Fitlads.net harness the power of members' computers to fight aids at home

To help with the fight against AIDS, Fitlads.net, one of the UK's most successful gay dating sites, is harnessing the spare computing power of its 210,000 members through "Grid Computing".

Scientists are now harnessing the combined 150 years of Fitlads.net members' spare computing time to observe the reaction of DNA to a huge permutation of AIDS drugs. However, even with the access to this enormous extra computing power, only finite testing can be undertaken, thus ably demonstrating the huge task facing AIDS scientists and researchers.

Grid (or, 'distributed' computing, as it is sometimes called) is a specific form of 'shared' computing power which relies on the use of completely independent computers connected to the Internet. This sharing occurs when the computers are online with spare capacity available – often referred to as "idle time".

This volunteer computing, using the combined excess capacity of domestic-based PCs, is most commonly used for scientific, mathematical or academic problems. When combined, these computers can produce similar computing power to that of a 'traditional' multiprocessor supercomputer, but at a much lower cost, and in a more effective manner.

This arrangement is well-suited to uses where multiple work can take place independently, without the need to communicate intermediate results between internal processors. It also saves reliance on electricity and cooling power requirements often necessary for one singularly located supercomputer.

Both supercomputers and grids can be used to run multiple parallel computations at the same time, which might be different simulations for the same project, or computations for completely different applications.

The only participation required from Fitlads.net members is the simple installation of a small piece of software, by invitation from the research laboratory working on the project. Only those members who want to take part and who accept the invitation, will be able to download and install the software. This software detects when the user is online, and cleverly utilises the spare capacity of the machine without compromising general PC activities – web surfing, word processing, desktop publishing or general applications – of the user.

Joseph Hill, a director of Fitlads.net said:

"We are delighted to be involved with this project. It is a clear demonstration of members of the gay community not only helping themselves, but making a worthwhile contribution to the welfare of the population at large."

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. More details on the "Fight Aids at Home" project, and links to the laboratory and details of how to join the project can be found at www.worldcommunitygrid.org

2. The "Fight Aids at Home" has been developed by the Olson Laboratory at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California.