

# Editor's LETTER

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## Organic Linking

**or-gan-ic**—forming an integral element of a whole; having systematic coordination of parts (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary)

As scientists, we are often concerned with networks at all levels. We probe networks of atoms, molecules, cells, and organisms. We tap into the network of published scientific literature and its roots of cited work and tendrils of subsequent citation. We endeavor to be part of professional networks of shared ideas and resources. Many new and sophisticated approaches to this last effort have emerged in the past two decades, starting with wide use of email and recently including social and professional networking resources such as *Facebook* and *LinkedIn*, respectively. Although it seems to be easier than ever to *stay* connected to fellow scientists, how does one make *new connections*, other than by meeting people at conferences and other traditional means? How can one get a feel for what one's peers are up to at other institutions?

One answer is a web directory that lists the scientists in a particular field by state and institution. One of us (M.M.) first started a site for synthetic organic chemists ([organiclinks.net](http://organiclinks.net)) in 1998, then still in the early days of the Web. The idea was a simple one: a directory that would allow academic and industrial chemists, as well as graduate and undergraduate chemistry students, with an interest in synthetic organic chemistry to quickly find out who was in their field and what their research interests are. Among other benefits, the directory would help undergraduates decide where to apply for graduate study and new faculty get some exposure prior to their first independent publications (indeed, even prior to their officially assuming their faculty position). The inaugural directory listed about 150 chemists. Currently it lists 532 chemists, principally at Ph.D.-granting institutions, but also at NIH and medical research centers. The site also offers a no-cost means of advertising postdoctoral openings for researchers seeking postdocs with skills in synthetic organic chemistry.

[Organiclinks.net](http://Organiclinks.net) is now 12 years old and receives approximately 30,000 page views each month. Web site traffic statistics reveal that visitors come from across the globe, from both academic and industrial domains. Interestingly, on average 95% of the visitors do not arrive to the site from a referring link, which indicates that those visitors have the link bookmarked. The site has inspired the creation of related directories, including U.K. organic chemists, French organic chemists, and organometallic chemists, all of which are linked together.

The success of *Organiclinks* suggested that a similar resource (*ChembioLinks*, [chembiolinks.net](http://chembiolinks.net)) might provide an opportunity to unite scientists from a more diverse interest base who are, perhaps, in more dire need of networking. The investigators in the emerging field of chemical biology come from many different backgrounds, each of which has its own *de facto* network based on common departments, conferences, and former mentors. Their efforts converge around a desire to explore the modulation of biological systems with synthetic small molecules. Interest in this field has been fueled, in part, by the burgeoning use of high-throughput screening and the concomitant development of new chemistry tools to prepare libraries, identify protein targets, and elucidate molecular interactions. The obviously disparate individuals involved might be defined by their backgrounds as cell and molecular biologists, synthetic chemists, and X-ray crystallographers, just to name a few. One of us (J.T.S.) concluded that the field of chemical biology could be well-served by

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a site like *Organiclinks* that provides a simple platform for people to get in touch with like-minded researchers who might be well outside their established network of colleagues. *ChembioLinks* was launched on the first of this year and currently lists over 300 scientists from a diverse array of backgrounds at a wide distribution of institutions including graduate departments, medical schools, and research institutes. As with *Organiclinks*, additional features will be added as needed.

Although more sophisticated electronic approaches to networking may be available, we believe that simple, focused, universally accessible resources like *Organiclinks* and *ChembioLinks* provide an easy way for communities of scientists of similar interests to get connected. We are confident that these resources will continue to enable scientists to expand their networks, and hope that they continue to inspire the creation of similar directories in other areas of science.

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