

## The New <http://www.mrs.org> Improves Member Services

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In October, the Materials Research Society will launch its upgraded Web site ([www.mrs.org](http://www.mrs.org)). This upgrade is the result of sustained investments that MRS has made in both servers and software. The redesigned site is part of a long-standing strategy to deliver member benefits electronically that will lead to an increasingly Web-based Society and could ultimately make MRS a mostly electronic community.

The old MRS Web site had served the Society long and well. It grew around an original structure in 1995 that dated to a few lines of HTML. The next 10 years saw enormous accretions around this core and vast growth in site traffic as [www.mrs.org](http://www.mrs.org) grew to be one of the core sites for materials scientists. Despite its somewhat ad hoc structure, MRS's Web site grew into a major member benefit for the Society. The site now ranks among the most highly valued member benefits, right after meetings. We use it to register for meetings, submit abstracts, and handle Proceedings papers. The site is also now a critical delivery vehicle for MRS publications (*JMR*, Proceedings, and *MRS Bulletin*) as well as a very valuable resource for members to access the literature. MRS members have (free!) access to the *Bulletin* and to all of the Proceedings since 2000 (more than 14,000 papers to date), as well as low-rate access to *JMR*. MRS's most downloaded papers are being accessed over 500 times/year (while, according to INSPEC, the average scientific paper is read only twice!). The on-line membership directory is the way we find our colleagues, and the Web is increasingly defining the very notion of "community." MRS's outreach activities are also now substantially electronic: the Strange Matter Web site that accompanies the MRS traveling science exhibit ([www.strangematterexhibit.com](http://www.strangematterexhibit.com)) has become a major success and is not only widely used by the external communities that we reach out to, but is also an award winner often cited as a prime example of how a scientific society can connect to the broader public.

So the Web site is now a big thing. The sheer size of it stresses the systems. It comprises 39,000 HTML files and 27,000 pdf



*"We are the electronic-MRS."*

*David J. Eaglesham*

files (growing by a further 60,000 pdf files soon, as all archival Proceedings come on-line for free member access). The Web site [www.mrs.org](http://www.mrs.org) is 14.45 GB, with the MRS intra-net (on an existing external server) at 4.96 GB. The site is also a central link for both the MRS membership database, TIMSSNet (96.3 MB), and the Strange Matter site (31.8 MB).

Traffic has grown steeply as the site has become more central to materials researchers. Page views range from 450,000 to 1 million per month. "User sessions" run up to 275,000 per month, including 75,000 to 110,000 "unique visitors." I think it is important to note that this means that [www.mrs.org](http://www.mrs.org) speaks to a community 10× larger than the MRS membership. The Proceedings are heavily used, with over 250,000 downloads in 2004, growing at a rate of 20%/yr.

Despite this enormous growth, for 10 years there were only cosmetic upgrades to the site, notably a new-look home page in 2001. Although on the face of it the Web site seemed to be responding well under pressure, the system was suffering from hardening of the arteries. The huge

number of pages, with their complicated intertwined links and cross-references, had become highly unwieldy to manage and keep current. Updating or refreshing almost any component of the site required unraveling a thread of links, like following a string back through a maze, only with hundreds of different threads. Consequently, while the MRS Headquarters staff performed phenomenal service in support of the site, the casual browser would occasionally be met with those dreaded pronouncements of "Page Not Found" and "Link Expired." More to the point, keeping the information current had become an Augean task that was consuming scarce Headquarters resources. It was time for an upgrade.

The new site is completely rebuilt from the ground up. A single content management system unifies the complex architecture of the site. Navigation is greatly simplified with a greatly reduced number of "top-level" pages, and searching is also greatly improved. The new site allows instant and simultaneous updating of multiple links when a single file is refreshed. It links seamlessly to MRS's databases for membership and meetings registration. It permits on-line purchase of articles as well as institutional subscriptions. And it enables a "My MRS" view with personalized preferences. These improvements to the Web site (both software licenses and upgraded servers) will pay for themselves in lowered expenses at MRS Headquarters.

The MRS Web site has become one of our most valued member benefits, and the new site is faster, cheaper, better, simpler to use, and, in my opinion, more beautiful. The upgraded site will improve the way we organize the meetings, register, and submit abstracts ([www.mrs.org/meetings](http://www.mrs.org/meetings)). It will improve the way we publish, read, and store our papers ([www.mrs.org/publications](http://www.mrs.org/publications)). And to a growing degree, it will define our community (<https://www2.mrs.org/Members/Directory.cfm>). We are the electronic-MRS. Add us to your "Favorites" now.

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**See page 669 for more information!**