The history of the right-to-life movement in the United States is aligned with technological innovations, and the connection between the two is obvious with even a cursory review of how historical forces shaped the movement as much as how technological advances shaped society in general.

When the movement began in the 1960s and the formative years of the early 1970s, the technological means used to educate the public on what was then the only life issue of abortion were minimal: newsletters, telephone alerts (usually of a legislative nature), and demonstrations.

The golden years of the Reagan-Bush era in the movement witnessed sophistication in technological advances used to communicate fundamental beliefs about the need to reestablish the first civil right to life. After the Baby Doe case in 1983, what was then only theoretical became reality, and infanticide was added to the phrase "life issues" which summarized those social problems eroding the first civil right to life. Our knowledge about medical technology increased. The 1980s saw the power of The Silent Scream, which effectively silenced media opposition at that time to irrational claims that the fetus was less than human. Administratively, groups around the nation were telemarketing for funds and hiring staff to guarantee that jobs and tasks previously left to volunteers would be stabilized by a consistent workforce.

When euthanasia advocates began clamoring around the end of the 1990s for the right to kill the elderly, the third element joined the phrase the "life issues" so that it has since solidified into its now common definition. Technologically, the movement experienced unprecedented growth, even during the dismal years of the hostile Clinton regime. As Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter first enunciated in their seminal The Media Elite (1986), major journalism outlets were solidly against pro-life interests. "The core of the book contains results from a survey of a random sample of journalists at America's leading national media: the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, the three major commercial television networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, and public television" (x-xi), and the authors confirm what the pro-life movement long understood, that 90% of the media elite agreed with the statement that "it is a woman's right to decide whether or not to have an abortion" (29, 305).

Of course, the dismal years of the Clinton occupation of the White House helped to solidify pro-life growth across the nation, and, if certain sectors of Washington were closed to pro-lifers during those eight long years, then other ways of defeating an entrenched anti-life philosophy were investigated and adopted. The media bias identified in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to some interesting alternative media outlets. While some may still consider the three major networks the primary source for their news, others, like pro-lifers, flock to outlets such as Fox News for a more balanced
view. After Rathergate and other cases of major media scandal, it has come to be a truism that cable news networks are not only much more unbiased than CBS or other poorly-rated networks, but also more amenable to pro-life interests.

Finally, pro-lifers’ use of the internet in the 1990s helped them to flex their strength, and two recent manifestations testify to this new power. First is the election and subsequent reelection of a president despite the wishes of the Hollywood establishment and the media elites; second is the incorporation of today’s young pro-life activists in venues which their older counterparts find frightening if not difficult to maneuver.

The above is necessarily brief. A detailed sociological review of the past thirty years of the movement is desperately needed so that we do not forget our history, a necessary predicate for our understanding where we are today and where the movement will be ten, twenty, or thirty years from now. Last year I suggested that today's activists and students can rely on several sources for quality information on the life issues. Besides reference databases recognized by professionals as unbiased sources of information on controversial topics, I suggested that activists and students can consult not only other web sources for pertinent and quality information, but also organizational websites, such as the National Right to Life Committee and University Faculty for Life.

My intention this year is to focus on two pro-life internet news sites: LifeIssues.net and LifeSiteNews.com. Moreover, besides considering the professional attributes which must attend any website which vies for public attention, it is necessary for the movement to establish a methodology for evaluating our own sites so that their credentials are recognized by all, especially students struggling to locate pertinent information on controversial topics and scholars conducting research. Thus, besides the general commentary which follows, I will identify those attributes of the websites which can account for their success and those which may need to be reevaluated.

LifeIssues.net is a much more scholarly website than its colleagues, containing articles, original research, and commentary from experts and professors who meet the three crucial criteria I mentioned last year. Any scholar should, first, have his or her terminal degree (usually a Ph.D.); second, he or she should be published; and, third, he or she should be conducting research in his or her field. Fr. Jerry Novotny, the webmaster for LifeIssues.net, affirms that the credentials of contributors to the site support the contention that the quality of the site is secure. Thus, persons culling research from the site can be assured that the material they will use is primary and not secondary research. In fact, a special feature of the website is the identification of the degrees and publication histories of contributors. Students, especially, may use items from these biographies as appositional statements to preface cited material. For example, there is a substantial difference between writing “Joe Schmo says that stem cell research...” and “Joe Schmo, professor of bioethics at XYZ University, says that stem cell research....”

LifeSiteNews.com is less scholarly in that the articles on this site are meant for popular consumption. Thus, instead of popular databases like Infotrac (now named
Thomson Gale PowerSearch) that most librarians would recommend, thinking that their recommended sites are unbiased, students and researchers can obtain quality articles from these websites that have the added value of offering the crucial pro-life perspective missing from other services.

LifeSiteNews.com offers summaries of Canadian and American pro-life news events. This service seems much more international in scope, at least in terms of communicating pro-life news throughout the English-speaking world. I can account for this international perspective and depth of coverage in two ways. First, Canadians may have a more intimate connection with the British homeland than Americans. Consequently, since life issues are being debated not only in the traditional “First World,” but also in the now-defunct categories “Second World” and “Third World,” Canadians may be more attuned to pro-life activism beyond the Americas. Second, Canadian pro-lifers are keenly aware that their government has been hostile to pro-life interests since Trudeau was prime minister in the 1970s. (Harper’s election may be a refreshing change vis-à-vis the life issues for our brothers and sisters in the true north.) Thus, Canadians may have been particularly aware that the best way to have concentrated their pro-life energies in a hostile political environment was to use and maintain the power of the written word.

Now that some general considerations of the services have been noted, other aspects involving a standard search string will be reviewed in more detail. To discuss the relative merits of the two pro-life internet news services, I decided to formulate a search on a contemporary topic, using terms which would be relatively easy to locate and yet would demonstrate the degree of complication within each of the services. Since Peter Singer’s most recent statement on infanticide has been in the news, I chose “peter singer disabled infant” as the search string for both services. The screen prints reproduced below capture results obtained on 17 September 2006.
Statistics for the Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of service</th>
<th>Hits in 2005</th>
<th>Hits in 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LifelIssues.net</td>
<td>2,530,072</td>
<td>2,025,017 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LifeSiteNews.com</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>10,000,000 (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Estimates (Jalsevac).

A quick review of the available statistics for the services should focus on the strikingly large numbers provided. Granted, anti-lifers may be accessing pro-life internet news services as much as pro-lifers access theirs, but I seriously doubt that there are sufficient numbers of anti-lifers interested in what our services have to say when they probably rely on the already discredited media elite. However, that the number of hits is not in the hundreds or thousands but in the millions testifies to the demand for specifically pro-life commentary on contemporary news as well as the sophistication of pro-life audiences.
To demonstrate the actual practice of contemporary students, I begin by entering the search in Google, a popular albeit biased search engine. If a student were to rely solely on this search engine for his or her research, then the daunting number of results—in this case, 160,000—would impede the quality of his or her research considerably. A search only of “peter singer” yielded even a larger number of hits (27,300,000), an even more daunting number of hits to review. The significant number of dot-coms is another impediment, since researchers strive to obtain material from educational or government sources as primary information. Moreover, the dated entries which first appear for the student or researcher further hamper research; material from 1993, 1999, or 2000 is hardly timely.

Finally, looking at the initial articles, one could not tell whether the material could be relied on from the pro-life perspective. For example, even though Nat Hentoff is referenced in one of the entries, unless one knew the particular history of this well-known author, one would not know that the opinion expressed in the Jewish World Review piece comes from a credible pro-life source.
There are many positive things to say about the LifeIssues.net website on first viewing. Unlike its popular perception as a metaphor for depression, color theorists claim that blue imparts a sense of comfort or “warmth” to viewers (Boggs and Petrie 211). The color arrangement in this site creates a soothing, secure feeling, perhaps made stronger by a solid block of blue color at the top of the page. LifeIssues.net has not only a copyright, but also a date of last update specified clearly in the upper right corner on the first portion of the page; the student or researcher does not have to search for it at the base of the page to guarantee that the site does not have link rot. This website collates the works of the more prolific contributors into writers and topic libraries; currently, there are 2,460 articles in the libraries. This collection is a convenient tool for those who do not want to hunt for a particular author or topic but who want to, for example, go immediately to Dianne Irving’s work on bioethics. Finally, both articles as Word documents and any accompanying PowerPoint presentations are stored on the site; thus, a student may access the text of an important work by a scholar as well as a succinct PowerPoint to aid his or her own work.

One aspect of the site has both a positive and a negative element. The high register vocabulary of article summaries could be both a deterrent and a benefit. Accessing web material which has high register vocabulary immediately testifies to the quality of the matter being discussed; however, that same register may hinder some from understanding what is being communicated, especially in light of what some theorists have said about the education level of the American public. Also, while most students and researchers know how to truncate searches or use wildcards in academic databases, no explanation of such opportunities (if such opportunities exist) is offered.
The seven results for the search are easily reviewable within a short time by a student or researcher. An astute observer would notice immediately that the search results page lists articles by Irving several times. Thus, if the seven items listed do not contain what the researcher is looking for, then he or she can return to the homepage and consult the library on Irving for other articles that may be more on point.
What is striking about first seeing LifeSiteNews.com’s page is the white space, a crucial factor in readability, the popular wisdom being that the more white space a text has, the more readable it is. Besides a copyright, a date of last update is provided.

While one point (the British English spelling of terms on the site) could be viewed negatively, such a criticism is more ethnocentric than it is substantial. It is more important to consider that the minor inconvenience of adjusting spelling changes is more than compensated by the site’s international scope.
The search produces one result on this site, and it presents the viewer with a succinct article on Peter Singer’s views on infanticide of disabled infants. A feature unique to this site is the listing of related links at article’s end.
A summary of pro-life internet news services would be inadequate in at least three respects. First, the services are still nascent tools in the movement. Second, more statistical data is needed to determine whether accessing these services is increasing simply because of novelty or because of genuine activist and researcher involvement. The last point, concerning activist motives, would be especially difficult to determine; certifying authorial intention, for example, has occupied literary criticism for thousands of years. The purpose of these services may not be merely informational in a strict journalistic sense, but motivational in that articles posted on the sites are meant to induce action. Establishing a causal connection between information conveyed in articles on these sites and pro-life activism requires much more sophisticated analysis than asserting that there is such a connection, usually supported by mere anecdotes. Third, a competing review from an anti-life perspective is necessary before my commentary on these sites can be either validated or refuted. Of course, the opinions of that anti-lifer would then need to be adjudicated by other reviewers, and so the discourse would continue. Future research by other social scientists and technicians can eliminate these concerns.

I hope that an exploration of the success of these pro-life internet news services had been not only an entertaining, but also an enlightening experience for those audience members—especially the college and university students—who first heard the above commentary when it was presented before the third annual Pro-Life Science and Technology Symposium at the Engineers Club in Dayton, Ohio on 23 September 2006. I welcome the work of other researchers as they explore in greater detail and technical focus the power that these internet tools have in helping us restore the first civil right to life.

Works Cited

Jalsevac, Steve. Email to Jeff Koloze. 26 Sept. 2006.