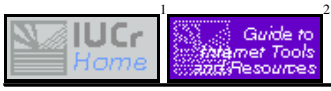

Why post the program and the proceedings of a conference to the W3?

Electronic publishing for a meeting with hundreds to thousands of abstracts is a major undertaking for a team, with a cost currently around two to three times that of the traditional hardcopy cut–and–paste methods, up to and including the production of pages for the printing of the program and abstract book. This cost, which is mostly in the retyping and proofreading of hardcopy submissions, will decrease as hardcopy submission decreases. Costs for transforming printable electronic abstracts into W3 posted ones are not very much in comparison. Provided that the resulting information in electronic form is distributed on the W3 in a timely fashion, these high costs for the whole operation are recovered in the end because:

1. The W3 can keep people who are on not on a mailing list nor in a directory informed.
2. The decision to submit an abstract can be based on actual titles and participants rather than just the general reputation of the meeting.
3. The decision to attend the meeting without participating in the program can be based on abstracts at fully organized sessions.
4. The functioning of the program committee is faster, more thorough and much cheaper, with no phone/FAX bills.
5. Registrants are fully aware of the scientific program and can network at the meeting instead of studying the abstract book at night.
6. Abstracts can be edited and the general appearance of the abstract book is improved.
7. Strong W3 presence increases the visibility of the meeting, of the organization and of the science of crystallography.
8. The proceedings in HTML form retain a long–term value: abstracts for all past *IUCr*, *ECM*, *Asian* AND *ACA* meetings would fit, with indexes, on a single CD–ROM and could be made full–text searchable.

Points 1, 2, and 3 may help increase the number of registrations at the meeting. Point 4 corresponds to actual big savings in the thousands of dollars. Points 5, 6, 7 and 8 increase the reputation of the association which brings long–term benefits in the form of membership dues. Point 8 could in the long–term become a source of income.

History

The first non–informatics meeting to have been present on the W3 with full HTML abstracts seems to have been the ADASS III[3] conference on astronomical data which was held in Victoria, BC, CANADA in October 1993. The meeting nevertheless had a strong informatics flavour and included a number of papers about the burgeoning W3. Howard Flack developed independently the Aperiodic '94[4] W3 site in the spring of 1994 with the full support of the program chair, Gervais Chapuis. There was no other meeting in–between, so depending on whether ADASS was or was not an informatics meeting, Aperiodic '94 was the first or the second non–informatics meeting on the Web with all abstracts in HTML. In just two years, and with two successive scale increases by factors of about 3, the initial mostly manual methods used for Aperiodic '94 (~180 abstracts) have been automated for ACA '95[5] (~700 Abstracts), and full–text search of abstracts was introduced. This year the methods have been refined and blown to the full scale of an IUCr meeting (~2,000 abstracts?). This is just as large as crystallography meetings can be expected to be nowadays. So far, crystallography meetings seem to be the only ones of that size with a tradition of retyping hardcopy submissions and posting of ALL abstracts. Experience has shown that the high costs of electronic publishing, including W3 posting, have been recovered so far through increased numbers of registrations at meetings.

[1] http://www.iucr.ac.uk/iucr–top/welcome.html
[2] int.index.html
[3] http://cadcwww.dao.nrc.ca/ADASS–homepage.html
[4] http://www.unige.ch/crystal/aperiodic/mtg–ch94–index.html
[5] http://www.cisti.nrc.ca/ACA95/

Caution!

Lawyers in different countries might differ on the following opinions of the present author and even amongst themselves but it seems reasonable to consider that abstract submission to a conference contains two kinds of information requiring the corresponding precautions below.

- Scientific information: the abstract itself, including title, authors and affiliations. The purpose of the meeting is to disseminate this information as widely as possible. The W3 and other electronic means are just another powerful way of distributing this essentially public information. An implicit copyright transfer of accepted abstracts should be claimed somewhere in the fine print of the *Call for Papers*.
- Personal information like mailing address, phone, FAX, email, age, hotel booking *etc...* Posting any of this to the W3 requires prior authorization by the participant. Printing of FAX and email data is sufficient nowadays to reach somebody but even that requires an authorization or at least the absence of a negative reply to a clear and conspicuous question.
- Abstracts are not expected to discuss or use results reported in abstracts submitted by others to the same meeting. Distribution of the text of abstracts should accordingly be limited to the program committee until the true deadline for abstract submission, about 10 weeks before the meeting. Full texts for all abstracts can then be released to the W3, preferably all at the same time. Anticipating the contents of a scientific abstract from its title is next to impossible, therefore titles can be posted to the W3 as soon as the abstract has been accepted.

[Index[6]] – 10th Sept. 1996 – Yvon Le Page[7] – **Not to be copied or reproduced without permission** – Author's current manuscript[8]

[6] int.index.html
[7] http://ylp.icpet.nrc.ca/YLP.html
[8] http://ylp.icpet.nrc.ca/why.htm