

Guidelines for Internet and Web Usage Oklahoma Grand Lodge of Masons

The internet allows Masons from around the country and across the globe to share fellowship and the common bond of Freemasonry. The Grand Lodge of Oklahoma is proud to support the growth of electronic Freemasonry. The intent of this guide is not to stop any interaction of Masons on the internet, rather, to provide some broad guidelines for what should be expected in communications distributed electronically.

It is critical that all of us interact on the internet with courtesy, and with a clear sense of the reach that the internet provides to the world. Your interaction and behavior on the internet will influence ten times the number of people that you meet personally. Don't let the opportunity to spread the benefits of membership go astray.

Your involvement with the placing of Masonic information on the internet is an extension of your interaction with any non-mason. No private, personal or secret Masonic information is to be expressed, implied or said on the internet. The internet is NOT secure for the discussion or placement of Masonic information that cannot be discussed with a non-member.

Consider this - someone who is not a mason and knows nothing of masonry could have the email address: Past_Grand_Master_Oklahoma@abc.com. There are few regulations covering who or what can be done on the internet. Assume that any information you send, post or discuss will be available to be read or seen by non-masons and govern yourself accordingly.

You represent Oklahoma Masonry to everyone who reads your profile, your posts and your email – even outside of Masonic sites. For example, if your email address is JustanOkieMason@abc.com and you post to a website about Chevrolet, everyone who reads your post will not only consider what you say about cars, but also “hey, this guy is a mason”.

There are already rules in our Constitution and Code regarding the naming of candidates and use of photographs – these are even more important on the internet. A small photo in a local paper might cause little problems to a new mason, but what about a photo that would remain on the internet for the rest of the man's career – affecting future jobs, church affiliation or other aspects of his life?

Moreover, a brother who would never have sent a letter to the members of the lodge requesting them to use their business service (forbidden by C&C), might well send an email to all of them doing the same.

Brothers: think about what you write, say and do. That alone will serve you well in all your communications. Our own OKEMASON listserv has been exemplary in being useful and well

administrated – use it as an example in deciding what you might or might not send!

Some General Points regarding the Internet

1. Keep your computer free from viruses, spyware and other internet nasties. If you don't know how, ask a local brother, your trusted computer vendor, or the web committee.
2. Everyone does not hold the same political, religious or government views as you do. We are to have no sectarian discussions or those that break the peace and harmony of the lodge. Remember as an EA, you are charged to be a quiet and peaceful citizen. Be considerate of others.

If you have a concern or question whether something is acceptable or not, please contact the Grand Lodge or your local District Deputy to find out – before you post!

Email

1. Take care of email addresses that they do not fall into the hands of unscrupulous people. Use the “BCC: field” for mass email. The BCC or Blind Carbon Copy field ensures that no individual emailed will see the email address of others in the mass mailing.
2. Generally, do not use “Reply All” unless the comment you are making is actually relevant to everyone on the list. So if there is an email to the members of the lodge from the chair of the ritual team asking who can attend – you need only reply to him that you can't attend (not every person on the list).
3. Always provide a means for someone to remove themselves from your email list or group. It is better still to give each person a ‘opt in’ rather than an ‘opt out’. That means, ask if they want to receive your email (just don't stick their email address into your address book and blast your email to everyone.)
4. The use of all capital letters is seen as SHOUTING, and is frowned upon.
5. Refrain from using email names such as “A Concerned Mason”.

Before you hit Send – reread what you have written to be sure it says what you mean. It is very difficult to catch the tone of a person via email, and something that is perfectly fine in conversation can come out perfectly wrong in an email.

Websites

Many lodges have excellent websites; a website can be a great way to let people know who you are and what you do.

The usual guidance and established information of Freemasonry should apply to the interaction of the internet and your involvement. Acceptable information would include a list of officers, the history of Lodge, contact addresses, a map to lodge building, upcoming events, Master's message, and links to other Masonic bodies or a newsletter.

Some general points regarding lodge websites:

1. Keep them updated! Someone looking for a local Masonic lodge who comes to your site and sees that it shows “new officers of 2007” or “Spring 1995 fundraiser” is going to have a much worse impression than if it is current.
2. Have contact information. How can someone contact you? When does the lodge meet? Be sure the lodge has an email address or create a google mail account.
3. Have a calendar.
4. If the site is not supported or kept updated, remove it/take it down.

Social Media (blogs, Facebook, etc)

Social media sites are a fun way to reconnect with friends and keep up with what they are doing. The sites cover a wide variety of interests. Regardless of site, all of them are informal and casual.

A Blog or web log is an online diary, for example, Bob Davis writes a blog entitled “The Papers of Robert G Davis at <http://robertgdavis.blogspot.com/>. By its very nature, a blog is the opinions of the writer thrown out to the world. Please remember that the profane do not necessarily understand our issues, goals or concerns. Do not write blogs anonymously. If you don’t want people to know who you are, how are they to know if what you write is true or false? Playing out Masonic issues in public is like watching parents discipline their child in a restaurant – you want it done, just in private.

Facebook and other assorted sites: don’t pester people with requests for games, links to friends or to “become a fan of” whatever. Watch your language – my mom is on Facebook! If you have non-masonic friends, you might consider making your friend’s profiles not visible to other friends. (If that does not make sense, ask a teenager to help you! ☺)

Conclusion

The transfer of information on the internet has the potential for bringing the light of Masonic truth to a new generation of people. The information available online leads them to the internet, their desire for growth brings a search for information and that will hopefully lead them to consider Freemasonry. Let the truths that guide us in our fraternity shine in a new and exciting medium.

Become an e-Mason (Electronic Mason)! Enjoy all the information and areas of interest available on the internet. The internet provides us all an opportunity for global interaction never before available. If you want to get started, ask a young mason in your lodge to help you out. If you can’t locate someone, contact the Grand Lodge Website committee.

Finally, the growth of the internet, email, websites and other communications can never replace the personal interaction each of us has with one another as brother masons. Sending an email cannot replace a phone call or visit to a sick brother.

*Produced Oklahoma Grand Lodge Website committee for the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Oklahoma
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Portions of this guide were taken from the Grand Lodge of Kentucky Internet Protocol [http://www.grandlodgeofkentucky.org/publications/web_protocol.htm] with permission from Most Worshipful L. Todd Eastham, Grand Master 2009-2010. We appreciate their kindness in allowing us to use it as a guide.

Please forward comments and updates to Brad Rickelman, Grand Lodge. Thanks!