

## **Online Access to IT Conference/Workshop Proceedings**

Report for BoG meeting of July 9, 2006, Seattle

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### **Background**

Last Fall Han Vinck asked if there could be some way to make access to IT Conference/Workshop proceedings available to all IT members. To a number of us, it came as a surprise that this was not already the case.

We asked IEEE Conference Publications if we could offer online access and received a recommendation dated Jan. 16 (see "online-access-ieee-recommend.pdf") from IEEE Sales and Marketing to add online conference access as a separate item on the annual dues renewal statement for IT members. The recommended price for our members was \$45/yr. The cost to the IT Society included a one-time charge of \$2500 and an annual charge of \$10,000. From experience with other societies, they estimated that perhaps 1 to 3% of our members would choose this option. As a result, there would be an annual cost to the Society of approximately \$5500 to \$8500.

At the IT Officers' Meeting in March just prior to the BoG meeting, it was decided to propose that the Society absorb the full cost of this and include online access (via IEEE Xplore) to all IT conference/workshop proceedings as part of the annual membership fee. The cost was proposed to be taken from IT Society Reserves for the next three years, as a "New Initiative". It was anticipated that this proposal and the spending of reserves would require IEEE approval.

The goals of this proposal were to increase the value of membership to Society members, and potentially, to increase membership. Society finances and reserves are in good shape. If after three years, we decide to continue this electronic access, the cost would need to become part of the regular operating budget of the Society.

This proposal was approved at the BoG meeting, and subsequently ratified by email.

As it turned out, we did not need IEEE Approval to spend the \$10K from our reserves because this amount falls within the guidelines for what can be spent from reserves.

As it also turned out, IEEE Conference Publications (e.g. Mark Vasquez) was very much opposed to our adding online access as an additional membership benefit. The reasoning, which in my estimation has some degree of merit, is that this would devalue something that we and IEEE are now selling at a substantial cost (to libraries, for example) and that currently provides healthy revenue. They thought it would not have much impact if, for example, one society did this. But if a number of societies did this, then libraries, for example might no longer be willing to pay the price that is typically charged. I was lead to believe that to provide such access would require us to petition for a waiver of current policy, and that this would be a nontrivial process.

We learned that they had permitted other societies to offer free online access for one year as a promotion with the idea of charging for online access in future years. They offered this to us and we agreed it for 2007.

Finally, at the IEEE TAB meeting two weeks ago, I learned from the Chair of the TAB/PSPB Products and Services Committee (John Barr, who is not an IEEE employee) that including online access in the basic membership fee is not prohibited, but it is, indeed, strongly discouraged. I also learned that the \$10K per year cost to the Society has been cut approximately in half.

### **The Issue for Consideration**

Thinking ahead to 2008 and subsequent years, we must now decide whether to pursue (a) the inclusion of online access to conference/workshop proceedings in the regular membership fee, or (b) the addition of online access as a separate dues item, or (c) none of the above.

**Notes:**

(a) would probably involve a substantial negotiation/petition process which we should begin soon.

If we choose (b), we are not bound by the recommended price of \$45/yr. Qualitatively comparing the value of conference proceedings to that of the IT Transactions (for which we charge \$30/year) suggests a lower price (\$10-20?) for the former. John Barr indicated that a much lower price might well be acceptable. On the other hand, even \$45/year is far less than the cost of registering for one conference or workshop, and far less than the cost of purchasing one ISIT Proceedings after the conference (>\$200).

The next issue of the IT Newsletter should mention that we are including online access to IT conference/workshop proceedings for 2007 as part of membership. It would be nice to be able to say what will or might happen in future years. The deadline for articles to the newsletter is July 15. If we make any decision now, it can be reflected in the Newsletter.

Some at IEEE think that we have already decided to charge for online conference access beginning 2008. With this in mind, they suggest that in the 2007 dues statement

"we should create a unique pub ID for the access, call it the Information Theory Society Member Conference Digital Library, and highlight that it as "Free for 2007". This way you set the stage for this being a promotional gift to the members, and it won't be as much of a surprise when you begin charging for it in 2008."

If we were to take this recommendation, we would have to act fast. Indeed it might already be too late.