ConfMan: Integrated WWW and DBS Support for Conference Organization

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1 Introduction

Everyone who has ever organized a national or international workshop, conference, or symposium knows how much work is involved in organizing such an event. Most organizers therefore use some kind of office tools, e.g., Excel or FileMaker. Unfortunately, there are a lot of incompatibility problems related to different representations in different applications. Another disadvantage is that program committee (PC) members have to travel if they want to take part actively in the final selection process. Traditional supporting tools like telephone or video conferences are only helpful for a few people to communicate with each other. However, PCs often consist of more than 15 members. Therefore, in many cases only PC members who live not far from the conference location participate in the final meeting and determine the conference program. This initiated the idea of an internet based tool for conference organization. The result is ConfMan which stores information in a database system (DBS) connected to the world wide web (WWW) through a collection of cgi-bin scripts.

Lately, several special applications for conference organization have been developed [2]. However, most of these still miss integration and integrity control throughout the entire process. Therefore, ConfMan has been implemented to support all major tasks of conference organization, e.g., paper registration, reviewing, on-line PC meeting etc., providing a full data integration and integrity control.

2 Functionality of ConfMan

ConfMan can be divided into four main modules handling paper registration, on-line PC meeting, registration of participants, and conference administration. For more detailed information about ConfMan, see [1].

Paper submission is handled by the *paper registration module*. The author has to fill out a form including contact author information (name, address, phone, e-mail, etc.) and paper information (authors, title, paper type, keywords, and abstract) which is sent to the conference management system and stored in the DBS. When receiving this information, the system automatically generates an e-mail notifying the contact author what information has been stored and how to upload the paper to the ftp-server.

The *PC-online module* is used for paper reviewing and on-line PC-meetings. Papers can be downloaded, and the reviews are submitted using a WWW-form. During the on-line PC-meeting, the PC-members can see all review results, including detailed and average ratings, comments to the authors, and the confidential comments. They can participate in on-line discussions and vote accept or reject for a given paper. Papers with new or unread discussions arguments are highlighted, giving PC members a quick overview of currently discussed papers. For security and confidentiality rea-

sons the PC-online module is login and password protected, and each reviewer is assigned a login and password.

The *registration of participant module* manages all information about the conference attendees: Every participant must fill out a registration form on the WWW including personal information (name, address, phone, e-mail, etc.) and which events to attend (conference, tutorial, etc.).

The *administration module* provides functionality to interact with other modules like sending e-mails (notifications, paper assignments, etc.), inserting and updating data in the DBS, and displaying status of the reviewing process. This module can only be accessed by members of the organization committee and is therefore protected via login, password, and an additional lookup in the DBS to verify whether the user is authorized to access these pages and scripts. We have divided the administration module into the following five parts:

- **Paper administration**: information about each paper may be displayed, e.g., authors, reviewing status, and if the paper is accepted or rejected. This information may also be updated or deleted. In addition, generation and sending of e-mails for notification of received papers and of final acceptance is managed.

- **Review administration**: the organizers can send the list of all submitted papers to the PC members. Papers can be assigned to PC members for reviewing, and the PC members can be informed about this assignment. Additionally, reviews may be inserted manually by the organizers.

- **Reviewer administration**: includes a list of all PC members, indicating the papers each PC member has to review. Different colors show which papers have already been reviewed and which not. It is also possible to prevent a PC member from voting on and participating in the discussion of a paper.

- **Participant administration**: a summary of all participant registrations is displayed. Participant information can be changed, e.g., to indicate that the payment of the conference fee from a participant has been received, and receipts for the participants can be generated.

- **Miscellaneous part**: handles system configuration and tailoring of ConfMan to a conference.

3 Conclusion

The main challenges and goals for the design and implementation of ConfMan have been to develop an integrated system that ensures data integrity, sufficient usability, and performance. The general conclusion is that ConfMan meets our design goals. The experience so far is that, by using ConfMan, the organization committee can save a lot of time. The already broad usage of ConfMan is probably the best argument for its usefulness. ConfMan has been, and is, used by several workshops and conferences (16 at the time of writing).

We offer ConfMan with certain disclaimers as public domain software to other interested persons and institutions (see http://ConfMan.unik.no/).

References

[1]   Halvorsen, P., Lund, K., Goebel, V., Plagemann, T., Preuss, T., Koenig, H.: "*Architecture, Implementation, and Evaluation of ConfMan: Integrated WWW and DBS Support for Conference Organization*", Technical Report I-1998.016-R, UniK, 1998

[2]   Summary of Conference Management Software, ACM, http://www.cs.arizona.edu/people/rts/summary.html