

# The Cyberspace Snow and Avalanche Center An Avalanche Information Center for the Future

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## ABSTRACT

The Cyberspace Snow and Avalanche Center, or CSAC, is an internet based avalanche center which provides reports on current weather and snowpack conditions, educational information, and more. It is international in scope. The organization is a public-interest non-profit and has tax-exempt (501c3) status from the United States Department of Treasury (IRS). The project is a grassroots effort operating entirely on volunteer efforts and has a broad base of support from the public, the outdoor industry, the media, and numerous avalanche professionals.

## HISTORY

The project began during the 1994-95 season. Jim Frankenfield, who was serving as Chairman of the Board for the Utah Avalanche Forecast Center, decided that having the Utah Bulletins available on the internet would help serve the public better. This would help build public support, which was particularly important at the time due to a 30% cut in Federal funding. The University of Utah donated some space on their gopher server and some software to automatically process and post bulletins received by electronic mail.

While it turned out that the UAFC was not able to submit their bulletins, the Canadian Avalanche Centre and the SW Montana Avalanche Center both heard about the project and were anxious to participate. Other bulletins, such as those of the Swiss SLF and the Scottish Avalanche Information Center, were already available on other systems and pointers were put in place. As the system became popular other centers participated as well. Utah's bulletin was later submitted by email courtesy of the University of Utah meteorology department. Almost all bulletins except those of the Northwest Avalanche Center and the Colorado Avalanche Information Center were ultimately available.

In addition to the bulletins and advisories some incident

and educational information was made available as well. The site became quite popular and the obvious next step was to move it to the world-wide-web.

Shortly after the end of the 1994-95 season a virtual web server was made available by the Computer Science Outreach Services project of Oregon State University. A domain name, csac.org, was acquired and a nonprofit organization was formed.

The domain name was on-line by the end of October, which meant that the project got a bit of a late start for the 1995/96 season. However, it became firmly established very quickly. During the season the home page was accessed well over 20,000 times and over 90,000 file transfers were logged. Logging accesses on the internet is difficult, so these are lower limits.

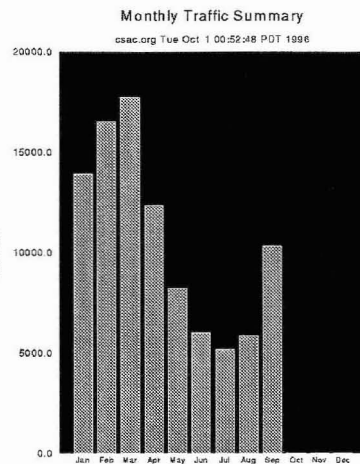
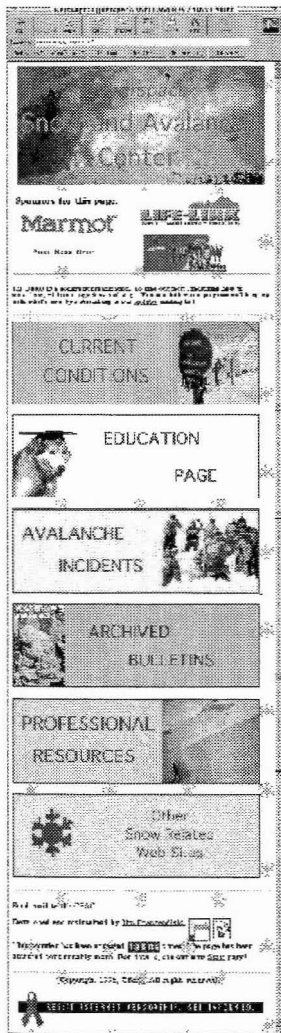


Figure 2 - Web site traffic for 1996 through September.



## THE FUTURE

As the project enters the 1996/97 avalanche season it appears that it is poised for rapid growth. Before the end of August numerous contacts had already come from the media. The CSAC is mentioned prominently in at least one new video and one new book, as well as numerous magazine articles.

Support has also grown among the outdoor related industries. Four companies now sponsor the CSAC, with another likely to be added shortly.

The project has become widely recognized on the USENET discussion groups covering climbing, skiing, snowboarding, and snowmobiling. These groups are monitored for avalanche related postings and questions are often answered. It is unusual in any such discussion for the CSAC not to be pointed to by someone in the group.

One of the challenges faced is getting the cooperation of some of the public agencies which produce public advisories. This has proven to be difficult in some cases. However, the US government in general has made great strides in providing information to the public via the internet over the past year.

Figure 1 (left)- The CSAC home page as of April or May 1996.

Another goal is to increase the level of participation from the professional community. The CSAC has always invited and encouraged participation by anyone interested. This invitation remains open. Anything of public or general interest can be put up on the CSAC web site at no charge. Assistance preparing materials in html format will be provided at no cost. Space and support has been offered and would gladly be made available to the CAA, the AAAP, and any other relevant organizations or individuals.

## SUMMARY

A single well-maintained web site with global snow and avalanche information will have many advantages. People traveling to a distant area will know where to find important information. (One of Colorado's first fatalities last season was a snowboarder from Tennessee.) Development and maintenance costs, both time and money, can be kept down even with the rapid technology changes occurring.

Traffic Summary by Country/Domain

csac.org Tue Oct 1 00:52:48 PDT 1996

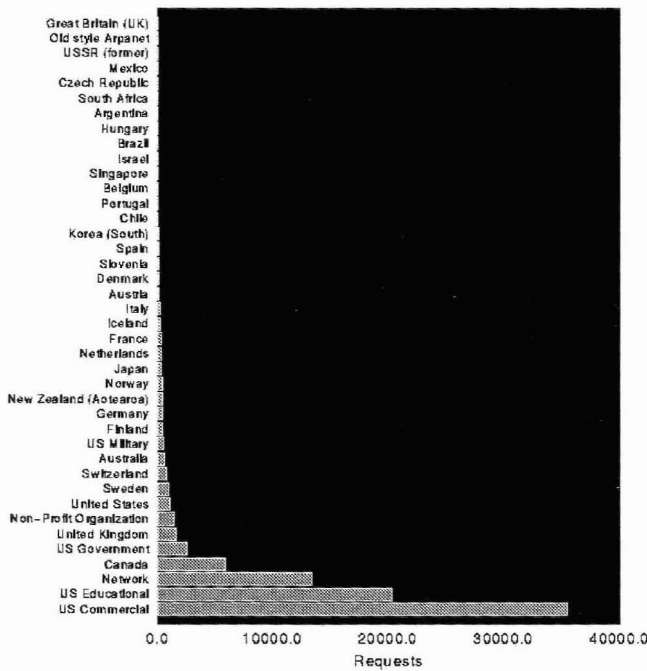


Figure 3 - File transfers by country for countries with over 2 or 3 requests.