

The National Sea Grant College Program is a matching fund program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the U.S. Department of Commerce. It provides a partnership of government, universities and industry working for economic development and appropriate use of marine and coastal resources of the U.S.A. SGNET, the Sea Grant Electronic Information Network, was established in June 1981 to enhance the timely and efficient exchange of information applicable to the management, operation and conduct of the National Sea Grant College Program.

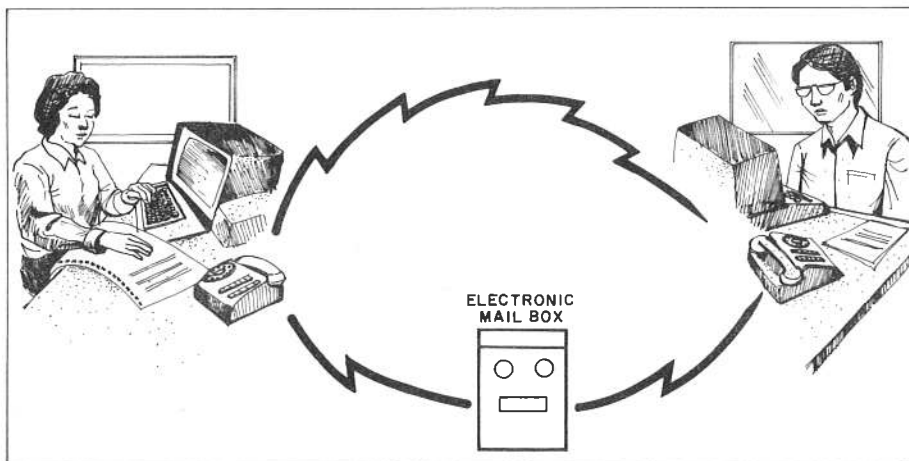
Due to the urgent needs for more up-to-date and more complete information on the status and accomplishment of the projects funded by the National Sea Grant Program, the Council of Sea Grant Directors, composed of about thirty Sea Grant Institutions' chief executives throughout the nation, decided to appoint a Special Task Force to look into the feasibility of a nationwide system to serve the information needs of the entire network community.

Design

The following objectives were used in selecting the proper software packages and structures for SGNET:

- To provide quality control at point of entry using editing and verification procedures.
- To provide easy access by local telephone, using any type of computer terminal equipped with a modem.

Electronic mail options. A message can be sent directly between computers using a telephone line connection or sent to an electronic mail box (computer), and stored until the recipient is ready to receive it.



SGNET : Sea Grant Electronic Information Network *

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- To provide low-cost online storage.
- To collect user statistics.
- To minimize development and maintenance cost by using readily available and well documented existing software.
- To minimize training needs by a user-friendly approach.

An action plan scheduling each step of the design was carefully drawn up so that each task would be completed as planned.

Implementation

The entire system, SGNET, was activated about seven months after it was first conceived. During the 1982 Sea Grant Week, the annual Sea Grant Conference held in July, the system was officially unveiled. It offers the following four options: Electronic Mail, Project Files, Publication Files and Calendar of Events.

A program called SGNET MENU allows the user to go from one option

*Summary of presentation at the ninth annual IAMSLIC conference (see p. 17).

to another by simply entering the desired number.

Training

Two training sessions were given and very well attended at that conference. In addition to the formal presentations, hands-on experiences were also provided. A user manual in three-ring-binder format was provided to each attendee. Additional copies were mailed to each Sea Grant Program's home office. Continuing training was given during the following year on a one-to-one basis via the telephone. A hot-line service is available from the Office of Sea Grant.

Thanks to the full support of the management and the cooperation of the Sea Grant community, the system was fully implemented as planned at the end of its first year of operation in spite of some difficulties, such as resistance to change, computer illiteracy, lack of face-to-face training sessions and telecommunication difficulties.

A SGNET Users' Group of ten users representing different targeted user groups in the Sea Grant community was formed to review, evaluate and recommend modifications and enhancements to ensure that the system is responsive to the information needs of the users. Since it began in October 1982, the SGNET Users' Group has published a "SGNET Users' Basic Guide", helped revision of the keyword listing, conducted a survey of all the types of equipment used to gain access to SGNET, and drafted guidelines for the use of the system at the request of the Council of Sea Grant Directors.

Future Expansion

A Sea Grant personnel directory has recently been added to the system. More options will be added as such needs arise. Due to its ease of use, SGNET has attracted users outside the Sea Grant community. The National Marine Fishery Service, another organization in NOAA, is offering two of its files to be put onto the system.

As new software packages become available, more efficient ones will replace the current software to increase the speed and accuracy in retrieving Sea Grant funded projects and generated publications.