

GREATER HARTFORD AREA SERVICE COMMITTEE

SOCIAL MEDIA AD HOC REPORT

The Social Media ad hoc subcommittee met a total of five times. We thank Toby for making the meeting space available at Avery St. Attendance ranged between two and eight. Danielle was kind enough to take notes. Our format was informal but well directed discussion that was effective in generating ideas and hearing all points of view, and the atmosphere was positive and never became contentious or chaotic. We had discussion along general topic lines, developed questions we felt were pertinent, and divided up some information gathering tasks. I feel confident that our report is consistent with our mandate and provides the groups some much needed information with which to make decisions. The motion creating this ad hoc spoke to the “benefits and cautions of using social media” so this report is outlined accordingly...potential benefits and potential cautions with a section for some questions to be considered and another for reference. This is not a recommendation. We are presenting gathered information, with some of it put into context.

Social media is a broad term and we need to make a distinction between interactive, information exchanging networks such as Facebook, and publicly accessible websites such as www.NA.org. This is not an examination of the use of internet technology. We have seen that the internet can be used effectively without being in conflict with the principles embodied in our Traditions and Concepts. However, Facebook and other social media sites have specific features which requires this specific look.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

For our purposes, Facebook or any social media site is really just one thing--an information/communications platform. It is a potential tool. The internet is an incredibly powerful medium and the aspects that make it powerful are essentially what the potential benefits are. These are:

- Reasonably accessible It is available for use to anyone with a computer/smartphone or tablet with internet capability and connection to Facebook.
- Immediacy Information can be updated at will and interactive users can post in real time.
- Reach Posted content goes everywhere.
- Potentially interactive Information on interactive sites can be exchanged as opposed to just seen.
- Cost effective There is minimal expense involved in creating and maintaining a page.

Any communication tool is a potential resource for addicts. "The ability to network with other recovering addicts and share in mutual support of one another's recovery offers many members a way to enhance their relationship with the NA Fellowship." The argument for the use of social media is fairly straight forward...addicts can use communication/information tools as a resource and as a tool this one is powerful.

POTENTIAL CAUTIONS

The first concern deals with threats to the principle of anonymity. Anonymity is so precious to our common welfare that we recognize it as the spiritual foundation of ALL our Traditions which are non-negotiable. The welfare of our Fellowship, our own personal recovery and the lives of the addicts who come after us depend on it. Anonymity has many applications, but we will concern ourselves with only two. First, is the requirement for maintaining personal anonymity. “In the public eye—including press, radio, films and other media—we need always maintain personal anonymity.” While many of us might feel comfortable identifying ourselves as recovering addicts with family, friends and co-workers, we do not have the right to identify as members of Narcotics Anonymous in public mass-communication situations. Facebook is a system that operates exclusively by making personal information public. Photos, names and personal data are not merely available; they are broadcast. The nature of what it does and how, is essentially the opposite of our spiritual foundation. It is impossible to couple these opposites without significant conflicts. The proponents of Facebook represent that this is all solved by the formation of an “invitation only, private group” which will keep it ‘unpublic’ and thus anonymous. There is concern with this.

- Security There is so much to be said regarding security on Facebook that we only headline the issue here. For an almost endless amount of info on this, Google “Facebook hack, or Facebook security”. Instances of every type of security breach involving Facebook are available and it’s troubling that there are websites openly promoting the ability to hack Facebook profiles at will. By their own account, Facebook admits to 600,000 compromised log-ins daily.

The scenario of trying to maintain the privacy of a group in a public setting means **anonymity is dependent on security** and there are no guarantees regarding security on Facebook. This is true regardless of whether the page or group operates at a public or private level. So while a group can be created private, there is no assurance that it stays that way. It is not a question of if security will be breached, but when and what the consequences will be. In spite of our best intentions, security issues pose significant threat to anonymity.

In addition to having the requirement to maintain their personal anonymity, NA members have the right to both expect their anonymity be respected and they not be exposed as addicts. There is concern for this based on content.

- **Content** An interactive site means it is impossible to control posted content. Inappropriate content can be deleted sometime after it has been posted, but unsuitable postings will be visible online. While threatening, abuse, and predatory behavior are easily seen as being harmful, the greater damage will be in what seems to make up the majority of blogging...opinions. Posted criticism or negative opinion concerning the activities or efforts of other groups fosters disunity. Expressing judgment of another member's recovery or beliefs breaches personal anonymity and online postings on the personal life or behavior of others opens the door for legal/liability blowback. The inability to control content will threaten the anonymity of individual addicts (deliberately or not) by poster/bloggers.

Beyond anonymity and unity there is a practical and significant concern :

- Legal/Liability Issues There is no such thing as freedom from lawsuits. The potential for civil liability in issues such as libel, defamation or personal loss will exist. The claim of exemption from liability as a “provider of service” is not a blanket protection from lawsuit; it is a potential defense in the event of lawsuit. (The amount of background information on this is too lengthy to include, I would be happy to share this if wanted)

Although the Facebook Terms of Service state that individual users own their posted content, at any point that it is advantageous to them either legally or financially, Facebook has the right to handle whatever has been posted on their site (deleted or not) in any way they choose.

Facebook may change its Terms of Service at will.

- What is the NA experience? The WSO:
The World Service Office of Narcotics Anonymous created its own Facebook page which it took down after operating for only 23 hours. The reasons were that they were unable to control the content of the page and the postings might not be appropriate, and they were concerned the page might impact an individuals' anonymity or privacy.

The WSO serves as a resource for the entire Fellowship. Their experience with Facebook, which was started with the same good intentions expressed in our area, lasted less than a day.

Other service bodies:

In terms of official groups (service body approved), there was only one found. There is another NA Facebook group which is not interactive that is believed to be official. There are many NA websites that are not affiliated with Facebook, and there are many self-started groups on Facebook who don't actually represent Narcotics Anonymous but we can't give you the collective experience of the fellowship on Facebook because there isn't any.

Unanswered Questions

Why so much emphasis on something not specifically directed at the well-being of the newcomer?

We already have official (group conscience approved) websites accessible for information and we have cell phones to communicate with whoever we choose; is Facebook just convenience? Is the potential to communicate more conveniently justifiable in relation to potential risk or threat to our common welfare?

Would this amount to duplication of currently provided services?

The Facebook Data Policy under its Terms of Service says it uses our personal information with other parties as part of its ongoing fiscal operations, doesn't this create an affiliation with Facebook?

Would this encourage isolation as opposed to fellowship or non-participation by technology substitution?

How do we justify creating another service body in GHA when we struggle to support our most basic services presently?

The Social Media pamphlet specifically says that addicts who have not yet found recovery may find NA unattractive if they think joining could mean having NA info posted on their social networking profiles, how do we justify that?

The Social Media pamphlet also says it could give professionals and others who might refer addicts to NA meetings the impression that NA does not take members privacy or confidentiality seriously; isn't this literally working against our own Public Information efforts?

References

One of the difficulties in drafting this report was trying to narrow down the information to be included. By necessity, this has been oversimplified and we have only offered some highlights in some areas. The amount of information available regarding legal issues and security is enormous. We have chosen to offer what we could substantiate factually, and we've relied on our own literature in an effort to put this into context. What we could not answer as fact we left as questions for your own consideration. Our references, and our strong suggestion for your reference is:

The Tradition section from It Works How and Why (green and gold), especially Traditions 11 and 12. Chapter 11 is specific to our public relations. Chapter 12 illuminates our principle of anonymity, and together they easily clarify much of the confusion and contradiction regarding this.

The Public Relations Handbook has a chapter dealing with internet technology in general.

Social Media and Our Guiding Principles remains the only NA reference point specific to social media. As it says, it is not intended to endorse or encourage the use of social media but is simply responding to the reality that members use it and offers guidance and insight in light of the tradition of anonymity.

Online information regarding Facebook security.

Online information regarding "Decency in Communications Act".

Facebook Terms of Service

Facebook Data Policy

In Humble Service,
Bill D.