Outpost

TNC Message Manager

Release Content Description
For Version 1.3

Version: 1.3
Date: November 2004

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Document

This Release Content Description document provides information about new or changed functionality that will be found in Outpost TNC Message Manager Release 1.3.

Existing functionality from the original release is not described here. For current information on Outpost, refer to the following documents:

Name	Release Date
Outpost TNC Message Manager User Guide, Version 1.2	May 2004

1.2 Organization

The information in this document is organized under the following sections:

- New Features. A new feature is a new capability that has not existed in any prior version of Outpost in any form.
- Enhancements. An enhancement is a change to an existing feature that further improves the performance or usability of the application. Enhancements include minor changes, internal changes (that may not be evident to the user, but contribute to improved supportability increased stability, or application performance) and bug fixes.
- Changes since Version 1.2. A list of the various capabilities that have been introduced in maintenance/defect releases since the v1.2 release.

2 New Features

"New Features" are changes introduced in Outpost that constitute a new capability usually requested by Outpost users to support the emergency response mission. The following New Features were implemented in version 1.3.

2.1 #48 Audio message arrival annunciation

A key feature of Outpost is the automatic interrogation and exchanging of messages with the BBS. This capability allows Outpost to operate in an unattended mode allowing the Control Operator to attend to other duties within the EOC. However, a periodic check of Outpost is still required to determine if a new message has arrived and requires attention.

This new feature adds the capability to select and play a .wav file every time a message arrives.

The settings are established at the Tools > Send/Receive Settings menu. The user can select to turn annunciation on or off, browse for a .wav file, and test it to determine if it is suitable. On pressing OK, the .wav file name is stored in the Outpost.ini file.

The test feature also confirms that the sound card is operating correctly. In the event that a sound card is not present, both the test (and during message annunciation at the time of a message arrival) will result in a "beep" being heard (essentially what happens today).

2.2 #245 Message Delivery and Read Receipts

Prior to the v1.3 release, Outpost was just another client operating in a BBS environment. Other BBS users could not tell whether an incoming message was originated using Winpack, Packterm, Hyperterm, Outpost, or some other terminal emulator program. In sort, Outpost's use was transparent and maintained a high level of message compatibility within the operating environment.

Several groups tell me they are now rolling out Outpost as their primary messaging client. This shift from a mixed packet client environment to an Outpost-only environment opens the door for Outpost to collaborate with other Outpost clients within a BBS Packet Network.

This new feature adds support for processing Message Delivery Receipt and Read Receipt requests. Receipts are short messages notifying the originator that their packet message was delivered or read.

This feature can be set up in 2 ways.

(i) From the Outpost Tools > Message Settings menu, the user can request a Delivery Receipt and/or Read Receipt for all messages they send.

(ii) From the Message form, the user can select a Delivery or Read Receipt for the message at the time of the message is created. This action also can override any global receipt settings previously established.

On detecting a Delivery Receipt request, Outpost will issue a short Delivery Receipt message during the same Send/Receive session in which the requesting message was received. This ensures a timely turn-around for these messages.

For Read Receipt requests, Outpost will create the Read Receipt message and send it during the next Send/Receive Session. Both receipt messages are very short one-liners made up of the date and time that the message was delivered or opened (read).

When the Delivery or Read Receipt messages are received back at the originating station, they are displayed in the In Tray. Both receipt messages will have the same subject line as the original message with the words "DELIVERED" or "READ" preceding the subject text.

Non-Outpost packet users will still be able to read these messages. However, they will see an additional set of characters (tags) at the beginning of each message that they can ignore or delete. Additionally, Non-Outpost packet users can also request a Delivery or Read Receipt from Outpost users by manually inserting the tags in their messages.

2.3   #261 Urgent Message Flag

While all messages sent during an emergency are important, some may be more important than others. At an EOC, incoming messages may be coming in from remote field or city stations with information on status or requests for assistance. Depending on the volume, sorting out the priorities of packet message traffic currently requires the receiving station to open, review, and disposition all messages.

This new feature allows the sending station to flag a message as Urgent.

This feature builds on the Tag processing implemented to support the Delivery and Read Receipt functionality outlined above.

This feature can be set from the Message form. The user can mark a message as URGENT by pressing the "Urg" button on the message form.

On sending the message, an URGENT Tag is added to the message text where it will be decoded at receiving station. When displayed at the receiving station, a new column on the main Outpost message list form will indicate that the message is urgent with Red text.

2.4   #319 Slot Time Send/Receive Initiation

The ability to automatically send and receive messages has been a capability with Outpost since its first release. Currently, an interval specified in minutes is selected that controls how often Outpost would initiate a Send/Receive Session.

For groups that are implementing an Outpost-only client environment, the next opportunity for collaboration is to improve channel utilization by minimizing packet collisions between stations that may occur during Send/Receive Sessions.

This new feature allows an Outpost client to initiate a Send/Receive Session based on selecting specific times (slots) during a 60-minute period.

The settings are established at the Tools > Send/Receive Settings menu. The Send/Receive Automation session has been re-written to present 1 of 3 initiation options:

(i)   No automatic initiation. The user manually initiates all Send/Receive Sessions from the Outpost main form.

(ii)   Interval Timing. The user selects the number of minutes between sessions, essentially what we do today.

(iii)   Slot Timing. The user can select up to 4 absolute times over a 60-minute period when the Send/Receive Session is initiated.

This feature offers a group of Outpost users with another means for collaboration. For instance, Station "A" may be assigned Send/Receive slots at 5 minutes past the hour, 20, 35, and 50 minutes. Station "B" may be assigned Send/Receive slots to occur 3 minutes later at 8 minutes, 23, 38, and 53. Station "C" at 12, 26, 41, and 56, and so-on. Once all PC times are synchronized (done manually), several stations could now occupy the channel with little or no collisions. As more stations are added, fewer slots per channel could be assigned.

While the above example begins to avoid collisions, I recognize that our BBS environments are fairly robust and can handle multiple connects at a time. With the goal of ensuring timely message delivery (frequency) and avoiding TNC timeouts (delays), determining the right slot assignments will take some experimenting.

For a small number of participating stations, using the Interval Time method may make more sense.

3 Enhancements

An enhancement is a change to an existing feature that further improves the application. Enhancements include minor changes, internal changes (that may not be evident to the user, but contribute to improved supportability increased stability, or application performance) and bug fixes

3.1 Message Handling

- #236: On the main Outpost message list form, all messages that have been Received AND are currently Unread will be displayed in **BOLD** text. Once opened, their listing is changed to unbolded text.

- #295: When saving a message with SaveAs, Outpost now sets the default file name to the current "Subject" string.

- #313: Supplements the drop-down menu by adding 3 buttons on the New Message Form to select the message type (Private, Bulletin, NTS).

- #323: Changes the default destination to allow the full address – category and route – to be entered.

- #324: When replying to a forwarded message or forwarding a replied-to message, all previously entered RE:'s and FW:'s found on the subject line are removed.

3.2 Send/Receive Changes

- #306, #307: Adds an option to allow immediate Send/Receive initiation on completion and validation of a new message. Once this option is set and the user presses Send from the Message form, a Send/Receive Session is run (send and retrieve) based on current retrieval options. This option does not alter any other Send/Receive initiation options or timing parameters that may also be selected.

- #311: Changes the interval timing option from a pre-defined list of time intervals (was 1 to 60 minutes) to a fill-in-the-blank option. Interval times can now range from 1 to 999 minutes (about 16 hours, 40 minutes).

- #312: Adds an option to not download bulletins that you wrote and initiated from your station.

- #318: Increase the number of Bulletin Filters from 3 to 5.

- #328: Changes the Interval Timer from relative time counter to using absolute time. Additionally, a count-down timer has been added to the main Outpost form (status line, bottom right, next to the Current Time) that, when either the Interval Time or Slot time options are selected, will count down the seconds to the next Send/Receive Session.

- #332: Removes all Line Feed Characters from all messages transmitted, regardless of the BBS. Currently, this feature is only turned on when the MSYS BBS option is selected.

- #335: Adds support for AEA 232 family of TNCs for the "18-Nov-04" date format.

3.3 TNC, BBS Handling

▪ #316: In the event there is an update to Outpost and the TNC data file changes, Outpost now checks if the file needs replacement. This is consistent with how we work with the BBS Data file.

▪ #325: When the MSYS BBS option is selected, the default List Filtered command is changed from "L>" to "L".

▪ #337: Changes the default Comm Setting for Handshaking from NONE to RTS/CTS (hardware handshaking).

3.4 Interactive Packet Enhancements

▪ #198: Automatically attempts to open the comm. port to the TNC when you begin typing in the Interactive Packet Window (IPW). You can still manually connect by pressing the Connect button.

▪ #201: Add capability to save an IPW transaction to a message form.

▪ #327: Corrects a problem where the Select All menu option did not select all the text in the IPW window.

3.5 Directory Settings

▪ #336: If a directory name is entered and does not exist, Outpost will now prompt you to see if you want to create it.

4 Changes since Version 1.2

The following is the list of changes that were released as part of the
Maintenance releases that followed the release of Outpost v1.2.

4.1   Release 1.2.1

▪ #173: Believed to have corrected the problem with a TNC set up with the
  comm. port configuration of BBBB-7-E-1. This was initially reported as a
  problem with the MFG-1274 TNC. This has not been confirmed.

▪ #179: Eliminated the control characters (little square boxes) displayed in the
  TNC Session Window. .

▪ #293: Resolved the Runtime Error when no printer was configured into the
  system. Previously, the user would get a Runtime Error 484 "Problem
  getting printer info from the system. Make sure the printer is set up
  correctly".

▪ #294: Resolved the problem where the Send/Receive Session that spans
  midnight would write the session to 2 different files. Now, it is written to
  the same file.

▪ #297: Added a log option to turn on binary trace of the TNC transactions
  with the BBS. This option should used for Debugging only, and should
  NOT be left on during normal operation because of the large volume of data
  that could be generated and logged.

▪ #298: Enhances the use of the auto-msg ID on subject line. Moves the
  cursor to immediately after the text, not in front of it.

▪ #299: Checks for, notifies the user, and rejects the situation when the user
  enters a Bulletin with an address > 6 characters. Bulletin addresses need to
  be 6 or less characters.

▪ #300: Added Status Bar to Message windows to report on status of issue
  #299.

▪ #301: Added the Sent Date to the "original message" header for Replied or
  Forwarded messages.

▪ #302: Added format detection for the SV1AIZ BBS msg list format. While
  the code is there, the requester reports the SV1AIZ BBS software was not
  going to meet their need form them to pursue.

4.2   Release 1.2.2

▪ #303: Add a S/R Session Dump. This logging option essentially dumps the
  text that is displayed in the Send/Receive Session window. This is good for
  troubleshooting.

4.3   Release 1.2.4

▪ #315: While sending maintenance releases, this feature checks if the
  BbsInfo file is the wrong size (corrupt or the program was updated), and
  prompts to replace it. All BBS configurations need to be manually set up
  again.

4.4 Release 1.2.5

- #309: Resolves the problem with the MSYS BBS where Outpost was not capturing the Message Subject correctly. Added separate prompt detection for the send, subject, and message.

- #310: Corrected the situation with BBS or TNC configurations where it would not perform the validation if the configuration was updated.

- #314: Change Session Dump to output to a single file, name changes at midnight. Additional changes in support of #303 above.

- #317: Corrected the situation with MSYS BBS where bulletins written on single line spaces were returned from the BBS double spaced. Removed embedded LFs from all data sent to MSYS BBSs.

5 Outstanding Requests

As of this writing, there are several outstanding requests – enhancements and defects – that may/or may not be resolved by the time of the v1.3 release. These are listed below.

5.1   Enhancements

▪ #106: Software handshaking (Xon/Xoff) is not available. So far, the use of Hardware (RTS/CTS) handshaking is sufficient. Currently, this is assessed as a low priority enhancement request.

▪ #139: Implement Binary Attachments. Currently, this is assessed as a low priority enhancement request.

▪ #240: Add support for the AGW Packet Engine. This has been a very popular request and hopefully will be the next area to be developed.

▪ #241: Add an on-line Help subsystem. Continues to be a good idea, just need to break down and spend the $$$ to buy a Help Builder package.

▪ #270: Delete BBS header and trailer text from a message. Most all BBSs add their own from, to, etc header lines. This option will allow the user to decide if they want to strip them from a message being displayed.

▪ #291. Port a stripped down version of Outpost to Pocket PC. Actually, more than one individual has asked about this. This is a lower request and will follow the build-out of PC-based functionality.

▪ #305: Make the In-Box and Out-Box sort order stay as previous set from run to run. Depending on how the 1.3 testing goes, this may make it into this release, or be part of one of the maintenance releases that inevitably will be required.

▪ #320: Need the capability to connect to a BBS through a KA node. Currently, there is only one requester on this. If this was a big enough issue, this could make it as part of the next release.

5.2   Defects

▪ #32: Outpost does not respond correctly to strings that match a prompt string that are embedded in the message other than at the end of the buffer. This is a problem when (i) the BBS commands are short and not unique (ie: MSYS' BBS prompt is ">") and (ii) message originators include these characters in the body of the message.

PLAN: waiting for feedback from users on how well they can address through better training.

▪ #334: MSYS route and date does not show up correctly in the OUTPOST message list form. When a route is included, it shows up in the Date Field. Also, the date field is not processed correctly.