

From the CEO

Have Something to Say? Now You Have a Place to Say It!

By Barbara Baldwin, M.P.H.

How the CSA Communicates with You



The CSA communicates with its members in a variety of ways—via the quarterly *CSA Bulletin*, the CSA Web Site, the *Gasline* electronic newsletter, and by e-mail (which goes out to every member whose e-mail address is in the CSA database)—but which method do members prefer? To find out, we employed Survey Monkey, an online tool that can create short web-based surveys. Our survey was advertised in *Gasline* and the query was posted to the CSA Web Site in January 2009. About 200 respondents indicated the top three ways by which they prefer to receive their communications from the CSA. The most common answer was, by a large margin, e-mail (about 79 percent). Second was the electronic newsletter *Gasline* (about 38 percent), followed closely by our print publication, the *Bulletin* (34 percent). Next was the Web site (28 percent), and least preferred for receiving communication from the CSA were district meetings (5 percent). The survey, the full results of which can be found at http://www.csaHQ.org/pdf/news/2009_csa_member_survey.pdf, was not sufficiently powered to reach statistical significance, but it does suggest a trend of increasing numbers of members using electronic communication and information transfer.

Each of these communication vehicles has its own advantages and shortcomings. E-mail is ubiquitous and easy for relatively efficient communication, but can easily end up in a spam folder, or be overlooked or deleted. Moreover, it reaches only those CSA members who have provided accurate e-mail addresses for their member records. *Gasline*, transmitted monthly, contains topical and often time-sensitive information presented in brief news items, but it is essentially a mini-newsletter via e-mail, and as such shares e-mail's pros and cons. The *Bulletin* is in a class of its own—a high-quality, substantive publication, with pieces written by many authors, full of in-depth articles on wide-ranging topics of interest and import to our members, and with educational reports on legislative and legal issues, as well as CME presentations. It is sent by snail mail to every CSA member and to other interested parties outside California, including many ASA leaders. Each *Bulletin* issue is also posted to the CSA Web Site, and articles from previous issues are available in an archive.

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All of the methods described above *push* information out to members, without their having to do anything special to receive it. Sometimes, members may respond to a *Bulletin* article or *Gasline* piece, but all of these are essentially a one-way communication from the CSA to you. None connects members with one another.

Information Exchange

For several years, the CSA has utilized listservs, which are e-mail groups wherein subscribers with a common interest or connection receive all e-mails from other subscribers on the list. They are extremely useful and reasonably efficient in exchanging information and opinions within certain fairly small or limited groups, such as members of a committee. Sometimes listservs are used to conduct “virtual” meetings, although these meetings do occur in cyberspace in decidedly slow motion, just from the nature of the medium. For example, listservs are established for the Board of Directors, the Educational Programs Division, the Legislative and Practice Affairs Division, The Public and Professional Communications Committee, and a few of the districts.

With listservs, particularly those that have a larger membership, sometimes a few people engage in an online conversation that is not of much interest to some others on the list. When they don't take their more personal exchanges “off line,” disinterested parties are “pushed” unwanted e-mails and may wish to drop off the listserv entirely if this happens too often. In addition, those who may be interested in the topic may be inhibited from participating in the discussion.

Social Networking

This term is probably familiar to everyone under age 40, but for many of us who saw 40 long ago, it is a relatively new concept in communication. Also called Web 2.0, social networking Web sites are online communities of Internet users. Depending on the Web site in question, many of these online community members share a common interest such as a hobby, religion, or politics. Once you are granted access to a social networking Web site, you can begin to socialize. This socialization may include reading the profile pages of other members and possibly even contacting them.

Most of us have heard of Facebook and MySpace, which are the largest social networking sites—with millions of members. Many others are being developed, including Twitter and Yelp, for example. They have Internet sites where a member has a Web page and constructs his demographic profile, can post pictures and videos, and invites others to be part of his network. The number

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of online “friends” can expand exponentially, where friends of your friends also become linked to you as new friends, and the network continues to expand. Depending on how active you and your friends are, exchanges can be continuous and very lively.

Many Web sites host social networks where people with an interest in a topic or issue can post opinions, ask questions and discuss others’ comments. Companies with a large Internet presence like Apple and Kodak have discussion forums with hundreds of discussion “threads,” electronic dialogues concerning problems some users have experienced, with other users offering their solutions. They also serve as a place where you can find users’ opinions of the products and services of the host Web site. Chat is a real-time version of an electronic conversation, usually between just two people, but sometimes more, and chat can be by text, voice, or video.

CSA Joins Web 2.0

The CSA is venturing into the realm of social networking, whereby discussion forums on topics of interest to California anesthesiologists can take place through the CSA Web Site. The CSA home page now has a button on the left navigation index labeled “Discussion Forum” so members can view and comment on issues being discussed. Members also may start new forum discussions on topics of interest.

Hopefully this venue will afford CSA members with a setting wherein they can converse with their anesthesiologist colleagues on matters of common interest and perhaps even learn new information on topics of their choosing. Please visit the forum page at www.csahq.org and see the current discussions. If you have something to say, now you have a place to say it!

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