

Chapter Three: AA and Electronic Communications

1. Introduction
2. Email
3. Bulk Email (Spam)
4. Conference Calls
5. Electronic Communications Liaison Officer
6. Local websites
7. Online Responder Service
8. Important Points to Remember
9. 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 communications in AA service work, to outline the role of the Electronic Communications Liaison Officer (ECLO) at intergroup and region level and to outline Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain (AAGB) policy in respect of our presence on the internet.

Comment [J1]: Omitted in error in H/B

Comment [J2]: Decap for consistency

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 bring the AA name into public controversy and damage the reputation of AA as a whole.

Comment [J3]: ECSC suggested insert 'could be in violation of UK law' but this has been omitted, as it is not necessarily so in other countries served by AAGB

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.

Comment [J4]: Decapitalised for consistency

Comment [J5]: Pluralized for grammar

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

Comment [J6]: pluralised

Comment [J7]: Depluralised

3:5 Electronic Communications Liaison Officer

The principal role of the ECLO is one of liaison, communication and co-ordination between groups, intergroups, regions, and the Electronic Communications Subcommittee (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 would be advantageous.

Comment [J8]: Comma removed

Comment [J9]: Added for improved readability

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 AAGB website team, advising the intergroups/regions on the availability and use of the facilities

Comment [J10]: decap

available on the AAGB website

- is responsible for checking the accuracy of any local information posted on the website (i.e. meeting list addresses, postcodes, local webpage content, etc) to ensure that out of date or misleading local information is not published on the website
- plays an important role in the recruitment of national webteam members (Online Responders, Forum Moderators and Technical Web Assistants), giving guidance and assistance to members applying for positions on the national webteam

Comment [J11]: decap

Comment [J12]: Recommended by ECSC

Comment [J13]: Comma inserted

Comment [J14]: decap

3:6 Local Websites (Microsites)

The AAGB website provides hosting for local websites free of charge and is maintained in accordance with our Traditions and the guidance given in our Structure and Service Handbooks.

To host local sites outside of the AAGB website incurs costs and charges, 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 host their local site, thus saving AA money and promoting Unity.

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.

It should be noted that the only websites which can be truly called AA websites are those which are supported by an official AA service body, i.e. intergroup, region or country.

Comment [J15]: changed from 'endorsed' by ECSC

3:7 Online Responder Service

AAGB provides an online response helpdesk where members of the public can make enquiries about AA, AA meetings etc. by sending an email to *help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk*

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

The helpdesk enquiries are answered by a team of on-line responders.

Qualifications for online responders: - 2 years' continuous sobriety and a thorough understanding of the program, the Traditions and the guidance given in the Structure and Service Handbooks. Experience of service within AA, computer literacy, particularly with experience of, and familiarity with email and the internet are also requirements for this role.

Comment [J16]: New section – suggested by ECSC and amended for style.

3:8 Important Points to Remember

Comment [J17]: Renumbered as a result

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 compute 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.

When posting information in the documents library, remember it is accessible to all.

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.

Comment [J18]: Renumbered as above

3:9 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 2013)