

The Baha'i Computer and Communications Association

Marion R. Finley, Jr.

Abstract

The Baha'i Computer and Communications Association (BCCA) was created to promote the use of contemporary and emerging computer and telecommunications technologies for the needs of the international Baha'i community. In particular, the Internet was used from the beginning as the medium of exchange and the vehicle for offering a variety of services to fellow Baha'is who are literally scattered across the face of the globe. The BCCA is managed by a group of volunteers who handle the implementation of its various Internet-based services. Its Coordinating Committee acts as a kind of executive body, again all volunteers. Therefore, in a real sense, the BCCA is a worldwide grassroots Internet-based association. The purpose of this paper is to present some of the experiences the Association has had over the brief span of its existence. These experiences illustrate some of the real advantages offered by the Internet to people in just about every land and the problems that might arise as well. They are offered as proofs that the Internet can indeed serve on an international basis among non-specialists in computers or telecommunications and to show what kinds of problems can arise and ways they might be avoided or treated.

It must be stressed that the Baha'i principles lay great emphasis on the value of sciences and technology and the need to develop these, together with healthy and sane moral values, for the progress of human civilization. This principle gives a "push" to every member of this world-wide community to overcome whatever prejudices or reticence he or she may have to use the fruits of contemporary science and technology. This does not mean, of course, that the transition to their use is always easy or smooth. Rather, this transition is a process, rapid in some cases, slow in others. But, overall, there has been a significant migration of the Baha'is to the Internet and its various services in recent years.

The basic services offered include the following: (1) a general unmoderated discussion e-mail forum in which members may discuss any issue they may wish. This leads to free-wheeling, ruminating discussions that can tend to the tedious; (2) a moderated "announce" service that allows members to give out news about events of interest, pose queries about events or people, and so on. This service reaches about two-thousand people world-wide and has been very useful in helping members find and or track down information of need to them; (3) an unmoderated technical e-mail forum. This forum deals specifically with technical issues revolving around computers and communications. For example, in one case, the person responsible for computer instruction in a school run by the Baha'i community was faced with limited resources and manpower. Thanks to help received from the members of this forum (and his own initiative), he was able to build up a viable computer laboratory and web-sites. People in such far-flung places as Macau, the Andes in South America, Japan, the islands of the Pacific, Russia, and others have received similar assistance through this forum. There are numerous other services and web sites as well.

The general conclusion that we can make is that our services, all Internet-based, provide a mechanism for drawing people of radically different backgrounds together and for creating a certain level of unity in action and purpose. At the same time, while it can act at a global level, it must also act at local levels to respond to specific local needs which may vary greatly from country to country or group to group. They can and do provide vital information for people united by a common belief system but living scattered across the globe as well as for those who wish to learn about this rather unique world community. Therefore, up to a point, it seems effective as a means of breaking through many of the barriers that separate humans from each other, even the awful barriers of race, gender and the strange alienation among the dwellers of modern cities and suburbs. In many cases, local needs have pushed applications of our services or of the Internet in general.

More information about the Baha'i Computer and Communications Association and its services may be obtained from the World Wide Web site: <http://www.BCCA.org>