



TECHNICAL COLUMNS

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By **Ron Hranac**, former *Senior Technology Editor*, *Access Intelligence* and *Communications Technology Magazine*

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ONLINE RESOURCES

By RON HRANAC

Ours is an information society, and cable is right smack in the middle of it. When it comes to tracking down information, the online world has become as valuable as the proverbial library bookshelf. This month, I'd like to share some of the online resources that I've found useful. This list is by no means intended to be comprehensive, and you likely have your own favorites. If you'd like to share some of them, drop me a note at rhrnac@aol.com. Here, in no particular order, are a few of my picks.

Links and other good stuff

Cable <http://cable.doit.wisc.edu/>

You won't find fancy Web graphics here, but Dave Devereaux-Weber's Cable site includes a collection of links, along with some otherwise hard-to-find downloadable documents.

Cable facts and figures

NCTA www.ncta.com

Every now and then, I'm asked to do a cable industry overview presentation. One place I refer to for current industry stats is the National Cable & Telecommunications Association Web site. On the left side of the home page, click "Industry Overview" then "Statistics & Resources."

Industry history

The Cable Center www.cablecenter.org

Curious about cable's history? The Cable Center has a decade-by-decade industry timeline on its site. At the top of the home page, click "Cable History," and on the page that pops up, click "Timeline." Choose the decade of interest or peruse from 1940 on.

Cable modem/DOCSIS

CableLabs www.cablemodem.com

CableLabs' Web site for Data Over Cable Service Interface Specification (DOCSIS) includes the full specs for DOCSIS 1.0, 1.1 and 2.0. Go to www.cablemodem.com/specifications/ and choose the appropriate version of DOCSIS.

Most of the time, I'm interested in assumed downstream and upstream RF channel transmission characteristics—carrier-to-noise (C/N), group delay and so forth—which are summarized in the DOCSIS Radio Frequency Interface Specification. After you click on the desired DOCSIS version, scroll down and click "Radio Frequency Interface Specification." Keep in mind that these are large documents, so a high-speed connection is recommended.



If you'd like to find out what cable modem termination systems (CMTSs) or cable modems are qualified and certified respectively, from www.cablemodem.com, click "Certification & Qualification Testing" followed by "CableLabs certified/qualified information." Choose HTML or PDF format for the spreadsheet.

SCTE-List, standards and InfoScope

SCTE www.scte.org

One of the most valuable cable-related online resources is SCTE-List, an Internet e-mail reflector. Here you can e-mail a question or problem to the List and get a quick reply—often in minutes. More than 1,500 industry professionals around the world subscribe to SCTE-List, and it's a free service. All you need is a valid e-mail address. For more information, start at the Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers' home page, click "Contacts," "Email Discussion Groups," "SCTE-List Technical Topics."

Did you know that SCTE's standards program is accredited by the American National Standards Institute? The Society maintains a comprehensive list of available standards on its Web site, and approved standards are available electronically for no charge. Go to SCTE's Web site at www.scte.org and click on "Standards" near the top of the page. On the left side of the page that pops up, click "Standards Available," scroll down, and choose the standard you're looking for.

SCTE has a nifty members-only online resource called InfoScope. To get to InfoScope, start on SCTE's home page by clicking "Member Login." After logging in, click "Information" at the top of the page, and then click where it says "Click here for Instant Access to InfoScope." That will take you to a ton of links and useful information.

Rules and regulations

FCC www.fcc.gov

U.S. cable operators are governed by Part 76 of the Federal Communications Commission's rules. The Engineering Division of the FCC's Media Bureau maintains a summary of the technical regulations at www.fcc.gov/mb/engineering/. If you'd like access to everything in Part 76, go to www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_03/47cfr76_03.html.

Other FCC rules of interest to cable operators are available at the following sites:

Technical notes

Times Fiber Communications www.timesfiber.com

For a number of years, the folks at Times Fiber have had a collection of very informative technical notes in their product catalog. This material is available online in the company's coaxial cable catalog and can be accessed either in the full catalog (www.timesfiber.com/pdfs/TFC_Cable_Book_III.pdf) or in the individual PDF specification sheets section (www.timesfiber.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/tech.specSheets/index.cfm).

Reading material

Communications Technology www.ct-magazine.com

OK, I'll admit that this is a little self-serving from the perspective of plugging the magazine you're reading right now, but I really do find myself digging through the publisher's online archives fairly often. The good news is that all articles published from January 1999 to present are available. The bad news is that articles older than that are, unfortunately, not available electronically.

Smile, you're on Candid Camera

Kramer.Firm www.cabletv.com

Jonathan Kramer and staff have amassed quite a collection of photographs from system visits. www.cabletv.com/pictures/ will take you to the company's photo gallery. Here you'll find examples of how not to do it. Lots of them. Some are pretty funny; others will have you shaking your head. Let's hope your system is not among those showcased in the site's pictures.

Technology, measurement and standards

NIST www.nist.gov

One could easily spend the better part of a day surfing the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Web site. Curious about the International System of Units (SI)? Ever wonder what a yotta is? Or maybe why kHz has a lower case first letter and MHz is upper case? The answers are at <http://physics.nist.gov/cuu/Units/prefixes.html>. Next time someone asks you what the speed of light is, find the answer by heading to <http://physics.nist.gov/cuu/Constants/index.html>, clicking on "Frequently used constants" then "speed of light in vacuum." If you just want to know what time it is—to within a fraction of a second—go to NIST's home page (www.nist.gov) and click "Check NIST time."

Ron Hranac is technical leader, HFC Network Architectures, for Cisco Systems, and former senior technology editor for *Communications Technology*. Reach him at rhrnac@aol.com.