The Internet as a Medium for Public Debate on the Issue of Returning to the Moon

Bruce Altner and Ajay Kochhar
ARIInternet Corporation

David Brandt
National Space Society

ABSTRACT

The current surge of interest in the global Internet at many levels of our society is largely due to the evolution of the World Wide Web (WWW) into an increasingly sophisticated application for discovering and interacting with distributed information resources. In the true spirit of a grassroots movement, we seek to harness the unique capabilities of this medium in order to stimulate public discussion of some of the important and controversial issues facing us today.

In this paper we describe our current project to conduct a WWW public forum on the question of returning to the moon, and all that this question implies. In addition to being an issue we fully support, the topic is ideally suited for the kind of forum we envision. It is an issue which looks forward as well as back, and which involves many fields of learning and many areas of human endeavor. It is capable of sparking heated debate and significant public interest. We believe that the keen interest in both the medium and the message will prove to be synergistic, helping to promote a more significant awareness of the respective agendas of both those who favor and those who oppose returning to the moon.

The actual "discussions" will take place over a period of months and will be indexed and archived for later distribution on CD-ROM. We solicit contributions of all kinds, ranging from serious commentary and scholarly position papers to humor and whimsical speculation. We will provide online help on basic hypertext document authoring and in some cases will help to create online versions of materials sent to us through more traditional means. All documents which meet the simple criterion of "being in good taste" will be placed on the ARIInternet WWW server and be made available to users of both simple and state-of-the-art Internet applications.

In order to encourage informed discussion on all of the issues associated with going back to the moon, we are constructing a virtual library of relevant background material, and as we proceed this "Reference Room" will evolve into a unique and valuable educational resource in its own right, a perfect complement to the accumulated body of submitted material that will constitute the discussion forum itself. Those who take the time to browse the reference material and to read the submissions will likely come away with a better understanding of the underlying issues and may even be moved to participate in the discussions. Teachers may wish to build lesson plans around the source material and the medium in which it is delivered, giving them a convenient way to stimulate and involve their students, in any subject area, and at any grade level.