

GISB Internet Discussion Groups

Background:

In the spring of 1996 when the Future Technology Task Force (FTTF) was charged with producing a large volume of technical specifications in a short amount of time, the group proposed the adoption of an electronic facility for conducting running discussions online. This would take the form of a bulletin board similar to Internet “newsgroups” where interested parties post comments and questions related to a discussion topic. All of the comments related to any specific topic are linked together in order as a conversation “thread.”

The need for a discussion group was added to the 1997 Action Plan, assigned to the Executive Director and GISB staff, and recommended by the Executive Committee to the Board of Directors, who approved the plan in December 1996.

The task force worked directly with GISB’s Internet Service Provider, Neosoft, to develop and assess options for implementing these discussion groups in conjunction with the GISB web site. In addition, FTTF researched other providers to find discussion group services that could be directly linked from the home page. The group narrowed the choices down to three: Delphi Custom Forums, a Neosoft implementation of AltaVista forums, and a Neosoft private newsgroup.

Action Plan:

The FTTF determined to initiate a trial of Delphi Custom Forums in conference with the Executive Director. This forum will be easy to set up and administer and furnishes only the necessary features, at a very small cost. The forum can be easily linked from the home page. An optional feature will allow GISB to divide the forum into up to 16 topic areas that can be managed separately and can be used to categorize discussions by task force or by GISB project.

The GISB office will set up and administer the forum, FTTF has volunteered to test the facility and report back to the Executive Director and make available a white paper on usability and value. The legal aspects of implementation and use were reviewed by GISB General Counsel.

Feature Summary:

Message Board - a powerful electronic message area that can be divided into sub-topics to organize message threads and allow controlled access to information. Up to 250 messages may be kept in the database at any one time. Additional messages may be purchased in increments of 500.

Banners - A special announcement space on the Message Board can be used to highlight or announce important news and upcoming events. Banners can be used to remind participants of regularly scheduled chats or meeting times, or point members to message "threads" of significant interest. Web-based banners can include text, as well as incorporate custom graphics and link to any site on the Web.

Access Control - the ability to regulate who can participate in your forum. It may be open to the entire Web public, or only to individuals identified by the forum administrator. The starter plan is open to up to 12 participants, with additional "slots" available for purchase in increments of 10 and 100. (Any Delphi Internet member also may be allowed to participate, at the organization's discretion, without counting against the slot allotment.)

Optional Features:

Chat Room - an interactive feature enabling real-time online discussions between two or more members at any time. Chat may be used on an ongoing basis, as well as a meeting place for scheduled events.

Topics - categories that allow organization of the Message Board and optional Web Site to the needs of the group, into up to 16 topic areas. Access may vary depending on the topic. For example, a business Custom Forum may have a "manager's only" topic that allows only selected individuals to see certain proprietary messages or web pages; other topics may be set aside for other classes of employees or vendors, while remaining topics may be open to the entire Web public.

Web Site - up to 10 megabytes of web space whose pages may be accessed according to the same topic and access-control features as described above.

Vanity Tag - Under the starter plan, the Custom Forum URL will be <http://www.customforum.com/customxxx>, where xxx is a number assigned by Delphi. A Vanity Tag allows personalization of the URL to <http://www.customforum.com/name>, where "name" is a unique alpha-numeric name up to 15 characters long.

Tailored Features - For large commercial web sites desiring a special look and feel, Delphi can incorporate custom graphics, logos, background colors and images into the Message Board and Chat Room; integrate multiple forums; and accommodate large volumes of users.

Participation:

The FTTF and the GISB office welcomes any individual to participate in these task force efforts, which were requested by the Executive Director.

Administration:

Users self-register when they first connect. GISB office can control process for gaining access and can clear inactive registration slots. Postings can be monitored.

Scope of Test:

The pilot test will use the forum in the course of normal task force activities for the purposes described in the proposal. At the close of the test (date to be determined by task force), the FTTF will prepare a progress report of its experience and recommendations on the following issues:

- Usability and benefit
- Security
- Registration process
- Administration
- Customization of features including required personal information for participants
- Antitrust
- Spam control
- Archival and retention of information

Once the test is completed, the FTTF will draft procedures for use of discussion groups based on the test results. These procedures will be forwarded to the Process Subcommittee for its consideration.

Welcome and Disclaimer Page for Forum:*

Welcome to the Gas Industry Standards Board's Discussion Groups

Thank you for participating in the discussion groups! This forum is provided to facilitate open discussion of topics relating to GISB standards and task force activities. Please note the *Expectations of Service* and *Rules of Conduct* prior to entering this forum.

Expectations of Service

- **GISB's Role:** *The Gas industry Standards Board does not offer any formal support in the public discussion groups.* Instead, GISB sponsors these discussion groups as a platform for open discussion of topics relating to GISB standards and task force activities. Opinions expressed in this forum are those of their respective authors and in no way represent the opinion of the Gas Industry Standards Board. The official source for information on GISB standards, including clarification of the standards is to be found on the GISB World-Wide Web site (<http://www.gisb.org>).

Rules of Conduct

- **Antitrust:** Antitrust guidelines direct forum participants to avoid discussing topics or engaging in behavior of an anti-competitive nature including: restraint of trade and conspiracies to monopolize, unfair or deceptive business acts or practices, price discriminations, division of markets, allocation of production, imposition of boycotts, and exclusive dealing arrangements.
- **Appropriate Language:** The purpose of the forum is to exchange, using appropriate language, technical information and experience with GISB standards and implementation issues.
- **Message Topics:** Please keep the substance of messages relevant to the discussion group topic.
- **Advertising/Solicitation:** The forum is for peer-to-peer discussion on GISB-related topics and for information sharing. Participants are asked to refrain from posting advertisements or engaging in solicitations.

* Reviewed and approved by GISB General Counsel