



EMA

Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association

IT Team

EMA IT Team Annual Report 2008-2009

Introduction

As the “IT Team Annual Report”, this document details the activities and tasks undertaken by the IT Team over the period from June 2008 to May 2009. It also summarises the future plans and initiatives of the team, currently under development, which lay the foundation for the team activities for the next term, starting June 2009 through June 2010 (next GA).

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the members of the IT Team for their enthusiasm and contributions. Special thanks also go to the European Commission, the Steering Committee and the Service Provider for their continued support.

Taghi Paksima
IT Team Coordinator
EMA Steering Committee
May 24th, 2009

Team’s Mission

Collaborating with the other EMA Service Teams, the IT Team endeavours to provide the front-end platform for the EMA community, as well as the required electronic

infrastructure for the services to be offered by the other teams, with the EMA website being its focal attention.

Since EMA is an association with its members residing and relocating with vast geographical distribution, we consider the EMA website as the association's office, hence giving it special priority.

It has been our utmost effort to bring together all possible technical services and features for the association. To this end, we are committed to our endeavour to provide the users with the best possible experience, and to provide them with a collaborative platform to efficiently communicate and contribute to the EMA community.

Team Members

The IT Team currently consists of 9 members:

Taghi Paksima (Team Coordinator)

Amenity Applewhite

Tsigereda Asfaw

Andrea Ximena Castano Sánchez

Jean-Michel Crozet

Atif Iqbal

Nantanoot Suwannawut (Aka Apple)

Yan Xu

Marta Ziemienczuk

IT Team Activities 2008-2009

The team activities undertaken during this term, from June 2008 through May 2009 are summarised as follows:

1. Team Meetings

The following is the list of the meetings the IT Team have had from June 2008 through May 2009:

June 23rd, 2008 – Teleconferencing
July 11th, 2008 – Teleconferencing
Dec 13th, 2008 – Teleconferencing
January 18th, 2009 – Teleconferencing
January 28th, 2009 – Teleconferencing
February 11th, 2009 – Teleconferencing
February 18th, 2009 – Teleconferencing
March 6 & 7th, 2009 – Liaison Group Meeting – Brussels
May 24th, 2009 – Teleconferencing

2. Team Organisation: Workgroups

To increase team productivity and delegate responsibilities across the team, this year the team divided its activities into several Workgroups (WGs). All team members were encouraged to join in as many workgroups as they were interested in, and each workgroup selected on member as the WG moderator. The following are the workgroups and their respective moderators:

- Chapters Services Workgroup (Marta)
- New Initiatives Workgroup (Taghi)
- Website Improvement Workgroup (Apple)
- IT Policy Workgroup (Taghi)

The workgroups were planned to have regular but short and focused meeting every 10 days to enable the members to sync up on their progresses. Although during the course of this term we were unable to fully follow this procedure due to several reasons, it did prove to work much more efficient than traditional team meetings every now and then.

To familiarise the audience with the missions of each workgroup, an brief overview of the each is provided here. For more information on the individual projects please refer to the respective sections in this report.

- **Chapters Services Workgroup:**
This workgroup was mainly focused on developing the "IT Services Framework" for the EMA Chapters, as described in section 4. See also the Annual Report 2007/8, section 11.

- **New Initiatives Workgroup**
This workgroup has been responsible to investigate the feasibility of the new technical solutions and ideas gathered through brainstorming sessions or user feedback and make draft proposals. Some of the projects in this workgroup have been eVoting System, Teleconferencing Solution; Online Collaboration Platform; WebTV System.

- **Website Improvement Workgroup**
This workgroup is responsible for reviewing the EMA website and the portal in an effort to:
 - Improve the usability and accessibility and quality of the website
 - Investigate the quality of the implemented functionalities against the contract
 - Propose new additions/changes (content, functionalities, etc) to address the missing requirements
 - Prepare a comprehensive report on the above issues

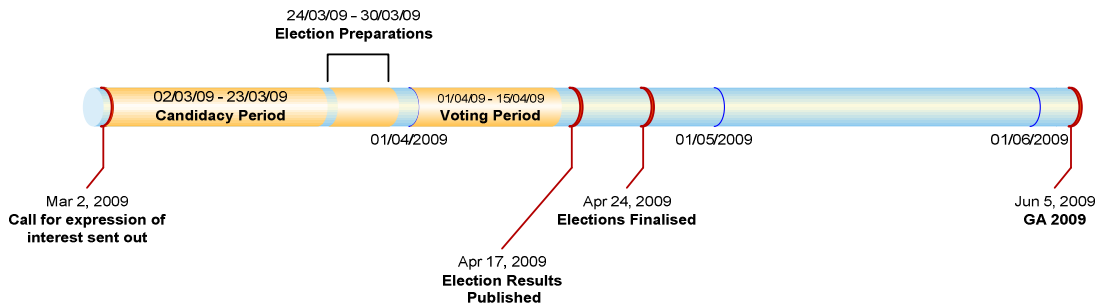
- **IT Policy Workgroup**
This workgroup was intended to define internal policies and procedures with regard to issues such as electronic correspondence, IT service requests, website management, content provision, etc.

3. Online Voting System

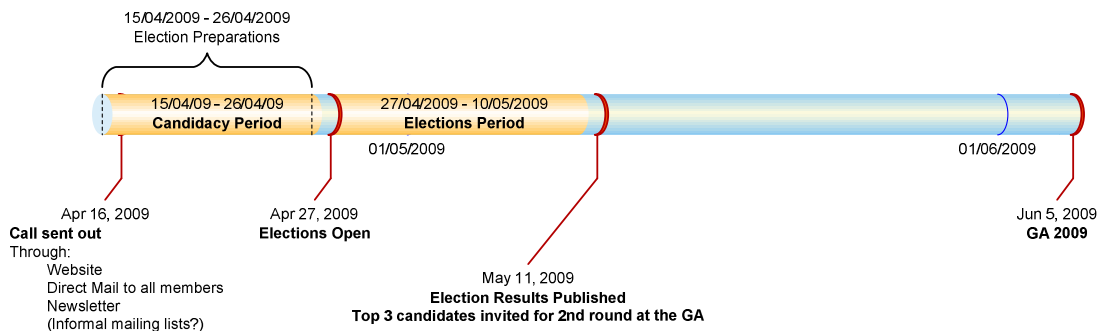
The IT Team first proposed to deploy an online voting system in 2006, and this has been on our agendas ever since. The main reason has been the need to provide a more democratic and unified method of electing EMMC representatives and in general broadening the equal opportunities of participating in all EMA elections to all members rather than those participating at the GA. This however was not realised for the last GA's elections as we had not have allocated budget for. The budget was approved for the current fiscal year and we finalised a solution provided by VoteNet earlier this year in January. VoteNet is a global leader in providing secure online voting systems with reputable large organisations such as IEEE. Thanks to the efforts by the Service Provider, we managed to not only deploy this service but integrate a single sign-on authentication with our community website. In other words, members once logged in to the EMA community website, can access their ballots and cast their votes without having to log in to a separate system. After short phases of integration and testing, the system was made available to conduct our first series of online elections.

In preparation for the forthcoming term and the GA 2009 the eVoting system was used for the following elections, together with the respective timeline. The coordinator of the IT Team was also responsible for organisation and coordination of conducting online elections throughout the process:

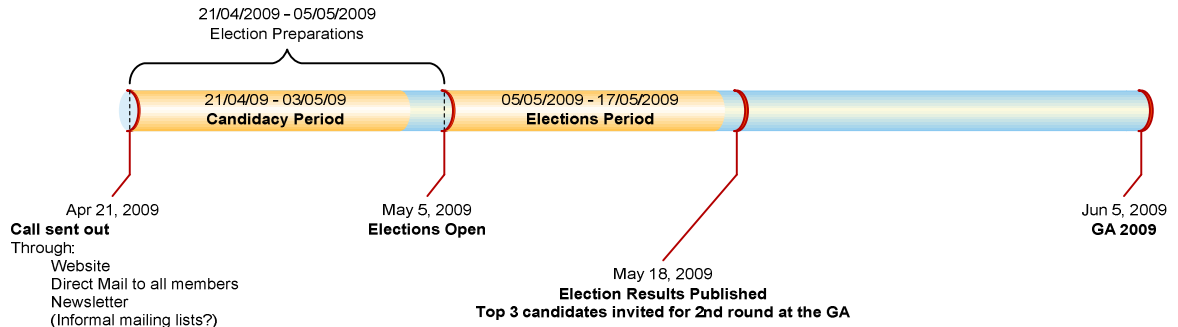
- EMMC Representatives Elections:** Traditionally EMMC representatives were elected or nominated by course coordinators. We have been able to make a shift in the procedure and provide every member with the opportunity to elect their course representative.



- Presidential Elections:** The system was used to conduct the primaries for the final presidential elections to be held at the GA. The top three candidates voted in this first round of online elections will attend the GA or a final election by GA delegates.



- Vice Presidential Elections Primaries:** For the first time, we conducted the VP's primary elections online, opening voting to all EMA members rather than the SC.



Although I am pleased that we could get this system running in short period, could adhere to our planned timelines, and the results were as good as expected; we did come across a few minor non-technical issues. The most notable cause of concerns for a few voters was the fact that they experienced delays in being able to vote. The reason was that these voters had to first become EMA members to be eligible to vote, and as membership requests are processed manually (in order to verify Erasmus Mundus status against the commission’s lists) some experienced extended delays in having their requests approved especially during the last week of elections, notably because some were asked to send in additional EM proof.

We have discussed these shortcomings within the SC, and will endeavor to address them for the next round of elections, by improving our policies and procedures. We also warmly welcome any suggestions or feedback from the members.

4. Chapters IT Services Framework / Online Collaboration System

The initiative called “Chapters IT Services Framework” was put on this year’s agenda in an effort to boost the process of online presence for the EMA chapters through developing a service provision framework which would provide them many of their major Internet services as part of our proposed package, and in the meantime would facilitate this process for the chapters, both technically and financially. Our requested budget of 10,000 Euros for this initiative was approved by the Commission last year and the team spent considerable amount of time discussing a feasible and more importantly extensible solution.

In the mean time, we had another new initiative which we started working on this year, under the title “Online Collaboration System”. This initiative was basically seeking to provide a solution to overcome the ever growing and inevitable needs of the Steering Committee and Service Teams such as: online collaboration, meeting management,

centralized document library, workflow enforcement, document review, online decision making, issue tracking and so on.

Along the way, and a bit late in the process, we realised that these two initiatives intersect and that we could neatly combine them in a single solution which would address most of the requirements of both, and would cover both the chapters and the rest of the EMA organizational structure. After a few months of discussions and evaluations we decided that Microsoft SharePoint was the best choice for our requirements.

What is SharePoint: SharePoint is an Enterprise-class online collaboration, content and document management and team productivity system. Some of the main features of SharePoint, as quoted from Microsoft, are:

- **Collaboration:** Help keep teams connected and productive by providing easy access to the people, documents, and information users need to make more well-informed decisions within their jobs. Windows SharePoint products and technologies include collaboration and community, document life cycle capabilities, alerts, task notifications, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), the basic Web-based user interface and navigation.
- **Portal:** The portal components of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 include features that are especially useful for designing, deploying, and managing enterprise intranet portals, corporate Internet presence Web sites, and divisional portal sites.
- **Enterprise Content Management:** Windows SharePoint Services provides core document management functionality: major and minor versioning, check-in/check-out document locking, rich descriptive metadata, workflow, content type-based policies, auditing, and role-based-access controls at the document library, folder, and individual document levels. Office SharePoint Server 2007 builds on these capabilities to deliver enhanced authoring, business document processing, Web content management and publishing, records management, policy management, and support for multilingual publishing.
- **Forms Driven Business Process:** Streamline forms-driven business processes with easy-to-use, intelligent, XML-based electronic forms that integrate smoothly with existing systems. This security-enhanced, client/server platform provides rapid-solution creation and deployment, centralizes form management and maintenance, and helps to extend business processes to customers, partners, and suppliers.
- **Business Intelligence:** Provide business intelligence (BI) capabilities to every employee, so they can share, control, and reuse business information in order to make better business decisions.

Some of the individual features which chapters and service teams can immediately start to enjoy are:

Document and form libraries, Picture Galleries, Slide libraries, Announcements, Shared Contacts Management, Discussion Boards, Calendar, Events and Tasks Management, Issue Tracking, Project Management with Gantt Charts, Online Surveys/Polls, Custom Lists and databases, Normal WebPages, RSS feeds, Web parts (40+), Wikis, Blogs, Item-level User Access Management, Creation of: sub-sites, document workspaces, team sites, meeting workspaces,

Further description of SharePoint is beyond the scope of this report, but readers are encouraged to review the product page at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/sharepointtechnology/> ; in specific the SharePoint feature specifications at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/sharepointtechnology/FX101758691033.aspx>.

I am excited to share my vision with you that using SharePoint, we can create a flexible infrastructure for our communities' collaboration and a very extensible foundation for our current and future communication, team working and networking needs.

The SharePoint solution acquired: The acquired system is based on WSS (Windows SharePoint Services) v3. As SharePoint is a licensed-based service, considerable amount of time was spent searched solutions to ensure the solution we acquire is extensible within our budgets. The current solution is a dedicated WSS system which can host an unlimited number of users, sites, and sub-sites and it provides 120 GB of disk space. Apart from all the exciting features, which I am positive all chapters'/Service Team members will appreciate, this solution comes with 40 additional web parts.

Framework/Package for chapters: The IT Team are currently discussing the details, however most likely each of the chapters will receive a dedicated collaboration site with the afore-mentioned features along with a custom domain name. It should be noted that this site will act like a community site for the chapters, rather than the public website and would only be accessible to members. We are also looking into ways we might be able to support chapters on the public front. Once commissioned, chapters will be responsible for most of the site administration and customizations as per the IT Policy and their own requirements, with support provided from the EMA IT. We are also planning to initially open this system to chapters' steering/directive group members in the first phase and to the rest of their members for the second phase. Details will be provided in due course, but suggestions are warmly welcome from stakeholders.

Next steps: The system in the process of being acquired at the time of writing. Once this initial stage is through the next phases would be to start deployment planning and develop the required site templates based on which we could then allocate new collaboration community sites for each of the recognized chapters as well as the

Steering Committee and the EMA Service Teams. We are also keeping an eye on the needs of the future EMMC alumni associations.

Where we are heading: My vision and aim is that we should seriously look into possibilities of rolling this out throughout all EMA and gradually replacing the current community section of the website with EMA SharePoint system. I am optimistic that this will drastically change the way we communicate and collaborate inside and across teams, and will enable us to reduce administrative burden, time, and costs over the long run, but at the same time gives us the agility to quickly adapt our system to the changing nature of the association without much time and any additional costs and development. We should endeavor to fully realize and test the system in this coming year.

5. Web Conferencing System, MS Live Meeting

I am also excited to announce the deployment of Live Meeting system as our global teleconferencing and meeting management system. Another initiative we had had on our agenda since last year was provision of a professional business-standard teleconferencing solution, not only to replace Skype which we have been using for audio-only conferencing but also to avail the teams with a number of important features including: high-quality audio/video web conferencing, desktop/application sharing, dial-in capability, meeting recordings and event webcasting. After reviewing several solutions, **Microsoft Live Meeting** was selected. Negotiating with one of the providers, a trial period was arranged which enabled us to test the system on several occasions, both inside the IT Team and at SC meetings. The solution we are about to purchase is based on the Standard version of the system which allows a maximum number of 15 concurrent attendees for each meeting. The system, once deployed, will enable all teams in EMA, including SC, Service Teams, and chapters to seamlessly use Live Meeting to conduct their online meetings, which would doubtlessly improve their productivities and hopefully reduce travel costs in very near future.

Readers are referred to <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/livemeeting/HA102415201033.aspx> for an overview of the Live Meeting's features and to the product's homepage at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/livemeeting/> for general information.

6. Website Improvements

We have stated on different occasions that the community section of the EMA website is far from what we expect it to be and does not meet our quality and usability bars. The IT Team has continued to investigate the afore-mentioned criteria and have been communicating the required improvements to the Service Provider on different occasions. Below is a summary of the major steps we have taken during the course of this term:

- **Service Provider-IT Team Meeting:** A meeting was held on December 5th, 2008 between Taghi Paksima, the IT team coordinator and Natalia Spartakova from ICUNet. This meeting was intended to liaise on the problems and shortcomings of the EMA website. Major issues discussed were:
 - Members' Directory Search: problems and required minimum improvements. (Incoherent field search such as search based on city EMMC, etc)
 - Members Profiles in the community section: Several issues, including lack of a unique EMMC assignment to members of the same EMMC. This issue became more problematic with the onset of the eVoting system's integration, as the system needed to be able to reliably distinguish members of an EMMC.
 - Improvements to the Jobs section.
 - Online Voting System
 - Chapters' IT Services Framework
 - Steering Committee's web presence
 - Online Polling/Surveys
 - Website Contents Improvements
 - Request for website usage statistics

- **Services Teams Online Profiles:** The intention has been to give team members a more public recognition in an informal setting. In order to have a more unified look and face of the final profiles on the website, a profile template was prepared and sent to all the Liaison Group members. 61 completed profiles were received. These profiles were then processed by a few members of the IT team and are due to be published on the public EMA website by the end of May, under a new section called "*Meet the Team*". The profiles will include information about the members, such as personal details, EMMC details, team activities and personal profile including a photo. A sample profile can currently be viewed at <http://www.ema.eu/index.php?id=131>. As these profiles are prepared manually, any future changes are unfortunately going to be very cumbersome to apply. We are planning to

look into the possibility of using our SharePoint system to provide members with a self-maintained profile on SharePoint, which we can then publish publicly.

- **Recent Improvements to the community:** Based on our recommendations, the community section has just received some changes and improvements: Members' Directory (member search), Activities section enlisting EMA events.
- **Jobs Section Improvement:** During the LG meeting in Brussels the Jobs team had a request to use part of their team budget to develop their own ad-hoc system for their intended new additions to the current functionality of the Jobs Section. After several sessions of discussions between the two teams it was agreed to have a new functionality developed by the Service Provider which basically enables employers to be able to post in new vacancies through a public facing section and to have the new posts accessible by only members in the community section. It should be noted that I strongly opposed in them outsourcing this to a private developer. It is against our policy to develop any websites outside of the EMA website as defined by the IT Team. This can also result in multiplicity of efforts, resources and budget posts and should be avoid in future as well. Currently ICUNet, EMA's Service Provider is developing the required changes to the current Jobs section of the website. This project is budgeted through the Jobs Team.

7. IT Policy

Unfortunately we were not able to take this initiative forward due to time and resource constraints. One policy issue which was actually put forward at the SC's meeting in Toulouse in April and was approved by the SC was the email tagging policy, as part of our electronic correspondence policy. This policy item aims to minimise the time spent reviewing incoming emails through adding pre-defined email tags to the subject of the emails. It also helps email client software to filter out such tagged messages to better readability and organisation.

Another issue which was proposed and approved by the Steering Committee at the same meeting was a preliminary agreement on IT service provision/request policy. It was agreed that all service teams should formulate their required IT services through the team coordinator, and pass it to the IT Team, which in turn conducts feasibility

studies, and requirements gathering and verifies whether the requested service can be provided within the budget and time constraints available at the time, in which case the team will then produce a time/budget estimation and initiates the acquisition process if required or otherwise requests allocated budget for the next fiscal year. Please refer to section 9-d for more details on the planned future work.

8. IT Team Budget

The IT Team had requested 11,000 Euros for this fiscal year, ending June 2009, which was approved and allocated by the Steering Committee and the European Commission. Below is a breakdown of the expected expenditures. It should be noted that as most of the items are in the process of purchasing, the figures are approximates only:

- EMA SharePoint System: ca. 8000 Euros; annual fee, from June 2009-June 2010 (See section 4)
- EMA Live Meeting subscription: ca. 1500 Euros; annual fee, from June 2009-June 2010 (See section 5)
- Skype Business Premium: ca. 200 Euros; internet phone call charges of the Steering Committee, from June 2009-May 2009
- Purchasing a projector for internal meetings of the SC/Service Teams: ca. 700 Euros

Next Term 2009-10: Future Plans & Initiatives

The following section summarises some of the initiatives and projects which we are planning to follow and hopefully deliver for the next term, starting June 2009 through June 2010:

9. Future Initiatives and Projects

My vision is that given the importance of our recently acquired SharePoint system, a major focus of the team's efforts should be dedicated to ensure proper planning, and provisioning will be in place to put this investment into good use and derive the return on the investment as soon as possible by rolling out the service across EMA teams. I am enumerating some of the major initiatives and projects I believe we should be working on for the next year, but would like to emphasise that these are pending approval of the new IT Team structure to form at the GA.

- a. **SharePoint Services Deployment:** Planning, policy enforcement, provisioning, rolling out, and providing support to the EMA teams. We also need to investigate expansion needs during the course of the year, especially with regard to the vision put forward in section 4 and the possible integration of EMMC alumni associations into the current system.
- b. **Live Meeting:** Roll out, training, policy making.
- c. **Website Improvements:** Team to continue collecting user feedback to improve the current website both technically and usability-wise. Conducting surveys is a definite path we should consider. We need to ensure we provide our members with what they ask for.
- d. **IT Policy:** Is well over due and now plays an even more important role with the SharePoint deployment. Here are some issues I believe we should be addressing:
 - Email/electronic Correspondence Policy
 - SharePoint deployment and management policy
 - EMA IT Service Request Procedure
 - Service Provision Policy
- e. **EMA TV:** A new initiative to enable streaming (web broadcasting) of major EMA events, either live or recorded, for all members.
- f. **EMA ID Cards and membership numbers:** Rather self-explanatory. There are technical reasons behind this initiative as well as the obvious promotional reasons.
- g. **Improvements to the current communication system:** Possibility/feasibility of using an IMAP-based system or MS Exchange. Provision of email account to chapters and service team members. Shared calendars, etc.

10.IT Team Budget 2009-2010

The team will be looking into areas, including items mentioned in section 9 above, which may require budget allocation after the GA. The team budget request report should be prepared by the end of June 2009. Apart from the items in section 9, I am proposing a budget allocation for the first-ever face-to-face meeting somewhere in Europe this year. This is required to consolidate and facilitate team activities, especially to overcome the recessions that normally happen in teams for a couple of times during each terms.

11.Team Organisation

Some changes to the structure of the workgroups are inevitable. I am proposing creating a new workgroup in the team called "SharePoint" with the main responsibility of the tasks explained in section 9-a. The structure would be decided shortly after the GA 2009. Workgroups coordination, meetings frequencies and member contributions and commitments are among other things to be discussed and decided at/shortly after GA.

12.Inter-team Collaborations

I foresee the following areas where we can explore mutual opportunities for collaboration with other service teams:

- **Internal Communication Team:** Since the renaming their team, they are now largely responsible for provision of contents for the website, which is an area we might be able to cooperate well. SharePoint and IT Policy are two areas in specific with grounds for collaborations.
- **Policy Team:** There are two fronts we can cooperate: one being the IT Policy development in which there might be areas that we need to consult with the Policy team; and the more important area being their involvement in improving the procedures and policies pertaining to the online elections for the next year. The latter being of crucial importance.
- **Promotions Team:** For the design and production of the membership ID cards/badges. Another area I have proposed on different occasions is integration

of an EMA merchandise online shop into our website, through which members can purchase their favourite EMA merchandise, all at very little cost for EMA.

- **Jobs Team:** Refer to the relevant paragraph in section 6.

Call for feedback, suggestions and contributions

I would like to take the opportunity to ask for your feedback on all IT-related issues. We would also warmly welcome any contribution offers from all EMA members.

If you feel passionate about IT and what we are doing interests you then we would love to hear from you. We are expanding our activities and are always on the lookout for good team players with some IT background.

You can reach us at it@em-a.eu.

Conclusion

The past year has been a very busy one for the IT Team; we have done a lot, but not enough. The forthcoming year will even be a more challenging but exciting one with all our ongoing projects.

I am pleased to have had this opportunity to share with all EMA members our very exciting new initiatives and undertakings. I truly hope you will enjoy just as much, using these service.

Taghi Paksima
IT Team Coordinator
EMA Steering Committee