Archives

[Textfiles archive](#)
This is the largest archive of BBS textfiles. It contains materials that date back to the early 1980s, albeit not easily searchable or sorted. These are almost all distinct textfiles rather than back-and-forth conversations.

[The Thing BBS archive](#)
This is a beautifully designed archive of one particular BBS: The Thing, which was active in New York City and focused on art. It preserves early 1990s conversations. By clicking first on one of the boards and then on one of the message threads, it becomes possible to follow the iterative conversations on the BBS. Media scholar Lori Emerson has written about the archive [here](#).

[ASCII art archive](#)
ASCII art, which consists of drawings made from typographic characters, was a staple on BBSs. The archive's FAQ indicates that it draws from a 1990s Usenet newsgroup for ASCII hobbyists. Browsing around the categories offers an overview of the type of art shared on BBSs.

[ASCIPR0N archive](#)
This mysterious archive gathers hundreds of pornographic ASCII artworks. It is unclear whether this is a personal collection or a group project. ASCII porn was popular on BBSs.

[FidoNet messages archive](#)
FidoNet, which reached peak popularity in the mid 1990s, made it possible for local BBSs to link up and forward files. This archive preserves messages shared to two BBSs – ExecPC BBS, which started in Wisconsin and became one of the world's most popular BBSs, and Starfleet HQ, a BBS focused on Atari games – between 1993 to 1999.

[FidoNews](#)
FidoNews was a newsletter for FidoNet sysops and users, distributed by FidoNet inventor Tom Jennings. This partial archive focuses on the 1984-1998 period; it gives an overview of the issues that occupied FidoNet users, from privacy concerns to popular culture. Note that .nws files can be read through an online file converter.

[BBS software archives](#)
This archive grew out of PC Micro BBS, which gathered utility software for BBS users and sysops. The archive largely focuses on 1990s software, but it also contains artworks and "how to" guides.

Scholarship

Brewster, Kathryn, and Bonnie Ruberg. "SURVIVORS: Archiving the History of Bulletin Board Systems and the AIDS Crisis." *First Monday* 25, no. 10 (2020).

This article focuses on one particular bulletin board system, active between 1987 and 1990 and dedicated to life with HIV. Exchanges on the BBS were preserved in print-out form, and the

authors consider how its changing media format – from computer to paper, from digital to analog – affects its continued life. Through a combination of queer theory and media history, this article uses the BBS to think about archives and precarity.

Cifor, Marika, and Claire McDonald. "'I Hope We Leave More of a Record': Radical Queer Care within and for the AIDS INFO BBS's Caregivers Mailing List." *Feminist Media Histories* 9, no. 1 (2023): 78–97.

This article focuses on a mailing list that emerged from a bulletin board system dedicated to information about AIDS. The mailing list gathered caregivers, and the article traces how, across thousands of e-mailed messages, a distinct model for technologized queer care emerged. The continued life of the mailing list and the BBS, even after both communication technologies fell out of use, is itself an example of this care.

Dame-Griff, Avery. *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet*. New York: NYU Press, 2023.

This book examines the transgender internet from its 1980s origins to the present. The first chapter, entitled "Dialing into the Revolution: The Bulletin Board System," focuses on BBSs. It describes how different gender communities (e.g., those interested in cross-dressing, those dedicated to queer activism, those oriented toward gender nonconformity – employed early computer networks that would bring them together) and into new visibility. The chapter considers what attracted users to BBSs as opposed to newsletters, highlighting anonymity, rapid asynchronous communication, and file sharing.

Delwiche, Aaron. "Early Social Computing: The Rise and Fall of the BBS Scene (1977–1995)." In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, edited by Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell, 35–52. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018.

This chapter presents a general overview of the the bulletin board system format's rise and fall, from asynchronous communication on local computers to interconnected systems that would eventually be replaced by the World Wide Web. The chapter connects different technological advances (whether hardware, such as better modems, or software, such as FidoNet, which made it possible to knit local BBSs into a global network) to social concerns and interests, from the emergence of the "hacker" figure to the popularity of pornography on BBSs.

Driscoll, Kevin. "Social Media's Dial-Up Roots." *IEEE Spectrum* 53, no. 11 (2016): 54–60.

This magazine-style article offers an accessible introduction to the culture of bulletin board systems, from its early beginnings to its blossoming in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This historical overview includes the development of FidoNet, which connected local systems into a more expansive network, and Echomail, which allowed all BBS users in the network to write to one another. The article underlines the "wacky and weird" aspects of BBS culture and mentions several specific cultural clusters, including religious BBSs. Now mostly forgotten, BBS culture turned the more formal and research-oriented internet into the public sphere we know today.

Driscoll, Kevin. "Thou Shalt Love Thy BBS": Distributed Experimentation in Community Moderation." In *Computer Network Histories: Hidden Streams from the Internet Past*, edited by Paolo Bory, Gianluigi Negro, and Gabriele Balbi, 15–34. Zürich, Germany: Chronos Verlag, 2019.

This chapter analyzes content moderation – a live issue on contemporary social media platforms – on bulletin board systems. Through an archive of how-to documents, legal advice, user policy agreements, and satirical essays, it examines a sample of moderation practices taken up by BBS sysops during the 1980s and 1990s. The analysis focuses on moments of contact between sysops and users, against the backdrop of increasing commercialization.

Driscoll, Kevin. *The Modem World: A Prehistory of Social Media*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022.

This monograph takes up the bulletin board system to offer an origin story for social media. While histories of the internet usually point to the military-academic complex or the entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley, a different history with the hobbyists who first developed social networks. An archive of BBS textfiles, oral histories, documentaries, and magazines reveals how dedicated enthusiasts pioneered solutions to the challenges that we now associate with social media platforms, from commercialization to community moderation. The last two chapters tackle two misconceptions about BBSs: that they were replaced (rather than extended or joined) by the web, and that they were *primarily* countercultural or liberatory.

Furman, Ivo. "Hi! Turkiye and Turkish BBS and Digital Cultures." In *The Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories*, edited by Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland, 209–24. New York: Routledge, 2017.

This article focuses on a 1990s BBS in Turkey, Hi! Türkiye or Hitnet. Based on FidoNet protocols, Hitnet connected Turkish BBSs that had been highly local before. Drawing on Hitnet correspondence logs held in a private archive, this article highlights a growing subculture of computer enthusiasts. The organizational roles these "coders" took on in physically maintaining Hitnet foreshadowed their key positions in, and influence over, Turkey's communication networks.

Liang, Li Shao, Lin Yi-Ren, and Arthur Hou-Ming Huang. "A Brief History of the Taiwanese Internet: The BBS Culture." In *The Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories*, edited by Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland, 182–96. New York: Routledge, 2017.

This chapter discusses development of the Taiwanese internet, to which the island's distinctive BBS culture was central. While text- and telnet-based BBS sites that characterized the 1980s and early 1990s have been replaced by web-based online forums in other countries, the BBS platform still enjoyed high popularity in Taiwan deep into the 2000s. This chapter attributes the endurance of BBSs in Taiwan to their origins in student communities and technical anchoring in academic networks, which have helped BBSs remain relatively autonomous – and important to social movements.

McIlwain, Charlton. "The Electronic Village Needs an Organizer." In *Black Software: The Internet & Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter*, 91–106. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019.

This chapter appears in a book about the Black radical tradition as it asserted itself in the computer revolution. It traces the development of AfroNet, FidoNet by and for Black folks. FidoNet was a network of BBSs that made it possible to call any BBS without incurring high phone bills – it began in the late 1980s and peaked in the early 1990s. AfroNet was a self-organized subset of this larger network; the chapter draws on oral histories, archived BBS posts, and Usenet messages to trace back how this network developed around careful organizers, who took on the work of collecting the names and phone numbers of Black sysops and spread the word about their boards through Usenet.

McKinney, Cait. "Printing the Network: AIDS Activism and Online Access in the 1980s." *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 32, no. 1 (2017): 7–17.

This article explores how these early BBS users extended access to these new computer networks by printing online information in newsletters. Their work bridged the sharing of text files over BBS – a novel-networked practice – with more traditional activist media tools familiar to readers trained in civil rights, homophile and feminist organizing. Through an analysis of digital-to-print practices in the Philadelphia-based Critical Path organization, the article demonstrates that HIV/AIDS activists approached new online networks as an equity issue shaped by their broader understandings of the structural violence performed by exclusion from good, up-to-date information.

Turner, Fred. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

This book follows the transformation of the computer, from a device for military bureaucracy to a tool for collaborative and even utopian liberation. The WELL, a San Francisco-based BBS, is a central part of this story. It was established by Steward Brand, an entrepreneur who first made waves by connecting different communes through his Whole Earth Catalog. The WELL brought together counterculturalists and technologists alike in imagining a virtual but decidedly alternative community to which computers would be central. This book provides a detailed account of the dynamics between users on one particular BBS and the larger history it charts – the move from computers as tied to mechanical conformity to computers as associated with communalism and a sense of moving social frontiers – is an important background to the BBS subculture, especially in its relation to hacking.

Woon, Chih Yuan. "'Protest Is Just a Click Away!': Responses to the 2003 Iraq War on a Bulletin Board System in China." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 1 (2011): 131–49.

This paper focuses on one influential Mandarin BBS in China, the Qiangguo Luntan, by critically analyzing the posted responses to a specific geopolitical event—the 2003 US-initiated war in Iraq. The lively discussions pertaining to post-9/11 global anxieties, (dis)order, and counterterror initiatives on QGLT demonstrate how interconnected Chinese communities are able to weave alternative viewpoints and shape antiwar consensus through the broad bandwidth of networked technology beyond the purview of territorially based governments.

Miscellaneous

[Documentary](#)
A hobbyist's delight, this freely accessible documentary aims to capture the BBS era.

[Essay](#)
This article considers how BBSs were abandoned. What does it mean to see a social network as a ruin?

[Magazines](#)
BBSing was a hobby, and hobbyists subscribed to magazines. One way to get a sense of the culture is to browse through these publications.

[Contemporary](#)
There are still people interested in BBSing today. Many of them gather on Reddit to share experiences and advertise their boards. For a particularly cool – and browser-accessible – example, see [A New Session](#).