

Information Superhighway IV



by Brian E. Rounsavill

We sure have come a long way over the past three years. Whether we like it or not everyone has had to take part in the information technology revolution. Just as fax machines did in the '80s, e-mail has now become a critical means for communication in the '90s, rather than a mere status symbol on your business card as it was but only a few short years ago. The Web has evolved from the novel pastime known as "surfing" into a vital research tool. Today, it is hard to imagine how we would do business or conduct research without these valuable on-line tools at our fingertips.

The Web. — Since 1994, the Society has made great strides in electronic communications, becoming a leader among the scientific associations by setting industry standards in this new information age. The ECS Website encompasses virtually everything that the Society communicates, prints, publishes and distributes. Purposefully not flashy in design, our Website is a comprehensive information resource. Instead of cluttering these pages and slowing download times with a lot of fancy images, animations and frames, our intent has been to concentrate on the content in order to provide the fastest and most comprehensive service for our international membership.

Our Website is updated and expanded with new features on a monthly, and often even on a weekly basis. Currently, we offer on-line meeting registration and we have complete meeting programs and selected abstracts available, in addition to articles from each issue of *Interface* and the tables of contents from the monthly *Journal*. You can perform keyword searches on our entire catalogue of publications, *Journal* articles and other volumes, as well as conduct a separate overall Website search. We have recently added a "Members-Only" section that provides members with an added benefit of exchanging resumes and job listings, a private scientific discussion forum, and an on-line member-

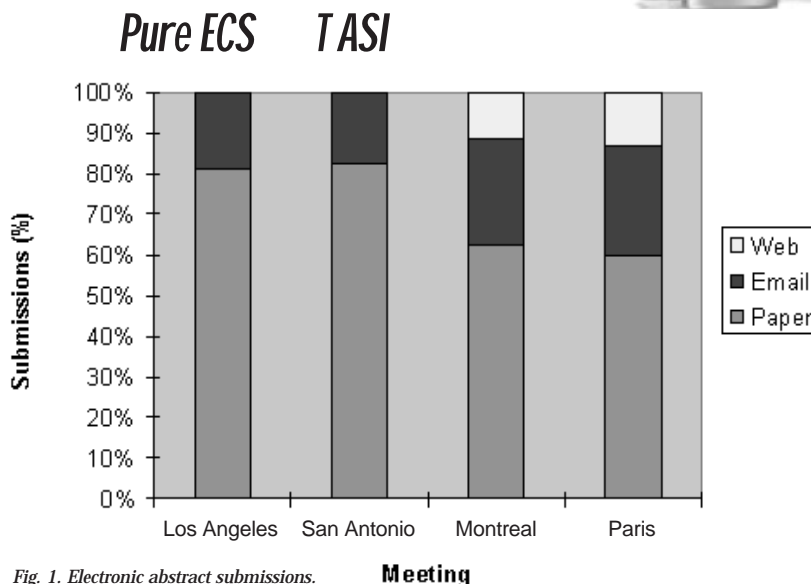


Fig. 1. Electronic abstract submissions.

ship directory. Our presence on the Web has added a whole new dimension to the Society's programs, member benefits and international initiatives.

Meeting Abstracts. — The first area in which two-way electronic communication tools were applied was the submission of meeting abstracts using the *ECS Tool for Abstract Submission via the Internet* (ECSTASI). A focus for the Society has been to become one of the leaders among scientific Societies in the area of electronic submission of meeting abstracts. Resulting from our hard work over the last three years we can now proudly say that no other technical Society accepts abstracts with such large amounts of technical content in such a wide variety of formats in a faster, more convenient mode. The rapid turnaround time between our abstract deadlines and the publication of the final technical program in relation to the actual meeting dates are the shortest in the industry, which allow for the latest scientific results to be presented. Electronic submissions now account for about 40% of the total meeting abstract submissions (see FIG 1). We are working hard to see this percentage move toward our ultimate goal of 100% in 1998.

History. — ECSTASI E-mail was first launched in 1995 for the Spring Meeting in Los Angeles. The first release of ECSTASI E-mail enabled authors to

submit text-only abstracts via e-mail by using a LaTeX mark-up language. In 1996, we expanded ECSTASI to allow submission directly through the World Wide Web, a service which we call ECSTASI Online. The initial version of ECSTASI Online handled abstracts saved as PostScript files. The PostScript abstracts could include graphics, tables and half-tones in addition to text-only LaTeX abstracts. ECSTASI Online is a revolutionary Web-based meeting abstract submission tool that has made the process much more user-friendly and expedient.

ECSTASI Online 2.0. — This Fall, in time for the San Diego Meeting abstract submission deadline of January 2, 1998, we launched ECSTASI Version 2.0. ECSTASI On-Line and E-mail have both been enhanced to accommodate virtually any type of pure word processor file in its native format; there is no longer a need to convert the abstract to PostScript before submitting it. ECSTASI Online's Web-based interface has been upgraded and is faster, easier and simpler to use. Meeting abstracts may be created in any of the different word processor programs, including all types of graphics, and submitted directly via the Web. Based on feedback, ECSTASI E-mail has also been rewritten to be much more flexible in the way it handles e-mail submissions. Both submission methods still accept PostScript and text-only abstracts, as well.

In addition to enhancing our software, we have also enhanced the hardware. ECSTASI Version 2.0 is now running on a new computer that is approximately four times faster than the original machine. We encourage you to take some time to preview the new ECSTASI Online 2.0 system which is located at the following URL:

<http://www.electrochem.org/ecstasi/>



Fig. 2. Introduction to ECSTASI.

Here you will find the introduction to the system documentation for ECSTASI Online (see FIG. 2). From this introductory page you can link to additional documents which will tell you all the necessary things you will need to know before you begin your abstract submission. After you have read and understood the basic requirements you can "click" on Begin Abstract Submission, which is the actual gateway into the ECSTASI Online system.

The gateway leads you to the ECSTASI Online Control Panel from which you can build your abstract submission. To submit an abstract all you have to do is complete the four basic sections of your abstract submission form: 1) title, symposium & presentation information; 2) author names; 3) author affiliations; and 4) the actual upload of the abstract itself. Preformatted templates are available in a variety of different word processing formats to make your abstract submission even easier. Simply select the word processing template you are familiar with, write your abstract, then submit the entire file as an attachment — it's that easy. As you make your way through the Control Panel, you can review the current status of your submission at any time. The Control Panel checkmarks will change from green to red as they guide you through a successful meeting abstract submission.

Online Technical Programming. —

By utilizing the many advantages associated with on-line communications and ECSTASI Online, the Society is able to not only receive meeting abstracts electronically, but to also code, post and acknowledge their receipt immediately. Symposium organizers are given access to a special Web page from which they can download updated lists of meeting abstract submissions daily, check a preliminary author index, review duplicate abstract searches, evaluate scheduling conflict reports, and submit their technical symposium schedules. As a result of these improvements in real-time communications, we are able to ultimately post the final technical program on the ECS Website less than a month after the actual abstract submission deadline. For the San Diego Meeting, we plan to make 100% of the meeting abstracts freely available online by the middle of February, which is roughly three months prior to the actual meeting date. Meeting abstracts that are submitted via ECSTASI Online will be made available as either PostScript or Adobe Acrobat (<http://www.adobe.com>) PDF files and meeting abstracts that are submitted on paper will be scanned and converted into GIF and JPEG files.

The Future. — The ECS has made significant progress toward providing a dynamically interactive presence on the "Information Superhighway" in an effort to better serve the needs of our membership and the non-member users of our on-line products and services. We are committed to applying these state-of-the-art skills and technologies to the many other aspects of the Society. Currently we are working toward the electronic dissemination of our other publications on-line, such as **Letters** and eventually the **Journal** (see page 12 story). There is no doubt that the advances in electronic communication technologies we have seen over the past few years will continue to change and adapt at an astounding pace for the foreseeable future. Throughout this on-line revolution, you can be sure that the Society will embrace the benefits of these new technologies in an effort to bring a little ECSTASI to your fingertips. ■

About the Author

Brian E. Rounsavill is the Society's Meetings and Online Programs Manager and is responsible for the Society's semi-annual meetings as well as the Society's Internet and World Wide Web communications.