

PANEL DISCUSSION: ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF USING THE INTERNET FOR BUSINESS SIMULATIONS TO INPUT DECISIONS, PROCESS, AND PRESENT FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC DATA OUTPUT

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Computers technology has advanced so rapidly and has become so complex that these changes have profoundly affected business simulations. In the last 20 years, business simulations relied heavily on students submitting decisions using 3 ½ disks. Now with new computers no longer containing 3 ½ disk drives and alternatives input means such as the flash drives using USB ports commonly available, business simulation authors and developers have had to recently again revise their simulations to accommodate these new developments. The latest challenge is the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web to receive decision inputs, process decisions, and to distribute the results. Some simulations are now solely Internet based. The use of the Internet may solve many current problems concerning simulation development and administration, but it also has created some new problems.

Web-based simulations require less involvement by the user. How much less involvement at this time is not clear and whether the less involvement is a plus or minus is also not that clear. Less interaction between users and the student participants may not be all that desirable. The design and development of web-based business simulations is also far more complex and also more costly in terms of time and money. Consequently there are two major points of view regarding web-based simulations:

1. A designers/developers point of view
2. An administrative/user point of view.

From a designers/developers point of view a number of questions arise including in the following:

1. What new programming skills are required?
2. What new problems, if any, arise from simulations that require both client side and server side programming and interaction?
3. How much additional time and cost is required to make a simulation web-based?

4. Does the development of web-based simulations from a publishing point of view require a much greater adoption based?
5. Will the availability of web based simulations increase the usage in simulations in collegiate education?
6. To what extent can simulations be partially web based?

From a users/administrative point of view likewise a number of questions arise:

1. By how much does a web-based simulation really reduce administration time involved in such former activities as collecting decisions, inserting decision disks, processing decisions, and returning returns to students including returning of decisions disks with updating results files?
2. Will users of web-based simulations spend less time in coming to an understanding of a simulation's scenario including an understanding of a given simulation's strengths and weaknesses?
3. What new problems, if any, will the lack of a printed simulation manual at the beginning create for students and administrators?
4. Will the requirement for each student to register online and use a credit card to register cause new problems?
5. Will the requirement that students create and use passwords create new problems?
6. Does a web-based simulation simplify or make more difficult the correction of processing errors and decision entry errors?

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In addition to these two major areas of concerns, several questions arise in other areas including the following questions:

What time commitment is required to maintain the web simulation server and to administer the operations of a web-based simulation?

Will the authors/designers of currently used traditional simulations be able to convert their simulations to being web-based?

Will the current technology complexity of business simulations result in less new business simulations being developed and made available for general use?

Will publishers be more likely or less likely to want to publish business simulations because of the increased cost of publishing and maintaining a web server dedicated to a given simulation?

A number of web-based simulations now exist. However, very few if any papers at ABSEL have addressed the above questions. There now it appears to be three routes to simulation administration: (1) Fully web based, (2) [partially web based, and (3) traditional processing. This panel is designed to provide a way of identifying the more important issues and to identify the pros and cons of different alternatives for processing simulation decisions.