

2010 Report of the Electronic Communications Committee

To: WNGGA Board of Trustees

Date: August 2010

From: Chair: Gerri Baker Parry

Committee Members: Hywel Davies, (Mona Everett as ancillary, AWO contact supporting website communication), Paul Mohr (web support), David Parry (volunteer- face book), Ceri Shaw (volunteer- Americymru), Gaabriel Becket (volunteer- website support), Ada Mae Lewis (ex-officio) and Stacy Evans (Ex-officio)

Charge to Committee: Maintain and update the WNGGA/NAFOW website and coordinate ancillary web-presence to give us a broader presence to the online world, and create a vibrant fully functional website, at the same time keep things simple enough that it can be maintained and managed by a volunteer.

Background : This is a continuation of the extensive mid year report in April, it was a lengthy detailed report and I will try to address here any changes or continuing issues. To recap from the mid year report in April 2010, the Electronics committee is comprised of a variety of people [some are included because of their work and support to the website and to not include them would be remiss], with differing levels of web knowledge and skill. There are still a few gaps in that knowledge and the ability to implement all of the ideas to make the website work better for the NAFOW and WNGGA.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Ancillary web-presence

Dave Parry has been pretty much running the Face book page with out much direction. For the most part has worked out very well. He has been glad to revise content if something he uses for promotion is not quite right. He keeps things current and fresh with a good mix of Welsh imagery and modern to steer people toward the NAFOW. Harnessing Dave's willingness to network with people has resulted in focused interviews for NAFOW promotion materials. He also networks with the Americymru social network site so the two work well together which gives more exposure.

Cari Shaw and Gabrielle Becket, have also been invaluable the exposure they have given us, even while they are planning their own events. As well they have been a great help and resource for help with finding short cuts in building website parts. I suggest that we continue to cultivate and associate with both of these online promoters.

Mona Everett, although not technically on the Electronic Communication committee, needs to be mentioned for her work with communicating with the AWO's, providing updates for the website and her work in learning how to utilize new online communication tools and executing online publicity.

All of the above mentioned along with the website, created a striking online presence for the NAFOW this year, that worked well together with virtually no prodding or monitoring.

I have to mention that as of August 10, 2010, the NAFOW/WNGGA website came up as the #1 search result in Goggle searches for "Welsh Americans". The people mentioned above should

be given much of the credit for creating the traffic to our site this year that has elevated us to this position.

NAFOW/WNGGA Website & how it is working

I've come to realize this year that managing the NAFOW/ WNGGA website properly and also serving on the WNGGA board was a bit bigger job than I had expected. At this time the website consists of over 500 files to keep track of and make sure they play nice together. In addition, staying on top of new tools and technology has been a challenge to manage the "new" look and function of the Website. Hopefully this is all work that can be built on for next year.

In creating this years website, there were many file versions, revisions and updates coming from all directions, which is difficult to make sure the most recent draft was being worked on. It is very time consuming on this end to get information before it is completed and proofed to have to do the same task repeatedly. One example there were at least a dozen versions of a document which kept changing slightly over the course of several months, because it was being proofed from the website.

Getting information on the fly and up on the website prematurely, wastes time and creates errors and confusion. This is usually the point where mistakes are copied and perpetuated from. Although a huge amount of information has been added to the site, it is now August and the informational part of the NAFOW pages are not as complete as it has been in past years. The pages are too wordy and the accommodations page with its many fixes and links to fix the Hotel registration problem is hopelessly confusing, even to me.

Troubleshooting and proof reading on the website is a continuing challenge this year, we do not have enough testers to find breaks and errors before they've caused unknown frustration to possible vendors, sponsors, advertisers and registrants that may not have been as persistent as others before we found out about it. There was a problem with a broken email link that was not reported until June, which is a worry as to how many people were not as persistent as others.

The last piece that still needs to be added to the website is one of the most important, recognizing the sponsors donors and volunteers. We should be prominently displaying our supporters wherever we are able to. But with crunch time in August in formatting the program booklet, hopefully this piece will not fall through the cracks. It would be to our advantage to get these up and promote their patronage as soon as possible in the future as it makes us look desirable and hopefully would encourage future support. At this writing it has been left as the last piece to be added because of time constraints on the webmasters part and the fact that we are still compiling these lists.

Within one year we have gone from using the website to duplicate the registration booklet, to now using it as a convenient hub for NAFOW / WNGGA business documents and communications, online registration, AWO's etc. Having all of this come to sit in one programmers lap has created a bottleneck at times.

I'm not sure what the answer is for the future; possibly dividing the workload and training a couple of others to be able to up date certain pages and separating the pieces, which is a bit dangerous to do as it can disable the whole site if not done with care. It would be ideal to find a dedicated volunteer to manage only the website (which in the past was me) or budget to hire a web producer which would be cost prohibitive. The ideas will need to be addressed before

NAFOW 2011 is upon us. Separating the registration and simplifying is the first step and is essential.

In going forward there is no guarantee in future years of a commitment of as many hours as was spent on the website this year; so it is important to make a big push to getting it simplified for the future.

Online registration services

I have had contact with several online registration companies and attended a conference demo. I'm impressed by the ease of the features; I believe one of these services would lift a lot of work off of IHQ and the Website. The cost seemed a bit steep at first, but when you compare the \$4-5 per registrant, that translates to approx 20 minutes of office time not to mention paper and postage. There are two ways to pay for this, Cvent offers a registration block off 200+ (the higher the numbers the cheaper it gets) or Reg Online which charges per registrant, but they both cost between \$4-5 per registrant, plus gateway fees for the credit card. Some events add this "courtesy fee" on top of the registration fees, which can turn people off. The comparison will follow on what those cost covers for comparison and try to factor in the hidden costs in the way we have historically operated. If the online registration runs seamlessly then we can still offer paper printout to be processed through IHQ.

Having almost total online registration is not so much an "if" but a "when", will we convert. There will a questionnaire going around at the NAFOW asking about this subject in the hopes to get an idea numbers who would be left out if we were to switch now.

Desktop and Publication Committee support by the ECC

These jobs included support in proofing the printing of the large hymnal, formatting the Program booklet for printing, created a comparison chart of our current postal rates for publications mailing, found and updated files and materials from past NAFOW's for other committees and IHQ and managed, created and supplied logos and art work for various projects.

It was found that the computer programs and templates that Karen Ellis used to coordinate and create the confirmation receipts, for NAFOW registrants has been lost or buried deep. I was able to create a set of data sheets with Excel and Word for IHQ that will merge the registration information easily into a confirmation receipt that can be sent to registrants. This should work to keep the registrants satisfied that their registration is correct prior to arrival and will serve as an appropriate receipt for tax purposes for board members. It is a cheap fix until decisions are made about future registration software.

I have been digging out files of templates, logos and stationary etc. that were created along with the NAFOW logo guidelines and forgotten. We could do better to update these materials so that they can be used as they were intended, and to cut out recreating the wheel in some instances and standardizing in others.

Observations on communication breakdowns and how we could do it better next year, from point of view of the website, member, an AWO newsletter editor and local promoter of NAFOW.

The website has served as the cockpit of planning this year, all information seems to run through it or archived there, and the flaws in the distribution process were easy to identify.

Some examples of making things harder than they need to be:

1. Although well intentioned, the Registration packet ended up being not as efficient as in the past, both in time and manpower to create and in using at the other end by registrants, vendors, members and AWO's. The registration materials not only did not translate easily onto the website they were difficult to use, for distribution in newsletters or handouts and too expensive for AWOs to reproduce and created twice the paper as was previous years. Changing the registration form to white 8.5x 11 pages in order to pass the burden to AWO and registrant's to make copies wasn't as efficient or as successful as it may have seemed. The two-page registration form got lost in the mass of paper and instructions, [by page count and weight, they are now twice as big as the 2003, 2004 & 2005 packets I have on file] this years pages became separated from each other and out of order quickly, so wasn't clear which pages all went together and it has to be more costly to reproduce. I know at least three societies on the west coast that either did not know do this or did not want to take on the cost of it. Having the pages arrive in two separate mailings also made finding what you need on the receiving end difficult. All members, AWO's, vendors & sponsors should have the same access to information, so that they may rent a table, register for event, eisteddfod, and advertise in the program or sponsor an event. You never know where you might find a supporter.

The registration packet could be more consistent and concise if we go back and use registration examples from years ago to reduce paper, postage and make it simpler to use. [I refer to *Report of Strategic Planning Committee April 2004* which refers to work done to standardize and simplify registration materials and also to a collection of past registration packets for examples, on the WNGGA board reports webpage]. By page count and by weight this years packets together were twice than the original registration booklet we used years ago. A collection of past registration packets are available for examples.

2. Another important reason to simplify the registration materials is for ease in distribution, not only in the mailings to members, but as handouts to AWO members to promote at their events. If the materials were created with several uses in mind then printing costs would go down by HQ being able to reproduce large quantities of fewer materials rather than creating lots of individual paperwork.

It may seem more costly to produce and distribute more registration materials in the short run, but when HQ historically distributed more materials we had more registrants. When we started cutting costs in this area NAFOW numbers and new WNGGA member started dropping. If a large amount of the same materials were produced at one time, the cost would go down and may become cheaper to print and deliver in packages to AWOs' for distribution. In many cases it is cheaper to print 5000 copies than 1000. In the past (at least 7 years ago) AWO's would receive packages from IHQ for distribution at events by St David's day at the latest, without having to ask. This is our event we cannot count on

AWO's to do our work for us, especially when we are making it difficult by creating such a large amount of paper. They are not doing it consistently for distribution or reproduction in newsletters. Although printing costs are up, we cannot afford to organize an event of this magnitude and then get stingy about getting the word out.

3. This is mostly an observation relating the above issue, when it became apparent while recently working a local information booth to promote the Portland NAFOW. With all separate bits and parts that have been created as NAFOW handouts, the one thing that would have been most helpful would have been one all-inclusive piece, possibly the 8.5 x 14 quad-fold with a single registration form, to give an over view of the weekend mentioning costs and registration options, rather than trying to explain it to each person and have them walk away empty handed. We did not hand out as many business cards with the website info as we thought we would and found many were dropped on the walkways outside our tent after they left the booth. I tried to make a sandwich board to show an overview but you can't take it away to read later or pass on to a friend.
4. I witnessed holes in communication for a new NAFOW registrant first hand with my own local society [the Puget Sound Welsh Association] by a new recruit to our board. She was tasked with buying an ad in the NAFOW program and table in the marketplace (with only slight intervention by me). And it took her several months to successfully find whom to contact, get the pertinent prices and information and figure out where to send each part. Her first inquiry email was at beginning of March, and after several tries was able to get information in June and by July found out that the pieces and payments did not reach their proper destination. The only reason it was caught is that I noticed that PSWA was not on the list of advertisers for the program when I got the list of advertisers. Needless to say this board member was less than impressed by the WNGGA process and level of communication for the customer. Having the ad solicitation come in a separate mailing from vendor forms made it much more work to find everything needed. Who else have we lost in this process? How can we bridge the gap?

Recommendations

- Make a point to try to attract future board members and volunteers with specific skills such as website and Internet, graphic art, publicity and promotion and fundraising and event organizing.
- Search for a dedicated volunteer with good website and Internet skills is a strong recommendation, possibly a student who takes direction well (but that would probably be an ever changing personality) some one not on the board, to focus only on the website. But they will need to be over seen and managed and prodded, which could be more work. Unless we are willing to pay for this there is not much of a carrot to dangle. This is a difficult position to entrust to an outsider when the website has now become so integral to the NAFOW process. If this person is found than it is suggested that we will need to set things up so that they do not have the access that I have had this year to WNGGA passwords and transferring online funds.
- The whole registration packet should be completely rethought from scratch. The creation of all of the registration materials, forms, letters and materials should be

created as a whole and formatted by one person or group so that it works together, is concise and as clear as possible,

- Look to the past and borrow what has worked. This will translate better for the website, in newsletters and distribution, if all registration materials are in one packet and delivered to all interested parties. The goal is to cut down on the need for more customer service troubleshooting, and save office time and cost and boost registration in the long run. If the registration materials are integrated and concise enough to use also for handouts and promotion at events we can take advantage of the cost cutting of large quantity copying.
- It is strongly suggested to simplifying the online registration format and commit to pay to use an event service in place of the PAYPAL free features and get that off of our site, as it is very unstable. I have left it alone for the most part although I find that there are problems and quirks but it is subject to errors and mishaps if it is fiddled with. Using a registration service will mean paying more, but will free up hours for IHQ for other tasks. Hopefully if the bulk of the registration is automated then time could be shifted to customer service.
- Customer service is our most important line of PR, if that is not running smoothly then no amount of promotion will compensate. All NAFOW registration funds and the vast majority of constituent communication should go to a single point, this does a great deal to streamline the registration process and cut out confusion and error. In the past that has been IHQ, but if we can no longer afford to pay for the level of customer service our constituents have every right to expect, then the board will need to find a way to fill that gap. Prompt customer service is essential to a successful event.
- Get as much work done updating and standardizing working policies, guidelines and materials as much as possible, to simplify and streamline the planning and running process for future years.

Respectfully submitted,

Gerri Baker Parry