www.TAPPI.org Then and Now

MARY GUNSTONE AND MIKE KIRBY

T he date was June 1995; the journal staff was busily developing a radical new high-tech "CD-ROM;" TAPPI headquarters staff saw the last of their trusted green terminal screens replaced by full-color personal computers; and Executive Director William Cullison decided the Association needed a "Web site." The deadline was Labor Day.

THE TAPPI WEB SITE REDESIGN: WHAT WAS DONE AND WHY.

HISTORY LESSONS

By September 1995, "TAPPI Web" was online, and as many as 35 visitors a day stopped in to see what was offered. As the months went by, information was added, rearranged, restructured, and rewritten to this phase-one site. After just one year in operation, it was clear that TAPPI Web needed an overhaul.

January 1996 saw the debut of TAPPI's redesigned Web site, now simply titled "TAPPI." This phase-two site made significant improvements to the structure and layout of the material the Association had online. While the original site was an exercise in experimentation and discovery, this new version sought to refine the information and make it easier for visitors to find what they needed.

This version of the site represented the Association during the initial explosion of the Internet into mainstream business. Ironically, the site would end up being a victim of its own success; as more visitors flocked to the site, the process of manually updating thousands of pages resulted in bottlenecks of information flow. By May 1998, a significant change in the Web site was needed in order to meet the growing demands for timely, accurate information online.

MEMBER-FOCUSED

Changing TAPPI's Web site would be of little value if the new site did not address member needs. Questionnaires were distributed at selected TAPPI conferences during August and September 1998. It was from this feedback that new features for the Web site were prioritized for the redesign. A major new section was added to the site; industry news would now be found on "TAPPI Online" on a daily basis.

Another area identified was that of member services. From updating membership records online to using private networking functions, the members-only area of the web site was in need of a major overhaul.

It became very clear that function took priority over form in the eyes of the typical TAPPI member. Overwhelmingly, members would rather pour over an accurate text-rich technical program than read a well-designed but outdated document.

INTERNET

A SITE IS REBORN

After eight months of planning, building, and testing, the new TAPPI Online was unveiled Feb. 1, 1999. By far, this has been the most ambitious change in design to date. Bottlenecks have been eliminated, and headquarters staff have been empowered to add information to the Web site on a constant basis.

Fresh information

Dynamic delivery of current information is at the heart of the new TAPPI Online. Members are presented with fresh content on almost every page. The home page gives "at a glance" current industry and member news as well as access to the most popular areas of the web site. Even a short visit to the home page allows users to come away with a snapshot of what is going on at TAPPI and in the industry. As a further enhancement, members can now personalize their visits using "Your TAPPI Online," a tool designed to allow users to tailor their information delivery to include the news and announcements of most interest to them.

Fast access

Consistent navigational elements help users easily find their way. The interface was designed to be simple, logical, and informative. Primary (site-wide) navigation is accomplished through use of a graphic link bar appearing at the top each page. Users can easily move from one section of the Web site to the next with a single mouse click. Secondary (section) navigation is available in an easily accessible links panel on the left side of most pages. From this panel, users can readily move between pages within each section.

Accurate listings

Registering for a conference, short course, or trade fair has never been easier. Members can more easily locate an upcoming event by searching our online database. The event technical programs are updated three times a week, giving members access to the most current information possible. Upon selecting an event, registration information, highlights of the event, venue and hotel information, technical programs, travel information, and more may all be reviewed. A simple click of the mouse takes the member to a registration area where he or she can proceed with limited online registration or download a printable registration form. The addition of an Events Calendar adds further functionality to this area. The Events Calendar is presented in a standard calendar format on which events are shown as color-coded bars. Moving the mouse over the bars will provide the event name, and with a click the user is taken directly to that event's information.

Powerful searches

TAPPI Online now contains more powerful overall search capabilities. A user can search any part of the site from anywhere within the site. New search options allow users to limit their searches to a particular area, several areas, or the full contents of the Web site. Searching the TAPPI Bookstore is now more intuitive. Members can specify product category, type, and keywords, allowing them to receive a list of related items more explicit to their request.

Member enhancements

Some of the most exciting enhancements have been in the area of member services. Members can now modify their individual membership information through an interactive online form. It is far easier to locate fellow TAPPI members using the improved Membership Directory and Products and Services databases.

FUTURE PLANS

TAPPI Online is a work in progress. The initial input from surveys and member suggestions set us the right direction, but there is a constant striving to improve information delivery systems and member services. Planned upgrades include an online payment system for membership dues, the ability to purchase individual test methods and tips from the TAPPI Bookstore, incorporation of Local Section events into the general Web site events listings, full text searches of online PDF files, and Bookstore searches by ISBN number.

It is the members who have provided the insight necessary to make TAPPI Online a world-class Web site. Suggestions and comments are not only appreciated but necessary in the quest to provide the most timely and detailed information possible. Please direct comments to the TAPPI Online Web Editor, Mary Gunstone, at webmaster@tappi.org. **TJ**

Gunstone is Web Editor for TAPPI JOURNAL. She may be reached at mgunstone@tappi.org. Kirby is Publications/IT Administrator for TAPPI, and may be reached at mkirby@tappi.org.

TAPPI JOURNAL **Online**
http://www.tappi.org/public/tappi_journal.asp

TAPPI Bookstore
http://www.tappi.org/public/library_catalog.asp

Conferences and Events
http://www.tappi.org/public/events.asp

Members Only
http://www.tappi.org/MembersOnly/index.asp