

traveling the information highway

Life members and the Web

with Bob Alden



Recently I had lunch with an old friend and colleague, Ray Findlay. He was commenting on the rapid growth of life members — their number has approximately doubled over the last decade, said Ray, who has a fantastic knowledge of IEEE facts. I began to think about this and relate it to a story in my local newspaper titled "Seniors retire to cyberspace."

Information about IEEE's information highway is available electronically. To find out what is available, view the Web page at www.ieee.org/eleccomm or send a message to fileservers@ieee.org and place the file name "info.email" by itself at the start of the first line in the message.

LIFE MEMBERS. The IEEE has 28,600 life members, according to the 1997 Report of the IEEE Secretary. There are only two of IEEE's 36 technical societies that have as many members as the IEEE has life members! Look at the volume of services, publications, chapters, meetings — and yes, even Web pages — devoted to members of IEEE societies. I want to explore the idea of developing Web-based services for life members and retired members. The first step is to note some existing services.

AARP & CARP. To quote the newspaper article I noted above, "The 50-plus bracket is growing faster than all other on-line groups, and these veterans of life are putting the Internet to remarkably practical use." This is reinforced by viewing the Web pages of North American associations for retired persons. The American Association of Retired Persons at www.aarp.org and the Canadian Association of Retired Persons at www.fifty-plus.net are providing Internet-

related services, Web pages on topics such as travel, and special discounts for members using the Web.

TOPICS. Let's consider some topics of possible interest for life members and retired members — retirement planning, investing, banking, health, travel and hobbies.

RETIREMENT PLANNING. The personal investments page of Prudential posted at www.prudential.com has information on retirement planning; the same type of link and information exists on the Fidelity Investments site at www.fidelity.com. There is a Canadian Web site called RetireWeb at www.retireweb.com which, not surprisingly, is sponsored by a couple of investment companies. These are only a random sampling of the many Web sites available.

INVESTMENTS. I suspect that the investment industry is one of the most active sectors of electronic commerce. Today one can find not only information but on-line transaction services. Strong On-line's Web site at www.strong-funds.com/ is one good example.

COUNTERING SCAMS. One of the concerns of potential investors is the possibility of being scammed by unscrupulous individuals. The U.S. Postal Service has an information site at www.usps.gov/websites/depart/inspect/ covering consumer fraud. Another site is the one for National Fraud Information Center at www.fraud.org/; the U.S.-based group cooperates with a number of other organizations in the U.S. and Canada. For those members who live outside North America, the sites are accessible to you, and you may find similar information services in other countries. A somewhat related topic is that of Risk Management. RISKWeb offers an electronic discussion group at www.riskweb.com.

ON-LINE BANKING. For those who prefer not to visit their local bank to transfer funds, pay bills and so on, there are now many on-line

banking services. We'll use as an example three large banks with international services that are based, respectively, in the U.S., UK, and Canada. The Bank of America site at www.bofa.com, Barclays Bank's site at www.barclays.com, and the Bank of Montreal's site www.bom.ca all feature on-line public information as well as password protected services.

HEALTH. The Web has many sites that are health, fitness, and disease related.

The World Health Organization at www.who.ch; the U.S. National Library of Medicine at www.nlm.nih.gov/; the Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/; the pharmaceutical information network at pharminfo.com/pin_hp.html; and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food and nutrition information center at www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/ all provide information to anyone who logs on.

TRAVEL. Airlines, car rental companies, hotels, and a whole lot of travel companies have Web sites that make it easy to browse, compare availabilities and costs, and provide either telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, or Web forms for on-line reservations. Some ask only for the type of credit card you will use when you arrive, some use a telephone link to finalize the arrangements including payment details, and some have so-called secure links for on-line payment. I use the phrase "so-called secure links" because I know some Internet users are not yet believers in this type of security. I have developed my own level of comfort and so far I have not been disappointed.

Airports are increasingly providing information to both travelers and those meeting arriving travelers. Some of these provide on-line arrival and departure times so that you can check for delays or cancellations.

HOBBIES. Most of us have hobbies and many of us wish for the time when we have more time to devote to those interests. Such a list is not easily developed because it is so diversified and unique to each person.

For example, the use of libraries for recreation as well a business is now enhanced by on-line catalogs, searching by title or author, and checking availability. Many other hobbies can be researched on the Web. For example, the main Yahoo search engine www.yahoo.com page lists photography, movies, music, sports, travel, autos, outdoors, and many other categories. For some, Web surfing using a commercial search engine is a joy; for others it is frustrating because of the sheer amount of choice and the wide variations in quality.

IEEE SERVICES? What services should IEEE provide? We could provide links to existing organizations like the ones I noted earlier in this column. We could provide links to Web sites that focus on such topics as retirement planning, investments, health care, leisure activities, and so on. I have samples of these in my world-in-general Web page set at power.mcmaster.ca/alden/wigf.html, including all the sites I have listed here as well as many in my travel section.

Sites like these could be part of a Web page set for life members. There is also the aspect of continuing professional activities such as consulting — these issues could be addressed and services developed. If any of you are interested in helping to develop IEEE services for current or future life members and retired members, why not let me know (I will pass on your message) or contact IEEE Life Member Committee Chair Dick Jaeger at life-members@ieee.org.

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