

GUEST EDITORIAL

Untangling the Web

A regular column focusing on the Internet and its associated technologies

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This issue starts a regular column aimed at informing IS control and audit professionals of developing trends in Cyberspace. In this column we will bring to your attention Cyberspace places for spending valuable and rewarding surfing time. Most columns will focus on particular aspects of the Cyberspace and will generally present two special items in highlighted boxes: one with a technology to watch and the other one with some "hot" sites!

In this issue, we begin with a description of our site, the Rutgers Accounting Web (RAW). We also present the Internet Phone as the technology to watch. And, with hundreds of thousands of sites in already in existence, we point to some basic sites that are of paramount importance to ISACA professionals.

RAW resources

The Rutgers Accounting Web (RAW), created in September 1994, is sponsored by the National Center for Automated Information Research. It currently has a plethora of accounting and auditing materials including Accounting Education Change Commission projects, the complete text and database of the Jenkins Report of the AICPA, numerous lectures and outlines in systems, auditing and accounting. The RAW currently hosts several important sites such as the Institute of Management Accountants, the American Accounting Association and the Institute of Internal Auditors. The RAW site can be found at: <http://www.rutgers.edu/accounting>

The RAW is part of the International Accounting Network with five mirror sites around the world. It concentrates on US accounting, while other nodes of the International Accounting Network have British, Australian, Hawaiian and Finnish orientations.

The RAW develops and maintains an information resource of great value called "Accounting Resources on the Internet." There you can find pointers to the Internet sites of CPA firms.

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the FASB, publishing houses and much more.

A particularly interesting RAW resource directs you toward Internet locations that host freeware and shareware software for building Internet sites. Current or forthcoming features on the RAW include publications of major professional organizations, searchable databases of articles in major accounting research journals, a searchable database of accounting academics (ANet),

and statements of research in progress.

The RAW is now getting about 50,000 "hits" a week and

Technology to Watch: The Internet Phone

Imagine making a large number of international calls at little or no incremental cost! This is now possible if you have a multimedia computer (a sound card, a microphone, and speakers or earphones) and the other party has the same hardware.

In addition, both parties must have Internet access and the appropriate software: Electric Magic (for Macs) or VocalTec (for PCs). A test version of each product, which allows you to talk for 90 seconds, can be downloaded directly from the Net. The sites to search for are:

<http://www.emagic.com/>
<http://www.vocaltec.com/>

Newer versions of Net phones are fully duplex (i.e. both parties may talk at the same time instead of one party having to wait while the other party talks) and therefore require a duplex sound card. This technology is now popular with cash-poor college students. It is viewed by telecom operators as a direct threat to their core markets.

is growing rapidly. Internet site usage is commonly measured in hits. A hit signifies that a certain file was requested by a visitor. Therefore, a hit does not necessarily correspond to a visit since a visitor may request more than one document. Moreover, if a particular document consists of the main text body and three pictures (gif files), any time a visitor requests that document, her request will be counted as four hits. It is generally assumed that a visit to a web site corresponds to seven-10 hits.

Commercial use of the Internet

While substantial hype has surrounded commercial opportunities on the Internet, most users still shy away from buying through the Internet and are reluctant to use it for commercial purposes. Buying habits are very difficult to change, and the shopping experience through the Net is quite different from the regular one. There also is substantial concern for the security of on-line transactions.

Some industries, however, are jumping on the electronic commerce bandwagon. Software, publishing and banking are among the industries in the forefront.

Most Internet researchers expect that the best opportunities for making money on the Internet, in addition to selling wares for the Internet itself, will be through advertising, subscription services, and transaction processing.

Advertising on the Net will allow greater tailoring and customizing of the marketing message. Electronic magazines may be able to adjust their messages in real time based on information requests made by visitors. Subscription services will allow the user to buy access to valuable information for his/her activities (e.g. stock prices, analyst reports, test results, etc.). Transaction services will progressively take care of the "back office" functions of many businesses, using the Internet as the virtual private network.

Be aware that Internet access providers (IAP) will charge between US \$15.00 to US \$30.00 for unlimited access. Note that in some cases this charge will cover only e-mail and telnet services, requiring you to pay extra for WWW usage. In general, it will pay to subscribe to an IAP if you typically access the Internet from the same place and use it for more than eight to 10 hours a month.

Disconnecting for now

In concluding this new edition to the *IS Audit & Control Journal*, it is obvious that this column could continue and fill an entire book. The Internet and its associated technologies are changing each day, and some readers may have knowledge they wish to share. These comments are welcome.

Readers are invited to forward via e-mail any questions, WWW site recommendations or other comments to the *Journal* at: publication@isaca.org

The Best of Cyberspace

Here are a few directories and search engines that are worth exploring.

Directories

Yahoo: a great favorite for finding WWW sites (over 80,000 WWW sites included)

<http://www.yahoo.com>

The Whole Internet Catalog:

<http://gnn.com/wic/wics/index.html>

The Global Online Directory

<http://www.gold.net/gold/>

Search Engines

Alta Vista Web Index

<http://altavista.digital.com/>

Excite NetSearch

<http://www.excite.com/>

Open Text Index

<http://www.OpenText.com:8080/>

LYCOS Search Engine

<http://www.lycos.com/>

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