

GridTalk

READERSHIP SURVEY OF *iSGTW*

JUNE 2008

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Abstract:

This report provides the results, analysis, facts and figures for the June 2008 *iSGTW* readership survey.

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OF ISGTW
June 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PURPOSE

The main purpose of this report is to provide the results, analyses, facts and figures for the June 2008 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 being 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.

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2. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Since the founding of the on-line newsletter *International Science Grid This Week*, or *iSGTW*, (www.isgtw.org) we have endeavored to learn more about our readers: Who they are, what they like to read, what they find of value in the site, and what they would like to see more of. We do this in order to better serve our readership, and by extension, the grid community as a whole.

Accordingly, since June 2007, *iSGTW* has been running surveys approximately every six months, using an online survey service called Zoomerang (see next sections, 3 and 3.1). In the interests of continuity—and to more easily compare one survey to another—we have sought to keep roughly the same questions in place from one survey to the next. Overall, the questions are substantially the same as previous surveys. At the same time, we have also introduced new questions, as the publication matures and develops.

For the June 2008 survey, new questions were developed after consultations among European editor Dan Drollette, American editor Anne Heavey and project manager Sarah Pearce. All questions were reviewed by the *iSGTW* Advisory Board and GridTalk Project Management Board prior to conducting the survey.

The questions asked in the survey are shown in section 4. A new question for this survey was Question 6 (“Would you like to see articles that are longer, shorter or about the same length”). Question 7 (“Are there any particular subject areas that you would like to see more coverage of, such as astronomy, grid security, biology, genomics, pharmaceutical research, earth science, other”) was a modification of the previous surveys’ (“What would you like to see more of in *iSGTW*—science, grid technologies, projects, people, policy, international content, other”). Question 8 was also new (“Please mark the appropriate checkbox ‘little or no interest,’ ‘some interest,’ or ‘much interest,’ for each of the following categories: grid technology, science research, humanities research, grid project profiles, profiles of people, interactive features {blog, forum, commentary, email to friend}, announcements”).

3. HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

Zoomerang (www.zoomerang.com) is a private, on-line service in the business of conducting surveys, for which EGEE pays a yearly fee. *iSGTW*, as part of an ongoing collaboration with EGEE, makes use of this subscription. Zoomerang automatically formats questions, tallies responses and breaks down the data by category. Zoomerang also tells us, in real time, the number of people responding.

After the questions have been agreed-upon and formatted, we submit a list containing the email addresses of our subscribers, and Zoomerang sends each one of them an “invitation” to fill out the survey, along with a link to the survey itself. If we wish, we can also send a “reminder” to those that have not yet filled it out.

For this particular survey, we mailed invitations to half of the subscribers on our mailing list, saving the other half for the next survey in November 2008. (We do not wish to exhaust our

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subscribers' goodwill, nor get responses from the same sample of subscribers.) Accordingly, we arbitrarily sent a survey to everyone whose email address started with the letters A through L, or approximately the first half of the alphabet. For those who completed the survey, we offered the opportunity to enter a lottery to win GridCafe merchandise. This incentive was a first for *iSGTW*, and aimed to increase the survey response rate.

In this particular survey, 223 people completed the survey from a pool of 2084 invitations, making for an extraordinarily successful response rate of 10.7 percent. (That is, nearly 11 percent of those we sent a survey to filled it out. An additional 14 percent followed the link to the survey website but did not fill it out.) Typically, the rule of thumb for an unsolicited survey is low; one IBM survey, done via fax, yielded only 32 responses out of 1811 invitations sent, or a 1.8% response rate (<http://www.peoplepulse.com.au/Survey-Response-Rates.htm>). In "A Hack's Progress," well-regarded veteran journalist Phillip Knightley cited his personal experience in designing surveys, in which his mail campaign achieved about a 4 or 5 percent response rate, or what occurred with our previous, on-line survey.

We suspect that the reason we more than doubled our earlier response rate may be due to *iSGTW* offering a lottery with grid-related prizes to those who filled out the survey. We will aim to offer a similar incentive in the next survey, to see if the relatively high response rate is maintained.

4. ONE PAGE OVERVIEW OF QUESTIONS

For the June 2008 survey, the questions were:

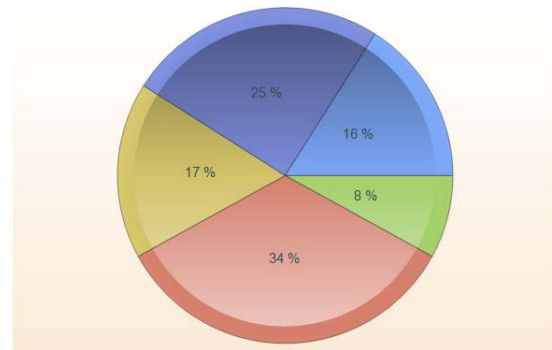
1. How often do you visit the iSGTW website?						
more than once a week	once a week	once every two weeks	once a month	hardly ever		
2. What is your profession?						
Student	Industry	Scientist	IT Professional	Media	Funding body	Other
3. Which grid projects are you involved in?						
EGEE	OSG	GridPP	TeraGrid	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	biology	genomics	pharmaceutical research	earth science	other (please specify)

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8. Please mark the appropriate checkbox “little or no interest,” “some interest,” or “much interest” for each of the following categories:								
grid technology	science research	humanities research	opinion	grid project profiles	profiles of people	interactive features (blog, forum, commentary, email to friend)	educational resources	announcements
9. Further comments or suggestions								

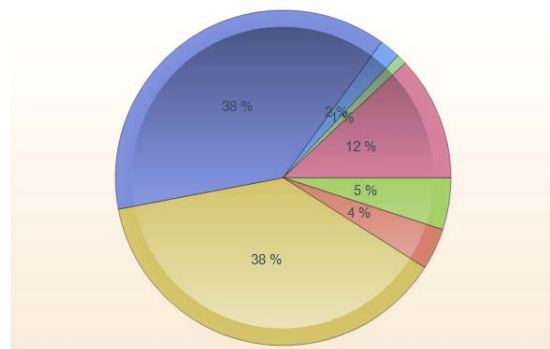
5. QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES IN DETAIL

1. How often do you visit the iSGTW website?		
more than once a week	17	8%
once a week	72	34%
once every two weeks	36	17%
once a month	54	25%
hardly ever	35	16%
Total	214	100%



CONCLUSION: The vast majority (84%) of those who subscribe to *iSGTW* read it, with few subscribing but not reading it (16%). The largest segment (34%) apparently reads this weekly newsletter on the same day that it comes out—a statistic borne out by our other on-line analytical tools, which show a dramatic upward spike in readership every Wednesday, our publishing day.

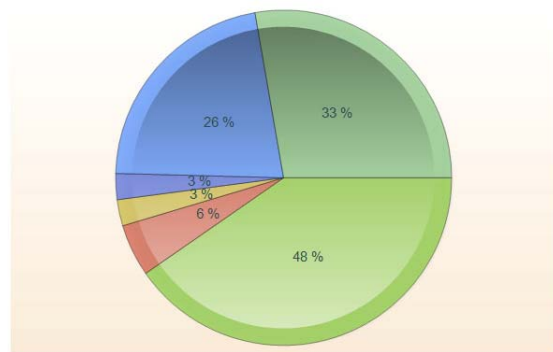
2. What is your profession?		
Student	10	5%
Industry	9	4%
Scientist	81	38%
Information Technology Professional	82	38%
Media	4	2%
Funding body	3	1%
Other	25	12%
Total	214	100%



CONCLUSION: As expected from looking at our previous surveys, most readers are either scientists or IT professionals, who together account for 76% of our readers. There are two segments of the population in which we see substantial potential for targeting new readers: students (5%) and media (2%). The *iSGTW* Marketing Strategy (Deliverable 3.3) will detail how we will attempt to increase the number of readers in these areas.

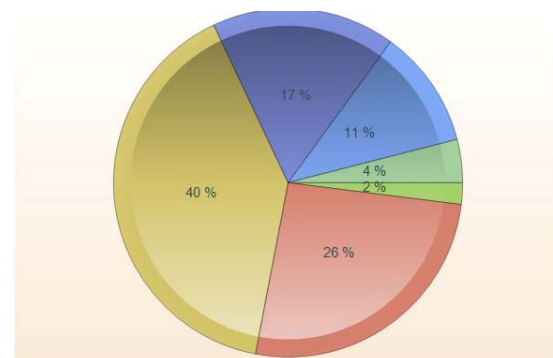
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3. Which grid projects are you involved in?		
EGEE	103	48%
OSG	12	6%
GridPP	7	3%
TeraGrid	6	3%
I'm not involved in a grid project	55	26%
I'm involved in other projects (please specify)	70	33%



CONCLUSION: Nearly half of our readers (48%) are involved with EGEE, a percentage which is very similar to our most recent previous survey (46%). What is striking is the percentage “not involved in a grid project” —26% as of June 2008, versus 15% in October 2007. We see this as an indication that *iSGTW* is succeeding in its effort to start reaching out to the broader community, among those who are more interested in what the grid can do for them as a tool, as opposed to the grid for the grid’s sake.

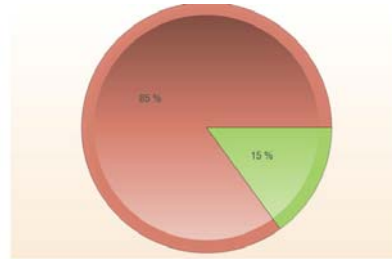
4. Age group		
<20	4	2%
21-30	55	26%
31-40	86	40%
41-50	36	17%
51-60	23	11%
>61	9	4%
Total	213	100%



CONCLUSION: The largest segment of our readership has consistently been in the 30s age brackets. (40% age 31-40 in June 2008; 39% age 31-40 in October 2007; 26% as of June 2007.)

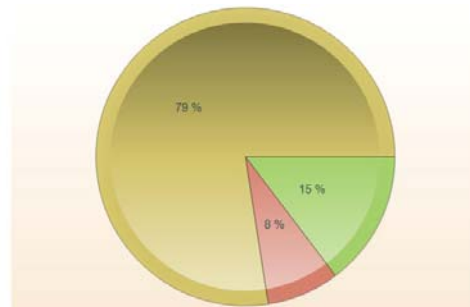
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5. Gender			
Female	33	15%	
Male	180	85%	
Total	213	100%	



CONCLUSION: Largely mirroring the gender distribution among engineers—in which men make up 90% of all practicing engineers in America and 94% of all American engineering professors, says Domenico Grasso, founder of the Smith College engineering program <http://www.progressiveengineer.com/PEWebBackissues2004/PEWeb%2057%20Dec%2004-2/57editor.htm>—our readership is largely male (85%). While the exact percentages vary from one *iSGTW* survey to the next, (76% male according to the October 2007 survey, and 79% male in the June 2007 survey), the overall picture is clear: This is largely a male readership. But in an effort to be as inclusive as possible, encourage the entry of women into grid-computing, and be part of numerous initiatives to redress the gender imbalance, *iSGTW* is seeking to produce more profiles of women, and is considering establishing a section to be entitled “Women in the Grid” in its Resources section.

6. Would you like to see articles that are:			
longer	32	15%	
shorter	18	8%	
about the same length	168	79%	

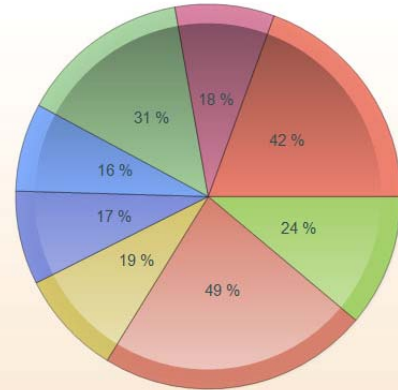


CONCLUSION: This would seem to indicate an overwhelming preference for stories that are of the same length as present—those that are 350 words maximum, which is very brief by the standards of print journalism. However, we found the opposite was true when we analyzed the reading habits of our subscribers in regards to one extremely lengthy (2,282 words) story on policy, entitled “Grid computing walks the standard line.” The tool Googleanalytics found that once readers started on the story, they stayed with it to the end, and they devoted nearly triple the amount of time to reading it that they devoted to our usual-length stories. We take this to mean that readers do respond to good writing and editing, breaking up the text into readable, bite-sized pieces, using colorful quotes and anecdotes, in-depth research, snappy headlines, numerous illustrations, and quotations from prominent players in the field. Apparently, if a story features these attributes—and does not *feel* long at first glance with the above devices, even if it is lengthy—readers will stay with it.

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7. Are there any particular subject areas you would like to see more coverage of, such as:

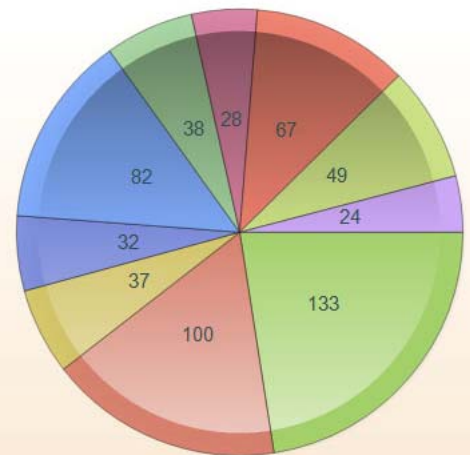
astronomy	44	24%
grid security	91	49%
biology	36	19%
genomics	32	17%
pharmaceutical research	29	16%
earth science	58	31%
atmospheric science	34	18%
Other, please specify	79	42%



CONCLUSION: With “grid-security” as the most popular response (49%), it is apparent that our audience is interested in both the technology used for grids and the science which grids produce. We left this question open-ended, with the opportunity for readers to type in their own suggested areas of coverage. In general, “high energy physics” seemed to be the most popular item volunteered by our readers under the “other, please specify” category; next came any sort of story on grid applications and technology. However, our readers have wide-ranging interests, including seismology, humanities, “industry use cases,” mathematics and finance. One reader wrote that “I think variety is your strong point.” This would seem to reinforce *iSGTW*’s effort to be as wide-ranging as possible.

8. Please mark the appropriate checkbox “little or no interest,” “some interest,” or “much interest” for each of the following categories:

grid technology	133	79%
science research	100	59%
humanities research	37	22%
opinion	32	19%
grid project profiles	82	49%
profiles of people	38	22%
interactive features (blog, forum, commentary, email to a friend)	28	17%
educational resources	67	40%
announcements	49	29%
Other, please specify	24	14%



CONCLUSION: Due to a formatting problem in Zoomerang’s “preview” mode, this question was incorrectly laid-out, so the checkboxes indicating the level of interest did not appear. However, we were still able to gather useful information from it, as readers apparently chose to “vote” for their most popular two or three topics, leaving the rest blank. Accordingly,

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the question as formatted did tell us the items that held the most and the least amount of interest. “Grid technology” was the overwhelming winner.

In analyzing the results, however, we do see a need to take the responses with the proverbial grain of salt. For example, “interactive features” ranked near the bottom, but we know from observing the success of blogs on GridPP that these items are tremendously popular once they are in place. (For that matter, the blogs and reader comments sections are some of the most popular items in on-line newspapers such as *The Guardian* {Manchester, UK}). We suspect this may be a case of *iSGTW* readers commenting upon something that they have not tried yet. In that regard, it may be a situation similar to that of preferred story length, referred to in question 6 above.

Nevertheless, the response to this question shows that we may want to be careful in the manner in which we roll out new interactive features for Deliverable 3.4 (“A fully redeveloped resources section used jointly by *iSGTW* and GridCafe, including information on joining Grid projects and multimedia content” by July 2009) and for Milestone M3.3 (“Launch *iSGTW* community forum, a new feature of *iSGTW*, aimed at scientists working on Grid or considering doing so, to encourage peer discussion and support” by April 2009). With that in mind, the reader response to interactive features may indicate a need for further investigation in the months ahead before that deliverable and milestone are due.

9. Further comments or suggestions

47 Responses

CONCLUSION: We had 47 responses here, split 47 different ways, indicating that our readers do like to give their opinion—and apparently are involved enough to want a say in the site’s content. Responses were generally positive, which may be expected from a self-selected group of grid users/enthusiasts.

For every negative comment (“Less self-authored puff pieces”) there were four positive comments (“great job,” “I like the balance of stories you cover,” “keep on producing such an interesting and valuable newsletter,” “it helps me quickly find topics and articles I’m interested in . . .”)

Most constructive were comments such as “an opinion section would be fun, and I would be interested in profiles of both grid projects and people” and “more news on developments in Africa would be appreciated” and “more articles on research in grid infrastructure.”

Most readers mentioned that they liked the balance of stories we cover, with a typical comment being “It’s fun, has a nice balance of technical and quirky articles, and it also has decent pictures and ‘wow’ articles.”

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5.1. COMMENTS ON THE USE OF ZOOMERANG AS A TOOL

Although Zoomerang is a successful tool that we have used previously, we did find some problems with the distribution of this survey which we will be able to correct next time. First, the software had some bugs in “preview” mode, which resulted in the initial email survey invitations not having the introductory text we had written. However, given the response rate, this does not seem to have been a substantial drawback.

There was also a problem with incorrectly formatted checkboxes for one question—number 8. Our intention had been to ask readers to choose among several levels of interest in stories, thereby ranking, for example, stories on grid technology versus project profiles. However, as distributed the survey only allowed them to tick checkboxes that stated whether they had an interest or not. By the time this problem was discovered, we already had a large number of responses, and changing the survey in midstream would have invalidated any earlier reader comments made to that point. After some phone calls to Zoomerang, it was decided to leave the existing question in place as is.

We found that for question 8, many readers simply marked the two or three items they liked the most and left the rest blank. This resulted in a situation that told us of the most popular topics (for example, “grid technology”) and the least popular topics (for example, “interactive features {blog, forum, commentary, e-mail to a friend}.” So, the question as formatted did tell us of the items that held the most and the least interest, if not the more moderate levels of readership interest in-between.

With the help of Zoomerang technical support, we have corrected the formatting of that question for the next survey, which starts in November 2008. We have also revised the email invitation.

Other than those glitches in formatting, we found the software generally user-friendly, and the help desk knowledgeable and responsive

6. COMMENTS, OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

To reiterate some of the conclusions outlined above, by using this survey in conjunction with previous surveys, on-line web analysis tools, past experience, and what we know of the success of other sites, we have found that:

- Our typical subscribers are currently mostly male, in their 30s and early 40s, technically oriented, working in IT or science, and mostly affiliated with EGEE. They are apparently loyal readers, reading every issue the week it comes out. They generally know what they are looking for in a given issue and go straight to the relevant pages. However, they do respond to good layout, design and writing, with stories in easily digestible chunks, and—once drawn into a story—they will stay with it to the end, even if it is much longer than normal or concerns a topic, such as policy, that they previously indicated they have little interest in.

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- If *iSGTW* wishes to make an impact beyond that of the immediate grid community, it needs to reach out to students and the media—which may call for stories written in a manner that is more accessible to outsiders or to those new to the grid, while not losing our core readership. This may require things such as defining every single acronym or phrase of grid terminology in a story, no matter how obvious it may seem. Similarly, it may call for giving more background on occasion. We will also look at specifically target-marketing students and the media.
- *iSGTW* needs to reach out to women in grid computing, but we may have a problem given the heavily male demographic of those currently involved in the grid.
- Because this is a web publication, readers expect shorter stories, but they will read longer ones, provided the stories are handled correctly. In a similar vein, the same is apparently true of story content—despite previous surveys in which readers said they did not want to read policy articles, our policy piece on standardization held their interest.
- While covering a variety of topics (“variety is your strength”), *iSGTW* needs to be sure to meet its central interests: grid security, technology, applications, project profiles and research.
- We need to consider how to roll out interactive features so as to gain greatest acceptance from our readers.
- In the interest of consistency and continuity, we will try to conduct future surveys with an eye towards keeping the same content, while being open to adding new material. However, we also want to avoid having surveys that are too long or too demanding of our readers— for example, in the previous, October 2007 survey, one reader wrote that he “never answers a survey that takes longer than 2 minutes to fill out.”