

Chapter Three: AA and Electronic Communications

1. Introduction
2. Email
3. Bulk Email (Spam)
4. Conference Calls
5. Electronic Communications Liaison Officer
6. The AA GB Website
7. Local Websites
8. Online Responder Service and Chat Now Service
9. Important Points to Remember
10. Summary

The purpose of this guidance is to provide practical help for AA members, groups, intergroups and regions who wish to use electronic communications in their service work.

“A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches... nothing matters more to AA’s future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination.”

Bill W, *The AA Grapevine, Inc.*, November 1960

3:1 Introduction

This guidance is not intended to be a technical manual; its purpose is to give guidance on the appropriate use of electronic communication in AA service work, to outline the role of the Electronic Communications Liaison Officer (ECLO) at intergroup and region level and to outline the policy of Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain (AAGB) in respect of our presence on the Internet.

3:2 Email

Electronic mail is a widely used and accepted method of communication. It is cheap, effective and very fast – and is used regularly as a service tool in AA. It is, therefore, vitally important to ensure that our use of this facility conforms to our Traditions, and special care must be given to guarding the anonymity of our members. It is recommended that the blind carbon copy (bcc) option be used when emailing multiple addresses, unless all recipients have agreed otherwise.

It is not recommended that workplace email addresses are used for AA work. As well as a potential breach of anonymity of the member, many employers object to employees sending/receiving private emails and actively monitor their systems.

It is recommended that officers at intergroup/region use AA email addresses for service correspondence rather than their own personal email addresses. Not only does it give a more professional appearance, especially when emailing to recipients outside the Fellowship, but it ensures continuity as the AA email address is transferred to the next office holder when rotation occurs.

3:3 Bulk Email (Spam)

The term “spam” is widely used as a derogatory term for any kind of unwanted electronic communication and is seen as a major nuisance. Spam is email sent to a recipient not known to the sender, and/or mail that has not been specifically requested by the recipient. Adding inappropriate or out-of-context messages to mailing list communications could also be included under the spam heading.

It is, therefore, strongly suggested that AA members do not send bulk unsolicited emails for AA service work i.e. email “mail shots”, as to do so could be in violation of UK law and bring the AA name into public controversy and damage the reputation of AA as a whole.

3:4 Conference Calls

Conference calls via the internet are a most cost effective method of verbal/video communication.

Various communications programs enabling video and conference calls are downloadable from the Internet. This often free facility enables free calls to be made computer to computer – with the ability to transfer documents between the callers as an added benefit. Such systems can allow calls both between computers and computer to telephone, so it can be an ideal way for small numbers of remotely situated members to engage in discussion, but is not recommended for meetings of more than 10 as it becomes unwieldy.

Conference calls and internet communication could be considered as a way of reducing the costs of small service meetings.

3:5 Electronic Communications Liaison Officer

The principal role of the ECLO is one of liaison, communication and co-ordination between groups, intergroup, region, and the Electronics Communications Sub-Committee (ECSC) – and to facilitate correlation and dissemination of relevant information between these principal service areas. Therefore a good understanding of the Traditions and Service and Structure Handbooks is more important to the role than technical knowledge. A minimum of three years’ sobriety is recommended, and a general competence with the use of computers.

If desired, a committee of technically skilled members could be formed to assist the ECLO in setting up/maintaining/updating any local website, with the ECLO acting as Chair of this committee. Such a committee would provide an opportunity for less experienced but technically skilled members to engage in service.

The ECLO:

- Is the liaison point between the local Fellowship and the Electronic Communications Sub-Committee, advising the intergroup/region on the availability and use of the facilities available on the AAGB website.
- Is responsible for checking the accuracy of any local information posted on the website (i.e. meeting list addresses and postcodes, local webpage content etc) to ensure that out of date or misleading local information is not published.

3:6 The AA GB Website

The national AAGB website is located at www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk, and is administered on behalf of the Fellowship by the General Service Board via the Electronic Communications Sub Committee (ECSC) and by the General Service Office (GSO) of Great Britain.

In addition to the ECSC and GSO staff, the website services are supported by Third Party Suppliers for server hosting. Technical support work may be outsourced by the General Service Board.

Alcoholics-Anonymous.org.uk is a multifunction site with dedicated areas allocated to fulfilling our Primary Purpose and to providing services to the Fellowship.

In accordance with Conference 2013 decision, the AAGB website allows the following external links (using an appropriate disclaimer):

- The websites of other national AA General Service Offices
- Mapping software, to aid searches for meetings
- Language translation software, to aid people for whom English is not their first language.
- Secure payment services websites, to allow members to use the online shop.

All other external links will require Conference approval.

3:7 Local Websites

The national AAGB website accommodates content for local web pages (Microsites) free of charge and is fully integrated into the main website and maintained in accordance with our Traditions and the guidance given in our Structure and Service Handbooks. There is also a Content Management System (CMS) which allows easy creation and editing of Microsite web pages, which removes the worry from having to maintain and pay for externally hosted websites.

To host local sites outside of the national AAGB website incurs additional costs, therefore it is strongly recommended that any local group, intergroup or region with a website take advantage of the hosting facilities provided by the national AAGB website to include their local information, thus saving AA money as well as having a centrally maintained meeting finder database and promoting Unity.

It should be noted that, in line with the decision of Conference 2013, local sites outside of the national AAGB website are external sites, and as such cannot be linked from within the AAGB site.

The content of local websites should be kept updated regularly by those responsible.

If any personal data is retained, due care must be taken to comply with all relevant legislation.

3:8 Online Responder Service and Chat Now Service

AA GB provides two online response helpdesks where members of the public can make enquiries about AA, AA meetings etc.

- Online Response Service (ORS). An email is sent to help@aamail.org.
- Chat Now Service (CNS). Certain pages of our website allow a visitor to open a keyboard chat.

These services are administered by the ECSC.

The aim of these helpdesks is to encourage the sufferer to call the national helpline number and to attend local meetings.

The helpdesk enquiries are answered by teams of Online Responders.

Qualifications for Online Responder are:

- Two years' continuous sobriety;
- Experience of service within AA;
- A thorough understanding of the programme of AA and a good understanding of the Traditions;
- Computer literacy:
ORS requires experience and familiarity with email across the Internet.
CNS requires the ability to answer queries quickly and succinctly.

Full training is provided before those new to ORS or CNS are expected to act as responders.

The ECSC will review ORS and CNS annually, taking care to ensure that the services are sufficiently resourced, have appropriate leadership in the form of Administrators and have succession plans in place for when the Administrators rotate out. The Administrators will hold positions on the ECSC, and may also appoint assistants to help with training and other administrative functions.

3:9 Important Points to Remember

Although there can be many advantages to using electronic communications, we must always remember that there can also be disadvantages. Care must be taken to ensure that no member is disenfranchised through lack of a computer or internet connection.

When using email in PI work, remember that your email may be the first contact the recipient has ever had with the Fellowship – and first impressions matter. Use an AA service email address to send to recipients outside the Fellowship.

Remember the recipient of your email cannot see your smile, or hear the tone of voice you use, so it is easy to give offence where none was intended. Be aware, also, that your email could be passed along to other recipients, unknown to you.

Courtesy and politeness in written communications is always essential, and we need always be mindful of our Traditions and general code of conduct.

The email accounts supplied by AAGB are protected by individual passwords. Only those users who are authorized should be able to access them.

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our Fellowship. Conference 2012 approved a card "Hints and Suggestions on Internet Safety" available from GSO with suggestions on how to preserve Tradition 11 when using the Internet and Social Media.

Access to the File Storage area is similarly protected by individual passwords. Note that using the File Storage area cannot guarantee the security of documents – while every effort is made to maintain stability it should not be used as a sole archive.

Be aware that anything posted elsewhere on the website is accessible to all.

3:10 Summary

Electronic communications are evolving swiftly. New features and services, which are not possible at the time of writing this guidance, will appear. There will be greater advantages to be gained – and greater pitfalls to avoid. We are responsible – not only for making the best use of the service and facilities available – but also of ensuring that it is used with integrity and in accordance with our Traditions. If we do this, we will not go far wrong.

(Revised 2017)