

# Going On-Line

## EDITORIAL STAFF

Scott Melnick,  
Editor and Publisher  
Patrick M. Newman, P.E.  
Technical Director  
Charlie Carter,  
Senior Technical Advisor  
Jacques Cattan,  
Technical Advisor

## EDITORIAL OFFICES

Modern Steel Construction  
One East Wacker Dr.,  
Suite 3100  
Chicago, IL 60601-2001  
Phone: 312/670-5407  
Fax: 312/670-5403  
e-mail: [aiscsm@interaccess.com](mailto:aiscsm@interaccess.com)

## ADVERTISING SALES

John Byrne  
Facinelli Media Sales  
2400 E. Devon Ave.,  
Suite 267  
Des Plaines, IL 60018  
847/699-6049  
Fax 847/699-8681

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**A**S IF CHOOSING A LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE COMPANY WASN'T BAD ENOUGH, more and more of us are now faced with picking an Internet provider. For most of us, there are two paths to the Internet: either hook-up with an on-line service that also provides Internet access (e.g. America Online or Compuserve) or contract with a direct Internet provider (e.g. Netcom or InterAccess).

To some degree, the decision rests on what your goals are. If you want the myriad of services—ranging from being able to make your own plane reservations to a host of dedicated chat rooms—available from an on-line service, then that may be your best route. While it also is the simplest route (they provide the very easy to use software and will even throw in a free trial period), it can be an expensive path. Typically, the on-line services charge \$9.95 for five hours per month with additional hours billed at \$2.95. However, if you're more interested in accessing the World Wide Web and the other Internet features, then setting up an account and dialing directly into an Internet host may be a better option. Typical charges range from \$20 to \$40 per month, but that cost usually includes between 40 hours per month and unlimited access (it pays to shop around).

I'm contemplating hooking up with America Online at home since they offer a number of professional forums of great interest to my wife; while at work we use an Internet host (*Modern Steel Construction's* new e-mail address is: [aiscsm@interaccess.com](mailto:aiscsm@interaccess.com)).

There are a wide variety of providers out there—some are national, some are only local. The most important factors in choosing a provider are the ease of connection and whether that provider has a local phone number to minimize phone connection charges. If you travel and plan on bringing a laptop with you, then a national provider with local phone numbers in a variety of cities makes more sense. Otherwise, it doesn't matter whether your provider is local or national. Definitely take the time to check on ease of access. One way to do so is to simply dial the connection number from a regular phone at several different times during the day. If you get a modem whine, great. If you often get a busy signal, look for another provider. Also, make sure that the local connection number is within eight miles of your office. Typically, phone companies charge hire rates for calls over eight miles.

Of course, once you have Internet access, the first thing you're probably going to do is "surf the web." So while you're there, check out AISC's new home page. It can be reached at:

<http://www.aiscweb.com>.

In addition to information about upcoming AISC events, the page has membership information, a listing of certified fabricators, and a collection of Steel Interchange columns. If you have any comments, please write, fax or e-mail. **SM**