

# The Internet and How it Can Help You

*Presenter:* Les Stewart  
*Session Secretary:* Peter Hyde

This session took the form of a practical demonstration of the Internet with visits to several sites of tramway and railway interest.

Before the actual demonstration, several issues were raised. The first of these asked what was the relevance of late twentieth-century technology to groups preserving early to mid twentieth-century technology. The obvious answer was that of Marketing. The Internet is a potent distribution channel to a vast marketplace. The origin of the Internet was as a mechanism for exchange of informative primarily amongst scientists. In its current developed form, it could be a useful tool in promoting actual museums as places to be visited (physically), and in publicising the souvenirs and publications that we sell.

The final idea offered to the meeting before the actual demonstration was—what should COTMA be doing?

The demonstration included examples of highly professional sites, as well as others showing poor presentation and incorrect information.

The Ballarat Tramway Museum home page was offered as an example of a “good” entry. It included:

- membership application
- sales information
- opening hours
- location.

A feature was the “Guest Book” where site visitors were invited to record their visit. “Thank you” e-mail is then sent to each recorded visitor, and the details can be used as the basis of a mailing list for e-mail in the future.

The Puffing Billy site was an extremely well developed one with museum descriptions, photographs, timetables, etc.

As an example of an organisation similar to COTMA operating a home page, the Association of Independent Railway Museums Society in UK was shown. This home page linked to subsequent entries for individual organisations.

There is danger that unless COTMA or individual museums do not establish an “official” Home Page(s), individual people may do so and provide information which is not correct or appropriate for museums concerned.

Discussion centred on cost and practicalities. By way of example, Les quoted the \$NZ50 per annum for maintaining the home page of NZRF. However the more pages, the cheaper the unit cost.

The development costs were not quantified. These can be done individually or prepared by external agencies with costs determined by the product and the market.

There is a risk in using cheaper smaller agencies, that they may not have long-term sustainability and the example was given of the Launceston Tramway Museum whose provider ceased to operate.

There seemed to be a "feeling" that COTMA should become active in this arena but no definite propositions emerged, other than to suggest that the subject be brought up at the Annual General Meeting.