

BulkRate 2.5.2

Welcome to BulkRate 2.5.2. This document contains important info not included in the manual.

BulkRate is an offline reader for FirstClass BBSs that runs on the Macintosh. It can capture messages for offline reading and replying, and can automatically retrieve attached files for you. BulkRate is shareware - \$25 US.

Shareware payments are now handled via Kagi. Use the Register program included with BulkRate, or register via the World-Wide-Web: <<http://kagi.direct.net/cgi-bin/register1.cgi?IH>>

If you re-upload BulkRate to other BBSs or services, please include all the files that came with it, especially the documentation.

Send bug reports or suggestions to greg_neagle@kagi.com or to the OneNet BulkRate conference.

Note that my e-mail address has changed.

BulkRate 2.5 adds support for TCP/IP connections to FirstClass servers, and in addition can make use of any available serial port for "normal" modem connections - even PC Card modems.

Version 2.5.2 notes

- Fixed some more date/time display problems that occurred with certain non-US date formats.
- Fixed a bug in the file transfer routines.
- Added a delay between BBSs when calling multiple BBSs with a script - this is the same as the redial delay.
- Fixed a recurring bug that occurred when BulkRate was waiting for certain responses from the server; one occasional symptom of this bug was a "Could not confirm message was sent" error.
- Increased the time BulkRate will wait while trying to establish a TCP connection.
- Other miscellaneous fixes.

Version history:

•• Changes in version 2.5.1 ••

BulkRate 2.5.1 was written to fix some problems with using BulkRate with FirstClass 3.5 Servers.

Two items have been addressed:

- 1) Failure while setting Preferences soon after log on. This was (mostly) fixed in BulkRate 2.5 (final), but there were still occasions in which it might fail. This version fixes that.
- 2) File transfers with a 3.5 Server. With BulkRate 2.5, downloads would use 128 byte blocks, affecting performance, and uploads simply didn't work at all. Some fixes have been put in place for these. See my notes below.

Additionally:

- The Palette should be more legible on black and white monitors.
- I fixed a problem with the Speech menu becoming corrupted if the quit process was cancelled.

Notes:

1) The Preferences setting problem was caused by a new option in the terminal settings command in FirstClass Server 3.5. This option allows one to choose 8-bit character mapping. BulkRate 2.5 and 2.5.1 recognize and take advantage of that setting, so it is now possible to send and receive extended characters from BulkRate when connected to a 3.5 server. The method I used to detect the new option in BulkRate 2.5 failed if the server was a bit slow to respond; 2.5.1's method should be more robust.

2) FirstClass Server 3.5 introduced a variety of problems with file transfers. First, CLUI commands that selected XModem1K file transfers under earlier versions of the server instead selected XModem-128 file transfers under Server 3.5. This accounts for the small block size on downloads, and the failure on uploads - BulkRate was sending 1024 byte blocks, but FC Server was expecting 128 byte blocks. (A properly written XModem protocol should have been able to deal with this, but as we'll see, SoftArc's file transfer protocol protocols are not necessarily written to spec.) A new wrinkle in Server 3.5 was that XModem uploads fail to capture the filename (try it yourself using ZTerm to see). So I decided to change to YModem uploads, since YModem is designed to explicitly send the filename (XModem is not). YModem is also a batch protocol, so I re-wrote the send routines to send multiple file attachments as a single batch transfer. Big mistake on my part. It turns out that FirstClass Server's YModem routines don't support batch transfers! This is incredible, since that is one of the main differences between YModem and XModem. So, back to the drawing board. A little more experimentation and I finally got everything to work; but the result is that BulkRate sends files with a hybrid XModem/YModem protocol - not really adhering to the standard implementation of either protocol. I continue to feel justified in not trying to implement ZModem transfers - if SoftArc's implementation of the relatively simple YModem protocol is not standard, I cannot even begin to guess what pitfalls await in SoftArc's implementation of ZModem, a far more complex protocol. I've seen enough oddities when using the ZModem protocol via ZTerm to make me wary of the whole thing.

Another issue remains. In my experience at least, under certain combinations of servers and connection methods, XModem1K downloads simply don't work - it appears the server never begins to send the file. Previously I tried to keep track of which conditions caused XModem1K to fail and in those circumstances, substitute XModem-128 transfers. With the release of the 3.5 server, I've decided to take a different approach, since I haven't been able to tell for certain how the 3.5 server changes things. With BulkRate 2.5.1, I've decided to let the user make the appropriate adjustments to the file transfer block size. Default is 1024 byte blocks, but if those don't work with a certain server and/or connection, the user can select 128 bytes block transfers to be used. This adjustment can be made in the File transfer settings window.

•• Changes in version 2.5 (final) ••

Fixed a problem with version 3.5 servers that caused an "Error while setting preferences".

"Other" item in the (font) Size submenu now works again.

Choosing "Mark as Unread" from the Mail menu now works again when an Incoming message is frontmost.

More timing changes when sending messages.

Small tweak to TCP routines to fix one potential cause of a crash.

Fixed a problem with window titles of Incoming messages under non-US date systems. (same fix as in 2.5b6 message list, but extended to the window title)

•• Changes in version 2.5b6 ••

Made some changes to TCP/IP routines that should improve reliability.

Added compatibility with the upcoming FC Server 3.5 version of the CLUI (assuming it is the same as the current CLUI on SoftArc Online).

Added (in Service setup->Exchange settings) the ability to change the size at which outgoing messages will be divided into multiple parts; feel free to set this as high as 32000. If a sending a large message causes the CLUI message editor to crash, you should then lower the number to less than the character count at which the crash occurred. I suspect this

change will turn out to be a support headache for me, but we'll see.

Cosmetic changes to the Service settings windows for consistency.

Another tweak to the incoming message list display to better accommodate international date formats.

"Mark as unread" will now toggle the read/unread flag if all messages in a selection are either read or unread; otherwise it simply marks as unread. This is the same as FirstClass Client's behavior.

Speech Manager support added.

•• Changes in version 2.5b5 ••

Fixed a bug introduced in 2.5b4 that sometimes caused the "Delete mail on server" routine to enter an endless loop.

When connected via a logon script, BulkRate now attempts all downloads using XModem-128 instead of XModem-1K. Apparently the FirstClass CLUI implementation of XModem-1K is broken under more than just TCP/IP connections...

File requests no longer truncate the file list at 255 characters.

"Reply all" no longer truncates the copied To and cc lists at 255 characters. (In the case of replying to spam, this could be a bad thing, but user beware...)

•• Changes in version 2.5b4 ••

More changes in timeouts, again, to try to fix the "timeout occurred while waiting for message sent confirmation" problem that occurs with some FirstClass Servers, especially Windows NT based servers.

Fixed a sorting problem in the Address Book. (Sorting was case sensitive) (Broken in 2.5b1)

Fixed arrow key behavior in outgoing messages. (Broken in 2.5b1)

Fixed a problem in BulkRate scripts that led to "Invalid or missing service file" errors. (Broken in 2.5b1)

Fixed a problem with scripts that contained multiple services and one or more services had multiple access numbers; this problem caused the services to be exchanged with several times rather than just once per script.

Fixed a problem where an error during the setting of FirstClass preferences could cause BulkRate to idle indefinitely; until the user clicked on "Cancel".

Cleaned up window activations to eliminate some of the flashing.

•• Changes in version 2.5b3 ••

Another attempt to fix the "timeout occurred while waiting for message sent confirmation" problem that occurs with some FirstClass Servers, especially Windows NT based servers.

Fixed a problem with downloading files whose filename ends in a question mark.

Quoting preferences should now be properly remembered again (broken in 2.5b1).

•• Changes in version 2.5b2 ••

I had reports of crashes with BulkRate 2.5b1 on SE/30s. I don't have an SE/30, but I do have a Mac Plus, and BulkRate 2.5b1 did crash on the Plus. 2.5b2 appears to run fine on a Mac Plus running System 6.0.4 and a PowerMac 7500/100

running System 7.5.3 (My main development machine). I hope that means it will behave on most if not all the machines in between.

2.5b1 refused to upload attached files. Fixed.

It was impossible to enter multiple phone numbers in the Connection settings in 2.5b1. Fixed now.

2.5b1 incorrectly displayed dates and times in some international formats (it did fine with the standard US date format). This has been fixed.

There still seems to be a strange occasional problem that results in a "File not open error" which is not fatal, but causes the current window to display garbage. I'm still trying to reproduce this one reliably so I can fix it. Closing the window will allow you to continue normally in most cases.

•• New in version 2.5b1 ••

BulkRate 2.5b1 adds the ability to connect over a TCP/IP network. The main Service window and the Service settings dialogs have been changed to allow you to enter TCP/IP information.

To configure a Service file to use a TCP connection, choose "Service setup" under the Service menu.

Under "Connect via:" select TCP/IP.

In the TCP/IP section, enter the TCP/IP host name under "Connect to:", and the appropriate port number under "Port:". Typically the port number is 3000 or 3004.

TCP Caveats:

Because of the network overhead, TCP connections over a modem are slower than "straight" modem connections - so mail exchanges will run more slowly. Worse, the already-slow FC CLUI message editor gets even slower under a TCP/IP connection, so sending messages will be even slower than normal.

The FirstClass CLUI appears to have yet another bug - XModem1K downloads refuse to work under a TCP/IP connection, so BulkRate steps down to a XModem-128 file transfer. Uploads still work with 1K blocks.

If your TCP connection is via modem (SLIP or PPP or TCP over ARA) - don't run a script that has some services connecting via regular dial-up modem, and some that connect via TCP. This is almost guaranteed to fail, since once the PPP connection is up, the modem port is no longer available for "regular" connections.

Why did I jump from 2.2b1 to 2.5b1?

2.2b1 never made it to official release status. After 2.2b1 was released, I added the TCP code. I felt that was a major enough change to warrant a bigger version number jump.

•• New in Version 2.2b1 ••

BulkRate 2.2b1 adds the ability to access serial ports other than the standard Macintosh modem and printer ports. The modem settings dialog has been changed in order to allow you to select from any available serial port.

(Technical note: BulkRate is now CTB-aware and should be able to access any serial port registered with the CommToolbox via the Communications Resource Manager.)

If you do not need to access serial ports other than the regular modem or printer port, I do not recommend that you test this software at this time.