



Mining in the global village

It has been just over fifty years since the concept of the 'global village' was introduced by Marshall McLuhan in 1964, yet it remains relevant to our everyday experiences. Modern communication technologies have seemingly shrunk the world even further since then.

Ray Tomlinson, in 1971, was the first person to send mail from one computer to another over a network (and also initiated the practice of using the @ sign to direct the networked electronic mail message to a particular user at a particular computer). In 1997, e-mail volume overtook postal mail volume, as more and more people recognized the convenience of this almost immediate, yet still asynchronous, mode of communication. That same year, 1997, saw the registration of the google.com domain name, and searching for information was transformed for ever, as people came to rely on the Google search engine to navigate the World Wide Web (invented by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989). It seems hard to believe that it's been only about 20 years since the mass popularization of the World Wide Web (arguably one of the world's greatest inventions since the wheel). Nowadays, we can almost instantly read about (or watch) events happening anywhere in the world.

The interconnectedness of today's world has led to a direct link between the slowing down of the rate of growth in urbanization in China and the state of the economy in Rustenburg, for example. There is also much mobility of people between countries and continents. Many engineers trained in South Africa work in Australia, and many Australian engineers work in the USA, and so on.

The SAIMM maintains strong links with similar societies in other countries. In November 2011, an inaugural meeting was held in London between several leading international mining and metallurgical societies – AusIMM (Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy), CIM (Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum), IOM3 (Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining), SAIMM (Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy), and SME (Society for Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration). The meeting was intended to foster cooperation between the various organizations, to discuss opportunities for improving and sharing benefits to members, and to benchmark the institutions against each other. Further meetings between these societies were held in September 2012 in Las Vegas (SME), in February 2013 in Denver (SME), in February 2014 in Cape Town (SAIMM), in October 2014 in Vancouver (CIM), and in March 2015 in Hong Kong (AusIMM). Agreements have been signed between these societies, resulting in the formation of what is known as the Global Mineral Professionals Alliance (GMPA). Discussions were held about the state of the mining industry in the various countries, as well as the structure and strategies of the societies represented. There was broad agreement that the societies would offer services to each other's members at member rates. This is a significant benefit to SAIMM members, as they can attend international conferences held by AusIMM, CIM, IOM3, and SME at the same cost as members of those societies. Calendars of events are circulated between the organizations to coordinate major events and minimize clashes.

The flagship project of the GMPA is OneMine.org, a database of over 100 000 technical papers that is freely available to be used by the members of GMPA societies. Support of this project – both financially and by sharing technical papers – is a necessary precondition for a society to belong to the GMPA. Participating societies also agree to publicize their GMPA affiliation on their websites, and to share meeting calendars and information about each other's international events. Representatives of each society meet once a year to exchange information, to maintain a common set of standards for technical events, and to look for further ways to increase member benefits with reciprocal arrangements. This also provides an opportunity to share approaches and resources to deal with global problems shared by all.

Until asteroid mining becomes accepted practice, we will have to settle for this global approach on Planet Earth.

R.T. Jones
President, SAIMM