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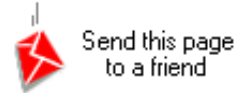
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Search the Web:**FEATURE****Avina Lobo**

If you're a seasoned Net user, 'smileys' or emoticons like :-) or :- (would probably be a regular part of your lingo while chatting or emailing. As would acronyms like BRB (Be Right Back), A/S/L, (Age/Sex/Location) LOL (Laugh Out Loud) or even your own version of 'Net shorthand' when you're just too tired to type.

However to a newbie using a chat room or an instant messenger for the first time, this could seem like a strange sort of online code language.

It's really just an ingenious way of using ASCII characters on your keyboard to express your emotions - a sort of 'Net body language' in a medium that uses just text for communication. An added benefit -- You save on Net time.

The smiley made its first appearance in 1982 on a Carnegie Mellon University bulletin board in a post by Robert Fahlman. Annoyed by misunderstandings sparked off by wisecracks, Fahlman suggested the use of a colon and a parenthesis :-) to accompany sarcasm so that people wouldn't take it seriously.

Twenty years on, [smileys](#), now called emoticons, have caught on like wildfire and are found in chat rooms, forums, email -- almost every means of communication online.

While speaking in person, facial expressions convey our state of mind or emotion. Online however, there's no way of telling whether a statement is meant to be taken seriously or in jest.

A simple ;-) helps clear the air.

Many, like Roopa Sukumaran, find emoticons an irreplaceable part of chatting. "A smiley can help take the edge off a sharp statement that one sometimes makes," she says, adding that they're also useful to 'fill gaps' when she has nothing to say.

Says Preeti K, a media executive: "Acronyms and Net shorthand really help me save time especially when I'm chatting with three or more people simultaneously. She agrees that emoticons help prevent misunderstandings.

Over time, emoticons have gone beyond just happy and sad faces to convey an entire range of emotions. While sites like [NetLingo.com](#) contain some of the more commonly used ones, the ['Unofficial Smiley Dictionary'](#) includes midget smileys (without noses) and mega smileys.

To find an emoticon for every mood, visit [The Smiley Dictionary](#), which has a searchable database for emoticons and graphical smileys. They also have smiley egreetings, fonts and mouse pointers.

As emoticons get more [creative](#), the only rule is: The whackier the better. You can find [everything](#) from Christmas emoticons, ASCII Marge Simpson and Batman emoticons to those conveying bizarre situations like [#\(,%/\)](#) (Slept too long on one side with no time to wash hair) or [!*|:-\(\)](#) (Hit by a baseball bat)!

Users adapt emoticons until they become a different 'dialect' of Net lingo. The Japanese have devised their own version called [Kao-moji](#). Different from sideways-tilted emoticons created by characters on QWERTY keyboards, Japanese emoticons are straight up like this [\(^o^\)](#) and are created with the various characters or kanjis on a Japanese keyboard.

Graphical emoticons are being used widely in chat rooms, forums, and IM clients like [Yahoo!](#), [Rediff Bol](#) and [MSN](#). You can even [add them](#) to your email or Web site, or use them in forums. MSN has cute little beer mugs, moons and stars, which have been christened '[Genicons](#)'.

On your next visit to a chat room, make some noise using audio emoticons: Instead of displaying an image, they play a sound like *meow* or a *slap*.

JLT ;)

Acronyms too have gone through their own transition from LOL, FYI and BTW to IYKWIMAITYD (if you know what I mean and I think you do) and 'YTTFATCCSH' (yours till the desert sands freeze and the camels come skating home)!

"I usually stick to common ones like LOL, GTG, GN, GM, BTW as not too many people are familiar with others," says Roopa, who uses ones like HHOK, BTWBO, AFAIC and WGAARA, WGAFA with a clutch of friends who know what she means. She adds, "My favourite is BTSOM!" Puzzled? Decode these at [The Acronym Database](#).

Though there are several acronym databases full of standard [Net shorthand](#), let your imagination run wild and create your own.

Are the days of emoticons and Net shorthand numbered because of voice chat, Web Cams and videoconferencing? Will they be nothing more than creative bits of ASCII text?

Linguists like [Naomi Baron](#) certainly think so and predict abbreviations will replace emoticons.

Yet, though Web Cams and voice chat have been around for quite a while, text is still the preferred medium of online communication.

And as long as text is still around, your emoticons aren't going anywhere!

Brush up your emoticons and Net shorthand!

Want in on the 'code language' that's liberally added to online conversations? Read up on the commonly used emoticons on [NetLingo.com](#) or [Emoticons 101](#).

Once you're acquainted with a few emoticons and abbreviations, go forth and use. There is no real netiquette on emoticon usage, but try not to overdo it. Stick to a few, every couple of lines.

And, on public forums with people you don't know very well, avoid using unfamiliar emoticons and acronyms that may not be understood.

Also Read:

-- [Think before you type](#)

-- [Dr Know on chat lingo](#)
-- [RediffSearch: Emoticons](#)

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