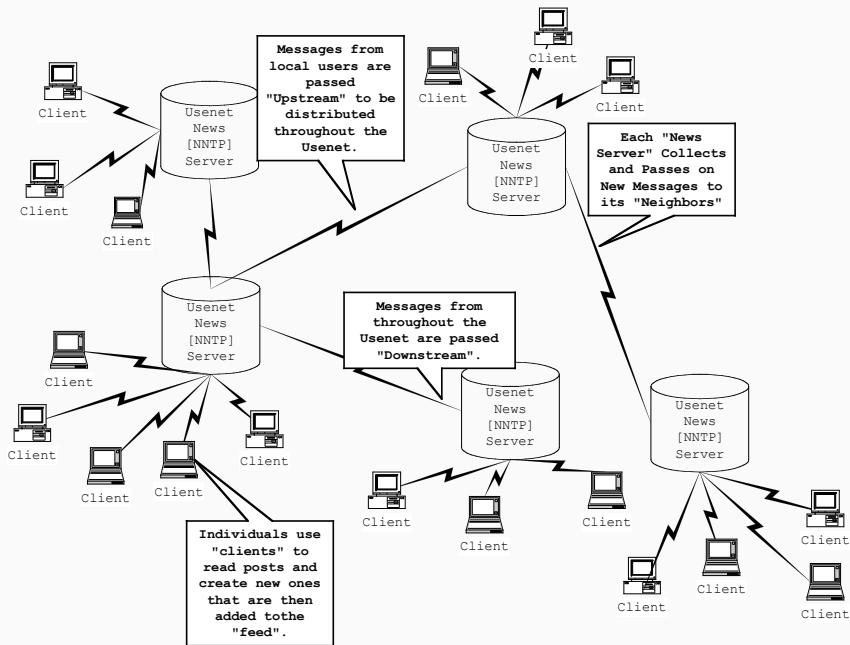
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  - 1991: open to public
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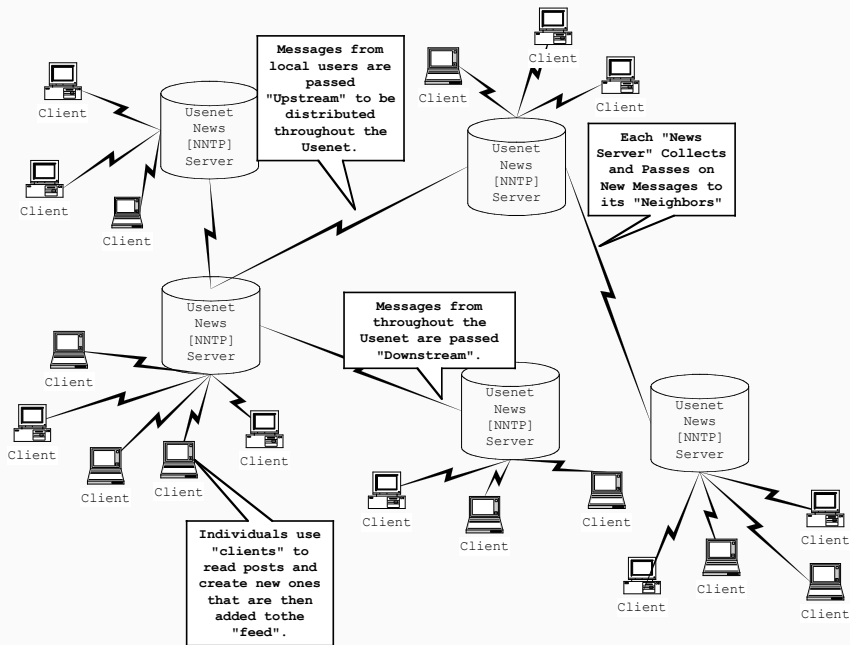




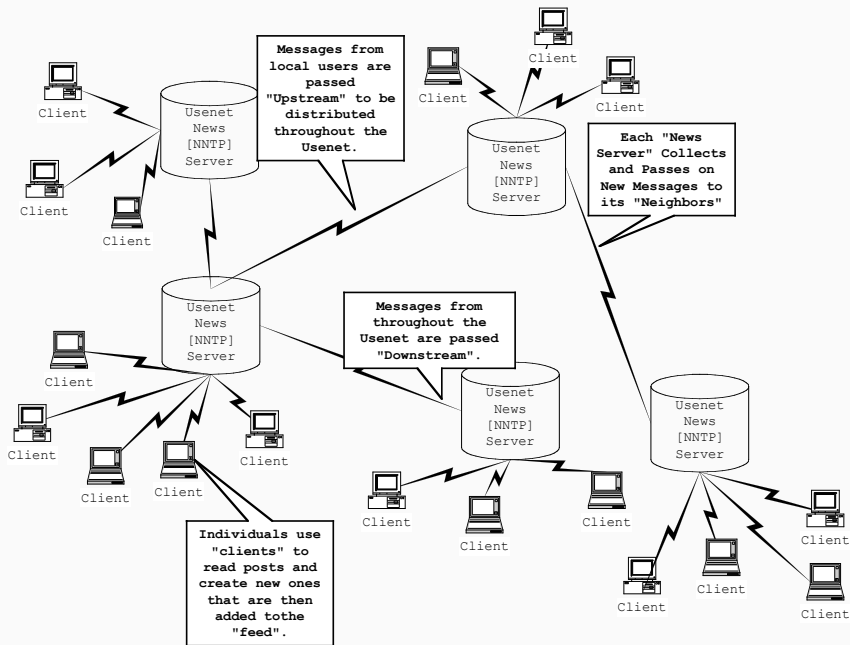
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Re: Zeileneinformation für Tracing	Stefan Matthias Aust	16.12.2006 10:42	42
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Re: Zeileneinformation für Tracing	Stefan Matthias Aust	09:14	26
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Zwei JREs gleichzeitig	Matthias	15.12.2006 23:10	16

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## Social media yesterday

*“I posed questions on Usenet, mailing lists and freenets. Along with these questions, I would attach some worthwhile preliminary research. People respected my questions and found the preliminary research helpful. The entire process was one of mutual respect and sharing of research and ideas. A real notion of ‘community’ and ‘participation’ takes place. I found that on the Net people willingly help each other and work together to define and address issues important to them. These are often important issues which the conventional media would never cover.”*



Michael Hauben (1973–2001)



## Social media yesterday

*“Awareness that we are members of the human species which spans the entire globe changes a person’s point of view. It is a broadening perspective. It is very easy for people to assume a limited point of view if they are only exposed to certain ideas. The Net brings the isolated individual into contact with other people, experiences, and views from the rest of the world. Exposure to many opinions gives the reader a chance to actually consider multiple views before settling on a specific opinion. Having access to the ‘Marketplace of Ideas’ allows a person to make a reasoned judgment.”*



Michael Hauben (1973–2001)

*“The Net has only developed because of the hard work and voluntary dedication of many people. It has grown because the Net is in the control and power of the people at the grassroots level, and because these people developed it. People’s posts and contributions to the Net have been the developing forces.”*



Michael Hauben (1973–2001)

## Social media yesterday

*“Much of the development of Usenet owes a big thanks to the early restrictions on commercial uses. Where else in our society has the commercial element been so clearly separated from any entity? Forums of discussion and communication become clogged and congested when advertisements use space. Because of the voluntary actions of those who use and redistribute Netnews and e-mail, people on Usenet feel it wrong to assist commercial ventures...Rather, people fight to keep it a resource that is helpful to society as a whole.”*



Michael Hauben (1973–2001)

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  - Usenet was developed by volunteers working for their own needs and at their own pace
  - Commercial interests were able to **efficiently** develop solutions that were better in certain respects
- Demographic shift
  - Usenet assimilated its users into a cohesive, cooperation-minded community
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## Where do we go from here?

- Will online society ever abandon big social media?
- Will it return to the by-and-for-the-people model of times past?
- Will we continue to allow our personal data and conversations to be commodified?



- Usenet is still around today
- User base has shrunk considerably, but is now relatively stable
- Essential administration and maintenance work still being carried out
- Usenet might be a model for a future modern but egalitarian discussion system

- The **Internet Engineering Task Force** publishes Usenet protocol standards
- **Developers** write the software for news clients, servers, etc.
- **Newsmasters** operate news servers
- The **Internet Systems Consortium** maintains a list of moderators and relays
- Each top-level hierarchy may (or may not) have a **managing entity**

- comp.\*
- misc.\*
- news.\*
- rec.\*
- sci.\*
- soc.\*
- talk.\*
- humanities.\*



- Established to streamline the administration of the Big 8
- Organizes community discussions on the creation and removal of Big-8 newsgroups
- Implements the corresponding decisions in concert with the ISC
- Helps maintain a canonical Big-8 newsgroup list

# History of the Big-8 Management Board

**2005** Established by former moderators of news.announce.newgroups

**2014–2017** Board gradually becomes defunct

**Apr. 2020** Board reconstituted with the blessing of its former members; weekly business meetings instituted

From: board@big-8.org  
Newsgroups: news.announce.newgroups  
Subject: Status of the Big 8 Management Board  
Date: Thu, 30 Apr 2020 01:06:49 EDT

This is an official communication from the Big-8 Management Board. Please note that followups are set to news.groups.

After a careful review of the Big 8 Management Board's activity and process, all remaining members of the Big 8 Management Board opted not to consider re-election and instead have voted to install two new volunteers as the new members of the Big 8 Management Board. These two volunteers are:

Tristan Miller  
Jason Evans

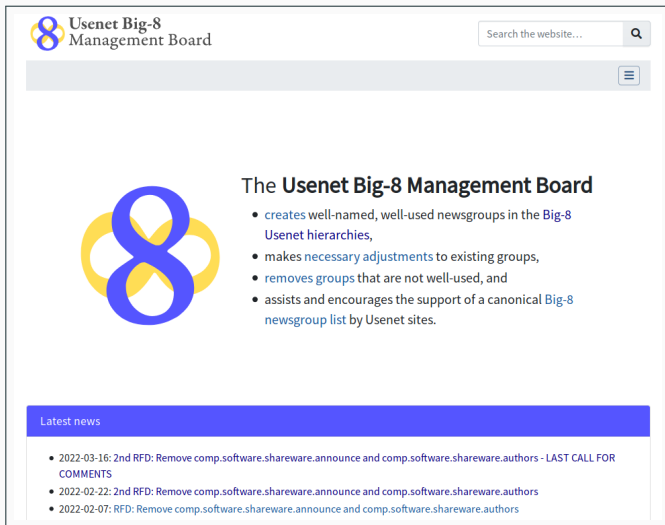
We believe these volunteers have the technical and social skills necessary to maintain the Big-8. Please give them your support while they develop their vision for the future mission and goals of the Big 8 Board.

Kathy Morgan, Chairperson Emeritus  
Bill Horne, former Chairperson



# History of the Big-8 Management Board

Aug. 2020 Website redesigned and reorganized: <https://www.big-8.org/>



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Usenet Big-8 Management Board. At the top left is the logo, a stylized '8' formed by two interlocking loops, one blue and one yellow. To its right is the text 'Usenet Big-8 Management Board'. Further right is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search the website...' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar is a grey navigation bar with a hamburger menu icon on the right. The main content area features the same logo on the left and the title 'The Usenet Big-8 Management Board' on the right. Below the title is a bulleted list of three items. At the bottom of the page is a blue header for 'Latest news' followed by a list of three news items.

Usenet Big-8 Management Board

Search the website...

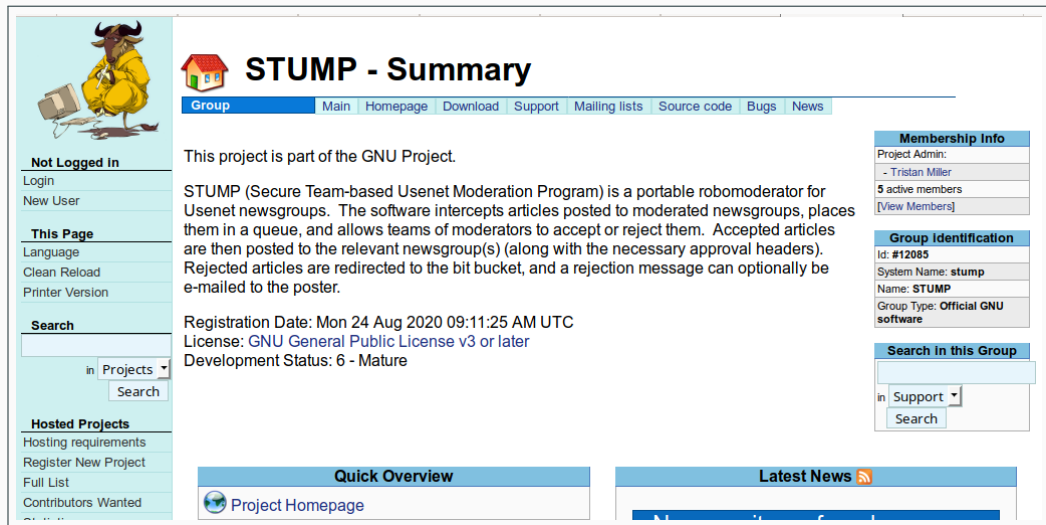
**The Usenet Big-8 Management Board**


- creates well-named, well-used newsgroups in the Big-8 Usenet hierarchies,
- makes necessary adjustments to existing groups,
- removes groups that are not well-used, and
- assists and encourages the support of a canonical Big-8 newsgroup list by Usenet sites.

Latest news

- 2022-03-16: 2nd RFD: Remove comp.software.shareware.announce and comp.software.shareware.authors - LAST CALL FOR COMMENTS
- 2022-02-22: 2nd RFD: Remove comp.software.shareware.announce and comp.software.shareware.authors
- 2022-02-07: RFD: Remove comp.software.shareware.announce and comp.software.shareware.authors

Aug. 2020 Members become maintainers of GNU STUMP and GNU WebSTUMP





## STUMP - Summary

[Group](#) | [Main](#) | [Homepage](#) | [Download](#) | [Support](#) | [Mailing lists](#) | [Source code](#) | [Bugs](#) | [News](#)

This project is part of the GNU Project.

STUMP (Secure Team-based Usenet Moderation Program) is a portable robomoderator for Usenet newsgroups. The software intercepts articles posted to moderated newsgroups, places them in a queue, and allows teams of moderators to accept or reject them. Accepted articles are then posted to the relevant newsgroup(s) (along with the necessary approval headers). Rejected articles are redirected to the bit bucket, and a rejection message can optionally be e-mailed to the poster.

Registration Date: Mon 24 Aug 2020 09:11:25 AM UTC  
License: GNU General Public License v3 or later  
Development Status: 6 - Mature

**Membership Info**  
Project Admin:  
- Tristan Miller  
5 active members  
[\[View Members\]](#)

**Group Identification**  
Id: #12085  
System Name: **stump**  
Name: **STUMP**  
Group Type: **Official GNU software**

**Search in this Group**  
in [Support](#) Search

**Quick Overview**  
[Project Homepage](#)

**Latest News**

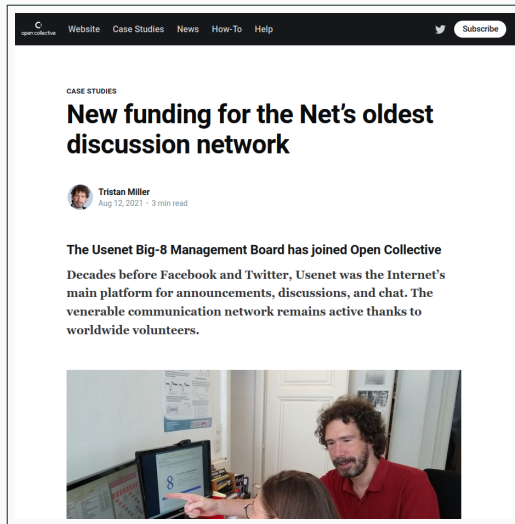
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[Login](#)  
[New User](#)

**This Page**  
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[Clean Reload](#)  
[Printer Version](#)

**Search**  
in [Projects](#) Search

**Hosted Projects**  
[Hosting requirements](#)  
[Register New Project](#)  
[Full List](#)  
[Contributors Wanted](#)

May 2021 Board joins Open Collective Europe



The screenshot shows a web page from Open Collective. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Open Collective logo, links for 'Website', 'Case Studies', 'News', 'How-To', and 'Help', a Twitter icon, and a 'Subscribe' button. Below the navigation bar, the text 'CASE STUDIES' is displayed. The main heading is 'New funding for the Net's oldest discussion network'. Below the heading is a profile picture of Tristan Miller, his name, and the date 'Aug 12, 2021 - 3 min read'. The main text of the article reads: 'The Usenet Big-8 Management Board has joined Open Collective. Decades before Facebook and Twitter, Usenet was the Internet's main platform for announcements, discussions, and chat. The venerable communication network remains active thanks to worldwide volunteers.' At the bottom of the article, there is a photograph of a man with curly hair and a beard, wearing a red shirt, pointing at a computer monitor. A woman's head is visible in the foreground, looking at the screen. The monitor displays a large blue number '8'.

# History of the Big-8 Management Board

Oct. 2021 First new newsgroup created since 2013 (comp.infosystems.gemini)

From: board@big-8.org

Newsgroups: news.announce.newgroups,news.groups.proposals

Subject: RESULT - comp.infosystems.gemini will be created

Date: Fri, 22 Oct 2021 10:22:26 EDT

RESULT

unmoderated group comp.infosystems.gemini

The Last Call for Comments (LCC) on 2021-08-10 initiated a five-day period for final comments. Following this comment period, the Big-8 Management Board has decided by 3/3 consensus to create unmoderated newsgroup comp.infosystems.gemini.

# History of the Big-8 Management Board

continuously Public outreach activities:

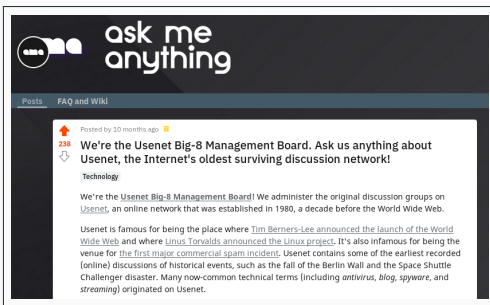
- Talks at openSUSE+LibreOffice Conference, Hackers Congress Paralelní Polis, LibrePlanet, etc.
- Reddit AMA
- Various Usenet tutorials published online



Collabora LibreOffice The Document Foundation SUSE

## Reviving Usenet

MySQL LINUX datto ADMIN fedora TUXEDO .riessapplications Required Magic



ask me anything

Posts FAQ and Wiki

Posted by 10 months ago

238

### We're the Usenet Big-8 Management Board. Ask us anything about Usenet, the Internet's oldest surviving discussion network!

Technology

We're the [Usenet Big-8 Management Board](#)! We administer the original discussion groups on [Usenet](#), an online network that was established in 1980, a decade before the World Wide Web.

Usenet is famous for being the place where [Tim Berners-Lee announced the launch of the World Wide Web](#) and where [Linus Torvalds announced the Linux project](#). It's also infamous for being the venue for [the first major commercial spam incident](#). Usenet contains some of the earliest recorded (online) discussions of historical events, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. Many now-common technical terms (including *antivirus*, *blog*, *spyware*, and *streaming*) originated on Usenet.

- Usenet...
  - is a well-established, decentralized discussion network
  - is built on open standards and free software
  - is robust and resistant to censorship
  - is respectful of users' digital freedoms
  - is still in active use and maintenance
  - has much to offer over today's discussion forums and social media platforms
  - is ready for your participation and support!