

Centennial Campaign

Maintaining Relevance to Industry

by Troy M. Miller

This is the third in a series of articles highlighting the goals of the ECS Centennial Campaign based on the ECS Case for Support. The first article highlighted education, while the second highlighted the membership objectives of the Case for Support. If you wish to view the Case in its entirety, or want more information about the Centennial Campaign, visit the ECS website at www.electrochem.org.

With the recent downturns in the global economy, corporations are finding it more difficult to find money to keep their employees technically current. Maintaining the relevance of ECS to industry—as budgets for travel, personal development, and research and development are lessened in response to economic pressures—will be a tremendous challenge. A recent ECS survey showed that 83% of respondents felt that the effect the current economy is having on the field is the number one issue affecting members and non-members alike.

Academia, government, and industrial professionals have an excellent opportunity to partner within ECS. Colleges, universities, and government labs provide businesses with the pure research needed to begin thinking of saleable applications. In turn, industry, while carefully assessing customer needs, provides academia and government with starting points from which to begin their work, and research and development dollars earned from selling the resulting goods drives this symbiotic relationship. ECS provides the forum where these groups can work together.

Improving relevance to industry is a major component of the ECS Case for Support. The Case includes five quantifiable objectives to better allow ECS to meet this goal. These objectives include improving ECS's Career Service Center, better supporting our short course program, providing top-notch Internet-based training materials, improving customer service to industry constituents, and increasing our student membership so that industry has a larger and better-trained pool of resources from which to pull.

Career Service Center

On average, the ECS website is visited over 34,000 times a month. Of those visits, a very small number navigate to the Career Service Center. Based on benchmarking of other technical societies, the number of individuals visiting the ECS website is high, while the level of traffic for the ECS Career Service Center is low. Since the ECS website was launched in 1995, the Society has concentrated on making it easy for our members to access technical journals and find information about upcoming

meetings, but the time has come to improve other aspects of these web-based member services. The Career Service Center also has not been well advertised to companies who wish to post openings or view resumes, nor to members who want to view the job openings or post their resumes. In addition, the ECS Center does not currently allow for e-mail notifications when a resume matches a job opening and vice versa.

On the ECS website, job openings may be posted by anyone, and anyone may view the subject line of the posted openings. However, only members are provided with access to the full openings. Similarly, only members may post resumes, but anyone can view the posted resumes. This provides an additional benefit of ECS membership to members, while allowing for a maximized universe for ECS members and corporations to interact within.

Improving the Career Service Center is a major objective of the Centennial Campaign. According to a recent ECS survey, the number one benefit of membership is networking. Providing a dynamic Career Service Center adds to this benefit. This is especially true in the current poor economy when many individuals are looking for work, and employers are looking for the most qualified individuals.

The Case for Support objective is to increase the number of individuals who access the ECS Career Service Center monthly by 100% by 2007. The ECS Case for Support will raise \$5,000 for a Career Service Center marketing plan, and will provide funding for improving the search and contact components of the Center. This second cost has not yet been budgeted, and may increase the overall cost of this objective.

Training

According to a contributing member company of The Electrochemical Society, corporate resources for employee training are declining. This issue is exacerbated in poor economic times. This affects not only corporate production, but scientific dissemination and progress as well. However, the same company acknowledged that if efficient and relevant resources were available for employee training, it would be very interested in taking advantage of these resources.

As highlighted in the winter 2002 *Interface*, the Case for Support has specific objectives to upgrade the current short course program, and offer Internet-based training resources. The short course program allows meeting attendees to either learn about cutting-edge technologies in their field, or learn

how information in different fields relate to their work. Currently, ECS short courses are available at biannual meetings only. They are scheduled for the Sunday morning prior to the start of the meetings and run for the full day. The Centennial Campaign will raise an additional \$14,000 annually to better market the short courses, to determine a societal mechanism to spur relevant short course topics, and to upgrade the instructor remuneration to ensure our courses are technically sound.

Unfortunately, only an average of five to seven short course are available each year, and these are limited because they are offered only at biannual meetings. Internet-based training materials reviewed and hosted by The Electrochemical Society would allow employees the opportunity to acquire additional training without the expense or time outlay associated with attending the biannual meetings. Educational groups will provide the content. ECS will ensure the content meets the high technical standards of the Society, and will provide an arena where these valuable resources can be accessed.

The Centennial Campaign will raise \$225,000 to offer web-based training programs to its members and associates. This outlay includes funds for a review process to ensure materials meet ECS technical standards, website hosting equipment, and a marketing plan to market the training materials.

Student Membership

Effective companies count on a strong employee base to remain profitable. As current individuals retire or move on to other opportunities, educated and trained new employees must replace them. One important resource for companies is students. By offering students membership in The Electrochemical Society and access to ECS technical journals for only \$10 annually, and by providing resources to help educate and involve these students in the electrochemical and solid-state communities, ECS is ensuring the availability of qualified future employees.

What makes ECS unique is the extraordinary synergy created by the interaction of Society members in their work. The Society's diversity is supported by the tremendous opportunities for these diverse groups to partner and optimize their resources. ECS creates an environment conducive to collaboration. This is true for students and employers as well. ECS meetings and the Career Service Center provide a perfect arena for students and employers to interact. In addition, the Case for Support calls for the creation of an electrochemical and solid-state online community where this interaction can be maximized.

The Centennial Campaign will raise \$49,000 to increase student membership in the Society by 15% in five years and to create an online community to expand networking opportunities. This money will be dispersed as follows: \$15,000 to develop a student marketing plan (including professor stu-

dent mentoring and distribution of informational posters to colleges and universities); \$10,000 annually to support new student chapters; and \$24,000 for computer servers for the online community.

Customer Service

ECS provides value to corporations by supporting their employees through the benefits of individual membership, but corporations themselves are also customers. At each biannual meeting, not only do corporations send employees to benefit from the networking and technical content, they also take advantage of sponsorship and exhibit opportunities. In addition, over 65 companies are Contributing Members of the Society and take advantage of additional benefits such as upgraded recognition and access to technical journals. Providing the best customer service to these industry patrons is a major objective of the Case for Support.

ECS recently invested in an improved computer system that allows for a more extensive industrial database. This database will be used to better inform corporations of the benefits The Electrochemical Society provides to them, and we have recently created a Corporate Development Roundtable made up of corporate members to improve benefits for industry. In 2002, the Society launched the Leadership Circle Award for contributing members who have retained membership for five years or more, and have presented these awards during biannual meetings to increase the company recognition. Finally, The Electrochemical Society began sending its employees to customer service training in January of 2003, so we can better serve our industry constituents.

The ECS Centennial Campaign will raise \$20,000 to develop an industry-marketing plan and continue the Leadership Circle Award program.

Conclusion

Industry appreciates efficiency and accountability. ECS is held accountable for its fiscal responsibility primarily by its volunteer Finance Committee and Board of Directors, but also by outside, independent auditors. This volunteer involvement means every dollar is accounted for by the very people that dollar supports. These same individuals make sure these dollars are spent efficiently, and spent to further the objectives of the Society. This focus is a great strength of ECS.

With your support, ECS will raise \$313,000 during the Centennial Campaign to improve the benefits industry derives from the Society. Upgrading the Career Service Center, increasing the training available, growing student membership, and improving customer service to industry constituents are important steps in maintaining the objectives of ECS. ■

Troy Miller is the ECS Director of Development.

“ *Improving relevance to industry is a major component of the ECS Case for Support.* ”