

Internet Lodge Technology Study 2010

**Internet Lodge No 9659
Use of the Internet by Freemasonry**

Technology Study Workgroup



The future ...

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Introduction

This is a generic version of a report from a study into the use of Internet by Internet Lodge No 9659 which was published internally to the Lodge in April 2010. The original report contained much material which was specific to Internet Lodge. We hope that this generic version will be of interest to the wider Masonic community.

Freemasonry has been making use of the Internet since the late 1990s. It began with a relatively small proportion of Masons using email and with some enterprising Lodges, and other Masonic bodies, creating simple web sites. This usage has grown to the point where many Lodges use email as their prime means of communication with members, including the distribution of Summonses and Minutes. Many Masonic bodies now have their own web sites and some of these are quite sophisticated, including the collection of subscriptions and dining fees.

However, in recent years the Internet has seen massive change and development, with new services and facilities appearing, and sometimes disappearing, with great rapidity. The primary aim of this study is to ensure that, as Freemasons, we keep up to speed with new developments on the Internet and, where appropriate, take advantage of them.

The purpose of this document is to:

- Describe current and recent developments on the Internet
- Consider their implications for Freemasonry in general
- Propose a policy on each significant development
- Propose guidelines for the Masonic use of Social Networking (Appendix A)

1 Mailing Lists

1.1 Background

A mailing list provides a single email address through which every member of a group can communicate easily with the whole group, without needing to know the individual email addresses of group members.

An email sent to the mailing list address is distributed automatically to every member of the list. Similarly, when an individual replies to an email he receives from the list, his reply automatically goes to every member, not just the original sender.

Mailing lists can be used for a wide range of purposes, from sending out important documents to casual chit chat. A series of postings and replies which all have the same email Subject constitutes a topic. Some topics can become lengthy discussion taking place over a period of weeks.

Some of the content matter regularly posted to mailing lists would actually be more appropriate to a forum (see below for discussion of Forums). Many interesting and educational discussions may take place on a mailing list. Although there may be a list archive, in practice these discussions are lost. Poor maintenance of email subject lines (not always the fault of the user – some email clients alter them in small ways) means that there are no coherent topic threads.

Where members of a mailing list are not familiar with the use of lists, it is not uncommon for embarrassment to be caused when a member replies to a posting without realising that every member of the list will be copied, not just the original sender. In these circumstances it is usually possible to change the list settings so that replies only go to the original sender. This can be inconvenient when a list is primarily used for discussion purposes – responders need to remember to copy the list explicitly on their replies. However, for a list which is primarily for one-way communication, e.g. from the Secretary to the members, setting the “reply-to-list” function to OFF is usually a good idea.

1.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

High. Every Lodge could benefit from a mailing list. Many Lodges now send out emails to lists of members. Members often use the “Reply-all” feature to send emails to other members of the Lodge. However changes in membership can mean that old, out-of-date distributions are accidentally used. In the worst case widows of deceased members may be distressed at continuing to receive emails addressed to their husbands.

A mailing list, centrally maintained by the Lodge Secretary or Webmaster, ensures that mass emails from Lodge members are always sent to the right recipients. There are several free mailing-list facilities easily available on the web, for example Yahoo! Groups.

1.3 Policy

Where a high proportion of members are on email, Lodges are encouraged to use an official mailing list rather than informal, personal distribution lists for mass emails.

Unless a mailing list is used primarily for discussion, Lodges are recommended to set the list so that, by default, replies go only to the original sender.

2 Web Sites

2.1 Background

Masonic web sites are now commonplace and are an important means of communication, both internal and external, for Grand Lodges, Provincial Grand Lodges, Lodges and other Masonic bodies such as Masonic Charities.

Development of a modern, professional-looking web site normally requires the employment of a specialist company. While this is affordable by the larger Masonic bodies such as Grand Lodges, this can be a problem for private Lodges. Some are fortunate in having members with advanced expertise who can create and maintain the Lodge web site free of charge. Others struggle to maintain even the most basic of sites.

A survey of Lodge web sites shows that many are stuck in the formats which were common in the late 1990s and early 2000s, giving a less than satisfactory impression of Freemasonry to visitors.

One of the best ways to limit the resources required to support a web site is to enable non-technical users (e.g. Secretary, Treasurer, Charity Steward) to produce and maintain content by themselves. Organisations have recently been adopting two approaches to this:

1. Moving information to the new media like Blogger, Facebook and Twitter which have been designed to be usable by almost anybody. Users can upload articles and images at will.
2. Using a Content Management System (CMS). These create web sites where the users themselves can publish and update content.

The problem with option 1 is that we introduce many new systems, each requiring its own unique user id and password. Individual members may not want to sign up for these additional systems and it is not reasonable for their Lodge to require them to do so. Also, the infrastructure supporting the Lodge's key information becomes splintered. In addition, there will remain a core of information and functionality that would not migrate easily to these kinds of systems.

Option 2 would therefore appear to be the best way to go. There is still an initial set-up cost for the CMS-based web site, but once set up, the Lodge Officers can easily maintain the content with a minimum of involvement of technically-skilled folk. There is an additional advantage in that the content is generally being authored by Masonically-experienced Brethren. Currently many updates are handled by technically-competent individuals who may be relatively inexperienced Masons or, in the case of an outside company, non-Masons.

Many users now access the Internet from devices other than personal computers. In particular, there has been a merging of PDAs, mobile phones and cameras into one multi-purpose device which is commonly used to access the Internet. Many Masonic web sites do not support mobile devices. This situation is now improving as the new generation of micro browsers begin to support Javascript (which is used for many web-site menus). When an organisation is creating or replacing a web site, it should ensure that access is convenient for mobile devices - and other devices such as home media servers.

2.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

High. The relevance of web sites to Freemasonry is already well understood. However, many private Lodges will be facing the problem of lack of resource to develop their sites further.

CMS may be the best way forward not only for Lodge web sites but for most sites belonging to clubs and similar small organisations.

2.3 Policy

Lodges should aim to have a web site which is appealing to visitors and useful to its members.

Lodges should consider the use of a Content Management System when creating a new site or upgrading an old one.

Masonic Bodies should aim to ensure that their web sites allow for easy access by mobile devices.

Masonic web sites must, of course, continue to conform to the guidelines and directives issued by any Masonic authorities under whose jurisdiction they operate.

3 Asynchronous Javascript and XML (AJAX)

3.1 Background

Back in the 1970s interaction with computers was usually via a terminal. The user filled out details on a terminal screen and hit the “enter” button. He then waited for the computer application to process his input and respond back to the terminal display.

The advent of the Personal Computer in the 1980s brought a massive change in the way users interacted with computers. Applications could now respond to the user on a keystroke by keystroke basis and this brought a new breed of highly interactive applications.

In the 1990s, with the arrival of the Internet, we all took a giant step backwards, almost to the 1970s paradigm, i.e. we submitted requests for web pages and waited for the server to respond. However there was a massive compensation for this seemingly retrograde move – we all stepped back to exactly the same point. With one single, local application – the Web Browser – we could access information in a standard way from any web-connected computer, anywhere in the world.

Since the 1990s there have been many enhancements to Browser function and Internet standards aimed at making our Browser experience more like the snappy, responsive experience we enjoy with PC applications. The latest set of these enhancements is known loosely as “Web 2.0”. AJAX (Asynchronous JavaScript and XML) is an important part of Web 2.0.

AJAX is a set of web standards and programming methods designed to allow a more interactive experience in the Browser, without the need constantly to reload a page. Many familiar services on the web now use AJAX to provide a better, more efficient, user experience: for example, Google’s gmail, Facebook, Flickr and Youtube.

Writing AJAX web pages is typically beyond the competence of those who create and maintain web sites on an amateur basis. Even where a Lodge member was capable of AJAX programming, it is questionable whether this would be a sensible use of his valuable time when he could be engaged in more extensive development of the Lodge web site.

3.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Low. AJAX and Web 2.0 have little direct relevance to Freemasonry although many Masonic web sites will eventually have AJAX content, allowing users better interactivity. However, except in rare cases, this function would not be provided directly by the site owner (Lodge, Provincial Grand Lodge, or Grand Lodge). It will usually be provided by professional developers or, perhaps more often, by pre-packaged elements in a Content Management System.

3.3 Policy

None at this time.

4 Really Simple Syndication (RSS)

4.1 Background

A web feed (or news feed) is a data format used for providing users with frequently updated content. RSS (most commonly expanded as “Really Simple Syndication”) is a family of web feed

formats used to publish frequently updated works - such as blog entries and news articles - in a standard format.

Content owners can provide (the technical term is “syndicate”) a web feed, thereby allowing users to subscribe to it. The advantage to the user is that he can receive timely information from the content owner’s web site, in a place of his choosing, without having to keep visiting the original site to check for something new.

All a user needs to take advantage of RSS is an RSS reader. The most well known reader is Google Reader. Most experienced web users employ an RSS Reader and subscribe to multiple feeds, all brought together in one page which they have assembled and which they check regularly.

Most modern web sites with fast changing content provide an RSS version to which users can subscribe. A good example is the BBC News site.

Any Masonic Body could provide an RSS feed for the news items appearing on its public home page. This would allow interested users (whether members or not) to read its news in a timely fashion.

Lodges could also provide a secure RSS feed to their members with news items from the members’ pages. One disadvantage of secure feeds is that not all RSS Readers support the authentication of private feeds. Unfortunately, one of the most popular readers, Google Reader, does not support private feeds.

4.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Moderate to High. Most individual Lodges do not have sufficient news, or a sufficiently large readership, to make the production of an RSS feed worthwhile.

However Masonic Bodies whose sites have a large readership, for example Grand Lodges and Provincial Grand Lodges, could find RSS a useful tool. For example, Brethren could subscribe to a news feed of the UGLE “News and Events” pages. When something new was posted, for example the latest “Quarterly Communications Speeches”, it would appear immediately in every subscriber’s Reader, without the need to navigate to the UGLE web site.

4.3 Policy

Larger scale Masonic Bodies (above the level of a private Lodge) are encouraged to create an RSS feed from the news areas of their web sites.

5 Photo Galleries

5.1 Background

A picture being “worth a thousand words”, photographs remain a compelling aspect of web site communications. In addition to the usual photographs which accompany articles on a web site, many personal, club and organisational sites include a photo gallery dedicated to displaying photographs in relatively large volumes.

Galleries are usually organised into “albums” or “sets” relating to a particular event or occasion. Some galleries allow any member to upload photographs while others restrict upload to authorised individuals.

In recent times galleries associated with traditional web sites have been overshadowed by the vast growth of the large, general photo sites like Flickr (run by Yahoo!) and Picasa (run by Google). These sites are easy to use and increasingly familiar to Internet users. In addition Facebook has a very easy-to-use photo gallery facility.

5.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Moderate. Many Lodges have photo galleries but few of these provide user-upload facilities or the ease of use provided by the general photo sites.

With increasing dispersion of membership of individual Lodges, it is particularly helpful for members to have the ability to refer to photographs of their fellow members.

Lodges would benefit from taking advantage of the private facilities of general gallery systems like Picasa. This would enable them easily to create and maintain photo galleries without the need for technical skills.

One issue is that individuals, independent of their Lodge, can easily upload photos to the public parts of sites like Flickr and Facebook which might not be appropriate. For example, photos of groups of Brethren in regalia who have not given permission for their photos to be made public.

Masonic authorities may need to consider a code of conduct for use of the web by individual Brethren, not just by Lodges. We used to worry about the content which would be put up by Lodges on their web sites. Nowadays, with the new social media, every Brother can have his own presence on the web.

5.3 Policy

Lodges are encouraged to use photo galleries, either in a private, members-only site or in a password-protected area of a general photo site.

Public photo galleries, while not disallowed, should be treated with care and caution – particularly with respect to any permissions required from individuals appearing in the photographs.

Lodges must, of course, continue to ensure that all web site photos are in compliance with the rules laid down by their Masonic authorities. (It is worth nothing that, within the United Grand Lodge of England, no individual’s photograph may appear on a public Masonic web site without his or her written permission.)

6 Instant Messaging

6.1 Background

Instant messaging (IM) is a collection of technologies used for real-time, text-based communication between two or more participants over the Internet, or other types of network. Examples of IM applications are MSN Messenger, Google Talk, AOL Instant Messenger, Facebook Chat and Skype.

Nowadays, most instant messaging applications include the options of voice and video communication as well as file transfer.

6.2 Relevance to Freemasonry

Moderate. Instant Messaging is now a common method of communication and uses will be found for it by many Lodges and other Masonic Bodies.

Where Lodge membership is dispersed, meetings over a system like Skype may be useful both for informal purposes and for administrative purposes – say when it is difficult for the Secretary and Treasurer to meet in person.

6.3 Policy

Members of Masonic Bodies are encouraged to communicate by whatever means they find convenient, including the use of Instant Messaging where appropriate.

7 Video Streaming

7.1 Background

Live video streaming is now commonplace on the web and there are several free services which offer this capability to individuals or small organisations like Internet Lodge.

Video streaming is a simple one-way communication with no opportunity for the recipients to participate, unless the response is via a different methodology, such as Skype.

Streaming can be public, where any Internet user can access the content if he chooses, or private, where it is password-protected for restricted access only.

Note: Video *Conferencing*, where all participants can transmit as well as receive, is a different subject from simple video streaming.

7.2 Relevance to Freemasonry

Low to moderate. Live video streaming of non-confidential Masonic events to interested parties will be increasingly common but is unlikely to become important for Freemasonry in general.

Private Lodges are unlikely to have a requirement for video streaming although it might be considered suitable on some occasions – for example if many Brethren were absent it might be nice to stream a message to them from the Worshipful Master at the Festive Board.

Larger scale Masonic Bodies, such as Grand Lodges, may find it useful to stream certain events and these would most likely be provided with full public access.

7.3 Policy

Any live video streaming by Lodges should be private and restricted to Lodge members, under an equivalent level of protection to that of a members-only web site.

Public video streaming should not be attempted by private Lodges.

8 Forums

8.1 Background

A Forum is an area on the web where members can hold multiple conversations and discussions in a well-organised format. Forums are very common throughout the Internet particularly for :

1. Product support – a place where users can ask questions and find answers to common problems
2. Communities of Interest – for example clarinet players, Stamp collectors, Freemasons

Forums have been found to be successful where

1. The community is sizeable, with a critical mass of members who wish to contribute to discussions rather than just read them.
2. For small working teams who need to keep a conveniently accessible record of their discussions.

From the above it follows that Lodge-level Forums are unlikely to be successful because of their limited size. The exception to this would be for small working teams within the Lodge – for example a sub-committee planning for a Centenary celebration.

One barrier to the use of forums is that members are usually required to sign in with their user ID and password to find out if anything of interest has been posted. This barrier can be alleviated if the forum is set up to email members when a new posting is made.

8.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Moderate to High. Forums are important to Freemasonry in general and there are many large, successful Masonic forums in operation today, for example <http://www.masonicnetwork.org/>.

Based on the experience of Internet Lodge No 9659, forums are perhaps not suitable for most Lodges. A deserted forum looks bad and tends to reduce overall morale about the Lodge's web site in general.

Forums are probably not desirable for Provincial or Grand Lodge web sites since forum discussion can often veer out of control and the effort of policing forums is unlikely to be worth the trouble.

8.3 Policy

Forums are best suited for small working groups or projects within a Masonic Body.

Lodges should think carefully before introducing a Forum in the members' area of a Lodge web site. It may fail to attract a sufficient volume of postings to make it viable.

9 Blogs

9.1 Background

“Blog” is an abbreviation of “Web Log” and is meant to suggest a public diary posted to the Internet. It is one of the many new ways in which individuals, without the necessity for technical skills, can maintain their own presence on the web. They can write what content they wish and upload photos and videos at will.

Each Blog entry usually gives readers the capability to comment on it if they wish.

Blogging is now a business. If a blog is of sufficient interest to attract a large number of readers, it can generate significant income from third-party advertising on its pages. There are a good number of well-known, highly influential blogs which help to shape public opinion and in the process provide an income for their authors.

Blogs for individual members of a small organisation like Lodge are likely to receive even less take-up than a Lodge Forum. This has been the experience of Internet Lodge No 9659.

Many organisations will have a “Chairman’s Blog” on their web site where the Chairman will share his thoughts either with the public at large or privately with his own members. Many web sites created by a Content Management System (CMS) have a front page which is a “blog roll” of the most recent articles. This tends to keep the web site fresh.

9.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Moderate. Blogs for individual Brethren are unlikely to be of much interest.

However blogs maintained by senior members, whether it be of a Lodge, a Provincial Grand Lodge or a Grand Lodge are likely to become increasingly popular.

The advantage, for example, of a “From the PGM” blog would be that the Provincial Grand Master would be able easily to write and update the entries himself, without the need for any technical help.

9.3 Policy

All Masonic Bodies are encouraged to keep a good flow of communications and to keep their web sites fresh and up-to-date. A blog, particularly a personal one from a senior member, can be a useful addition to the existing methods of communication.

10 Wikis

10.1 Background

A wiki is a website with pages that can be edited by any visitor. It allows the easy creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages via a web browser using a simplified markup language or a WYSIWYG text editor. Wikis are typically powered by wiki software and are often used to create collaborative websites, to power community websites, for personal note taking, in corporate intranets, and in knowledge management systems.

Probably the best known example of a wiki is “Wikipedia”, an online encyclopaedia whose information is created and maintained by the public at large.

Organisations can create their own local wikis for in-house use. It is unlikely that a small unit, such as a Masonic Lodge, would have a need for a wiki.

10.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Low to Moderate. There is no obvious application of Wikis within Freemasonry in general.

There is a large amount of Freemasonic information in the public Wikipedia – see for example <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freemasonry> - which Grand Lodges may wish to check for correctness.

10.3 Policy

None at this time.

11 The Big Online Services

11.1 Background

In recent years many Internet users have moved their email away from their immediate service provider to one of the big three online services provided by Google, Yahoo or Microsoft. These provide not only central access to email from virtually any computer in the world but a host of additional services including mailing lists, groups, blogs, data storage, calendar, documents, spreadsheets, photo galleries, chat, task management, contact management and web sites.

Google, currently the fastest-growing service provider, provides integrated services to small and medium-sized organisations in the form of "Google Apps". Their free, entry level service provides support for your own domain name and up to 50 email addresses together with all the above-listed facilities.

For a small organisation like a Masonic Lodge, Google Apps could provide a one-stop solution for a simple web-site and some of its internal administration. However many Lodges require a web site which is more sophisticated than can be provided by Google Apps.

Some individual services provided by Google or Yahoo (for example groups, photo galleries) might be of interest to Lodges.

A significant minority of Internet users have security concerns about entrusting data to online services. It could therefore prove impractical for a Lodge to *require* all its members to have a user id on one or more of these services.

11.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Low. Some Lodges might benefit from services provided by the big online suppliers but they are of little relevance to larger Masonic Bodies.

11.3 Policy

Lodges which do not have the resources to provide their own fully functional web site should consider whether some of the facilities of the major online services could usefully be employed, for example for photo galleries and mailing lists.

12 Social Networking

12.1 Background

This is presently a massive growth area on the Internet. There are numerous systems and types of social networking (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and so on) and the major ones will be covered individually in this document.

A key element of Social Networking is that it provides virtually any individual with the capability easily to create and maintain a presence on the web. This is a major shift from the early days of the Internet when some technical expertise was required to create even the simplest web page.

The original concept of social networking may have been the creation of “networks of friends” on the web but this has expanded to cover almost every kind of Internet usage, often nothing to do with social networking.

There is a good deal of Freemasonic content in these media and control or approval by Masonic authorities is virtually impossible.

12.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

High. It is where most individual and group activity on the web is now concentrated. Lodges and individual Masons will increasingly have a presence in these media.

12.3 Policy

Freemasonry should take advantage of social networking media but in a controlled and responsible manner.

Guidelines are suggested for the Masonic use of social networking, for both individual members and also for Lodges and other Masonic Bodies – see Appendix A of this document. These guidelines are specific to UGLE but might form the basis for more general guidelines.

Lodges are recommended to appoint a Masonically-experienced Brother as their Lodge Communications Officer (LCO) to oversee all public content on the web site and in the new social media. This will ensure that the Lodge’s presence on the Internet has a consistent theme and that content is always compliant with any rules or guidelines laid down by their Masonic authorities.

13 Facebook

13.1 Background

Facebook is the world’s leading social network with almost 500 million members and 900 employees. Members can post information about themselves or interests, upload photographs and

videos and connect to other members, groups and organisations. Members can control who has access to their information and typically restrict access to those they know and trust.

Many organisations have a Facebook presence. This presence can be in two formats “Facebook Fan Pages” (usually referred to simply as “Pages”) and “Facebook Groups”.

13.1.1 Fan Pages

These were introduced when Facebook noticed that members were trying to connect to brands and artists in ways that didn't quite work in their original scheme.

Pages are “official” in the sense that they must be operated by a bona fide representative of the organisation or the individual depicted. Facebook will discontinue a Page (and potentially its owner's id) if it is found not to be genuine.

If a Masonic Body has a Facebook Page, any Facebook member, Mason or not, can register as a fan. By default, they can leave postings, rather like those on a Lodge web site guest book today. Alternatively, the Page can be set only to allow posting by the owners, not by visitors.

When a Facebook member registers as a fan, this is seen by their Facebook Friends who may also become interested. Thus interest in the Page can spread through a network of similarly-minded people. (Note: since the original version of this document Facebook has replaced the terminology “become a fan” with the simpler term “like”. Thus the term “Like” when applied to a Facebook Fan Page, has more serious connotations than might be implied by its simple English meaning.)

Masonic Facebook Pages are likely to lead to increased applications for membership of the Craft.

13.1.2 Groups

Facebook Groups are more like clubs for members who have a common interest in a particular topic. Any member can create a Group on any topic – whether or not he or she is an official representative for that topic, individual or organisation.

There are three kinds of Group:

Open - anyone can join.

Closed - anyone can apply to join but needs to be approved by an administrator

Secret - not viewable by the public and can only be joined by invitation.

The terminology “Secret” for the third type of group is unfortunate in regard to Freemasonry. These are really just private groups, no different than say Yahoo Groups which are commonly used today by Brethren working on particular projects. For the remainder of this document we will refer to them as “Private” Facebook Groups.

13.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

High. There is a sizeable, and increasing, amount of Masonic activity and content on Facebook.

The Grand Master has a fan page which is primarily Masonic in content at <http://bit.ly/8mHLU2>.

There are many Masonic groups. A prominent example is the Group “Young Freemasons of England” (<http://bit.ly/7epp8B>) which has more than 600 members. Many of the active members of the group are young Brethren from Lodges which are part of the UGLE University Lodge

Scheme. It is likely that some of the future leaders of the Craft are currently members of this group.

The rescue of the failing Tetragon Lodge No 6302 was accomplished by a group of young Masons who met on Facebook.

We will soon be seeing increased “official” use of Facebook by larger-scale Masonic Bodies such as Grand Lodges and Provincial Grand Lodges.

13.3 Policy

Masonic Bodies are encouraged to have a presence on Facebook, in the form of a Facebook Fan Page.

Unless there is a particular need, public postings by visitors to Masonic Fan Pages should be disabled.

It is recommended that the public Facebook content should primarily be a subset of the information on the existing public web site.

Where a Lodge has a Lodge Communications Officer (LCO), the Facebook presence should be owned and managed by him.

There is no objection to groups of Brethren using Private Groups to work on particular projects if Facebook is their preferred medium for this activity.

14 Twitter

14.1 Background

Twitter is a micro-blogging service which allows you to make short postings of a maximum length of 140 characters to your personal Twitter home page.

Other users can elect to “follow” you. This means that, instead of them having to navigate to your Twitter page to find what you have posted, your post appears in *their* Twitter “stream” seconds after you created it.

By looking at your own Twitter stream, you can see immediately what all of the people/entities you are following are posting, virtually as they post.

There are several types of “Twitterer”:

- **Friends and Family**
Twitter is a simple and easy way to keep up with friends and family – especially if spread around the world. It requires much less effort than email on both the part of the poster and the followers.
- **Public Figures and Celebrities**
Twitter enables public figures to reach the public directly, without the intervention of the news media. Once the number of followers reaches a critical mass, the micro-blog becomes a tool for shaping public opinion. For example Lance Armstrong the cyclist

posts several times a day to Twitter and has 2.5 million followers. He has made significant use of this in generating support for his anti-cancer charity “Livestrong”.

- **Organisations**
Many organisations use Twitter to convey news, marketing messages and to provide links to more extensive material on their web sites.

Twitter is also an important source of data. The millions of postings occurring per day are searchable. This provides a mine of information on the “collective consciousness” at any given moment. Users often include tags in their postings to enable them to be picked up easily by search engines, for example #haiti or #earthquake. A notable example concerned the tragic events in Mumbai in November 2008 when news services were able to find out what was happening from people on the spot who were using Twitter.

Twitter can be used from a browser, PC/Mac Client application or mobile phone.

Most Twitter ids are public, viewable by anyone who navigates to your Twitter page in addition to appearing in the streams of your followers. However users may chose to “lock” their ids. In this case their postings are only viewable by those to whom they have given explicit permission.

14.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

High. It is unlike most social networking facilities which seem to become more useful the lower you descend a hierarchy towards the individual member. Twitter by contrast becomes vastly more powerful the higher the level of the Twitterer in the organisation. Twitter id’s such as BarackObama, DowningStreet, SarahBrown10, CNN and so on, with millions of followers can have a significant and rapid impact on public opinion.

Twitter provides an opportunity for Provincial Grand Lodges and Grand Lodges to:

- Rapidly respond to issues directly to the public, without being filtered by the press
- Get messages directly to the press who will be checking the GL Twitter id from the moment an issue arises.
- Create traffic to new articles on their web sites
- Show a normal, everyday, human face to the public at large

The Provincial Grand Lodge of Buckinghamshire has a Twitter ID at <http://twitter.com/buckspgl>.

Large numbers of individual Brethren are active on Twitter, many with Masonic ids like “Adonirum”, RoseCroix or “SussexMason”.

14.3 Policy

Masonic Bodies should consider having a presence on Twitter.

Lodge Twitter postings should primarily be for brief Lodge news items and links to articles on the approved public web site.

A Lodge Twitter ID should not follow any individuals. It may follow Provincial or Grand Lodge Twitter IDs, should such come into existence in the future.

If the members of a Masonic Body find it useful, a private Twitter id may be created for internal communications purposes.

15 MySpace

15.1 Background

MySpace, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, was the world's largest social network until it was overtaken by Facebook which now has almost 500 million users worldwide compared to MySpace's 125 million.

MySpace is, on balance, directed towards a younger audience than Facebook and oriented more towards music and other entertainment media.

There is little evidence of current Masonic activity on MySpace. The top result for a search on the keyword "Freemasonry" returns a link to a MySpace blog which has not been updated since 2007.

15.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Low. The current growth in Freemasonry in social networks is much more on Facebook than MySpace and this trend is likely to continue.

15.3 Policy

None at this time.

16 Second Life

16.1 Background

Second Life (SL) is a virtual world developed by the Linden Lab company. It launched in 2003 and is accessible via the Internet. Users, referred to as "residents", interact with each other through avatars. Residents can explore, meet other residents, socialize and participate in individual and group activities. They can create and trade virtual property and services with one another, and travel throughout the world. Users must be over 18 years of age. Linden Lab provides the basic technical infrastructure for Second Life but almost everything else in the world is built or constructed by the residents themselves. The world sees approximately 1 million unique users per month.

Second Life has its own economy based on an internal currency, the Linden Dollar (LD). LDs can be used to buy, sell, rent or trade land or goods and services with other users. Virtual goods include buildings, vehicles, devices of all kinds, animations, clothing, skin, hair, jewellery, flora and fauna, and works of art. Services include wage labour, business management, entertainment and custom content creation. Linden dollars can be purchased with real-world currency at a rate which varies but is approximately 250 LD to the US Dollar.

Only a relatively small number of residents earn large amounts of money from the world. According to figures published by Linden Lab, about 64,000 users made a profit in Second Life in February 2009, of whom 38524 made less than 10 USD, while 233 made more than 5000 USD.

Profits are derived from selling virtual goods, land rental, and a broad range of services. There exist a few Second Life entrepreneurs, whose profits exceed 1 million USD per year.

Many well-known businesses have an official presence in Second life, for example IBM, Nike and Toyota. A business presence can be for marketing and publicity reasons or, just as likely, for internal company communications. In October 2008 IBM hosted a conference in Second Life for its top creative employees from around the world. The three day conference, with 250 attendees, saved an estimated 350,000 USD in travel and accommodation costs.

Many educational institutions, including several British universities have virtual campuses in SL which provides a rich environment for distance learning. In November 2009, Edinburgh University held part of its graduation ceremony in Second Life to ensure that students on its E-Learning course who were unable to travel to Edinburgh did not miss out on the graduation celebrations. They were able to download robes for their online avatars, and gather in a virtual bar after the ceremony.

Several countries, including Sweden, have official “embassies” and/or national exhibitions in Second life.

There is a significant amount of Masonic activity in Second life. Those involved are drawn from both regular and irregular Freemasonry. By far the most significant project undertaken by regular Masons in Second Life is the Blazing Star Masonic Island (BSMI). This is a large, partly residential, island which contains many notable Masonic structures including a museum, art gallery and full size examples of Masonic Temples including Craft, Royal Arch and Mark Lodge rooms. Visitors, whether Masons or not, are free to explore the island and its buildings and facilities. Residents of the island have built themselves some fine homes and have the benefit of access to several clubs and facilities, including a yacht club.

Conduct on BSMI is subject to strict rules which aim to ensure that the behaviour of Masons on the Island is as "virtuous, amiable and discreet" as it would be in real life. For example the wearing of Masonic Regalia of any kind is totally prohibited on the Island. (There are several Masonic Regalia stores in other areas of Second Life where many and varied types of regalia can be purchased.)

One UGLE Lodge, Internet No 9659, has a small embassy on the Island which provides some basic information about the Lodge. They have acquired two (real-life) joining members who first encountered the Lodge in Second Life.

Recent evidence suggests that there may be some contraction of interest in Second Life since the time of high press coverage in 2007 and 2008. It is not yet clear whether this reduction in usage is a lasting trend. However it would be wise not to commit significant resources to this medium until its long term future is clearer.

16.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

High. Many large and well-respected organisations are active in Second Life and it is only a matter of time before we see bona fide Grand Lodges with an official presence there.

The opportunities to explain and publicise Freemasonry in virtual worlds are similar, if not greater, than those afforded by the Internet in real life. For example, an exact replica of Freemason’s Hall in London could be constructed in Second Life. This would enable people from

all round the world, apparently walking but actually sitting at their computers, to go on a tour of the building.

Today Freemasonry is receiving more and more candidates who make their first contact via the Internet. In future, there will be an increasing number of Candidates whose first encounter with Freemasonry is in Second Life or some other virtual world.

Many Masons pursue their Masonry as vigorously in virtual worlds as they do in real life. All the Masonic considerations which in UGLE are subject to the Book of Constitutions are equally applicable in virtual life - for example the wearing of regalia or holding of processions in public. Questions of Masonic Regularity apply equally in virtual worlds as they do in the real world.

The Rules of Conduct for visitors and residents to the Blazing Star Masonic Island would provide a useful starting point for a Grand Lodge or other Masonic Body attempting to get to grips with the practical considerations of an official Masonic presence in Second life.

From the perspective of those who have little experience of virtual worlds such as Second Life, these considerations may appear laughable. However, once in-world, they are quickly seen to be serious and significant issues.

16.3 Policy

Brethren are expected to conduct themselves, from a Masonic perspective, in Second Life by the same standards they employ in real life.

17 Google Wave

17.1 Background

Google Wave is a recent development by Google which attempts to develop email to the next stage. They describe it as "what email would be if we designed it from scratch today".

Email has been in existence for 40 years now. It was modelled on conventional paper post with messages being created by one user on his computer and sent to another user on their computer.

However there are significant differences between email and traditional post. The most fundamental difference is that with paper post there is always an identifiable original. With email there is the sender's copy and the receiver's copy, plus potentially many others which have been copied or forwarded to others. These additional copies may get changed or edited along the way. In a complex chain of emails (such as we are used to on the Internet Lodge mailing list) it can become very difficult to disentangle the logical chain of correspondence.

Wave solves the problem of multiple copies. Instead of creating an email, the "sender" initiates a wave. Instead of sending an email to the recipients he invites them to join the wave. Everyone is therefore reading the same copy. There are many additional facilities for users to work on and develop the wave which has the following special properties:

- It stores all actions done on it chronologically without exceptions, all participants can at all times play back the development of the file.
- You can invite anybody to Waves you initiate and everybody that is invited can do the same ad infinitum. Even to the extent of making Waves public.

- All participants can edit the Wave or reply or add files, text, images, links, additions etc. with exception of Group-waves where the group-permissions rule.
- It is real-time: in other words those participants in a Wave can actually see any other participant editing and typing.
- It can be used from any computer (or smartphone or netbook etc.) from anywhere in the world.
- Wave is developed as an open standard so that it is not necessarily specific to the Google company.

Wave is unlikely to replace one-to-one email but could potentially take over the part of the email space which deals with communication in groups. Discussion groups or working groups could potentially be better served by Wave than by email or mailing lists.

Wave is a very new technology in its early development. It may take off or it may be a nine-day wonder.

17.2 Relevance To Freemasonry

Low. This technology is too new to have an immediate relevance to Freemasonry. This may change if Wave becomes a popular method for group working and communications.

17.3 Policy

None at this time.

Appendix A: Guidelines for Masonic use of Social Networking (UGLE)

Guidelines for Masonic Bodies

- The UGLE-approved public website should remain the Body's prime means of communication with the world at large.
- Where possible, other external communications should be a subset of the information on the approved web site. For example:
 - A posting on Twitter would typically provide a one sentence summary of, and a link to, an article on the public web site.
 - A Facebook page would typically be made up of items drawn from the public home page of the website.
- Where Social Networking pages are a Masonic Body's main presence on the Internet, or where their content is significantly different from that of the approved web site, those pages must be subject to the same UGLE approvals process as any other public web pages.
- The Twitter IDs of a Masonic Body should not "follow" any individual Twitter IDs other than those of other Masonic bodies – for example Provincial or UGLE Twitter IDs.

Guidelines for Individual Brethren

- There is no objection to suitable Masonic content or references in individual postings on social networking sites.
- Only an individual who has received explicit approval to do so may claim to represent a Masonic Body, including a private Lodge, on any public area of the Internet.
- No individual may use the Logo, or other copyright material, of a Masonic Body on a personal web site, or other personal medium, without formal permission from that Body.
- Individuals are requested not to use Masonic handles or IDs (e.g. Hiram357 or EastLancsBro) in their social networking activities.

Glossary

AJAX	Asynchronous Javascript And XML. A method of making web pages more interactive. An example of Web 2.0 technology.
Avatar	An avatar is a computer user's representation of himself/herself whether in the form of a three-dimensional model used in computer games, a two-dimensional icon (picture) or a text-based username used on Internet forums and other online communities.
Blog	Abbreviation of “Web Log”. A public diary or commentary posted to the Internet.
BSMI	Blazing Star Masonic Island. An area of Second Life devoted to Freemasonry.
Client	An application or system that accesses a remote service on another computer system, known as a server, by way of a network.
CMS	Content Management System. Simplifies the publication of web content to web sites and mobile devices, in particular, allowing content creators to submit content without requiring technical knowledge.
Forum	A web site organised to facilitate online discussions.
Google Wave	An online personal and collaboration tool provided by Google.
IM	Instant Messaging. A tool for real-time communication between two or more participants over the Internet.
Javascript	A scripting or programming language which is implemented as part of a web browser, providing enhanced user interfaces and dynamic websites.
LD	Linden Dollars. The currency used in Second Life, approximately 150 LDs to the US Dollar.
Mailing List	A single email address through which every member of a group can communicate easily with the whole group.
Netbook	A small, lightweight, and inexpensive laptop computer.
PDA	Personal Digital Assistant. A small electronic device which can include some of the functions of a computer, a cellphone, a music player, and a camera.
RSS	Really Simple Syndication. A method for providing a news feed, over the web, of frequently-updated information.

SL	Second Life. An Internet-based virtual world where residents can interact with each other through Avatars.
Video Streaming	The delivery of video from a computer server to the end user in real time (or very close to real time).
wave	The message document used by Google Wave that contains the complete thread of a particular online collaboration.
Web 2.0	A collection of web technologies that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the Internet.
Wiki	A web site with pages that can be edited by any visitor.
Wikipedia	An online encyclopaedia whose information is created and maintained by the public at large.
WYSISYG	What You See Is What You Get. A type of text editor in which content displayed during editing appears very similar to the final output.
XML	eXtensible Markup Language. A set of rules for encoding documents electronically in a simple, logical and highly structured way.