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From Humble Beginnings

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Abstract

Michael Lambur, the *Journal of Extension* editor who presided over the transition from paper to electronic format in 1994-95, recounts some of his experiences during this historic effort. Highlights include how little was known at the time about publishing a journal electronically, how we initially began, reactions to publishing electronically, and recollections about the people involved in the process at the time.

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It's hard to believe that the electronic *Journal of Extension* is 10 years old. Congratulations! It's an honor to be asked to write a Commentary as the first editor who presided over the transition from paper to electronic format back in 1994. There are so many things I could write about, but I'll keep it simple and give you only some of the highlights as I remember them.

Mr. Naiveté

I knew next to nothing about being a journal editor when I took on this job. Former *JOE* Board member Judith Jones came into my office one day and asked if I would consider becoming the editor for the journal. She said *JOE* was going totally electronic and it would involve reading and editing manuscripts and then putting them together for *JOE* issues. I thought, how hard could this be? So I willingly accepted and soon discovered that I was Mr. Naiveté.

However, in retrospect, being naive was probably a good thing. At that time there were very few electronic journals and little to go on to provide direction. So we were not bound by convention and free to pursue our vision of an electronic *JOE*. We forged ahead and capitalized on the creative ideas of the many good people we had working on the project. And over time we found that we made good decisions that laid the groundwork for what we have today. Oh and, by the way, I learned how to become a journal editor, in case you were wondering.

So How Do You Do an Electronic Journal?

As mentioned above, we had no template to follow for how to create an electronic journal. We consulted with a number of library staff and learned that we were pretty much on our own. So we just moved ahead and flew by the seat of our pants, so to speak. It took 6 months to make the transition from paper to electronic copy, and we had to completely revise the editorial process. The technical and editorial staff did exceptional work to make this happen. We published our first electronic edition in June 1994.

Authors submitted manuscripts as text files, and our issues for 1994-95 were published in ascii text, with no special formatting. Even with a 6-month delay in publishing, the volume of manuscripts submitted, processed, and published in 1994-95 remained the same as for the hard copy format in the previous years. In addition, we added a new Commentary section, a piece on often-asked questions about the journal, a piece on the manuscript review and evaluation process, and a variety of marketing materials, and secured our Internet domain name (joe.org) and increased publication from four to six issues per year.

Of course, thanks to the increasing capabilities of the World Wide Web, often-asked questions and information about our review and evaluation process no longer accompany each issue. Instead, that information and much more is a permanent part of the *JOE* Web site at www.joe.org.

Reactions

As editor, I had the opportunity to talk to many people around the country about the new electronic *JOE*. There was some remorse expressed at first by users about not having a hard copy of *JOE*. But this subsided, and users quickly warmed to the new electronic format.

Interestingly, the Board was still focused on the print issue after we had been publishing electronically for about a year. I'll never forget the Board meeting where we were hotly discussing whether or not to include a "print entire issue" option. Judith Jones finally reminded us that an electronic journal was not a print medium. This caused us to take stock and realize that we were really in the electronic age. While this is still included as an option, I continue to wonder how many readers take advantage of it.

The People

My most vivid recollections are of the people that I worked and interacted with in my editorship as we transitioned to an electronic format. Jim Summers was president of the Board of Directors at the time and led the transition for the electronic *Journal of Extension*. He was a man of vision and a most likeable and gracious person. I truly enjoyed working with him.

Kathy Treat, vice president, and Janice Leno, secretary, provided solid Board leadership throughout my tenure as editor. They were delightful people to work as well. Ellen Ritter, who preceded me as editor, was a wealth of information and taught me the ropes. I'll never forget when she told me, "You're the editor and in charge of content--the Board is advisory." Emmett Fiske served as chair of the editorial committee and had a can-do attitude that served us well. All Board members took the job seriously and provided exceptional leadership throughout the transition. I truly enjoyed and looked forward to the Board meetings. And we had fun in the process, too.

The technical support people, Dirk Herr-Hoyman, Patrick Robinson, and Tom McAnge, were terrific and worked with us every step of the way to make the electronic *JOE* happen. We faced many technical challenges along the way, and they led us through these with ease.

Finally, the two people who I remember most fondly are Teresa McCoy, Assistant Editor, and Cheryl Kieliszewski, Editorial Assistant. I worked in the trenches on the editorial operation with these two people for 2 years. I would have been truly lost without their extraordinary support and assistance. There were no two more creative, caring, and dedicated professionals than Teresa and Cheryl. Working with them in the 2 years I was editor was a joy that I will always cherish.

From Humble Beginnings

As I look at the most recent edition of the *Journal of Extension* on the Internet and reflect back on where we started 10 years ago, we did, indeed, come from humble beginnings. In 1994 the idea of an electronic journal was a radical one. No other hardcopy journal had ever moved to a completely electronic format. The very idea of replacing a hardcopy journal with something one reads on a computer screen was strange, to say the least.

Through the vision and leadership of Jim Summers and with a host of dedicated Extension professionals, we took the leap. From our humble beginnings of knowing next to nothing about publishing an electronic journal, over time we learned, persevered, and have made the *Journal of Extension* a premier electronic journal on the Internet.

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