

# ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND THE *JOURNAL OF CAVE AND KARST STUDIES*

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Electronic communications and desktop publication are becoming a significant part of the way that the *Journal of Cave and Karst Studies* is doing business. For some time now, the review process has been expedited by the use of electronic mail. This allows fast communication between the editor, associate editors, authors and reviewers, which is important in reducing the time between submission of the manuscript and eventual publication. It also allows for fairly long, rapid communications, without the expense of phone calls.

When Dr. Louise Hose and Dr. Jim Pisarowicz were appointed to their current editorial positions with *Journal*, they began a conversion from our traditional publishing process to a more digital one. Previously, after a manuscript had been reviewed and revised, it was sent to the printer, who retyped the text from the hardcopy, and pasted up the photographs for the layout. The goal established by Hose and Pisarowicz has been to receive (via mail) a copy of the final manuscript on disk (because most authors now compose on computer anyway). This will save both time and money, because the manuscripts will no longer need to be retyped by the printer.

Recently, the process has been taken one step further. During early 1996, I received the first fully electronic submission to the *Journal*. This included both text, and figures, and came after an initial query by the author as to whether the *Journal* accepted such submissions. The author sent his manuscript over the Internet. Many questions were raised because we had never accepted such a submission before. In this case, the author, a resident of the former Soviet Union, preferred electronic submission because it was faster, cheaper, and more certain than physical mail.

As this manuscript has made its way through the review process, a number of difficulties, as well as benefits, have been recognized. Foremost among the benefits have been the speed and ease of communication between the author and the associate editor. This has easily reduced by 50% the time needed for review and revision. The main difficulties have been questions of electronic format. There are currently about 25 commonly used formats for text files, and about 35 for graphic files. Add to this the ten or so different compression routines which are used to prepare files for Internet transmission, as well as the different Internet mailing programs, and the complexity becomes obvious. Decompression of the files, and conversion between these formats is a tedious and frequently time consuming process.

Some scientific journals have taken electronic publishing a step further. The American Association of Petroleum Geologists now publishes their *Bulletin* on the Internet<sup>1</sup>, as well as in paper format. This is free for the taking and includes all text, data, and figures. The last three issues are always maintained on line. A paper subscription to the same journal (published 12 times a year) is \$140. One journal has gone yet another step. A consortium of five scientific societies has just begun publication of a journal called *Earth Interactions*<sup>2</sup>. It is published ONLY in electronic form, not in paper, and makes full use of interactive calculations and graphics. It is interesting to note that electronic publishing was initially viewed as a way to control costs of the production of a journal. The experience of those societies who have gone this route, however, has been that the costs are actually quite similar. What is saved in paper and mailing costs is lost to hardware, software, and communications expenses.

Of course all of this is limited by the access of authors, editors, and readers to computers and the Internet; not everyone is directly connected to the information superhighway. Consider the following: As a matter of course, I request e-mail addresses and phone numbers from anyone submitting a manuscript. A recent submission came to me with no e-mail address, phone, or fax numbers. In my letter acknowledging receipt of the manuscript, I requested this contact information from the author. The reply (by mail) was: "We live remotely away from roads and off the grid, so do not have a phone. However, if you leave a message at the local public radio station, they will broadcast a message, and then we can call you at a time you are at a phone."

The bottom line in producing a high quality *Journal* is not whether someone is on the Internet, or has a fast desktop computer. Rather, the bottom line is the quality of the scientific work that they submit. Given the diversity of the NSS, I expect that we will be receiving and reviewing high quality manuscripts in a variety of formats for some time to come.

<sup>1</sup> For those with Internet access, the AAPG site may be visited at <http://www.geobyte.com/current.html>. Adobe acrobat software (needed to read the journal) may also be downloaded freely from the site.

<sup>2</sup> Information on this journal may be viewed by <http://earth.agu.org/ei/>.