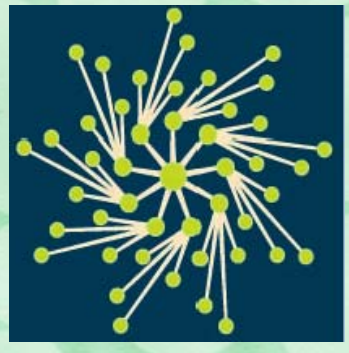
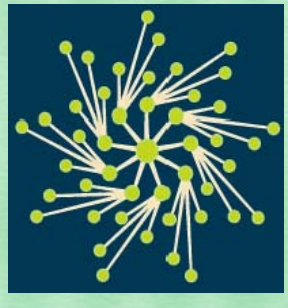


Creating Communities on the Internet

Presentation by the
Bahá'í Internet Agency

Bahá'í Internet Agency



- Created in the 2004 by the Universal House of Justice to support the International Teaching Centre with its Internet related work.
- A principal goal: To encourage the creation of high quality Bahá'í content on the Internet.

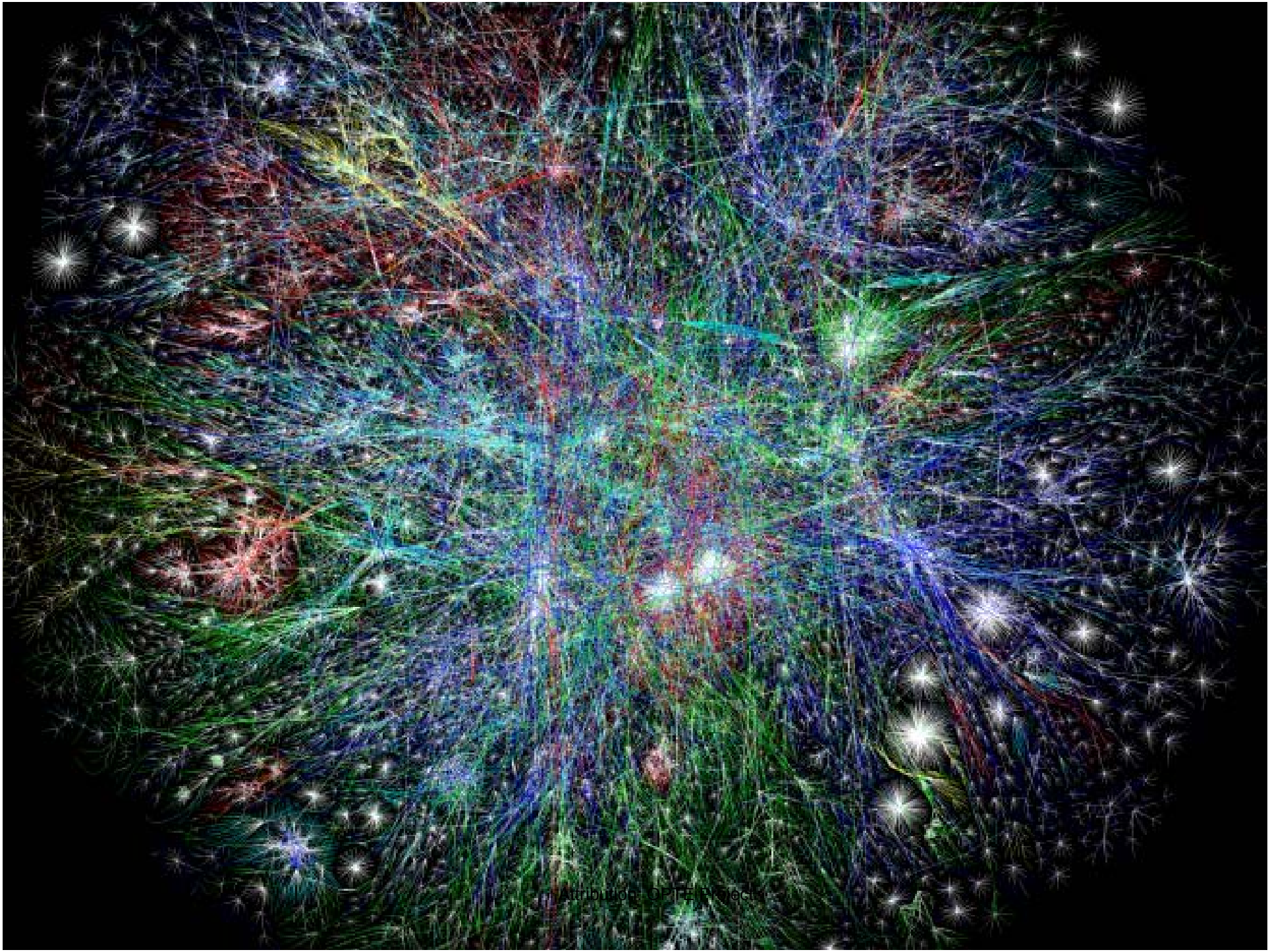
"The presentation of the Faith on the Internet, and through other media will undoubtedly prove an important area of experience and learning in advancing the process of entry by troops…"

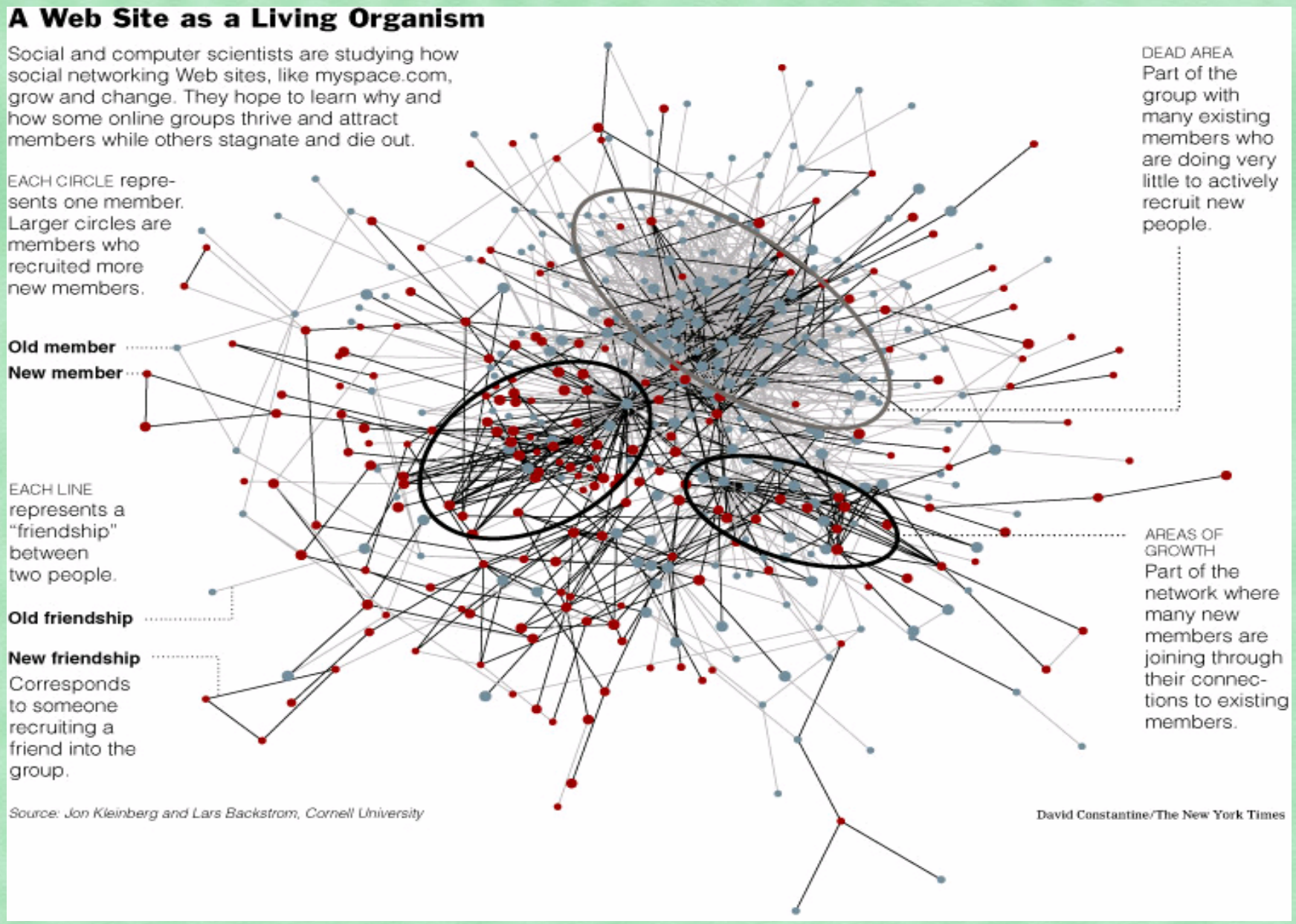
International Teaching Centre, 12 July 2006

The Internet in Context

"The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind."

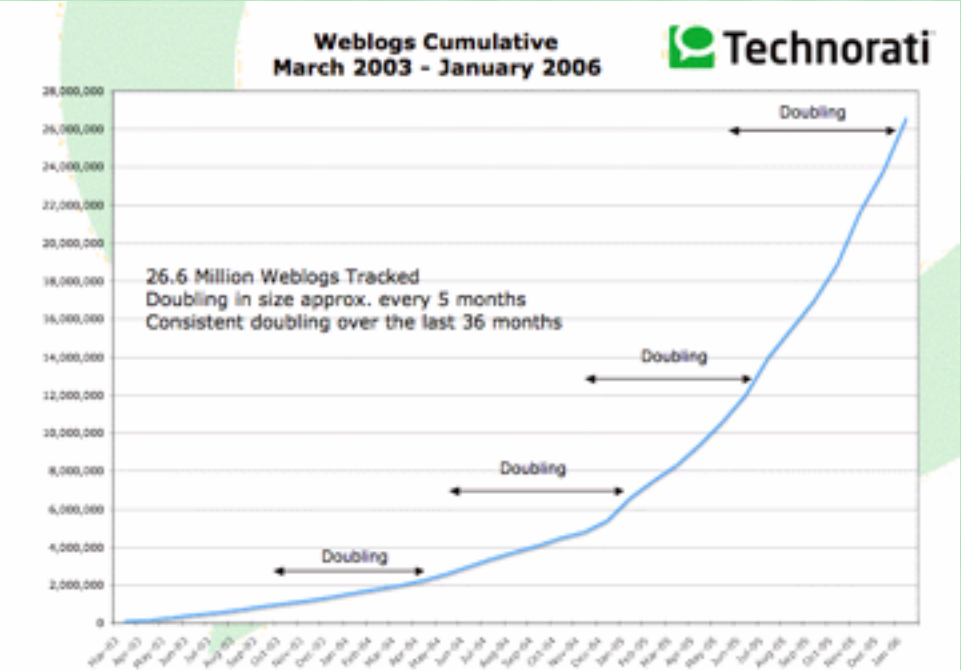
From the Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 1983


Attribution: OPTE Project


A Web Site as a Living Organism
Social and computer scientists are studying how social networking Web sites, like myspace.com, grow and change. They hope to learn why and how some online groups thrive and attract members while others stagnate and die out.
EACH CIRCLE represents one member. Larger circles are members who recruited more new members.
Old member
New member
EACH LINE represents a "friendship" between two people.
Old friendship
New friendship
Corresponds to someone recruiting a friend into the group.
DEAD AREA
Part of the group with many existing members who are doing very little to actively recruit new people.
AREAS OF GROWTH
Part of the network where many new members are joining through their connections to existing members.
Source: Jon Kleinberg and Lars Backstrom, Cornell University
David Constantine/The New York Times

The Search for Community

- Web sites present information; weblogs (blogs) create communities.
- People are searching for a sense of community that is missing in their daily lives.



Doubling Rate of Blogs

The Bahá'í Blogosphere

- A few hundred Bahá'í blogs with a couple dozen active ones. (This is a normal ratio for blogs.)
- Most Bahá'í blogs represent personal experience with a significant number others focused on teaching and Youth Year of Service.
- Primary language: English
- Location: International
- Most bloggers are youth

Internet Communities

- People want to be involved
- Feedback and dialogue are highly valued
- Participation can take many technical forms. Blogs are the most obvious, but some regions of the world find participation via cell phone SMS messaging or through Internet chat rooms.
- The degree of participation varies according to context.
- Virtual communities have cultures.

Internet Culture

- Treat participation in an online community as pioneering to another country.
- Look for opportunities to serve your audience.
- Remember there are real people on the other side of the connection and apply Bahá'í principles accordingly.
- Perfection is impossible. Sincerity of purpose almost always comes through and people are forgiving of mistakes made by people with good motives.

Building on Bahá'í Principles

Some Principles to Consider

- Trustworthiness
- Unity in Diversity
- Oneness of Humanity
- Equality of Women and Men
- Principle of Consultation
- Service to Humanity
- Independent Search for Truth
- Harmony of Science and Religion
- Non-involvement in Partisan Politics

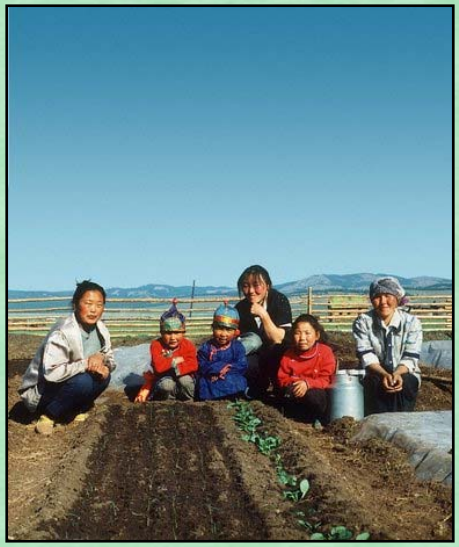
Some Possible Blogs Types

- Community events blog
- Topical blog – a topic with which you have expertise or interest
- Interview blog/podcast
- Public talks/events/performances podcast or video podcast
- Audio books podcast
- Selected readings or prayers podcasts
- Online course
- Music podcast. Interview musicians and play some of their music. Make sure to get permission to use their music.
- Personal blog. A personal blog from a Youth Year of Service individual may be inspiring to other youth.

Possible SED Blogs Types

- Update staff and participants
- In-service training
- Community relations
- Donor relations
- Enhance the image of the Faith by presenting to the public information about your activities.
- Chronological presentation of a project's activities

Extending the Internet



- Cell Phones
- Email
- Send a CD-ROM or floppy disk
- Voice recordings over the telephone
- Send a letter and photos to someone with an Internet connection

Preparation

- Are you able to maintain interest in the project?
- Who are the people you expect to come to site?
- Why will they come and why should they keep coming back?
- Which features are most valuable to your visitors?

Promotion

- Word of mouth
- Newsletters and other forms of Bahá'í communications
- List your site on Google
- Setup an account on Technorati and list your blog
- Visit similar sites and leave postings

Feedback

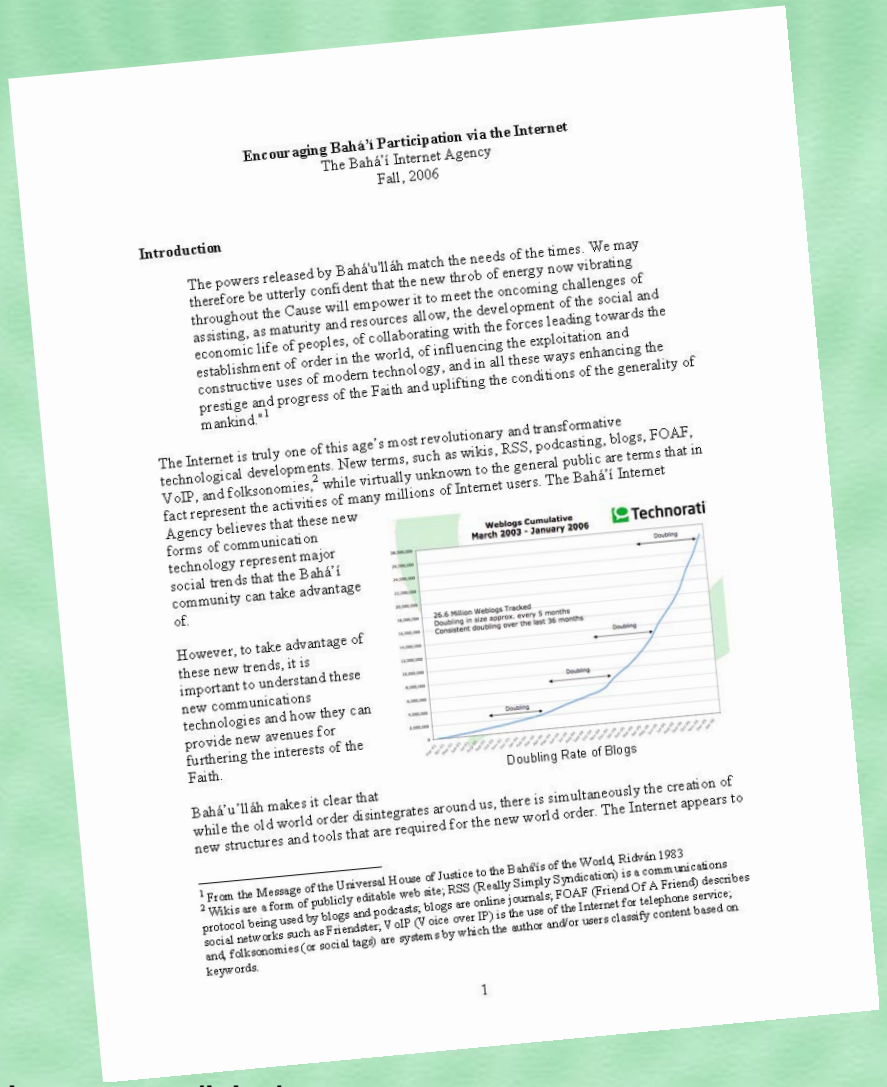
- Ask a diverse group to review your site before launching.
- Provide mechanisms for visitors to communicate with you and with other visitors.
- Be careful of spam and inappropriate comments.

Sources of Help

- Your local and national institutions
- The Bahá'í Internet Agency
- The Bahá'í Computer and Communications Association (BCCA).
- Technically-oriented Bahá'ís
- Youth
- People already doing it

Resource Documents

- Encouraging Bahá'í Participation on the Internet
- Guidance for Blogging & for Podcasting
- Search Engine Optimization Basics
- Guidance for Online Behavior



Encouraging Bahá'í Participation via the Internet
The Bahá'í Internet Agency
Fall, 2006

Introduction

The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind."[1]

The Internet is truly one of this age's most revolutionary and transformative technological developments. New terms, such as wikis, RSS, podcasting, blogs, FOAF, VoIP, and folksonomies,[2] while virtually unknown to the general public are terms that in fact represent the activities of many millions of Internet users. The Bahá'í Internet Agency believes that these new forms of communication technology represent major social trends that the Bahá'í community can take advantage of.

Doubling Rate of Blogs

However, to take advantage of these new trends, it is important to understand these new communications technologies and how they can provide new avenues for furthering the interests of the Faith.

Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that while the old world order disintegrates around us, there is simultaneously the creation of new structures and tools that are required for the new world order. The Internet appears to

[1] From the Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 1983
[2] Wikis are a form of publicly editable web site; RSS (Really Simply Syndication) is a communications protocol being used by blogs and podcasts; blogs are online journals; FOAF (Friend Of A Friend) describes social networks such as Friendster; VoIP (Voice over IP) is the use of the Internet for telephone service; and, folksonomies (or social tags) are systems by which the author and/or users classify content based on keywords.

1

http://www.bcca.org/bia/

Further Help

- Bahá'í Internet Agency: info@bia.bahai.org
- BCCA: bcca-cc@bcca.org
- Thane Terrill: thane@bia.bahai.org
- And, of course now…