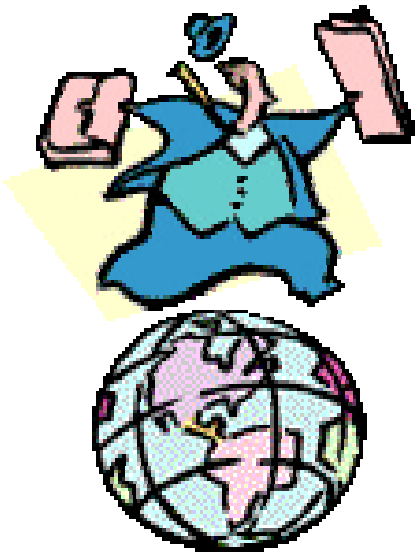
Meetings in an Electronic Environment
Final Report



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Preface

I wish to say thank you to the reference group and consultants for their interest and participation in this project. As a junior technical writer, it has been my job to think as a user while writing appropriate instructional materials for my target audience. It has been my privilege to learn and interact with literacy practitioners and professionals outside my local area.

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I wish to express my appreciation to all the staff and directors of Laubach Literacy Ontario. The amount of time, patience and expertise you brought this project was incredible. Both Alan Cherwinski and Anita Watkins provided timely technical support. Additionally, I wish to thank the literacy programs that responded to Internet surveys and field-tested the AlphaCom Guidebook.

Respectfully submitted,

Maia Shapley
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Executive Summary

“Meetings in an Electronic Environment” is a pilot project funded by Ministry of Education & Training (MET) involving Laubach Literacy Ontario, commonly known as “The AlphaCom Project”.

Laubach Literacy Ontario is a provincial umbrella group representing a network of community-based agencies across Ontario. The Board of Directors is annually elected by its membership. Directors live in different communities across the province and typically gather for face-to-face meeting every few months. Travel and accommodation have proven to be an expensive endeavour for this nonprofit association.

Historically, directors have complemented their face-to-face meetings with an electronic conferencing system called AlphaCom. Members would Telnet to the Cosy conferencing system, incurring long distance charges while doing so. Literacy practitioners would subscribe to both open and closed discussions, while receiving free mailboxes. The Laubach directors were active participants on AlphaCom. They discussed many board-related matters in their closed conferences.

In October of 1997, the Cosy conferencing system was replaced by a web-based conferencing system. Literacy agencies were to assume the cost of participating on the new AlphaCom website by acquiring the necessary computer equipment, software and Internet accounts. The AlphaCom website was to provide a new and economical means of the conferencing among literacy practitioners and the Ministry of Education and Training (MET).

The Laubach Board of Directors received funding from MET to conduct a pilot study called “Meetings in an Electronic Environment”. The premise was the Board could reduce the need for costly face-to-face meetings by conducting board business online. The project investigates the legal implications, cost-effectiveness and practicality of conducting board meetings using the Internet. The intent was to develop and field-test a meeting model while using the AlphaCom conferencing system. A handbook would be written illustrating how a board can hold meetings in a discussion group while following parliamentary procedure.

The project stressed the importance of all directors having Internet access and detecting barriers for person unfamiliar with the technology. Persons with low literacy skills and distinct learning styles should not feel alienated by Internet communications. The new technology needs to facilitate group collaboration and communication among both directors and staff. In order for the board to work effectively as a team, individual participants need to feel comfortable and competent with Internet communications.

COMPUTERS UPGRADES

In the beginning, an assessment was made to determine the necessity for computer upgrades so directors may access the Internet. The Executive Director underwent the arduous task of determining the hardware and software needs of the field-trial participants; and hired a technical specialist to do the work.

After the upgrades were completed, the project coordinator surveyed the staff and directors to determine the depth of computer training necessary to conduct an online board meeting. It soon became apparent many users required training in Windows 95, file management, AlphaCom and the Internet.

TRAINING

It was decided the newly elected board would receive group instruction on board operations and how to use the new AlphaCom website. An instructional guide was written on how to use the AlphaCom discussions. The project coordinator supplemented the hands on training with individual instruction and telephone support. Directors and staff continued to practice their Internet skills in the closed Laubach discussions.

More experienced Internet users provided encouragement and advice to novice users. People's interest and comfort with Internet communications varies. Participants learned the most when they asked questions, practiced their computer skills and had reliable technical support. However, some field-test participants volunteered to test other methods of communication like web chat, bulletin boards, message paging and Microsoft NetMeeting.

Laubach's student representative required the most hands-on training. This was his first exposure to typing, computers, and the Internet. Along with his wife, the student gained an understanding and appreciation of AlphaCom, e-mail and web chat. Already an experienced board member, he was able to read and participate in the online board meetings with the assistance of his wife or tutor. His reading skills were far superior to his keyboarding and mouse skills. He would often read aloud both messages and reports while dictating his responses to a typist. Reading aloud provided him the opportunity to proof read his own messages before posting them to AlphaCom.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

The necessity for training materials written in plain language became obvious early on in the project. In order to participate in an online board meeting, participants needed to be versed in parliamentary procedure, basic window 95 skills, e-mail and AlphaCom. The search for affordable and good quality materials began.

For parliamentary procedure, the Laubach board needed to adopt a standard by which to follow. Robert's Rules of Order tend to be rigid and difficult process to follow (e.g. various motions and how they are treated). By the second field trial, the board decided to adopt the "Call to Order" by Herb Perry. Having a user-friendly reference book simplified the meeting process for both directors and staff. During the field trials, the project coordinator consulted with Herb Perry several times, an expert in the governance of nonprofit associations in Ontario.

The Handbook for Online Board Meetings was developed specifically for asynchronous meetings held on AlphaCom. The Handbook explains the meeting process and the roles and responsibilities of the directors. The AlphaCom Guidebook acts as a companion piece to the Handbook. After the field trials, revisions were made to both instructional materials. Field-trial participants were also given articles on how to use e-mail, web browsers and common Internet terminology.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

AlphaCom provided technical support to the staff, directors and members of Laubach Literacy Ontario. Alan Cherwinski and Anita Watkins created four closed conferences, fixed technical glitches, archived meetings and magically replaced lost passwords. Betsy Trumpener assisted staff with the tough task of moderating. Mike Kelly graciously assisted people with file attachments, software installations and the art of online conferencing.

Laubach Literacy Ontario also received excellent technical support from their local Internet provider Golden Triangle and Future Design Software. Both companies helped keep the office computers online while keeping staff abreast of new technologies.

SURVEYS

During the project, Laubach had an opportunity to survey its directors, a sample of community-based agencies and the regional networks. These surveys provided insight into the acceptance of Internet communications, frequency of use, the necessity for training and up-to-date equipment.

It was discovered the reticence on the part of many practitioners to participate on AlphaCom had to do with the perceived lack of training. The AlphaCom Guidebook provided an independent learning opportunity for many people who wished for instructional material written in plain language.

MAIN PURPOSE

The main purpose of this project is to promote online business communication within a volunteer board, while increasing the effectiveness of board operations through the use of AlphaCom and e-mail.

This study explores the practical implications of using AlphaCom versus other web-based conferencing methods for board communication within an association. Questions raised:

- Can a volunteer board effectively conduct board meetings on AlphaCom?
- How does AlphaCom and Internet communications fit into a larger information system for an association like Laubach Literacy Ontario?
- Are some conferencing methods more suitable than others?
- What skills and equipment are necessary?

MAIN GOALS

- Write a handbook for conducting board meetings on AlphaCom.
- Investigate the legal implications of conducting board business on the Internet.
- Promote Internet communication through the use of AlphaCom and e-mail.
- Investigate alternative conferencing methods using the Internet.
- Write a final report with recommendations.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The Laubach Board of Directors held two online meetings using a closed AlphaCom discussion. Online meetings proved to be a cost effective in terms of dollars and distance. However, participants' felt meeting in asynchronous time was too impersonal. The time required to participate in a single board meeting on AlphaCom was ridiculous when compared to that of a face-to-face one. Conferencing online appears to supplement face-to-face meetings rather than replace the need for them altogether.

Project Objectives

A. Research business communication practices on the Internet.

B. Research board policy and procedures within the provincial Laubach association.

C. Assist volunteer directors to register with AlphaCom.

D. Promote and facilitate participation within the literacy discussions.

E. Investigate how board policy and procedures can be applied to a closed AlphaCom discussion.

F. Field-test the new virtual boardroom on the AlphaCom website.

G. Investigate the training and support necessary for an adult learner to participate on AlphaCom and a board meeting.

H. Investigate how a virtual environment may affect a person's learning style preference while conferencing on the Internet.

The project objectives are summarized on the next eight pages.

A. RESEARCH BUSINESS COMMUNICATION PRACTICES ON THE INTERNET.

The Internet is a highly unregulated industry in Canada and abroad. It has become a very popular means of communication among organizations and individuals. Most businesses consider the security risks associated with the Internet as manageable and regulate their usage accordingly (see Security).

The majority of consumers have little reason to fear from the threat of computer sabotage, as there is little monetary incentive for outsiders to break into their system. 128-bit encryption provides adequate security for the majority of Internet users. Larger corporations and financial institutions have adopted elaborate security measures. Criminals have bigger hopes of monetary success if they break into large-scale computer systems and databases. Then again, the vast majority of computer crimes are caused by internal sources (Gaskin,1997).

Until recently, associations had just three ways to reach people: by fax/phone, mail, or in person. Today networks, web sites, and e-mail are available to most businesses twenty-four hours a day. Relationships between directors and staff can be built and maintained using Internet technologies. Greater convenience and accessibility can be achieved at a much lower cost.

The AlphaCom website offers private moderated conferences to registered users. While no longer supporting mailboxes, most users have private mailboxes with their local Internet service provider. Directors and staff can benefit from this new forum while conferencing in asynchronous time.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

Action Plan:

- Establish a provincial reference group.
- Establish guidelines that facilitate meaningful communication while using e-mail and the AlphaCom discussions.
- Conduct a literature review on available Internet conferencing.
- Investigate issues of security, privacy and confidentiality.

Available Resources:

- ✓ Computer shows sponsored by local business
- ✓ Internet and computer magazines
- ✓ Internet Service Providers
- ✓ Industry Canada
- ✓ “Cyber Law Canada” by Jeffrey M. Schelling, LL.B
- ✓ “Corporate Politics and the Internet” by James E. Gaskin

B. RESEARCH BOARD POLICY AND PROCEDURES WITHIN THE PROVINCIAL LAUBACH ASSOCIATION.

Historically, Laubach committees and directors have used AlphaCom for information sharing, event planning and collaborative projects. Formal meeting protocol was rarely applied within an AlphaCom conference. Regular discussions were held among staff and directors. A consensus was reached when a few motions were put on the table and discussed. A full quorum was never established with respect to voting. Meeting minutes from AlphaCom discussions were neither written down nor approved by the board (except for a few motions).

Directors were surveyed to discover their feelings regarding the Internet. (See Internet Surveys).

They expressed concerns about:

- The legality of doing business on the Internet.
- Issues of security, privacy and confidentiality.
- Losing data and when computer systems crash (i.e. viruses).
- Steep learning curve for novice users.
- Ongoing expenses for computer upgrades.

And they also thought:

- The Internet can potentially save the organization time and money.
- Internet conferencing was novel way to communicate with one another and their literacy colleagues.
- Demonstrated a willingness to learn and embrace new technologies.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

Action Plan:

- Review two years of AlphaCom transcripts.
- Attend face-to-face board meetings.
- Review meeting minutes and committee reports.
- Research parliamentary procedure for nonprofit associations.
- Investigate legal implications of conducting board business online.
- Identify criteria relevant to effective board meetings.

Available Resources:

- ✓ “Call to Order” by Herb Perry
- ✓ “The Association’s Report”, a quarterly newsletter
- ✓ “Joining Boards & Committees, A Learner’s Guide”, by LLEO
- ✓ “Robert’s Rules in Plain English” by Doris P. Zimmerman
- ✓ “Doing Good better!” by Stoesz and Raber
- ✓ “Board Orientation Manual” by Laubach Literacy Ontario
- ✓ Corporate by-laws of Laubach Literacy Ontario

C. ASSIST VOLUNTEER DIRECTORS TO REGISTER WITH THE ALPHACOM.

Laubach board members were surveyed to assess their level of computer literacy and Internet access. Most members are novice Internet users. The majority has Windows 95 and a Pentium computer. A few directors posses a 486 machine with a 14.4-baud modem and Windows 3.11. The majority has a CD-ROM, but no speakers or microphone. All have a word-processing program, either WordPerfect or a version of MS Works or Microsoft Word. (See Appendix for Internet Surveys)

Directors and staff were provided with a hands-on training workshop on Dec 6th, 1997 at the Windsor Library. All directors explored the AlphaCom website and registered with the new Laubach discussions. Many participants were learning about AlphaCom and the Internet for the very first time. More experienced computer users were encouraged to assist less experienced ones. Directors were encouraged to practice file attachments, sending and receiving e-mail.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

Action Plan:

- ❑ All directors have Internet access and an e-mail address.
- ❑ All directors are registered with AlphaCom with working passwords.
- ❑ Receive group training and instructional materials.
- ❑ Identify technical support and resources available to them.
- ❑ Staff and directors receive an up-to-date e-mail list of all participants.

Available Resources:

- ✓ The AlphaCom Guidebook by Maia Shapley
- ✓ 'Help' discussion on AlphaCom, moderated by Anita Watkins
- ✓ AlphaCom webmaster, Alan Cherwinski
- ✓ Field Consultant, Mike Kelly
- ✓ Computer magazines and handouts
- ✓ "World Wide Web with Netscape" by Jim Minatel
- ✓ "Internet for Dummies" by IDG Books
- ✓ "10 Minute Guide to Windows 95" by Sue Plumley

D. PROMOTE AND FACILITATE PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE LITERACY DISCUSSIONS.

Using the model "LLO – Meeting Under One Roof", four new Laubach conferences were proposed for the AlphaCom website (see Appendix). As a provincial organization, Laubach needed four meeting rooms under one roof, each with a specific purpose. The closed discussions were called:

Literacy Discussion	Purpose
Laubach Playroom	Informal meeting place for both staff and directors.
Laubach Board Forum 98	Formal meeting place for both staff and directors.
Laubach Bulletin	General information place for Laubach members, trainers and directors.
Laubach AlphaCom Project	Formal meeting place for the provincial reference group and interested practitioners.

The Laubach Playroom provided an opportunity for staff and directors to learn AlphaCom and practice their Internet skills. Forum 98 allowed directors and staff to discuss important matters and anticipate a formal board meeting. The Laubach Bulletin provided the provincial office a means to communicate with its membership and disseminate information. Laubach members joined other public, sector and regional conferences available on AlphaCom.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

Action Plan:

- Provide support on how to use AlphaCom and the Internet.
- Moderate the Laubach discussions.
- Market AlphaCom discussion to the Laubach membership.
- Survey membership to determine Internet access and e-mail.
- Share and distribute The AlphaCom Guidebook to the literacy field.
- Provide informed advice to the AlphaCom staff.

Available Resources:

- ✓ AlphaCom staff
- ✓ The AlphaCom Guidebook
- ✓ Laubach's quarterly newsletter, Each One Teach One

E. INVESTIGATE HOW BOARD POLICY AND PROCEDURES CAN BE APPLIED TO A CLOSED ALPHACOM DISCUSSION.

Presently, Laubach's by-laws do not prohibit the organization from holding board meetings on the Internet. Typically, directors decide to hold a meeting at a mutually convenient time and place (MacLeod,1995). The board president chairs the meeting, a quorum is established, and an agenda approved. Reports are submitted. Motions are made; discussion held and votes are cast. A meeting usually adjourns after a few hours.

Guidelines need to be written about motioning, voting and submitting reports electronically etc. The chair needs instructions on how to run an online meeting, while the secretary needs help tracking events in asynchronous time. A formal board meeting has never been held on AlphaCom before. Also the Laubach association has never held a formal board meeting in non-real time.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

All directors possess an e-mail account and have Internet access at either their homes or office. Directors are registered with the new Laubach discussions and practicing their new Internet skills.

Action Plan:

- Consult with the Laubach executive about Robert's Rules of Order and parliamentary procedure.
- Review old board meeting minutes.
- Create a new AlphaCom conference for board meetings.
- Establish draft guidelines on how to conduct a board meeting on AlphaCom in non-real time (asynchronous time).
- Write a Handbook for Online Board Meetings.
- Designate a discussion moderator.

Available Resources:

- ✓ Board Executive of Laubach Literacy Ontario
- ✓ Meeting minutes for the Laubach association.
- ✓ "Call to Order" by Herb Perry
- ✓ "Joining Boards & Committees, A Learner's Guide", by LLEO
- ✓ "Board Orientation Manual" by Laubach Literacy Ontario
- ✓ "Corporations Act of Ontario", published by the Ontario Government
- ✓ "Forming and Managing A Non-Profit Organization in Canada" by Flora MacLeod

F. FIELD-TEST THE NEW VIRTUAL BOARDROOM ON THE ALPHACOM WEBSITE.

Laubach Board Forum 98 was created on AlphaCom December 1997. It became apparent; the board would need a separate conference in which to hold formal board meetings. "Laubach Board Meetings" was created in January 1998 for such purposes.

AlphaCom conferences are made up of message categories, which help organize the discussion. Message categories were specifically designed to help organize the Laubach board meeting:

Meeting Agenda	Motions	Calendar Events
Reports & Minutes	Voting	Staff & Office Business
The Chairperson	Discussion	

The first official online board meeting will be held in February. This asynchronous meeting will last no longer than a week. There will be an agenda, motions made, discussion held and votes cast. The Handbook will be field-tested and appropriate changes will be made after the first trial.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

Action Plan:

- ❑ Schedule the first board meeting on AlphaCom.
- ❑ Have participants fax their confirmation sheets to the Laubach office.
- ❑ Distribute the draft handbook and meeting agenda.
- ❑ Track motions, votes and participation during the meeting.
- ❑ Provide technical support when necessary.
- ❑ Survey participants after the first field-test.
- ❑ Rewrite the Handbook for Online Board Meetings.
- ❑ Schedule a second field-test.

Available Resources:

- ✓ The AlphaCom Guidebook
- ✓ The Handbook for Online Board Meetings
- ✓ Alan Cherwinski, AlphaCom webmaster
- ✓ Mike Kelly, Field Consultant
- ✓ Herb Perry, Association Consultant

G. INVESTIGATE THE TRAINING AND SUPPORT NECESSARY FOR AN ADULT LEARNER TO PARTICIPATE IN A BOARD MEETING & ALPHACOM.

AlphaOntario offers an assortment of educational materials on CD-ROM. It is assumed the adult learner has access to a computer and tutor to teach them how to use the technology. In January '98 a search of AlphaOntario's online catalogue did not produce any curriculum on how to use the computer or what the Internet is about.

The majority of adult learners have poor computer skills, let **alone** knowledge of the World Wide Web. Computer literacy involves an understanding of computer terminology, keyboarding, mouse use, file management, windows operating system, and related software. Analytical and reading skills are necessary in order to follow on-screen instructions. Keyboarding and writing skills go hand in hand too.

Internet literacy involves the knowledge of modems, web browsers, search engines, web addresses, e-mail, and web pages. A Straightforward Guide to the Internet by the Roeher Institute is a plain language guide to the Internet. It is an ideal teaching tool for both students and tutors.

Adult learners need to understand the role and responsibilities of being a board member. Any instructional material provided needs to be written in plain language and in an easy to read format.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

Action Plan:

- Investigate resources with respect to computer and board training.
- Attend an Internet seminar at the '97 OLC Conference offered by Mike Kelly of AlphaCom.
- Assist Laubach's student representative with obtaining Internet access.
- Provide group and peer instruction on how to use the computer and the Internet so he may fully participate in an online board meeting.

Available Resources:

- ✓ "Joining Boards & Committees, A Learner's Guide", by LLEO
- ✓ "Board Orientation Manual" by Laubach Literacy Ontario
- ✓ "A Straightforward Guide to the Internet" by the Roeher Institute
- ✓ "The Big Basics Book of Windows 95", Second Edition, by QUE®

H. INVESTIGATE HOW A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT MAY AFFECT A PERSON'S LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCE WHILE CONFERENCING ON THE INTERNET.

The World Wide Web is a myriad of visual images and text. A relatively high level of literacy is required for navigation and following on-screen instructions. People communicate with one another chiefly through the written word. Information is relayed through web pages, e-mail, newsgroups, web chat etc. Persons with non-visual and non-writing preferences are likely to be frustrated with the Internet.

The Internet may challenge auditory and kinesthetic learners. Audio is a common form of entertainment rather than two-way communication. Video is less common, and quality varies. Messages are not conveyed with body language. People use the keyboard and mouse to communicate with one another.

Software is available for persons wishing to operate their computer by oral commands. However, voice-enabling software is not compatible with all computer programs. A computer must be trained to recognize an individual's voice. The technology tends to be clumsy and not suitable for the average user. It's most suitable for tasks like dictating and word-processing, but it does not replace the need for basic literacy skills. Special equipment is available to help persons with physical disabilities.

Preparing for the First Field Trial

Action Plan:

- ❑ Monitor people's reactions to the meeting process on AlphaCom.
- ❑ Recommend how people can cope in a virtual environment.
- ❑ Investigate the use of e-mail, newsgroups, web chat and video conferencing in terms of user-friendliness.
- ❑ Research the necessary hardware, software and training requirements.
- ❑ Investigate the expense involved in small group communication via AlphaCom, telephone or face-to-face.

Available Resources:

- ✓ Sales demonstrations by local companies [www.picturetel.com].
- ✓ Microsoft NetMeeting [www.microsoft.com]
- ✓ Mirabilis ICQ [www.mirabilis.com]
- ✓ The Ultimate Bulletin Board [www.ultimatebb.com]
- ✓ Computer and Internet magazines

Timeline	Major Project Events
September 1997	Computer Upgrades (Internet ready computers)
October 1997	The AlphaCom website is open. Directors and staff are surveyed about their computer skills and feelings toward the Internet.
November 1997	Four closed Laubach discussions were created.
December 1997	Hands-on AlphaCom training at the Windsor Public Library. Instructional material is provided on the Internet, e-mail; file attachments, web browsers etc.
January 1998	The AlphaCom Guidebook is distributed to the literacy field. A survey of Laubach programs revealed an urgent need for AlphaCom training. A new conference is designed for specifically for board meetings.
February 1998	First draft of the Handbook for Online Board Meetings is released. The first AlphaCom board meeting is held.
March 1998	The Call to Order by Herb Perry is adopted as the parliamentary standard by which the Laubach association will follow. The second board meeting is held. The Learners Clubhouse is created with students in mind.
April 1998	Preliminary findings are shared with the literacy field. A report is posted on AlphaCom and NALD.
May 1998	Herb Perry reviews the Handbook and provides feedback.
June 1998	Mike Kelly of AlphaCom reviews the two archived board meetings. AlphaCom asks for informed advice on how to improve moderating functions.
July 1998	AlphaCom is consulted to see if Lotus Notes software can enhance the meeting process.
August 1998	The organization formerly known as AlphaCom becomes the AlphaPlus Centre. Laubach programs are surveyed to see what progress they have made on AlphaCom and the Internet. A similar Internet survey is conducted with the regional networks.
September 1998	Survey findings are shared with AlphaPlus and the networks.

First Field Test

The first online meeting was held February 16th – 23rd 1998. The board tackled an aggressive seven-day agenda. Directors meet daily to review reports, form motions and cast votes. The meeting proved to be a huge time commitment for both staff and volunteer directors.

Chairing a virtual meeting was a challenging task. The Chair was the busiest person while posting 20% of the total conference messages. She spent an average of 2 hours per day on AlphaCom while others reported 1 to 1.5 hours a day. Throughout the meeting Laubach's staff participated and provided support for approximately 2 hours per day.

Monday through Friday, the board meeting averaged nearly 40 messages per day. The agenda was created to handle the bulk of the work in the first four days, in hopes of avoiding a heavy workload on the weekends. As expected, the participation rate was steady during the week and dropped off slightly on the weekend. The meeting resulted in over 300 messages posted to AlphaCom.

Discussion tends to be circular in non-real time. Motioning and voting occur simultaneously. The meeting proceeded at a relatively fast pace (re: message count). Typically, directors looked to the chair for direction and assurance to see if parliamentary procedure was being followed.

The board president facilitated discussion, acknowledged the movers and seconders of motions, called votes and reported the results. As meeting chair, her chief responsibility was to enforce parliamentary procedure was being followed (Zimmerman,1997). The secretary kept meeting minutes while recording motions and votes on a tally sheet. The project coordinator also kept a tally sheet.

Misunderstandings quickly arose when directors did not fully understand the debate among participants or the current status of motions and votes. Message threads proved to be an impractical means of following discussion. Directors began to question if they were sufficiently empowered to make fully informed decisions in asynchronous time. Both staff and directors are aware 'the primary aim of boards and committees is to enhance and facilitate decision-making"(Tropman,1984).

Many board members felt disconnected from one another because of the lack of body language and oral discussion. The meeting was described as "impersonal" and "tedious" at times. Directors worked as a team despite the perceived lack of togetherness. Consequently, directors casually chatted in the Playroom while needing a break from serious board business. Committees and staff would hold side meetings in Forum 98. Additionally, experienced Internet users would help out novice users that were frustrated with the new meeting platform.

Depending on their role during the meeting, some directors checked in several times a day while others only once. Many participants were restricted as to when they could join the meeting. Some directors share Internet access with co-workers, while others have Internet access at home only. Many could not join the discussion until after 6pm.

Attendance varied throughout the day. Some people participated at 12 midnight while others joined as early 6am in the morning. Most likely this is a reflection of personal choice, as well as low Internet traffic and better speeds for the time of day. As participation fluctuated during the course of the week, the notion of a 'floating quorum' arose.

The average quorum for the week was nine directors. A good average, despite the fact one director was vacationing, a computer crashed for two days, ISP troubles, net traffic jams, and other work commitments. The ‘floating’ quorum was calculated daily to track board participation. This is based on the assumption a participant would post a message to AlphaCom.

UNANTICIPATED EVENTS

- The time necessary to train board members on the Internet, AlphaCom and Windows 95.
- The time necessary to train staff and board members to moderate a closed discussion.
- The ‘Learners Clubhouse’ potential to help adult learners overcome their fears of the Internet and learn the AlphaCom system.

MODERATING FUNCTIONS

The board meeting was held in a closed-moderated discussion on AlphaCom. A moderator has the power to add and remove participants from the discussion. Moderators can edit and delete any message in the discussion, but should not do so without informing conference participants. It is the duty of the moderator to inform all participants of any upcoming changes, announcements or technical delays. The moderator may act as a mediator between conference participants if necessary, while enforcing any user agreement among participants. During the field trials, the project coordinator shared the moderating duties with the Executive Director. Sharing these duties increased the likelihood of a moderator being available at all times, while removing the burden of responsibility from an already busy chair. A moderator shares in the responsibility of coordinating a meeting by advertising the date, time and agenda well in advance.

Summary of First Field Test

The first field trial was a seven-day business marathon that proved to be time-consuming for all participants. Tracking attendance, motions, discussion in asynchronous time proved to be frustrating. It was unrealistic to expect all directors to check in daily for a weeklong meeting on AlphaCom. The chair may need to call a recess if an issue of quorum arises during the course of a board meeting.

Reports were either distributed by regular mail or file attachments. Those with Windows 3.1 and small memory capacity had difficulty downloading and reading file attachments. Persons with a 14.4 baud modem felt surfing AlphaCom was extremely slow and not an efficient use of their time.

Laubach's student representative initially felt fear and reticence about participating on the Internet. We identified many of the barriers an adult learner would encounter on the Internet. For example, a high level of literacy is mandatory in order to participate in the AlphaCom. It is evident all participants (board members, staff & learners) need comprehensive computer skills that include Windows 95, Internet and AlphaCom.

The private conference called the 'Playroom' provided all directors an opportunity to relax, team-build, and learn about the Internet, while taking a break from serious board business.

During the course of the meeting, participants felt precious time was wasted with circular discussion and the repetition of basic facts and figures. The secretary found it difficult to record minutes in a chronological fashion. People experience different levels of awareness in non-real time. This creates difficulty while trying to discuss important issues with your colleagues. Some people became confused and things needed to be repeated. Additionally, individual participants type and read at various speeds. As a result, experienced typists and Internet users would navigate through the discussion quicker, post messages and finish sooner.

Despite the difficulties, the first field-test went well. Directors knew one another and had prior board experience. They were highly motivated to meet online while anticipating substantial savings. A team of novice directors would not have had similar results. Participants demonstrated a readiness to embrace new technologies. Computer and Internet skills play a large role in a participant's comfort with the AlphaCom conferencing system.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

- Parliamentary procedure on the Internet.
- Directors feeling disconnected from one another.
- Individuals coping in a virtual environment.
- The computer skills necessary to participate on the Internet.
- Archiving board conferences held in cyberspace.
- Policy regarding issues of electronic data transfer, security, confidentiality etc. on the Internet.
- Future changes to the AlphaCom web conferencing system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A second field-test.
- Clearly define the motioning cycle.
- Directors prepare for board meetings.
- Clear writing standards.
- Helpful hints on how to cope in a virtual board meeting.
- Update instructional materials.
- Develop a list of necessary computer skills.
- Market the “Learners’ Clubhouse”.

A second field-test is necessary to test alternative agendas, and simplify the motioning and voting processes. Explicit instructions are needed on how to treat different types of motions. A well-composed motion is clear and to the point. A poorly worded motion lacks clarity and utility. A poor motion can stall a board meeting if directors do not clearly understands its intent. The Laubach board should adopt a parliamentary standard by which to follow. The legal implications of electronic ratification should be further investigated.

Motions act as a valuable tool in terms of group consensus and discussion. A motion is not legally binding if it is made outside of a formally called meeting (Perry,1984). The motioning process dictates a motion has a mover and seconder. If the chair accepts the motion made, it then belongs to the meeting. Directors debate the issue until a vote is called. The fate of motion is decided by a majority vote.

Directors need to come prepared to board meetings. Information packages should be sent to all participants. Committee reports and minutes should be read prior to the meeting. This ensures people come to meeting prepared and ready to discuss agenda items. To make an informed decision, directors need to read all conference messages before posting a response (especially the chair's comments). Directors need to be encouraged to ask questions if they are unsure what is going on.

Clear writing standards are important while preparing messages and reports.

Reports should be written in plain language to facilitate easy understanding. Participating on AlphaCom means a lot of reading, writing and keyboarding. Participants tend to read messages literally. Questions and misunderstandings arise if messages are unclear. Take the time to prepare responses properly and answers people's questions.

An individual's resourcefulness and sense of humour helps them cope in a virtual environment. Breaking up the board meeting into meaningful segments is also helpful (i.e. daily agenda). Directors were seeking strategies in how to cope in a virtual meeting:

- Participate for only short periods at a time (e.g. 20 minutes).
- Attend the meeting well rested and in good spirits.
- Keep pen and paper by the computer.
- Ask the board chair when in doubt.
- Read your messages aloud before posting it to AlphaCom.
- Check off agenda items as they are being addressed.
- Take a walk before returning to the meeting.
- Call someone just to hear his or her voice.
- Chat in the Playroom.
- Play video games.
- E-mail your friends.
- Turn off the computer and say goodnight.

Instructional materials for the board meetings need to be revised, the AlphaCom Guidebook & the Handbook for Online Board Meetings. Revisions should include the motioning process, meeting agenda, writing reports and the role descriptions of the chair and secretary.

Student Participation

What kinds of computer skills are necessary for an adult learner to participate in an online board meeting? Laubach's student representative is learning keyboarding and mouse skills by playing computer games and practicing his typing. Additionally, he is accessing the Internet and AlphaCom with the help from his tutor and family. AlphaCom is a text-based environment. Reading and writing messages are how directors communicate with one another in a discussion group. The necessary computer skills are briefly listed below.

- Reading and writing.
- Knowledge of basic computer components.
- Keyboarding
- Operating a mouse.
- Word-processing
- File management
- Knowledge of Windows 95/98
- Logging onto the Internet.
- Navigating the World Wide Web.
- Send and receive e-mail.
- Enthusiasm for new technology.
- Opportunities to practice new skills.
- Peer Support.

Students need to be taught the necessary computer skills to participate on the Internet. A certain proficiency in reading and writing is also required. For those participating in an online board meeting, they should possess a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure.

THE LEARNERS CLUBHOUSE

The Learners' Clubhouse is a new student conference room on AlphaCom. The open discussion needs to be promoted within the adult literacy community. Student representatives from Ontario Literacy Coalition and the Movement for Canadian Literacy should be encouraged to join the discussion. Adult learners should be provided with opportunities to apply and practice their newly acquired computer skills. Peer support should be encouraged.

PEER SUPPORT: WORKING WITH A STUDENT DIRECTOR

March 1998

Arnie Stewart is a member of the Laubach board of directors and I am his tutor. Arnie has had the Internet in his home for a couple of months now. Conceptually, Arnie has a good understanding of what the Internet is about. He has been introduced to personal e-mail, web chats and the AlphaCom conferencing system. Arnie is able to read online material fairly well. However, typing responses into the computer is time-consuming because he is a two-finger typist. He composes his letters and reports offline with the help of his tutor or family.

Arnie is an experienced board member. He understands the role to the chair, secretary, treasurer and the responsibilities of a director. He has attended numerous face-to-face board meetings and understands the importance of the meeting agenda.

On the first day of the board meeting Arnie and I spent two hours going over the board package, which included committee reports and the seven-day agenda. We numbered the reports according to the days of the week. After reviewing the reports, we attached post-it-notes to the reports. These acted as reminders to questions he wanted to ask while attending the meeting.

We spent an hour together writing his CHAMPS report, which I typed into Forum 98 for him.

We logged onto the Internet and joined the meeting. Arnie read the meeting messages aloud and compared them to what was on the meeting agenda. He dictated his responses to me as I posted the messages to AlphaCom.

I left the next day, and Arnie participated in the online discussion, made motions and voted for the remainder of the meeting with help of his 'secretary' (the lovely Barb). As the meeting proceeded, Arnie checked off agenda items as they happened as a means of tracking what he had to do next.

Arnie must have spent at least 12 hours involved in the board meeting. Arnie had a lot of positive things to say about the online meeting, but I am going to let him speak for himself. I asked him to write up a report on how he felt about the online meeting and learning about computers.

Respectfully submitted,

Maia Shapley

PERSPECTIVE OF AN ADULT LEARNER

Arnie Stewart
03/18/98 06:12 PM
Comments
On-Line-Meeting—Feedback

Another New Beginning

Not only have I learned to spell and read, but now I have learned how a computor works. I guess I mean how I make the computor work. (I still have to learn how to enlarge this writing space.) It was to my benefit that I had two days steady on the computor, with the help of the brilliantly minded Maia to direct and encourage me! How many times? Well never mind. My secretary even kept us going with coffee. This on-line-meeting was an eye opener. Certainly not the face to face that I was used to. It did me good to type information and read lots of reports. I really checked the agenda and all reports carefully to know what to ask and post my opinion. I did make a couple of mistakes, but I got better and learned more. I was happy that my post it notes were handy for each subject. I also liked each category that we could go to i.e. boardroom, playroom, forum 98 etc. I learned alot of information not really pertaining just directly with students. I see a broader information on literacy. It is wonderful to see everyone on the board trying to help each other in this new on-line-meeting. As Lana said "We're only the Model T, soon the caddilac." It is nice to know that we are not the back seat drivers, but we are doing the driving, and in the right direction. It's also nice to show other literacy fields how diversified we can be. Most important on this new on-line-meeting, I'm proud to know (even though this has been a small hardship on each and every board member) we are each a partner in sharing the financial savings in literacy costs. Congratulations to all on a superb job well done. Arnie p.s. I know I will even learn alot more with next meeting as I will only be able to be on-line after 3:30p.m. each day, because I have to work.

Love Arnie :>)

Second Field Test

WHAT'S NEW?

- ✓ The board meeting is staggered over two weeks – 6 days in total.
- ✓ A 'Motions Summary List' will be posted daily to the board meeting.
- ✓ Key words and a numbering system will identify all motions.
- ✓ Directors are provided guidelines on how to make an amendment.
- ✓ Directors track their votes with a worksheet called 'Tracking My Votes'.
- ✓ The chair will discount votes cast before a formal vote is called.
- ✓ A new message category is created for the secretary.
- ✓ All committee reports will be submitted electronically and posted to AlphaCom.

A second field-test was held in March 1998 with the Laubach board of directors. The meeting was divided into two sessions, part one & two.

Part One	Part Two
March 23rd – 25th	March 30th – April 1st
Call to order	Committee Reports
Approval of the Agenda	New Business
Approval of the Minutes	Adjournment
Treasurer's Report	
Staff Report	

MAJOR MEETING EVENTS

The vice president of the board chaired the meeting. The AlphaCom website was shut down for maintenance on the evening of the 23rd. As a result, one director tried to cast a vote by e-mail. The chair did not accept the vote because of poor wording. The meeting resumed on Tuesday morning. Several directors continued to experience technical difficulties; messages weren't getting through or they were not able to log onto AlphaCom. The meeting resulted in confusion and miscommunication. On Wednesday afternoon, the chair halted voting and called a recess.

During the meeting break, some directors continued to hold discussion on AlphaCom and get caught up on board business. The meeting formally reconvened on morning of the 30th. The chair asked directors to confirm their presence and acknowledge whether or not they had read all the discussion messages.

In part two of the meeting, all committee reports were posted to the AlphaCom. Discussion was held and motions were made. Votes cast. The second half of

the board meeting ran more smoothly than the first. Business concluded on the Thursday and the meeting was adjourned.

DIRECTORS' EVALUATION

Fifty percent of the directors reported they liked the meeting and felt it was worth the time and effort. Half of the directors did not like the meeting. They found it difficult to share ideas because of the lack of body language. Many persons felt their messages were misread or misinterpreted.

The majority of directors felt:

- ✓ the meeting was better organized
- ✓ the Motions Summary List was helpful
- ✓ the new meeting schedule was flexible
- ✓ the Tracking My Votes worksheet was helpful
- ✓ technical difficulties were extremely frustrating
- ✓ miscommunication causes hurt feelings and confusion

Additional observations:

- ✓ some people prefer face-to-face communication
- ✓ it is difficult to work as team in non-real time
- ✓ people were less enthusiastic about the second field trial
- ✓ people have diverse learning styles

Recommendations made after the meeting:

- ❑ tact and diplomacy are important
- ❑ reports should specify what actions are required of the board
- ❑ reports should be written in plain language
- ❑ 'mandatory motions' should be indicated on the agenda
- ❑ the chair needs to set timelines for debate and voting
- ❑ lurkers should be encouraged to post messages
- ❑ a live web chat may address diverse learning styles

Summary of Second Field Test

In the second field-test, daily participation was more consistent. An average of eight people participated per day. The flexible meeting schedule accommodated for many of the technical delays. The chair recessed the meeting when necessary and the majority of agenda items were addressed. Participants were less enthusiastic about this second field test.

Technical difficulties hampered the efforts of many directors trying to attend the meeting. Fewer motions were made this time - 11 in total. Directors established the pattern of discussing motions one-day and voting on them the next. All votes were carried, although it took longer to pass them. Over two hundred conference messages were recorded. The chair was the busiest participant and posted the most messages by far.

Both technical difficulties and the lack of body language tested the board's patience and sense of togetherness. The meeting process was stalled; the channels of communication were temporarily broken. A lot of time was spent figuring out what was going on. When faced with these obstacles, directors and staff sought alternative means of communicating by either fax or phone. Experience suggests some issues are better resolved in person.

After the meeting, directors and staff were looking forward to the next face-to-face meeting. There was a general willingness for directors to still hold discussions on AlphaCom. However, they would not hold another formal board meeting on AlphaCom until many of issues raised during the second field-test were addressed.

REVISIONS

Revisions to the Handbook for Online Board Meetings should include:

- a standard agenda
- tips on how to write a 'good' motion
- guidelines on how to cast an informed vote
- worksheets to help track motions and votes
- a meeting evaluation form for directors
- strategies for tracking participation
- a skills list for participating directors
- coping strategies for a virtual meeting

Discussion

TRACKING PARTICIPATION

It is necessary to have several methods of tracking participation in a virtual meeting. Before the meeting starts, ask directors to sign a "confirmation of attendance" form and fax it to the secretary. Check the 'participants' list daily to see if an individual has joined an AlphaCom discussion.

Request participants to post a message to the discussion, even if it is to say "I am here and I have read the discussion." This reassures others they are not working in alone, but members of a larger collaborative effort. Inform the chair personally by e-mail, fax or phone if you are to be absent for a day. This helps the chair to account of your presence while informing the group of your absence.

PROXY VOTING

According to the Corporations Act of Ontario (February 1998) a “proxy” enables a shareholder to appoint another shareholder to attend and act on his/her behalf at a shareholder meeting. Proxy voting does not apply to regular board meetings. However, they do apply to annual general meetings and this is in accordance with Laubach’s Ontario’s by-laws. The by-laws of an organization outline a set of rules by which its membership agrees to conduct business (Zimmerman,1997). “By-laws define the primary objectives of an organization and describe how that organization will function”(p.97).

LIABILITY INSURANCE

The Incorporation Act of Ontario itself requires very little in the way of insurance. However, many government ministries require a minimum standard of liability insurance if you are to have a services contract with them. According to the Ministry of Education, all literacy delivery agencies are required to be incorporated, governed by a board of directors and possess board insurance. This applies to the provincial Laubach association as well.

Incorporation status itself provides limited liability protection for its directors. According to Stuart Budd:

> This means that if someone were to sue the organization/ corporation that the directors would not be personally liable. The suit, if successful, would involve only the assets of the organization and not those of the individual directors.

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Board/Staff Relations Workshop, www.alphaplus.ca/ Retrieved on October 26th, 1998.

Neither incorporation nor board insurance can protect a director if they are found

responsible for any criminal activity or negligence. Also, the personal assets of directors are potentially at risk if they are personally named in a lawsuit. Often board insurance will cover the legal costs of a corporation or director(s) while defending themselves in a lawsuit. Issues of legal liability are complex, and associations should seek the advice of a lawyer in these matters.

ASSOCIATION CONSULTANT

Herb Perry was provided an opportunity to review the Handbook for Online Board Meetings. He provided input into the motioning process and meeting agendas. The motioning process involves a mover, seconder, acceptance by the chair, before a motion belongs to the meeting and can be discussed. If the chair decides not to accept a motion and/or rules it out of order, the motion does not belong to meeting.

Once a motion is accepted and belongs to the meeting, the mover and seconder of the motion cannot withdraw or alter it. The fate of the motion must then be decided by a vote. A motion may be withdrawn/altered prior to the chair accepting the motion and it belonging to the meeting.

The agenda does not need to be approved before it is discussed. Any deletions or additions should be discussed before approval is sought through a vote. It is the most efficient way. Herb Perry also recommended, “impartiality” be added to the chair's role in a board meeting.

The same legal issues that apply to regular board meetings are also applicable to electronic board meetings. For instance, the board as a whole is criminally liable for criminal wrong doing because they make their decisions collectively. If a director misses a meeting when a major decision is made, they are still held accountable for that decision, as long as they get the meeting minutes within two weeks of the meeting date. An individual director may write a letter of dissent stating their objections and send it by registered mail to the board secretary within 10 days of receiving the minutes. Because of the above reasons, Herb Perry the stresses the importance of meeting minutes, their thoroughness and impending approval by the board.

Herb Perry thought it was interesting how we could have several motions on the table at once -- this practice does not seem to violate parliamentary procedure as long as the motioning process is followed correctly. He commented the project was a fascinating endeavour on Laubach’s part and would be glad to review any future revisions to the handbook.

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

It is not uncommon to experience technical difficulties while conferencing on the Internet. People often experience password failure or trouble logging onto the

Internet. It's possible to handle these obstacles by creating a flexible agenda and having a backup communication system. If someone is unable to download a file attachment, fax it too them instead. Telephone people to find out why they are absent from the meeting. Be prepared to postpone agenda items when necessary. Identify technical resources and support before the meeting begins. Technicians are often a phone call way and can resolve most computer-related problems (e.g. network administrator or technical staff at your local Internet service provider).

AN UPDATE ON LOTUS NOTES

The Laubach board was curious if adopting Lotus Notes software could improve online board meetings. The AlphaCom website was built using this software. Potentially, Lotus Notes Client software could solve the archiving needs of Laubach. If the software were installed at the office, this would allow us to store/print/copy the archived messages as we wish. The messages would remain archived on the AlphaCom server and be viewable by means of the Internet. Otherwise, we could download and store the messages on the office computer. Despite these benefits, we were discouraged from purchasing Lotus Notes because of the expense and training involved. Additionally, it appears Lotus Notes will not be adopted on a provincial scale by literacy programs as originally suggested by the ministry in 1997.

Is there a need for Laubach board to store conference messages on the AlphaCom server indefinitely? What purpose is served by archiving data? Once meeting minutes have been ratified after a board meeting, there is no need to archive conference messages. It's recommended the organization erase its conference messages from the AlphaCom server at a predetermined date chosen by the board.

CONSULTATION WITH THE ALPHACOM STAFF

Mike Kelly reviewed the archived Laubach conferences and made the following observations:

The current AlphaCom system may not be suitable for board meetings. He was amazed how short and brief the messages were. Reading the conference messages was time-consuming and the discussion tended to 'lag'. Tracking meeting events was difficult as votes, motions and discussion occur simultaneously.

He thought the meeting experience could be improved if browsing were made easier, the voting process simplified (by adding a vote button), and keeping discussion separate from the motions and votes. There is room to improve the meeting model and modify the conferencing system to suit our needs. Presently, he didn't know how or when we could achieve these desirable changes due to

the merger between AlphaCom and AlphaOntario.

Internet Surveys

During the course of this project, Laubach has had the opportunity to survey its directors, a local school board, sample of literacy programs and the regional networks concerning their computer skills and the use of Internet communications. (See Appendix for Internet Surveys)

DIRECTORS OF THE BOARD

At the beginning of this project, the Laubach directors were surveyed about their prior Internet experience, equipment and feelings toward this new technology. In the past year, most directors had been introduced to the Internet, the majority were labeled as novice users. They may be familiar with e-mail, but the vast majority had no exposure to bulletin boards, web chats or file attachments. They were more likely to have some Windows 95 experience if they had a computer at their workplace. All directors had some prior experience with a word-processing program except one. Those with previous exposure to the Internet considered it as more entertainment rather than a business tool. The group as a whole was apprehensive yet excited about using the Internet to hold formal board meetings. Towards the end of the project, directors were amazed by the many of applications the Internet could be used for.

SCHOOL BOARDS

In January 1998, Laubach Literacy Ontario was approached by a local school board about potential AlphaCom training. They had learned how the Laubach staff and directors recently received AlphaCom training from their project coordinator. The school board had recently obtained Windows 95 based computers and Internet access. As a group of literacy instructors they were interested in receiving similar AlphaCom training.

Before agreeing to provide the instruction, the group was assessed for their computer and Internet skills. The survey revealed many literacy workers were in need of basic keyboarding, mouse and Windows skills, let alone introductory Internet skills. This reflects a greater provincial trend of employees seeking skills upgrading due to the introduction of computers into the workplace. Literacy instructors ended up receiving computer training from another local source, but were given copies of the AlphaCom Guidebook to help in their studies.

The school board survey helped reinforce the basic rule computer skills are essential before persons can exhibit competency at Internet applications. Workers at the local school board faced a similar learning curve, as the directors and staff at Laubach Literacy Ontario (e.g. word-processing, file management, Windows 95 and Internet skills etc.).

LITERACY PROGRAMS

Roughly two-thirds of the Laubach councils have Internet access at their program offices. Twenty-five programs are registered with AlphaCom and the provincial conference known as the ‘Laubach Bulletin’. Membership involves staff, directors, and trainers sharing information and resources.

Generally speaking, Laubach councils are active participants on AlphaCom given reliable computers and Internet access. In the past year, all Laubach councils have received copies of the AlphaCom Guidebook, which contributed to the number of councils registered with the literacy discussions.

REGIONAL NETWORKS

On the provincial level, AlphaCom appears to be an effective means of communicating among regional networks and sectors. Staff at the regional offices can be characterized as active AlphaCom users with reliable Internet access. Benefits to Internet communications were cited as the exchange of information and ideas, event planning and a sense of fellowship among literacy practitioners.

Typically networks rely on traditional methods of communication to reach literacy programs and instructors (fax, telephone and postal service). Networks report barriers to membership participation as being: lack of computer resources and formal training, and complaints AlphaCom is a slow and unfriendly conferencing system.

Traditional methods of communication have not been replaced by new Internet technologies. Most networks demonstrate a willingness to embrace new Internet technologies (e.g. AlphaCom and e-mail); however, describe this as a period of transition for the Ontario literacy field. Literacy programs, instructors, tutors and students all must have 'equitable’ access to computer resources and the Internet before they become mainstream within the literacy community.

GENERAL SENTIMENT TOWARDS ALPHACOM

Active AlphaCom users tend to come from funded programs with computer equipment capable of browsing the Internet at decent speeds (e.g. 28K modem speed, 33K or 56K is preferred). Registered users are more likely to label AlphaCom as a user-friendly system if they have received some formal instruction. Survey results suggest many users find AlphaCom a slow and unfriendly conferencing system. These types of complaints tend to diminish once users become proficient with the technology and begin to rely on the Internet as a means of networking with their colleagues.

The Nature of Online Meetings

The Laubach board has conducted several online meetings on AlphaCom in the past few months. The meeting process appears to be fairly systematic and efficient given high levels of participation and few technical difficulties. However, there is a distinct difference between face-to-face meetings and a text-based environment – a sense of meaningful communication.

Online meetings tend to be mechanical in the nature. Directors' felt they spent the majority of their time motioning and voting rather than debating the issues. This trend affects the flow of information and the depth by which issues are explored.

It is difficult to generate discussion in asynchronous time. Discussion tends to be circular as several issues can be simultaneously addressed. As in all meetings, some issues are given greater priority than others. Therefore, not all messages posted to a conference are given equal attention. People's level of awareness fluctuates during an online meeting as they check in at various times. This trend affects the flow of information and the sequence of meeting events as individuals proceed through the conference at different speeds. This is less likely to happen in face-to-face meetings as issues are addressed in a chronological fashion and discussion easier to facilitate.

Motivation in an online meeting is closely linked to participation. The majority of board members felt more motivated to attend face-to-face meetings compared to online meetings. One director said:

> Being a volunteer, the motivation for participation is different. I genuinely enjoy spending time with the board and the fellowship that you get from a face-to-face meeting – it is one of the many rewards.

In a virtual environment, tact, diplomacy and plain language are very important when working with a large group. Misinterpreting messages can lead to confusion among participants. A group's sense of "togetherness" is diminished over time with the lack of personal contact. As a result, team building becomes an important part of the moderator's job.

PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE MEETINGS

Online participation is linked to an individual's habits, preferences and previous exposure to the Internet. Active participants checked into the board conference several times a day and posted many comments. They felt the time required to participate was demanding but a necessary part of their job. Less active directors, who typically participated once a day, felt their time commitment was more reasonable. They also posted fewer and shorter messages.

Active participants tend to have some distinguishing traits:

ACTIVE	LESS ACTIVE
✓ Frequent Internet users.	✓ Infrequent users of the Internet (may exhibit a discomfort toward new technology).
✓ Active AlphaCom users.	✓ Inactive AlphaCom users
✓ Check into the board conference several times a day.	✓ Check into the board conference once a day.
✓ Active and vocal in face-to-face meetings.	✓ Observe discussion and post fewer messages (i.e. lurker).
✓ Movers and seconders of motions.	✓ Prefer non-written communication, possibly a reflection of poor writing skills.
✓ Chairpersons.	✓ Prefer face-to-face meetings, because that is what they are accustomed too.

The number of messages a participant posts to AlphaCom does not necessarily reflect their overall commitment to the meeting process. A participant may post fewer messages, but they still cast a vote on every motion. They may contribute to the discussion by asking a pertinent question, providing alternatives rather than writing long-winded speeches. As a result, fewer choice words often reflect thoughtfulness and commitment to the parliamentary process.

WORDS HAVE POWERFUL MEANING IN CYBERSPACE

The written word means everything. Misunderstandings can result if words are poorly chosen. Imagine people interpreting your words literally. You are not able to convey meaning through the use of body language or sound. Your group members can only acknowledge your presence through the use of words. If you don't post a written message, how do they know you are listening or even participating? People react strongly when they feel their fellow group members are not listening.

People carry similar expectations of immediacy and acknowledgement from others in an online meeting as they would in a face-to-face one. Individuals often feel isolated from group members because they lack physical contact. Saying very little is often misinterpreted as a lack of desire to participate.

Cyberspace is a text heavy environment and users equate brevity with comfort. The less time people are made to spend reading and writing on the Internet the happier they are. Clear writing standards are more greatly appreciated in a virtual environment. On average, people are more tolerant of spelling and grammar mistakes as long as messages are meaningful and short.

Users need to be taught how to effectively communicate and cope in a virtual environment. Lurkers should be encouraged to post messages while informing group members they have read and understood the discussion. Communicating over the Internet can be pleasant for users it they have realistic expectations. Meaningful correspondence involves plain language and courtesy towards your fellow users.

Internet Ethics

The World Wide Web is a vast information resource shared by millions of users. Learning to effectively communicate facilitates greater understanding among Internet users.

Clear Language Writing – keep it short – keep it relevant – be as clear and concise as possible. Spend the time to correct spelling and grammatical errors. A complete and accurate subject line is very helpful for users who take the time to read and understand your message.

Read carefully, especially if you disagree with something. People tend to read e-mail and postings too quickly, and fail to understand the real intent behind a message. Apply some common sense to what you are reading before assuming it is valid. Read a message several times before you write a reply.

Keep your target audience in mind. Follow *formal writing practices* while addressing business colleagues, directors and employees. Speak to clients with respect and in the way they wish to be addressed. *Humour* can be easily misconstrued on the Internet; err on the side of caution, and save it for your personal correspondence (e.g. family and friends). *Acronyms* are more likely to confuse and annoy people who do not understand them. Use them sparingly.

It is a multicultural community – respect people's differences. There are well over 50 million Internet users from various countries, organizations and backgrounds. As you explore the Internet you will run into all kinds, behave with sensitivity and tolerance.

Broaden your understanding of the Internet. People access the Internet around the world for both business and personal reasons and at varying speeds. Learn the lingo, understand the culture and the laws.

Slade, R. (1997) Roberts Rules of Internet Order [Article]. Techbabes: Technology with Creativity and Style. Retrieved July 25th, 1997 from the World Wide Web: http://www.techbabes.com/WebTech/Reference/rules.html

BUSINESS EXPECTATIONS

Generally speaking, Internet users possess similar expectations of doing business on the World Wide Web. The Internet community was founded on a common set of values and beliefs. They value mutual support, free access of information and individualism. Persons are encouraged to genuinely participate, speak for themselves, and not from their station or rank. This sense of virtual equality facilitates the voluntary exchange of information.

Internet based conferencing has the ability to change traditional corporate structures as employers and employees are encouraged to talk freely and share ideas. Social and behavioural norms change as people lose many distinct characteristics associated with face-to-face communication (i.e. ethic origin, status and personality). Lines of authority may be modified while conferencing online. Discussions that once occurred behind closed doors have become public domain. Individuals need to be cautious with Internet communication as they have a tendency to be archived and reviewed persons at a latter date.

Internet based conferencing in some ways has positively affected group decision-making and collaboration:

> Face-to-face meetings and decision-making situations differ in numerous ways from their online counterparts. People who often dominate meetings and conversations because of rank or personal style may be no more visible online than people who are less likely to contribute in a face-to-face meeting. The primary contributing member of a group may be quite different when he or she uses e-mail or group computer conferencing. Systems that change these organizational hierarchies may prove very productive, especially when the users are working on mutual goals.
>
> Swadley, R.K. et al. (1995). The Internet Unleashed Second Edition. Indianapolis, IN: Sams Net Publishing, 702.

Internet communications can benefit businesses that wish to enhance internal and external communications. Colleagues can collaborate with one another while reducing the need for face-to-face meetings. Organizations can quickly disseminate information to their clients or membership, while reducing the need for telephone calls and faxing.

Learning Styles

Information technology can affect people with distinct learning styles in variety of ways. Auditory persons may feel isolated or misunderstood while conversing with others in asynchronous time. Typically, they prefer telephone and face-to-face communication. They are often become frustrated with written instructions.

Visual learners tend to thrive in an online environment. They are able to digest large amounts of electronic data with less discomfort. The World Wide Web is a myriad of graphics, colours and written instructions.

Kinesthetic persons may regard keyboarding and reading as passive behaviour. While conversing on the Internet, hands-on learners miss speaking to others through the use of body language. In the field trials, kinesthetic persons reported discomfort with non-real time communication.

Persons with distinct learning styles have different learning preferences. They will respond to different teaching techniques with varying degrees of success.

Learning Styles	**Preferences**	**Teaching Tools**
Visual learners learn best by seeing something done.	✓ Remember visual details. ✓ Have a strong sense of colour and may be artistic. ✓ Have difficulty with oral directions. ✓ Need written instruction.	• Charts • Diagrams • Colour • Videos • Computers • Written instruction
Auditory learners learn best by hearing things.	✓ Enjoy talking and listening to people. ✓ Will talk to themselves while doing a task. ✓ Require oral explanations. ✓ Have trouble with written instructions.	• Audiocassettes • Reading out loud • Music
Kinesthetic Learners learn best by doing.	✓ Has to do it to know it. ✓ Hands on learning. ✓ Learn better when physical activity is involved. ✓ Has difficulty sitting still.	• Role playing • Experiments • Physical Activity • Frequent breaks while studying. • Repetition • Models

Adults should be aware of their individual learning style or preference. With this personal knowledge it is easier to adjust in a virtual environment. Visual learners can create diagrams and charts if they are faced with long passages of written text.

Auditory learners should read out loud when reading and composing messages on the Internet. Playing relaxing background music may help them focus on written instructions. Choose real-time communication whenever possible, through web chats and/or audio conferencing.

Kinesthetic learners tend to feel fidgety while working at the computer for extended periods of time. They should take frequent breaks and brisk walks when necessary. Keep a pen and paper by the computer for tracking important dates and events. Repetition can be an important reinforcement tool for kinesthetic learners.

After the field trials, Laubach sought conferencing alternatives because of the discomfort experienced by auditory and kinesthetic learners in a virtual environment. Auditory learners, and to a less degree kinesthetic learners, were quite relieved when AlphaCom field trials were over. They missed the body language and oral discussion they associated with face-to-face meetings. The very things lacking from non-real time conferencing like AlphaCom.

Alternative Web Conferencing Techniques

ICQ

Many directors and staff at Laubach Literacy Ontario are registered with the ICQ conferencing system. After downloading the software from the Mirabilis website, users register a 'nickname' and establish a personal contact list. ICQ has been a valuable tool for staff working remotely from home. For instance, the project coordinator can liaison with directors and the Laubach office in real-time over the Internet. ICQ allows users to exchange messages, web addresses, and files almost instantaneously. What is ICQ?

> ICQ ("I Seek You") is a program that lets you find your friends and associates online in real time. You can create a Contact List containing only people you want to have there, you can send them messages, chat with them, send files, configure ICQ to work with external applications and more.
>
> Entry Level Guide – ICQ Starter, Mirabilis Homepage; www.mirabilis.com Retrieved on October 30, 1998

ICQ free web-based conferencing software compatible with Windows 95/98 computers. As long as you have an Internet connection, you can join the ICQ network. It is not browser-specific, and hardware requirements tend to minimal.

WEB CHAT

ICQ web chat is a user-friendly way for committees to meet and discuss business. At Laubach, we have managed to join as many as five people to a simultaneous discussion. It an ideal means of communicating with small groups in real-time. Meeting minutes can be electronically saved. Individuals can personalize their font size and colour, in order to distinguish themselves from other participants.

BULLETIN BOARDS

The Ultimate Bulletin Board is a user-friendly message board purchased by Laubach Literacy Ontario for the Training Post website [www.trainingpost.org]. Laubach investigated alternatives to AlphaCom once we determined that very few volunteer tutors could be reached electronically via AlphaCom (see Internet Surveys). A group of literacy workers and directors field-tested the Ultimate Bulletin Board in August 1998. Field-testing involved persons familiar with AlphaCom, but interested in discovering a user-friendly alternative.

The majority of participants felt the new layout was easier and faster to navigate

than AlphaCom. Registration was quick and easy, and e-mail verification is a handy tool. Visitors can effortlessly scroll through a variety of message threads. In all forums, messages are listed from oldest to newest (i.e. message threads are listed newest to oldest). It allows people to browse through the discussion as if you're following the natural flow of a conversation.

Mike Kelly participated in the field-test and felt the Ultimate Bulletin Board may be an alternative medium for online board meetings:

After a successful field-test, Laubach decided to adopt the Ultimate Bulletin Board as a means of promoting information sharing among literacy trainers, staff and tutors on the Training Post website. The Ultimate Bulletin may prove to be a non-real time conferencing alternative, if Laubach chooses to hold another online board meeting in the future. The Ultimate Bulletin Board is compatible with Windows 3.11 as long as you are running Internet Explorer 3.03, the Netscape equivalent or higher.

MICROSOFT NETMEETING

Microsoft NetMeeting enables real-time communication with audio, video and web chat over the Internet. Audio and video conferencing is restricted to only point-to-point communication (i.e. between two participants).

Microsoft NetMeeting enables you to communicate with other over the Internet or your local Intranet. Using NetMeeting, you can:

- Talk to others
- Use video to see others and let others see you
- Share applications and documents with others
- Collaborate with others in shared applications
- Send files to others
- Draw with others in a shared Whiteboard
- Send messages to others in Chat

Microsoft NetMeeting™ Version 2.1 (1998)

In order to use Microsoft NetMeeting™, you must meet the minimum hardware and software requirements:

- Microsoft Windows 95/98
- Pentium computer with 32 MB of RAM
- A fast Internet connection (28.8k baud modem or faster).
- To use the audio features of NetMeeting you need a sound card (full duplex), speakers, and a microphone.
- To send video you need both a video-capture card and camera.
- Computers slower than a Pentium will not be able to receive any video signal.

Audio conferencing with NetMeeting between two people can sound like an ordinary telephone conversation. The project coordinator was able to use NetMeeting on a couple of occasions to converse with a web programmer in Montreal (re: Training Post website). White boarding is an excellent tool while trying to illustrate an idea or diagram to another person. Slides can be saved and edited at a later date. Web chat supports the audio conferencing quite well, especially if your Internet connection becomes poor.

NetMeeting software is available for free from the Microsoft website [www.microsoft.com]. Audio conferencing is a cheap alternative to teleconferencing; given you have an appropriate sound card, speakers and microphone. Speakers and microphones are relatively cheap for personal computers. A full duplex sound card is available for approximately $100.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

It is possible to view video on the Internet. It is not anywhere near the quality of television, 30 frames per second (Smith,1997). Most commonly, people download video clips from the Internet. Audio and video files are notoriously large. Downloading takes a lot of time, patience and a speedy connection.

Live video streams are possible, however quality varies and lag time is very noticeable. Slow Internet connections and limited bandwidths are typical problems for users (both sender and receiver). The big problem is delivering video that works within the bandwidth constraints imposed by modem speeds (Bremser,1997). Persons with 28.8 modems are only able to provide about one-fiftieth of the bandwidth of a typical CD-ROM video.

Video conferencing over standard phone lines is not practical for regular computer users. You will not be able to talk to everyone and people must follow the same protocols in order to communicate with one another. The worldwide standard for video conferencing is the H.323 protocol. Microsoft NetMeeting supports this standard, but CU-SeeMe does not. Furthermore, Windows 3.11 is not capable of video conferencing. “Because of the demands that any type of

video system places on your computers, even some of the lower-cost products will still require fairly high-end desktops to function properly"(Strom,1997).

The necessary equipment for desktop videoconferencing:

- 16-bit sound card (full duplex)
- Microphone
- Speakers
- Video Card (2 to 4 Megs)
- Video Capture Card
- Video Camera
- 32 Megs RAM
- Pentium 200MMX (minimum)
- Windows 95/98

"The simplest kind of conferencing is point-to-point, which means conducting a single 'conversation' between two locations. There are also multi-point connections, which are more like a TV broadcast among many recipients – some of whom may be receiving only the video stream" (Strom,1997).

An emerging alternative is private conferencing rooms. Companies like PictureTel offer dedicated conferencing rooms to businesses wishing to hold real-time meetings on the Internet [www.picturetel.com]. They offer multi-point communication while using their dedicated videoconferencing server and a 128K ISDN connection. It is a cheaper alternative for companies not able to afford the necessary equipment. Videoconferencing can be an extremely valuable communication tool, however it has its limitations. Video and audio quality is dependent on bandwidth, software and hardware requirements. It remains a viable option for only a few users.

Strom, D. (1997, September). Videoconferencing in Focus. Internet World, 54-58.

Bremser, W. (1997, October), Video Streaming. Internet World, 63-68.

Smith, V.H. (1997, July). See Me, Hear Me: Our Reporter Reveals the Realities of Internet Conferencing. Home Office Computing, 43-44.

Guidelines for Acceptable Internet Behaviour

E-MAIL

- Avoid using fancy fonts or formatting in the body of your message. The recipient of the message is less likely to see it the way you send it. Avoid the use of tabs or columns.
- Respect copyright on the materials you reproduce. If you shorten passages or quote relevant parts be sure to give proper attribution.
- Ask permission from the author before forwarding or re-posting any messages you receive.
- Respect any confidentiality agreement that exists in the workplace.
- Never send chain letters or junk mail (i.e. large amounts of unsolicited information).
- Use sarcasm and similar forms of speech carefully.

FILE ATTACHMENTS

Files may be attached to e-mail or posted to a discussion group.

- Tell the recipient the name and type of file you are sending them.
- Don't sent large files without compressing them first (e.g. WinZip). Make sure the recipient can decode them.
- Don't send an attachment if your file is a text document fewer than 250 words. Copy and past the text into the body of your message instead.
- Attach files in a format the recipient is accustomed to (e.g. WordPerfect or Word). If you are unsure what software your recipient uses, covert word processing files to plain text (TXT) or rich text format (RTF).
- Include a note with important documents asking the recipient to verify they received your message intact.

Smith, V.H. (1997, September) Guaranteed Online Delivery: Dos and Don't to Help Your Files Reach Their Destination. PC Magazine, pp. 57-58.

Hambridge, S. (1995 October) Netiquette Guidelines [Article]. Retrieved July 25th, 1997 from the World Wide Web: http://www.guru.apana.org.au/netiquet.htm

WEB CHAT *An interactive dialogue.* *People exchange written messages.*	• Introduce yourself. • Turn taking is important. Listen before you respond. • Don't flame or SHOUT at users (i.e. refrain from using capital letters). • Respect group discussion. Don't introduce irrelevant topics. • If you type slowly and make mistakes, don't stop to correct every mistake. Keep typing. • Ask if you do not understand something. • Give people adequate opportunity to respond to your comments before re-posting them. • Don't assume everything is working correctly. Other participants may be experiencing technical difficulties. • Say farewell to group members before logging off.
DISCUSSION GROUPS & BULLETIN BOARDS *People post messages to an electronic board.* *Messages are shared and read by others within a group.* *Public and private conferences exist.*	• Read the old messages before you posting a response. • Get an understanding of the group culture and what is being discussed. • Respect any group guidelines or user agreements. • Remember you are addressing a larger audience. • Do not divulge confidential information. • Assume individuals speak for themselves. • Messages should be brief and to the point. • Acknowledge the views of others while stating your own. • Give people time to read and respond to your message. • Personal matters and disagreements should be resolved through e-mail. • Do not get involved in flame wars.

Living in the Electronic Age

Computers and the Internet have brought an abundance of information to people's homes and offices. In this electronic age, information overload is possible. The information highway involves a variety of mediums: print media, telephones, radios, televisions and the World Wide Web.

"At a certain level of input, the law of diminishing returns takes effect; the glut of information no longer adds to our quality of life; but begins to cultivate stress [and] confusion". According to David Shenk, all this influx of technology is likely to cause "information anxiety" for the average person. David Shenk is author of the book Data Smog Surviving the Information Glut (1997).

Meeting in asynchronous time over the Internet encourages people to search and converse with others who share similar interests. This is made possible through an infinite number of channels, web pages and online communities. When faced with all these choices, people develop filtering devices to help them discern their likes from their dislikes and adapt to this "stimulus overload. The number of cliques or "consumer tribes" growing on the Internet is related to increased number of Internet users. Shenk's cautions one of the hazards of online conferencing is the loss of "common information and shared understanding". Speedy communication does not necessarily translate into better decision-making among persons.

The outcome of electronic communication is not all negative, in particular the Internet. Online conferencing can still be valuable, convenient and enjoyable if people learn to effectively cope in this new information age. "Most of us have excess stimuli and data in our lives, distracting us, pulling us away from our priorities and from much desired tranquility" (p.185). Shenk recommends people learn to limit the amount of electronic input in their lives, this involves filtering electronic data. Persons can begin by turning off the television, and leaving their pager and cell-phone at home. If you feel overwhelmed, limit your e-mail, take a break from cyberspace, and resist the urge to upgrade your electronic equipment.

Just as equally important as limiting the amount of electronic input, learn to be your own editor. David Shenk's cautions people not to add to the information overload. Be economical in what we say, write, publish and broadcast on the Internet. Clear writing standards are greatly appreciated by avid Internet consumers.

The third law of data smog states, "computers are neither human nor humane". People may operate a computer and use it as a communication tool; however, "information technology truly cannot replace human experience" (p.199). If you feel overwhelmed by electronic data, be an active consumer, take an inventory of your life and simplify it.

The Internet & Global Communication

The Internet is a “anywhere-anytime network” which transforms the relationship between people and information. The World Wide Web creates relationships and virtual communities through common interests, business and education.

> Businesses can maintain communications by way of asynchronous methods, meaning that both parities do not need to be online or in the same place at one time: rather, parties can exchange mail and information across time and distance freely. This method reduces the need to be so aware of time zone differences and variations in the phone and mails systems of various countries. Using the Internet lessens logistical concerns because employees do not need to be in the same room or city for meetings. Companies can create and edit documents collaboratively in this asynchronous environment.
>
> Swadley, R.K. et al. (1995). The Internet Unleashed Second Edition. Indianapolis, IN: Sams Net Publishing, 695.

The Internet is a relatively inexpensive means of communicating with people quickly and efficiently. Synchronous communication makes it possible to hold real-time meetings on the Internet with colleagues through web chat, audio and video conferencing. Like any face-to-face meeting or teleconference call, it still requires a great deal of preplanning and scheduling. Telecommuting is increasingly common, and some businesses have employees work from home or abroad. Companies can form and maintain working relationships while online. This may become a part of their normal communication routine or temporary situation.

Asynchronous communication like e-mail, discussion groups and bulletin boards are more common. E-mail is form of personal correspondence that can be easily shared with individuals or a larger group. Bulletin boards are a convenient way for large groups to gather and share ideas, while reading and posting messages any time. With busy and conflicting schedules, most organizations opt for asynchronous communication for its convenience and low expense. Non-real time conferencing tend to have minimal hardware and software requirements, making it more accessible to greater numbers of potential users.

Internet-based Communication Tools

Information on the Internet can be managed and exchanged utilizing different methods of communication. The size of your target audience, accessibility, cost and the nature of the communication all play a role in determining which Internet tool you should use.

Tools	Benefits	Limitations & Risks
E-MAIL	✓ Fast and economical. ✓ Specific issues and subjects are easily addressed. ✓ Information can be circulated to large groups of people. ✓ Flexible for users as messages can be composed and sent when the author wishes.	• Messages can be easily copied to unauthorized persons. • Messages are typically casual and spontaneous.
WEB CHAT	✓ Real time communication with multiple users. ✓ Ideal for small group communication and people separated by great distances. ✓ Dialogue can be saved for future reference.	• Confusing at times. • Flow of information can be erratic.
DISCUSSION GROUPS & BULLETIN BOARDS	✓ Means of staying connected to a large group of people. ✓ Persons with similar interests can ask questions, share and receive information.	• Asynchronous time. • Lurkers.
VIDEO CONFERENCING	✓ Real-time communication. ✓ Lectures, demonstrations and group meetings are possible.	• Multiple point communication is difficult. • Hardware/bandwidth requirements are large and expensive. • Quality fluctuates.
AUDIO CONFERENCING	✓ Real-time communication. ✓ Ideal for small group communication.	• Quality can vary and fluctuate during transmission.
WHITEBOARDING	✓ Lets multiple users display pages of text and graphics while marking them up simultaneously. ✓ Works well in conjunction with web chat and audio.	• More likely to be used by intermediate users.

Security

You should never assume anything thing is secure on the Internet. Communication systems present a number of security concerns: unauthorized access, viruses and the physical integrity of hardware and data (Freedman, February 1998). Even if you are using some type of encryption device *and* password protection, *everyone should adhere to some basic precautions*. The following list of security precautions is far from complete, and computer users should consult a technical specialist or network administrator for further recommendations.

Passwords Don'ts:

- Don't use the same password on every machine.
- Don't write passwords down.
- Don't use your first or last name (or any combination).
- Don't use your child or spouse's name.
- Don't use personal information that is easily obtainable.

Know whom to contact for help. If you are experiencing software or system problems contact technical support. If you are experiencing problems with your Internet connection call your Internet Service Provider. Contact your network administrator or supervisor if you receive anything that appears questionable, illegal or constitutes online harassment.

Run all downloaded software through a virus-scanning program such as Norton's AntiVirus [www.symantec.com]. Only download software from reputable companies and websites. Do not open any files attachments from people you don't know.

Protect your privacy. Reveal as little information about yourself to others.

PRIVACY ISSUES

Canadians should take an active role in protecting their privacy, according to the federal government's Task Force on Electronic Commerce, (Toronto Star, March 19th 1998). They have recommended several *guidelines* on how new legislation can address the protection of citizens against privacy abuses. The task force's suggestions include:

- Consent should be required before personal information is collected.
- Canadians have a right to know what and how this information is being used.
- Information should be collected for legitimate purposes, and by "fair and lawful means".
- Agencies should be responsible for the security and accuracy of the data they collect, and openly publicize any information management policy.

- Individuals should have access to any personal information collected.

The Canadian Standards Association has also taken similar steps to adopt a policy regarding the collection of personal information (Schelling,1998). Their draft policy deals with the issues of security, accuracy, openness, consent, limiting the use of personal information etc. (Racicot et al.1997).

WORKPLACE PRIVACY

In the workplace, employees in many instances lack privacy rights with respect to electronic mail and communications.

> A business Internet connection is a company resource. Employers are free to make and exercise policy over its use, just as with their telephones, fax machines, copiers and other communications devices paid for by the company for business use.
>
> National Computer Security Association (1997 September

According the Toronto Star (March 19th), there are major exceptions to section of the Criminal Code that prohibits the use of any “electromagnetic device to intercept a communication”. Employee communications can be monitored if they have received sufficient notification from their employer (Campbell,1998).

Generally speaking, any e-mail or files sent from the office computer are considered the property of the company and can be investigated. However, companies still need to be careful and should not “unilaterally intercept employee communication”. It is an indictable offence under the Criminal Code to willfully intercept private oral communication (Freedman, February 1998). An employer is not committing a crime by intercepting communications if the originator of the communication has given expressed or implied consent.

Both employers and managers possess legitimate concerns with respect to the issue of monitoring employee communication. E-mail is fast becoming the preferred method of communication among businesses (Grimm,1998). Maintaining good customer relations and a public image are essential to any well-run business. As companies move towards greater Internet communications, they want to ensure their staff is behaving properly with clients. Employers are often held responsible for their worker’s actions during the course of employment (Campbell,1998). As a result, managers are often concerned with liability and the threat of espionage. In order to “avoid unnecessary workplace conflict”, employers should be perfectly clear about any monitoring policy they may have. They should have a corporate policy that clearly states what constitutes proper and improper use of the company’s e-mail system.

Any corporate policy with regard to e-mail should possess some basic elements, according to Grimm's article on "E-mail and an Employer's Liability":

- E-mail is a form of business correspondence.
- Apply good judgement when addressing colleagues and clients.
- E-mail accounts are property of the company.
- Using company e-mail for personal purposes is discouraged.
- E-mail is not private. It can be monitored.
- Electronic documents can be archived indefinitely.
- Protect confidential information and trade secrets.

Any policy created by an employer should be explicit and enforceable. An effective, yet flexible policy should address both the needs of the company and its workers. If this policy *is* common knowledge within the workplace, the employee has given implicit consent to the monitoring of communication. J. Schelling's book Cyberlaw Canada: The Computer User's Legal Guide offers helpful hints for companies wishing develop and implement an e-mail policy.

INTERNET POLICY

Internet policies should highlight that fact that e-mail and other Internet services are provided for business purposes not pleasure (Kyer & Bercovitch,1996). Policy is intended to help prevent employee misconduct and the decline in productivity that is often associated with unregulated use. Many people are under the mistaken impression they can say or do anything on the Internet without liability. This is not true. The difficulty in enforcing laws on the Internet does mean they do not apply.

Often companies have their employees sign confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements. It is reasonable to assume this type agreement applies to all workplace Internet communications. In turn, e-mail messages can carry legal weight in Canada. "E-mail is a record of communication and is generally admissible into evidence" (Freedman, February 1998). Furthermore, contracts can be electronically negotiated over the Internet. David Schelling (1998) devotes a chapter in his book to electronic contracts and their implications.

A company's biggest threat to computer security lies within the organization itself (Gaskin,1997). Internet access raises the odds of improper disclosure of confidential information, theft of data and damaging computer viruses. Netiquette does play a large role in Internet security, however professional courtesy and good manners do not replace the need for standard policy and protocol.

Lastly, a comprehensive Internet policy should be written in plain language with proper technical and legal advice. Employers should educate workers about the potential risks and liabilities associated with electronic communication

(Freedman, March 1998). Companies should also divulge any monitoring practices and routine security measures.

Issues of Content Liability in Canada

In 1997, a group of researchers prepared a report for Industry Canada on the issues of content liability and how they relate to the Internet (Racicot, Hayes, Szibbo & Trudel,1997). The report discusses how the Criminal Code of Canada deals with illegal activities on the Internet. Activities like obscenity, child pornography and hate propaganda may occur on Internet, however they are not immune from legal prosecution.

In Canada, obscenity is defined as any publication whose dominant characteristic is the undue exploitation of sex, or sex together with crime, horror, cruelty or violence (Racicot et al, 1997). The publication and distribution of obscene material (including the possession for such purposes) is against the law. Knowingly selling or exposing the public to obscene materials is also illegal. Furthermore, the possession, publication, distribution and making of child pornography are against the law in Canada.

The issue of hate propaganda is addressed in the Criminal Code, federal human rights statutes and provincial regulations (Schelling,1998). The Criminal Code of Canada primarily deals with three offences:

a. Advocating or promoting genocide.
b. Inciting hatred against any identifiable group by communicating statements in any public place where such incitement is likely to lead to a breach of the peace; and
c. Willfully promoting hatred against an identifiable group by communicating statements, other than in private conversation.

The public dissemination of hate propaganda toward an ‘identifiable’ group is most likely to be found on web pages, web chats or mailing lists. If discriminatory messages are found on a website within Canada, authorities can shut down these operations and lay charges (i.e. the web server or Internet Service Provider).

CIVIL LIABILITY

The Internet raises important questions concerning issues of liability and who is responsible. Generally speaking the person who performs the illegal act is responsible for resulting damages. However, "under Canadian common law, employers are generally civilly liable for employee misconduct committed while acting within the scope of employment" (Freedman, February 1998). Consult the study "Issues of Liability for Content Circulating on the Internet" (Racicot,1997) and proper legal counsel to understand fully the risks associated with civil liability and the Internet in Canada.

Each person is responsible for statements he/she makes on the Internet in the same way as he/she is responsible when making them in person, by mail, telephone, print media, electronic media etc. (Racicot et.al, 1997). Civil liability issues must be analyzed in the context of private law, the civil law of the Province of Quebec and the common law of Canada.

There are six principal situations that can generate civil liability on the Internet.

Prohibited Acts:

1. defamation, libel and harm to reputation;
2. invasion of privacy;
3. misuse or failure to protect personal information;
4. communication of erroneous information;
5. violation of secrecy; and
6. unfair competition.

Misconduct over the company's communication system, can lead to many kinds of liability including defamation, harassment, discrimination, human rights violations, wrongful dismissal etc.

TRADE-MARKS INFRINGEMENT

Trademark infringement deals with the unauthorized use of a registered trademark. According to Schelling (1998), "A trademark is a word, set of words, or symbol that is used to distinguish the goods or services of one person from those of another" (p.97). Trademarks can be logos or graphics-based. The *Trades-Mark Act* deals with registered trademarks in Canada, and this applies to the Internet applications. To avoid trademark infringements consult lawyers, conduct a thorough availability search before choosing a trademark, and register it with the federal government.

COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

Historically, Canada has been a full participant in the various international copyright conventions. Canada and U.S. copyright laws are not the same. The United States tends to set its own precedents with respect to common law. The *Copyright Act of Canada* protects the rights of copyright owners: to perform or produce the work, to perform it in public, to publish it, to communicate it to the public by telecommunications and to authorize any of these acts.

> One of the obvious ways for Internet participants to avoid liability for copyright infringement is to avoid activities, which have a high risk that copyright will be infringed. Owners and hosts of websites should take care to ensure that they own or have licensed all rights to any copyright material included on the website
>
> Racicot et al, (1997) p.290

Copyrighted material should not be confused with trademarks or patents. The *Copyright Act* can protect the form or expression of an idea, but the not the idea itself. **Copyrighted materials can include:**

- Literary works.
- Data or facts.
- Computer programs.
- Sound recordings.
- Multimedia works.
- Blank forms or templates.
- Fictional characters.

David Schelling's book Cyberlaw Canada: The User's Legal Guide has an extensive chapter that deals with copyright issues in Canada, common myths and how to obtain copyright etc. It is recommended as an excellent resource guide for persons interested in the issue of copyright and the Internet.

Conclusions

The "Meetings in an Electronic Environment", project investigated the legal implications, cost-effectiveness and practicality of conducting board meetings using the Internet, particularly the AlphaCom system. The intent was to develop and field-test a model while following parliamentary procedure.

The Laubach board held two online meetings using a moderated closed discussion on AlphaCom. Online meetings proved to cost-effective yet time-consuming. Directors missed the human element and team spirit they associated with face-to-face meetings. People with auditory and kinesthetic learning styles felt challenged in a virtual environment. It is difficult to hold meaningful discussion and make informed decisions in non-real time. AlphaCom failed to prove itself as an effective medium for formal board meetings. Conferencing on the Internet appears to complement face-to-face board meetings rather than replace the need for them altogether.

The following computer skills were identified as necessary for participating on the Internet:

- ✓ Reading and writing.
- ✓ Knowledge of basic computer components.
- ✓ Keyboarding
- ✓ Operating a mouse.
- ✓ Word-processing
- ✓ File management
- ✓ Knowledge of Windows 95/98
- ✓ Logging onto the Internet.
- ✓ Navigating the World Wide Web.
- ✓ Sending and receiving e-mail.
- ✓ Enthusiasm for new technology.
- ✓ An opportunity to practice newly acquired skills.
- ✓ Peer support.

Associations may hold board meetings on the Internet given: the majority of directors agree to do so, it does not violate their corporate by-laws and *all* members have equal access to the Internet.

For associations that follow parliamentary procedure, many board-training materials are available from the United Way, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and publications like Herb Perry's *Call to Order*. Laubach Literacy Ontario adopted the 'Call to Order' as the standard by which to follow because of its practical and user-friendly nature. Community Literacy *of* Ontario is also a resource for policy and procedures for community-based literacy agencies.

After this project, the Laubach felt AlphaCom remains an effective means of

communicating with its membership and the literacy community. Twenty-five Laubach programs are registered with AlphaCom and the provincial conference known as the 'Laubach Bulletin'. Their main reasons for participating are information sharing, networking and financial considerations. Internet communications has the potential to cut down on faxing, long distance phone calls and face-to-face meetings.

Generally speaking, Laubach councils are active participants on AlphaCom given reliable computers and Internet access. In the past year, all Laubach councils have received copies of the AlphaCom Guidebook, which has played a large role in increasing the number of councils registered with AlphaCom. In the future, many literacy programs have intentions of providing computer resources to both volunteer tutors and students. Presently, most programs qualified this access as "limited".

The literacy field is just beginning to embrace Internet communications. They still rely heavily on traditional forms of communication. Provincial and regional associations can benefit from web conferencing given their membership has Internet access and feels comfortable with the technology.

In the beginning, AlphaCom was an ideal web conferencing system in order to conduct this pilot study. Laubach Literacy Ontario was an association looking for a web-based conferencing system that would enable them conduct board business and better communicate with its membership. AlphaCom offers discussion groups to the Ontario literacy community free of charge. It provides registered users with the following services:

- ✓ Password protection.
- ✓ Moderated discussions, both public and private.
- ✓ Share electronic documents via file attachments.
- ✓ Search messages by date, author, and category.

Despite these many features, AlphaCom has been characterized as slow and cumbersome system. Password failure is common. Discussion moderators rely heavily on system administrators because they are not permitted full access to the moderating functions. Uploading file attachments to AlphaCom is not a reliable means of disseminating information. Search features are neither quick nor effective. Navigation is inferior compared to other online discussion systems. Because of above-mentioned reasons, AlphaCom has been described as unfriendly conferencing system (see Appendix).

Asynchronous communication like e-mail, discussion groups and bulletin boards are more common than real-time Internet applications. With busy and conflicting schedules, most organizations opt for asynchronous communication for its convenience and low expense. Non-real time applications tend to have minimal hardware and software requirements, making it more accessible to greater

numbers of potential users.

Real-time applications tend to enhance and facilitate greater meaningful discussion and decision-making among group participants. On average, audio and video conferencing is more expensive than traditional asynchronous methods. However, auditory and kinesthetic learners converse more comfortably with real-time communication. It's also more suitable for small group communication.

As Internet communications become mainstream within the Ontario literacy field, they will be a cheap alternative for face-to-face meetings and teleconferences. If the Laubach board cuts down on one face-to-face meeting per year, they can potentially save a couple thousand dollars. A teleconference call with ten participants costs on average four hundred dollars per hour.

Organizations that utilize Internet applications expose themselves to greater security risks like breach of confidentiality, privacy, theft, viruses' etc. These associated risks can be managed quite well with a comprehensive Internet policy, user education, encryption methods, secure servers and password-protection. Organizations can develop policy with assistance of legal council and system administrators.

The 'Meetings in an Electronic Environment' study produced the following products:

- ✓ A Guide to the AlphaPlus Literacy Discussions
- ✓ Handbook for Online Board Meetings
- ✓ Laubach Discussions on AlphaCom
- ✓ The Learner's Clubhouse
- ✓ Internet Survey Results
- ✓ Final Report

Recommendations

Many of the same principles that apply to formal board meetings can be applied to committees and small group communication (i.e. agendas, the roles of secretary and chair, consensus decision-making etc.). Internet conferencing is can meet the communication needs of many associations and their membership. In the past year, the Ministry of Education and Training has funded many Internet related projects within the adult literacy field. A literature review should be undertaken to identify the results of these technology studies.

The Laubach organization needs to reassess the computer resources available to its directors, staff and membership. Internet communications have increased significantly over the past year, along with protocol and operating standards. In the near future, individuals need to focus their attention on computer upgrades

and Windows 98 training. A year 2000 analysis needs to be included in this assessment. In the future, a minimum standard of protocol should be followed in hopes of including as many participants as possible.

Laubach Literacy Ontario has received funding from the Ministry of Education and Training to begin a second study called 'Online Communication and Information Systems'.

ONLINE COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION SYSTEMS

This twelve month project will build on the results of the “Meetings in an Electronic Environment” study. The Handbook for Online Board Meetings is based on parliamentary procedure and written for nonprofit boards using the AlphaCom literacy discussions. Holding formal board meetings on AlphaCom proved to be an impractical endeavour. In non-real time, it is difficult to work collaboratively and follow parliamentary procedure.

Laubach Literacy Ontario continues to use AlphaCom to communicate with its membership, network with the literacy community, hold provincial focus groups, and maintain staff/board relations. As Internet communications become mainstream, there exists greater opportunities for small groups to meet online and work collaboratively. Interactive tools include web chat, bulletin boards, ICQ etc. Many working groups follow a consensus decision-making model rather than a parliamentary one.

In this new project, Laubach intends to build on small group communication while using alternative conferencing techniques, market instructional materials and provide training workshops.

Project goals involve:

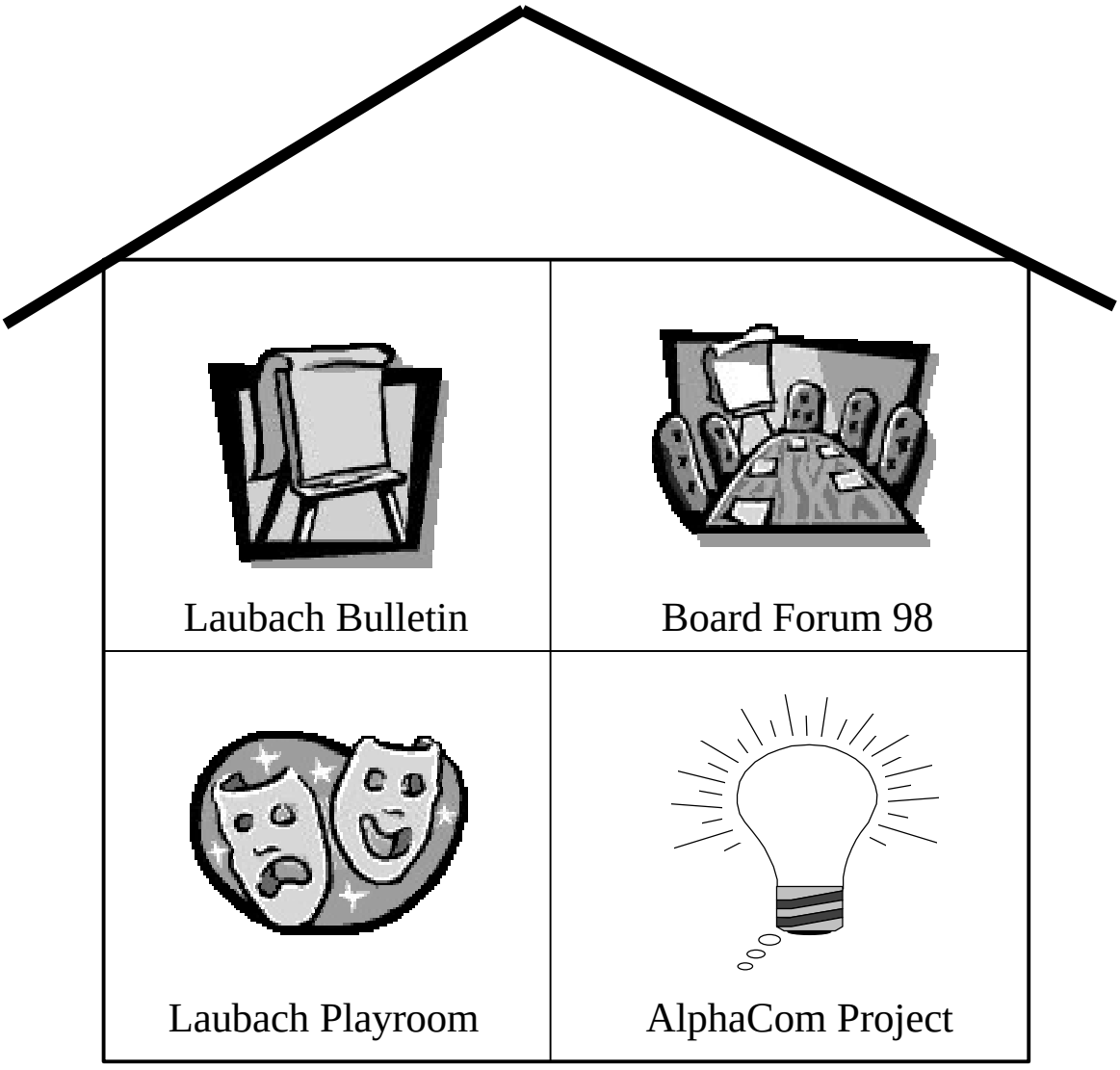
- Update instructional materials to reflect impending changes to AlphaCom.
- Adapt the Handbook for consensus decision-making and small working groups.
- Provide training workshops for groups meeting online (i.e. boards & committees).
- Field-test alternative conferencing methods for small group communication.
- Field-test a communications model that involves Internet polling and traditional survey methods within a provincial organization.

This project begins in November 1998. In December, a provincial reference group will be organized to provide advice and support to the project coordinator. For more information on this project, call the Laubach Ontario office in Kitchener at (519) 743-3309.

Appendix

LLO – MEETING UNDER ONE ROOF

LLO – Meeting Under One Roof



Developed by Maia Shapley in October 1997.

LAUBACH LITERACY ONTARIO – BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Currently, all Laubach board members are connected to the Internet and registered with AlphaCom. Prior to this project many had limited Internet experience. The majority is connected to the Internet at home. One-third have both access at home and work.

The majority of users were connected to Internet using a 28.8-baud modem. They also reported using Pentium machines with Windows 95 (Pentium I). A few were still connecting to the Internet with 14.4-baud modems, and 486 machines with Windows 3.11. The majority of users were using Netscape 3.0 as recommended by AlphaCom. All users reported having a printer, mouse and colour monitor. Most had a CD-ROM, while few possessed a microphone and speakers.

In October 1997, Directors were surveyed to discover their feelings and concerns re: the Internet and conducting board business online. They expressed the following:

- the legality of conferencing online (re: corporate by-laws and policies)
- security, privacy and confidentiality issues
- felt overwhelmed or intimidated by the Internet learning curve AND at the same time felt the Internet possessed a lot opportunities for communication and information
- fear of losing data and the computer crashing (i.e. viruses)
- felt the money required for computer upgrades was costly
- in practice email was commonly treated as a form personal communication
- novice users felt Internet communication was time-consuming
- intermediate users felt the Internet was saved time

SCHOOL BOARD SURVEY

In January 1998, Laubach Literacy Ontario was approached by a local school board about potential AlphaCom training. They had learned how the Laubach staff and directors recently received AlphaCom training from their project coordinator. The school board had recently obtained Windows 95 based computers and Internet access. As a group of literacy instructors they were interested in receiving similar AlphaCom training.

Before agreeing to provide the instruction, as a group they were assessed for their computer and Internet skills. The results of the survey indicated many workers were in need of basic keyboarding, mouse and Windows skills, let alone introductory Internet skills. The results of this survey were indicative of many employees in the province, seeking upgrading due to the introduction of computers into the workplace. The literacy instructors ended up receiving computer training from another local source, but were given copies of the AlphaCom Guidebook to help in their studies.

The school board survey reinforced the basic belief computer skills are essential before persons can exhibit competency at Internet applications. Workers at the local school board faced a similar learning curve, as the directors and staff at Laubach Literacy Ontario (e.g. word-processing, file management, Windows 95 and Internet skills etc.).

INTERNET SURVEY FOR LITERACY COUNCILS

Target Audience: A sample of Laubach community-based programs in Ontario.

January '98 – A Random Phone Survey

In a random survey of councils, twelve programs had Internet access and completed the survey. Only half of those sampled were registered with AlphaCom. Those not registered with AlphaCom felt they needed help registering and subscribing to literacy discussions. The majority expressed concern about technical difficulties and having to learn a new conferencing system. Furthermore, councils expressed an interest in joining the new provincial conference called 'Laubach Bulletin'.

The vast majority of Internet users in the sample reported spending less than five hours a week online. Users reported checking their email at least once a week sometimes several times. When asked how they prefer to receive communications from the provincial office, the majority said faxes with electronic mail as a close second. Only two users reported AlphaCom as a preferred choice.

August '98 - A Paper Survey

Sixteen councils responded to this paper survey focussing on AlphaCom usage. All had Internet access except one program, which was in the process of hooking up. Everyone in the sample reported at least one staff person was registered with AlphaCom. Registered users would visit the AlphaCom website weekly or several times a week. The main reasons for visiting AlphaCom were information and networking with other programs. Four programs stressed the importance of downloading forms and/or reading the latest messages on Info MET. No literacy council reported having its own discussion on AlphaCom.

The majority of councils felt the 'average' user did require some 'formal training' in order to use the literacy discussions effectively. One council made the comment formal training 'maybe' required for some users but not for all. One program described the AlphaCom Guidebook as an 'excellent' resource in learning how to use the literacy discussions.

Persons familiar with the literacy discussions reported AlphaCom to be an "user-friendly" system. The rest said no, 'maybe', 'somewhat user-friendly' or 'frustrating'. A couple of users admitted having 'no basis of comparison' in order to answer this question, suggesting a lack of experience with alternative discussion systems.

Then again, the sample felt AlphaCom was an effective means of communicating with the literacy field in general. Their number one reason for participating was information. Those surveyed felt volunteer tutors had no awareness of AlphaCom or its purpose. This suggests literacy practitioners mainly use AlphaCom and its services.

Fifty percent of the sample was able to provide tutors with access to computers and/or the Internet. Most program offices qualified this access as "limited". Often only staff members were connected to the Internet. Many of the respondents had plans to provide computer resources to *both* tutors and students in the future, however equipment and funding were mitigating factors.

In perspective…

Roughly two-thirds of Laubach councils have Internet access at the program offices. The remaining third have limited computer equipment or none at all. Some community-based programs reported having relatively cheap Internet access but out-dated computer equipment. Additionally, several Laubach councils have limited funds and operate on the generosity of volunteers.

Twenty-five Laubach programs are registered with AlphaPlus and the literacy discussion 'Laubach Bulletin'. Members of the discussion also include directors, staff, trainers and a few regional networks.

Sixty percent of the registered programs have participated in the discussion in the past month. Nearly thirty percent of the programs are registered with AlphaPlus but have never participated in the discussion (re: Laubach Bulletin). No one knows *when* a user registers with AlphaPlus. Consequently, it is difficult to assess why users are not participating. Are they new to the AlphaPlus system *or* disenchanted users? Participation is recorded as the last day the user browsed a discussion. It is not dependent on whether or not the user posts a message.

Active AlphaPlus users tend to come from funded programs with computer equipment capable of browsing the Internet at decent speeds. Registered users are more likely to label AlphaPlus as a user-friendly system if they have received some formal instruction on how to use it.

Generally speaking, Laubach councils are active participants on AlphaPlus given the necessary computer equipment, reliable Internet access and some formal Internet training. The vast majority of Laubach councils have received copies of the AlphaCom Guidebook (instructional material on how to register and effectively use the AlphaPlus literacy discussions). It can be inferred the Guidebook has played a contributing role by increasing the number of Laubach councils registered with AlphaPlus in the past eight months.

INTERNET SURVEY FOR REGIONAL NETWORKS

Target Audience: Sixteen regional networks in the Ontario. Twelve literacy networks responded to this survey.

In August 1998, all network offices reported having Internet access except one. All offices with Internet access claimed to have at least one staff person registered with the AlphaCom. Those registered with AlphaCom reportedly use the system on a daily and/or weekly basis.

The majority of networks reported their reasons for participating on AlphaCom were to keep informed about literacy events and share ideas. "Necessity!" described one network. "A sense of community," said another. A few mentioned practical reasons like planning meetings, conducting board business and a means avoiding postage and long distance costs. Half of the networks stressed the importance of participating in conferences like "Network of Networks" and InfoMet.

A slim majority of the networks reported having their own AlphaCom discussion. The vast majority of network staff felt some formal training was required in order to use the AlphaCom system effectively.

Users were evenly divided on whether or not they felt AlphaCom was a user-friendly system. Persons who reported 'yes' qualified their answers with such comments as "in my own experience', "yes, if users have been provided with formal training", and yes "but slow". Persons who reported 'no' typically commented on the need for AlphaCom to be "easier and faster'.

A slim majority of the regional networks felt AlphaCom was not an effective way to communicate with their membership. Most users reported AlphaCom had the potential to become an effective means of communicating; however, "only with those who are committed users", "in time", "if training is provided and resources are available" and "provided that instructors have access to a computer". Although, the regional networks did report AlphaCom was effective means of communicating with other regional offices and sectors.

All regional networks felt volunteer tutors had 'no' awareness of AlphaCom let alone a knowledge of how to use it. A few offices reported "outreach was needed".

The majority of networks reported practitioners are encouraged to participate on AlphaCom; however, they perceived barriers to participation. One network commented, "my greatest frustration is that some don't/won't/can't". Access to AlphaCom is a large concern for many literacy practitioners as "few have electronic communication (email and/or Internet access)."

Eleven out of twelve respondents listed fax and telephone as their preferred means of communicating with its membership. Many networks commented they couldn't rely on AlphaCom to communicate with their membership because issues of access and

inconsistent usage on behalf of subscribed members. AlphaCom is cited as being "too time-consuming and inefficient" by many registered users. Regional networks continue to depend on traditional methods of communication. Even if members are registered with AlphaCom they "can't count on their messages being read by all members". Many reported their regions were "proceeding slowly" towards the use of Internet communications, and in particular email.

Conclusion:

On the provincial level, AlphaCom appears to be an effective means of communicating among regional networks and sectors. Staff at the regional offices can be characterized as active AlphaCom users with reliable Internet access. Benefits to Internet communications are the exchange of information and ideas, event planning and the sense of fellowship experienced by literacy practitioners.

Furthermore, networks typically rely on traditional methods of communication (fax, telephone and postal service) to reach literacy programs and instructors. Networks report barriers to membership participation as being: lack of computer resources and formal training, and complaints AlphaCom is a slow and not-so-friendly conferencing system. Most networks demonstrate a willingness to embrace new Internet technologies (e.g. AlphaCom and email); however, describe this as a period of transition for the Ontario literacy field. Until literacy programs, instructors, tutors and students have "equitable and consistent" access to computer resources, training and the Internet, traditional methods of communication will not be replaced by new Internet technologies.

COMPUTER LITERACY & INTERNET SURVEY

For Laubach Directors

Name: City:
EMAIL address:
Phone Number(s): Home: Bus:
Position on LLO board: Staff Position:

INTERNET ACCESS:

Do you have access to the Internet at:
a. home b. work/office c. both d. other Please specify where _____

Who is your Internet Service Provider *ISP*? _____
(e.g. AOL, Simpatico, Syntex)

Please specify your Web Browser.
Netscape (version _____); Internet Explorer (version _____); Other_____

Do you have an email account? Yes. No.

If yes, please circle your mail program: Netscape Internet Explorer Eudora Other

INTERNET LITERACY:

Are you currently using the Internet at home or work? Yes. No.

If yes, on average how many hours a week do you spend online? Please circle.

0-5 hours 5-10 hours 10 or more hours

Do you know how to send and receive email messages? Yes. No.

Do you use your email:
a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. occasionally e. not at all

Do you have any newsgroup experience besides TELNET? Yes. No.

Have you participated in any Internet chat groups with other online users? Yes. No.

HARDWARE:

Do you own or have access to a personal computer? Yes. No.

If yes, please specify where: home _____business _____ both_____
other _____ (i.e. school, library, friends and family)

What type of computer is it? 386____ 486 ____ Pentium _____ MAC_____

How much RAM are you working with? 8MB 16MB 24MB 32MB 64 MB

Do you have a modem? Yes. No.

If yes, what is its speed? 9600 14.4 28.8 33.3 56.6 other_____

Does your modem have any telephony capabilities? (i.e. fax or voice mail)
If yes, please specify _____.

Do you own or have access to a printer? Yes. No.

Do you have a mouse? Yes. No. Do you have a colour monitor? Yes. No.

SOFTWARE:

Please specify your operating system.
Windows 3.X _____ Windows 95 _____ MAC_____ DOS only_____ Other_____

Note: If both your systems at home and work are different, please specify.

Do you have a word processing program? Yes. No.

If yes, please specify: Word Perfect (version_____); WORD (version_____); Other __

RESOURCES:

What help resources do you have available with respect to questions concerning the Internet and computers? Please list them.

- ➢
- ➢
- ➢
- ➢

What are your fears and concerns about this new Internet Technology.

- ➢
- ➢
- ➢
- ➢

Please mail or fax your responses to the LLO office in Kitchener.

INTERNET SURVEY FOR SCHOOL BOARD

Name:

Organization:

Survey Questions	Yes	No
Have you used Windows 95 on a regular basis in the past three months?		
Do you know how to copy, move and delete a file using Windows Explorer?		
Do you know how to type, save and print a letter using a word processing program?		
Do you know how to connect to the Internet using your computer and modem?		
Do you know the name of the web browser you use?		
Do you know how to find a Website if you were given the web address?		
Do you know how to bookmark a frequently visited website?		
Do you have an email account?		
Do you know how to send and receive email messages?		
Do you know how to attach a file to an email message?		
Are you registered with the new AlphaCom web conferencing system?		
Have you registered with the open literacy discussions?		

What are your fears and concerns about the Internet?

-
-
-
-

1 INTERNET SURVEY FOR LITERACY COUNCILS

Name of Council:

Contact person:

Do you have access to the Internet:
a. home b. work/office c. both d. other Please specify where_____

Do you have an email account? Yes. No.

If yes, your email address is _____

Do you check your email:
a. daily b. weekly c. monthly d. occasionally e. not at all

Would you prefer to receive LLO announcements and literacy news by:
a. fax b. mail c. phone d. email e. AlphaCom conference

On average how many hours a week do you spend online?
a. 0-5 hours b. 5-10 hours c. 10 or more hours

Are you registered with the new AlphaCom web conferencing system? Yes. No.

Have you registered with the new LLO literacy discussions? Yes. No.

Have you participated in any Internet chat groups with other online users? Yes. No.

What are your fears and concerns about this new Internet Technology?

-
-
-
-

2 INTERNET SURVEY FOR LITERACY PROGRAMS

Name of Program: Fax:

Contact person: Email:

1. Do you have access to the Internet at your program office? Yes No
2. Is any of your program staff registered with AlphaCom? Yes No
3. How often does your staff use AlphaCom?

   a. daily b. weekly. c. monthly d. occasionally e. not at all
4. Briefly describe your reason(s) for participating on AlphaCom.

5. Does your program have its own AlphaCom conference? Yes No
6. Do you feel the average user requires some formal training in order to use AlphaCom effectively? Yes No
7. Would you describe AlphaCom as a user-friendly conferencing system? Yes No
8. Do you feel AlphaCom is an effective way to communicate with the literacy field? Yes No
9. In general, do you feel volunteer tutors have an awareness of what AlphaCom is and how to use it? Yes No
10. Are volunteer tutors given access to computers and/or the Internet at the council office? Yes No

    Comments:

INTERNET SURVEY FOR REGIONAL NETWORKS

Name of Regional Network: Fax:

Contact person: Email:

1.	Do you have access to the Internet at the regional office?	Yes	No
2.	Is any of your network staff registered with AlphaCom?	Yes	No
3.	How often does your staff use AlphaCom?		
	a. daily b. weekly. c. monthly d. occasionally e. not at all		
4.	Briefly describe your reason(s) for participating on AlphaCom.		
5.	Does your network have its own AlphaCom conference?	Yes	No
6.	Do you feel the average user requires some formal training in order to use AlphaCom effectively?	Yes	No
7.	Would you describe AlphaCom as a user-friendly conferencing system?	Yes	No
8.	Do you feel AlphaCom is an effective way to communicate with your membership?	Yes	No
9.	In general, do you feel volunteer tutors have an awareness of what AlphaCom is and how to use it?	Yes	No
10.	Are literacy practitioners encouraged to participate on AlphaCom within your region?	Yes	No
11.	Please circle the *top three* means by which your office communicates with its membership:		
	Fax Telephone Newsletter Regular Mail AlphaCom Email		
	Comments:		

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