Editorial

New Automatica submission and review system PAMPUS

When Automatica became the IFAC journal back in 1969 and George Axelby took over as Editor, authors were required to submit their papers in typewritten form (double spaced, "top copies"). George entered the new submissions in his logbook and forwarded the papers to his various Associate Editors, who in turn would approach the reviewers. All this was done by airmail, which was better then than it is now. When there was a pressing matter, George would use telex. Individuals did not usually have their own telex machines and the university teletypes were typically located at the library.

As the number of submissions began to grow the operation reached a point where George could no longer handle it alone. The editorial system was restructured in 1980 by the appointment of a number of subject editors. George Axelby became Editor-in-Chief and administered the whole process. At some point in time he acquired a PC and a fax machine. He set up an electronic database that was migrated to my office when I became Editor-in-Chief in 1994.

A typical feature of George Axelby's management system is that the paper flow is centrally monitored and controlled. Copies of all the decisions about the papers are sent to the Editor-in-Chief's office and recorded there. The final versions of all papers pass through the Editor-in-Chiefs office before going to the publishers. Not all journals work like this; often the various editors divide the work among them and communicate directly with the publisher.

The great advantage of the centralized system is the possibility it offers for quality and workflow control. As the Editor-in-Chief monitors all activities he can step in when reviews are unduly delayed or if there are problems in the decision process.

The disadvantage of the centralized system is that it is labor intensive and therefore costly. The editors need to keep track of their own paper flow and also remember to send to the Editor-in-Chief's office copies of all the correspondence so that the decisions may be recorded in the central database. This did not change when at the beginning of this millennium e-mail submissions were allowed and the Editor-in-Chief's office went from paper archiving to electronic archiving.

The internet obviously offers marvelous possibilities for the management of global operations such as Automatica. Many journals, including Automatica, have taken small steps in this direction. Elsevier Science, Automatica's publishers, have several projects on the way dealing with internet solutions for paper flow management. Some vendors offer commercial products.

A year ago I retired part-time from my faculty position. This gave me time to start thinking about an internet solution for Automatica's review and paper flow management. As a result, the Automatica On-line Paper Review Management System *PAMPUS* went live last April.

The system is administered at a single web location www.autsubmit.com that is supported by a dedicated server. All participants in the review process, authors, editors, associate editors, and reviewers, are serviced there. The efficiency of the system derives from the fact that every relevant action in the review process is automatically recorded in the database. As a result, each participant in the review process has immediate access to the information the participant needs. The laborious and costly manual updating has almost completely been eliminated.

I briefly describe the services that are provided.

Authors. Authors who wish to submit it a new paper complete a form providing the information needed for the review process, and upload the paper in electronic form directly from their computers without using FTP. The document needs to be in ps or pdf format and is stored in a central electronic paper store at the server. Hardcopy submissions by regular mail are still accepted for the time being. Since these submissions are scanned and manually entered into the system a delay of several weeks may result. After having submitted the paper the corresponding author receives a password. This allows authors to log in to view the status of their paper and to upload revised and final versions at the editor's request.

Editors. When an author has submitted a paper the editor receives an e-mail notification from the system. Upon receipt the editor may log in and assign the paper to one of the associate editors with a few mouse clicks. After having received the reviews and the publication recommendation from the associate editor the editor may prepare and transmit a publication decision to the authors from the site. Naturally, at all times the editor has a complete overview of all the papers in his charge that is automatically kept up to date.

Associate editors. When the editor assigns a paper to an associate editor the associate editor immediately receives notification by e-mail, with a copy of the paper attached. The login page of the associate editor has an up-to-date list of all papers that have been assigned to the associate editor. The system assists the associate editor in approaching reviewers by e-mail, and building up and maintaining a database of reviewers. The associate editor may decide to share the reviewer with the rest of the Automatica editorial staff, or not. After having collected the reviews the associate editor may use the system to prepare and transmit a publication recommendation to the editor.

Reviewers. Reviewers may be approached through the system although associate editors may also choose to use a more traditional approach and rely on paper review forms. If reviewers are approached through the system then they receive a copy of the paper and a review form as attachments to an e-mail message. If they wish reviewers may log in and complete the review form on-line. The review may be saved before submission to complete it later if desired. Reviewers may enter or paste their comments to the author of the paper into the box provided for this purpose, but they may also upload their comments in ps or pdf format. Reviewers may also inspect the reviews they previously submitted to Automatica. They automatically receive notification of the publication decision for the papers they reviewed.

The system has various other features, such as help information on every page, and options for updating the information manually, down- and uploading files, entering and uploading items for archiving, and viewing information about the paper flow. The availability of these features depends on the privileges of the user.

Although the system is highly automated an effort has been made not to make it impersonal. Almost every communication from one user to another requires a personalized cover note from the initiator, however brief.

The review management system is called Pampus because I could not think of a suitable acronym. Pampus is a shallow in the former inland sea Zuiderzee in The Netherlands. Late in the 19th century a fort was built there on an artificial island as one in a ring of 42 fortifications surrounding Amsterdam. Like the fort island Pampus was built and designed to help defend Amsterdam, the Pampus system is meant to help protect the quality and integrity of Automatica.

I hope that many of you will have occasion to use the services of Pampus. All the information that authors need to prepare and submit papers to Automatica is of course available at the Pampus site www.autsubmit.com. Also the list of recently accepted papers, current up to the last minute, may be consulted here. Elsevier Science's Automatica website at www.elsevier.com/locate/automatica provides information about the journal profile, subscription rates and contents services. My own Editor-in-Chief's website www.math.utwente.nl/eic has the on-line searchable cumulative Table of Contents 1963-present, and the full texts of recent and advance editorials.

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