

@mrs.org

E-mail aficionados, b-board readers, and Internet surfers will surely recognize the headline above. Yes, the Materials Research Society is going "on-line" and entering the world of electronic member services, a long-standing goal for both MRS headquarters and for the Society's volunteer leadership. This month I want to tell you a bit about where we've been, electronically, and where we can go.

For several years we have been discussing the nature and role of electronic services for MRS members. The MRS 2000 Long Range Plan, published in 1992, devotes much attention to such things as e-mail communication with headquarters, bulletin board services, and electronic submission of meeting abstracts. These and other ideas were further refined by an Electronic Services Task Force that was operative in 1993 and 1994. When we started thinking seriously about implementing some of these ideas, however, we realized that at headquarters we had neither the hardware infrastructure nor a staff sufficiently trained in electronic media to make optimal use of the Internet. As a result, we decided to spend much of this year working primarily behind the scenes, addressing these and related issues.

As a stopgap measure to enable the MRS Executive Committee, Meeting Chairs, Committee Chairs, and other key volunteers to conduct MRS business electronically with headquarters, we first established MRS e-mail accounts through a commercial provider of dialup e-mail services. Since this included an Internet gateway, everyone involved in MRS operations, governance, and meeting planning was able to communicate effectively and reliably "over the net." Electronic communicating produced immediately obvious benefits and efficiencies—a great improvement over previous years, in which there was a heavy reliance on faxing and express mail services. As volunteer time becomes ever harder to find in this rapidly changing economy, I believe that continuing provi-

sion of such efficiencies will be crucial for ongoing Society prosperity.

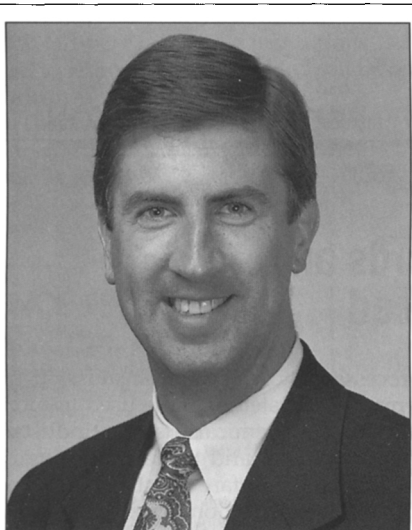
It also became immediately obvious that simple e-mail service would never be enough. Those with experience in using such services as "anonymous ftp," "gopher servers," and other standard Internet features knew that we had just scratched the surface; thus was born the commitment, simply put, to redesign the way MRS headquarters works. Rather than merely doing things the way they had been done before, only electronically, we decided that, over time, the fundamental structure and operations at headquarters would have to change. It's fashionable right now to refer to this as "corporate reengineering," but whatever label you attach, it's clear to those involved that exciting changes are ahead. Driven largely by rapid advances in computing

technology, headquarters is moving away from a minicomputer-based architecture toward a distributed client-server network. Much of the hardware has already been purchased, and the long-term task of converting the relevant business systems has also begun. In the end, though, I'm confident that we have set the stage for greatly improved member services—the very reason for MRS's existence—and for more agile and flexible Society management.

Members' first opportunity to directly use the Internet connection came with the Spring 1995 Meeting Announcement, in which interested readers were offered the chance to inquire, through the Internet, about submitting their abstracts electronically (through s95abst@mrs.org). Since this letter is being written before the November 1 deadline for abstract submission, we can't give you the results of this initial foray. But it's a new day for MRS, and I'm glad to see its dawn.

So what lies ahead? With strong backing from incoming president Julia Phillips and the rest of Council and the Executive Committee, I'm certain that by the end of 1995 we will have in place a growing suite of electronic member services. The future may bring such things as electronic submission of *JMR* manuscripts, ordering of MRS publications, membership renewal, meeting registration, publishing of individualized reprint volumes, and custom meeting planners in which all talks on a given set of topics would be identified. In addition, enormous opportunities exist for providing technical and scientific information, continuing education, and access to a variety of important resources, based on the interests of members and the resources of the Society. It should be an exciting year as the future of these services becomes more clearly defined.

JOHN C. BRAVMAN



It has been a great privilege to serve as president of MRS during 1994. I want to thank everyone for this opportunity, and for all of the hard work and support they have offered. It has been deeply appreciated.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John C. Bravman".

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