



From the Editor

7,626,291,792,000 Bits and Still Counting: The Microscopy ListServer Turns 21

For more than two decades, Nestor Zaluzec has operated the MicroscopyListServer (ML) and its predecessors from his home. Over these years, thousands of questions about microscopy and microanalysis have been asked; most have been answered by several microscopists from around the world. This important service, co-sponsored by the Microscopy Society of America (MSA), was one of the first scientific listservers.

Prior to 1993, the precursor of the listserver was run as an electronic bulletin board system (BBS) using a 1200 to 9600 baud telephone modem. After two years of operation, Zaluzec found the BBS too slow and hard to manage; he then created the MicroscopyListserver on October 1, 1993. If one counts the BBS startup, the ML can be considered the longest running social media outlet for microscopy in the world. The Confocal listserver, which started in November 1991, postdates the start of Zaluzec's BBS (July 1991) by a few months. One can certainly say that the microscopy community was doing "microscopy-based social media" long before there was a Facebook or the phrase "social media."

Originally, contributions to the ML were received as personal emails to Zaluzec, who maintained the "list of subscribers" and manually processed the daily traffic. Then, as now, there have never been requirements to become a subscriber. No society affiliation is required, and everyone is welcome, including commercial organizations. To subscribe, you simply use the online form at www.microscopy.com. All subscriptions are inspected to avoid phishing attempts to harvest email addresses. The ML subscriber list is protected and released to no one.

The MSA began a co-sponsorship of the ML in 1998. Other entities have offered to buy or co-sponsor the listserver and its website, but Zaluzec has always declined in order to keep this activity non-commercial and independent.

The software to run the ML was written, debugged, and is now maintained personally by Zaluzec. Each day he checks the system, which has been out of service only a few times in 21 years. The longest outage was 4 days when the fiber optic line near his house was cut by a construction crew.

Individuals subscribe and unsubscribe continuously. A typical current number of subscribers is 4,000; whereas, the total number of subscribers to date is over 10,000. Since the year 2000 there have been 578,000 downloads and over 100,100 searches of the archives—from over 63 countries. Interestingly, 7,626,291,792,000 is approximately the number of bits of information sent out to subscribers from October 1993 to August 2014; this represents over 500 million email messages transmitted by the ML.

In each issue of this magazine, a selected group of ML entries is edited by Thomas E. Phillips for our NetNotes department. My thanks to Nestor Zaluzec for supplying data for this editorial.

Charles Lyman
Editor-in-Chief

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