

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
January 25 - 27, 2012
Chicago, Illinois**

**Report: Enhancing SAA's Use of
Social Media and Online Communications**
(Prepared by the Communication Technology Working Group)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SAA's FY10-FY14 Strategic Priority Outcomes and Activities¹ aspire to "make increasingly effective use of current and emerging technology in order to enhance communication with internal and external audiences and stimulate collaboration among its constituents" (Technology, Desired Outcome #3). To advance this objective, the Council charged the Communication Technology Working Group (CTWG) to:

- Convene a public forum at SAA's 2011 Annual Meeting to solicit input on what resources, capabilities, and uses individual members and groups want from SAA;
- Analyze functional gaps between SAA's officially sponsored communications technology and constituent needs and/or user practices;
- Identify priority areas; and
- Submit recommendations to the Council.

In fulfillment of its charge, CTWG makes the following core recommendations to the Council:

- Provide access to Wi-Fi at Annual Meeting.
- Facilitate tweeting and/or blogging at the Annual Meeting.
- Establish specific Twitter hashtags for Annual Meeting sessions, preconference sessions, and continuing education workshops.
- Make more effective use of RSS and website news feeds by promoting the existing capabilities of SAA's list server and Drupal content management system.
- Re-publish to the SAA website the SAA President's and the SAA Executive Director's bi-monthly columns from *Archival Outlook*.

¹ <http://www2.archivists.org/governance/strategic-priorities>

WORKING GROUP REPORT

Members

The members of CTWG are: Brian Doyle, Rebecca Goldman, Brad Houston, Elizabeth Skene, Eliot Wilczek, Elizabeth Yakel, and Elisabeth Kaplan (Council liaison)

Activities

Members of CTWG held several phone conference meetings and undertook environmental scans to organize the structure of the Social Media Forum and its topics for discussion. Hosting the forum in conjunction with *ARCHIVES 360°* on Thursday, August 25, 2011, working group members announced the event in printed marketing materials, on the SAA website, on Facebook, and on Twitter. The forum drew 48 attendees. Brian Doyle presented a 5-minute introductory slideshow to introduce the main questions to be discussed. Anecdotal feedback suggests that attendees valued the open format and opportunity to express opinions. As one member blogged,² “I particularly enjoyed the [Social Media] Forum ... because it was a small group of likeminded individuals and we were able to really participate in the conversation.”

CTWG compiled and topically arranged notes from the forum (see Appendix) and posted them to the the group’s microsite. In addition, working group members posted a call for online comments and received six replies via the CTWG microsite.³

Following the Annual Meeting, CTWG members discussed the forum feedback via email and began to distill observations into actionable strategies for enhancing communication. Working group members supplemented these findings with remarks from key SAA constituents, particularly leaders of roundtables and sections that have an active social media presence.

Doyle compiled a spreadsheet of potential recommendations and asked CTWG members to rate them on a scale of 1 to 5 and provide additional comments. Subsequently, we used these data as a guide in a follow-up teleconference to determine the group’s final recommendations.

Findings

- 1. Constituents repeatedly affirmed a desire to foster community and to stimulate conversations between and among both internal and external audiences.** For example, forum participants want more opportunities to discuss Annual Meeting sessions and Continuing Education workshops, not only at the conference but throughout the year.
- 2. Messages from SAA should be tailored to the medium.** In the case of social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), fostering conversations should be the primary objective. Messages should, when appropriate, have a more personal voice associated with an individual, either an SAA staff or Council member. Messages from SAA should not always speak in the corporate voice. SAA should also consider strategically what desired outcomes are and are *not* in scope

² <http://journeystoamerica.blogspot.com/2011/09/75th-annual-meeting-of-society-of.html>

³ <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/communications-technology-working-group-ctwg>

for each social media platform. What specifically does SAA hope to accomplish via Facebook, via Twitter, via LinkedIn, and so forth?

- 3. Information overload is a problem.** There are too many streams of information. Constituents commented at length on various ideas for content aggregation. Commentators also cautioned that SAA’s outreach activities should avoid generating “appeal fatigue.”
- 4. There is a perceived disconnect between SAA and the broader community.** Group leaders want to extend their reach to nonmembers, to increase public awareness, and to encourage users to seek out archivists for help. Increased collaboration with allied professionals and with regional archives associations also was discussed. These comments are consistent with SAA’s Advocacy and Public Awareness strategic priority, especially Desired Outcome #3,⁴ but suggest that the measurable activities of SAA staff, its component groups, and external stakeholders may not (yet) be well aligned.
- 5. There is an implicit “top-down / bottom-up” tension between the grassroots nature of social media and the desire for increased organizational support to facilitate effective communication and information exchange.** Prominent examples of the latter include demand for comprehensive Wi-Fi service at the Annual Meeting and provision of persistent hosting and management of multimedia files for component groups.⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended Actions

The CTWG believes that these are concrete and tangible goals that SAA should be able to address in the relatively near term.

- 1. Provide access to Wi-Fi at Annual Meeting.**

Provision of Wi-Fi at the Annual Meeting was rated a “must do” by the majority of CTWG members. In fact, it was the highest rated of the potential strategies. The CTWG recommends that the Annual Meeting Task Force and the Finance Committee work with SAA staff to determine the fiscal impact of having Wi-Fi at the Annual Meetings and pursue any and all viable means to implement this service. The CTWG recognizes this service can be costly, but strongly recommends that wireless be an operational and financial priority of SAA. Many of the CTWG’s recommendations are based on the premise of having a Wi-Fi-enabled Annual Meeting. Participants at the forum overwhelmingly said that they would pay increased registration for this service. (This activity relates to Finding #1 and Finding #5.)

⁴ Desired Outcome #3 for Advocacy / Public Awareness reads, “Using American Archives Month as one communication vehicle, plan and implement a public relations campaign, directed to users of archives, whose goals are to 1) increase users’ appreciation of archives; 2) continue to “brand” American Archives Month as a profession-wide opportunity to build public awareness; and 3) increase archivists’ involvement in public awareness activities.”

⁵ This logically relates to Council “to-do” item #D89—i.e., “consider capacity of SAA Archives to preserve SAA’s digital records (and) consider other options if UW-Milwaukee cannot provide access to SAA’s digital material.”

2. Facilitate tweeting and/or blogging at the Annual Meeting.

Forum participants suggested that one or more staff members could be assigned to tweet or blog from the Annual Meeting. Working group members also discussed assigning similar roles to members of the Program and Host committees. The main objective would be to establish “a little infrastructure” to facilitate social media communication.

CTWG members agreed that this responsibility cannot be assigned to a single group—although coordination of activities might be effectively charged to the Host Committee. Rather, SAA should encourage the addition of social media strategies to existing activities and responsibilities. For example, the Host Committee could tweet about tours and special events. Staff could tweet public service announcements. The Program Committee might tweet information related to calls for papers, group endorsements, etc.

Finally, SAA might consider recruiting a small cadre of “conference correspondents” to initiate online discussions. The Midwest Archives Conference has used this model successfully for the past two years. The Society should confer with colleagues at MAC to learn more about their experience and explore developing a similar model for SAA. (This activity relates to Finding #1.)

3. Establish Twitter hashtags.

Establish specific Twitter hashtags for Annual Meeting sessions, preconference sessions, and continuing education workshops, and promote in the onsite program, in the online event calendar, and via other media. (This activity relates to Finding #3.)

4. Use RSS feeds more effectively.

Make more effective use of RSS feeds by promoting the existing capabilities of SAA’s list server. Likewise, the staff has developed a new “global” newsfeed⁶ on SAA’s Drupal website that aggregates content created by component group leaders. This feature also should be promoted more effectively. (This activity relates to Finding #3.)

5. Re-publish SAA President and Executive Director columns on the SAA website.

Re-publish to the SAA website the SAA President’s and Executive Director’s bi-monthly columns from *Archival Outlook*. (This activity is an alternative to Item G below and relates to Finding #1.)

Issues for Further Discussion and/or Investigation

These are issues identified by the CTWG that merit further consideration by the SAA Council, staff, and community members. While in general the CTWG feels that SAA should undertake these important tasks, they require further consideration and discussion before action can be taken.

⁶ <http://www2.archivists.org/newsfeed>

6. Improve SAA staff’s use of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter.

While all forum participants and working group members agreed that social media should be used to foster conversations, opinions regarding the staff’s use of Facebook and Twitter varied. For example, one individual commented, “I love SAA tweets!” Others expressed concern about the preponderance of broadcast communication, as compared to more personal interaction, with some remarking they wanted to know *who* at SAA Headquarters is doing the posting. Some participants suggested that staff discontinue the practice of automatically forwarding Facebook status updates to Twitter and tailor messages to the medium. However, as one CTWG member remarked, we still do not know what information members prefer to receive or by what channels.

With this variety of opinions—and with potentially relevant survey data forthcoming in Spring 2012 about member needs and satisfaction—no clear recommendations emerged in terms of proposed guidelines for staff use of social media. That being said, the working group encourages the Council to continue discussing this issue and, as additional information becomes available, to explore training on the use of social media and/or the establishment of a social media policy for staff. (This activity relates to Finding #2.)

7. Establish a Presidential, SAA Council, and/or SAA Leader Blog.

As one forum participant commented, “a Presidential blog would really foster conversation.” Variant models discussed by the working group included an SAA Council blog and an SAA Leader blog. Observing the desire among members to “put a face” with their elected leaders, CTWG members generally concurred with this sentiment but also agreed that blogging cannot be recommended as a *requirement* of office. CTWG encourages the Council to consider ways in which it might *informally* increase personal online communication with members. (This activity relates to Finding #1.)

8. Establish an official Annual Meeting wiki.

Annual Meeting content is distributed across numerous sites, including the SAA Extranet (i.e., Drupal), the SAA Intranet (i.e., webpages dynamically published by the member database), Host Committee wikis, and unofficial wikis and blogs. While SAA staff encourages speakers to submit presentation materials for posting, many Annual Meeting participants prefer to manage their content independently with Web 2.0 tools. Limitations in the SAA Intranet interface also hinder effective information retrieval.

An official, interactive wiki would serve as a single destination for meeting information, as well as promote communication among conference participants. This would yield significant benefit. However, working group members held differing opinions on whether this goal would necessitate resource-intensive “top-down” efforts or entail more of a do-it-yourself “bottom-up” approach. For example, to keep annual meeting information highly consistent with other online conference materials, a wiki might demand a high degree of coordination vis-à-vis existing speaker and event management procedures used by the staff, which would entail significant expense. Working group members recognize that an effort of such scope and complexity would be beyond the Society’s means at this time. However, CTWG encourages the Council and staff to keep this issue on the Society’s radar screen, to

determine fiscal and operational impact, and to explore it further according to additional findings. (This activity relates to Finding #3 and Finding #5.)

9. Identify external social media venues to promote SAA’s advocacy and public awareness efforts.

Rather than a formal initiative, this should be an evergreen activity incorporated as standard operating practice into all advocacy and public awareness efforts. (This activity relates to Finding #4.)

10. Develop a destination on SAA website for the public and improve the information architecture.

The issue of making part of the SAA website geared toward the general public (potentially related to Finding #4) has long been identified as a concern. Much of the content posted to the SAA website is aimed at SAA members. Working group members acknowledged that this may be an important issue beyond the immediate scope of CTWG but regarded it as “a whole other kettle of fish.”

Appendix: Social Media Forum Meeting Notes

What is CTWG's objective?

- Yakel: Best social media strategies for SAA to pursue.
- We need to understand:
 - Users and what they need/want from SAA.
 - Interest in communication among and between component groups.
 - Stronger connection to the archives community.
 - Desire among component groups to extend reach to non-SAA members and get the public to seek out archivists for help.
 - Kaplan: Who are the outside constituencies?
 - AT/Archon / External groups with internal connections
 - Archivematica \ Both use Google groups
 - ArchivesSpace
 - Conservators
 - Technologists
 - Allied associations and regionals
 - “Cloud collaboration” (e.g., Chatter, etc.) could be good strategy to recruit potential new members
 - Which social media platforms best deliver various kinds of information.
 - Social media not just about pushing info but, rather, fostering community.
 - How to effectively use multiple streams to excite people.
 - Information overload: Too many streams of information; Users tune much of it out. Don't repeat same info via FB, Twitter, and email.
 - Counterpoint: Don't like info coming from a single source.
 - Message needs to suit the medium.
 - Nature of the media yields implicit tension between what organizations can do vs. what individuals can do. Who makes the connections?
 - Everyone uses social media in lots of different ways. Who coordinates? (Can anybody coordinate it?)
 - Threat: SAA invests lots of time on a specific social-media tool that subsequently gets superseded by the latest trends.
 - Disconnect between what happens inside SAA and what happens in the profession at large.
 - Kaplan: How can SAA use social media better? What orgs are doing a good job? Any models out there?
 - SAA hasn't had a president who blogs or tweets. When this happens, that will really foster a conversation.
 - American Association of Museums (AAM) has really embraced social media, might provide a good model.
 - Need more emphasis on appropriate technology for different messages. Social media can/should be more “touchy-feely.”
 - Doyle: Social media brings together multiple networks (e.g., professional, friends, family, etc.) How do we keep personal and professional lives separate?
 - Evanston History Center has a social media policy.

- Social media is just one type of communication, one piece of many moving parts (e.g., publications, website, etc.) Social media cannot be looked at in isolation. Strategy needs to look at the big picture → Caution: May expand scope of CTWG.
- Issue advocacy:
 - Appeal fatigue → Need to be very careful about what we communicate and where.
 - Planned Parenthood a model for issue advocacy.

Twitter

- Love SAA tweets.
- User needs:
 - More hashtags for education sessions and continuing education workshops. Include official hashtags in program literature so people can follow tweets for programs, not only at annual conference but throughout the year.
 - For people who can't afford to travel, helpful to be able to follow discussion.
 - Distribution of workshop materials would help prospective attendees persuade resource allocators (e.g., "Look what we could have learned; let's go next time.")
 - Something along the lines of the feed for Sue (T-Rex)
 - Counterpoint: Social media changes; Doesn't make sense to invest a lot of time creating "official" hashtags.
 - Bitly links to marked-up slides.
- Best practices:
 - Use Twitter for community development and less as broadcast media.
 - Twitter should foster conversations.
 - Twitter best for self-promotion; not much more.
 - Good for "shout-outs."
 - Want to know *who* at SAA is communicating.
- Many people use Twitter both for internal and external communications.
- Twitter has clamped down on Twapperkeeper → Constraints on content aggregation.
- Use Twitter and Facebook to communicate with members during the Annual Conference. [Online comment]
- Foster ... on-site communication between attendees, SAA staff at the annual meeting. Perhaps better use of Twitter or Facebook could help solve this. [Online comment]

Blogs & Blog Aggregators

- User needs:
 - Aggregate content:
 - <http://code4lib.org> is an example of a successful blog aggregator.
 - Would be great for someone to do—i.e., bring posts from different blogs together in one place.
 - Who would be best positioned to do that? If it's SAA, is that too official?
 - MARAC is considering a blog aggregator.
 - Could be done regionally.
 - Opportunity for collaboration.
 - Regional website job post aggregators might also be a good model.
 - See also "Social Tagging" below.
 - Doyle: How do people search for information?

- Topically? Geographically? Via personal networks (i.e., word of mouth)?
- Best practices:
 - Blog comments good for conversations.

Social Tagging (Bookmarking)

- Implicit user need is content aggregation.
 - Has SAA considered social tagging via <http://www.delicious.com> or <http://digg.com>?
 - Does SAA have a delicious account?
- Suggested practices:
 - SAA could formulate suggested lists of people and institutions to follow.
 - SAA could create a set of “official” hashtags for individuals to use.
 - Counterpoint: hashtags have a short lifespan → Could be difficult for an organization to maintain.
 - Day of Digital Archives on October 6 leverages the short lifespan of a (Twitter) hashtag.⁷
 - Google+ could have potential but doesn’t support organizational pages.

RSS Feeds

- Are RSS feeds available from SAA? Want more info via RSS. Want to access via gReader.
- RSS feeds available on SAA list server but need to make them easier to find.
- Make available for news and events via SAA website as well as the list server.

Facebook

- Best practices:
 - Facebook good for photo tagging.
- Use Twitter and Facebook to communicate with members during the Annual Conference. [Online comment]
- Foster ... on-site communication between attendees, SAA staff at the annual meeting. Perhaps better use of Twitter or Facebook could help solve this. [Online comment]

WiFi at Annual Meeting

- SAA should more actively support onsite communication via social media (e.g., Twitter)
- Not happening now → No wifi!
 - Beaumont: Annual Meeting Task Force will examine this issue.
 - Forthcoming member survey should query about tolerance for additional fees.
- Other ideas:
 - Consider having assigned, official tweeters
 - Get three bullet points from speakers prior to sessions / Do pre-interviews with speakers
 - Send out bullet points and URLs in real time.
 - Question brought up by working group was, "What other organizations are doing it right?" Midwest Archives Conference (MAC) had a very successful social media campaign this past April. They had assigned multiple staff members live tweeting and live blogging the concurrent sessions and meetings. By having more than one person tweeting and blogging, it also helped add/see other people's perspectives and what topics and points jumped out to them. As a person said in the forum, it was also great to see the feeds from sessions that participants couldn't attend, as you can only be in one place at a time. The tweeting and blogging was also helpful after the conference, as it jogged my memory while I wrote my travel reports and blogged about my

⁷ Notes show that hashtags came up again in context of content aggregation. Not clear if this has any relation to Delicious/Digg.

own experience. One other point about live tweeting and blogging: it gives an additional access point for people to join a conversation that otherwise wouldn't. I was a new member and a first time attendee to MAC and by following tweets and having "conversations" with people through Twitter, I was able to make connections and share in the moment with other people in a less-intimidating way (versus face-to-face conversation with strangers). Having something similar during future SAA meetings is a great way to reach out to those who may be too shy (or overwhelmed!) to join in the conversation and be involved in the SAA community. [Online comment]

- Allow members and attendees to communicate with each other by providing Internet access in all meeting rooms. [Online comment]

Miscellaneous

- Provide informal venues for professional conversations—places where conversations started at conferences or on Twitter (or wherever) can be conducted in public, so that others can join in. Right now, there's not a good forum (that I know of) for this type of conversation. [Online comment]
- We in the Congressional Papers Roundtable are interested in developing the range of digital content available on our SAA Web pages. Specifically, we have begun a video oral history project to document the history, perspectives, and events that comprise CPR. We would like SAA to manage these born-digital files. Currently, we are planning to host and serve these files at a member's institutional server and through that institution's iTunes U account. We would like SAA to develop capacity and guidelines for serving up a full range of digital content especially including video for SAA groups like CPR. --Jill Severn, Chair, CPR 2010/11 [Online comment]
- My day job is working with students with disabilities (SWD) at a university. This is just a gentle reminder that whatever communication tools we use should be accessible to those with sensory impairments and/or other disabilities. [Online comment]