11.2: Personal URL Redirection Service

SGB Meeting, 21 September 2003
Submitted by Emil Volcheck, SIGSAM Chair, `volcheck@acm.org`

Resolution:
The SGB recommends that Information Systems implement the **Personal URL Redirection Service** as a member benefit and requests that Information Systems report on progress towards implementation at the next SGB meeting.

Background:
Information Systems has developed a **Personal URL Redirection Service** that allows members to forward a URL of the form `http://acm.org/~membername` to a web page of their choice. The status of this service is "Completed, but not released" according to the Information Directors Projects page[1].

SIG Information Directors Support Redirection

A May 2002 survey of SIG Information Directors shows strong support for Information Systems (IS) to release and implement this service.

The following 18 SIGs responded to the survey: ACT, ADA, APL, ARCH, ART, CAPH, CAS, DOC, GROUP, IR, MIS, MOD, OPS, PLAN, SAC, SAM, SIM, UCCS.

The survey had two questions. The first question addressed the desirability of this service. For question 1,

> Do you think the Personal URL Redirection Service would be a valuable member benefit, if released? (please answer yes/no.)

17 responded "yes", 1 responded "maybe".

The second question compared URL Redirection to a "Virtual Business Card" proposed by IS that displays a static page listing a member's homepage without forwarding the URL. For question 2,

> Which service would members of your SIG find to be more useful? URL Redirection or the Virtual Business Card? (please answer Redirection, VBC, or your members probably wouldn't care.)

[1] `http://acm.org/infodir/projects/`

11 responded “Redirection”, 4 responded “don’t care”, 1 responded “VBC”, 1 responded “both”, and 1 responded “I don’t know”.

Conclusion: SIG Information Directors overwhelmingly believe that URL Redirection is a valuable member benefit and a large majority (11-1-6) find this to be more useful than the “Virtual Business Card”.

Advantages:

- Portability: like the ACM email forwarding service, the URL Redirection Service allows a member to keep the same URL for their homepage when they change jobs or ISPs. (A similar redirection service is offered by pobox.com.) The “Virtual Business Card” provides a certain portability at the cost of a longer URL and requiring an additional click and page load to access the member’s page.

- Stable URLs: the URL Redirection Service provides for forwarding of complete file paths allowing a user to specify stable URLs for documents. For instance, a paper on my homepage retained its number one search position with Google even after I changed ISPs (and homepage URLs) because Google indexed it under `http://acm.org/~volcheck` rather than its actual URL.

- Branding: allowing members to use acm.org URLs for their homepages raises awareness of ACM. The Virtual Business Card is less useful than redirection, so members will not be as likely to take advantage of it, meaning it will have less impact.

Disadvantage:
IS has raised one objection to the URL Redirection Service: that a member of the public might see a redirected URL and confuse it with an official ACM web page. Wayne Graves, IS Director, has stated

> URL forwarding is similar to email forwarding. What ends up happening is that whatever site you go to “seems” to be an acm.org site. This can lead to problems.

This could happen with a “cloaked” or “masked” URL redirection, where the actual destination URL is not displayed. The URL Redirection Service as developed by IS replaces the acm.org URL with the actual destination URL.

Therefore, confusion with official ACM web pages is unlikely since at no time will the destination page appear in a browser with an acm.org URL.

If such confusion remains a concern, then redirection could still be implemented by having the browser display a message like “Redirecting to a member web page” before completing the redirection. This would still be more convenient than the “Virtual Business Card”.