2014 Kellerman Lecture for Western Australia

LOOKING THROUGH A GLASS ONION: FREEMASONRY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Introduction

It is estimated that within the next two decades almost everyone on the planet will be connected to the *virtual* world in some way.

With the accelerating growth of technology, people will need to adapt to living in two different worlds: the *physical* world, which is governed by the state and long-established laws, and the *virtual* world, which is growing exponentially, mainly without state control, and very much the realm of individuals, with their ability to access and interpret vast amounts of information, thus creating their own reality and view of the world.

As technologies change and connectivity becomes more far-reaching, they change the way we interact with each other and develop relationships through social networks that are no longer restricted to the physical, but exist online in the digital world, through the proliferation of 'social media', creating a cheap and easy way of staying in touch. Organisations such as Freemasonry will need to learn to adapt, or risk becoming irrelevant in modern society.

The purpose of this paper, and supporting demonstration, is to consider whether the impact of 'social media' on Freemasonry is simply the next fad/evolution in communication that allows us for the first time to practise Freemasonry on a global scale in real time, or does it revolutionise our ability to correct the distorted view the world largely still has of Freemasonry, providing a virtual voice to all people of the benefit of the Craft, driven by the strong current of global connectivity and the proliferation of 'social networking'.

The demonstration will be how to set up a personal profile page on 'Facebook', and use this popular social utility to create an online presence. But first it will be necessary to consider what 'Facebook' actually is, in the context of 'social networking', and how people are now choosing to communicate around the world, through the rapid adoption of its manifestation, 'social media'.

New media

There is a fundamental change occurring throughout the global community in how people think and respond to the world around them, with the advent of real-time data, or 'new media' as it is now termed, that is exponentially growing as more and more people access the Internet, and the virtual world. This *new media*,[1] expressed as on-demand access to *content* anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, and relying on interactive user feedback, is creating a transformation in the way governments, organisations and individuals will choose to engage with each other.

Freemasons now have an opportunity not only to connect easily with each other in a truly global community, but also to provide content that tells the story of Freemasonry and its contribution to the community, through the virtual world, in real time. They can now engage in meaningful conversations with people in a two-way exchange, rather than the traditional forms of media or communication which are only one-way.

Social networking now allows us to engage with more people, share all sorts of information, experience different cultures through the sharing of dynamic data, and build longer-lasting relationships that will influence our thinking far beyond the physical world and our traditional ways of communicating.

So what is this thing called 'social media', and how did it evolve?

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1   Defined by Schivinski, Bruno & Dąbrowski, D: 'The Effect of Social-Media Communication on Consumer Perceptions of Brands' in *Journal of Marketing Communications*: Feb 2014, 2–19, accessed 12 March 2014.

Industrial revolutions

The first industrial revolution began in Britain in the late 18th century, with the mechanisation of the textile industry. Jobs previously done by hand by hundreds of weavers working in 'cottages' were brought together in a single cotton mill, and the factory was born. The second industrial revolution came in the early 20th century, when Henry Ford mastered the moving assembly line and ushered in the age of mass production.

The 'digital revolution',[2] which is now being referred to as the 'third industrial revolution', started in the 1970s with the development of the mainframe computer, which was initially for the use of government agencies, departments of defence, and universities. The personal computer (PC) evolved in the early 1980s, following a decade of development after the launch of 'the computer in a room', with users no longer needing long hours in the computer lab of the local university, but able to put the power of the desktop computer into their businesses and homes.

The first two industrial revolutions made people wealthier, and materially improved their living standards. The digital or third industrial revolution combines the emergence of digital technologies with industrial manufacturing, emerging and renewable energies, and information technology. This is the game-changer, providing not just an improvement in efficient and profitable industry, and thus the overall wealth of an economy, but is also responsible for a change in how the world communicates. It delivers opportunities which transform people's lives across all borders and geo-political boundaries.

The onset of the 'Information Age' is associated with the Digital Revolution, just as the Industrial Revolution marked the onset of the Industrial Age.

The Internet and the World Wide Web

The Internet, conceived in the late 1960s by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA),[3] an agency of the United States Department of Defense, and in concert with the development of the main frame computer that it would eventually run on and support, was developed as a fail-proof network that could connect computers together and be resistant to any single point of failure or attack, thus protecting the integrity of the government's data storage. There is an hypothesis that suggests that the Internet cannot be totally destroyed in one event, because if large areas of the network are disabled, the information can be easily rerouted. The Internet primarily ran simple software applications such as e-mail and computer file transfer.

Though the Internet itself has conceptually existed since 1969, it was with the invention of the World Wide Web in 1989 by British scientist Tim Berners-Lee, and its introduction in 1991, that the Internet became easily accessible to the general public, with each new user accessing the system, intensifying and adding to a growing network.[4]

Today, the Internet is a global platform for accelerating the flow of vast amounts of information and rich data to more and more people who are accessing the World Wide Web, and is pushing many, if not most, older forms of media into obsolescence.[4] In 1993 only 1% of communication was carried out using the Internet. By 2007 more than 97% of the world's communication was through the Internet and the World Wide Web. Cables have been laid all around the world to facilitate faster and better communication. Online connectivity grows every second; it is estimated that currently the Indexed Web comprises at least 3.48 billion pages.[5]

In the leading article on the home page of a website called 'Digital Renaissance', the anonymous author makes a significant observation:[6]

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2   'The Digital Revolution' – Wikipedia community post, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_Revolution, accessed 12 March 2014.
3   'DARPA, the first 50 Years', US Dept of Defense, April 2008, 78–85.
4   Berners-Lee, Tim: *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web by its inventor*, with Mark Fischetti, HarperCollins 1999.
5   Daily Estimated size of the World Wide Web, http://www.worldwidewebsize.com/, accessed 8 January 2014.
6   http://digital-renaissance.info/, accessed 12 March 2014.

It is very tempting to compare the internet and the World Wide Web with the invention of the printing press, as they are both technological backbones behind new artistic, intellectual and social movements. The Renaissance brought us naturalism, rational inquiry, the scientific method and political meta-understanding. The internet has bought us a digital renaissance whereby a library of information beyond our wildest dreams has now become available and accessible to anyone who can get online.

A key phrase here is *social movements*. The Internet is the world's largest ungoverned meeting place, market place, information storage facility, social network and self-regulating environment ever conceived and created, yet it is the largest source of information on which the world now makes decisions. This impacts every aspect of people's lives and in some cases their very survival. Individuals and organisations interact and make decisions daily, based on feedback received from users, which in turn has begun a social movement that is played out every day online, and in turn influences other individuals, encouraging them to participate in the growing virtual 'conversation'. We shall explore this social phenomenon a little later in this discussion.

In their seminal book, *The New Digital Age*,[7] Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, the driving force behind Google, describe the Internet as:

The internet is the largest experiment involving anarchy in history. Hundreds of millions of people are, each minute, creating and consuming an untold amount of digital content in an online world that is not truly bound by terrestrial laws. This new capacity for free expression and free movement of information has generated the rich virtual landscape we know today.

These two tech company giants further refer to the Internet as 'one of the few things that humans have built that we truly don't understand'.

The reference is specifically directed to the fact that the Internet, with the vast amount of data traffic over its network, is both tangible, by way of the desktop PC, screen, mouse, keyboard and data line coming into the home providing connectivity, and via a hand-held device that allows wireless connection, yet at the same time is intangible and in a state of constant mutation, growing larger and more complex with every second, as more and more people find access.

For the first time in history, people are able to interact with each other by way of an online two-way conversation, in real time, and impact the way they view the world, through applying their view of humankind and what is important to them, adding to the rich nature of the world's collective history.

Wikipedia, the accepted and widely referenced online encyclopedia, is a prime example of this new way of thinking and communicating. The site is a creative participation of contributors who form a community of editors, and its fundamental principles are based on five 'pillars':[8]

1. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia;
2. Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view;
3. Wikipedia is free content that anyone can edit, use, modify and distribute;
4. Editors should treat each other with respect and civility;
5. Wikipedia does not have firm rules.

The site allows and relies on the provision of articles, text blocks, images, videos, and in some cases voice recordings, all adding to the rich information pertaining to a particular subject or reference, in real time, and by anyone.

Wikipedia illustrates a watershed moment in this Digital Revolution which started almost 60 years ago. There has never been a time in human history where more people have access to more information, and been able to develop, disseminate, amend and participate in real time content at a greater rate, without the interference of the state, or reliance on third-party providers as still exists today.

So how many people are actually taking advantage of the vast store of information on the

7   Schmidt, Eric & Cohen, Jared: *The New Digital Age*, John Murray, London 2013, 3.
8   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars, accessed 12 March 2014.

Internet and connecting to the global virtual community to share and retrieve information, when and how they want it? A review of the latest statistics released by the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations specialised agency for information and communications technology, recorded that, as at the end of 2013, the number of people connected to the virtual world was estimated at 2.4 billion, and growing at a yearly rate of approximately 30%.[9]

If we consider that the current population of the Earth is estimated at 7.23 billion, growing at a rate of approximately 1.14% per year and declining,[10] *then within the next 10 years the world's online population will outnumber the population of the planet.*

A bold prediction, but what is driving this need for connectivity? The growth in connectivity has been driven by the advances in communication devices, more recently with the release of the *smartphone*, followed by the *tablet*, which have revolutionised the way we think about and access information. These devices are now available at a price point that is accessible by almost all peoples of the world.

Individuals will have more than one profile in the virtual world, which in itself will drive a greater net number of virtual community members, but equally will raise a number of questions on security, privacy and integrity of personal data. Technology organisations and providers will be required to provide more secure environments for people to exist in. *Privacy* may give way to *security* across the Internet and within the social media world, as we navigate through our post-9/11 world of 'homeland' technology that often favours the security of the country and the organisation over the individual.

There is no doubting that governments, industry and technology companies will need to collaborate and ensure that the integrity of people's personal data is maintained and not exposed to internal leaks and outside attack. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that currently the responsibility for engaging in the virtual world still rests with individuals, and their choice to participate or not.

In the past ten years the number of mobile phone subscribers has increased from 1.5 billion in 2003 to 6.8 billion at the end of 2013, and is estimated within the next two years to exceed the world's population.[11] If we consider our own region and look at mobile phone subscriptions in Australia, at the end of 2013 some 25 million mobile phone subscribers were registered, and had grown in a decade from 12.6 million in 2002, to 24.3 million in 2012.[12] The current population of Australia is 23.4 million,[11] suggesting that the potential virtual population of Australia has already eclipsed the physical population, further highlighting our insatiable need to become and remain connected, through more convenient and mobile devices.

It is interesting to note that the biggest technological battleground over the past three years, and ongoing for the foreseeable future, is that between the two largest communications technology outfits and global pioneers in mobile device hardware (and software), Apple and Google. These two goliaths are locked in a state of constant battle over what both of them consider to be the object that has most revolutionised people's thoughts and behaviour—and

9   Drawn from 'Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world' (totals and penetration rates), ICT Data and Statistics, International Telecommunications Union (ITU) data and statistics—Individuals using the Internet, http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx, accessed 12 March 2014.

10   Drawn from 'Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world' (totals and penetration rates), ICT Data and Statistics, International Telecommunications Union (ITU) data and statistics—Mobile Cellular Subscriptions, http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx, accessed 12 March 2014.

11   World O Meters, Real Time World Statistics, current world population, accessed 12 March 2014, http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/.

12   Australian Bureau of Statistics Population Clock, accessed 8 January, 2014, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/1647509ef7e25faaca2568a900154b63?OpenDocument.

driven the world to connect—the smartphone.

In his recent book, *Dogfight – How Apple & Google went to war and started a revolution*, author Fred Vogelstein makes the observation:[13]

> Ponder the individual impacts of the book, the newspaper, the telephone, the radio, the tape recorder, the camera, the video, the compass, the television, the VRC, the DVD, the PC, the cell phone, the video game and the iPod. The smartphone is all of these things in one device and it fits into your pocket.
>
> It is radically changing the way we learn in school, the way doctors treat patients, the way we travel and explore. Entertainment and all media are accessed in entirely new ways.

He asserts:

> What this means is that Apple versus Google isn't just a run of mill spat between two rich companies. It is the defining business battle of a generation. It is an inflection point such as the moment when the PC was invented, when the Internet browser took hold, when Google reinvented web search, and when Facebook created the social network.

The fight for market share of the smart phone will continue between these two giants.

So who is winning the battle of the smartphone, Apple and its iconic iPhone and iOS software, or Google, who use intermediaries to manufacture the hardware, and their Android Software offering? From an operating system perspective, as of the end of May 2013, Android (Google) was the most popular operating system, with an 81.9% market share, followed by iOS (Apple) with 12.1%, Windows Phone with 3.6%, and BlackBerry with 1.8%.[14] This demonstrates that just as the Internet, and data exchange across its network, is in a state of constant change and mutation, the smartphone—by its nature and importance to the evolution of communication technologies—is in a similar state.

Social media

While power in the *physical* world is largely vested in governments and organisations with the ability to control the extent and availability of information, in the *virtual* world the ability of individuals to access and interpret vast amounts of information empowers these individuals to make informed decisions. This virtual empowerment enables individuals to peel back the layers of an organisation, and see right to the heart of its values, philosophy and beliefs, as well as its actions. This creates the need for a level of accountability for individuals in how they manage information. We are yet to see it manifest itself in Freemasonry.

Social media is the embodiment of that virtual empowerment, as individuals look to search, view, interact with, and respond to, information they identify as important to them. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as:[15]

> a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web (2.0) and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.
>
> Social media is the interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks – it's as simple as that.
>
> The ability to connect, stay in touch, make new friends, form and develop long lasting relationships, contribute to conversations, identify like mindedness through sharing and digesting data, and making an overall contribution to the fabric of society, as an individual sees it, is what Social Media gives to the individual – how that individual choses to engage with it is up to them.

It is remarkable how the above description overlays the very essence of what Freemasonry is and offers to the world: like-mindedness through association, personal development through ritual

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13 Vogelstein, Fred: *Dogfight – How Apple & Google went to war and started a revolution*, HarperCollins, London 2013, 2.

14 'Smartphone Ownership – 2013 Update' Aaron Smith, Senior Researcher, Pew Research Centre USA, 5 June 2013, pp 6
http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media//Files/Reports/2013/PIP_Smartphone_adoption_2013_PDF.pdf .

15 Kaplan, Andreas M & Haenlein, Michael: 'Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media' in *Business Horizons*, (2010) 53(1), p61.

and the transfer of wisdom, contribution to the community through the process of self-awakening and understanding, and the desire to be happy. The difference is that we are governed by ancient obligations, constitutions and rules, accepted landmarks that must be preserved, and the belief in fidelity and commitment to our philosophies and to each other—very much unlike the Internet, which is largely ungoverned.

However, Freemasonry embraces the basic idea of allowing every man to think for himself and to expand his knowledge. Over the centuries this has been borne out by the embracing of Freemasonry by such brilliant minds as Voltaire, Mozart, Abraham Lincoln, and Winston Churchill, among others. Unfortunately, Freemasons also have been specifically condemned and persecuted for their free-thinking by dictators such as Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and Franco.

Even today it is illegal to be a Freemason in some countries. It is possible however to investigate and learn about Freemasonry and its teachings, by means of access to the Internet and through social media sites which are not outlawed in these same countries, such as Syria and Afghanistan, who's regimes have pushed all organised and associated religions and spiritual organisations underground.

Facebook
Social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive forums through which individuals and communities share, create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. Through this virtual social networking, people have introduced, and continue to introduce, change in communication between organisations, communities, and individuals.

Facebook is an example of this in which most users are also participants, and currently is the most utilised and recognisable social media site on the planet. Started by Mark Zuckerberg in June 2004, Facebook pioneered the idea that people want to connect and remain connected with friends, family and colleagues, creating the world's first truly online Social Network, the story of which was immortalized in the Hollywood feature film 'The Social Network', which describes exactly what Facebook started, and continues to emulate.[16]

There are a number of rival sites beginning to gain ground. The top 15 are: Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, Pinterest, Google Plus +, Tumblr, Instagram, VK, Flickr, myspace, Tagged, ask.fm, meet up, meet me, and Qzone (mainland China, regulated but available).[16] There are over 200 registered *open* social networking sites that are utilised by a myriad of different people and groups, with different individual and collective needs. These next generation social media sites will likely overtake Facebook in popularity and usability.

As users begin to influence the virtual world in ways that create a gap in the market, as the demand for richer and more diverse content evolves, other sites that recognise these changing trends will develop. These will deliver the next iterations of Facebook, Twitter, etc, hence the inevitable move towards multiple profiles and identities we will all possess online, at an accelerating pace, as we try to engage in different conversations, on different platforms.

Social media, and in this case Facebook, are all about how an individual is represented online and how he interacts with the virtual world, which in turn impacts on his physical world. The most striking example of this development is what occurred on 18 December 2010, with the birth of the so called 'Arab Spring' in Tunisia, which spread over the next two years throughout the Arab world, most of which was dominated by oppressive regimes. This hailed the start of 'Virtual democratisation', where governments were unable to combat the effect of mass mobilisation of the population, created through the use of social media.

In particular, the prevalent use of Twitter and Facebook empowered those who sparked the revolts the world witnessed, by engaging their fellow countrymen in mass protest by sending out Twitter and Facebook messages, known as tweets and posts respectively, with accompanying video and audio, showing what was happening on the front line. In Egypt in January 2011 they

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16   Mark Zuckerberg Facebook profile, https://www.facebook.com/zuck, accessed 8 January 2014.

mobilised the vast population of the capital, Cairo, and within a few weeks caused the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, thus emphasising the overwhelming will of the people, expressed in the virtual world and manifested in the physical.[17]

While I am not suggesting that the outcome across the Arab world would have been different over time, through the natural course of history, what this adoption of social media does demonstrate is the true social nature of these technologies. Normally obedient and law-abiding citizens who know that they are living in changing times are now able to make a difference, as they begin to understand that governments, who have no terrestrial governance over the *virtual* world, can be held to account. It gives them the strength and belief that they can make a difference, by connecting with the mass populace who share a desire to make the necessary changes to advance their lives.

So, rather than continue to talk about the power of social media and to speculate on the impact of Facebook, let me take you through the simple process of signing up to Facebook and creating a profile, which in turn will become an individual presence online, and explore what opportunities it provides to become connected to the virtual world, and begin an online social network.[18]

[At this point, the lecturer will provide a demonstration and short workshop on creating a profile on Facebook and adding a friend, and then searching for key Masonic sites to demonstrate the information exchange and conversations possible via other social media sites.]

Conclusions

We have explored the notion of the virtual world and the reality it presents to a connected individual. I would suggest that it is *not* a fad, but an opportunity we *must* embrace!

Can we begin to harness the technology Social media provides, and start to broadcast a new message to the world? Are we able to accept an evolved sense of ourselves, and engage with the world through a two way conversation with those who chose to seek out Masonic literature and information?

Social networking and marketing guru Lois Kelly describes the new conversations all companies and organisations need to start having:[19]

New Marketing is about conversations – listening, having something new to add, and talking, like we mean it instead of hiding behind corporate packaged speak. It's about being more interested in the world outside our companies (organisations) and sharing ideas that go beyond the company or its products (Goals). It's about things that help to get to know us in ways that build understanding, trust and feelings that make us want to do business with our companies.

The new age is about providing the right content for our membership and the world, to engage in conversations that explore the environment outside of Freemasonry, and gives us a greater understanding of who our market is, and where they congregate. In order to provide them with information that they will find interesting and useful, we need to learn where we can add value, through the process of discussion, and demonstrate the enormity of the contribution we can make.

In 1968 the Beatles released an album titled 'The Beatles (White Album)'. The first track was a song written by John Lennon, 'Glass Onion'. He disliked critics over-analysing his lyrics, and *Glass Onion* was aimed at them. He said:[20]

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17   The Guardian Interactive - Garry Blight, Sheila Pulham and Paul Torpey Friday 6 January 2012, 'Arab spring: an interactive timeline of Middle East protests', accessed 12 March 2014 http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline.

18   Belicove, Mikal E & Kraynak, Joe: *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Facebook*, Penguin USA 2012, 5–23.

19   Kelly, Lois: *Beyond the Buzz – The next Generation of Word of Mouth Marketing*, Amacom, NY 2007, p1.

20   'The Beatles Bible – not quite as popular as Jesus' website, updated currently, accessed 30 March 2014, http://www.beatlesbible.com/songs/glass-onion/.

> They're looking through a glass onion trying to figure out some complex meaning behind every line in every song by The Beatles. They may think they're onto something, but really it's distorting their vision.

In pop culture, Lennon's phrase 'Looking through a Glass Onion' has the meaning 'taking a distorted view of something for no reason or outcome'. It also implies a foolish endeavour, looking for layers of meaning in something that is transparent.

Like Lennon and the Beatles, Freemasonry has often been viewed through the lens of misunderstanding and ignorance, distorting the viewer's understanding of the principles of Freemasonry and, until now, denying him the opportunity to review accurate information provided through credible sources that exist in both the physical and the virtual.

For many, we Freemasons have hidden our light under a bushel and not been prepared to promote our principles, philosophy and tenets to the world at large, which has resulted in a decline, over many years, of new members to our fraternity.

This reluctance to speak to the world has effectively created a 'lost generation' to Freemasonry, which has for some time been evident around the world, as we begin to see the impact of not encouraging the past two generations to become actively involved in the oldest Social Network in the world.

Are we prepared to run the risk of losing another generation of young men who are looking for something more to enhance their life and contribute to improving the physical world around them if we don't take up the opportunity that meaningful conversations conducted through all media provides?

I would suggest that we are not, and would go further to say that a lack of attention to this important communication tool is tantamount to negligence on the part of the members of the Craft today, in securing its future and relevance for our noble institution, in what it represents, and the members it represents, now and into the future.

We cannot allow ourselves to be forced into obscurity because we 'weren't there' and didn't give the virtual world a diet of challenging information that caused participants to think about how they lived and interacted in the physical world.

Individuals and organisations connected to the virtual world—and particularly those who understand they can provide rich data that allows other connected individuals to develop their own reality—are beginning to ensure they are part of the global conversation that continues to drive the virtual social network. Some examples of this are: the Arab Spring; the Boston Marathon bombing; and Typhoon Haiyan, which devastated the Philippines).

The reality of social media and living in the virtual world is a new phenomenon and we are yet to understand its full potential—the good, the bad and the ugly.

What is true and is becoming more evident, however, is that governments, organisations and individuals will need to adopt a new level of accountability for how information provided online is interpreted and manifested. Accordingly, while communication technology surges ahead, there is very much a need for human guidance.

Communication technology and data exchanged over the Internet provide for individuals to create what they choose to make of the world, but there will always remain the need to ensure that governments, organisations and individuals learn how to use the information provided, appropriately and faithfully, guided by policy and the terrestrial laws of the physical world.

Computers alone will not solve the issues that our current and future worlds will face, both virtual and physical. Humans, through the application of intelligence and judgment, will still need to provide the guidance and direction for where the collective effort needs to focus, and what *connectivity* means to current and future conventions.

Belief in the demise of an organisation such as Freemasonry can often act as a 'Glass Onion' itself and cloud a person's view of the relevance of what that organisation stands for. Through harnessing the power of connectivity, and being prepared to engage in conversation with the virtual world, we can achieve greater acceptance, engagement and membership of the Craft in the physical world.

Social media, and in particular Facebook, and its next iteration—whatever that may look like, which the online community will determine—focus on building social relations among people who share common interests or activities. It is this interaction between people that is important, as it revolves around a common theme or goal. Let us think about it as 'Freemasonry focusing on building social relationships among the Brethren, so that they can meet in like-mindedness and work to develop the fraternity and the community'. The goal is to be the premier organisation composed of men of integrity and character, who are honest, true to their word, believe in God, are devoted to family, charitable in their community, and courteous and helpful to each other.

It is not a message that can simply be promoted in a one-dimensional posting on a website, or in a newspaper article or on a bumper sticker. It requires a careful conversation and the investment of time and effort in answering the questions that people will have about what Freemasonry is, and how they can be a part of it.

Today, social media is shrinking the world and allowing communications to take place and information to be exchanged instantly. It is time for us to embrace what is available to us through social media and look to bring what is a traditional and highly regarded fraternal organisation to the world, both virtual and physical, and introduce ourselves in a way that will allow us to say 'G'day' across multiple borders, time zones and languages instantly, and start a conversation that will only end when we choose it to.

Perhaps the Freemasons of the next generation will interact with each other in ways that we have not even conceived yet. Let us take a sneak peak into what might be the reality in the not too distant future, and contemplate what this Freemason of the future might be looking for.

Will his expectations of meeting fellow Masons be the same as today, and will he be content with what is now available, or will he expect to attend a lodge meeting when he wants, how he wants, and through the medium of his choosing?

I will leave you to contemplate on this.

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