

2001 SAA Web Strategy Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched in 1996 and redesigned in 1999, the SAA Web site has evolved into a vital and creative tool for delivering membership services, disseminating news, championing ideas and causes, as well as promoting the association and its products by situating SAA in a global marketplace unreachable through previous methods. By enhancing the five components of a successful—site content, communication, commerce, advocacy and education—SAA can transform its site into a thriving online community and bolster revenue streams.

The 2001 SAA Web Strategy Plan takes into consideration economic factors, human resources, operational stability, strategic goals, and SAA membership needs. The following two courses of action are proposed:

- First and foremost, capitalize on existing strengths of the SAA Web site and continue to give the site forward momentum. Enhancements have been prioritized into two tiers and include an interactive jobs bank; additional online advertising opportunities; the implementation of database-driven, dynamic Web pages for assorted directories and listings; forms to assist with event registration and journal subscriptions; and online educational offerings. Also proposed are improvements to the Web site's design and architecture; the initiation of a "Web Liaisons Program" that would expand guidelines for the creation of section and roundtable Web pages, as well as facilitate their integration into the SAA Web community; and an enhanced catalog of titles.
- Second and equally important, the plan proposes exploring global technology issues in the SAA office, particularly as they apply to the integration and dissemination of data between Web-based applications and internal management systems. The present challenge to integration is assuring the adequate and timely fulfillment of Web-based services, and achieving workplace efficiencies. At SAA, day-to-day operations—such as management of membership records, events management, order processing, accounting functions, etc.—depend on an association management software system. We will research the suitability of this and other products for integration with Web applications. The ultimate goal is to find a solution that achieves true resource economy, thus maximizing productivity and boosting profit margins. Throughout our investigations we will solicit the expertise of SAA leadership

Attached please find documentation and details supporting the above proposal as well as cost estimates and a timeline for completion of this Web strategy plan.

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1. OVERVIEW OF THE SAA WEB SITE

The SAA Web site includes approximately 350 static HTML pages occupying nearly 13MB of storage space from a total quota of 100MB. Technical features on the site are limited to static HTML, Javascript rollovers, the Atomz.com search engine, and simple CGI form-to-email functions. Data indicates that the five most requested areas of the SAA Web site during November 2000 were as follows (approximate hits per week are noted in brackets):

- Online Employment Bulletin [1,175]
- SAA Publications Catalog and other online resources [495]
- Professional Education (seasonal schedule; Directory of Archival Education in the U.S. and Canada) [480]
- E-mail Lists/Listservs [180]
- In the News [175]

It should be noted that data on Web page hits fluctuates monthly, depending on SAA events and activities. For example, requests for the online annual meeting program ranked second in August with 260 hits per week and dropped to 125 hits per week following the conference, which was held August 28-September 3.

Additional SAA content exists on the Web which is not hosted on the SAA Web server, including 8 section sites, 4 roundtable sites, a Membership Committee Web site, and 12 student chapter sites. Content on these pages has not been calculated in the above data.

2. TECHNOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The static nature of the SAA Web site requires that pages be maintained and updated manually in HTML by the SAA Webmaster. This is accomplished using Macromedia Dreamweaver, an HTML-authoring and Web site management program. HTML is adequate for simple presentation of content via the Web. In addition, interactive forms (e.g., the Job Ads Submission Form, the Leader List Information Form, etc.) have been created using CGI scripts, which convert data submitted via a Web form to e-mail or to a text file stored in a secure directory on the remote server.

On a large site, static HTML is cumbersome and labor-intensive. Furthermore, interactive Web applications (e.g., e-commerce, member "kiosks," etc.) require the ability to capture and manipulate data. This requires a database. A database-driven model would streamline the maintenance process and improve the ability for end users to submit information and/or modify data via dynamic Web applications. In the future, it would also allow for online member registration, event registration, and publications sales. The latter applications will require integration with SAA's association management software system. However, other Web applications could be developed with the use of an independent database.

SAA's hosting service provider offers a range of options for adding a database to SAA's Web resources. Renting the database would relieve SAA of licensing obligations, as well as the responsibility to administer the database. This option may require migrating the domain to another server platform.

Additional tools will also be required to create the Web applications themselves. Dreamweaver UltraDev (<http://www.macromedia.com/software/ultradev>) is a Macromedia product that allows developers to dynamically connect Web pages to databases and easily add server-side logic, navigation, and interactivity. UltraDev facilitates the creation of active server pages (ASP), which function with MS SQL databases. (Additional information about Dreamweaver UltraDev is available via the Macromedia Web site.)

In addition, certain proposed Web applications, such as the improved *SAA Online Employment Bulletin* and the *SAA Directory of Archival Education in the U.S. and Canada* could incorporate online credit card processing. This would require the establishment of a new Internet merchant account, as well as a service plan with an online payment vendor. The cost of establishing an Internet merchant account would need to be investigated further with the assistance of the SAA Finance Director.

Finally, the proposed Web Liaisons Plan calls for the creation of a sub-domain to provide server space, along with limited FTP access, for organizational unit Web sites.

3. IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

SAA Online Employment Bulletin: The *SAA Online Employment Bulletin* is an area ripe for development. Web traffic data shows that this page, the most visited area on the SAA Web site, continues to offer a significant revenue stream for the association. The standardized nature of its content lends itself well to database functions. The proposed Web application would allow advertisers to submit announcements, as well as institutional logos for display, which would immediately be posted to the SAA site on a daily basis, enhancing its benefit to advertisers and job seekers alike. A "mail this job to a friend" link could also be incorporated for each announcement. Real-time credit card processing would be an optional feature.

SAA Directory of Archival Education in the United States & Canada: An enhanced online version of this publication would allow institutions to submit and modify listings throughout the year. Like the *SAA Online Employment Bulletin*, this would be a database-driven application. Real-time credit card processing for submission of institutional listings would be an optional feature.

American Archivist Online Subscription Form: A CGI form-to-email device would facilitate collection of subscription information, or modifications to pre-existing records, for the *American Archivist* via the SAA Web site. Similar to those forms currently used, data would be e-mailed to the appropriate staff member(s) and/or written to a secure directory.

SAA Web Advertising Program: The most visited area on the SAA Web site is the *Online Employment Bulletin*. Since posting job ads online in February 1998, advertising has skyrocketed. Certainly, a number of economic factors have contributed to the growth of jobs, but SAA cannot ignore the revenue generated by these classified ads—roughly 2% of SAA's gross income. By introducing online display advertising opportunities to other vendors, additional revenue can also be generated.

Internet advertising is a combination of traditional advertising and direct marketing. The advantages it offers are targetability and personalization; tracking; deliverability and flexibility; and interactivity. Like all other advertising, online advertising attempts to disseminate information in order to affect a buyer-seller transaction. However, Web advertising differs from other media by enabling customers to interact with the advertisement. Options range from clicking on the ad for more information, to technologies which permit the customer to take the next step and purchase the product in the same online session. Both *Archival Outlook* and *American Archivist* accept display advertising. In addition, the International Archives and Technology Exposition during the SAA annual meeting allows vendors to promote their products and services in person. The SAA Web site will permit vendors to have a presence with SAA year-round. An advertising package will be developed incorporating all of these potentialities by summer 2001. Achieving a fluidity between traditional print and Web media is a goal.

There will be no display advertising on the SAA home page. Instead, there will be discrete placement on heavily trafficked areas as well as on undervalued Web space (thank you pages or receipt-for-payment pages). Ad formats to be offered will include banners, sponsorships, and vendor links.

- Banner ads were the first type of advertising (besides a Web site itself) that cropped up on the Web. They come in a range of sizes, but are usually 7 inches wide by 1 inch deep (468 pixels x 60 pixels). "Although advertisers and publishers have been saying that

advertising must go beyond the banner,' this format receives the vast majority of Web ad spending and will continue to be a Web advertising staple." (*Advertising on the Internet*, 1999)

- Sponsorships will allow advertisers to sponsor specific areas or sections on the SAA Web site (e.g., the annual meeting area, sections of the publications catalog, etc.).
- Vendor links are text advertisements running down the left or right side of a page.

Web Liaisons Program: As indicated in Section 1, a significant amount of SAA content exists outside of the SAA domain (i.e., archivists.org) in the form of section, roundtable and student chapter Web sites. This extended Web community is not currently indexed by the SAA search engine, causing "satellite" information to be less accessible. The diffuse nature of the resulting network impedes communication within the Society, as well as the effectiveness of SAA's Web presence.

The goal of the Web Liaisons Program is to establish greater cohesion between the numerous segments of SAA's online community and to strengthen the *Guidelines for the Society of American Archivists Web Sites*

(http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/app_b.asp#website), where necessary and appropriate. The program's proposed objectives are as follows:

- To establish optional server space for organizational units via SAA's hosting plan and to provide limited FTP access for the maintenance of unit Web sites. The creation of a sub-domain would help to segregate content maintained by the SAA Webmaster from content maintained by organizational units, thus preventing the inadvertent deletion of essential files and otherwise protecting the integrity of SAA's home page;
- To provide easy-to-use templates that would facilitate development of unit Web sites and help maintain consistency of navigation tools throughout SAA's extended Web network;
- To establish a SAA Web Liaisons e-mail list;
- To maintain a flexible approach that does not require the use of certain development tools, dictate methodology, or otherwise undermine the "diverse nature of the units."

It should be noted that while server space and design templates will be provided to organizational units, they need not be required to use them. The search engine currently used by SAA allows for multiple entry points. That is, it can be configured to search pages within multiple domains. By combining entry point settings with URL masks (i.e., directories not to be indexed), the SAA Webmaster can tailor the searchable area to include content hosted at any location on the Web. What is most important, and what the Web Liaisons Program seeks to accomplish, is to foster better communication and coordination between the SAA Webmaster and SAA's section, roundtable, and student chapter Web liaisons.

4. SECONDARY PRIORITIES

Continuing Education Online Program: The *Report of the SAA Task Force on Continuing Education* (<http://www.archivists.org/governance/tfce.html>) calls for the reorientation of SAA's education program "to take advantage of the rapidly maturing technology of distance education." This entails the creation of online workshops.

The recent hire of two part-time SAA Education Directors will allow this program to move forward, but important questions have yet to be explored in depth. For instance, in accordance with the TFCE report, special consideration will need to be given to the relationship between course developers and course instructors. Courses will need to be "portable"—that is, independent of any particular instructor. At the same time, the partnerships between the SAA Continuing Education Department, course developers and instructors will necessarily require a degree of flexibility.

In the course of the coming year, we will need to identify what technological components will be required to accommodate these considerations (e.g., portability, flexibility). What instructional features should be incorporated and what are the budgetary implications? A number of potential models are being explored to answer these questions. They include:

- **ASP Solutions**
ASPs, or application service providers, are Web-based products such as [Blackboard.com](http://www.blackboard.com). They provide out-of-the-box, user-friendly development tools for creating online courses that are administered via a graphical user interface (GUI). Typical features may include Web-based e-mail for instructors and students, discussion boards, chat rooms, utilities for testing and tracking of student performance, and online registration/payment functions. The primary benefit of such solutions is ease of use since the technical infrastructure is ready-made. However, the cost of these programs may be prohibitive.
- **University Partnerships**
Similar to the ASP model, these are fee-based services in which higher education institutions rent their technological infrastructure to organizations. The benefit of this arrangement is that it would appear less commercial, an important consideration for a non-profit professional association. An example is NIU's Division of Continuing Education (<http://www.online.niu.edu/dce/about.html>) which "works in partnership with regional businesses, institutions, associations, and groups to provide a variety of customized services. Faculty and alumni experts offer specialized services in the areas of consulting, training, and research. Specialists within the division provide additional administrative services to groups and organizations involved in seminars and training activities." Cost and functionality of these solutions are yet to be determined.
- **In-house Solution**
Macromedia—the manufacturer of SAA's Web-authoring software, Dreamweaver—has developed a free extension called

CourseBuilder, which complements Dreamweaver and Dreamweaver UltraDev. The extension provides a suite of developer tools specifically designed for creating Web-based course materials. These include utilities for interactive learning and testing (e.g., multiple choice and true/false questions, text entry items, etc.) The program also provides "a visual interface for creating engaging interactivity and sophisticated logic for Web applications, interactions that judge user responses, track a user's movements on the screen, time out a question, or respond to an interaction with any number of multimedia or logic-based responses." In addition, student progress and/or test scores may be recorded in a database. The benefit of an in-house solution is cost-savings for software and services. Conversely, it would require significant development time and could tax SAA's human resources.

Additional Database-Driven Web Applications: Many other areas of the SAA Web site—those containing standardized, formatted content—could also benefit from the database model, discussed in Section 2 and proposed for the *SAA Online Employment Bulletin* and the *Directory of Archival Education in the United States & Canada*. These include:

- The SAA Professional Resources Catalog
- The Directory of SAA Student Chapters
- The Directory of Archival Organizations in the United States & Canada
- The "International Archival Organizations" listing
- The "Associated Professional Organizations" listing
- The SAA Leader List

Improvements to Graphic Design and Navigation Tools: Improvements to the SAA site's graphical interface should be made on an ongoing basis. Good design is not simply a cosmetic issue. It has a substantial impact on the marketability of SAA's goods and services. It is also crucial to making information on the SAA site easy to find. Since implementing SAA's "new look" in 1999, we have observed certain design strategies that work very well. In other cases, there is room for improvement and refreshment. As the various objectives outlined above are implemented, design changes will also occur as a simple matter of course.

5. CONCLUSION

The proposals outlined in this report represent a considerable amount of time and effort, ranging from the improvement of existing SAA Web resources to the implementation of state-of-the-art technologies and the creation of three innovative, new programs (e.g., the Web Advertising Program, the Web Liaisons Program, and the Continuing Education Online Program). This is in addition to regular ongoing projects, such as production of *Archival Outlook*, the *SAA Professional Resources Catalog*, the *SAA Employment Bulletin*, the *American Archivist*, promotional brochures, advertisements, ongoing Web maintenance, and myriad publishing activities. Subsequently, the proposed Web projects are slated to be completed within the next 18 months, if not sooner. Implementation will be on an incremental basis.

Our long-term vision also includes the delivery of fundamental member services via the Web, particularly member registration, event registration, an online member directory, and publication sales. Development in these areas is vital to the success of SAA's Web site. However, progress must be made cautiously and give adequate attention to SAA's operational stability, human resources, and budget. The technological systems required to introduce data integration between the Web and our association management software system are complicated and raise serious compatibility issues.

It is our recommendation that an internal Technology Working Group be assembled that would include skilled IT consultants, the SAA Webmaster and other administrative staff. The purpose of this working group would be to continue a detailed exploration of the data integration challenge and identify feasible solutions that will allow SAA to bridge the technology gap and build the infrastructure that will bolster revenue streams and transform the SAA site into a thriving online community.