ConfShare: A Unified Conference Calendar for Researchers

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ABSTRACT
We propose a web-based academic conference information sharing system that is named "ConfShare". There are some web services for sharing academic conference information. Researchers are not familiar with the services well. We consider that a major reason is a user interface. A primary user interface for retrieving a conference information in such systems is a keyword search. It is difficult for researchers to find and get conference information stored in the systems. We develop a novel user interface that users can browse and retrieve conference information interactively. The information in an academic conference consists of some attribute information such as a location, an acronym name, submission deadline and notification dates and so on. ConfShare enables users to browse their information and use them for an interactive filtering of conference information. The user interface makes it possible to find and get a conference even if a user has vague demands.

Author Keywords
Information sharing, Conference calendar, User interface.

ACM Classification Keywords
H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous. H.5.3. Group and Organization Interfaces.

INTRODUCTION
We develop a web-based information system for sharing academic conference information for researchers. The name of the system is "ConfShare"(fig.1). The goal of this project is to achieve a better way to find and get an academic conference information. The system enables researchers to aggregate academic conference information. And researchers can access to the information through a web browser.

There are some similar web services for the same purpose. However, from a result of our preliminary user studies, these systems do not provide researchers with a suitable user interface for users who have no search keywords. We,

therefore, design another user interface that is able to satisfy such user's needs. The ConfShare, though a contributor manually posts some typical attribute information of a conference, enables users to browse their information separately and interactively. The GUI enables users to find and get conference information even if they have vague requirements.
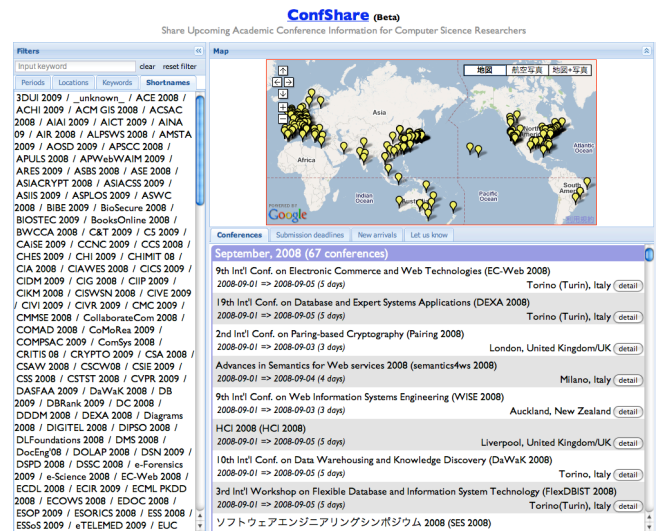

Figure 1. A snapshot of the ConfShare

ISSUES FOR GETTING A CONFERENCE INFORMATION
There are some issues in current schemes for finding and getting an academic conference information. A conference information has been disseminated through mailing lists and conference web pages. However, both dissemination methods have some issues about user notification and conference information delivery. At first, we consider about a mailing list. It is not easy for researchers to find appropriate mailing lists. Even if researchers subscribe a well-known mailing list of conference information like dbworld[1], they receive tons of e-mails from the mailing list. Moreover, it is difficult for researchers to find appropriate conference information from them. And receipt

timing and a content of notification do not always match with subscriber's needs.

On the other hand, a conference web page is open to the public. It is, however, impossible for researchers to access the web page in case they do not know the URL information. The issue of conference web pages is that how to inform a URL of them to researchers. Since URLs of many conference web sites are not constant, researchers have to get a URL of them. We usually use a web search engine for that purpose. There are, however, some issues in a web search engine. One of them is that it is hard to get a URL unless researchers have an appropriate keyword such as a full name of a conference. The other issue is that it is difficult to get a URL of a latest or a next conference web page because of a delay in data indexing on a web search engine.

There are another two types of systems for the purpose. One is conference calendars that are mainly maintained by academic organizations[2]. Although they aggregate conference information and provide them to the public, collected conference information are limited in associated with a hosted organization. This solution has only a limited improvement for the issue. The other solution is a web service. Some services are proposed for the same purpose [3,4]. It is, however, hard to make use of shared information because of a poor user interface such as full-text search. These issues in the alternative solutions may give researchers the impression that such web services are not useful practically.

CONFSHARE: A UNIFIED CONFERENCE CALENDAR
From these considerations, we developed a ConfShare as a web-based academic conference information sharing service. A major difference from other related web services is to implement an interactive user interface from several points of view. Figure 1 is a screen shapshot of the ConfShare. A main screen is composed of a world map and a list. A list displays either conference information or submission deadline information. Information in the list are sorted by date and a user can switch a displayed information by clicking a tab button on top of the list. A user can also look at a detail information of a specific conference if she/he clicks an interested entry in the list.

A world map is implemented with a Google Maps API and each yellow marker in the map displays a location of each conference. A user, therefore, gets to know locations of the conferences and its submission deadlines that will be held on a specific location by clicking the marker.

ConfShare also provides an attribute information browser for interactive filtering in the left side of the main screen (fig. 1). The browser is folded as a default. The browser enables users to browse four types of attribute information of a conference. They are a date, a location, a keyword and a shortname of the conference. A shortname means an acronym or an abbreviated name of the conference name.

For example, "CSCW" is a shortname of the "Computer Supported Cooperative Work" conference. Keywords are extracted from a conference name. For example, ConfShare gets four keywords:"computer", "supported", "cooperative" and "work" from the conference name "Computer Supported Cooperative Work". These information are extracted by the system from a posted information or directly posted by a contributor.

An important point of the attribute browser is to assist in getting to know conference information that users are interested in. For example, a user can interactively retrieve information of conferences that will be held on user's country in this autumn. It is difficult to do such query by a keyword search. This function makes ConfShare useful than other systems[3,4] because the attribute browser and interactive filtering can help to find and get an interested conference even if users do not have specific keywords.

ConfShare is also available from an iPhone and an iPod touch. A user interface is optimized for these terminals and is quite different from an interface for a web browser. We carefully implemented the user interface to be able to browse a conference data easily from these terminals. Researchers, therefore, can check upcoming conferences and submission deadlines in their spare time at anywhere.

CONCLUSIONS
We proposed the ConfShare as a web-based CSCW system for academic conference information sharing. ConfShare provides users with a novel data representation and interactive filtering function. These improvements make it possible to find and get academic conference information even if a user has vague requirements. In other words, it makes possible to meet wider demands of researchers. We consider that aggregating academic conference information brings a great advantage for all researchers. It could reduce handling time in tasks around conference information. ConfShare has potential to become such service. In order to realize it, the system needs many users' cooperative actions as contributors.

You can use the ConfShare. We maintain the system to verify whether or not ConfShare and its user interface can motivate researchers to post a conference information. And, if not, we have to argue that what kind of function or someone else will be needed for users to involve an academic conference information sharing.

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