

We've Built It, But Are They Coming? International Participation in ASIS&T Online Educational Offerings

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International Information Issues and ASIS&T

EDITOR'S SUMMARY

ASIS&T has offered 55 educational webinars on key topics in information science since 2010, originally prompted by the Webinar Task Force. The successor Online Education Task Force broadened the goal to promote online education and communication among the membership and was followed by the Web Presence Task Force, which aims to bolster the Association's online presence overall, starting with a website redesign. The ASIS&T website offers members the potential for professional development and networking, and online channels are being explored to enhance engagement for all members, especially international members and those unable to attend Annual Meetings. A spring 2014 survey revealed that, while 75 percent of site visitors were from the United States, a substantial number represented India, European nations and North/East Asian countries. Webinar registration is strong for international members and visitors. Based on these indicators, several recommendations are offered to drive ongoing education, international outreach and recruitment efforts.

KEYWORDS

distance learning	international aspects
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social networking	Association for Information Science and Technology
engagement	

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In 2010, under the initiative of past president Linda C. Smith, ASIS&T began offering educational webinars on trending topics in information science. Linda's longtime interest in online education, as well as comparable offerings in other professional associations, informed this decision. With the Board's support, Linda formed the Webinar Task Force in early 2011, and appointed Diane Pennington, who was then co-chair of the Information Science Education Committee, as its chair. Linda believed that webinars would provide substantial membership benefits in the form of convenient professional development and charged the task force with determining whether information professionals would find them valuable. The task force's final report, which is available at <http://asist.org/Conferences/webinars/TaskForceOnWebinars.pdf>, demonstrated members' support for webinars, and the webinars have evolved into a popular, valuable membership benefit. Members can access archived webinars at <http://asist.org/Conferences/webinars/>.

In fall 2011, after the work of the Webinar Task Force had concluded, President Diane Sonnenwald morphed the Webinar Task Force into the Online Education Task Force. This task force considered the nature of ASIS&T's online offerings: were webinars enough or were there other delivery formats and communication channels that would be valuable to the membership? The task force recommended a more holistic approach to addressing the evolving online education and communication needs of ASIS&T members. The task force's final report can be found at http://asist.org/Online_Education_Task_Force_Report_final.pdf. Additionally, a panel of Online Education Task Force members was convened at the 2012 Annual Meeting, and Diane and Linda published a *Bulletin* article in 2013 (http://asist.org/Bulletin/Feb-13/FebMar13_Rasmussen_Smith.html) to update members on this work.

Past president Andrew Dillon appointed the Web Presence Task Force in 2012 in order to continue this interconnected work, and Harry Bruce, the current president, has sustained its existence. The Web Presence Task Force, with Diane as chair once again, has been investigating issues surrounding ASIS&T's entire online presence. As noted in Harry's "President's Page" column in the February/March 2014 issue of the *Bulletin* (http://asist.org/Bulletin/Feb-14/FebMar14_PresidentsPage.html):

[I]t was decided that the Association would commission a redesign of the ASIS&T website. A survey conducted by the Web Presence Task Force, chaired by Diane Rasmussen Pennington, revealed the urgent need for updating and upgrading to current technology and design so that our website better reflects a world-leading information association. We will soon be releasing a call for proposals from experts in the field of website design and construction to submit outlined plans for the website. In the meantime, the Board has decided to commission the Web Presence Task Force with the implementation of several changes to the current ASIS&T website including

- 1. Creating a central, rotating-image, news banner that makes it easy to refresh and update important information that is relevant to ASIS&T members;*
- 2. Changing location of the login section and making it uncomplicated for users to log in and stay logged in;*
- 3. Altering the size of the main ASIS&T banner on the homepage to allow for more usable space for essential items; and*
- 4. Tidying up the layout and navigation "above the fold" to ensure essential activities (such as connecting to the Digital Library) are easy to find.*

Membership Has Its (Virtual) Benefits

The Board and the various task force members have continuously explored the notion of more fully utilizing the potential for an expanded online presence to enhance membership benefits. The leadership hopes these efforts will improve opportunities in professional development and networking regardless of time or physical location.

While our vision is not yet entirely realized, opportunities already exist. As Diane noted in "ASIS&T's Webinar on Webinars: How to Propose, Organize and Present a Webinar," any ASIS&T-related group can host a webinar (www.asist.org/Conferences/webinars/2012/webinar-on-webinars.php). Staff members at ASIS&T headquarters are ready to work with anyone who has an idea for a professional development topic or even a need for improved communication. Since many members who have a desire to meet or collaborate are physically dispersed throughout the world – perhaps the Taipei chapter and the European chapter would like to co-host an event! – using the webinar platform is an ideal way to work together and learn from each other.

The Board will continue to explore online modalities that increase our ability to connect across time and place. Members who cannot attend Annual Meetings and already receive ASIS&T publications through their institutions may have questioned the value of personal membership, but we hope that current and online initiatives will provide services to all information professionals, regardless of their role in our profession and their physical location.

This increased connection is an important point for all members, but it is especially important for international members. When Diane Rasmussen Pennington traveled to Finland in 2011 to present at the European Chapter's ISSOME conference (www.asist.org/Chapters/europe/?p=83), she heard several pleas from European members for ASIS&T to involve them more fully in organization-wide events and communications. The conference was packed with fascinating, cutting-edge research; imagine if it had been webcast to ASIS&T members worldwide!

Increasing ASIS&T's internationalization was a major initiative of Diane Sonnenwald's presidency, and it led to our recent name change from the American Society for Information Science and Technology to the Association for Information Science and Technology. Although the majority of members are still based in North America, the Association has a sizeable amount of activity from information professionals worldwide. The next section provides data about where our website visitors and webinar attendees are physically located.

Website Use

A snapshot of the asist.org website using Google Analytics between February 16, 2014 and March 18, 2014 showed that there were 21,552 total visits (return and new visits) to the asist.org website. Unfortunately, data is not captured on whether or not the visits are by members or non-members. Of the total visits, 17,914 were unique, first time visitors to the site. A total of 16,778 (or 77.82%) were new visits. The majority of the visitors to the site were from the United States with 10,411 total visits (or 48.31%), with 7,868 or 75.57% being new visits. Following U.S. visits, India (1,246 or 5.78%), Canada (850 or 3.94%), the U.K. (840 or 3.90%), China (639 or 2.96) and Australia (519 or 2.41%) were the top five non-U.S. visits. The top 10 non-U.S. countries comprise 5,671 or 26.31% of all visits to the site. See Table 1 for the United States and top 20 countries (including the United States) that visited asist.org during the snapshot period.

Regional Views

A snapshot of two regional views shows that visits to asist.org from European or North/East Asian countries comprise only about 5.5% of all visits to the website.

European view: A sample of European countries with visits to asist.org shows that visits from countries including France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden equal 1,178 visits or 5.46% of visits to the website during the snapshot period.

North/East Asia view: A sample of North/East Asian countries with visits to asist.org further illustrates that visits from a sample of countries in this region including Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan equal 1,193 visits or 5.53% of total visits to the website during the snapshot period.

These figures, and more specifically the regional views presented, show that international visits to the asist.org website are lower than those from U.S. visitors. All of the sampled countries are listed in the top 25 (excluding the United States) who visited the website. Again, as data about visitor membership status is not collected, it is not possible to say with certainty that visits are from members. However, these regional snapshots might suggest countries that should be targeted with increased efforts to recruit new members or to encourage increased involvement within ASIS&T.

TABLE 1. Website visits by country (February 16-March 18, 2014)

COUNTRY	TOTAL VISITS	PERCENTAGE	NEW VISITS	PERCENT NEW VISITS
United States	10,411	48.31%	7,868	75.57%
India	1,246	5.78%	1,105	88.68%
Canada	850	3.94%	641	75.41%
United Kingdom	840	3.90%	688	81.90%
China	639	2.96%	449	70.27%
Australia	519	2.41%	392	75.53%
Brazil	400	1.86%	312	78.00%
Spain	332	1.54%	184	55.42%
Germany	328	1.52%	271	82.62%
Philippines	265	1.23%	242	91.32%
South Africa	252	1.17%	221	87.70%
Malaysia	249	1.16%	200	80.32%
France	212	0.98%	173	81.60%
Kenya	199	0.92%	169	84.92%
Pakistan	193	0.90%	175	90.67%
Netherlands	186	0.86%	150	80.65%
Nigeria	163	0.76%	137	84.05%
Indonesia	153	0.71%	134	85.58%
Taiwan	150	0.70%	111	74.00%
South Korea	146	0.68%	113	77.40%

Webinar Attendance

Webinars are another ASIS&T benefit extended to members and non-members of ASIS&T. ASIS&T has been offering webinars since November 2010. ASIS&T has conducted 55 webinars over the last 3.5 years. Nine of the total webinars have PASIG (Preservation and Archiving Special Interest Group) sponsorship and six are sponsored by ASIS&T special interest groups (SIGs). Only six of the offerings were *not* free for ASIS&T members. (See www.asist.org/Conferences/webinars/ for a complete list of the webinars).

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TABLE 2. Webinar registrations by country (2012-2014)

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF WEBINAR REGISTRATIONS
United States	1,393
Canada	147
Japan	30
Germany	22
United Kingdom	21
Australia	20
China	20
Brazil	12
India	12
Taiwan	12
France	9
Sweden	8

A total of 1,825 participants have enrolled in the webinars. Of this total 1,393 (or 76.32%) are from the United States and 147 (or 8.05%) from Canada. The remainder of the participants are from non-North American countries, comprising 432 (23.67%) of total webinar registrations. These data indicate that while the United States and Canada registrations are higher than other countries, international registrations are almost a quarter of all webinar registrants in 2013 shows the majority of registrations are from the United States (979 registrations or 83.60%), which indicates that non-U.S. webinar registration remains low but that international members/non-members are

taking advantage of this online educational offering. See Table 2 for the top 10 countries with webinar participants.

Recommendations

As the above website visits and webinar registration figures show, asist.org and webinars are important resources for international visitors. The analysis also points out countries with strong visitor or webinar registration history that could be further targeted in recruitment efforts. We offer the following recommendations for increasing international participation or membership.

1. Extend our outreach to our international members to determine
 - a. types of educational offerings (current and new) they would participate in

- b. programming or topic ideas of this audience
 - c. reasons for participating in educational offerings
 - d. reasons for not participating in educational offerings
 - e. social media outlets they use or would like to use for Association communication
2. Develop a larger international social media presence by inviting international members to participate in the new Presidential Social Media Initiative
3. Explore the idea of developing alternative modes for including more international members in Annual Meetings through hosting meetings in international venues or providing virtual conference sessions to Annual Meetings but also to international chapter events
4. Explore mentoring opportunities such as pairing senior international ASIS&T members with new members, with collaboration from SIG/III
5. Explore possible funding for more support for international members to attend Annual Meetings through competitive or other programs
6. Use the Google Analytics of the website to track visits to determine countries to target in membership recruitment efforts

Conclusion

ASIS&T already has an active international presence that can be seen through the SIG/III-sponsored International Reception at the Annual Meetings, exciting events organized by our international chapters and so on. The Board’s goal of increasing internationalization of its membership and its activities calls for participation from all sides. The Association must foster this aspiration by enhancing its online presence through providing webinars and other modes of virtual professional development, interactive social media outlets and an updated website with enhanced functionality. At the same time, it is hoped our international members will provide the Task Force and the Board with their ideas for improving virtual networking and professional development possibilities. We look forward to the conversation. ■