INTERNET DEBATING: A NEW AGE DAWNS

by Alfred C. Snider

INTRODUCTION

It is a hackneyed phrase these days that the internet is changing the world and "bringing the world together." While this is often spoken in the news and in our schools, it is not often spoken in the halls of competitive debate. Many of us are so engrossed in the all-consuming realities of competition, getting to the next tournament, researching the next topic, and keeping space open for the rest of out lives that we have not noticed the changes that the internet can bring to the actual practices of debating itself.

This piece attempts to bring these issues into the forefront by sharing recent events, introducing existing technology, and outlining the short term and long term possibilities these events and technologies provide. This piece is based mostly on my own personal experience and work in this area, but it is clear to me that one of this would have been possible without the active support of my home institution (the University of Vermont), my friends and associates in the technical and debate communities, and donors and supporters who have made so much of my work possible (such as the World Debate Institute, Apple Computing, and PeoplesForum.com to name just three). None of this has been a solitary journey, as even the methods needed to explore internet debating have brought me together with many others as an inherent part of the process.

The language of this piece assumes that readers are familiar with internet "lingo" already or have read my companion piece, "The Forensic Internet: Beginners Welcomet" (*Rostrum*, June 2000).

HISTORY

I have been at the University of Vermont since 1982, and in the early 1990's I became involved with Macintosh computers and I instantly saw great potential for personal computing and the internet to change my career as a debate coach and teacher of rhetoric, argumentation, and persuasion. I began to use email extensively in 1993, and in 1995 I started a debate internet site I called "Debate Central." The way debaters used email exploded when various debate email listservs became the preferred mode of instant communication in our community, and I rode along on that explosion. Our internet site grew from a simple text ("gopher") server into a full-fledged text and graphic world wide web server (http://debate.uvm.edu). My involvement with internet matters grew by leaps and bounds, but I was frustrated by our confinement to simple text and static pictures because the process of debating is inherently oral, live, and dynamic.

Spring, 1999 –
Streaming Media Meets Debate Central

In 1998 I became aware of the potential to "stream" audiovisual signals through the internet. I saw the potential of this technology to bring our oral, live, and dynamic activity onto the internet. I strongly supported my university's decision to acquire and operate a "streaming media" server (in fact, I actively lobbied for it). I soon learned that it wasn't quite as easy as all that. In fact, I simply didn't have the computer power available to even prepare pieces of tape for streaming. I was able to use a machine maintained by our Computing and Information Technology department, and I encoded my first piece of video. We have been doing a weekly television show as part of our public debate activities all through the late 1980's and 1990's, so this was logically a first choice. Terry McKnight, Andy Ellis, and I recorded an edition of our "Flashpoint" television show in the usual way (at our local public access cable television studio maintained by Adelphia Cablevision) on the subject of "Internet Debate," and we speculated about the potential for this medium. The video is still available and predicts many of the events and developments to follow, although none of us ever thought at the time how quickly things would move. This piece of video was then "encoded" for internet streaming and served by our university's server with a link that originated at Debate Central.

During that Spring other pieces of video were encoded and streamed, and we began to build up a library of available offerings. Not waiting for reality, we formed an entity called Debate Central Broadcast Network (DCBN) and began to look into how we could expand our offerings.

One of the great lessons of the internet is that it is all just an empty show without content. My website experience had shown me that while many people rushed to build "debate" websites in the latter half of the 1990's, they were often just a spot with a few pictures and links to more links with very little real content. As far as debate was concerned, the information superhighway was really full of a lot of on ramps and off ramps but with very few real destinations worth going to and staying at. My experience with Debate Central had shown me that content was the most important factor. Most of those sites no longer exist today, because content accumulation and updating is a difficult and not very flashy effort. Thus, in expanding our streaming media offerings I knew that we first needed to find some strong content.

Fortunately, the World Debate Institute offered an ideal source of such content. The Summer of 1999 was the 17th for the World Debate Institute, an intensive residential Summer program for college and high school debaters which features some of the finest lecturers and teachers connected to the debate activity. It provided an ideal source for content.

Summer, 1999 –
World Debate Institute, First Live Events

I prepared for a rush of new content by purchasing a Mac G3 450 Mhz computer with an Iomega Buz drive for video media processing. In the weeks before the World Debate Institute I processed a number of video pieces for streaming, but it wasn't the real "hard" debate instruction content I wanted.

Andy Ellis and I began to prepare for WDI 1999 as the first real "online" debate institute. We acquired a digital video camera to capture our content and we arranged with our university's Media Services department to use a computer of theirs for "live" streaming of WDI events. As the days passed and the clock ticked towards the

beginning of the session we tried to prepare the technology for the opening session. We had a pre-WDI faculty training session we wanted to capture and an opening keynote speech we wanted to webcast live. Just hours before WDI 1999 began we finally determined that all the pieces were in place and it was actually going to work. This pattern would be repeated in the months to come.

While the opening session and the keynote speech by Jim Wade were both webcast live, there wasn't much of an audience, and that wasn't a problem for us. We wanted to see if it would work before we tried to attract a larger audience. Debaters know that it is better to make a fool of yourself in front of a small audience than a large audience. Once we determined that the technology was working (I could sit across the street in my office and watch the lectures going on in our main space in the Royall Tyler Theatre) we began to announce events and encourage a global audience to watch.

While we webcast many events, certain events were of more importance than others. These included:

A lecture by Kate Shuster, one of American debate's greatest teachers and lecturers, deconstructing the study of international relations.

Our 200th "Flashpoint" show, featuring many of the people who had been such a big part of the show during its history.

A British format four team debate on "This house would regret the trade blocs," which was reacted to by viewers from around the world, who liked the technical quality but said that many of the American accents were too thick.

A grand finale debate featuring an international composition of both parliamentary and policy debaters, including former national champions, on "This house would post the ten commandments in public schools." The debate featured floor speeches and a large live audience.

The awards assembly for both the college and the high school programs. This was particularly important to me because I later got word that parents, watching many hundreds of miles away, saw their son receive awards. That impressed me with the power of this new medium.

One of the other important events which took place at WDI 1999 was networking. Jethro Hayman, a WDI faculty member and alumni of the University of Vermont and now the debate coach at Cornell University, became very interested in these technologies and we made an agreement to pursue them in the coming semester. Marc Whitmore, a WDI faculty member and a graduate of St. Andrews University in Scotland and the newly named coordinator of debating for the English-Speaking Union in the UK (a group which coordinates debating in the British Isles and in many countries around the world) also expressed strong interest, and we agreed to pursue the possibilities in the months to come.

Andy Ellis and I tried a live webcast from my office to an office in another part of the same building, reasoning that the distance wasn't important as long as it went through the internet. Once we were webcasting, I stole a line from Alexander Graham Bell and said, "Andy, come here, I need you." We both laughed.

During the Fall we held several technical meetings to arrange for the next steps in the evolution of our use of these technologies. Wesley Wright, Andy Ellis, and I met with Deb Tufts and Eric Zelman of Apple to pursue a way to achieve our goals of a webcast distance debate. Apple agreed to supply us with a G3 computer and the necessary software so that the University of Vermont could use QuickTime technology. It became clear that QuickTime was the preferred technology for such events because it is the only existing system which allows for two audiovisual windows to be open at the same time. The idea was to create a web page with two QuickTime windows in it – one for each team.

December, 1999 –
Vermont vs. Cornell, First Distance Debate

Cornell University and the University of Vermont agreed to stage a webcast distance debate at the end of the Fall semester. The idea was to have debaters in Ithaca, New York, debate against debaters in Burlington, Vermont while watching and hearing each other on a computer screen. Wesley Wright, the technical wizard behind all of our efforts, began to put the technical pieces of the puzzle together. We had hoped for a November date for the debate, but the pressures of the competitive debate season on the parties involved and then the academic pressures of the end of the semester pushed the date back to December.

In the week before the planned debate I spent many hours trying to achieve a link up with Jethro Hayman at Cornell University. Cornell began to supply hardware and technical assistance and we got closer to our goal. Finally, we established a link and set a date and time.

On Tuesday, December 23, 1999, at 10:00 AM Eastern Time, the world's first webcast distance debate was held. The topic was, "The United States should immediately lift all economic sanctions on Cuba." Cornell was affirmative and was represented by Anapurna Singh and Jethro Hayman. Helen Morgan and Sarah Jane Snider represented Vermont. The debate started on time and took a little over 60 minutes.

The event went off flawlessly. Both sides could see and hear each other and remote viewers reported acceptable video and excellent audio. NBC covered the event. We estimated that about fifty computers watched the event, but we had not publicized it extensively because we didn't want to fail in front of too large a crowd and it was scheduled at an odd hour and day, the morning of the Tuesday before Christmas.

In London Marc Whitmore was watching. He was encouraged by what he saw. He determined that if he could see and hear the debate on a non-optimal connection to a British internet service provider, then it was possible to do even more.

March, 2000 –
Vermont vs. London, First International Distance Debate

If we had tried to downplay our efforts so far, that stage was a part of the past. Our next effort was to create a truly global event and to publicize it for a much larger audience. Marc Whitmore approached the leaders of the English-Speaking Union about staging such an event and gained their approval. The ESU was able to obtain sponsorships from Burson-Marsteller (the world's largest public relations firm) and Andersen Consulting. They lined up a series of notables to be at the event and we decided on a Spring, 2000 Trans-Atlantic event.

In Vermont we began organizing our side of the event. We gained a patron in PeoplesForum.com; an internet site designed to promote debates and discussion about important issues and ideas (http://peoplesforum.com). Lance Brown and Editte Lehrman of PeoplesForum.com were visionary in their willingness to get behind this groundbreaking event, thus guaranteeing for themselves and their firm an important place in global debate history. With

PeoplesForum.com providing support and Apple Computing providing us with equipment, software, and technical advice, we moved ahead. Vermont U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, often known as the "Cyber Senator," and independent member of the U.S. House of Representatives Bernard Sanders indicated their willingness to support this effort and give welcome messages from Washington.

In Europe LiveTX.com (a company dedicated to streaming video) had demonstrated their abilities by webcasting from the deserts of Mongolia using much the same technology and hardware we would be using. They agreed to promote the debate as well as provide a server solution on their side of the Atlantic.

In Vermont we beefed up our server capacity and acquired various bits of hardware and software we would need. I personally agonized over the possible disasters which could befall us while perched so precariously on a global stage, including loss of connectivity between London and Vermont (we can't have a debate if we can't see and hear each other) and the swamping of our server capacity among other things. Wesley Wright of the University of Vermont and Joe Hazard of Apple Computer tried to assuage my fears as well as head them off in the real world.

Eight days before the debate we conducted a technical test and after some minor difficulties Marc Whitmore and I were able to wave at each other and say hello. We felt great after the test, and began to believe that it was really going to happen.

The event took place on March 14, 2000 at 1 PM Eastern time, 1800 hours Greenwich Mean time. The Vermont event featured greetings from Leahy, Sanders, and Vermont Vice Provost Jane Lawrence. The London event featured T. J. Dowling of the US Embassy, Lord Watson of Richmond, Vernon Ellis of Andersen Consulting, Alex Allan the E-Envoy of the UK government, as well as many other notables. The topic was, "The dinosaurs never see it coming: an exploration of the promises and perils of advanced technology." The focus of the proposition was that rapidly advancing technology threatens to render the unadaptive extinct. The proposition team, representing the University of Vermont, consisted of Aaron Fishbone, Rae Lynn Schwartz, Helen Morgan, and Sarah Jane Snider. The opposition team, representing the English-Speaking Union, consisted of James Probert, Sebastian Isaac, Jos Lavery, and Sarah Monroe.

The event was fraught with tension. Eight minutes before it was scheduled to begin there still was no connection with London. In a teleconference seminar room in the basement of the Waterman building at the University of Vermont, with NBC and CBS cameras rolling, with University and Apple Computer representatives watching pensively, I stood at a podium and said over and over again, "Hello London, can you hear me?" Suddenly with five minutes to go, the picture from London came up on a projection video screen in front of us and it was beginning.

The debate was a huge success. Email came in from Brazil, Portugal, Australia, New Zealand, and all over America. Figures indicated that over 8000 computers were watching the event. The video was somewhat pixelated and didn't always match up with the audio, but the sound was excellent and the attending audiences on both sides of the Atlantic seemed well pleased. The major problem experienced by those watching the event was a problem with making sure that the QuickTime plug-in was properly installed in the receiving computers, but from our end it worked and worked well.

The Chronicle of Higher Education put it this way:

"Participants uniformly declared the event a success, suggesting that it opened a door to live, low-cost international communication of all sorts.

Alfred Snider, a professor of forensics at Vermont, noted at the event's end that images of the Vermont team were captured and Webcast largely with relatively unsophisticated equipment — a digital camera and an Apple PowerBook computer linked to an Apple Macintosh server. The streaming-media software, he said, cost about $200."

March, 2000 – CEDA & NDT, First Webcast Tournament Debates

Emboldened by our success, we then planned to accomplish another first, to do a remote webcast of a competitive tournament debate. We had been lucky in all our previous events to be at a "home" site with excellent internet connectivity and excellent technical support. There was risk of being far from home, with a dial-up internet connection, and no technical support. Andy Ellis, Jethro Hayman, and I had been a part of these events, but we were not computer experts.

The Cross Examination Debate Association agreed to allow us to webcast the final round of their national tournament from the Doubletree Hotel in Overland Park, Kansas. My thanks to CEDA President, Gina Lane, for her willingness to try something this new and this risky. Once again, PeoplesForum.com was our patron. The round was scheduled to take place in the evening around 9 PM, and as the afternoon wore on Jethro Hayman, Andy Ellis and I began to set up the webcast. We had a normal phone line installed in the room where the debate would take place. We had some considerable trouble getting the webcast to work, and it eventually started to webcast properly, but only after a phone call back to Vermont to Wesley Wright to answer some questions. Initially the audio had some break ups, but as time went on we were able to adjust the settings and achieve a steady audio flow.

The debate took place and we received a steady stream of email during the webcast. Some viewers expressed some problems but most of them indicated that it was working. After the debate we stayed on screen while the judges made their decision. We webcast the deliberations and then the announcement of the decision. Two of the judges stayed after to explain their decisions, one for each side in the debate.

The feedback after the CEDA finals was very encouraging. Steve Mancuso of the University of Michigan reported that his students had been in their squad room preparing for the upcoming National Debate Tournament and they stopped to watch, huddled around the computer screen as the debate unfolded and was decided. He later told me how amazing that scene had been, his team in Ann Arbor watching a debate being held in Kansas.

One week later, still in the Kansas City area, we webcast the final round of the National Debate Tournament from the Marriott Hotel. The Board of Trustees of the NDT, as well as the NDT Committee and the NDT Director, Donn Parson of the University of Kansas, graciously agreed to allow us to attempt the webcast. Linda Collier of the University of Missouri at Kansas City, the NDT host, was of great assistance to us. We started testing the webcast during the quarterfinal debate, and it did not go well. For some reason the audio was terrible and continued to break up. Changing the set-

tings improved things marginally during the semifinal debate, and even after continued communication with Wesley Wright in Vermont things did not get much better. Finally, as the final round approached we managed to get a steady audio signal, but it wasn't quite up to the quality we had a week earlier at the CEDA finals. The NDT webcast took place and both audio and video were steady, but for some reason the quality of the CEDA webcast was not reached. We speculate that it was the nature of our connection in Kansas City, but only additional experience will allow us to determine these things. Replication should lead to improvement.

The decision was announced after midnight and we carried it live. I later heard that groups of supporters back home were glued to their computers during the debate and when it was announced.

TECHNICAL BACKGROUND

This is a preliminary look at available hardware and software. Debate Central is currently developing hardware and software package information, in cooperation with the manufacturers, which will be available at a number of different price levels. Please be aware that this is a very fast changing field and information may become dated quickly. Consult Debate Central for updates.

What follows is a simplified explanation of how this is all accomplished. It is a bit more complicated than this, but with the help of a few manuals and good old-fashioned trial and error it can be done. After all, we did it, and although we have some expert advisors none of us are computer or internet experts. I encourage people to realize that it is possible to teach yourself how to accomplish these things, and once you have learned how to open these doors they remain open to you after that. You may remember how difficult riding a bicycle looked when you were very young, or how imposing your first computer looked, but rest assured that it is not an insurmountable barrier. Debate Central looks forward to offering advice and support documents as these efforts move forward.

Receiving –
QuickTime, RealPlayer, & Media Player

Anyone wishing to receive streaming audiovisual signals should probably have at least these first two pieces of software installed on their computers. A sound card is also required for PCs, and all recent Macintosh computers come with sound capabilities. They are both quite serviceable and have different advantages and disadvantages, but those come into play when deciding which format to send messages out in as opposed to which format to receive messages in. Many sites use RealPlayer and many use QuickTime, and a wide number of popular sites use both for the same offering so that you have a choice. If you wish to be open to receiving a full spectrum of new media offerings I would encourage having both. Both are available either as "free" players or as low cost items to purchase.

RealPlayer is available from Real Networks. As of this writing it is in version 7. It can receive both audio only as well as audiovisual streams. The viewing window is available in the original size the message is being sent in or as a double size window. On some systems it can even offer a full screen picture, but this is usually fairly grainy and pixelated, so is not that useful. It comes with a number of preset channels and you can add or subtract channels as you wish. It is available in both PC and Macintosh versions. When you use Internet Explorer as your browser it downloads a very small file (with the suffix ".ram") which, when clicked, brings up the viewing window, unless the player has actually been embedded in a specific web page. When you use Netscape Communicator as your browser it opens the window immediately after you click on the link for the audiovisual signal. [RealPlayer http://www.real.com/player/index.html]

QuickTime is available from Apple Computer. As of this writing it is in version 4.1. It can receive both audio only as well as audiovisual streams. The viewing window is scalable to the size you wish. It comes with a few preset channels and you can add or subtract channels as you wish. It is available in both PC and Macintosh versions. It seems to work equally well with Internet Explorer and Netscape Communicator. [QuickTime player http://www.apple.com/quicktime/]

You might also want to investigate Windows Media Player, but it tends to tell your browser when you install it to use only it to receive audiovisual signals, and thus makes it difficult when you wish to view signals in other formats. Many of our viewers who get the "plug in not properly installed" message for QuickTime are having problems because Media Player has tried to keep QuickTime out. However, it is popular and available. [http://www.microsoft.com/windows/mediaplayer/en/download/Macintosh.asp for Macintosh and http://www.microsoft.com/windows/mediaplayer/en/default.asp for PC]

At Debate Central we currently use RealPlayer for our pre-recorded offerings and QuickTime for our live offerings, for reasons explained below. At some point we will make a decision between the two, and right now we prefer QuickTime because Apple has offered superior technical assistance and support and it has a superior interface. But, this field is changing very quickly and the major corporate players are acting with vigor, so one never knows what things will be like even a few months from now.

Serving –
QuickTime Streaming Server &
RealServer

If you have a server and wish to start serving your own audiovisual content you can use the above formats. The University of Vermont main computer systems offer only QuickTime and Real, so that is our experience. Debate Central utilizes Macintosh machines to author and serve, so our reported experience here is moderated by that.

QuickTime Streaming Server runs on any G3 or G4 Macintosh running system OSX. It has shown itself to be powerful and reliable. It can serve a few hundred streams at a time. Copies of it are available for your inspection. Because it is an open code system it can be ported over to other servers, such as those of Sun Microsystems, but this takes considerable computer expertise. [Apple QuickTime Streaming Server http://www.apple.com/quicktime/servers/]

RealServer can be run from PC systems and can serve a limited number of streams, and the initial "free" version should work well as a start up system. Higher level serving software can be a bit more expensive. [http://www.realnetworks.com/products/basicserver/info.html]

Microsoft Media Server is also available but I have no direct experience with it. [http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/en/technologies/tools.asp]

I urge college and universities to ask their main computing departments to install either QuickTime or Real systems. A QuickTime system could be installed by individual programs for a few thousand dollars investment in hardware and software.

Authoring and Producing – QuickTime Pro & RealProducer

Audiovisual content can be produced and encoded for internet streaming in several different ways, but they all begin the same way. You have an audiovisual signal (either from a camera or a videotape) which you must first digitize. You will need a fairly powerful computer (I use a Macintosh G3 450 Mhz) with a video capture card or device. The new line of iMac DVs are ideally suited for this, but audiovisual enabled PCs are also capable of this function. You will need a capture program. I use Adobe Premiere currently, although I am anxious to try Apple's iMovie. You play your source material into your computer and "capture" it in digital format. Current camcorders and VHS players can be used as input devices. Then, the files are "saved" onto your hard disk, almost always in the QuickTime format, with the suffix ".mov." Please be aware that these files take up lots of hard disk space, even when captured at fairly moderate quality and screen size. These lower quality settings are acceptable because the quality of streaming media isn't that high to begin with, and as one UK speaker in the Vermont-London debate put it, "this isn't television." A 30 minute capture may take up one whole gigabyte of hard disk space. This means that for most of us, you capture a video file, encode it, and then dump the original captured file after it is encoded because they are simply too large to keep around.

Once a file is captured it needs to be encoded in a format suitable for streaming. Which format you encode for depends on how you are going to serve the content. If you are serving them for RealPlayer you will need to use RealProducer, and if you are serving for QuickTime you should use QuickTime Pro. In both cases you launch the encoding software, point towards the captured file on your hard disk, indicate the quality settings, and tell it to start encoding. At the end of the encoding process you will have a file suitable for streaming. These files are much smaller than the originally captured file. For example, a one gigabyte 30 minute video file is usually reduced to a ten megabyte file by RealProducer. These files, as well as QuickTime files, can either be streamed over the internet or distributed on CD-ROMs.

These files can then be mounted on the server you will be using. Links to these files can be added to your web pages or player windows can be embedded in your web pages as you see fit. Then, these files are ready to be watched by anyone in the world with an internet connection and the proper player installed.

Distance Debate Webcasting – Sorenson Broadcaster & QuickTime Streaming Server

There are fewer current options if you wish to have a real time interactive distance debate. QuickTime is the only player which allows you to have two audiovideo windows open at the same time so that not only can each team see the other team but observers can see both windows at once with a different team in each one.

Each team will need a copy of Sorenson Broadcaster. This excellent piece of Macintosh-only software is small but extremely powerful. Each team will need to have a camera and microphone to capture the action, that needs to be connected to a Macintosh computer with a video capture card or device. That computer will be running Sorenson Broadcaster [http://www.s-vision.com/products/SorensonBroadcaster/] which will encode the signal on the fly and then send it over an internet connection (even a dial up connection to an internet service provider) to a QuickTime Streaming Server. That server will then serve the two received signals to one web page with two windows in it, one for each team. Then, viewers from anywhere in the world who have QuickTime installed need only load that web page and watch the debate. This is the system we have successfully used for both the Vermont-Cornell debate and he Vermont-English-Speaking Union debate. We know that it works. Other systems may work, but we know of no others which support two windows at once.

Remote Webcasting – Sorenson Broadcaster & RealProducer

Finally, it is possible to webcast from a remote location. This involves a camera and microphone, once again linked to a computer with video capture capability. PCs can run RealProducer for live capture and then through an internet connection send it to a RealServer at a home base location. Macintosh computers can run Sorenson Broadcaster for live capture and then through an internet connection send it to a QuickTime Streaming Server at a home base location.

To illustrate this process, I will describe the configuration used to webcast the CEDA and NDT final rounds. We have a Sony Digital Video camera (although just about any video camcorder would do) which we link to a Macintosh G3 Powerbook. Our specific Powerbook uses an Irez Capsure PCI card which automatically digitizes the signal and this keeps the load off of the Powerbook processor. The CapSure card is popped into the PCI slot on the Powerbook and the RCA connections from the camera are attached (yellow video connection into the CapSure card, red and white left-right sound connection to the "Sound In" slot in the rear of the computer using an adapter which comes with the CapSure card). Then, we launch Sorenson Broadcaster and set it for video and audio sources, quality settings, and network destination (where you will be serving the signal from, usually your server at a home location). We would then start up our internet connection. Sorenson Broadcaster would then be used to "save" our settings as a ".sdp" file (Sorenson Data Protocol). This file would be sent by email to the home base server we are using, and once it is mounted there it is ready to serve your remote signal. Then you simply push the "Broadcast" button on Sorenson and you are webcasting. Anyone with an internet connection and QuickTime installed on their computer should be able to watch your signal, either directly through the QuickTime player or through a web page with a QuickTime window which you design and offer from your home server.

SHORT TERM POSSIBILITIES

Demonstration Debates & Events

In the months ahead webcast events and debates as well as internet distance debates will remain demonstration projects. By that I mean that people need to be introduced to the technology and its results so that they can begin to understand its uses and potential as well as, perhaps more importantly, realize that it is within their financial and technical capacity.

To this end we are currently seeking exploratory partners in the United States and abroad who are interested in this pioneering work. So far the only schools with demonstrated distance debate capacity are Cornell University and the University of Vermont, but we expect that this number will grow rapidly. The World Debate Institute in the Summer of 2000 will feature many webcast events between July 15 and August 11. There are also plans for a possible intercontinental internet debate between WDI in Vermont and the International De-

bate Education Association summer workshop in Ustron, Poland. WDI will also feature a workshop on internet debating.

In the Fall of 2000 Cornell University and the University of Vermont will be scheduling more internet distance debates, and hopefully others will join us.

Creation of a Network of Schools

By utilizing the current server system at the University of Vermont and other schools which have streaming servers or are willing to install them, it should be possible to create an initial network of schools interested in internet debating. These schools could affiliate together in a loose fashion to begin participating in the initial "breakout" of these techniques. Once aware of each other these schools can begin scheduling debates and events between themselves, either using our server as available or using servers made available by other members of the network.

Interested schools and groups can contact me at asnider@zoo.uvm.edu for further information.

Creation of a 24/7 Webcast Facility

In the late Spring and early Summer of 2000 Debate Central will be launching a 24 hour a day seven day a week webcast facility. This facility, channel, or network (new concepts may require new vocabulary) will webcast audiovisual streams to anyone connected to the internet who wishes to watch.

Programming will consist of debates, instructional sessions, events, and panel discussions about current issues. Content will be sought from the debating community at large and will be added to webcasts after review. It will not be "Debate TV" but it will come as close to it as is currently possible.

Watch for it at http://debate.uvm.edu/dcbn.html

The First Internet Debate Tournament

In the Fall of 2000 an effort will be made to stage the first internet debate tournament. Teams entering will agree to participate in four debates on the college policy debate topic as well as supply a judge for two debates. Each debate will be judged by a critic watching the webcast and casting a ballot as usual, but then providing critique of the debate which will also be webcast. After the four preliminary debates there will be an appropriate number of elimination rounds with three judges in each.

Unlike existing debate tournaments this one need not occur on a single weekend, or on weekends at all. When Team A meets Team B with Judge C they will be assigned a webpage (instead of a room) and will negotiate a time for the event. The time will be publicized for those interested in watching. They will merely be required to hold the debate within a given period of time (one week) for example, with the entire tournament taking from five to six weeks.

After this tournament is held we will attempt to organize a webcast college parliamentary debate tournament, a high school policy debate tournament, and a high school Lincoln-Douglas debate tournament.

These events should surely demonstrate both the promises and problems of this technology, and based on this experience we can move forward as seem warranted.

LONG TERM POSSIBILITIES

Things are changing so rapidly that it is risky to look too far into the future in terms of technology dependent matters such as these. However, the prospects are so exciting that it is difficult to resist the temptation to speculate. Please forgive my exuberant rhetoric, but these are possibilities and dreams, not concrete plans.

Regularization of Internet Debating

Internet debating could become a regular event. It is clear that it will never replace "live" and "in-person" debating but, it can add an exciting new element to debate competition. My prediction is that it will become additive to current debating practices, and in the process allow more individuals to participate. Schools who cannot afford an extensive travel budget will be able to compete after a modest, one-time expenditure. Isolated and rural schools will be able to debate without the rigors of travel. Those who must work on weekends will be given an opportunity to participate in debates at times which are convenient for them. Even coaches, often worn out by travel, may be revitalized by a debate activity which no longer demands sacrificing weekends and logging so many miles.

Leagues and organizations may recognize internet debates as special categories for recognition, or may even treat them like any other debates for purposes such as season-long sweepstakes and individual and school "points."

A Global Internet Debating Community

Internet debating has the potential to break down the tyranny of distance. This distance has made it very difficult for students from different parts of the nation to debate against each other, and virtually impossible for students from different parts of the world to debate each other. With internet debating there is no physical difference between debating a team from the other side of town or the other side of the world, but when students from different countries and different cultures begin debating against each other the differences will be huge. When we learn to talk to each other and listen to each other and, of course, be judged and critiqued by each other, there is a chance for growing global understanding. If debating can help create a feeling of community, global internet debating may, in some small way, create a feeling of global community.

The Global Citizen Podium

These technologies have been discussed in reference to their application to debates and debating. However, there is more that may come of it. If citizens, not just students but citizens, can climb on a globally available podium to speak their minds a new form of discourse might emerge. Where we now must depend on news channels and the talking heads of newscasters to evaluate events and developments, in a future scenario citizens might be able to talk directly to each other about events, reporting can come from citizens "on the ground" at the places where the events are taking place, and reactions and ideas can come from a global audience.

In April, 1999 we recorded an edition of our weekly television show, Flashpoint [#187} where Andy Ellis, Terry McKnight, and I discussed a future scenario much like the conflict in Yugoslavia which was going on at the time. In this future, internet webcast scenario, instead of just hearing from a few news sources, citizens could watch a myriad of webcast events where citizens from China, Russia, Africa, Europe, Fiji, and all parts of the world could "join the debate" about what should be done and how governments and individuals should behave. The topic "should NATO intervene?" might be debated by many teams from many nations, bringing many more perspectives to light.

If democracy requires a participating and vocal citizenry, increased audiovisual connectivity may, in some small way, contribute to a growing trend towards "real" global democracy.

FACILITATING STEPS

These developments are not centralized, but take place one person at a time and one school at a time and one debate at a time. Your involvement is critical to the advancement of these possibilities. I urge you to get involved.

Watch & Demonstrate

You can begin by loading QuickTime and RealPlayer onto your internet connected computers. Watch streamed media of all sorts (news, arts, entertainment) but also watch future webcast debates and debate events and instruction already available on the various websites. Show these to your friends, teachers, and coaches, and discuss the possibilities with them. One of the problems with this technology is also a problem with this article — words simply do not convey the reality of it, people need to watch and see in order to grasp what it may mean. Watch for yourself and then show others.

Join the Debate & the Network

Encourage your school to get involved. If you have an appropriate computer in your home use that to get involved. Show this article to a teacher, administrator, or parent, and try and put the technological pieces together. Contact us and become a part of the hopefully growing network of internet debaters and schools. If you can watch an internet distance debate you are not that far away from being in one. Most schools have cameras, and once you are able to plug that into a computer with a video and audio card you are just a few pieces of inexpensive software away from being in a live distance debate.

Young people today are much more acutely aware of the potentials of the internet and computers than many adults are. Realize this and try and show those in other generations the way.

There is a new debate future coming. I hope to "see" you there!

REFERENCES TO MENTIONED DEBATE WEBSITES

Debate Central
http://debate.uvm.edu
English-Speaking Union
http://www.esu.org
LiveTX.com
http://www.livetx.com/
National Forensic League
http://debate.uvm.edu/nfl.html

TECHNICAL REFERENCES

Apple Computer
http://www.apple.com/
QuickTime player
http://www.apple.com/quicktime/
QuickTime server
http://www.apple.com/quicktime/servers/
QuickTime Authoring
http://www.apple.com/quicktime/authoring/
Sorenson Broadcaster
http://www.s-vision.com/products/SorensonBroadcaster/
RealPlayer
http://www.real.com/player/index.html
RealProducer
http://www.realnetworks.com/developers/index.html
RealServer
http://www.realnetworks.com/products/basicserver/info.html

(Professor Alfred C. Snider, Edwin Lawrence Professor of Forensics, University of Vermont
Outstanding college debater at Brown University, Third place 1972 National Debate Tournament, 29 years as college coach, as qualified teams for the elimination rounds at both CEDA Nationals and the National Debate Tournament, originator of gaming paradigm, 1993 National Coach of the Year, one of the most widely published debate theorists in the world. Director and Founder of World Debate Institute. System Operator of Debate Central [http://debate.uvm.edu].
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