

A.A. in an Electronic Age

Some Opportunities and Some Challenges:

Remember the olden days—four or five years ago? Before FaceBook, I-phone, podcasts, YouTube, mp3s and other technologies were widespread? In those days a website was created by a technical wizard and was a one way communication between the publisher of the web site and the reader. Now anyone can create a web site without technical skills and with social networking sites, like FaceBook, the Internet becomes an interactive communications medium. An audio or video “recording”, or photo, used to be created on CD or DVD or on paper and distributed physically. Now that “recording” or photo can be created by anyone and posted on personal web sties for download by others, posted on FaceBook, or E-mailed. The list goes on.

All this comes to incredibly powerful communication tools. In this article, I’d like to get us thinking about the opportunities these tools might give us to better carry the message, and to consider some of the challenges we might encounter in doing so within our Traditions. Another article, “Anonymous at the Level of Press, Radio, Films...and Facebook” coming next month will discuss the important subject of anonymity on social networking sites.

Opportunities:

The ways we might use technology to better carry the message are only limited by our imaginations and the need to respect our Traditions. Here are just a few thoughts to get you started:

- Much information for AA members, professionals, and the general public are already made available on the **www.aa.org** web site. Have you thought about letting professionals and the public in your town know about the web sites as a source of information? Do you use it as a source of information?
- Web sites for Area 57 (**www.aaoklahoma.org**), Intergroup (**www.okcintergroup.org**) and Northeast Central Service (**www.aaneok.org**) already provide information on events, meetings, service opportunities. Simply making those web sites more widely known will help carry the message. Does your group keep its on-line meeting schedules up to date and are your events posted?
- Have you googled the words “Alcoholics Anonymous” and the name of your hometown? Do the hits turn up good information about AA in your town? Do they imply affiliation with other entities ? Could someone contact AA in your town via the Internet?
- Had you thought about creating a web site for your group, or for the AA groups in your town, to provide local AA information and make it easier to find AA there? Very attractive web sites can be made with no technical skills required. Just be careful not to promote AA or promote one AA group over another. Simply provide information, and keep that information up to date. For information on how to go about this, E-mail the State A.A. Office (secretary@aaoklahoma.org). If you decide to do this, you will want to download the AA **Guidelines on Internet** from the **www.aa.org** web site.
- Had you thought of creating a “group list” to text or E-mail reminders or other information to members of your group?
- Free, or low cost teleconferencing is available via the web. What opportunities might this open up for participation in ways not possible before?

- Speaker and conference “tapes” in mp3 format are easy to download, E-mail and share with others. But please avoid using speakers’ full names, and you might not want to support sources that use full names. If you make a recording, be sure you have the speaker’s permission.
- If you or your group have any other ideas of how we can use current media to further carry the message and would like to discuss those ideas, please feel free to E-mail me (delegate@aaoklahoma.org).

Challenges:

The challenges of the new electronic age are centered around our Traditions, particularly those of anonymity, affiliation, and attraction vs. promotion.

Any discussion of anonymity needs to distinguish between -- (a) personal anonymity, ~~and~~ (b) anonymity at the public level, and (c) the anonymity that "is the spiritual foundation of all of our Traditions" which is that A.A. operates as a whole -- not as any individual and is always mindful of ego-deflation and humility. In the case of personal anonymity, two principles apply. (1) Each AA member can reveal his membership in AA as much or as little as he likes, always examining his motives; and (2) we need always protect the anonymity of other AA members, unless we have the express permission of the individual, not just an assumed permission. That would include posting information or photos on social networking sites that might break someone else’s anonymity.

In contrast, at the public level, full names and faces are never to be used *with or without* permission. What is the public level? Tradition 11 cites "press, radio, and film", and those certainly still apply. But with newer technology, we now include television and publicly viewable web pages, blogs, and social networking pages (like FaceBook, etc). Our AA General Service Conference in 2005 deemed that "the Internet" (which includes all of those just mentioned) **IS** in the same category as "press, radio and films" for our Traditions. Therefore, a social networking page accessible to “friends” and “friend’s friends” should likely be included as **at the public level**, since you have no idea who “friend’s friends” might be. You might want to consider even a page limited to “friends” as **public** unless you have an extremely limited list of friends. The thing is, you can’t tell who is visiting your page silently. **Again, no full names or faces at the public level.** And in particular, please refrain from posting identifiable information or photos on unrestricted social networking pages. For more on this, watch for the Delegate's Corner article coming next month.

E-mail, and “private” blogs and web pages not viewable by the public are generally considered as being in the realm of personal anonymity --- that is --- that you can choose to reveal or not reveal your AA membership as you choose. But be careful not to break the anonymity of others by mentioning them on a FaceBook page, etc. in a way that would **imply** their membership -- by posting pictures or by listing them in an E-mail "CC" list that might be seen by others. In the TO: blank on E-mails -- use **BCC** instead of "CC" (as BCC does not show their names from your E-mail address book in the E-mails that are sent).

As to **implied** affiliation, if you create a personal list, group, web site, etc. -- please avoid using the name Alcoholics Anonymous, or A.A. It is better to use “friends of Bill” or “people in recovery -- something like that instead. A Group or District web site can use the words “Alcoholics Anonymous” within the bounds described in the GSO **Guidelines on Internet.**

Also a word about **attraction vs. promotion:** Any medium — leaflet, pamphlet, TV spot, newspaper announcement, even a web site — can be either informational or promotional. The difference is in the **tone** and the **message.** So we need not fear communicating AA information using any available means, including electronic. We just need to limit the content to simple statements about AA which give information and which avoid promoting AA and which avoid implying affiliation with other entities.

These questions about how to apply our Traditions take on added dimension with the spread of social networking. It used to be that only our members who were technical wizards (and the organizations they made web pages for like our Area web sites) had to be aware of our Traditions. Now, in a sense, we are all web publishers, and we will all need to be more conscious of our Traditions and honoring them as we use the Internet. Only by being informed can we protect our Fellowship and place "**principles before personalities**" on the web, as well as in the rest of our lives.

The following points, used at the International Convention in San Antonio are thought provoking. Please feel free to use it and discuss it at your group also.

PHOTOGRAPHS. Out of respect for others, please do not take photographs during any of the meetings at the International Convention. Please remember that the taking of photos during A.A. meetings makes many members uncomfortable about the confidentiality of the gathering. Also, please be considerate when taking photographs around Convention venues. Take care that you do not capture images of A.A. members, family members and friends who did not give permission and may not wish to appear in your pictures."

The INTERNET. The long form of A.A.'s Eleventh Tradition says "Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed." In keeping with this principle, please do not post recognizable photos of identifiable A.A. members on Web sites accessible to the public, including unrestricted pages on social networking sites. And whatever the medium, no disclosure of a member's affiliation with A.A. can rightly be made by anyone but the individual him- or herself."

REMEMBER "It should be the privilege of each A.A. to cloak himself with as much personal anonymity as he desires. His fellow A.A.'s should respect his wishes and help guard whatever status he wants to assume." ("Anonymity" by Bill W., *A.A. Grapevine*, January 1946)"

Let's continue this discussion throughout Area 57 (all groups in Oklahoma). Please -- Talk about it in your groups. Ask questions. Check the sharing on the subject on www.aa.org. Feel free to email me at: delegate@aaoklahoma.org with questions or comments.

Workshops coming -- on this topic:

Fun in the Fellowship 2.5 Saturday, September 18th - Kelley Club - NE 23rd & Kelley, OKC
4:15 pm (Anonymity / Media Services / Web Site)

Internet: Friend or Foe? Workshop (Part 2) --- time and place to be announced

Would your group or District like to host one, also?