GridTalk

READERSHIP SURVEY OF *iSGTW*
JANUARY 2010

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Abstract:

This report provides results and analysis for the January 2010 *iSGTW* readership survey, in which 294 readers, or 10.3% of the 2,854 subscribers contacted, gave their comments upon the publication, its content and direction. (This is about 3% lower than the response rate for the last survey, which was conducted in mid-summer. This may reflect the effects of the holidays.) Most subscribers said they enjoy the selection of material and the variety of topics covered, and gave positive comments. 45 readers gave comments in this survey in the "Further comments or suggestions" section.

As of the time of writing this report, *iSGTW* has 5,806 subscribers. We have collected survey responses from 1,148 readers since the first survey was conducted in June 2007, which means that 20.4% of the total readers have given us their opinions as of the date we mailed out this survey.

As a result of this survey, we will continue to emphasize science in general (in addition to purely grid/IT stories), include more links to explanatory sites such as GridCafe and GridGuide, and fine-tune the back sections, which had a complete overhaul in September. We will also strive to continue diversifying the subject matter, and start taking on more of supercomputing, cloud computing, and the case-study approach to tell the tale of distributed computing. In accordance with our readers' wishes, we will include more coverage of areas such as green IT.

Delivery Slip

	Name	Partner /Activity	Date	Signature
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PURPOSE

This report's main to provide the results and analyses of the January 2010 readership survey of the *iSGTW* newsletter.

1.2. TARGET AUDIENCE

This deliverable is intended for all GridTalk project partners, as well as anyone interested in understanding how GridTalk's message and achieved results are made available to the grid community. The European Commission (EC), project partners and project activities are free to use elements of this document to support individual promotional and marketing activities.

1.3. DOCUMENT AMENDMENT PROCEDURE

Amendments, comments and suggestions should be sent to GridTalk Manager, Sarah Pearce, email: s.pearce@qmul.ac.uk.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to learn more about our readership and their interests, we conduct short (9 questions) surveys twice per year, using a private survey service called Zoomerang. We have done so since the founding of *International Science Grid This Week*, or *iSGTW*, (www.isgtw.org).

In January 2010 – the most recent survey – we contacted approximately half of our subscribers, or 2,854 people. Of those, 294 people, or 10.4%, responded, a very good response rate. (By way of comparison, in the first survey – conducted in June 2007 – only 39 people responded, for a 5.6% response rate.) Among other things, readers answered questions about their background, interests and their expectations and desires for the newsletter. In order to detect any trends, we compare responses from each survey.

Much like previous surveys, the January 2010 results showed that typical subscribers are male, in their 30s and early 40s, technically oriented, and working in science or IT. They regularly read *iSGTW*, often on publication day. They know what they are looking for in a given issue and go right to it, spending minimal time browsing; they typically screen what is included in the emails version, then go to the website for specific articles of interest.

Of special note is the slight change we made to question #7 ("Are there any particular subject areas you would like to see more coverage of?") in which we added the categories of "Green IT," "Physics," "Social science," "Humanities," "Health and medical research" and "Atmospheric science" to the possible answers. Perhaps surprisingly, "Green IT" topped this category, even above the traditional vote-winner, "Grid Security." "Green IT" even won out over "Physics" – which could arguably show that our efforts to expand our audience is showing signs of success, as we now have a more inclusive community than our traditional, original base in the high-energy physics community. (This ties in with the wide variety of subjects that our readers suggested we cover, which include "electromagnetics," "art," and "artificial intelligence," among others.)

The January 2010 survey reiterated items we had learned in previous surveys: our readership strongly likes variety of subject matter, and they are interested in the applications of the grid as much as, if not more than, the nuts and bolts of the grid itself. Certain topics – grid security, for example – still rank near the top of readers' lists of favorite topics, even if they are not as overwhelmingly popular as before. Other items, such as the possibility of social networking, consistently rank near the bottom. ("The ability to comment on an article" was also in this bottom tier.)

Our surveys seem to be remarkably consistent over time, with only minor statistical variations up-and-down, which could be due to standard deviation. For example, iSGTW consistently has a predominantly male readership, who usually make up about 80% of the audience. We also continued to see that readers prefer to describe themselves as "Scientists/Researcher" as opposed to pure "IT Professionals."

We did see a 6% decline in younger readers in this winter survey as compared to the last one in the summer of 2009, which was a phenomenon that happened last January as well. One possible explanation is that during winter break, there are fewer college students and graduate students available to fill out our survey.

When the latest Readership Survey results are taken in conjunction with other metrics, such as our Google Page Ranking (8 on a scale of 10 as of January 20) and our steadily increasing readership (55.9% more subscribers now when compared to April 08), these tools paint a mutually reinforcing picture, that shows overall reader satisfaction with the publication. This finding is supported by five times as many positive responses as negative responses in the open-ended "Further comments" section.

Of the few comments that had a negative component, the strongest one said that "I saw more than one (article) in my field that was pure PR." The respondent went on to say that "This makes me question the trustworthiness of the ones in other fields."

This call for a more impartial, journalistic tilt had appeared in the last survey as well, when a respondent said that they "Would like to see more on real user experiences even if negative! Negative experiences can be useful, if problem phrased in polite, constructive manner."

In contrast, a typical positive comment said "I find the most satisfying and successful issues are those with one slightly longer piece and lots of quarter-page news and reports to give me the feeling I am keeping up to date (which I hope is not fooling myself.)"

One reader summed up the overall tone by saying: "This is the best place I know of for general information about the link between sciences and grid technology. Great job!"

2.1. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Since June 2007, *iSGTW* has been running on-line surveys twice per year, using "Zoomerang" (see next sections, 3 and 4). In order to provide continuity – and therefore be able to compare surveys to each another – we have tried to use roughly the same questions, although there may be some variation in the precise wording. Accordingly, we have tried to reformat questions so that they are clearer for readers, and we have introduced new questions and eliminated old ones as appropriate. (For example, we removed the question about the technical level of the publication, after 98% of respondents told us that they liked the technical level as it is, or would like it even more technical.)

For the January 2010 survey, one question (#7 "Are there any particular subject areas you would like to see more of") was reworked to give readers more responses to choose from. We also added more choices to answer Question 8 ("Please mark the appropriate checkbox "little or no interest," "some interest," or "much interest" for each of the following categories.") As with all previous surveys, the questions in the January 2010 Survey were reviewed by the *iSGTW* Advisory Board and the GridTalk Project Management Board prior to launch.

All questions are shown in section 4.

3. HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

Zoomerang (www.zoomerang.com) is a private service in the business of conducting surveys, for which a one-year subscription was paid by EGEE. *iSGTW*, as part of a collaboration with EGEE, is able to use this subscription. Zoomerang allows us to format questions, tally responses, and break down data.

After our questions had been agreed-upon and formatted, we submitted a list containing the email addresses of our subscribers, and Zoomerang sent each of those on the list an "invitation" to fill out the survey. We also sent out one "reminder" e-mail, and advertised the surveys in the "Announcements" section of *iSGTW*.

For this survey, we invited about half of the subscribers on our mailing list – those whose email address began with the letters M through Z. (We saved the rest for our next survey.) Those who completed the survey were automatically enrolled in a draw to win GridCafé merchandise. This incentive worked well previously, and increased the response rate.

Of the 2,854 invitations sent out, 294 people completed the survey, making for a 10.3 percent response rate, which is considered very good. That is, over 10% of those whom we invited to join the survey filled it out. An additional 6 percent followed the link to the survey website but declined to fill it out. By comparison, our June 2008 survey had a 10.6% response rate. The first survey, conducted in June 2007, had a 5.6% response rate.

One possible reason for *iSGTW*'s high response rate may be due to the prize-incentives (grid-related T-shirts, hats and mugs) offered by *iSGTW* to those completing the survey. As this reward system worked well in the previous three surveys, we envisage using it in the future.

4. ONE PAGE OVERVIEW OF QUESTIONS FOR JANUARY 2010 SURVEY

1. How often do you visit the iSGTW website?				
more than once a week	once a week	once every two weeks	once a month	hardly ever

2. What is your profession?						
Student	Industry	Scientist/Researcher	IT Professional	Media	Funding body	Other

3. Which grid projects are you involved in?					
EC-funded	NSF-funded	DOE-funded	National	I'm not involved in a grid project	I'm involved in other projects (please specify)

4. Age group					
<20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	>61

5. Gender	
Male	Female

6. Would you like to see articles that are:		
Longer	Shorter	about the same length

7. Are there any particular subject areas you would like to see more coverage of, such as:						
astronomy	grid security	life sciences	genomics	health/ medical	humanities	earth science
atmospheric science	green IT	social science	physics	other (please specify)		

8. Please mark the appropriate checkbox "little or no interest," "some interest," or "much interest" for each of the following categories:										
grid tech	science research	humanities	opinion	grid project profiles	profiles of people	ability to comment on an article	social networking	cloud	super computing	volunteer computing

9. How often do you visit the "Jobs in Grid" section? (Please pick only one.)
once a week
once every two weeks
once a month
hardly ever
never

10. Further comments or suggestions

5. QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES IN DETAIL

1. How often do you visit the iSGTW website?	
more than once a week	4%
once a week	27%
once every two weeks	22%
once a month	24%
hardly ever	23%
Total	100%
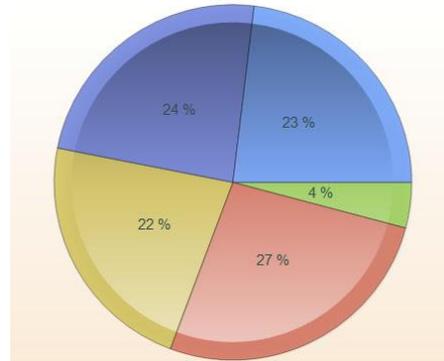
CONCLUSION: Most survey respondents (77%) said that they visit the *iSGTW* website regularly, with few (23%) "hardly ever" reading it. About 27% visit the site weekly, in line with the fact that the newsletter is published weekly. These statistics are within about 4 percentage points of our earlier surveys, and supported by our other on-line analytical tools, such as Googleanalytics, which shows an upswing in readership every publishing day.

2. What is your profession?	
Scientist/Researcher	40%
IT Professional	32%
Other	12%
Student	5%
Media	4-5%
Industry	4%
Funding body	2%
Total	100%
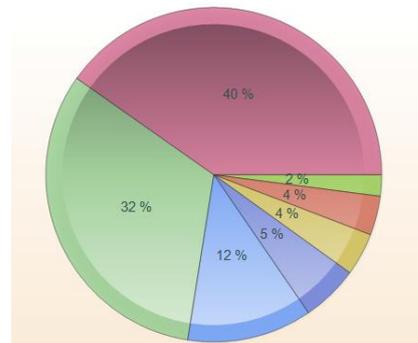
CONCLUSION: The most striking item here was the fluctuation in the percentage of readers who described themselves as "Scientist/Researcher" over time. In December '08, only 35% of readers described themselves as "Scientists;" this figure went up by 16 points to 51% in July 2009, then dropped 11 points to 40% in January 2010. This may show how a slight change in wording, from "Scientist" in 2008 to "Scientist/Researcher" in mid-2009, can sway results. The other answers only fluctuated by an average of 3 or 4% from previous surveys.

We did see a small increase in readers who describe themselves as a part of the media, with nearly 5% saying that they are with the press. (The July 2009 survey found that only 3% of our readers were in the media. Interestingly, this time we had readers say that "we do a lot of media production on sci-tech topics," along with "working on LHC book.")

We did see a small increase in those who are members of funding bodies (2% now as opposed to 1% in the last survey – the first in which we had this option as an answer. One person said he was a "Reviewer of several grid related projects.")

3. Which grid projects are you involved in?	
I work for an EC-funded project	37%
I work for a national project	29%
I'm not involved in a grid project	27%
I'm involved in other projects (please specify	16%
I work for an NSF project	7%
I work for a DOE project	7%
Total	123%
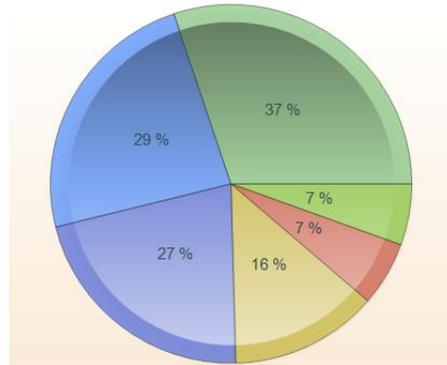
CONCLUSION: In our first surveys, we had readers identify themselves by individual project, such as "Open Science Grid." This time, we asked them to identify themselves by the categories above, with room to put in other affiliations. (Some worked for multiple projects at once, which is why the total is more than 100 percent.) Most of our readers (37%) are involved with an EC-funded project, with the next largest group (29%) working for national projects. Under "Other projects," responses included "LIGO," "Israeli Association of Grid Technologies," "Biofuels," "NATO," "ITER fusion project" and "Grid Ceramic Computing," whose titles suggest that *iSGTW* has a wide reach among the worldwide grid community. Significantly, 27% said that they were not involved in any grid project, showing that *iSGTW* reaches beyond those working solely in grids. The smallest categories of respondents said they worked for NSF projects and DOE projects.

4. Age group	
31-40	33%
41-50	27%
21-30	14%
51-60	13%
>51-60	11-12%
<20	1%
Total	100%
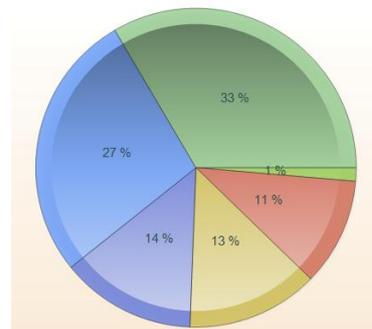
CONCLUSION: Once again, the largest segment of readers have been in their 30s and 40s, with this group about 10% larger than the last survey, which came largely at the expense of those in their 20s and below. As we noted in the last report and in the December '08 report, there seems to be a regular, predictable, rhythmic increase in younger readers in summer and a decrease in their numbers in winter, ever since the first survey was conducted in the summer of 2007. This may have to do with winter break in academia (when students go home) and summer science/computing/physics programs (when students are taking part in summer internships, summer computing schools, or similar programs). Consequently, the *iSGTW* reader survey shows more young readers when students are available in the summer, and skews older in winter when they are away from any grid projects and less accessible.

5. Gender	
Male	79%
Female	21%
Total	100%
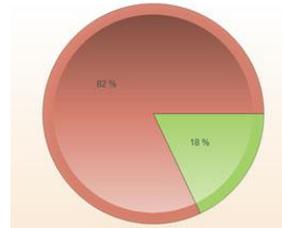
CONCLUSION: Our readership is largely male (79%), mirroring the gender distribution in this field. While there's been minor variation in the percentages in each *iSGTW* survey, (82% male in July 2009, 79% in our December 2008 survey, 85% in the June 2008 survey, 76% in October 2007, and 79% in June 2007), they paint a consistent portrait, of a largely male readership.

However, as noted in previous surveys, it was interesting to see that when *iSGTW* produced more profiles of women (in line with the Gender Action Plan's effort to encourage the entry of women into grid-computing), these "Women in Grid" issues were also popular with our existing, male readership.

6. Would you like to see articles that are:	
About the same length	80%
Longer	14%
Shorter	6%
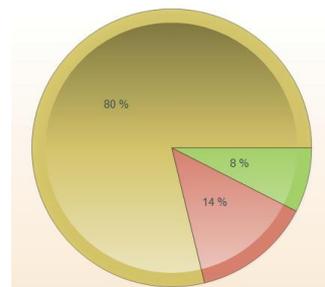
CONCLUSION: 80% of respondents said they want articles of "about the same length," similar to our last survey, with a figure of 78 %. Over twice as many (14%) wanted longer stories as opposed to shorter stories (6%).

This seems to verify success in moving stories from 350 word size to stories of 500 words or more on occasion. Previous analysis tells us that readers do stay with longer pieces, as long as they are well-written and edited, with text broken-up into readable pieces. Our readers prefer colorful anecdotes and quotes, original material instead of old press releases, snappy headlines, illustrations, newshooks, and opinions from prominent grid users. They also seem to like first-person accounts, as in our story about researchers who made an application that worked equally well in the cloud as well as the grid. Consequently, we have been endeavoring to solicit more first-person accounts, as they become available.

Googleanalytics also showed that our readers like special issues – such as our all-crime issue – in which they spent three times as much time reading them as the average. (The science reporter from Texas Tech contacted us to say "What a cool set of stories about a non-

traditional HPC topic. Great reporting by the whole team. I'm still amazed you're able to get such a rich publication out each week.")

7. Are there any particular subject areas you would like to see more coverage of, such as:	
green IT	36%
grid security	35%
physics	30%
other, please specify	27%
health & medical research	25%
astronomy	22%
earth science	21%
social science	20%
life sciences	18%
humanities	17%
atmospheric science	15%
genomics	11%
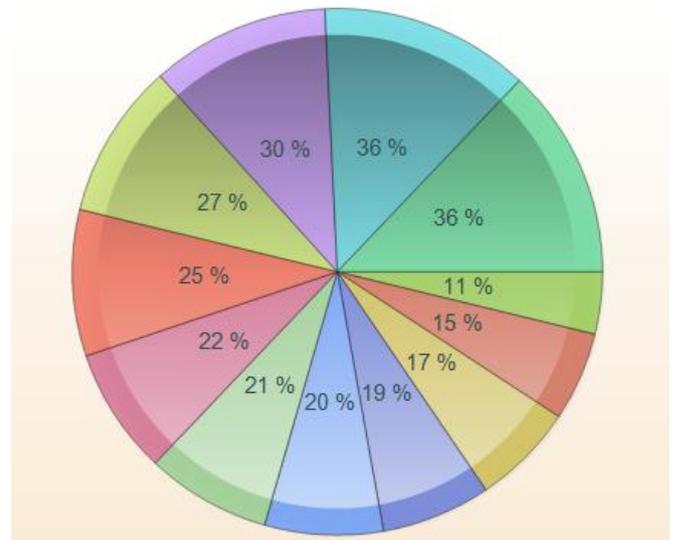
CONCLUSION: A surprise here was the popularity of "Green IT" among our readers; it was even more popular than the perennial favorite, "Grid Security." And both Green IT and Grid Security came in above "Physics" – something unexpected, given the origins of the publication and its ongoing relationships with CERN and Fermilab.

However, this development does seem to tie in with *iSGTW*'s effort to expand to include the broader science community. (One reader wrote that "If I have time to read an article, it is usually quite good, but I am not interested in too deep IT articles, I have this already elsewhere and better, thanks.")

Another interesting facet is that "Other, please specify" was among the top four responses – our readers have such diverse interests that they did not want to choose from among the existing dozen categories. In fact, when readers had a chance to make suggestions here, they came up with 70 different ideas for new subject areas to cover, few of which overlapped.

These suggestions include: "art," "industry," "innovation," "solar energy," "developer's corner," "finance," "high performance computing," "public health," "ecology," "mathematics," "artificial intelligence," "K-12 educational programs," "biodiversity," "natural disaster," and "road map to getting going submitting jobs on the grid for absolute newbies."Interestingly, "grid-security" – the previous favorite – has been steadily dropping in popularity, from 51% in December '08, to 40% in July '09, to 35% now. It may be that we are seeing the effects of a more diverse readership with more varied backgrounds and broader interests, with a bit less concern about the nuts and bolts of how the grid works, but more of an interest in what the grid can do for them in their research. (While still wanting a road map.)

Or, it may be that as grid technology becomes a more developed technology, earlier worries about questions such as grid security are subsiding.

> **8. Please mark the appropriate checkbox "Little or no interest," "Some interest," or "Much interest" for each of the following categories:**
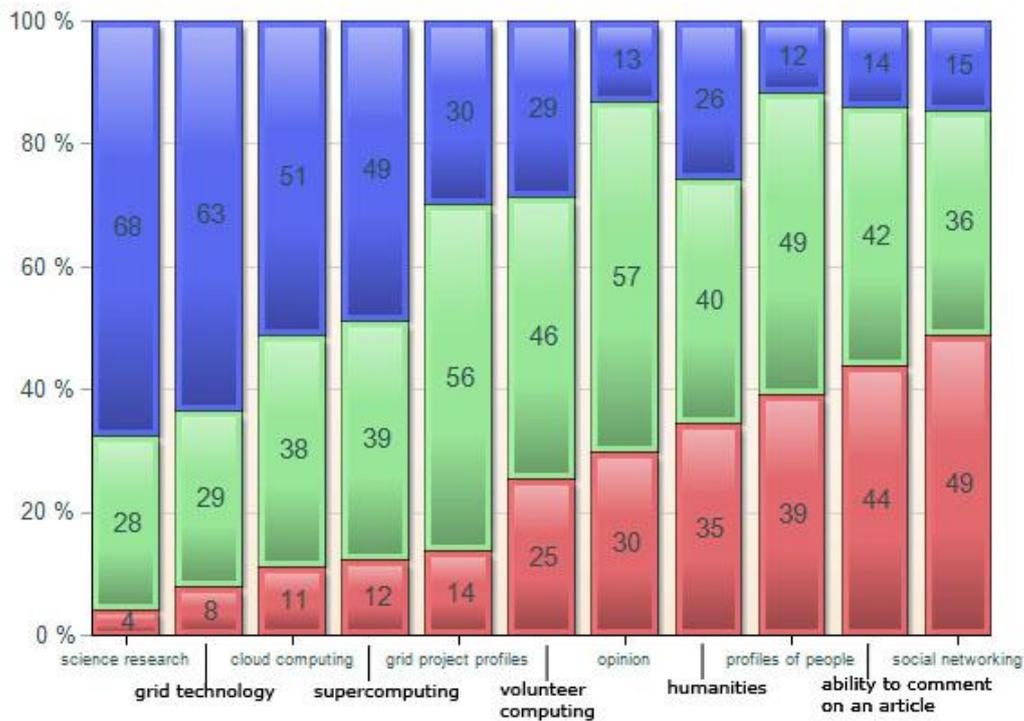
	Much interest	Some interest	Little or no interest
Science	68%	28%	4%
Grid Technology	63%	29%	8%
Cloud computing	51%	38%	11%
Supercomputing	49%	39%	12%
Grid project profiles	30%	56%	14%
Volunteer computing	29%	46%	25%
Opinion	13%	57%	30%
Humanities	26%	40%	35%
Profiles of people	12%	49%	39%
Ability to comment on an article	14%	42%	44%
Social networking	15%	36%	49%

In the chart at top, the more Blue shown for a given topic on the vertical axis, the more readers had "Much interest" in it.
*The more Red, the more readers had "Little or no interest" in it.*

Green shows the more ambivalent expression of "Some interest." See Conclusion below.

CONCLUSION: "Science Research" at far left has a huge amount of interest, with 68% of readers saying that they have "Much interest" in it. In contrast, "Social Networking" at far right had the largest number of negative responses, with 49% having "Little or no interest".. Meanwhile, a category such as "Opinion" falls about midway in-between, as seen by its broad expanse of green, in which the majority of readers (57%) said that they have "Some interest." It may be that as *iSGTW* readers already have access to social networking sites elsewhere, along with places where they can blog, tweet and otherwise interact and provide feedback and commentary about distributed computing – GridCast and GridPP are just two examples of such sites – they feel less need for a separate, *iSGTW* social networking function in which to interact online. It may also be that in some ways, our cutting-edge scientists are very conservative about what they want from a weekly on-line newsletter.

Another item to note is that a significant portion of the readership says they subscribe to *iSGTW* while having "Little or no interest" in "Grid technology" (8%), "Cloud computing" (11%), or "Supercomputing" (12%). Obviously, they are finding something else of interest in this computing-oriented publication. In the future, it may be interesting to ask our respondents if we can contact them one-on-one, and follow-up to find out more.

9. How often do you read the 'Jobs in Grid' section? (Please pick only one)	
Once a week	7%
Once every 2 weeks	3%
Once a month	17%
Hardly ever	42%
Never	30%
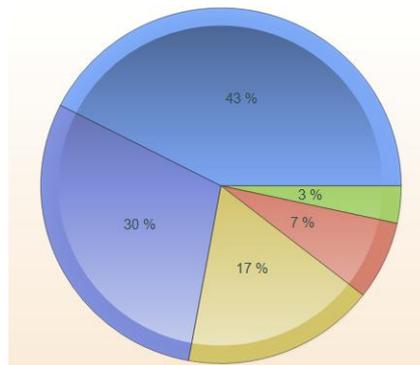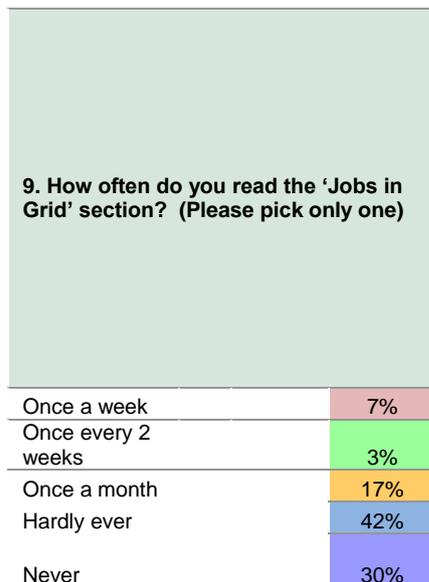
CONCLUSION: The readership seems to be divided into 3 broad groups. 27% say that they read this section regularly on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis. Meanwhile, 42% say that they "hardly ever" read it, and 30% "never" read it.

This is in stark contrast to what our Googleanalytics online software shows: "Jobs in grid" was the 7th most popular item out of the 1,650 pieces we've published in the past year. It may be that respondents don't want to admit that they look at the job advertisements, even in an anonymous survey. Nevertheless, the organizations with positions to fill have been eager to partake of this service. There are 7 advertisements in this section as of January 26, for a total of 11 jobs.

_____

10. Further comments or suggestions
45 Responses

CONCLUSION: We had 45 different responses for this open-ended question. 32 responses, or over half of the total, wanted *iSGTW* to remain much as it is.

Four had complaints, about such things as problems with the publication's email version ("My preference for Pine does not work too well with your mailing system, but I have seen *much* worse. Keep up the good work.")

Five were a variation of descriptions on how the reader uses the email version – as one put it: "The articles are generally great summary information."

A few comments stood out, reflecting items that *iSGTW* has considered:

- "I had to Google *iSGTW* to learn what it was. May be my fault, but please expand the term in your communications."
- "Please make a user-friendly alias for your URL. It is impossible to remember!"
- "More info on computing schools offering grid education. Grid certification courses – a discussion rolled out" (By coincidence, *iSGTW* ran a story on CERN's computer summer school right after the survey went out. Googleanalytics said it was the third most-popular item of the month; perhaps there is more interest in the grid and education, enough to warrant a special issue.)

Most comments were positive. A few in particular stand out:
- "There are always interesting articles to look over, and I usually learn something too!"
- "I find the most satisfying and successful issues are those with one slightly longer piece and lots of quarter-page news and reports to give me the feeling I am keeping up to date (which I hope is not fooling myself.)"
- "I enjoy having the newsletter delivered to my email address – I may not go to the site very often, but I like to see what the summaries have to say."
- "This is the best source I know of for general information about the link between the sciences and grid technology. Great job!"
- "Go go go ☺"
- "Can you post the feedback to this survey?"

(In response to that last question, we ran a feature story midway through the month-long survey period, giving readers a dozen or so of the unexpurgated, raw responses.)

4.1. COMMENTS ON THE USE OF ZOOMERANG AS A TOOL

Although Zoomerang is a successful tool, we had previously found some problems with the distribution of the survey, which we corrected by revising the email invitation. We also changed the formatting of some questions for greater clarity. Such minor improvements may also account for the high rate of reader response. The software is mostly user-friendly overall; most importantly, the telephone help desk is responsive and knows their product well.

5. COMMENTS, OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the results from this survey continued the trends found in previous surveys:

- Most of our subscribers are male, and 74% are in the age brackets running between their 20s and their 40s. Our typical reader works in science, and says that he likes technically oriented material on a broad variety of subject matter. He is most likely to be affiliated with EC-funded projects or national grid projects. He is a loyal reader, visiting the *iSGTW* site more than once a month, and usually uses the publication as a way of getting quick summaries or roundups of events. Googleanayltics tells us that our typical reader is familiar with the publication and its arrangement of Features, Opinion, Links, Images and Announcements; after a quick scan of the front page, he goes straight to the relevant article.

- *iSGTW* seems to be starting to reach beyond the core grid computing community – we have had more stories on cloud computing and supercomputing, for example – and our readers say they like this development. Our readers seem to appreciate our glossary of technical terms, with at least one reader writing "I am hoping you and your writers can clarify the issue" when it comes to defining a new concept.

- Although *iSGTW* aims to promote science computing, readers are very sensitive to any indication of overt propaganda or public relations cheerleading. As scientists, they look askance at outright PR, but are willing to accept an upbeat report from a peer about a promising new technique or a novel approach to problem-solving.

- Googleanalytics also showed that our readers like special issues – such as our all-crime issue – in which they spent three times as much time reading them as the average.

- Our readers tell us that they are extremely resistant to social networking when it comes to a purely *iSGTW*-affiliated social-networking site. Instead, they like the one-stop-shopping, quick round-up of the weekly newsletter format. Despite this, they apparently enjoy giving feedback (*iSGTW* had about 120 email responses to its survey within the first hour it was posted.)

  It may be that they feel overwhelmed by the number of social networking outlets and that the market is saturated; at the EGEE conference in Barcelona, the European editor was repeatedly told by a number of different readers that "keeping up with yet another social networking site about computing is a chore." This attitude may account

for the lack of interest we keep finding for social networking, as in Question 8 ("Please mark the appropriate checkbox 'Little or no interest,' 'Some interest,' or 'Much interest' for each of the following categories.") It may be that a good deal of our readers' social networking needs are already met by other, existing outlets, such as the blogs and tweets on GridCast, for example. We hope to resolve this dichotomy between readers' showing that they like to give us feedback while at the same time saying that they have little interest in social networking.

- As a result of this survey, we will also strive to continue our diversity of subject matter, and include more of the case study approach to tell the tale of distributed computing.

- We will include more on subject areas such as green IT, education, supercomputing and clouds, in an effort to expand iSGTW's reach. We will also take into account the specific actions suggested by readers, such as easy-to-remember URLs and a better explanation for the publications' title (or perhaps a name change).

- We may also consider the idea of including a question that asks respondents if they wish to give us their contact details in order to have a one-on-one feedback session and provide more in-depth commentary.