Changing ACM Computer Communication Review (1988-1991)

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ABSTRACT

A brief description of how SIGCOMM's quarterly newsletter evolved into an entry-level journal.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **General and reference → Surveys and overviews**;

KEYWORDS

History, ACM SIGCOMM

ACM Computer Communication Review (CCR) first appeared in 1969. ACM no longer has the first issue. My recollection from seeing a copy in the CCR editor's archives is that it was four stapled pages, without a cover. The second issue in March 1970 had an industrial green paperboard cover and contained an editorial from the SIG chair, some conference announcements, and a single article.

Not much changed for the next eighteen years. When the CCR editor, John Burruss, invited me to become his replacement in the summer of 1988, CCR still had the industrial green cover and typically had a chair's editorial, some calls for papers, and a couple of papers. Quarterly issues were often combined due to lack of material. It was a newsletter

As he transitioned CCR to me, John made clear that he and the new SIGCOMM chair, Vint Cerf, thought there was room to make CCR a better newsletter. John commented I was "energetic and naïve enough" to make it happen. I then talked with Vint. He outlined plans to make SIGCOMM a more vigorous professional society during his tenure and encouraged my thoughts about remaking CCR. Vint dubbed my thoughts as a plan to make CCR into "an entry-level journal" and encouraged me. Duly charged, I went off to try to make it happen.

I dug into the editorial archives (as I recall they were the better part of a file cabinet) and found a old letter from ACM Headquarters suggesting that perhaps SIGCOMM would like to upgrade its newsletter cover and providing samples of color covers on glossy cover stock. I confirmed with ACM that the change was possible, grabbed the example cover in red, and took it to the ACM SIGCOMM '88 conference where I announced the cover change as a symbol of the new CCR.

I came home from the conference to confront reality. The editorial queue was empty. Frantic, I buttonholed colleagues for interesting tech reports and presentations they'd seen recently and then wrote to the authors asking to publish their work. Edward Witzke and Sherry Frese contributed an article on adjacency matrices and network analysis[7]. Tassos Nakassis contributed a tech report on checksums[5]. To this I added an essay on the status of OSI standards from Lyman Chapin[2] and a reprint of an OSI report. This assemblage produced a credible first issue of the new CCR with its new cover. Both the Witzke/Frese and Nakassis paper would be cited by later works. People noticed the content had gone up a notch.

The January 1989 issue was even stronger, with Eugene Spafford's analysis of the Internet worm[6], an experimental routing protocol described by Dave Mills[4], a paper on frame relay by Wai Sum Lai[3], and a description of a tool used to design the Internet MIB by Jeff Case and me[1]. The new CCR was off and running.

Yet CCR also needed help. I used two-thirds of the annual page budget on the January 1989 issue. The new cover, while an improvement, was still pretty drab.

The help came from Vint. Vint told me to keep going and ignore rumblings from ACM about the page budget. Furthermore, when Vint got word from others that they thought the cover drab (I'd been too worried about costs to mention it), he called me and volunteered that (a) CCR needed a professional cover; and (b) he'd make it happen. In the July 1989 issue, the new cover appeared and it remained CCR's cover format until it became an online journal.

The change was dramatic. A few numbers make the point best. In 1987, the last full year before I became CCR editor, CCR (independent of the annual SIGCOMM conference issue) published 194 pages and, as of May 2019, the articles in those pages have been cited 11 times. In 1989, my first full year as editor, CCR published 534 pages and the articles in those pages have been cited 305 times. CCR had evolved into Vint's entry-level journal.

What made this swift evolution possible? Networking was rapidly growing as a field and there was a need for more places to publish good work. In the mid 1980s, only a few universities had professors specializing in networking. By the mid-1990s, it was the rare university who lacked such a professor. CCR hit the wave. I would also like to think some hard work on my part to make CCR look good and to attract and select good papers (I was the entire editorial and reviewing team) helped. Finally, and perhaps most important, were Vint's efforts to improve ACM SIGCOMM in all dimensions. CCR was part of much larger evolution of SIGCOMM that Vint drove. He made the annual conference better by pushing for better papers, for more discerning program committees and a greater international presence. He created the SIGCOMM Award. And he gently nudged me to keep making CCR better. He'd email after most CCR issues with comments about where he thought it was improving and where additional improvement could come. He encouraged me to experiment. And, as noted earlier, he took problems like page counts and cover design off my desk and put them on his desk.

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