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MOTD

by Rob Kolstad

USENIX & SAGE

The Advanced Computing Systems Association &
The System Administrators Guild

by Rob Kolstad

Rob Kolstad is currently Executive Director of SAGE, the System Administrators Guild. Rob has edited *login*: for over ten years.



kolstad@sage.org

SAGE: Approaching the Crossroads

I've now been in the SAGE directorship position for a year. Here are a few words on some of the interesting challenges I've encountered.

A summary of the job is in order, of course. SAGE's goal is "To advance the profession of system administration." To that end, the professionalization of system administration is often cited as a corollary. Paul Evans started the professionalization movement many years ago when he pointed out that professions have common properties:

- A book of knowledge
- A university degree program
- A certification program of some sort
- Conferences/gatherings
- A code of ethics
- Professional journals/publications
- Recognition programs for outstanding contributors

SAGE is moving down the road to creating all these various properties, which is good. Best of all, public recognition for the career of system administration is high and growing. It appears that high school students all know of such things.

I think there are about 750,000 sysadmins in the USA (and an additional substantial fraction of that many throughout the rest of the world). This means that the odds of having one as a neighbor are fairly high. The profession's recognition is making progress.

Some barriers to organizational success, though, have come as a surprise to me.

One of the most jarring recent events was the realization that many of our prospective members have very committed ideas about what a "system administrator" is (and thus what the audience for SAGE is) – and SAGE isn't on their radar.

Often, these people are network administrators, security admin-

istrators, or some other sort of administrator who looks upon "system administrators" as "someone else." Sometimes, they view sysadmins as a sort of inferior species, which is also surprising to me. Apparently, specialization has some sort of value that I don't understand very well (and, since I don't work in a large company, I'm going to have to work extra hard to learn more about this particular phenomenon).

At any rate, none of SAGE's messages gets through to these other administrators since they're not tuned to "system administration" information. One email conversation I had was very illuminating in that my correspondent simply could not hear "generic administrator" when filling out a form. If a question did not specifically address "network administrator," then he/she simply could not answer it. This puzzled me greatly.

I subsequently urged many in our community to create an umbrella term that could be used to refer to the collective of all sorts of system administrators. Many great suggestions have emerged, but none of them seems perfect, yet. Often, the problem I'm talking about is misunderstood or denied. This is very strange to me.

Another of the other biggest challenges I'm now facing is that joining SAGE isn't very simple. To that end, I'll be lobbying strongly at the USENIX Board of Directors meeting in San Antonio to create a simple and extremely affordable fee structure for joining SAGE. Wish me luck. My goal: a click on a website and a small amount of money gets you a shiny membership card and all the rights and privileges of SAGE membership.

Our industry's economic slowdown has resulted in reduced SAGE staffing so my personal response time for many issues continues to worsen. I have never been so far behind on email or on my to-do list as I am today.

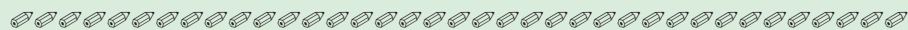
To that end, I am soliciting volunteers to assist with some specific SAGE projects. Here's the first three:

- Completing the paradigm for creating and maintaining SAGE-affiliated organizations both in the USA and around the world.
- Submitting white papers for the SAGE Web site
- Repairing and implementing various functions on the SAGE site.

These positions are neither "advisory" nor "personnel management". They are roll-your-sleeves-up and make results happen positions. I'll endeavor to insure that obstacles are removed – but the organization really needs a bit more manpower right now. If you're interested, please email me and let me know of your interest.

I think that the field of system administration (and all the sub-

fields that, in my mind, it contains: network admin, security admin, database admin, LAN admin, etc.) is not only technically fascinating but one of the highest-leverage fields of endeavor. I'd really like our organization to be the premier technical association for the hundreds of thousands of administrators (of all sorts of systems – SAGE is not parochial about this). If you have suggestions or ideas, please do forward them to me. Finances and timing combine to make 2003 the year that we must all succeed on this task. Any assistance is appreciated!



First Haiku Contest

Let's write some Haiku. You've probably seen Haiku, little three line poems with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second line, and five more in the last line. Syllabic stresses (accents) are not important. Here's a quick one:

Surfing excitement
No response to any site
Sadness rules the night

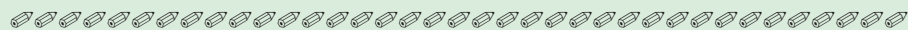
The brief Haiku captures a thought, a moment, a scene, or a vision. The best Haiku amplify insight or even cause an "Aha!" or epiphany.

Many Haiku traditionally describe the seasons of the year. Being a technical society, this doesn't seem quite so germane to our mutual interests.

This first Haiku contest solicits your entries describing some state of the Internet. Many entries will be posted on the web-site and potentially printed in these pages. The winning entry will be highlighted and rewarded: its author will be win a handsome polo shirt commemorating his/her vision and creative writing ability.

Details: Please submit entries to haiku@usenix.org with the subject line "Haiku — internet".

Entry deadline: July 1, 2003. No limit on entries (other than pragmatism). Anonymous entries win no physical prizes. Void where prohibited by law.



;login:

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR:

Rob Kolstad kolstad@usenix.org

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR:

Tina Darmohray tmd@usenix.org

MANAGING EDITOR:

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MEMBERSHIP, PUBLICATIONS, AND CONFERENCES

USENIX Association

2560 Ninth Street, Suite 215

Berkeley, CA 94710

Phone: 510 528 8649

FAX: 510 548 5738

Email: office@usenix.org

login@usenix.org

conference@usenix.org

WWW: <http://www.usenix.org>

<http://www.sage.org>