

THE OPINION OF THE COLLEGE OF FELLOWS

The Information Superhighway: Appraisal Organization Access

Initiation, Chair Responsibility,
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Analysis of the ASA Board of Governors' 1993 midterm "packet," which contained reports of officers, board members, and committee leaders, led the College of Fellows to recommend in February 1994 that five major society concerns be evaluated—communications, education, ethics, membership, and international expansion—in light of the new electronic technologies of cyberspace and the unfolding information superhighway.

Subsequently, ASA initiated an interactive computer information system called the Appraisal Profession Online. The potential of such a system is described and summarized in the following Opinion.

The award of a Nobel Prize for medicine in 1962 commemorated the joint discovery in 1963 by Francis Crick and James Watson of the double-helix structure of DNA, a discovery described as "the most significant contribution to biology since Darwin's theory of evolution."

Crick and Watson's discovery thrust biotechnology into a variety of significant aspects of modern life: genetic keys to birth, food products, and health; civil and criminal courtroom identification methods relying on DNA "fingerprints"; and medical ethics.

The world around us changes when a major discovery—a "breakthrough"—occurs. After receiving the Nobel Prize, James Watson became director of the Human Genome Project. Francis Crick, now 77, is reported to have observed, "We were lucky with DNA. Like America, it was just waiting to be discovered."

These ongoing discoveries in biotechnology may be compared with corresponding "breakthroughs" in communications media. Witness the revolutions in computer technology and emergence of bulletin boards and databanks on the Internet, a worldwide electronic network providing access to resources such as libraries, government agencies, research centers, and publishers. This global "information superhighway" is already utilized by some 15 million computer users.

Venue

A primary function of the College of Fellows is to issue written expressions of its Opinions, judgments, and conclusions concerning concepts, practices, and methods that relate to the appraisal profession.

The explosion of opportunities for accessing information via computers—employing avenues such as electronic mail, bulletin boards, and access listservs—is shaping business communications throughout the world. Professions such as law, engineering, medicine, and accounting are exploring the potential for more effective practice/procedure.

Proposal

It would appear to be advantageous for the American Society of Appraisers, in its representative capacity on behalf of thousands of professional valuation practitioners, to formally facilitate organizational access to the electronic information superhighway. This effort would result in enhanced member services, broadened educational reach, increased communications effectiveness with the public, increased opportunities for professional pro bono activities, and construction of a base for the creation of a North/Central/South American electronic network followed by global electronic communication with compeer information-oriented professional organizations.

U.S. Case Example

Sponsored by the Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS), the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Project links 22 federal agencies with eight private dispute resolution organizations via electronic mail (American Bar Association, Harvard Law School, National Institution for Dispute Resolution, Ohio Commission on ADR, Oregon Commission on ADR, American Arbitration Association, Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution, Conflict Net).

It is reported that these eight organizations were chosen by ACUS because they are *nonprofit* providers of ADR training; they have *data access* to important ADR; they are interested in *sharing information* on ADR; and they are connected to *additional ADR groups* via network.

In an effort to stimulate similar cooperative networking ventures, the United States government, via H.R. 2629 (the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure and Public Broadcasting Facilities Act of 1993), has provided \$20 million for matching grants to “promote innovation ... by supporting telecommunication demonstration projects....” Eligible: educational institutions and research facilities.

Commentary

Access to the electronic information superhighway would not only make available the rich resources in the libraries of governmental agencies, research centers, and publishers; such access would enhance the value of membership in the American Society of Appraisers. An electronic forum would enable members to quickly gain information about conferences/examinations/courses; the status of proposed federal or state legislation affecting appraisers, and so forth.

Personal computer access to the society could provide an alternative to the present educational structure, which necessitates physical attendance at courses, conferences, and seminars, involving expenses for lodging, food, travel, and time.

Electronic technologies are already being employed by universities and other learning centers: lectures, class discussions, papers, and examinations are accomplished via home- or office-based computer systems employing taped lectures, electronic mail, conferencing, and self-paced tutorials.

For the first time, the society can establish a practical, open-door communications system to serve the general public, responding electronically in minutes to such questions as: Where can I find an appraiser for a certain kind of property? How can I contact an ASA chapter in my area? How can I learn to be an appraiser? Does your society have a code of ethics? Is it general or specific?

With an established electronic networking system, the society could make known—in a swift manner to an unbelievably wide audience—information concerning the society's long-range pro bono publico programs. For example, information about ASA's pioneering position on licensing/certification (of all appraisers, in all disciplines, in order to protect the appraisal-buying public), which is little known today by the public and scarcely recognized by many regulatory agencies, could easily be widely disseminated.

Establishment of an Internet communication system for appraisers could bring society members, chapters, committees, and officers into immediate and cooperative contact. The system could be extended nationally to compeer organizations such as, for example, the American Arbitration Association or the American Right of Way Association, together with cooperating governmental agencies. Electronic communication could be achieved with appraisal groups in Canada, England, Mexico, and Venezuela. Similar communications could be undertaken with educational institutions in Western and Eastern Europe, where ASA has already established professional ties, such as Kaunas University of Technology in Lithuania.

Summary

The American Society of Appraisers, which has a long and successful record of pioneering new appraisal practice/procedure concepts (e.g., licensing/certification of appraisers; pro bono publico, 1971; College of Fellows, 1973; Valuation Sciences Degree Program, 1974) should establish professional organizational access to the electronic information superhighway via the Internet and related technologies.

Such electronic access should (1) emphasize increased service to the society's membership; (2) facilitate educational programs; (3) strengthen communications with the public; (4) improve pro bono publico activities; and (5) afford an electronic networking base for communication with compeer organizations, nationally and internationally.