

Organizational Members - March 2007 - Board of Trustees Meeting

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It has been a busy and exciting first quarter as we move forward with implementing ISOC's 2007 organisational membership plan. Consistent with our 2007-2009 program goals, our focus this year is on three areas: ISOC member retention and recruitment and IETF sponsorship. As discussed in greater detail in this report, we are moving forward in all three areas to implement our plan.

With respect to member retention, we have significantly increased our member outreach and communications, focusing on greater personal contact (phone calls, meetings and email) with members, as well as conducting a survey of all organisational members to determine their views of ISOC, assess their perceptions of the value of membership and inquire as to future programs and services that they feel would add additional value. We also are working with the Advisory Council to establish value-added programs and activities that will increase member participation.

In stepping up recruitment, we have contacted and met with many potential members, with an emphasis on network operators and product providers. In conjunction with our new communications department, we have started work on new marketing materials designed to educate prospective members about ISOC and the value of membership. We are refining and expanding membership benefits in order to more clearly define the differences in value associated with levels of membership at higher dues levels.

In speaking with prospective members, we generally find strong awareness of the ISOC's close relationship with the IETF, but less awareness of ISOC's policy and education activities. These meetings with prospective members have provided us with an excellent opportunity to build awareness of our new policy and education programs and initiatives. This is very valuable since prospective members (and even some current members) are telling us that policy and education constitute a rapidly increasing part of the membership value proposition that appeals to non-technical management and policy-oriented people within organizations.

With respect to sponsorship, we have been working with the IETF Administrative Director and with IAOC and ISOC Board members to identify and secure hosts for upcoming IETF meetings. We have a tentative commitment from one member to host the Vancouver meeting this fall, and efforts are underway to identify hosts for the Summer and Fall 2008 meetings. In addition to meeting hosts, we are working to sign-on sponsors for the IETF meeting Welcome Reception. Notwithstanding our best efforts, we were unable to find a sponsor for Prague meeting Welcome Reception. We are reviewing the sponsorship case to determine if there is a better way to present the opportunity to make it more attractive to potential sponsors. We announced our first sponsor (Google) for the new ISOC Fellowship Program to the IETF. We are quite pleased at the positive global media coverage that the announcement of this new ISOC program received and hope to leverage the positive reception in attracting future sponsors.

Retention/Dues

Through March, our retention rate has been strong (99%) as we lost only one member. This is significant because nearly 53% of all organizational members renew in December and January alone. Martin Kupres is largely responsible for this success through his work with our members to facilitate timely dues payments.

A critical process to ensuring strong retention rates is to improve member communications, so that we can best understand how members perceive the value of membership. To this end, staff conducted a survey of organizational members in December 2006.

a. Member Survey

The survey was designed to determine the value that organizational members place on current ISOC's programs and services and to solicit suggestions on potential new benefits and services. 43 out of 140 organization member representatives responded to the survey (30% response rate). While respondents represented a good cross-section of our organization members, we will look to improve upon our member response rate in future surveys. Special thanks to the Advisory Council Executive Committee members who participated in its design. The survey will aid in developing future product and service offerings for existing and prospective members. Survey results are posted at:

<http://www.isoc.org/members/surveys/SurveyResults/21> .

The survey results have been shared with the AC Executive Committee and members as well as our policy, education and communications departments, in order to assist us in developing programs and services moving forward (e.g. topics for web casts) as well as to improve the delivery of existing member services (e.g., website). We plan to do a follow-up customer satisfaction survey in six months (June 2007).

b. Member Outreach & Communications

In addition to the survey, we have had many conversations and meetings with our current organization member representatives. It is a priority for us to communicate with member representatives at any available opportunity. These dialogues contribute to understanding members' perceptions, needs and expectations and ensuring they are aware of the many opportunities for them to participate within ISOC and its member community.

The outreach strategy is comprised of the following activities:

- Improving standard communications. Renewal letters are now being personally tailored to the primary membership contact and these letters highlight ISOC's major activities/accomplishments in the preceding year, as well as specifics on new member opportunities and benefits under development. Each concludes with a request for a phone call to discuss membership and issues of interest. Payment acknowledgements likewise have been turned from confirmations into personalized thank you messages with similar requests for an appointment to talk. Members appear to sincerely appreciate that senior ISOC staff place an importance on meeting them and have an interest in their opinions.
- Increasing the level of information to members. We now regularly provide organization members with documents and analyses prepared by our policy team. For example, we shared with the members details on ISOC's participation at IGF in

Athens and at ITU World in Hong Kong. In addition, we recently collaborated with the education, policy and communications departments in sending out a survey to organization members asking their views on the critical Internet issues and how they believe ISOC can be most effective in educating policy makers on these issues.

- Expanding participation of individuals. We are considering ways to expand the number of individuals within each member organization who participate in ISOC and utilize our programs and services. In many cases the involvement of organization members in ISOC is limited to those individuals that participate within the IETF, or are identified as the as the “primary” and “alternate” representatives to the Advisory Committee (and often, the AC reps also are active in the IETF). We see significant opportunity in the 2007-2009 timeframe for increased member engagement and participation in ISOC, particularly as we build up our public policy and educational activities.

We are confident that by improving and expanding our outreach and communications activities, we will increase the membership value proposition for our current organization members, (while also demonstrating enhanced value to prospective members).

c. Advisory Council

We have had several discussions with the AC officers and with individual organization members on refining the value proposition for members and improving communications and outreach as discussed above.

As an outcome of these discussions, we have updated the AC webpage on the ISOC website (include minutes of past meetings, announcements and agendas of future meetings, etc.). <http://www.isoc.org/orgs/ac.shtml> In addition, we are working with the IT department to construct an AC Wiki page which will distribute this information more efficiently and allow members to post their own information or contributions to the group. And we have been discussing with the AC Executive Committee opportunities to enhance the value of in-person meetings and encourage greater member participation (e.g., meeting locations, agenda topics, etc.).

Pursuant to the aforementioned strategy of expanding organization member participation, we are actively soliciting more and varied participation, particularly in the areas of policy and education, in our planning calls and meetings. In addition, we are exploring new initiatives, consistent with the AC’s of providing advice to the Board. Work products from any subgroups/initiatives will be shared with the Board.

Recruitment

As we continue with our front-end efforts of getting the program and its resources where they need to be to support a larger and more aggressive recruitment campaign, we have recruited three new members since the November Board meeting. They are The Council of Hungarian Internet Providers, SIDN and DigiCert SSL Certificate Authority. Again, thanks go to Martin Kupres as the first two of these are the direct result of a project he undertook roughly a year ago to reach out to the large number of ccTLDs who are not yet ISOC members. We are pleased to report that NeuStar is our newest Platinum member, thanks to their hosting of the IETF meeting in Prague.

Our 2007-2009 recruitment strategy is built upon a strong foundation, one that requires us to create the basic building blocks for success; namely, identifying and segmenting the potential market, developing a clear value proposition, creating appropriate marketing materials to convey our message and generating visibility for ISOC.

a. Research

The membership team has begun to identify organizations to target for membership, with an emphasis on network operators and product providers. We are leveraging available support resources to identify the appropriate people to initiate contact where we don't have that information already. We also are engaging the help of current members and other associates to make introductions for us with people that they already know in the correct positions with those prospects.

b. Prospecting

In the first quarter we have met with (by conference call or in person) several notable prospects on which we placed a high priority for one or more of the following reasons: a) they are past ISOC members b) they have potential to be high level members c) we have identified a good point of contact who is very interested in ISOC. In addition, we have several meetings pending with prospective members (some who will also help us make contact with others) that occurred leading up to the March Board meeting. The following are some of these organizations: AOL, Oracle, VeriSign, LINX, IT Industry Association of France, Flag Telecom, STROM Telecom, AT&T, UBI France, ICC, CBI, MAAWG, British Telecom, Infinera, Global Crossing and others.

We also have begun to work with Sebastian Bellagamba of our Latin American & Caribbean Bureau on developing a membership prospecting plan for that region. Sebastian is a seasoned and respected member of the Internet and business community in the region and he is already proving a valuable asset in identifying prospects.

c. Membership Materials

Existing ISOC marketing materials are generally outdated and not targeted to specific prospect segments. Therefore, we have been working with our communications department to develop new marketing materials, with an emphasis on multiple levels of marketing collateral which is targeted to those organization segments we identify for membership. We look to have those materials available next month.

As a companion to materials used to communicate the value of membership and elicit interest in learning more, professional presentation materials are useful if not expected in situations where we have secured the opportunity to present ISOC and ask for commitment. We have developed a general membership presentation, designed to complement a discussion on why an organization should join ISOC. It is intended to be modular in that not all of the slides may be necessary in every discussion. It is also designed to be customized to the specific audience. The basic deck focuses on the business case for membership. The slides would be adjusted accordingly for use with other customer segments (e.g., educational institution).

Per the request of the Board, staff and others who may speak on ISOC's behalf, we will soon have available an alternate version that is more oriented towards outlining the activities of the organization and providing information necessary for interested parties to initiate further contact with staff for more details.

d. Enhanced Visibility

As part of our marketing efforts, we plan to collaborate with our new communications department to identify opportunities to raise ISOC's visibility within the Internet community and also to ensure consistency in our messaging. We are confident that these collaborative efforts between communications and membership will pay dividends in our recruiting efforts moving forward.

Dues and Benefit Restructuring

One of the more challenging issues we have encountered in recruiting new members (and also trying to make the case for existing members to upgrade) is the prevalent lack of differentiation in benefits across the different levels of membership. A nonprofit that pays \$1,250 (50% discount of Small Business level) receives benefits that in many respects are similar to those received by organizations that are Silver and Gold members.

Traditionally, ISOC's membership proposition has been based on a philanthropic appeal to support the Internet Society's work to "bring the Internet to everyone." And of course, several organizations use the fact that ISOC supports the IETF to justify their memberships, though even here, we see companies elect to be members at a lower level than would be expected based on company size and revenues. The fact that IETF participation does not depend on any financial contribution to ISOC limits the dues level and also makes those dues purely discretionary. The philanthropic value of IETF support is an important component of the membership case, but continued reliance on it alone is not sustainable or practical. Our plan is to continue consulting with current and prospective members and to develop recommendations for the most appropriate dues and benefits structure. We remain on schedule to have a plan for Board consideration prior to year end.

Sponsorship

We are working with the IETF Administrative Director and with IAOC and ISOC Board members to identify and secure hosts for upcoming IETF meetings. We have a tentative commitment from one member to host the Vancouver meeting this fall, and efforts are underway to identify hosts for the Summer and Fall 2008 meetings. In addition to meeting hosts, we are working to sign-on sponsors for the relatively new IETF meeting Welcome Reception (isn't this a bit redundant? It is exactly the same text as on page1). Despite our best efforts, we were unable to find a sponsor for Prague meeting Welcome Reception. In speaking with various companies, the comments we have received suggest that the cost of the event (particularly where the company is not the IETF host) is not viewed as commensurate with the value a company would receive from sponsoring the Reception. This suggests we may need to revisit the structure of this particular sponsorship.

As noted in the January Board report, Google has stepped forward the first sponsor of the ISOC Fellowship to the IETF program <http://www.isoc.org/educpillar/fellowship/index.shtml>. We continue to seek additional sponsors at \$15K (USD) each to cover the annual costs of the program (projected at \$80K USD, based on sending a total of 15 Fellows to the IETF meetings in 2007). We have some companies that have expressed interest, though it might be later in 2007 or 2008 before they sponsor. We have posted information to our website about the program and are reaching out to members as well as other organizations. In addition, we are working with the communications and education departments to produce printed information on the success of the program and opportunities to sponsor.