

ICAI - A Virtual Institute

Virtual Institute Project ties together the operations of all the Decentralized Offices of the Institute with Head Office (HO). It has provided a facility for seamless flow of Information among all the offices and branches of the Institute. The systems turns into a unified centralized system that addresses the consolidation issues being currently faced by the Institute related to members and students records. The Institute has created an All India database of Members and Students and put enterprise software in place for efficient operations. To start with all the decentralized offices of the Institute have been migrated on to the new platform in the end of December 2004. The concept further gets extended to all branches as well. The solution is similar to a Core Banking Solution, which most of the banks these days are migrating to.

THE SYSTEM PROPOSES TO:

- Bring all operational functions of the institute, onto a common Intranet.
- Provide an online channel to the Students, Members, and Firms and provide services of the Institute at the doorsteps of Students and Members.
- Provide an online platform for the regulatory councils and committees of the institute to share information and manage their meetings.

Very shortly, the 2nd phase covering Internet Modules that enable services of the Institute at the doorsteps of Students and Members will be implemented.

The project is first of its kind in the Indian Academic world. As a part of the project, the Institute has established Infrastructure in terms of Data Centres (Main & Disaster Recovery sites both Level 3 standards), Server Farm with High Availability Cluster (SUN Cluster with Oracle Real Application Cluster-RAC), Corporate Network for ICAI (VPN), and an enterprise e-mail system. Virtual Institute is hosted over the infrastructure under reference. The system has Payment Gateway/ Electronic Clearing System (ECS) interfaces for online/ mandated payments. OCR/ ICR interface for mass data handling, electronic filing interface to enable implementation of paperless office concepts, smart card interface for capturing attendance of members for compulsory professional education programmes are under implementation. **ICAI is the 1st Institution to acquire a digital certificate issuing capability as a sub-certifying authority.** The PKI interface will enable electronic filing and digital signing with Virtual Institute.

Virtual Institute is expected to bring a paradigm shift in the functioning of the Institute by way of providing right information to right person at right time using concepts such as Home Institute, Anywhere/ Anytime Institute with 7 X 24 X 365 services, which are similar in nature to Home Banking concepts.

Website Redesign:

The Institute website was first launched in 1997. Since then, one major structural change had been made.

Several factors indicated that a significant redesign was needed.

- The site has seen a growth in content (from half-a-dozen pages to over four hundred)
- Some material was no longer relevant and needed to be retired or demoted
- The busiest part of the site (usability materials and resources) was relatively 'buried'
- There was so much information in the busiest area of the site that it was necessary to scroll the equivalent of two pages just to read the secondary navigational elements
- Because plain HTML was used, many pages had to be updated whenever a new page was added. This was laborious and error-prone
- The activities of Institute had grown significantly since the site's inception, and there was a requirement for the site to be more effective as a vehicle for the profession, while continuing to be a resource for the usability community.

The process we followed is not the only way to undertake such a redesign. For example, it is perfectly feasible to conduct a redesign without consultation and without usability testing. However, following a structured approach improves the probability that the new version will serve the requirements of the profession and the needs of the users.

Analysis consists of gaining a sufficient understanding of:

- Requirements of the profession
- User needs
- Constraints (such as platform, budget and time)
- Current content.

Because of the nature of our relationship with our members and students, we had a large amount of information to be effectively disseminated to existing users of the site. Clearly, it would be important for us to continue to maintain those resources. We had conflicting feedback on the visual aspect of the design. Some users strongly supported the simple nature of the site design, while others commented that it was 'bland', 'heavy' or lacking colour.

It is important when conducting a redesign to ensure that all current content is identified, and an appropriate action is taken for each piece of content. This is a tedious job, but one which, if neglected, can cause much difficulty in terms of problems with the redesigned site.

Once sufficient analysis and information gathering has been conducted, it is appropriate to move into a stage of active design. The usual process is to use personas (user profiles), scenarios and specified requirements to conduct one or more participatory design workshops.

Considering the above, we retained the original vision for our site, while improving its operation and appearance, and meeting most of our original goals. We conducted further usability testing to validate the changes made. However, given that we were satisfied with the results of the testing, and have made minor changes to address the requirements, we had a degree of confidence that the new site represents an improvement, from a usability perspective,

on the previous version.

The cost of conducting the usability activities described above were minimal, resulted in useful changes to the site, and provided a degree of confidence that our new design has improved the speed of accessing the site.

Further changes are on the way to achieve active design described above. The site would ultimately get changed to an interactive portal with authentication coming from the All India Member and Student database of the Institute ultimately providing online services to Students and Members at their doorsteps.

ICAI's Digital Certification Centre:

Electronic Furnishing of Return of Income Scheme, 2004

Introduction - Income Tax Department has launched the Electronic Furnishing of Return of Income Scheme, 2004 vide **Notification dated 30.9.2004**. Under this scheme, eligible assesseees can file their returns of income electronically through persons authorised to act as e-return intermediaries. The intermediaries will digitise the data of such returns and transmit the same electronically to the e-filing server of Income Tax Department under their digital signatures.

Eligible assesseees - Any person, except an Association of Persons/Body of Individuals, who has been allotted a permanent account number (PAN) and who is assessed or is assessable to tax in any of the sixty cities, which are presently on Income Tax network (Refer schedule A of the notification), would be eligible to file his

return of income under this scheme. The returns of income required to be filed u/s 139(1) of the Income Tax Act for the assessment year 2004-2005 onwards can be filed under this scheme at the option of the assessee.

Persons eligible for appointment as e-Intermediaries -

Following categories of person can apply to become e-intermediaries provided they fulfill the eligibility criteria laid down in the Scheme, and have set up computer hardware and software as prescribed in Schedule B of the Scheme.

- A registered company / statutory body as an employer
- A firm of Chartered Accountants
- A firm of Advocates
- A Chartered Accountant
- An Advocate
- A registered company / bank providing financial services

Registration of e-intermediary -

A person eligible to be appointed as e-intermediary will have to apply to the Registrar appointed by CBDT for this purpose. M/s National Securities Depository Ltd. (NSDL) has been appointed as 'Registrar' vide CBDT Order **F.No.225/109/2004-ITA-II dated 27th October, 2004**. The applicant shall have to make an on-line application through web-based facility available on **www.tin-nsdl.com**. The on-line application shall be signed digitally by either a class II or class III digital certificate. It will have to be followed by sending paper documents of proof of fulfillment of eligibility criteria, a due diligence certificate certifying that the applicant has set up the prescribed hardware & software, application processing fee and

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refundable security deposit payable to the Registrar, as under to the Registrar :-

**Security deposit will be refunded if the application is rejected or if a registered e-Return Intermediary surrenders its registration or allows the registration to lapse. # Service Tax will be applicable (at present it is 10.2%).*

Detailed Procedure for application is available at www.tin-nsdl.com

The Registrar will verify that the application is complete and all the necessary documents certifying the eligibility conditions have been submitted. The registrar will verify Contents of the **registration application Form** and the **Due Diligence Certificate**. Due Diligence Certificates can be issued either by a System Auditor certified by the Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA) or an Authorised Information Systems Auditor (ISA) of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India.

On successful submission of the application, a temporary user ID and password along with the URL for the data transmission test will be communicated to the applicant by the Registrar by e-mail. On receipt of these details the applicant shall log on to the Server of Income Tax Department for passing the data transmission tests before he is authorized to act as e-Intermediary and allotted his E-Return Intermediary Identification Number (ERIIN). The data transmission tests would be carried out on-line to ensure that the applicant has necessary technical skills to transmit data to Income Tax Department Server in safe/secure mode and as per prescribed data structure. These would be on-line and necessary guidelines

for taking the same would be available on the Department's website. After successfully completing the data transmission tests, an appointment order will be issued by Director General of Income-tax (Systems) in his capacity as the e-filing administrator, containing E-Return Intermediary Identification Number (ERIIN) and password valid for two years. These are defined **Role and responsibilities of e-return intermediary**.

Filing of Return of Income under the e-filing scheme -

An eligible person opting to file his return of income under this Scheme shall approach and give his consent to any one of the e-intermediaries to act as his agent for the purpose of furnishing his e-return for the relevant assessment year. The intermediary shall receive the paper return of income, along with all its enclosures, duly verified by the assessee or shall prepare the return of income on the basis of the documents furnished by the assessee, as the case may be. He will then transmit the data of return in the prescribed data structure under his digital signature at <http://incometaxindiaefiling.gov.in> to Income Tax Department. On successful validation of data structure and PAN, the Department will issue on-line acknowledgement of the return. The e-intermediary will have to submit signed paper return to the Assessing Officer affixing a print out of on-line acknowledgement within 15 days. The date of

on-line acknowledgement will be deemed to be the date of filing of the return provided the paper copy is submitted within 15 days. In case the PAN of the assessee is not in the jurisdiction of the Assessing Officer before whom the e-return is being filed, it will be necessary to first get the jurisdiction transferred before filing the e-return under this Scheme before the new Assessing Officer.

Particulars	Amount (Rs.)
Interest Free Security Deposit (Refundable)*	25,000
Application Processing Fee (Non-Refundable)#	2,000
Correction/Updation Processing Fee (Non-Refundable)#	500
Renewal Fee (Non-Refundable)#	2,000

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The Single Key Pair Class II Digital Certificates issued by ICAI Sub-ordinate certifying authority in individual capacity can be used for e-Intermediary purpose for e-Filing of Income Tax Returns. So far many members and firms have already obtained Digital Certificates from ICAI. Further many requests are under process. Members & firms interested in obtaining the said certificates can visit <http://www.icai.org/digital/index.htm> for further details/procedure. Clarifications can also be obtained on e-mail from rajanikant@icai.org.