

VP Electronic Presence
Report to the 2013 Winter Meeting of the Policy Council
Submitted by Bob Eberlein January 26, 2013

Summary

The WordPress based website is working well and has simplified coordination of changes made by different people. Numerous changes have been made to the Web Portal and we will be going live soon with an integrated membership directory. We are also updating the functionality to enhance the experience of conference goers and obviate the need for printed abstract proceedings at the conference. Overall, we are still struggling with making the Society Web Site the top destination for those with interest in System Dynamics.

WordPress Web Pages

All of our main web pages are now running off of WordPress, a content management system that allows editing and maintenance of pages through a web interface. This allows different people to make changes to pages without having to worry about coordinating efforts. It also keeps a consistent format between the pages and allows global format changes to be made. The conference and main web sites are both done using this, as are subsidiary websites include the tool and cases subdomains.

A number of less prominent pages remain static pages. Some of these will be converted to WordPress when they need updating, but some will likely remain static. The pages related to conference proceedings remain static pages that are generated by the Web Portal and then edited somewhat before being finalized.

Web Portal

What used to be referred to as the submission system is now being called the web portal. In addition to submitting and reviewing papers the Web Portal also supports conference registrations, Society membership processing and contact information updating. In addition, we have just added the membership directory functionality as discussed below. These are the reasons for the name change.

For the conference, there are a number of changes that have been made the Web Portal. The paper submission process now starts with an explicit selection of Thread, with the full Thread descriptions shown. Hopefully this will allow the papers to be more accurately selected into the author chosen threads. The thread definitions have also been updated by the Program Chairs to try to improve clarity.

Once a submission has been created, there will be a check to be sure that the submitted paper for review has the same number of pages as indicated in the information provided. This is intended to prevent people from putting up short placeholders with the intent of

later uploading the paper. We are also locking the review paper after 24 hours, so that all reviews are based on the same paper.

It is also now possible for authors to download the material they have uploaded to be sure it is what they think, and to delete material they uploaded in error or changed their minds about (except the review paper which is locked after 24 hours). The material that can be uploaded include the review paper, supporting materials, proceedings paper and new this year presentation slides. The latter are intended to give conference attendees a chance to preview presentations.

We have also added in an online schedule which year that will allow conference attendees to see a daily schedule, a schedule by time, session contents, paper descriptions and author information including a picture and short bio. These pages have been designed to be small, so that they will work well on a phone. This will allow people to learn more about current sessions than is available in the paper schedule, or printed abstracts. This capability, along with a generally wider availability of electronic information, makes the printed abstract proceedings much less relevant. It is hoped, that after 2013, we will no longer need to create printed any proceedings.

Membership Directory

We had been using a separate service at memberclicks.com for the membership directory. This has the disadvantages of requiring separate log in credentials, lagging information updated at the Central Office, and requiring hand processing by the Central office of any changes entered through it.

The new membership directory available through the Web Portal has essentially the same search capabilities as memberclicks, is easier to access and is better integrated with the Central Office work process. We are making this available now, and will make an announcement in March (allowing additional time in case any issues arise).

Discussion Forums and Overall Web Presence

We have been increasing the activity on our Facebook page in the hope of both reaching more people not normally connect to the System Dynamics community and forestalling the development of competing forum. We also made a foray into LinkedIn, but it did not catch on and that space remains dominated by other groups not part of the Society. The Society's discussion forum remains moderately active.

On the one hand, having a variety of locations in which discussion of System Dynamics is occurring means there is widespread interest and so is a good thing. On the other hand, the quality of what is out there is not especially high (nor is it incredibly low – I would probably give it a C-). I have been trying to make the Society's web presence more of a focal point than it is for some time.

One mechanism for drawing people to our website is more topical issue discussion. The current incarnation of that is a column aimed at showing how past publications in our literature inform current issues. This is something Jim Thompson is looking into organizing. We are also putting up a page of new bibliographic references, to both encourage readership and the inflow of citations into our bibliography.

We have, in the past, had discussions of a blog that would allow members to talk about current issues. The potential lack of input along with the difficulty of letting people express their opinions without making the Society the owner of those opinions have kept much from coming of that. Still, any ideas along these lines are appreciated.