

# Graph-Drawing Contest Report

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**Abstract.** This report describes the the Third Annual Graph Drawing Contest, held in conjunction with the 1996 Graph Drawing Symposium in Berkeley, California. The purpose of the contest is to monitor and challenge the current state of the art in graph-drawing technology.

## 1 Introduction

Text descriptions of the four graphs for the 1996 contest can be found on the World Wide Web at URL [www.research.att.com/conf/gd96/contest.html](http://www.research.att.com/conf/gd96/contest.html). Graph A represents a finite automaton used in a natural-language processing system. Graph B represents the calls made between a set of telephone numbers. Graph C is an artificial graph that was designed as a special challenge for standard algorithms. Graph D represents the structure and content of a fragment of the World Wide Web. An effective graph drawing had to communicate not only the edge connections between vertices, but also any vertex- or edge-attribute values peculiar to the graph. Thus the main judging criterion was one of information visualization.

Approximately 35 graphs were submitted by the contest deadline. The winners were selected by a panel of judges, and are shown below.

## 2 Winning submissions and honorable mentions

### 2.1 Graph A

This directed graph contains 1,096 nodes and 1,691 edges. Each node is either a terminal or a nonterminal node, and each edge is labeled with a single character. It depicts part of a finite automaton used in a natural-language processing

system. Our intention was to award separate prizes for the best overall drawing of this graph and for the best distorted drawing that emphasized a particular node.

However, only four submissions (two each for the regular and distorted views) were received, and the judges felt that none of them was good enough to win. But because of the challenge offered by this graph, the judges awarded special honorable mentions to Gilles Paris ([paris@ireq.ca](mailto:paris@ireq.ca)) of IREQ Institut de recherche d'Hydro-Quebec, Canada, and to Falk Schreiber and Carsten Friedrich ([\[schreibe, friedric\]@fmi.uni-passau.de](mailto:[schreibe, friedric]@fmi.uni-passau.de)) of Universität Passau, Germany. Paris submitted three-dimensional color drawings of the graph. Schreiber and Friedrich did not draw the graph explicitly, but instead decompiled it by listing all the words that could be spelled out by traversing the graph's edges.

## 2.2 Graph B

This graph contains 111 nodes and 193 edges. It was extracted from a large telephone-call database by a utility that finds connected components of graphs in external storage. Graphs like this are used by the police in the investigation of telephone fraud and other criminal activities. For obvious reasons, random numbers were substituted for real numbers. However, the area codes are actual area codes for the United States and Canada.

The winning drawing for Graph B, shown in Figure 1, was submitted by Ulrich Fößmeier and Michael Kaufmann ([\[foessmei, mk\]@informatik.uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:[foessmei, mk]@informatik.uni-tuebingen.de)) of Universität Tübingen. An initial drawing was generated by an algorithm for finding partially layered representations of planar bipartite graphs.<sup>4</sup> The final version of the drawing was refined manually.

An honorable mention for this graph was awarded to François Bertault ([Francois.Bertault@loria.fr](mailto:Francois.Bertault@loria.fr)) of CRIN/INRIA-Lorraine, France. His drawing is shown in Figure 2. The layout algorithm used was a spring method. Node positions were adjusted manually, and nodes are color-coded according to the area code of the corresponding telephone number.<sup>5</sup>

An honorable mention was also awarded to Vladimir Batagelj and Andrej Mrvar ([\[vladimir.batagelj, andrej.mrvar\]@uni-lj.si](mailto:[vladimir.batagelj, andrej.mrvar]@uni-lj.si)) from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, for the drawing in Figure 3. This layout was obtained by a program that positions vertices on a rectangular net so as to minimize edge crossings. Nodes were repositioned manually. Color coding and a key (not shown) associate nodes with area codes and telephone numbers, respectively.

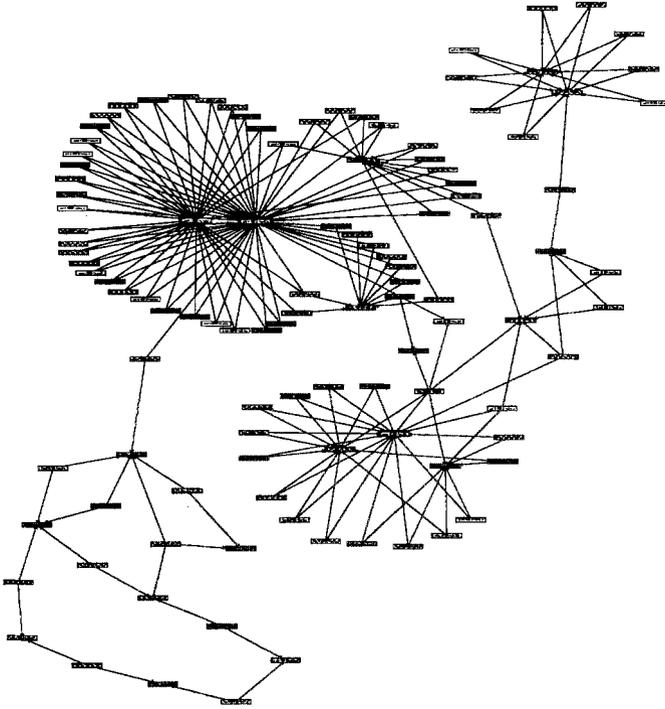
## 2.3 Graph C

Unlike the other graphs, Graph C was contrived without reference to a real-world application. It contains 65 nodes and 125 edges. The winning drawing was

<sup>4</sup> Graph B was in fact the inspiration for developing this algorithm.

<sup>5</sup> To obtain a color hard copy or a PostScript version of this report, please contact Joe Marks ([marks@merl.com](mailto:marks@merl.com)).





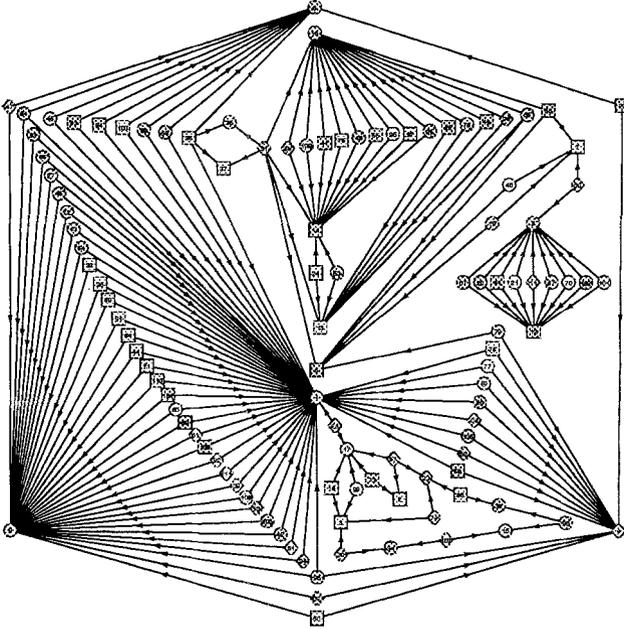
**Fig. 2.** Honorable mention, Graph B (original in color).

Carsten Friedrich ([schreibe, friedric]@fmi.uni-passau.de) of Universität Passau, Germany. The layout results from a spring method. Figure 6 is due to Günter Rote (rote@opt.math.tu-graz.ac.at) from the Technische Universität Graz, Austria. The layout techniques used to produce the drawing were not described in the submission. Lastly, Figure 7 was submitted by François Bertault (Francois.-Bertault@loria.fr) of CRIN/INRIA-Lorraine, France. A spring algorithm was used to separate the graph into two components. The layout of the planar component was found by first computing a planar embedding, and then applying a spring method that conserves planarity. The grid component was also handled by the spring method. Finally, the curved edges were added by hand.

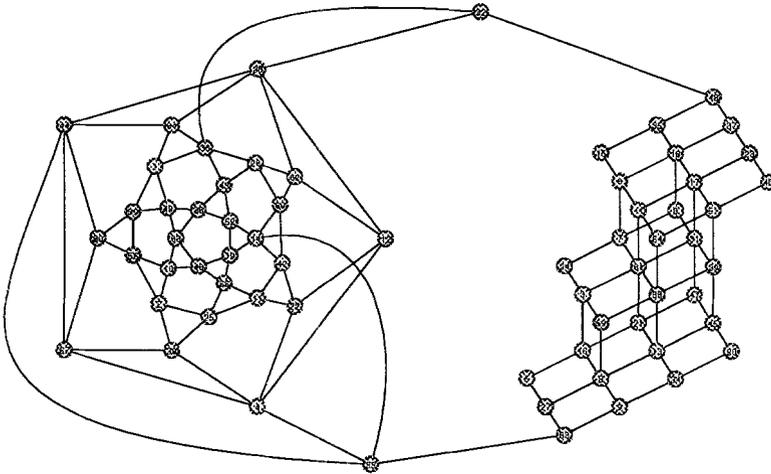
## 2.4 Graph D

This directed graph contains 180 nodes and 229 edges. It represents some of AT&T's WWW sites and their contents. Each node represents either a URL, a text label, or an image; the node type can be inferred from the node's text label. So although the graph is relatively small, the node-attribute data make for a challenging visualization task.

The two best submissions for this graph took basically the same approach, which is to allow the user to view subsets of the graph interactively. Figure 8



**Fig. 3.** Honorable mention, Graph B (original in color).



**Fig. 4.** Winner, Graph C (original in color).

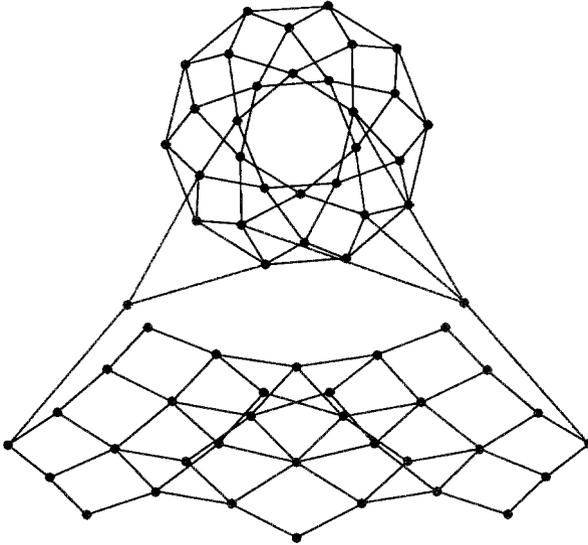


Fig. 5. Honorable mention, Graph C (original in color).

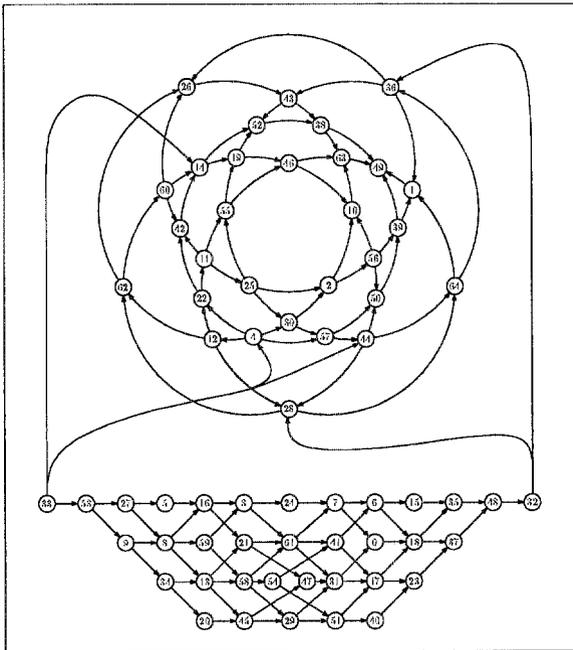
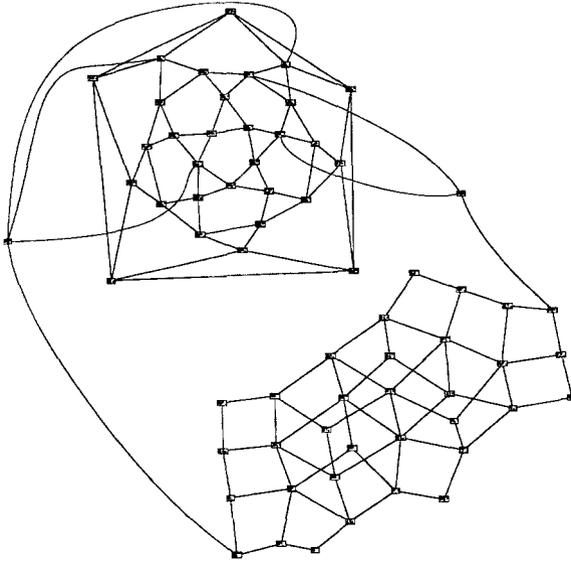


Fig. 6. Honorable mention, Graph C.



**Fig. 7.** Honorable mention, Graph C (original in color).

contains a screen snapshot from the winning system, developed by Falk Schreiber and Carsten Friedrich ([schreibe, friedric]@fmi.uni-passau.de) of Universität Passau, Germany. They made the following modifications to the graph before computing layouts:

1. Node clusters were identified initially using a spring method.
2. Nodes that were referenced from different clusters and which had no successor were duplicated in each of the clusters.
3. Nodes whose labels had the prefix “<http://www.att.com/>” were displayed as an AT&T icon, which eased the text-labeling task considerably.
4. Some nodes with exactly one predecessor and one successor were replaced with a labeled edge.
5. Clusters that were connected to the rest of the graph via just one node were made into subgraphs. Nodes for these subgraphs were displayed large AT&T icons in the top-level graph. Clicking on these nodes causes the subgraphs to be displayed.

The subgraphs were drawn automatically (for the most part) by a Sugiyama algorithm. The main graph was drawn using a spring method, with subsequent modification by hand.

The drawing in Figure 9 was submitted by Thomas Kamps, Jörg Klein, and Thomas Reichenberger ([kamps, klein, reichen]@darmstadt.gmd.de) from IPSI, GMD Darmstadt, Germany. They also made similar structural changes to the graph to enable it to be visualized and explored interactively. All layouts were

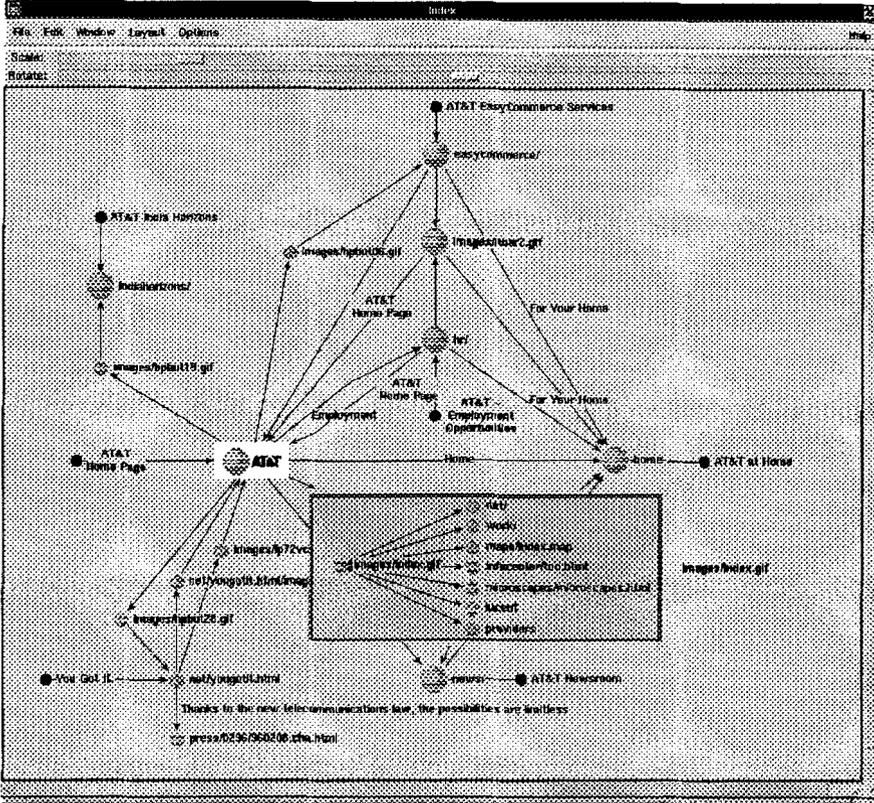


Fig. 8. Winner, Graph D.

computed using a spring method, with the exception of the drawing of the curved edges and the label abbreviation, which were done by hand. A screen shot of their system is shown in Figure 9.

### 3 Observations and Conclusions

Our first observation is that Graph A proved to be too challenging. It has 5 to 15 times as many nodes as the other graphs, and it also has labeled edges, which are not handled well by most current graph-drawing systems. We had hoped that the graph would serve to showcase the capabilities of distorted-view graph drawing, but no entries of this kind were submitted. Nevertheless, the graph may serve well as a near-term challenge for the next generation of graph-drawing software and may return in future contests.

The widespread use of spring methods among the better submissions is our next observation. A majority of the winning or honorable-mention drawings



classifying and quantifying post factum editing.

Lastly, we note how well interaction was used to visualize Graph D. Three-dimensional graph drawing may be a very good idea if the third dimension is temporal, not spatial! A graph that would be near impossible to explore and comprehend as a single drawing was made quite accessible in two well-designed interactive contexts that use a discrete “expand/contract” metaphor for navigating the graph.

The two final observations lead to our main conclusion, which is that future graph-drawing contests need to encourage and better accommodate interactive graph-drawing systems. Existing two-dimensional methods can be made more effective in well-designed interactive systems; interactivity may be essential for making three-dimensional graph drawing useful. We are investigating the possibility of introducing a separate category of video submissions next year as a way to foster research into interactive graph drawing.

## 4 Acknowledgments

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## References

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