ALMA MATER-GRADUATE RELATIONSHIP VIA INTERNET

VZTAH ALMA MATER- ABSOLVENT PROSTŘEDNICTVÍM INTERNETU

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Abstract:
The most common way of maintaining contact with the graduates is the Internet. Its main advantage is that contacting our graduates and being contacted by our graduates can easily be realised from any part of the World. The continuous, quick and cost friendly updating possibility, as well as its interactivity has also to be emphasised. The number of educational institutions that are realising the importance of alumni relations is increasing. The role and use of Internet for this purpose will be shown in this study.

Keywords:
alma mater, graduates, alumni relations, Internet, website, communication

Anotace:
Nejběžnějším způsobem udržování kontaktu s absolventy je internet. Jeho hlavní výhoda spočívá v tom, že tento oboustranný kontakt může probíhat mezi jakýmikoli části Světa. Neustálá, rychlá a nákladově příznivá možnost, stejně tak jako interaktivita by měla být také zdůrazněna. Počet vzdělávacích institucí, které si uvědomují důležitost udržování kontaktu s absolventy stále roste. Úloha a využití internetu k tomuto účelu bude probrána v tomto příspěvku.

Klíčová slova:
alma mater, absolventi, vztahy s absolventy, internet, website, komunikace

INTRODUCTION

Internet plays a decisive role in the communication between universities and their graduates nowadays. Our institution is currently developing an interactive web site to provide easy and effective communication channel for both parties. The aim of this study is to emphasise the advantages of Internet and the wide variety of programmes and duties it can facilitate in the alma mater and graduates relationship and communication and examine the background and efficiency of its usage. Three aspects were studied, (1) computing skills of graduates of the University of Debrecen, Centre of Agricultural Sciences that enables them to use computer and Internet as a common way of communication, (2) computer and Internet access in Hungary, (3) possible subsidisation programmes to improve computing and Internet access at present in Hungary.

INTERNET IN THE ALMA MATER AND GRADUATE RELATIONSHIP

Until the early 90s, alumni professionals used technology exclusively or primarily as an internal tool. The real revolution caused by the development of cheap, ubiquitous, and rapid electronic communications (such as e-mail and the World Wide Web) has been their application as tools for connecting alumni back to their alma mater. With the advent of e-mail

and the Internet, however alumni officers now have the opportunity to communicate with their constituents literally every day of the year. We can't predict what development will replace the Web in a few short years, we can safely assume that digital communication will continue to spread throughout our lives. By the late 90s, university, college and independent school alumni offices had found many creative applications of the Internet (as online services) for their work: (1) school songs, (2) Happy Birthday listing (interacts with database directly), (3) photo gallery, (4) virtual reunions, (5) online education, such as mini-courses and book discussion groups, (6) bulletin boards/forums/discussion groups – general or by special topic, (7) secure financial transactions, (8) live events - with or without audio, (9) searchable directories, (10) silent auction for fund raising, (11) virtual postcards of campus, (12) lost alumni locator, (13) business card exchange, (14) career mentoring, (15) job posting service. Of course the foregoing list is not comprehensive, nor will each of these features be useful to all institutions. This compilation can act a catalyst, however, to spur an office to more creative thinking about how to apply the available media (Shaindlin, 1999).

Feudo (2003) also emphasises the advantages of Internet use in alumni offices. Nowadays alumni staff members rely more heavily on e-mail communications to save on print materials.

Perhaps the characteristic in which young alumni differ most from older alumni is communications. The information age is here and the expectations and reality of young alumni revolve around electronic communications. Although all of society is becoming conversant with the World Wide Web, young alumni are far more savvy and sophisticated in this regard. "Snail nail" and telephones are not nearly as immediate or effective with young alumni as they are with their predecessors. Many institutions are meeting this challenge by introducing electronic communities. Assigning permanent e-mail addresses to graduating students is a sure way to keep them electronically attached to their alma mater. Such programs assign to alumni, on a permanent basis, the e-mail addresses they had as students. As long as the alumni keep the institution updated with a current e-mail address, the institution can forward all e-mails sent to their permanent e-mail addresses. Because alumni used their student addresses for so long, their friends become accustomed to them. The alumni then do not have to worry about keeping their friends updated on changes to e-mail addresses. Permanent e-mail addresses are a valuable service and a powerful incentive for young alumni to stay in touch, one of the greatest challenges with recent grads (Nostrand, 1999)

COMPUTING SKILLS

The computing skills of graduates play a decisive role in using the Internet effectively as a communication tool between the alma mater and the graduates. The University of Debrecen, Centre of Agricultural Sciences offers eight 5-year degree programmes, five 3 or 4-year programmes and two postsecondary programmes at present. Students have the opportunity to acquire basic computing skills at each degree programme. As regards the Agrobusiness degree programme, students can choose the major in Computing in their third year of study since 2000. Students of this major are provided with high level computing training. As regards the degree programme in Agriculture, students can also choose the major in Computing in their third year of study since 1995. It can be stated, that students can acquire appropriate computing skills within the framework of basic education at all the degree courses. The offered majors in Computing provide them with extra knowledge, thus graduates of this major are able to bear jobs requiring high level computing skills, as well.

AVAILABILITY OF COMPUTING EQUIPMENTS

The modern mobile and wire line communication system and the business sector that is well equipped with modern information and communication tools have been continuously improving. In addition to these, the expertise itself ensures a favourable and strong basis for the development of information economy and society in Hungary. These favourable conditions are as follows:

- Both the average GDP growth/year and the enlargement of the market share of modern information and communication tools is larger in Hungary than in EU countries[1].
- As regards the main figures of communication services, such as telecommunication, Hungary has reached the average of EU countries[1].
- The computerized higher education and research institutional network, as well as the Sulinet/Irisz programme connecting most of secondary and primary schools into the network is a European level one.
- The number of PCs in the public sector has considerably increased but should be further developed.
- Investigation process of multinational companies with the lions' share of the information sector has been sped up in recent years in Hungary, and export-oriented production has also been started.
- It is favourable that there is a relatively small number of dynamically improving companies within the Hungarian information technology sector that are competitive even in international markets (http://www.gm.hu/szechenyi/szt-informatika).
- The importance of the Internet and its related information centres in small and medium size enterprises has also been realised. This should be emphasised, since this sector does not always realise its importance, and cannot provide the necessary financial sources. Surveys show that this process has been started even in the underdeveloped regions of Hungary (Bereg region) (Csapó, 2001).

The arrears can be demonstrated as follows:

- The supply of the civil sector with modern computing and communication tools is relatively low.
- As regards the economic and technological development of Hungary, number of implementations, environment of information technology market, preparedness to become an information society, figures of Internet use and access, as well as E-commerce, Hungary is lagging behind the majority of EU countries[1].
- The appropriate legal-regulation system still needs some modification (http://www.gm.hu/szechenyi/szt-informatika).

The GfK Hungária Market Research Company and Szonda Ipsos conducted a joint survey of PC owners in 1999, which shows that the ratio of men among PC owners is higher (53%) than women (47%). The ratio of 19-49 years old people, highly educated people and people living in Budapest or in towns with higher than 100,000 inhabitants, and households where the monthly net income is higher than 90,000 HUF is higher than the average. The ratio of people over 14 years of age owning communication technologies in 1997 and 2000 can be seen in Table 1.

[1] before the enlargement in 2004

Table 1

Ratio of people over 14 years of age owning communication technologies in 1997 and 2000 (in the percentage of asked people)

Tool	1997	2000
Computer, PC	6	20
Mobile phone	8	19
Phone	59	76
TV with teletext	24	36
Internet access	8	14

Source: GfK Market Research Company and Szonda Ipsos

On the basis of the Netsurvey's figures for May 2001, 16,3% of Hungarian people older than 14 years of age had Internet access and 10,7% used the Internet regularly. In August 2001, 17,5% of the same group of people had Internet access and 11,8% used the Internet regularly. This figure still lags behind the average for EU countries, where 20% of the adult population uses the Internet regularly. In Hungary, the number of Internet users at home has increased considerably of late. The frequency and level of Internet usage has been continuously increasing. The survey shows that more than 250,000 people visit the Internet a day, thus more than 700,000 people per week can be reached through this media.

On the basis of Fessel-GfK Market Research Institute's figures for 2003, 69% of American people, 68% of Finnish people, 67% of Dannish and Swedish people older than 15 years of age used the Internet. This ratio in Hungary was 15% in 2003.

The number of adults with Internet access at home increased by 70% within one year, shows the "iBasic" survey. The number of people with Internet access at their work place or school exceeds 550,000, while this number is nearly 500,000 for people with Internet access at home (Netsurvey, 2002).

The computing equipment supply of SME's with 5-50 employees can be considered good, since 90% of them have computers. At one third of these enterprises, there is only one computer, more than one third have 2-4 computers and the rest owns five or more. Among the 1,024 enterprises included in the survey, 43% had Internet access, and 11% were planning to gain Internet access (Netsurvey, 2002).

Statistical data on Internet subscribers in December 2003 can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Number of Internet subscribers by access services (December 2003)

Public switched network by modem	ISDN	xDSL	Cable TV	Leased line	Wireless	Other	Total
357 478	35 524	115 158	77 189	4 641	67 678	18 023	675 691
Same period of previous year = 100,0							
109,2	102,8	359,3	247,5	103,4	…	111,9	151,5

Source: KSH 2004/1 Statisztikai havi közlemények

SUBSIDISATION PROGRAMMES FOR IMPROVING COMPUTER AND INTERNET ACCESS

About 2,5 million people can use the modern information and communication tools at their work places, friends, schools, public points in Hungary, although some conditions are still missing to the en masse use of Internet. People with potential Internet access in year 2000 in Hungary can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

People with potential Internet access in 2000 in Hungary

Method of access	**people with potential access in thousands**
individual telephone line subscriptions	500
access in schools	520
public access (approx. 600 end points, 1 500 people)	900
access at work places	800
Total:	2,720, after deducting the overlaps, approx.

Source: http://www.gm.hu/szechenyi/szt-informatika

After the EU accession process of Hungary, several subsidisation possibilities are available within the framework of the National Development Plan. The Plan contains 5 Operative Programmes: Agriculture and Rural Development Operational Programme, Economic Competitiveness OP, Environmental Protection and Infrastructure OP, Human Resource Development OP, Regional Development OP. Within the five Operative Programmes several possibilities are provided for both individuals and companies in the field of computing and IT developments, as well as training.

CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS

- Computing skills of our graduates is adequate to stay in touch with them via the Internet. The variety of courses in Computing, as well as the majoring possibility in Computing serves as a good basis. It is also important to be mentioned that students are often requested to prepare individual project works within the framework of several courses, in which the use of computer and Internet is necessary.
- As regards the main figures of communication services, Hungary has came up with the average of EU countries. As regards the civil sector, the availability of modern computing and communication tools is relatively low, although this lag is decreasing continuously. The different support programmes have greatly contributed to this development.
- On the basis of the facts mentioned above, our efforts to keep contact with our graduates via Internet as a main communication channel, seems reasonable.
- The continuous development of IT can be used to mediate information through the Internet, but we have to take into account that our graduates also have to own the same level of technique to receive all the information.

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