

Technology Committee Meeting Minutes
NCDA Winter Meeting
Washington, D.C.
January 28, 2000
3:00 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.

Committee Minutes

NCDA's 2000 Winter Conference Technology Committee Meeting was chaired by Steve Gartrell, and attended either in part or in full by at least 30 members.

The following topics were on the Committee's agenda: I) a general report on NCDA website usage; II) administrative changes to the website and member listserv; III) directing staff to take steps to increase advertising traffic on the website; IV) an IDIS/DGMS update (see agenda)..

I. NCDAONLINE/ WEB- SITE USAGE

Romulus Johnson presented a comprehensive report on *NCDAOnline* web site usage. James Welfley of *Welfley WebWorks* assisted with the development of Romulus' report.

a) General Usage: According to Webtrends, *NCDAOnline* received an average of 1,819 hits per day from May 25, 1999 to January 14, 2000. The most important and impressive NCDA Online activity stats, however, are the number of page views we receive and the length of time users spend surfing the site. NCDA Online's average daily page view amount is 604; visitors to the site spend an average of 27 minutes, 59 seconds (basically one half-hour).

In rank order from greatest to least, our top three most visited content pages are 1) the main page; 2) the members forum; and 3) the members only sign on page. The daily averages for these pages are 437, 38, and 26 respectively.

Completing the rest of the top 8 pages are: 4) the online Job Board (~16/day); 5) Important Links (~9/day); 6) Upcoming Events (~8/day); CDTI (~7/day); and 8) About NCDA (~6/day).

b) Members: Of 512 NCDA members, approximately 320 receive the Washington Report online; that is nearly 65% of the membership. (About 192, continue to receive the Washington Report in hard copy form only. Exact figures aren't available because a small minority of communities subscribe to both services.)

With respect to the Members only portion of NCDA Online, based on activity reports on the website for the months of May-December, 1999 the three most popular areas on the site are: 1) the CD Database (4,295 visits/613 per month/23per day); 2) the forum (4,090 visits/584 per month/22 per day); 3) and the Listserv registration page (760 visits/187 per month/4 per day).

II. WEB SITE ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

The following administrative questions were addressed by the committee:

- 1-Should the Association use the listserv to notify members about postings to the Forum?
- 2-Should the memberlist including names and addresses be posted in a restricted portion of the site?
- 3-Delivering The Washington Report by e-mail as opposed to asking members to download from the internet.
- 4-Resolving the issue of the difficulty of getting attachments to the Washington Report.
- 5-Netiquette 101: establishing guidelines for controlling unwanted e-mail traffic on the web-site.

Outcome:

- 1-After some discussion, the committee moved to return to the practice of sending automatic forum notices to the member listserv. This was done because it is viewed as essential to keeping traffic on the website high. For those who have problems with this feature, the committee is recommending that they delete the notices without reading them.
- 2-The committee unanimously approved a motion to place the member-list, including names and addresses, on a secured area of the website. NCDA staff will investigate options to keep this area as secure as possible.
- 3-*The Washington Report* will continue to be delivered by e-mail, as well as downloadable directly from the website.
- 4-With respect to the issue of making it easier to get attachments from the website, the Committee has directed staff to place live links to the attachments in the e-mail version of the web-site.
- 5- The Committee directed staff to distribute an information sheet entitled 'Netiquette 101' to the entire membership. 'Netiquette 101' provides tips on how to make sure unwanted messages don't end up on the list-serv.

III. ADVERTISING ON NCDAONLINE YELLOW PAGES

The Committee discussed options for encouraging advertising on the online yellow pages. It was decided that staff should more aggressively market the Yellow Pages pursuant to the guidelines laid down in the Committee's January 1999 original proposal to allow vendors access to the

website. It was agreed that some of the site most popular pages would be available to advertisers to post understated links to the Yellow Pages.

IV. IDIS/DGMS UPDATE

Bob Meehan of HUD gave the following report:

1) IDIS--

7,400 people are using IDIS (or at least have passwords). They are working on over 400,000 activities. \$10.4 billion has been expended through IDIS.

In the past it took three years to get CDBG performance information out to Congress and the public. This year, they were able to do it in *three weeks*.

HUD is encouraging grantees to use the Web to access IDIS. The funding for Sprintlink access is expected to run out in the spring. But, he does expect that HUD will have to find funding to continue Sprintlink. There are too many grantees who don't have Web access. He is also aware of the problems with speed and with the reports module in the Web version.

Since the states are being cut off from the Voice Response System and forced onto IDIS by June, most staff effort will be on converting the states (33 of them) to IDIS and on getting DGMS (Digital Grants Management System - which will replace IDIS) on line. They'll be doing some tinkering with IDIS but can't promise major improvements.

2) DGMS--

HUD expects to start converting grantees to DGMS in July, with all grantees converted within the next 18 months (ed. note: Yeah, uh huh). IDIS will stay operational for two years. Two NCDA members are DGMS pilot cities, Jacksonville and Seattle. They report that only 30% of the DGMS modules are operational yet. They will keep us posted on its progress.

DGMS will be picking up all of HUD's grant programs, so if you have HUD grants other than CDBG, HOME, ESG, or HOPWA, you'll be using DGMS for those, too. They will be adding Section 108 soon.

Bob was asked about what kind of Web browser would support. He said that unlike IDIS, which only supports Netscape, DGMS will support MS Internet Explorer as well as Netscape. In response to another question about the transition of data from IDIS to DGMS, he said that the same people who worked on the IDIS transition will be working on DGMS.

Finally, he said that DGMS will have a much better reports module that will allow grantees to design their own reports.

One major concern is that HUD's Info Technology Budget (which includes Comm. 2020, formula allocation, as well as IDIS and DGMS) has been cut by \$100 million dollars this year (from \$369 million to \$265 million). This doesn't make sense what with DGMS conversions and all. NCDA staff will be looking into the issue and will get back to us. [IDIS/DGMS notes prepared by Steve Gartrell]

E-MAIL 'NETIQUETTE' 101

In September of 1999, the Association received a flurry complaints from members about receiving unwanted, duplicate e-mails from the member list-serv. We are in the process of making a number of technical changes to the website and the online list-serv to make sure that both the list-serv, the online Forum, and the daily digest work more smoothly. However, there are a number of very simple guidelines members can follow to make sure that problems of the kind which occurred last September never occur again. So, here goes: e-mail 'netiquette' 101 for NCDAOnline users.

- **Don't be a lazy Reply-er !!!**

When you respond to a message from the list-serv, it goes to all the members who subscribe to this service. As a courtesy to your colleagues, please make sure that you don't submit private, individual responses to the listserv. The easiest way to avoid doing this is to **think before you click reply**. Just ask yourself, does my response to a list-serv message really need to be read by all 500 plus NCDA member communities? If not, then please take the time compose a new response directed to the personal e-mail address of the person you wish to communicate with.

- **Be mindful of you're e-mail programs auto-response setting**

One of the main sources of the junk e-mail that aggravated everyone last September was the fact that a vacationing list-serv subscriber had their e-mail program set on auto -respond. This meant, every time that person received a routine notice from the list-serv, their computer generated an automatic reply to every single other registered subscriber. The end result was a vicious loop of unwanted junk e-mail: the automatic reply to the list generated more-email traffic from the list serve, which in turn generated only more automatic replies, which, of course, generated even more junk e-mails to the list-serv and so on and so forth.

- **Protect Yourself**

It pays to remember that the list-serve and or NCDAOnline Forum are first and foremost public address systems. As a practical matter, everything you write while using it is instantly broadcast all over the country. Under current federal laws, there is little to no privacy protections when using e-mail. If it comes to that, anything you e-mail can and most certainly will be used against you. So, if you're sending an -email on a sensitive topic, think first before you click. And for those who think we're being paranoid by bringing this up, well, just ask Bill Gates if he doesn't regret saying a bunch of nasty things about his competitors in e-mails he sent to other Microsoft executives.