Embracing Technology in Campus Leadership
Rushing Headlong Into the 21st Century
by Del Suggs

In the past forty years, student leaders have embraced each new technological advance. Consider these particular changes: from manual typewriters to electric to the IBM Selectric. If you've never heard of it, the Selectric was a marvel. You could actually change fonts, and it would allow you to correct mistakes without erasing! How about the touch-tone phone? Compared to rotary phones-- waiting for the dial to rotate back around so you could enter the next number-- they were cutting edge. Then came the Facsimile Machine, the fax, when it had to be there even faster than Federal Express' overnight delivery service.

Tomorrow's student leaders will be even more dependent on technology than today's office. However, it will likely have even fewer machines. In the near future, most "office equipment" will consist of two advanced machines: a computer (with broadband Internet and printer/scanner), and a cellphone. And it's likely that the smartphone may replace the computer. Those peripheral devices like printers and scanners may become unnecessary as we become a more "paperless" society.

Technological Compatibility

While there is some resistance to embracing the new advances, most students are ahead of the curve. It's refreshing to see the sea change in attitude. Student leaders are at the cutting-edge of the newest technology.

If college students and student leaders have access to the same technologies, then there is an extraordinary opportunity. One beautiful thing about this common technology is the way it can help create better campus organizations. Let's consider some of the most popular new opportunities that are useful in the world of campus clubs and organizations.

Facebook

Facebook is known as a social networking site. Basically, a student signs up, gets a free web page called a "profile," and can begin to start communicating with "friends" (other members). The attractive thing about these sites has to do with their interactive nature. "Friends" link to each other. They can link to other sites (YouTube, etc.) to share information. Music, photo, and video files can be linked and shared. Friends can essentially design their "space" to match their personalities and interests. This is how a lot of people make friends and communicate with their peers.

We're all familiar with the potential (and real) problems with these social networking sites. They have gotten a lot of bad press, and some of it may be deserved. But they are not going away. Students log on and stay on for hours each and every day. Users can set their own profile to private if they want, and keep any strangers from exploring their personal site without prior approval.

What can this mean to student leaders and their organizations? First of all, if you're not on Facebook, then log on and join. It's the only way to become familiar with the sites and their potential. You can't truly appreciate all they can do until you're involved. Don't worry, this is a legitimate consumer website. You won't be automatically branded as a predator just because you have a Facebook profile. I do-- and so do Stephen Colbert, Willie Nelson, Barack Obama, and most of the students on your campus.

You can set up a "Page" for your organization. It's really simple. Go to www.facebook.com and create a page. Then, invite the students in your organization to "like" the page and link to your site. Investigate all the different options for this social networking site. Once students are linked as friends, you can send out "Invitations" to your events. You can also link to the pages of programs and events you have scheduled so that your network of friends can learn about them.

While membership in this site is free, there is a service being offered by Facebook. For a small fee, you can send an electronic flier to every member of a specific group. For example, you could send an electronic flier announcing an upcoming event to every member who attends your college or university. That is some amazing target marketing!

Listserv and Electronic Mailing Lists

Before the advent of the world wide web, those with email capabilities often subscribed to electronic mailing lists. These mailing lists generally used the most popular software called "Listserv" first developed in 1984. The original use of listserv was as a mail reflector. Any member could send an email to the listserv address, and it would be resent ("reflected") to every other member. This enabled online discussion, with everyone having access to all information. Because members have to subscribe ("opt-in"), it's not SPAM.

You could have an electronic mailing list for your organization. Your members could sign up and receive emails about upcoming meetings and events. It's free. You can set up your own mailing list at Yahoo (www.Yahoo.com) and Google (www.Google.com).

Of course, if you set up your Facebook Page and your members all become friends then you can simply use it instead. The nice thing about an emailing list is that your messages don't get lost in the crowd of "status updates" as they can in FaceBook. Of course, it also assumes that your peers check their email regularly.

Text Messaging

Nearly all students "text" (that is, send text messages). You can see them thumb typing on their cellphones in class, in the student center, and even while walking across campus. If they are using text messaging so heavily in their personal communication, then

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your club should be using it to communicate with them.

Perhaps the simplest method is a service called "Mozes" (**www.MOZES.com**). You can set up an account, and Mozes will send your text message to every one who has subscribed to your texts.

It's simple. Open your free account, and get your "keyword" (like "MySchoolSGA" or "SAB") which identifies your account. At that point you're ready to text. Ask your peers to text your keyword to this number: 66937 (that's dialing MOZES on your phone keypad). They will receive your welcome text message and will be subscribed to your list.

When you want to send a text message to your "mob" (that's the term for your MOZES group), you log on to your account at the MOZES website and send it. All who have subscribed will get your text message on his or her cellphone. It's a bargain at $5 a month for your account.

There are a few other ways to communicate through texting. **www.Broadtexter.com** is a similar site to MOZES, except it's free. The downside is your members actually have to go to the Broadtexter.com site to register for your text messages. Remember, with MOZES they can sign up from a basic cellphone.

There is one more way to get a free broadcast texting system for your group. Don't laugh-- it's called "Twitter." You know about Twitter because it's so popular with the media, and not so popular with students, but it's a very effective means of broadcast texting.

Here's how: go to **Twitter.com** to create an account for your organization (we'll call it "Campus SGA"). Now, have your members text "Follow Campus SGA" to 40404. They will be signing up to receive your tweets. They don't have to create their own Twitter accounts. They will just get your tweets! Voila, instant broadcast texting!

Club Collaboration

The last new innovation I'll cover is online project management. That may sound confusing, but it's remarkably simple. Because your members' lives revolve around the Internet, they will grasp this quickly, and utilize it to the fullest extent once they understand what it does and how it works.

One of the most popular project management sites is **www.BaseCampHQ.com**. Anyone can sign up for the most basic service for free. If it proves useful you can expand into an account with more capabilities for a small monthly fee. And, it's a password-protected site, so access is only available to the people you allow to have log-in privileges.

It's very straightforward to work with BaseCamp. You set up your organization online. You can even upload your organization's logo, and it will personalize every page you use. Within the site, you'll have to-do lists, assignments, latest activity on the site, even a message board. Your club members can log on, get their assignments, then check them off on the list. They can communicate with you and each other on the message board, posting comments and concerns. It has a calendar for milestones, so you can set and meet your deadlines.

Here's a couple of things I love about BaseCamp. First, you can assign responsibilities to the to-do list. For example, if John is assigned to "Bring sponges to the Car Wash," he'll get an automatic email notice. Second, your scheduled meetings and other events will automatically trigger a reminder email to your members.

Your members, who even now are online most of each day, can stay as connected with each other as if they were sharing an office. It is a great use of technology that keeps everyone informed. BaseCamp may be the best way to deal with those communication problems that nearly always occur in group projects.

Getting In-- And Staying In-- The Loop

So, if any of this is new to you, here is your assignment: log on and explore. Sign up for a Facebook profile, and see how useful you find it for working and communicating with your members. See if you can't find ways to use it to inform them about your organization and events, and invite them to participate.

Set up your free broadcast texting account, get some students to sign up, and create your first "Flash Mob" (look it up!). Take your next big collaborative event (maybe "Spring Fling" or "Welcome Week") and put it online at BaseCamp. See how productive your student leaders can be when they are able to work whenever and wherever they choose-- in their dorm room, the library, or Starbucks.

You better learn this technology, because it will be with us for a while. You don't want to be one of those people whose VCR is always flashing "12:00" because they can't set the clock. If you embrace technology, then the VCR won't be a problem. You'll have TiVO.