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*The amazing thing about a dancing bear is not how well
it dances – but that it dances at all.*

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DubUBB notes for Version 1.10

You'll have found this in .ZIP file along with a folder called TAPUBB.

TAPCIS used to mean, "The Access Program for Compuserve Information Service."

TAPUBB is the access program for UBB.

It is a hack. A kludge. A desperation effort. An awesome gigantic step backwards to make messages posted on a Web site accessible by a DOS program written, essentially, around 1984. It will do many things in weird and unaccountable ways.

It is, to be blunt, a stunt.

Feel free to ask me "Why". But don't be surprised if I answer, "Because."

Here are the step-by-step instructions for a painless transition to the new world of TapUBB.

Join the bulletin board as a member

The board is found at <http://www.aero-farm.com/ubbthreads/ubbthreads.php>

You won't be able to do anything at all with TapUBB until you are able to log into the bulletin board. Thus, you must establish yourself as a member of the aero-farm UBB board. New users must go to the Login page and then the Register page. Obviously, you should keep track of the username and password you select.

Keep in mind that this is a low security password. The bulletin board managers have access to it, and it is sent over the Internet in the clear every time you log in. Choose something that **isn't** the same as, for example, your personal banking or corporate VPN password.

Your login name isn't the same as the name that appears on the board. For example, I log in as "rdubner". But my member profile has a place for my name as it appears on the forum; I have that "public name" set to "Bob Dubner".

When you do log in, you might want to turn on the "Remember me..." option on. It can save time. But it's not necessary; the TapUBB program can log you in each time.

If you have any trouble, your best bet is to talk to Mike Overly, <mailto:mikeoverly@netzero.com>, for help.

Set up your UBB profile to be friendly to TapUBB

Once logged in, select “My Home”, and then “Edit Display Preferences”

I currently have

English
‘the blues’ (I don’t know yet if other style sheets work; they probably do)
0 for the time offset – the server is set to East Coast time, as am I.
MM/DD/YY 10:19 AM is the time format. Don’t use any other!
Forums
Main index
Active in the last day *
Descending Date
Flat mode / Expanded Mode (choose either; TapUBB overrides it)
Expanded Threads *
10 *
10 *
On
60
5
Yes
Yes
Yes

The one that you **must** not mess with is the date format. That has to be as specified.

Some of those are marked with an asterisk. If you change them, the performance of the TAPUBB might get slower, but the results won’t change. Reducing the parent posts, and increasing the total posts, might even improve performance. I haven’t fussed with it yet.

I have “Active in the last day” selected because I check messages fairly frequently. If you go in every couple of days, change it to “Active in the last two days”. You can set it to any value; if on any day it isn’t looking back far enough to cover everything since you last logged in, TapUBB will adjust it.

Selecting “Collapsed Threads” instead of “Expanded Threads” will definitely slow things down a bit, because every single time the program asks for a pages of message headers, it will have to then read the expanded page. Our tireless Research Department is hot on the trail of a fix for that.

Once you set up those parameters, you can run TAPUBB.

Load up the TapUBB software

Remember, this is a hack, a kludge, a stunt. It **will** work for you if you follow the instructions. But if you add or change things because you like being ornery, it's very likely that things won't work.

Please try following my step-by-step instructions **first**, get it working, and **then** start fooling with it.

Take the enclosed TAPUBB folder and put it into the root of one of your disk drives. It doesn't matter which drive, but the .INI files in the distribution assume that the program is living in a folder X:\TAPUBB\

There are two files in the folder: Tap43.BAT, and TAP25.BAT. Those adjust the size of the box that TAPCIS runs in. I like TAP43, but I have big monitors. Right-click one of them, and send it to the desktop as a shortcut.

Rename the shortcut as something containing the word "TAPUBB". This is important; if you don't do that, then TAPLINK won't work correctly. TAPLINK is a second window that shows you URLs from the TAPCIS window; you can click on them in TAPLINK and your web browser will open them. *Note: TAPLINK will only work on Windows XP or later; the TAPLINK window will do nothing except display a message to that effect. Windows 95/98/Me/2000 users can remove the "start taplink" line from the .BAT file.*

When you double-click the TAPUBB shortcut, the resulting TAPCIS window is probably not going to be to your liking. Single-click the little black C:/ icon in the upper left corner, and select Properties. On the Font page, I select Raster Fonts 10 X 18, but, again, I have a big monitor. I also have the Layout page set so that the "Let system position window" option is OFF, so that TAPCIS always comes up in the same place.

On the options page, I have the "Window" Display Option selected. QuickEdit is OFF, Insert Mode is ON.

When you are done making those changes, you'll want to select the option to "Modify shortcut that started this window" to make them permanent.

A fresh install of the TAPUBB interface doesn't know how to log you in to the UBB forum, nor can it register you. You need to register yourself so that you have a username and password. If you log in with the "Remember Me" option turned on, you should be ready to proceed with TapUBB.

You're now ready to run TapUBB

Double-click the desktop shortcut to TapUBB. In a moment, you'll be looking at the TAPCIS 6.2 main screen.

It is already is set up to just view the one aero-farm forum; it is named AVSIG.

Note: at this writing, the UBB forum has been up for about ten weeks and there are about 11,000 messages – and counting – on the board. You might want to consider limiting that. Before pressing the ‘N’ key, you might want to consider clicking the menu item “Other”, then “Special Actions”, then “High Forum Message”.

At that point, you might set “Reset high message read to:” to be “14 days”, and the “Forum(s)” to be “AVSIG”. Then click “OK”.

By doing that, your initial download will be all of the messages posted in the last two weeks, rather than since time began.

Press N, and it will initially download the entire forum. (N means New Stuff; it will download any messages you haven’t seen before.)

After a while, all the messages on the forum will be available. You can double-click in the InBox “Msgs” item. Or, you can press the R key and then the Enter key twice to activate the AVSIG.MSG file.

Wait a minute! It’s complaining that I have to log in!

Yeah, it does that. During the initial period when people started using TAPUBB, some folks got in like they were covered in grease. Others had all kinds of problems; it had to do with what browser they were using, and cookie settings, and Lord knows what. It got boring. So, I implemented automated log in.

The program will notice that you aren’t logged in, and tell you to put your username and password into T6COM.INI

That’s simple enough. Double-click on the \TAPUBB\T6COM.INI file. In it you will find two lines that will look like this:

```
LoginUsername=YourUsername  
LoginPassword=YourPassword
```

Replace “YourUsername” and “YourPassword” with, well, your username and password. (Do I have to tell you *everything*?) After that, you should never be bothered by login problems.

Some people sometimes have trouble finding \TAPUBB\T6COM.INI. That’s usually because Microsoft’s default file browser settings don’t show you the file extensions of registered file types. You have two choices.

One: you can in the browser, select Tools / Folder Options / View and deselect “Hide extensions of known file types”.

Two: switch the view to “Icons” mode, where you see the big icons for each file. Microsoft’s default icon for .INI files looks kind of like this:



So, you want to find a file named T6COM that has that icon associated with it, and double-click it.

What do I do if I need help?

You contact me. <mailto:dubner@dubner.com>

Or ask the question on the forum itself. A lot of folks have made this work, and maybe somebody has seen the same problem you have.

When you do, tell me what’s going wrong. There is a very useful log file I create: DUBNER.LOG. Send it along, too. In fact, take a look at it yourself, first – it may well give you some useful hints that’ll let you sort things out yourself.

What’s that URL at the end of each message?

That’s the URL of the original message on the bulletin board. If TAPLINK is working, you can click on that to see the message as it appears on the board. Likewise, where Web view users might see embedded graphics, TAPUBB users will see an HTTP: link that they can click on if they like.

Also, where Web users see *italics* or **boldface**, TAPUBB users will see [i]italics[/i] and [b]boldface[/b]. <shrug> Get used to it.

How about smileys and other UBB stuff?

All of the UBB codes work through TAPCIS. You can create italics, and boldface, and put in smileys. There are links to UBB code instructions on the message board. Where Web users see a grinning little graphics, TAPUBB sees that somebody wants you to see the image GRIN.GIF. It sorts that out, and it ends up looking like <grin> in the .MSG file.

But everything should work; you just have to type out the UBB codes for it.

Note: as of May 6, 2004, Mike Overly has smileys disabled in the aero-farm board.

How come some messages start off with “[Attachment...?”

Web view users have the option of uploading a file along with a message. When they do that, the message header on the Web view has a clickable link to to the uploaded file. When TapUBB

sees that, it puts the Attachment notification – along with the URL to the uploaded file – at the top of the message.

What's going on with the To: and From: fields?

Compuserve allowed you to designate a message To: somebody; you could start a new thread that way. UBB has no equivalent capability; messages that start threads

But as people used TapUBB early on, it became clear to me that this was confusing. Folks were filling in the To: field, and the information was just disappearing.

So, in version 1.2, I added a feature: TapUBB puts the To: information at the beginning of thread-starting messages when they are posted. When TapUBB reads a thread-starting message, it looks for that To: field and places the information it finds there into the TAPCIS .MSG header. This should make TapUBB work fairly sensibly without being too offensive to the Webfeet.

Why does 73247,2334 appear next to my name in the headers?

One of the useful features of TAPCIS is that messages to or from your account were highlighted. They were also counted on the way in, and the number of personal messages to you appeared in the InBox count.

TapUBB simulates this by extracting your public name from the first page it sees. When it sees a message to you or from you, it appends the CIS UserID from the TAPCIS.INI file to the To: or From: field. This gives TAPCIS the cue it needs to highlight your name.

Likewise, because TapUBB is able to identify messages to you as they are read from the board, it can adjust the “Pers” count in the InBox entry.

Why 73247,2334? Because that was my personal Compuserve ID, and your TapUBB installation was cloned from my TAPCIS implementation. It's totally unimportant; that information is purely internal to your TapUBB installation. If you feel like replacing the UserId= field in your TAPCIS.INI file, go right ahead. It may hiccup when you first run it, because the UserId field won't match the bogus information in the encrypted password file – but you should be able to Okay your way through it.

How about Private messages?

UBB doesn't provide for in-thread private messages. If you try, TapUBB will refuse to post it.

The UBB forum does provide for private off-thread messages, but TapUBB doesn't know anything about that. Eventually, I suppose, I can modify it to at least alert you that a Private message is waiting for you, but I doubt I'll ever try to read them or post them. For now, you'll have to check the board with your browser to see if there are any Private messages for you.

How do I cut down on my connect time?

Back when Compuserve charged \$12 per hour for a 1200 baud connection, connect time was a huge issue for everybody. Nowadays, the spectrum is broader. Those of us with full-time broadband connections don't care much. I, for example, download every message and just X my way past threads I don't care much about. (See below.)

But there are still users for whom connect time is an issue. For example, AVSIG has at least one member who lives in a RV, and who connects in from just about everywhere using dial-up access over a cell phone.

So, being able to cut down on connect time can be important.

There are two features available for cutting down on the number of downloaded messages.

First, there is section selection. From the TAPCIS main window, double-click on the word AVSIG in the [Forum/Services] column.

In the [Edit Forum Settings] box, you want to look at the "Read message sections:" and "Scan message sections:" entries.

The "Read message sections" defaults to All. You can go into it and select which forum sections you want to always read.

The "Scan message sections:" defaults to None. You can go in there and select which forum sections you want to have scanned.

It is your job to make sure that they don't overlap – the results are confusing if you set a section to be both read and scanned.

When you do an 'N' pass with some sections set for "Scan", you will be presented with the InBox option of marking threads for download. You go through the list, marking the ones that you want to download, and/or un-marking the ones you want to skip.

TAPCIS is very clever about that – it will keep track of what threads you've read before, and what threads you've decided to skip before. The effectiveness of the tool can be measured by the disappointment of some TAPUBB users when I didn't immediately implement thread scanning, and the cheers that resulted when I finally included it with version 1.10

But what's going on with the '^' key?

For people who scan threads, there is a very useful function available – after you've selected a thread for downloaded, it is certainly reasonable to decide later that you aren't interested in downloading any more messages in that thread. So, TAPCIS provides a "don't download this thread anymore" hotkey – it is the '^' key, which is a Shift+6 on an American English keyboard.

The trouble comes because TAPCIS was designed for Compuserve's limitation of twenty-four characters for a thread's Subject: field. The UBB board provides for a subject field longer than that, and for the most part, TAPCIS handles the longer field with aplomb. But if you try to '^' on a subject with more than 24 characters, well, it tries to find that long string in the list of known subject headers (which is kept in the ...\\MESSAGES\\AVSIG.TMK file), and it can't find it, because the .TMK file has the subject headers truncated to 24 characters.

So, you get a message popup about "can't find...."

I haven't been able to think of an easy solution to this one. I *have* thought of a couple of solutions that are kind of annoying to implement – "annoying" being defined as "probably time consuming" – and since I haven't heard any screaming and yelling from people using the header scanning function, I am not motivated at this time to implement them.

A quick primer for new TAPCIS users.

TAPCIS was under active development for about fifteen years; it has a lot of capability. Most people only use a fraction of it, which is just as well, since in the TAPUBB hack/kludge/stunt only a little bit of all that capability is relevant.

For example, some users have used TAPCIS's "thread marking" capability. TAPCIS could download thread headers, and then you could select which ones you wanted to read. TAPCIS would keep track of which headers were new to you, and which you had read before, and which you had rejected before. TAPUBB does **not** have that ability, and I don't think it ever will; the UBB board doesn't lend itself to that.

TAPCIS is rich with Help screens. Press F1 and read for a while.

Here are the commands that I find myself using most of the time. Other users will indignantly point out that other commands are essential. <shrug> Okay.

Main Screen Functions:

From the Main Screen, I will type 'N' to download new stuff.

From the Main Screen, I type 'O' to go Online and upload my messages that are waiting in the Outbox.

From the Main Screen, I use <F7> or Alt+X to leave TAPCIS.

From the Main Screen, I type 'W' and then follow the instructions to start a new thread in a forum section.

From the Main Screen, I type 'R' and then <Enter> twice to read the AVSIG message file.

From the Main Screen, I will double-click “AVSIG” in the Forums/Services box. Practically all of the options are meaningless now. The one that is important is the “Read message sections” line. It is probably best at first to leave it at “All”, but once you know what’s going on you can set it to just look at the forum sections that are important to you. Click “Save and Activate” to make your changes take effect.

The TAPUBB program maintains a “High Message Number” in the T6COM.INI file. If you need to change that – for example, to force rereading of messages, or to go back and read messages from a section you had turned off but now have turned on again, then you can use the

Other | Special Actions | High forum message

menu item. All of the possibilities offered – All; Last; N days of messages; the last N messages, or a specific message number – are available. You probably won’t use this much, but it does work.

Message File Navigation

When reading messages, the two keys I use the most are the numeric keypad + key and the PgDn key.

The + key moves to the next message.

Spacebar also works to show you the next message, for you laptop users.

The PgDn key moves down inside a message.

The numeric – shows you the previous message.

PgUp brings you up inside of a message.

Home brings you to the first message;

End shows you the the last message.

The “X” key is important; it skips the current thread. (Without thread marking, skipping threads is your main defense against looking at things that you find boring.)

F3 turns on the Outview. Normally, TAPCIS just shows you New messages. If you want to see all of them, press the F3 key. Press F3 again to get back to the New view.

Ctrl+backarrow: incredibly useful. It shows you the parent message of the one you were just reading.

The [key takes you back through the messages you’ve been looking at in reverse order. For example, I’ll often press Ctrl+backarrow, and then pres [to get back to where I had been.

The F7 key gets you out of reading messages and back to the main screen

Many different Views are possible; click on View | Edit View to get at the possibilities. Practically the only one I ever use is the prepackaged View Name: “New”. I use that one when I’ve been reading some messages, go back to the Main Screen, and then go back to reading messages and I want to see the New ones again – the default view shows you New/Unread messages. The “New” view will show you the messages even though they are flagged as Read.

F2 gets you into the Find menu.

Once a find is set up, you can use the “N” key to Find Again.

There are **many** hotkeys. When looking at a message, press F1 and then click on “Reading and Managing Messages”.

And, of course, there is the important “R” key.

“R” opens a the Reply window, so that you can reply to a message on the board.

Text Editing Navigation

Again, the F1 key is your friend. Press it after pressing “R” to start replying to a message, and you’ll be given a wealth of information.

The ones I use:

When replying to a message, the message you are replying to is in a window above your typing window. The F5 and F6 keys scroll you through the parent message.

When typing and editing, the format of a paragraph sometimes gets wonky. Put the cursor on the first line of the paragraph, and press Ctrl+B to reformat it.

The cursor keys do what you think they should, and the PgDn and PgUp keys as well.

When you are done editing the message, <F7> is the “I’m done with this message” key.

You can block text out with the mouse, or by holding a Shift key down and using the cursor key. Once text is blocked, you can use Ctrl+K, Ctrl+Y to delete it. You can use Ctrl+K, Ctrl+C to copy it, and Ctrl+K, Ctrl+M to move it. It’s buggy. Don’t complain to me. You can, usually, make blocked text unblocked with Ctrl+K, Ctrl+H. That’s also buggy. Don’t complain to me about that, either.

Uploading messages

Once you've done reading messages, and your replies are ready, you go back to the Main Menu and you press "O". And up they go.

Typically, at that point, you press F7 to leave TAPCIS entirely. When you next come back, you fire up TAPCIS with the TAPUBB desktop icon, and then you press "N" to pick up with all the messages that were posted since the last time you pressed "N".

And that's all there is.

Contact information

This is very early times here, and I anticipate a lot of discussion. My e-mail is rdubner@dubner.com, and feel free to call me pretty much any time between about 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. Eastern time at 201-664-6434