

# CHAPTER UPDATE

Chapter Services HotLine: 800/553-3743

Special Information for Chapter Officers

Summer 1997

**Editor's Note:** *Today, it seems that the World Wide Web (WWW) is everywhere. It's hard to find an advertisement in a newspaper, magazine, or on television that does not list a web address. Harnessing the power of this electronic communications tool will be an important challenge for the College's chapters in the coming year. This issue of **Chapter Update** is intended to provide an overview of the power and usefulness of*

*web-based communications and to help chapters plan, develop, and produce a website for their members. In this issue, we review some background information about the WWW and identify the types of information that chapters should consider putting online, using the new services developed by the College's Communications Department to get chapters' websites "up and running."*

## DEVELOPING ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS: CHAPTER WEBSITES

### World Wide What?

The World Wide Web is part of the Internet. The terms are not synonymous. A bit of history about how and why the WWW and the Internet were created might help to put the importance of these two powerful electronic communications tools into perspective.

The Internet is a conglomeration of computers around the world that are connected to each other at various times in order to communicate—a network of networks. The "Net" is not located in one place; it does not originate from a single computer; and it is not "owned." In the beginning, the Internet was an experimental network created for the US Department of Defense in the 1960s. Developed by the Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA), and known as ARPAnet, this network was intended to connect research centers and provide a military communications tool that could be maintained even in the event of nuclear war.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ARPAnet continued to grow. Simultaneously, independent networks were forming, with names such as USENET and BITNET. In 1986, the National Science Foundation established a national network, based on new, improved, and more usable ARPAnet computer-language protocols, that connected five supercomputers by telephone lines. The NSFnet brought computer networking to an enormous international research community. The NSFnet has become the high-speed network backbone that is used today throughout the world and that is known as the Internet.

A major factor in the popularity of the Internet has been the growth of the World Wide Web. So, how did the WWW come into being? The WWW is a loose network of documents connected with hypertext, a system that was developed to help teams of physicists located all over the world to rapidly exchange data and research materials. By the end of 1991, the first WWW "browser," which uses

hypertext to link or jump from one point to another, was made available to the high-energy physics community. The WWW was on its way!

By 1993, the Web began to explode, with WWW access on the Internet increasing tenfold every six months! Since then, the Web has only gotten easier to use, with the development of sophisticated browsers to navigate the Web and software to help organizations and individuals create their own Web pages. Today, in addition to research institutions, universities, and libraries, Internet users have access to business, entertainment, cultural, and other groups. Never before have so many resources been available to so many people. Because of hypertext, the Web can integrate text with graphics, sound, video, and animation. One visit to the Web will show you how unique this communications tool is.

### Your WWW Connections

To hook up to the Internet and the WWW, you need two items: your computer hardware and a service provider. You don't need the latest, most powerful computer—just a modem and a personal computer with plenty of memory. The following are some hardware options:

Computer	Good	Better
Windows	486	Pentium
Macintosh	68040	Power Mac
Random Access Memory (RAM)	8 MB	16 MB
Modem	14.4 Kbps	28.8 Kbps or ISDN

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Internet service providers (ISPs) provide access to the WWW and to the Internet. These ISPs allow you to hook up to their computer, which is in turn connected to the Internet. There are many ISPs; some only provide access to the Internet, while others offer special services, such as e-mail capability. The five most popular commercial ISPs are:

- America Online 800/454-6500
- CompuServe 800/848-8990
- Microsoft Network 800/426-9400
- Prodigy 800/776-3449
- eWorld 800/426-9400 (for Macintosh users only)

Local ISPs can provide Internet access and e-mail, but lack other features that commercial services provide, such as sports scores or summaries of the day's news. NetCom (800/353-6660) is an example of a local ISP. You can find the names of other local ISPs by calling your local phone company.

Once you're connected to the Internet, you'll also need a browser program, which is used to retrieve and display Web pages. ISPs include a browser as part of their packages. The most popular Web browser is Netscape, and many organizations and individuals design their Web pages to be read specifically by this browser.

Because the WWW is a collection of hypertext documents, each of the documents must have an "address." These addresses are called Uniform Resource Locators, or URLs. A URL includes the hypertext protocol, the domain name, and in some cases, a filename. The College's URL is: **http://www.facs.org**. (Note: http is an acronym for hypertext transfer protocol.)

The last three letters, .org, are known as a "top-level domain" and give some information about the website. The top-level domains are:

- .edu (educational institutions, universities)
- .com (commercial business, companies)
- .gov (nonmilitary government site)
- .mil (military site)
- .org (not-for-profit organizations)
- .net (any host associated with network administration)

Outside the United States, the most common URL country codes indicators are .uk (United Kingdom), .nl (The Netherlands), and .ca (Canada).

In some cases, you will know the exact URL for the site you want to visit, and you can enter it into your browser and go right there. However, when you don't know the specific URL, you'll need a search engine that will navigate the WWW and locate the information you're seeking. Some search engines search by category, and others can perform searches based on words alone. The addresses for some of the most popular search engines used today are:

Search Engine	URL
AltaVista	http://www.altavista.digital.com
Excite	http://www.excite.com
InfoSeek	http://guide.infoseek.com
Lycos	http://www.lycos.com
Magellan	http://www.mckinley.com
WWW Worm	http://wwwwww.cs.colorado.edu/wwwwww
Yahoo!	http://www.yahoo.com

## What's on the ACS Website?

The Internet is a popular and powerful communications medium. Today, ACS chapters need to consider how to harness the power and popularity of Web-based communications to deliver quick and cost-effective services to their members.

Going online through the WWW offers many benefits. Since the College launched its WWW home page in March 1996, the number of pages that comprise the ACS website has grown from a few dozen to almost 1,000! Today, Fellows and guest physicians can review the entire 1997 Clinical Congress scientific program and register online, including enrolling in and paying for postgraduate courses. Spouses and guests of Clinical Congress attendees also can register and pay for Social Program activities online.

In addition, visitors to the College's website have quick and easy access to the College's official statements and perspectives on a variety of issues and topics. For example, the College's Socioeconomic Affairs Department regularly contributes online reports on Congressional testimony and other ACS communications to Congress on key issues, such as the Medicare fee schedule, managed care issues, and graduate medical education.

To assist surgeons in maintaining the financial stability of their practices, the Socioeconomic Affairs Department also features an online managed care and coding "tips of the month."

Several sections of the ACS website are updated monthly. Selected features from the ACS *Bulletin*, including Dr. Ebert's "As I See It" column and "Dateline Washington" reports, appear online by the first day of each month. The entire lead article from the current issue of *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* and the *JACS* current table of contents can be viewed online beginning the last week of each month. In addition, several ACS departments and committees (trauma, cancer, education and surgical services, and professional liability) now have "home pages" on the College's website, with profiles of their programs and reports on current activities.

ACS chapters also have a web page that has become increasingly important as it continues to grow and offer more online information that relates to chapter activities, including chapter websites.

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In addition to providing easy access to information, placing information online can help eliminate the need for copying and mailing documents. For example, the Organization Department frequently receives telephone calls from vendors who want to exhibit at chapter meetings. Today, these callers are referred to the College's website and to the section on chapters. There, all the chapter meetings for 1997 (and some for 1998) are listed. Access to information on the WWW is a time-saver!

### Getting Your Chapter Online

To help ACS chapters develop and maintain a presence on the WWW, the Communications Department, in conjunction with the College's Internet service developer, Telusys, has developed a simple, easy-to-use service—the ACS Chapter Website Program. Although this new service is not free to the College's chapters, the College has negotiated very competitive prices. Telusys specializes in association-related Internet services and activities, including satellite services for chapters.

Participation in the ACS Chapter Website Program is optional. Chapters may elect to locate and negotiate fees with their own Internet service provider if they want a website. However, the College is introducing this program and encouraging chapter participation to make the process easier, as well as cost effective and time efficient. Similarly, chapters may find a member who is interested in designing the chapter's website or pay an Internet service developer for this project.

Under the ACS Chapter Website Program, Telusys will design and develop a chapter website from submitted materials for a flat fee of \$595. Telusys will directly bill chapters a monthly service fee for site maintenance. Chapters have a choice of "signing on" for one of the following four levels of service:

#### Level I

5 MB of space with one e-mail box, no upload access  
\$20.00 monthly

#### Level II

10 MB of space with two e-mail boxes, upload access  
\$35.00 monthly

**Site administration program:** Update all data on the chapter site at any time. Unlimited upload access to your chapter's web files, with the ability to add, delete, rename, and view uploaded file revisions.

#### Level III

25 MB of space with two e-mail boxes, upload access  
\$45.00 monthly

**Site administration program:** Update all data on the chapter site at any time. Unlimited upload access to your chapter's web files, with the ability to add, delete, rename, and view uploaded file revisions.

**Level IV: Interactive website** \$85.00 monthly

Utilizes features as they are brought onto ACS website at no additional cost to chapters.

#### Level IV features include:

**Membership directory:** Membership information is entered into the site's database for display online and includes links as specified. Password protection can be added at no extra charge.

**Membership application:** An online membership application is forwarded to the chapter e-mail box, and pertinent member information is posted to the member directory.

**Calendar listing:** Chapter events are listed online via an input administration program, and your out-of-date items are automatically deleted.

**Site administration program:** Update all data on the chapter site at any time. Unlimited upload access to your chapter's web files, with the ability to add, delete, rename, and view uploaded file revisions.

**Auto response e-mail form:** Users can request information from the chapter by using a browser-generated automatic response form.

With a Level IV plan, chapters may add their own features, such as links to other sites of interest, a link to the ACS website to share its bulletin boards, search engine, product ordering, or credit card transaction services. Level IV services allow a chapter to take advantage of these features without the expense of including them on the chapter's site.

#### Other charges (all levels of service):

Additional 25 MB of data storage:	\$25.00 monthly
Custom development of graphics:	\$75.00 per hour
Development of HTML-coded pages:	\$40.00 per hour

*(Chapters may submit material already coded into HTML to save costs.)*

All levels include a chapter development charge of \$595 per chapter.

**There is no charge to transfer an existing website to any level of the plan if there are no developmental changes to it.**

For further information on the ACS Chapter Website Program, contact Sally Garneski, Manager, Public Information/Electronic Publishing Division, ([sgarneski@facs.org](mailto:sgarneski@facs.org)), 312/664-4050, ext. 409.

### What to Do before Taking the Next Step

In going online, several considerations must be addressed by the chapter's leadership. First, who will manage the chapter's website activities? A **webmaster** should be selected to oversee the entire website and its contents. Chapters that have larger websites that require weekly or biweekly revisions might consider finding someone to assist the webmaster in the role of **content developer**. A content developer assumes

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responsibility for coding documents into HTML and placing them online. Experience and knowledge of HTML coding is necessary. With a content developer to perform this function for the chapter, the webmaster can devote his or her attention to the overall administration of the website and focus on bringing new ideas and applications online. The World Wide Web is not a static medium; it is always changing, and planning ahead to orchestrate changes is an important responsibility for any webmaster. Unless the chapter decides to delegate the actual preparation of web pages and updates to Telusys or another outside vendor, a webmaster also should be knowledgeable about personal computer systems and web authoring software that utilizes HTML.

Now, what type of information will the chapter publish on its website? To help formulate your content, the chapter leaders and webmaster could review the websites of several chapters that are already online. These sites, developed by the San Diego, Indiana, Missouri, Ohio, Washington, and Puerto Rico chapters, vary in the amount of information presented, as well as in overall complexity. At a minimum, chapters should consider publishing the following:

- Names, e-mail addresses, and/or phone numbers of all chapter officers, council members, and committee chairs; each individual's institutional or hospital affiliation also could be included.
- Dates, locations, and times of future chapter meetings, including council and committee meetings; when annual meeting information is published online, it also should include registration information and, if appropriate, hotel accommodation information.
- Reports on recent council and/or committee meetings.
- Most recent issue of the chapter newsletter.
- Reports on other activities or programs that will be of interest to the chapter membership, such as grand rounds that are being conducted at area hospitals, or other organizations' special activities, such as the local cancer society.
- Other information that would be useful to chapter members, such as state legislation affecting surgery, regulations affecting medical licensure, and so forth.

The content of the chapter's web pages must be accurate, timely, and up-to-date, and the website must include information that will benefit the chapter's members.

Other key elements to consider in developing your chapter's website include:

- **Table of contents**—Usually appearing on the home page, the "table of contents" gives the visitor a preview of what information can be found online. A menu of items with links to secondary and tertiary pages typically comprises the table of contents.

- **Second- and third-level pages**—Most websites present information to visitors on subsequent pages; this type of construction or layout will help to keep the home page attractive and uncluttered.
- **Consistency**—All the pages that comprise the website should have a consistent look, in terms of the typeface and colors that are used, as well as the format that is used to present information.
- **Easy navigation**—The website should be designed so that it is easy to navigate and locate information. A good rule of thumb is "no more than three clicks" to get from the home page to the information that you want to present to visitors.
- **"Short" web pages**—Visitors should not have to scroll endlessly to get to the bottom of the page; using second- and third-level pages will help to keep web pages short and viewer friendly.
- **E-mail addresses**—Use e-mail address tags that will link directly to an individual's e-mail for all key chapter-level contacts.
- **Posting dates**—To promote the timeliness of your online information, include posting dates. For pages posted initially, the posting notation could read, "Online July 1997." As the information is revised, the posting notation should read, "Revised 8/1/97."
- **Feedback mechanisms**—If possible, design a feedback form that can be used by your website visitors. This form is a great way to learn about the information that is used by your visitors and what information they would like to see added (or deleted).
- **No dead ends**—Be sure to check that all links go to their intended destinations. Navigation links back to the home page or to a menu should be incorporated into all second- and third-level pages. To help prevent "dead ends," map out your chapter's site on paper or develop an outline of your site.

To ensure that your chapter members know and use your website, consider doing the following:

- Include your website URL on your chapter stationery, business cards, fax cover sheets, and program brochures; integrate your URL with your chapter's address and phone number.
- Conduct "hands-on" demonstrations of your website at a chapter meeting.
- Include announcements about your website in your chapter newsletter.
- Include your URL on chapter dues notices.\*

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\*Katie Atkinson: Creative ways to market your Website. Chicago Society of Association Executives, *Forum*, Vol 81, No 4, May 1997.

## Summary

To enhance communications among chapter members, chapters need to develop a presence on the WWW. Electronic communications are quickly becoming a way of life for many organizations, and chapters need to begin planning their future communications activities and programs today.

Maintaining a chapter home page is also a financial commitment to your chapter's future communications

goals and objectives. The College's Communications Department and its Internet service developer, Telusys, have developed financially feasible levels of Internet service for ACS chapters. If chapter finances are a constraint to getting online, chapters could consider raising dues, developing a long-term, volunteer-financing arrangement, through which chapter members can share in the website expenses, or using corporate sponsorship income to fund website expenses.

For more information on and assistance with your chapter's website, contact Sally Garneski, the College's webmaster, at 312/664-4050, ext. 409, or via e-mail at [sgarneski@facs.org](mailto:sgarneski@facs.org). Chapters that select their service level and complete their application forms will receive assistance from a representative of Telusys and the College's webmaster.

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