Electronic Publishing - How To Do It: GASNet

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Citation


Abstract

GASNet was initiated as an Internet information resource in 1993 with a mailing list, a Gopher service and an FTP server. A WWW server was added early in 1994, one of the first 500 on the Internet.

With the rapid expansion of professional content on GASNet and the spectacular growth of Internet users in the mid and late 1990's, usage of GASNet soared over the years. In 1996 and 1997 mirrors were added throughout Europe and in Australia for faster access all over the world.

Although it took till January 1999 to develop, this approach was immediately successful. Usage of GASNet started increasing even faster than it had before. The more graphic design also proved to be far more cumbersome to maintain, however. Although a web-authoring program was initially used to generate the site, this still left dozens of details that had to be hand-edited for each and every page, thus making site style consistency hard to maintain. Additionally, the authoring program did not provide well for the inclusion of dynamic content. Because dynamic content was the fastest growing part of GASNet, pages were increasingly being hand-coded (again), but this time with the overhead of the graphic design.

As we were at the maximal extent of our possibilities to maintain GASNet it became clear that in order to foster further growth in both scope and depth we had to adopt a professional structure. The incorporation of GASNet in June 2000 enabled us to make funds available to create a completely new infrastructure. This new structure was put into place in April 2001. It is designed to minimize the work required to maintain all details of each page while keeping the site flexible, the site style consistent and putting emphasis on the scientific and editorial content. The current setup features a database that contains all details of the site structure and content sources. Server based scripts generate all pages according to the information in the database and take the content from XML or PHP (for dynamic pages) coded content. The same content sources may be used, using similar scripts, to generate pages for different platforms, such as PDA's.

The new structure has been in place for less than 6 months but has enabled us to put our energy into content development and platform diversification. Over the past few
months, several micro-sites with academic content have been 
added, with more in various stages of development.

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References
1. HyperText Markup Language, the language used to 
   describe web pages. http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/
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