KEYNOTE
MREN/CIC CONFERENCE ON DIGITAL VIDEO
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THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL VIDEO LEADERSHIP
M. A. Rahimi
Northwestern University

Ten years ago, I was chairman of the Board of Merit the entity that has been providing a packet-based network to Michigan universities for over thirty years. There was one item that appeared on the agenda every time we met – placed there by Michigan State -- provision of video services on the Merit Network. The reason for the item was that Merit had just finished the design of NSFNet and had begun to operate it with a DS-3 backbone. Transfer of video was feasible but there were many issue beyond, as it turned out, the technical capabilities of the time.

Ten years later, many of those issues have been resolved. We do share MREN a high-speed network, well-established video protocols exist, highly capable software to store and forward video is available, exciting hardware and software for creation and manipulation of video is universally available, and relatively inexpensive and powerful servers for storage and presentation of video are in place. So, for example, at Northwestern, we do provide video-on-demand to half-a-dozen courses as a matter of daily business.

The leadership in digital video that we collectively enjoy provides us with many challenges:

- The systems that we are using are evolving, while we are providing production level services. The recent maturity of these systems will mean that we need to cater to pent-up demand from our technology leaders who have been waiting to explore the new possibilities.
- The new technology is more than just video. It integrates video with all other digital technologies. The experiences we have gained in deployment of video are not completely relevant. We need to invent a new field.
- The technology enables our students and faculty members to become producers, directors and distributors of video-based programs. The management, support and resource requirements are new challenges that we must face.
- As our students are exposed to high quality digital video (or to be exact the new media), we need to meet their expectations in our teaching and research activities.

There are other challenges:

- Our universities' management structures are not designed to deal with the new media. We have broadcast, continuing education, audiovisual, etc. scattered around our campuses. We need to bring together the much-needed expertise that we already do have to focus their efforts on the future challenges.
- Finally, potential national policy changes could affect pricing and control of network resources that we use and could make the present success not scalable.

The good news is that we have the potential to dramatically change the core business of our universities. Our presidents and provosts recognize this. The other good news is that, to face these challenges, we have each other. The combination of experts from our universities and several important technology corporations gathered here should give us the necessary capabilities to meet these challenges.

I hope you will build on the friendships and the collaborations among you, while you are here. I hope you will continue your work and collaboration beyond the conference. I know Larry Amiot will continue to push us all to keep our leadership and meet the challenges that we face.
Have a great meeting, enjoy your stay in Evanston, and have a safe trip home.