

Web Editor's Report  
October 2010  
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## WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT

The new SAS web site was launched in January 2010 due to the hard work and vision of Jim De Haseth. Jim did extensive development, with the collaboration of our web developer Juan Pablo Claude at Big Nerd Ranch, especially developing the web infrastructure and the interface for the Journal on the SAS home page. At the March 2010 SAS meeting the Executive Committee directed that the highest priority for the next phase of development would be to generate an on-line membership and renewal system as well as a functioning site search function. As these items proceeded Jim decided that he did not wish to participate in the further development of the web site. His efforts and dedication will be sorely missed.

In April Bonnie Saylor was designated as the "super user" for the web site and I assumed the role of liaison with the web developer. The web site has been designed as both the web presence for SAS and the repository for all of SAS's data on members, local sections, the journal, etc. using the Django programming language, which utilizes a core database as the engine for the entire web site, rather than having data reside on individual pages. There are several ramifications of this design that became evident during phase II development. The basic (and laudable) goal was to create a web site that required minimal maintenance by the members. The consequence of this design, however, is that while the content of fields in the database is easy to change, the presentation of the data on the pages is much more rigid, and the web pages are not directly editable by the users. More importantly, the National Office needs to have intimate access to the database for a wide variety of reasons, not the least of which is to provide the necessary and current information required for maintaining its 503c status. This problem would be particularly severe over any period of migration for the database. Although the BNR web developer was planning to design the new database by taking the old one and updating its design for web applications, the National Office and EC representatives were not confident that sufficient input from the office had taken place to ensure that the new database would meet their needs. It was also felt that a sufficient functional testing plan had not been considered, since the data in the database was critical for the functioning of the Society.

Faced with an uncertain future of data access despite the on going need for current data, in a May conference call the Executive Committee refocused the web developer on the highest priority of getting the on-line renewal and application process up and running. Because of the complexity of transferring the database to BNR and then transferring it back while new members were being added at the office, it was decided that in the near term a stand-alone application for on-line membership (equivalent to the legacy system from the old site) should be in place.

After weeks of slow implementation of this plan, and difficulties in communicating with BNR, it was decided that it would be in the best interest of the Society if a new web

designer was hired who was closer geographically to facilitate one-on-one interactions. In June we severed our relationship with Big Nerd Ranch and initiated a new contract with Flow Theory Networks, a DC-based web developer whose development philosophy is based on using as much pre-existing programming as possible, rather than developing each module from the ground up.

FTN has worked quickly to deal with the priority issues of the web site. An online form is now available for automating the process of joining the Society as well as renewing membership. The search function of the web site is operating and provides results from the web site, membership directory and the Journal. Rotating banner ads now populate the search results page, as well as other second level pages.

## CONTENT UPDATES

Despite the difficulties in the development of the web site several content areas were expanded. The Newsletter section was set up by Dave Butcher and has been continually updated over this time period. The Spectroscopist's Calendar kept by Mary Carrabba has been updated regularly. The Home Page was made editable and announcements can now appear as needed. A new section focusing on open sources programs that researchers may find useful was created. An early history of SAS created by Marvin Margoshes was added in July and the Compendium of Focus articles updated in August.

Future content updates are planned to tie a monthly home page update to the Journal.