The IEEE Professional Communication Society is pleased to submit our review of the IEEE Website to the Sales and Marketing Oversight Committee. Based on a request from John Vig, we specifically focused our efforts in two areas: purchasing a subscription to print or online periodicals and becoming an IEEE member. Since I am familiar with the IEEE web site, I asked a non-member, who does not frequent the IEEE site regularly, to find out how to purchase a subscription to a print publication and join IEEE. As the results show, purchasing a subscription is a difficult task, while joining IEEE is simpler to find but the information presented could use some fine tuning.

**Purchasing a Publication or Online Collection**

From the IEEE homepage, it is very difficult to find where one can purchase any type of subscription. There are a number of different ways to find this information. The first path my non-member took was through the Publications link. After looking around in that area for a while, he backed out to the home page and clicked on Catalog & Store. From there, he still was not sure he was in the right area as it looked like somewhere to purchase books. At that point, he said he either would have given up, or if really, really motivated, tried to find a phone number.

As I conducted a review of the same process, I also met some of the same difficulties. There are many roads to get to the 2005 Subscription Pricelist. The first, and easiest, is to choose the “Subscription Packages” options from the Catalog & Store flyout menu. From there, a user would click on the link at the end of the first featured story. This link could be made more prominent.

The second option, is to click on Catalog & Store. This is an option that anyone with Javascript disabled may choose as the flyout menus will not work if someone has chosen to disable Javascript. From there, a user would need to know to click on the IEEE Collections and then the link at the end of the first featured story.

The third option, is to choose an option off the Publications flyout menu (i.e. Online Collections, Journal/Transactions, etc.). Unfortunately, none of the flyout links lead to subscription information. These links all assume that the user is already a subscriber and is looking for a way to access information.

The final option is to click on the Publications link, which takes them to a page with a number of links. Fortunately the first link is “How to Subscribe,” which takes the user lower on the page. The user then needs to choose between being a member and adding the publication or clicking on the link to the price list.
Concerns & Recommendations

My primary concerns are navigation structure, pricelist configuration, and branding.

My concern with the current navigation structure is that it is not easy to find how to subscribe to a publication. A button labeled “Catalog & Store” has a connotation that a person would subscribe or purchase with their credit card. If a person is looking for more information on an Online Collection or IEL membership, they will not be looking to pay with a credit card. “Publications” seems to be an obvious link, but following this link requires time and effort on the part of the user to find package and price information. A simple recommendation would be to add a link from either (or both) the Publication or Catalog & Store button that says “2005 Pricelist” or “Pricelist and Ordering Information”. Something that helps users trying to purchase IEEE publications find the publication information quickly.

The pricelist configuration brings up another set of concerns. This is a large online table. The text is incredibly small. Even at a resolution of 800 x 600 pixels, there is still room to increase the type size. In the IEEE target market, especially within industrialized nations, you can expect a majority of users to browse the site at a resolution of at least 1024 x 768.

The pricelist is also not branded with any of the various website designs. In fact, it does not even have an IEEE logo on the page. There is a lot of extraneous text with two different links to the Acrobat reader.

In addition, links are available to very brief descriptions of the journals. There are no direct links to information about the IEL or other collection packages. Since these are the most expensive products, one would expect to be able to learn more about them. A simple recommendation here is to brand the page and make all links clickable to a page with more information about the products.

Finally, branding is an issue. A user searching the site could be taken through a number of sites: IEEE main site, IEEE sub pages, IEEE Publications Online, IEEE Catalog & Store, and IEEE Xplore. All of these pages have a different look and feel. The Catalog & Store does not even use the same color scheme as the rest of the site. The Xplore interface colors change, based on the route taken to reach Xplore, it appears. This will only confuse users. Unfortunately, there are no simple solutions here as a consistent look and feel across sites can only be established by revising the entire IEEE online presence.

Joining IEEE

Joining IEEE is a much easier process. A user can simply click on the Membership button or choose “Join” from the flyout menu. The only complication here is the first page of the membership application. In my opinion, this page is trying to do too much and contains information that many people will never read.

The page starts out with a large link to the application. The “You will need” information on the left is a nice touch and helpful to users before they move forward. However, after the link, there is quite a bit of text offering a number of suggestions, describing the benefits of secure vs. non-secure inside a box, providing information on when to expect a member number, describing cookies, and so forth. Since this information is after the link to the membership
application, many people will not read this page. They will click on the link at the top of the page and move forward. My recommendation in this case is to present this page as a series of bullet points and link to the application at the bottom of the page. Anything overly technical can be removed. While I understand that IEEE target members are technical in nature, they are not all computer savvy.

As an aside, there are currently broken image links on the application itself.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This brief review shows that Sales & Marketing should primarily be concerned with the presentation of publication pricing information. By adding a link off the home page, increasing the type size in the pricing list, and providing more descriptive product descriptions, users will have a much easier time finding products and understanding the benefits of each product.

Overall, the various IEEE sites need a more coherent look and feel so that it does not appear to a user that s/he has viewed three completely different sites when moving from IEEE to Xplore to the Catalog and Store.

Finally, the text introducing the membership application can be streamlined to make it easier for users to read it.

**Reviewer Biography**

Beth Weise Moeller, holds a BS in Physics and Technical Communication from Clarkson University, an MS in Technical Communication from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and a Ph.D. in Communication & Rhetoric from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Her Ph.D. research concentrated on the design of hypermedia (integration of hypertext, graphics, video, and sound) interfaces for optimum user performance. Her research has been published in journals such as *Technical Communication Quarterly, Journal of Business and Technical Communication* and *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*. In addition, she has presented her work at international conferences such as *Society for Technical Communication* and the *International Professional Communication Conference*, sponsored by the IEEE Professional Communication Society, and for local organizations such as the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce. She owns Interactive Media Consulting, LLC, a web design and development firm in Saratoga Springs, NY.

For the IEEE, she currently is Immediate Past President of the IEEE Professional Communication Society, as well as General Chair for IPCC 2006. She also serves on the Publications Pricing Committee and as a corresponding member to the Information Technology Strategy Committee. Locally, she serves on the Board of Trustees for both The Children’s Museum at Saratoga and the Saratoga Independent School.

Beth can best be reached via e-mail at beth@imediaconsult.com