

GridTalk

READERSHIP SURVEY OF *iSGTW*

JULY 2009

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Abstract:

This report provides the results and analysis for the July 2009 *iSGTW* readership survey, in which 13.85% of the 2,751 subscribers we contacted – the highest percentage response so far – gave us their comments upon the publication, its editorial content and direction. (In absolute numbers, we had 355 responses, the largest ever.) Most subscribers said they read the publication regularly, enjoy the selection and variety of topics covered, and gave generally positive comments.

iSGTW now has 5,019 subscribers, and we have collected survey responses from 854 readers in the time since the first survey back in June 2007, or 17.01% of the total readership.

As a result of this survey, we will be putting more emphasis upon scientists in general (as opposed to IT professionals), make the site more friendly to newcomers, include more links to explanatory sites such as GridCafe, and continue to make *iSGTW* more visually compelling in the back sections. We will also strive to continue our diversity of subject matter, and the case-study approach to tell the tale of distributed computing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PURPOSE

The main purpose of this report is to provide the results and analyses of the July 2009 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.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to learn more about our readership and their interests, we conduct short (9 questions) surveys every 6 months, 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 July 2009 – the most recent survey – we contacted approximately half of our subscribers, or 2,751 people. Of those, 355 people, or 13.85%, responded, which is a very good response rate. (By way of comparison, in the first survey – conducted in June 2007 – only 39 people responded, or 5.6% response of those contacted.) Among other things, they answered questions about their background, interests and their expectations and desires for the newsletter.

In order to get a sense of any trends, we compared their responses to those of our previous surveys.

Much like our previous surveys, the July 2009 results showed that our typical subscribers are male, somewhere between their 30s and early 40s, technically oriented, and working in IT or science. They regularly read *iSGTW*, with many reading it on the same day as publication. They generally know what they are looking for in a given issue and go right to it, spending minimal time browsing; as one subscriber said in response to an earlier survey “I screen what is included in every issue using the email I receive, then go to the Web site for specific articles of interest.”

Of special note is a new question added to this survey (#9), asking “How often do you visit the Jobs in Grid section?” Of those who responded, 10% read it each week, 8% read it within 2 weeks, 11% read in that month, and 40% “hardly ever” read it. (A remaining 32% say they “never” read it.)

Looking at the results to this question in another way, almost 68% said that they read it at some point. Just over 32% said they never read it.

The July 2009 survey also reiterated things we had learned from previous surveys: our readership strongly likes variety of subject matter, and they are interested in the applications of the grid sometimes more than as the grid itself. Certain topics – grid security, for example – are still at the top of readers’ lists of favorite subjects, even if they are not as overwhelmingly popular as before. (Grid security lost 10% in favorability in the rankings.) Other items, such as the possibility of social networking, consistently rank near the bottom.

We did run across the hint of some trends, when compared to our earlier surveys. We seem to be gaining more outreach among non-technical audiences. We saw a 16% increase among those who described themselves as Scientists/Researcher as opposed to pure IT professionals. We also saw a trend toward younger readers, and towards those who are more interested in science as a whole instead of pure grid computing. Certain topics, such as atmospheric science, saw a spike in readership interest; other topics, such as finance, were volunteered by readers several times in our “Further comments or suggestions” section. These probably reflect events in the general media, such as the increased public awareness of global warming and the meltdown of the global economy.

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 July 28) and our steadily increasing readership (39.4% more subscribers now when compared to April 08), these tools paint a consistent, mutually reinforcing picture, that shows overall reader satisfaction with the publication. This finding is supported by four 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 most striking one pleaded for a more impartial, journalistic slant, saying that the reader “Would like to see more on real user experiences even if negative! Negative experiences can be useful, if problem phrased in polite, constructive manner.”

A typical positive comment said “I’m relatively a novice in the grid domain and this is by far the best place to learn about and keep up to date with the grid technology field.”

The most succinct comment of *iSGTW*’s role among grid-users was: “Please keep a broad mix of things; while I have my specialties, I like to see what other people are doing too.”

Background and History

Ever since the founding of *International Science Grid This Week*, or *iSGTW*, (www.isgtw.org) we have attempted to learn more about our readers: what they like to read what they find most valuable in the website, and what they would like to see more of. By conducting surveys, we hope to better serve our readers (and the grid community).

Consequently, 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 of the publication as it is, or would like it even more technical.)

For the July 2009 survey, one new question (#9 “How often do you read the ‘Jobs in Grid?’”) was developed after consultations among *iSGTW* staff. We also reworked the responses to Question 3 (“Which grid projects are you involved in?”) and 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 questions, the July 2009 Survey was reviewed by the *iSGTW* Advisory Board and the GridTalk Project Management Board prior to conducting the survey.

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 join. We also sent out two “reminder” e-mails.

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

Of the 2751 invitations we sent out, 355 people completed the survey, making for a 13.85 percent response rate, which is considered very good. (That is, nearly 14% of those whom we invited to join the survey filled it out. An additional 7 percent followed the link to the survey website but did not 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 extraordinarily 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 two surveys, we envisage using it in the future.

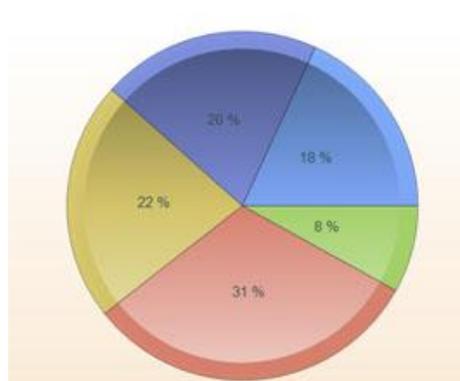
4. ONE PAGE OVERVIEW OF QUESTIONS

For the July 2009 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/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	biology	genomics	pharmaceutical research	earth science	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 technology	science research	humanities research	opinion	grid project profiles	profiles of people	podcasts	videos	the ability to comment on an article	social networking
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									

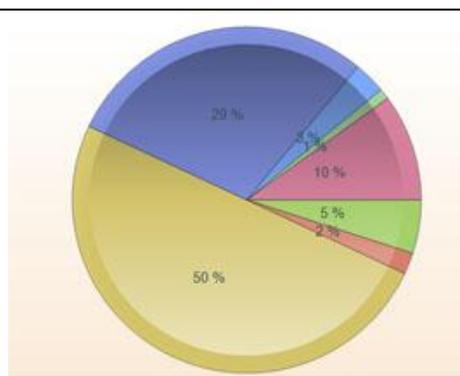
6. QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES IN DETAIL

1. How often do you visit the iSGTW website?	
more than once a week	8%
once a week	31%
once every two weeks	22%
once a month	20%
hardly ever	18%
Total	100%



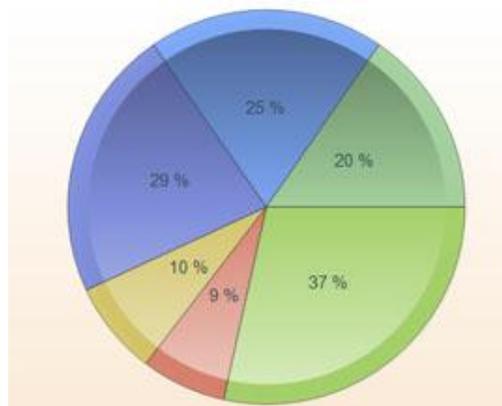
CONCLUSION: Most survey respondents (82%) said that they visit the *iSGTW* website regularly, with few (18%) “hardly ever” reading it. About 31% visit the site weekly, in line with the fact that the newsletter is published weekly. These statistics are either identical or within 3 percentage points of our previous surveys, and are supported by our other on-line analytical tools, such as Googleanalytics, which shows a sharp upswing in readership every publishing day.

2. What is your profession?	
Student	5%
Industry	2%
Scientist/Researcher	51%
Information Technology Professional	29%
Media	3%
Funding body	1%
Other	10%
Total	100%



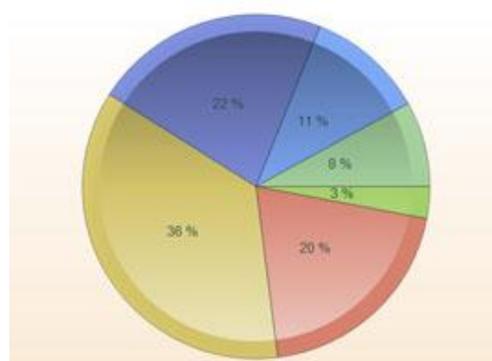
CONCLUSION: The most striking change here was in the percentage of readers who describe themselves as “Scientist/Researcher”: just over half, or 51%. (In previous surveys, the figure hovered around 35%, or a difference of 16 percentage points. For comparison’s sake, the other answers to this question only fluctuated by an average of 2% from previous surveys.) This could be taken to mean that we are starting to succeed in one of our goals – to appeal to researchers who are not expert in information technology but could benefit from using the grid in their work. (One caveat – we did change the wording on this question ever so slightly, so that one of the responses was “Scientist/Researcher” instead of just “Scientist.”) We still have not had much success in reaching out to the media, (only 3% of our readers) which makes logical sense as we have not yet undertaken our outreach effort to the press – something we expect to redress this summer as per our Marketing Strategy, with the help of temporary staff (an intern at the *iSGTW* European office.) Funding bodies make up only 1% of our readership, the same percentage as before.

3. Which grid projects are you involved in?	
I work for an EC-funded project	37%
I work for an NSF-funded project	9%
I work for a DOE-funded project	10%
I work for a national project	29%
I'm not involved in a grid project	25%
I'm involved in other projects (please specify)	20%
Total	100%



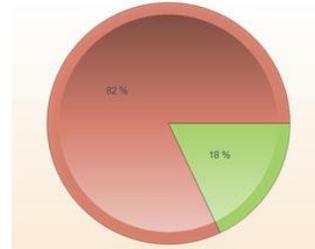
CONCLUSION: In previous surveys, we had readers identify themselves by individual project; i.e., “GridPP” or “OSG.” This time, we asked them to identify themselves by the categories above, with room to put in other affiliations. (Some worked for multiple projects at once.) Most of our readers (37%) are involved with an EC-funded project, with the next largest group (29%) working for national projects. In “Other projects,” responses included “Nordic project,” “Teragrid,” “Australian eResearch project,” and “Latin American Supercomputing,” whose names suggest that *iSGTW* has a wide reach among the worldwide grid community. Of particular interest were the 25% not involved in any grid project, showing that *iSGTW* does appeal beyond those currently working in grids.

4. Age group	
<20	3%
21-30	20%
31-40	37%
41-50	22%
51-60	11%
>61	8%
Total	100%



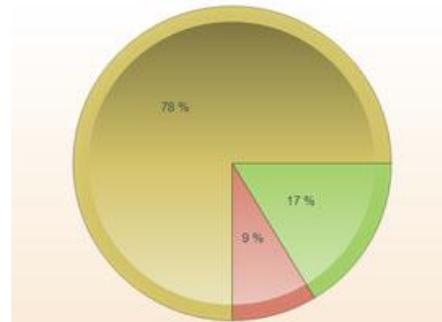
CONCLUSION: The largest segment of our readership has always been in the 30s- and 40s-age brackets, and we actually saw an 8% increase among these two groups in this latest survey. We also saw a 3% gain in readers among the 21-30 age group. These increases came largely at the expense of the 41-50 age bracket (6% decrease), along with a 3% decrease in the >61 age bracket. Overall, this may show that we are starting to tilt toward a younger audience. However, as we noted in the December '08 survey, part of this fluctuation may be because surveys conducted during the summer reflect the increased number of summer students and interns working on grid projects; while surveys conducted during the winter occur at a time when most younger people are at home for winter break. We have noticed a rhythmic, regular increase in younger readers in summer and a decrease in winter since the first survey, conducted in summer 2007.

5. Gender	
Female	18%
Male	82%
Total	100%



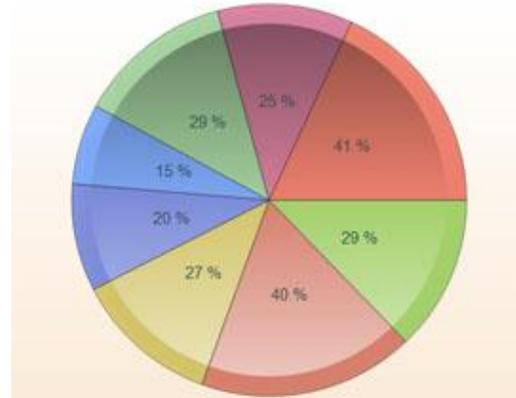
CONCLUSION: Our readership is largely male (82%), mirroring the gender distribution among engineers. While there is some minor variation in the percentages in each *iSGTW* survey, (79% male in our December 2008 survey, 85% male in the June 2008 survey, 76% male according to the October 2007 survey, and 79% male in the June 2007 survey), the statistics tend to hover around the 80% male mark. One interesting thing to note is 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. Our Googleanalytics software showed that our readers liked the special issues – they spent three times as much time reading them as the average, and the women in grid editorial was the most popular story for the month of March.

6. Would you like to see articles that are:	
Longer	18%
Shorter	9%
About the same length	78%



CONCLUSION: 78% of respondents said they want articles of “about the same length,” which is very similar to our last survey, in which the figure was 80%. Twice as many (18%) wanted longer stories as opposed to shorter stories (9%). This is compared to 19% wanting longer stories and 5% wanting shorter ones in December 08. This statistical variation from one survey to the next is tiny, but could hint that while we have had success in moving stories up from a previous average of 350 words, we may be just starting to enter the upper limits of story length. Overall, it seems that our strategy of having stories run 350 words minimum, with more long ones (500 words on average, and 800 or more on occasion) has been successful. We know from previous analysis that readers do stay with longer pieces, as long as they are well-written and edited, with text broken-up into readable pieces, peppered with colorful anecdotes and quotes, in-depth research (as opposed to recycled press releases), snappy headlines, illustrations, newshooks, and opinions from prominent grid users. Consequently, we have been running more stories in the 500-to-800 word range, and our readers seem to be saying they approve – but hint of being wary of going farther.

7. Are there any particular subject areas you would like to see more coverage of, such as:	
astronomy	29%
grid security	40%
biology	27%
genomics	20%
pharmaceutical research	15%
earth science	29%
atmospheric science	25%
Other, please specify	41%



CONCLUSION: For all but two subject areas, the percentages are either identical to, or within 1 or 2 percentage points of, what we had found in our June and December 2008 Surveys.

The two exceptions were “grid security” and “atmospheric science.”

While still our single most popular topic, “grid-security” had dropped 11 points in popularity since our last survey. (It had been at 51% in December 08.) Now, the level of interest is down to 40%. Taken in conjunction with the increase in those who identify themselves as “Scientist/Researcher” as opposed to “IT professional,” it may be that we are starting to see the effects of a slightly younger, slightly more diverse readership, with broader interests and 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.

There was a large upward jump in interest in “atmospheric science,” from 15% in December to 25% now – perhaps reflecting the growing public concern about climate change.

Readers also had the opportunity to write down areas in which they would like to see more coverage. “High energy physics” and “grid technology” continued to be the items most frequently volunteered by our readers; but now comes medical imaging, clouds and grids, finance and “economic data sharing” (perhaps reflecting the financial meltdown?), humanities, “unusual applications,” “real-time tools,” “disaster mitigation” and “Any and more user case studies!”

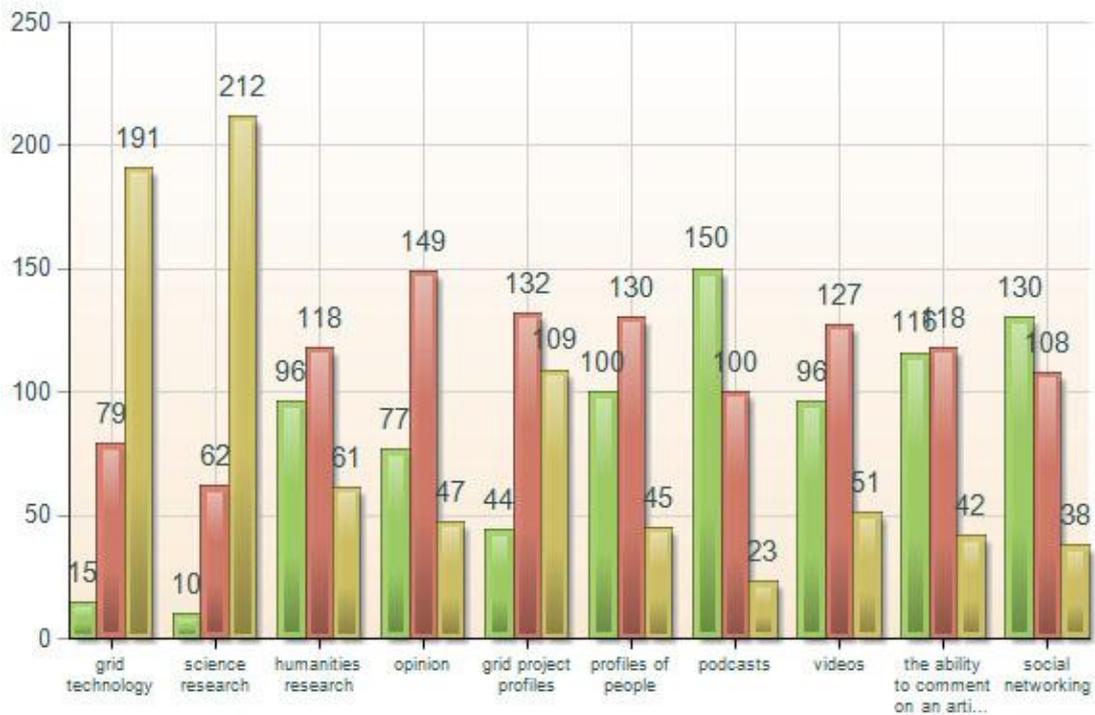
One respondent put down “anything and everything.”

8. Please mark the appropriate checkbox “Little or no interest,” “Some interest,” or “Much interest” for each of the following categories:

	Little or no interest	Some interest	Much interest
Grid technology	5%	26%	69%
Science research	3%	21%	76%
Humanities research	33%	44%	22%
Opinion	28%	54%	18%
Grid project profiles	15%	46%	40%
Profiles of people	36%	48%	16%
Podcasts	54%	36%	10%
Videos	34%	47%	19%
The ability to comment on an article	42%	42%	16%
Social networking	46%	39%	14%

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

■ Little or no interest
 ■ Some Interest
 ■ Much Interest



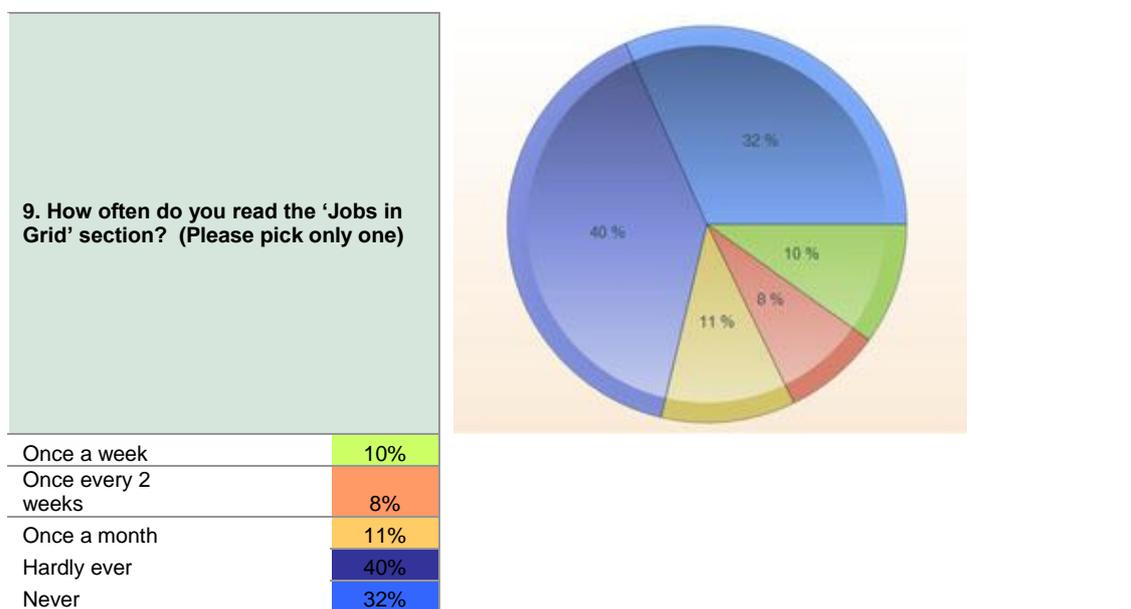
CONCLUSION: For the first time, “science research,” with 211 responses (76%) placed at the top of the list for reader interest, even above the traditional favorite of “grid technology,” which had 190 responses of “much interest,” or 69%. This seems to be in line with our observations noted about the responses to Question 7, which indicate that readers have more interest in what the grid can do for them in their research.

In the “some interest” category, “opinions,” “project profiles,” “profiles of people,” and “humanities research” scored well, with ratings in the mid-forties. There were lower ratings for “podcasts” and “social networking,” which together replaced the previous category of “interactive features” (140 respondents, or 54%, said that podcasts were of “little or no interest;” 130 respondents, or 46%, said that “social networking” was of “little or no interest.”) However, 10-20% of our readership did express “much interest” in podcasts, videos and social networking – a still significant part of *iSGTW* readership.

On a related note, our respondents made a distinction between quick, short podcasts, and in-depth videos – with videos having a 20% better rating when it came to “little or no interest.”

42% of respondents put “the ability to comment on an article” in the “little or no interest” category. At the same time, 16% had “much interest” – showing that while this may not be of interest to everyone, it is still of concern to some. (In the same sense, not everyone wants to write a letter to the editor, but those that do want to write such a letter, really want to write it.)

As noted in previous surveys, we know that social networking opportunities and reader comments are some of the most popular online features, so we suspect *iSGTW* readers may be commenting upon something that they have not tried yet. Nevertheless, their response shows that we will need to start slowly and take into account feedback when we overhaul the *iSGTW* community forum and put it under the “Nature Networks” umbrella.



CONCLUSION: The readership seems to be divided into 3 broad groups: those who say they read this section regularly (whether once per week, per 2 weeks or per month); those who “hardly ever” read it; and those who “never” read it. In contrast, our Googleanalytics online software does show it is of high interest to our readers (the 8th most popular item out of the 1,650 we’ve published in the past 12 months), while the organizations who place the job advertisements have been very grateful for this service – at least that is the tone of their subsequent emails.

10. Further comments or suggestions
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54 Responses

CONCLUSION: We had 54 different responses for this open-ended question. 30 responses, or over half of the total, wanted *iSGTW* to remain much as it is. Four had complaints, about such things as the size of the publication’s email version (“The *iSGTW* emails are WAY too big . . . 3 of them are a Mb. I am considering unsubscribing solely for this reason”). Five were a variation of descriptions on how the reader uses the email version – they seem to treat the email version as a headline service that highlights articles of potential interest, then they go directly to the website to click upon the specific article.

Four responses were requests for more in-depth, technical articles. Two had suggestions, and 6 had no real information (“Please note I am 78 and retired”), other than general positive commentary (“I think you’ve improved the publication in the past year. I know it’s not easy – Keep it up!”). Overall, there were 4 times as many positive responses as negative.

The most strongly negative comment was: “There are commercial Grid magazines. Please do not give them unfair competition with public money. Only concentrate on EGEE and OGS (sic) project news. Do not include job banks.”

However, most commentaries were positive. A few in particular stand out. (Most of these seemed to come from educators):

- “I think the overall job *iSGTW* is doing is wonderful. I have provided a link to undergrads during a talk as an excellent source of info for those interested in HPC and scientific research using HPC.”
- “I teach environmental biology and biology to majors and nonmajors and graduate classes in science methods to K-12 teachers and consider myself in the middle between PIs and the lay public having been involved in several NSF, state, and local funded science education programs. I appreciate what you are doing. It helps me with my service and outreach to others.”
- “I like a lot the articles about women on science/grid/everything :-)”
- “It’s an interesting mix as is; especially impressed by access to archives etc. Some more in depth articles would be a good addition.”

Another common theme seemed to be an appreciation for the diversity of subject matter:

- “Please keep a broad mix of things; while I have my specialties, I like to see what other people are doing too. If there was the occasional story on successes with tech transfer to/from business, that would be great!”
- “You should think of an annual print version if you do not have one already.”
- “I have a huge interest in the LHC, though I am not a scientist at all. I am a perennial student of science and your newsletter covers a great variety of science and culture. I just love it.”

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 were able to correct by revising the email invitation. We also changed the formatting of a few questions, for greater clarity. Such minor improvements may also account for the increase in reader responses. The software is generally 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:

- Our typical subscriber is male, in his 30s or early 40s, and perhaps a bit younger and with interests that are more diverse than previously. He is working in science, and he likes technically oriented material. 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. Googleanalytics tells us that our typical reader is familiar with the publication and its layout (Features, Opinion, Links, Images, Announcements) and after a quick scan of the front page, goes straight to the relevant pages
- *iSGTW* seems to be starting to reach beyond the immediate grid community – our glossary of technical terms seems to be part of the reason, as does giving more background on occasion, and bearing the informational needs of newcomers in mind. At the same time, *iSGTW* must continue to be careful not to water down the editorial product to the point of losing existing readers.
- Although *iSGTW* aims to promote grids for science, we must be careful not to be seen as a PR tool, simply republishing press releases. When we partner with grid organizations on special issues, they need to remember this – and they must understand that in the interest of fair play, *iSGTW* must give equal space to grid organizations that may be their “rivals.” We have a commitment to journalism and a quality standard to uphold if we are to retain our reputation and subscribers.
- Our readers are still a bit wary about social networking, podcasts, direct commenting on an article, or other interactive features. But they did show flexibility previously, when it came to story length and technical level, so the same may be true here.

- As a result of this survey, we will be putting more emphasis upon scientists in general (as opposed to IT professionals), make the site more friendly to newcomers (by reworking the glossary and resources), include more links to explanatory sites such as GridCafe, and make it more visually compelling in the back sections. 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 also report the key findings of the biannual user surveys, in order to inform subscribers about reader preferences, and perhaps encourage greater participation in the next readership survey.