

Your Support from RI

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The RI Secretariat provides support to clubs and districts in a wide variety of ways — from assisting your administrative and public relations efforts to offering best practices for membership development and retention to coordinating humanitarian and educational grants. One of our most important functions is communication, not just from the top down but from and among our members as well. Today, I'd like to talk to you about some of the Secretariat's new and exciting initiatives that are taking advantage of technology developments that facilitate all forms of communication with and among members.

For example, if you've been following Rotary on Twitter this week, you know that news from this assembly is being tweeted throughout the Rotary world. That kind of instant worldwide conversation makes me realize that Rotary was made for the digital age. After all, Rotary clubs have been building social networks long before the Internet made them so popular. And we've been communicating with each other around the globe for many decades. It's just a lot easier now.

In the past five years, Rotary has joined the digital revolution full force. Let me give you just a few examples:

- Our e-club pilot project is offering flexibility and convenience to hundreds of members who might otherwise have had to drop out. And e-clubs also offer a convenient way for other members to do make-ups.
- In this time of financial constraint, we've been conducting many of our committee meetings via the Internet, using web conferencing tools to bring us together and help RI save thousands of dollars.
- We've even been able to put the entire 99-year catalog of *The Rotarian* magazine online, through Google Books, which scanned and posted over 1,100 back issues at no cost to RI. Every issue is searchable, so you can locate articles more easily.

Our website continues to draw enormous traffic — almost 1.5 *million* visits each quarter. Rotary.org is the best place to find the most timely information, including updates on the organization's financial picture and news about polio eradication efforts and Rotary's US\$200 Million Challenge. You'll also find e-learning modules that can help new members quickly become better acquainted with Rotary. Or you can learn more about the Future Vision Plan and follow the progress of the Future Vision pilot. And, of course, you can contribute to The Rotary Foundation and register for the Montréal convention online.

But the Internet also allows the Secretariat to greatly improve our communication with Rotarians.

- How many of you know that Rotary has an official RI Facebook page? And we have more than 36,000 fans! Every post we make draws comments from Rotarians all over the world.
- Our LinkedIn site hosts some very interesting discussions by Rotarians on a wide range of topics. It's proving to be an excellent forum for members to share concerns and ideas. The official RI group has about 6,000 members. It's grown so much that we had to ask LinkedIn to expand the group's membership limits [beyond LinkedIn's default maximum size of 5,000 members].
- We're spotlighting our videos on Rotary's YouTube channel, which was one of the first nonprofit channels. We have about 1,000 subscribers and some 80,000 views monthly.

- Members are creating a giant Rotary photo album on the RI Flickr site. I encourage you to visit and post some photos of activities in your district.
- And, finally, 6,000 people are following us on Twitter, eager to find out what Rotary International is doing right now. Followers can “retweet” our announcements, which allows RI to reach exponentially larger audiences.

This is just the beginning. There are many more social networking sites that we’re exploring. Some of them are very popular in Asia or Latin America or Europe. We want to make sure that we have a presence in all parts of the world and that Rotarians in all language groups have the opportunity to connect with each other and form communities online.

We’re also working to make www.rotary.org more interactive. You may have noticed that our news stories have a comments feature at the end that allows readers to react to the story and share information about similar projects in their clubs. Comments help us to better understand what topics are of greatest interest to Rotarians. But they also show how Rotarians feel about Rotary. We get a lot of feedback on stories about outstanding club and district projects. Invariably, readers express how such stories make them feel proud to be a Rotarian. And whenever we run stories about generous contributions to our Foundation or the \$200 million challenge, we see an outpouring of gratitude from Rotarian readers.

Occasionally, the comments are less favorable, but we don’t edit them. We need to hear what Rotarians don’t like or disagree with. We do, however, reserve the right not to post any comments that include profanity, personal attacks, or commercial promotions, though I’m happy to say that we don’t get too many of those.

We’re also actively soliciting responses from members through a new feature on our website called *Your Voice, Your Solution*. Every month, we present a different situation and ask Rotarians how they would handle it. Thus far, members have weighed in on such issues as attracting younger members, finding interesting speakers, and updating club websites. I encourage you to take a look at this feature; use it as a resource and as a way to share your successful experiences in dealing with the specific challenge being addressed.

We also find out what Rotarians are thinking by conducting surveys on a wide range of topics. About a year ago, we surveyed the readers of *Rotary World*, our quarterly newsletter for club presidents and district governors. We wanted to find out what they liked and disliked about this publication and whether it was helping them to do their job. We got a variety of responses, but in general, readers wanted more focus on the issues and challenges they face every day in running a club or district. They also said they wanted less paper coming from RI.

In response to those two overriding themes, we created *Rotary Leader*, a digital newsletter for all Rotarians serving in leadership roles. This month marks the final print issue of *Rotary World*. But we’ve also created a preview issue of *Rotary Leader* that we are launching at this assembly. Beginning in July, we’ll increase the frequency of the publication from quarterly to bimonthly.

Rotary Leader will focus on topics of specific interest to club and district leaders. For example, this preview issue includes tips on successfully applying for PR grants, ideas for attracting younger members, and the best practices for identifying and nominating candidates for Ambassadorial Scholarships and Rotary Peace Fellowships. You’ll also find links to other stories on our website that you might find interesting. And we’ll be able to embed video and audio into the digital edition, using all our media to expand our message.

Without the restrictions of printing and international mailing costs, we hope to reach many more Rotarians with *Rotary Leader* than we could with *Rotary World*. We will automatically push the publication out to club presidents, district governors, and governors-elect, provided that we

have their e-mail address. But much of the content in *Rotary Leader* will be helpful to other club and district leaders, as well as to Rotarians who are interested in taking on leadership roles. Encourage your assistant governors and district chairs to subscribe, and make sure your club presidents are all receiving it. Stop by the Rotary Bookstore to see a demonstration of the preview issue and offer staff some ideas for articles in upcoming issues.

For many decades, Rotary International has communicated with its members by sending them publications and letters. But that communication was primarily one-way. Now there are so many ways that you can tell us what you think, what interests you most, and how the Secretariat can help you be a more effective leader.

Meeting face to face, as we have been this week, will always be the most satisfying method of communication, and I encourage you to take the opportunity to speak to the Secretariat staff who are here in San Diego. But with more than 200 Rotary countries and geographical areas and only eight RI offices worldwide, maintaining such personal communication is challenging. So I encourage you to use technology to talk to us. Become a fan of the official RI page on Facebook. Join the discussion on LinkedIn. Follow us on Twitter. Comment on our news stories, and respond to any surveys you may receive from RI. Use whichever of these methods you find most convenient, but keep the conversation going. We want to know what you think.