

## **Community Organizations: Communicating through Technology**

A challenge of any community group can be spreading the word about your latest fund raiser, service project, or public event. Today's technology lets us communicate like never before. But many organizations are still depending on the postal service to send information to members, and news releases and fliers to inform the public. Computers have given us e-mail, web sites, even list serves and blogs as ways to communicate. But many of us do not take full advantage of these opportunities.

**Email** can be a great way to share ideas and information within your organization. You don't pay postage and the word gets out immediately. It can also be a means for collecting information. But keep in mind a few simple rules of email etiquette. Be professional – don't use cutesy smiley faces or "text messaging" abbreviations. Be sure your grammar and spelling are correct. And even though spell-check might catch a misspelled word it doesn't catch words that are misused. So be sure to proofread every message before sending. And be cautious sending attachments. Because of varying technology and computer viruses many people can't or won't open an attachment.

While email is useful for discussing issues, it may not be the best way to make group decisions. There's a lot to be said for having a thorough face to face discussion before making significant decisions. Much is communicated through tone of voice, facial expressions and body language that you will never get in an email.

**Web sites** can be a cheap, fast, accessible and a convenient way to share your organizations message with the world. When people plan a trip to a community, look for a new church home, or seek out volunteer opportunities many of them are doing it on the web. But websites that aren't well maintained can create a negative impression. If your group has a website, it should be continuously updated so that information is current.

**List serv** is a common term for an email-based mailing list. List servs also serve as email discussion groups. Many organizations deliver news to its members via a list serv. Typically, members have to request to be added to a particular list serv by providing their email address to the web master or point of contact at the organization or association.

**Blogs** are essentially online diaries posted in a chronological order. This online journal is available for other people to post diary entries related to the original intent of the blog. Blogs allow for an immediate and interactive exchange of information.

Before any organization sets out to develop a web site, list serv, or blog, it is useful to define the audience, determine what type of information is best suited to each format, create an attractive format, and have a plan for continual maintenance.