

ALLIANCE.TXT

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>>                                <<
>>          ALL YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT      <<
>>          ALLIANCE TELECONFERENCING      <<
>>          (but were afraid to ask)      <<
>>                                <<
>>          by Shadow 2600      <<
>>                                <<
>>                                <<
>>          as published in 2600 magazine May 1985 page 2-X      <<
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Information provided by Alliance Telconferencing, the Demon, Elric Bloodaxe, Forest Ranger, John Doe, Keymaster, Market Navagation Inc., the Serpent, Shooting Shark, Telcom.ARPA, Joe Turner and the members of the official BBS of 2600 magazine: the Private Sector BBS.

>>>WHAT IS ALLIANCE

Alliance Teleconferencing Service is a bridging service offering teleconferencing to business's. A conference merely is several phone lines tied together allowing people to talk to many locations at once. Alliance is owned by AT&T Communications. Alliance uses #4 ESS's to control its conference. According to Alliance, conferences can be originated and controlled from most locations in the United States. The service started only available in 202, but now has been spreading throughout the country. One thing to remember is that even in the same area code some Central Offices will allow access, and others may not. Conferees can be from anywhere dialable by AT&T, including international. Alliance can be reached at 1-800-544-6363 for social engineering or for the setting up conferences in locations that cannot access 0-700's. Using this the conference can be billed to a Calling Card or to a third number.

Alliance themselves say the cost of a teleconference is 25 cents a line per minute, as well as the cost of a direct dialed call for each of the locations from the conference site. A monitoring Alliance operator costs an additional \$3 an hour. Thus, rumors of \$6,000 conference bills seem a little exaggerated. However, conferences can last for several days and can have several international participants, thus running the bill up.

>>>CONFERENCE NUMBERS

Dialing 0-700-456-X00N will result in "This is Alliance

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Teleconferencing in [location]. You may dial during the announcement for faster setup." The main conference numbers are -100X and -200X. The locations indicated by the X (as given by Alliance and the logon recordings) are 1 being Los Angeles, 2 being Chicago, 3 being White Plains New York, and 4 being Dallas. 0 gets you the conference site closest to you. The -100X lines only accept up to 21 conferees, and usually don't allow international dialing. The other conference numbers allow up to 59 lines when available as the lines have to be apportioned between the various conferences going at the site, and also allow international dialing. According to Alliance themselves -200X are graphic conferences, -100X allows up to 59 conferees, and both always allow international dialing. However, actual exploration doesn't bear these out.

Alliance doesn't seem to admit that -300X conference (X=0 to 2, all located in Chicago, Illinois) numbers even exist. These conferences announce that they are graphic, and they seem to bear this out. They can also be handled as an audio conference. The only difference is that it asks when adding conferees whether the location is graphics (hit 4) or audio (hit 5). Choose audio. These tend most often to allow the passing of control, dialing of international calls, and also less used than the other lines.

Dialng 0-700-456-150X or -250X results in an modem connect sounding tone, followed by "You have reached Bell System Teleconferencing Service's Special Set for testing and measurement. Please enter your service code [3 digits] or wait for instructions." Shooting Shark first found the -150N and -250N conferences. These cannot be reached from most area codes, resulting instead in a "The number you have dialed cannot be reached from your calling area" just as if it were an 800 number not reachable from your calling area. The onnly one I know that does get trough is 201 (Northern New Jersey. The X goes from 0 to 4, just like the normal -100X and -200X conferences. There is no -350X series. I haven't as of yet figured out the "service code." This can be used as a normal conference, except that it requires you to confirm your choice by voice, and each section is separated by those modem connect sounding tones. Rumors are that this is the upcoming new conference system, which is supposed to add features such as the deletion of conferees. However, any keypress I have tried other than 1, 6, or 9 (the normal controls) results in a dire warning telling me "Please wait for an Alliance operator to come to your assistance." I haven't yet stuck around long enough to find out what "assistance" means. Alliance won't admit these exist, and therefore the -150X and -250X warrent much further and deeper investigation.

Alliance can be reached by other means. Blue boxing to 213-080-0123 and other direct routing to the Alliance machines no longer seems to work. However, box routing to 0-700-456-N00X does work. PBX's in

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conference country are often used to call conferences. Merely dial a PBX's inward access line, enter the access code, dial an outside line, and then either touch tone 0-700-456-N00X yourself, or dial 0 and get the operator to do it for you. Sometimes they insist that the 0-700 SAC doesn't exist, but just remain firm and just tell them to try it. Social engineering also works, just call an operator and try to convince her to KP+0-700-456-1000+ST and position release, after getting her to believe you are maintainance/whatever. Getting a direct drop on an inward operator increases the chance of succeeding, such as by dialing 0-959-1211 from a pay phone (BIOC Agent 003's Basic Telcom VI, discovered by Karl Marx) Another trick suggested by Shooting Shark is to use a white boxable phone (see 2600 page I-40, July 1984) or even an ATM help line or a hotel phone in an airport (as in the April 1985 2600, Page II-19) Since when arranging a conference you really dont need to speak, just set up a conference normally, and when done call another payphone nearby, pass control, and continue. The conference will still be charged to the first pay phone.

Several techniques are available to both improve the quality of the call. Since the call may be going through up to several extenders to reach a non-800 PBX, and from there to Alliance, the signal quality can get quite poor. A technique that helps to keep Alliance from knowing your number is to call Alliance via a PBX, add in the lower end of a loop, pass control to it, and then call the high end. A variation on this technique is to call your other line or a payphone next to you, or even, if you have call waiting, to call yourself again, pass control to yourself (it works), and then hang up the original call. All these techniques may not always work, as sometimes Alliance refuses to pass control, as mentioned above.

>>>CONFERENCE CONTROLS

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Alliance is extremely user friendly, as it was designed for businessmen. Help messages abound, and all you need to do is to follow their directions, but here is a brief going over of the commands. After the e must apportioned. To change your choice dial a *, or to go onward a hit #. To add a number while in control mode dial 1+ the phone number. To dial international dial 1 + 011 + the phone number. Passing control can be done by dialing 6 + plus the number of the person on the conference you wish to pass control. Then by hitting a # you rejoin the conference, or by just hanging up you leave. When in the conference dialing a # will return you to control mode.

When conferees hang up, a "dee-doot" will be heard. The controller also hears the phone number of person who left. Hitting the # immediately calls the departed back. There is no way to drop people

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from conference other then getting a conference operator to do it or by blowing 2600 hrtz down the line. However, this will drop each and every person on a trunk using in-band signaling. Hitting a 0 in control mode summons a conference operator, however, she/he takes control before he/she answers, so only do this when you know what you are doing. Hitting a 9 in control mode requests a "silent attendant listener line." According to the Demon this option allows the controller to hear the tones and phone numbers of people hanging up while he is in control mode. Conference op's claim this function is for secretaries and such to listen to, but not participate in, conferences for note taking purposes.

If these instrustions sound confusing, don't worry. Remember, the entire conference is accompaniied by extremely user friendly messages. Recently, on weekends or late night, many telcom hobbyists have had problems with transferring control, getting instead a recording "Not available at this time". Also, similarly, international dialing is sometimes unavailable. Generally -300X does this less often, then -200X next.

>>>DANGERS

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One must always be prepared for listeners whenever one conferences. If one is discussing "questionable" matters on a conference, last names and phone numbers should NEVER be given out. One of your fellow telcom hobbyists might be a FBI agent, or sometimes a conference operator listens in conferences which sound "suspicious." They do not do this usually, as Alliance usually carries business calls (you have to remember this folks!), and thus doesn't expect fraudulent calls. Sure ways to interest a op is to have either all the conferees but one or only just the controller hang up. When a controller hangs up the conference op takes control and attempts to let the the former controller "regain his conference" by calling him at home. Also, controllers who spend long amounts of time in control mode, resulting in everyone else hanging up, arouses the attention of the op. The number which orginally started the conference can hang up though, after passing control, but the conference will still be billed to it.

On weekends Alliance ops tend to be more prying, and often on weekends or late nights one cannot pass control or call international. One op to particulary look out for is Jack Rae who works after 8 PM on weeknights at -1001 (LA). If you get a very sure person taking control and advising you to get off the conference NOW, do it. There has been many stories of him forcibly disconnecting conferees and calling them later at home. My only run in with him ended up with me unable to hang up on the conference (every time I picked up the phone I got the conference) for about one hour. Remember, once Alliance op takes

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control, when you "bailout" by hanging up, your phone number comes through loud and clear. Only deal with conference operators when you know what you are doing. However, some of them have been known to talk with conferees about Alliance and telcom in general.

Dangers of fraudulently started conferences seem to be slight. The only person I knew who got caught was forced to pay for a phone call from Dallas (where the conference was started) to his home in California. Stories of phreaks being forced to pay \$6,000 seem a little exaggerated, especially considering the cost of a conference. This is not to say it is safe, but it definitely is safer than using 950's fraudulently. Even phreaks whom set up several conferences a night for months, including the harassment of DA operators, haven't been caught. However, I nor 2600 suggests you attempt a fraudulent conference. Even merely permitting yourself to be added to a fraudulent conference is enough for prosecution according to AT&T. One thing that prevents a lot of this investigation is that most fraudulent conferences are set up with PBX's, and thus the prosecution lies with the owners of the PBX, and AT&T isn't even involved. For this reason, PBX's often are traced.

Another risk is that all numbers dialed are recorded by Alliance, even misdials. The numbers dialed are all printed out and sent to a vault at the Chicago Bell Test Labs for storage for their records. In addition,, conferences are randomly taped and monitored for fraud. It would seem safer to use Alliance to call an extender, and then dial out from there, as although Alliance records all numbers dialed, logically they probably only pay attention to numbers they intend to act on, i.e. add to the conference. The subsequent use of a extender is a matter of investigation by another company, and don't forget AT&T and the extender companies are competitors, and thus they wouldn't go out of their ways to cooperate.

>>>STUNTS

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Often when a conference starts to slow down, people start suggesting various stunts to liven things up. One word of warning, most of these techniques would be construed as harassment, and thus are illegal. One of the most common used is adding a multitude of Directory Assistance operators. Listening to them ask each other "What city please?" and then arguing about who belongs on the line is extremely humorous. Confusion reigns when you attempt to get them to look up a number. Some DA's have had this done so many times that they realize that this is a conference and will either hang up immediately or will threaten you with taking over your conference. Remember, only the conference operator can take over a conference, so most of these threats are ineffectual. When any of them give a hard time, just ask to speak to their supervisor, as this usually

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adds even more confusion. Similar things can be done with business offices, repair service ("sir, I'm getting all this cross talk on my line" "no, its my line." ad infinitum) telex ops, and other phone company personnel. Also, computer compaines or other corporate bureaucracies have similar chaos potential. One interesting thing to try is to pose as a phone company employee for social engineering purposes. However, most phreaks fail to realize that "TSPS maintainence" or "Bell Security" gets a little too repitious and suspicion arousing due to their over-heavy use.

Generally, for courtesy's sake, one should call people who generally expect to get weird calls at odd hours, and are often bored at their jobs. Radio station DJ's often enjoy this, as do hotel operators and bell boys. Going international often increases the fascination with conferences. Several hotel ops around the world expect and look forward to conferences calling them during the dull early morning hours, and the conferences sometimes place calls for them in appreciation. Military bases are another good site, as are unattended payphones. Sometimes people at random are called up. It often is impossible to convince people that they ARE getting a conference call, as they twist up some impossible theory to explain 15 chotic people speaking at once. Even President Reagan (2600 I-23 April 1984) and other "celebraties" have been attempted to be reached by conferences. Often telling their secretaries that this is a conference call can arouse their curiosity enough to come on line. A common statement is "You damn computer hackers are so smart to have figured this out." Little do they know how simple it is, and it also shows how people and the mass media constantly misidentify anything mildly out of the ordinary as the fault of computer's influence on people. (sorry about the side digression)

Remember that when adding recordings or extenders to a conference that they generally will not hang up. Similarly, people added can't be forcibly disconnected without the conference operator's help, and can stay on as long as they want, monitoring or taking notes. Only way to rid a conference of these is to blast 2600 down the line, with the results predicted above (I ALWAYS get dropped by 2600 blasts) When adding "dangerous" people such as FBI agents or informants the use of three way calling by one of the conferees is generally more intelligent, as it permits the caller to forcibly drop them.

Many of these stunts mentioned are plain childish, rude, and unthoughtful to others. Many of these definately would count as harassment. Frequent resortation to these often arouses the suspicious curosity of Alliance ops. Continual use of these may end up in a general tightening up of security in Alliance, not due to fraudulent calls, but from complaints. Use in extreme moderation.

>>>OTHER CONFERENCES

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ps are rare, but do exist. Sometimes businesses connect several phone lines together to form a conference. One of the most famous was the ULCA one at 213-206-2810 to -2817 as last known. One up as of the writing of this article is at 602-976-0770 to -0777. Another conferencing system is City Conference in Oakland and San Francisco. Similar to this is a system called Phone-a-Friend in Worcester, MA at (617) 550-5000 (only reachable from within Worcester). I have also heard of others operated by Pacific Bell in California and other telco's elsewhere. These services should soon spread soon to more cities as local telco's search for more revenues. (what? you thought it was free?)

Every once and a while conferences are set up in the old historical phreaking mold on PBX switchboards or on telephone switching equipment by renegade linemen and the like. One of the most historic of these was the "2111" conference" which was arranged through an unused telex test-board trunk in a 4A switching machine in Vancouver Canada. For several months phone phreaks could MF via a blue box 604 (Vancouver's area code) then 2111 (code for telex testing board) to reach phreaks and other telcom hobbyists around the world. Sometimes conferences set up by this method are accessible via normal phone lines. These conferences, by their very nature of actual adjustment of switching equipment, are rare.

Several companies offer alternate bridging services, otherwise known as conferences. These all claim they have higher quality than Alliance. They control the conference themselves "so you can just get down to business without worrying about details." You can ask them to leave, but then there is no one in control of the conference. Generally they offer smaller conferences than Alliance's 59 (Market Navigation's limit is 19) They all charge considerably more than AT&T (Market Navigation Inc. quoted a rate as \$195 per hour for a 12 person conference plus the cost of the dialed phone calls) You generally have to set up conferences ahead of time. They all will send a bill to your company, and some will allow the use of a credit card instead. Generally you have to book ahead of time. Examples of these independent firms are Darome Connection (203-797-1300), Market Navigation Inc (914-365-0123) and Telesession. The numbers are for setting up conferences, although you can social engineer them as well.

>>>CONCLUSION

Basically, conferenceing, even fraudulently, is one of the safest ways to get in contact with other telcom hobbyists, by its track record of busts. They are very few and far between. Several times Alliance operators have dropped in on conferences and carried on conversations with the

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participants. Much of the information in this article was picked up from these sources. Often one hear's the common comment of many telcom corporations that "they are using us as a tax writeoff," however, how long can they keep taking losses in this post-divestiture age of telco competition. Expect in the near future to see other telcom companies such as ITT, MCI, and GTE Sprint get into the act, as conferences are really pretty cheap to set up and aren't that technically exotic. Telcom hobbyists can get together to pick each others brains for info, and starters can learn the ropes in the presence of several more experienced phreaks. Also, just normal socializing with people all over the country is fun, especially when you realize you probablly never would have met them otherwise, and probably never see them. In order to join a conference try calling someone on it who has call waiting or two phone lines, as he can relay to the controller that you want to be added. Conferenceing is all in all an excellent way to communicate with the telcom community at large, when in moderation. Use, don't abuse.

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