

***COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS FOR THE UNIT COMMISSIONER***

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***June 2018***

**Piedmont-Appalachian College of Commissioner Science**

**Ridgecrest Conference Center**

**Ridgecrest, NC**

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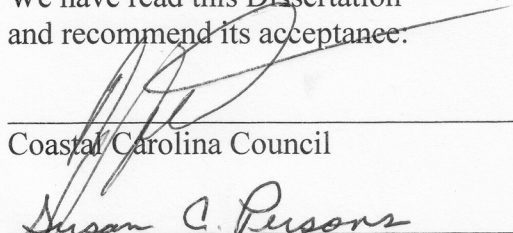
To the Doctoral Candidate Review Board:

I am submitting herewith a Dissertation written by Ronald Pearman, entitled "Communication Tools for the Unit Commissioner". I have examined the final copy of this report for format and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Commissioner Science.

*Walter L Bates*

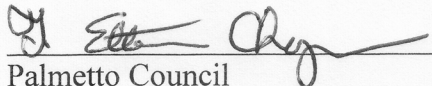
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my wife and best friend, Gwynn, for support in so many ways. Her understanding and patience allow me to participate in Scouting. She knows how important Scouting is in my life and she has never questioned the time I have spent in Scouting. Scouting is not her “thing” but she has supported my involvement, as well as my son’s, for many years.

For inspiration, I want to thank my father and my Scoutmaster for their love of the program, the outdoors and placing that seed of Scouting that would grow for a lifetime. My Scoutmaster, B.R. McClure, was the single most influential person in my life, other than my father. I probably did not appreciate it during my Scouting life as a youth but his leadership and involvement in my life proves to me that the program works. Scouting is not a youth program, it is a life program.

For support, I thank my advisor Lynn Bates, who has not only been there for my doctoral paper but as a friend in Scouting for many years. His dedication to the program and to the commissioner service is exceptional.

About twenty years ago, I began the path of becoming a commissioner. I was involved with Roundtable, district commissioner training then the College of Commissioner Science. Going through the Roundtable program, Bachelors, Masters and then Post-Graduate studies, I thought I had found my place in Scouting for life. It did not work out, however, since I was asked to become the District Chairman then Council Vice President. After service in these positions for several years, I thought my Scouting career was probably winding down. After serving on the council board for a couple of years in committee positions, I was asked to help my

district again by becoming program chairman. A new district commissioner found that he had been accepted into medical school and had to resign. I was asked to become District Commissioner.

Sometimes things just work out. Sometimes it just takes a while. I always regretted that I had been taken on a path away from the role of commissioner and that I never had a chance to complete my Doctorate of Commissioner Science. My thanks to all who directly or indirectly made it possible to get back on track.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Communications represent a large part of the duties of a commissioner. Advances in technology have created new tools that can help the commissioner do their job. This study looks at the many forms and methods of communications available, mainly through social media and the internet. The effectiveness of each are discussed, in relationship to their total use as well as by the commissioner. The various methods of communication among commissioners, commissioners and their units, the district and council to commissioner, as well as how information is distributed from the national office are discussed.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Commissioners take communications for granted. After all, they are the liaison between the unit and the program. They must communicate to do their job. How is that accomplished? Do we simply check a box and say, “Visit done, I am through for two months”? What has that done for the program? What information are they providing to the unit from the district and council? Are they doing the job as a commissioner if the District Executive is the first to know if a unit is in trouble? There is so much more that can be done to provide a better program if they just use the tools at hand. This work will provide the commissioner with a set of tools, that when used properly, are a path for more effective communications within the Commissioner Corps.

Let’s look at the who, what, where and when of communications. First, the obvious connection is between the unit and the commissioner. We all know the duties of a commissioner are a lifeline to the unit. The commissioner communicates through the Communication Tools and possibly a phone call, if the unit is in trouble or there are concerns. How can this be improved? This is one of the questions this study hopes to answer.

The second area of concern is the information provided to the commissioner and among commissioners. How is information sent out and how effective is the method? Are Commissioner Tools being used? Where do the commissioners get their information and how do they share it? Is there a mechanism in place to assure that the information sent is being received?

Third, there is the communication between the commissioners and the District and Council leadership. How many times have we heard from a unit that they did not know about an

event? How can commissioners keep the unit in the loop on what is going on? The District leadership also needs to know what is going on with the unit. I am not just thinking of unit health here but looking at whether a unit is going to participate in an event and if they are not, why not?

What is the mode of communication? Obviously, face to face is one option. Meetings such as roundtables are another option. With the wealth of information available on the internet, there are certainly options there. Is one method better than others? Have methods changed over the years?

The traditional role of the commissioner as defined on the scouting.org site is multiple roles including friend, representative, unit doctor, teacher and counselor. All these roles involve communications, mostly direct one on one contact. This study will not examine the role of the commissioner but instead look at several ways and types of communications that can be used to strengthen the role of the commissioner rather than to change it.

Most would recognize communication methods such as email, phone calls, written reports and direct contact as the mainstays of commissioner contacts. With advances in technology, however, many new tools are available. How effective are these traditional methods and is there evidence of their effectiveness? A search of the internet will give some indication of what has been done, how it has been used and how effective it has been.

There are many new methods available. The internet has allowed for Facebook, Instagram, groups including Facebook and email groups, email list programs, instant messaging, YouTube, and others. The important aspect is not only being available but how will they be used



by commissioners for their ongoing communication needs. Also, specific BSA tools such as Commissioner Tools are evolving, making them more effective for day to day communications.

The first and one of the most important communication tools is face to face contact. This could be one on one or in a group at a meeting. This is the most important contact method of the unit commissioner and the unit. For the commissioner to do the job, face to face contact is necessary. Face to face contact at roundtable meetings also provides interaction with other leaders as well as other commissioners and district leadership. One on one contact between the unit commissioner and the district commissioners also allows for extended conversations beyond the comments available within the Commissioner Tools.

Phone calls offer many of the same advantages of face to face contact but is usually limited to one on one conversations. Conference calls are possible for groups and were popular in past years but have been replaced for the most part by web-based tools. Phone calls are still a very effective tool, partially because everyone has one. Whether calling about an upcoming meeting or event, or simply checking in with the unit between visits, phone calls will continue to be one of the most important communications tools.

Handwritten forms, memos, letters and reports were once a big part of the communication for a commissioner. The Commissioner Work Sheet was the primary tool used for evaluating unit performance. They are still available and are an excellent resource for evaluation of the conditions and needs of a unit. It is rare to see a written report of any kind used for anything more than for taking notes or for personal use. Occasionally, a handwritten survey or evaluation might be used for input from a group or a training class. Copies of the detailed

assessment sheets from Commissioner Tools are available in the Commissioner section on the [scouting.org](http://scouting.org) site.

Electronic tools have taken over as favored means of communication. There are now many varied tools and methods, some more appropriate for commissioner communications than others. Very few people do not have a computer or a smartphone or both, so most people have the availability of most, if not all, of these tools.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF COMMUNICATION METHODS

If we think about communication over the history of the Scouting program, we quickly realize how much has changed over a very short period. The Boy Scouts of America started in 1910 or over 118 years ago. The telephone was just getting popular although it was not close to being in every home. Radio was just getting started and still did not have regular broadcasts. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of various methods of communication, we must first define some of the more recent methods.

Social media is defined by Merriam-Webster as “Forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)”. These would include Facebook (sites, groups, and chat), Instagram, Twitter, email and email-based groups, personal blogs, messaging (both text and application based), intranet chat, discussion forums, dedicated information sites, and shared calendars. Most of these, either directly or indirectly, can be used and have value to commissioner service.

Communications can also be defined by three different methods. These methods can then be applied to the many different forms of communication. Interactive communication allows all the participants to respond in real-time, making this a very effective method. Examples would include face-to-face meetings, video conferencing, conference calls and messaging chats. Push communications distributes information without immediate feedback for the group. Email or voicemail would be examples of push communications. Pull communications allows the group to

access the information on their own time. Almost all dedicated information sites including Council and BSA National sites would be examples of this method. Pull communications would allow substantial amounts of information to be at the disposal of the user.<sup>1</sup>

There is little in the literature about communication tools, beyond the national Scouting sites and resources. Most of the resources discuss Commissioner Tools, which is the prime method of communication for the commissioner. This paper will not be a discussion on how to use the basic tools, i.e., entering data from visits. There are many “how to” papers and videos used for training that cover the Commissioner Tools in detail. Later in the discussion portion, however, ways of using the data and how comments can be improved will be covered. References are less likely to talk about the use of social media tools and their use by commissioners. This work is also not a tutorial on how to use various social media platforms, but to consider their effectiveness in commissioner communications.

The most obvious social media tool is Facebook. Facebook was launched in 2004, not long when considering Scouting history, but an eternity for computers and software. Now, after almost 14 years, there are now over 2 billion users. It is still increasing at a rate of 16% year over year. Every minute there are over 500,000 comments posted, nearly 300,000 statuses updated, and 136,000 photos uploaded. Over 4.75 billion pieces of content are shared daily.<sup>2</sup> Content on

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<sup>1</sup> Project Communication Management: Push vs Pull Communication for PMP Exam. (2017, April 20). Retrieved November 13, 2017, from <https://edward-designer.com/web/project-communication-management-push-vs-pull-communication-for-pmp-exam/>

<sup>2</sup> Strategic Insights, The Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics. Updated November 2017. Retrieved November 13, 2017, from <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>

Facebook is as varied as anyone's imagination. Content pages can be liked and followed so the user receives updates when additional information is posted to a page. Individuals are also followed and information from their page can be followed as well. Information can come from almost any source.

Facebook has a feature called Groups. These are generally populated by members with a common interest. There are basically two types of groups, open and closed, also called public and private. Private or closed groups require membership approval and are not viewable to the public. Groups allow information to be shared among members including documents, photos, and share pages. Members can also message each other in a private message or comment to the entire group.<sup>3</sup>

Twitter is another well-known social media tool. It provides short, concise snippets of information to be sent quickly and efficiently. Twitter began in 2006 as a messaging service platform. Originally, and until recently, only 140 characters per message or tweet were allowed. Why only 140 characters? A 140-character limit was part of the SMS protocol for the mobile carriers. It has recently been doubled to 280 characters since that protocol is no longer relevant.<sup>4</sup> Twitter does not have the same group capability as Facebook so many third-party solutions are available to those wishing to create a group within Twitter.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Petronzio, Matt (2013, Jan. 28) Everything You Wanted to Know About Facebook Groups. Mashable. Retrieved November 13, 2017, from <http://mashable.com/2013/01/28/facebook-groups-101/#IzE0fJxP9gqs>

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, A. (n.d.). The History of Twitter You Didn't Know. Retrieved November 13, 2017, from <https://www.lifewire.com/history-of-twitter-3288854>

<sup>5</sup> Carta, D. (2009, February 15). HOW TO: Create Groups for Twitter. Retrieved November 13, 2017, from <http://mashable.com/2009/02/15/twitter-groups-3/#nH0EhR93FZqX>

Instagram was launched in 2010 as an internet-based photo-sharing application. It allows photos to be shared either publicly or privately.<sup>6</sup> It allows real-time sharing of photos on the Instagram platform and allows sharing to Facebook, Twitter, etc. This allows photos to be shared to several platforms without reposting to each site. More than 59% of the Instagram audience is within the 18 to 29-year-old range. There are now over 800 million Instagram users, adding over 100 million new users in the first 6 months of 2016.<sup>7</sup> That pace has quickened now adding 100 million new users each month.<sup>8</sup>

The business side of social media is led by LinkedIn. Begun in 2003, it was aimed at connecting professionals. Growth was slow in the beginning but in 10 years reached 225 million users. By early 2017 that number had grown to over 500 million users.<sup>9</sup> Even though LinkedIn is aimed at professionals, many special interest groups are available. The interactive forums, however, have become less popular than those on other sites.

Chat rooms were once the rage of the internet. Now chat rooms predominantly reside in the gaming world. The exception to that is intranet chat and is primarily found within the business world. It requires specialized software and allows members of the group to privately see and interact with other members of the group. It could be described much like a private Facebook page but is totally controlled by the owner. Members can't come and go and outside

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<sup>6</sup> The History of Instagram. (2014, May 12). Retrieved November 13, 2017, from <https://blog.dashburst.com/history-of-instagram>

<sup>7</sup> York, A. (2017, July 19). Social Media Demographics to Inform a Better Segmentation Strategy. Retrieved November 13, 2017, from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/new-social-media-demographics/#instagram>

<sup>8</sup> Etherington, D. (2017, September 25). Instagram now has 800 million monthly and 500 million daily active users. Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <https://techcrunch.com/2017/09/25/instagram-now-has-800-million-monthly-and-500-million-daily-active-users/>

<sup>9</sup> A Brief History of LinkedIn. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <https://ourstory.linkedin.com/>

members cannot be invited. This allows important company information to be shared within a company group and that information is protected as part of the software.<sup>10</sup>

Another popular tool is messaging, also known as instant messaging. Most people who are familiar with Facebook use Messenger.<sup>11</sup> These do not require purchased software and, in the case of Messenger, is part of the Facebook software package. Other application-based software programs for messaging are available, but Messenger is by far the most popular application. More than half of all the application-based messaging is by Messenger. The other popular applications are WhatsApp with 14 percent and Snapchat with 12 percent.<sup>12</sup> All of these messaging applications function as private messaging services using one-on-one conversations or group conversations, using a group set up by the host member.

The other type of messaging is tied to mobile phone usage package and is subject to usage fees from the phone provider. The SMS or short message service texting is cell phone to cell phone or can be internet to cell phone. It is also what most people think of when referring to texting.<sup>13</sup> By definition these are meant for short messages. There is a limit of 160 characters per message. Even though SMS messaging is part of a paid service, most people (72%) use it rather

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<sup>10</sup> Eisenhauer, T. (n.d.). Why Every Intranet Needs Chat & Instant Messaging Features. Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <https://axerosolutions.com/blogs/timeisenhauer/pulse/249/why-every-intranet-needs-chat-instant-messaging-features>

<sup>11</sup> Facebook Messenger. (2017, December 21). Retrieved November 19, 2017, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook\\_Messenger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook_Messenger)

<sup>12</sup> Martin, J. A. (2015, May 28). Facebook Messenger is king of IM apps, but people still prefer SMS. Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <https://www.cio.com/article/2927653/mobile-apps/facebook-messenger-is-king-of-im-apps-but-people-still-prefer-sms.html>

<sup>13</sup> Fendelman, A. (n.d.). What Is SMS Text Messaging? Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <https://www.lifewire.com/definition-of-sms-text-messaging-578676>

than using an application-based program like Facebook Messenger because they think it is easier and faster.<sup>14</sup>

Group SMS messaging with dedicated software can be useful for very large groups, such as churches and other large non-profit groups, community groups, educational institutions and businesses. These can be used to send out short blast messages to a large number of people in a simple, inexpensive and effective way.<sup>15</sup>

Other, not so obvious, tools are the email marketing programs. These allow large amounts of data to be distributed to a dedicated mailing list. Unlike regular email, these can provide custom graphics within the program. Mail campaigns can be pre-planned then sent out at regular intervals. These programs are usually used by businesses in direct mail marketing to distribute sales or interest information, but they can also be used by organizations to push out information about meetings, events, and educational items. They can also be used very effectively as a means of newsletter distribution. There are many programs out there, nearly 130 by one count but most of the market share belongs to two programs, MailChimp and Constant Contact. MailChimp has nearly half the market, primarily because it is free, at least for most smaller users. Constant Contact is the most popular paid program. These two make up 62% of the business and the remaining 128 programs 38% of the market.<sup>16</sup> These programs are designed to distribute information to users who opt in by giving their permission to receive the

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<sup>14</sup> Martin, J. A. (2015, May 28). Facebook Messenger is king of IM apps, but people still prefer SMS. Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <https://www.cio.com/article/2927653/mobile-apps/facebook-messenger-is-king-of-im-apps-but-people-still-prefer-sms.html>

<sup>15</sup> (n.d.). Retrieved November 20, 2017, from <https://www.eztexting.com/group-texting>

<sup>16</sup> (n.d.). Retrieved November 20, 2017, from <https://www.datanyze.com/market-share/email-marketing/>



information. They may, by design, opt out or unsubscribe from the list. Most of these programs require a way to unsubscribe from the service.

Shared or collaborative calendar apps can help manage assignments and appointments or allow teams to manage tasks or meetings. These are particularly useful for groups because they allow calendar items to be sent by email then accepted by the end user and, when accepted, are added to the calendar. Since they are shared, they are also accessible from one's mobile or the desktop. These apps allow a user to look at the availability of the participants by using open scheduling. Several apps are available, but most are aimed at small businesses. The most popular app is Google Calendar and is free. Calendars can be shared with users without a Google account. However, to be fully interactive each user should establish a Google account and install the app.<sup>17</sup>

Along with the discussion of calendars, scheduling meetings can be a very frustrating and time-wasting experience. Although calendar apps allow the sharing of a meeting, the scheduling of that time can now be done with a free application. There are premium applications out there but there are enough free applications to allow for several ways to schedule meetings. Most quickly allow the host to present several options of times and dates, then allow the participants to vote on which of the options they have free. The best allow interaction with the user's calendar so there is not so much back and forth from the app to the calendar.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pan, J. (2012, September 20). 4 Shared Calendar Apps For Team Efficiency. Retrieved November 20, 2017, from <http://mashable.com/2012/09/20/shared-calendar-apps/#4fF8zdWNF8q7>

<sup>18</sup> Z. (n.d.). The 17 Best Meeting Scheduler Apps and Tools. Retrieved December 5, 2017, from <https://zapier.com/blog/best-meeting-scheduler-apps/>

Discussion boards, also known as discussion forums, and message boards are really online bulletin boards and have been around since 1979. That is four years before the first PC was introduced. It was one of the first methods of two-way communication available on the internet. These forums used asynchronous communication, allowing users to post and respond to messages at any time rather than a chat room, where all users must be logged on simultaneously.<sup>19</sup> Users must log onto the site to comment or to retrieve messages. A user may ask a question, then other users reply to the “thread” until the moderator or administrator closes the topic, after which no comments are accepted. The full discussion is left for other members of the group to read. These discussion boards allow for specialized topics and allow users to ask questions or respond to the group. The forum groups may be public or private and might require the users to register to post on the site. Early growth of these forms was phenomenal with over 300,000 by 2001. In 2016, there were so many they are no longer counted.<sup>20</sup>

File-sharing and cloud storage offer the ease of being able to access information from any computer while storing a large amount of data. Files can be viewed from any phone, tablet or computer connected to the internet. The obvious advantage is the data is not stored on a computer but on a server in the “cloud”, the term used to describe off site storage of data, files or photos. They offer an extra level of protection if the user stores the data on their own computer and the cloud as a backup for valuable information. For users with limited storage, cloud storage

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<sup>19</sup> Discussion Forums. (n.d.). Retrieved November 30, 2017, from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/economics/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/discussion-forums>

<sup>20</sup> Internet forum. (2017, November 30). Retrieved November 30, 2017, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet\\_forum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_forum)

can expand the capabilities of a phone or tablet. The real advantage is the storage capability is practically limitless. The downside is price. The more storage needed, the higher the cost. Most offer modest free storage but for a large amount of data or photos, a paid plan will probably be necessary. OneDrive, Dropbox, Google Drive, Box and Amazon Cloud Drive are some of the most popular services available. Some offer ways to automatically sync shared files so the latest files are always available.<sup>21</sup> Files can be shared with one individual and even those not subscribed to the service. Very large files are much easier to share than by email, where size restrictions may slow or prevent the files from being transferred.<sup>22</sup>

Surveys are another way of getting feedback from a group. Simply described, an online survey is a questionnaire that a target audience can complete over the internet. These are frequently used by business to measure the tastes of their customers, but it can also give immediate feedback to an event, training, or to some form of information delivered to a group. Surveys have been used in paper form at the close of an event to measure the effectiveness of that event.<sup>23</sup> The online survey is easy, and the cost is minimal. It allows the participant to answer the questionnaire at their own pace and chosen time. Some online surveys provide tools

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<sup>21</sup> Mitroff, S. (2014, February 19). OneDrive, Dropbox, Google Drive and Box: Which cloud storage service is right for you? November 30, 2017, from <https://www.cnet.com/how-to/onedrive-dropbox-google-drive-and-box-which-cloud-storage-service-is-right-for-you/>

<sup>22</sup> Hoffman, C. (2014, September 10). How to Share Files and Folders from Your Cloud Storage Folder. Retrieved December 5, 2017, from <https://www.howtogeek.com/196435/how-to-share-files-and-folders-from-your-cloud-storage-folder/>

<sup>23</sup> What is an Online Survey? - Definition from Techopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved December 5, 2017, from <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/27866/online-survey>

for analysis of the data which can save time over hand counted paper surveys. They can often aid in the presentation of the data, also.<sup>24</sup>

Websites are good examples of pull communications. These sites allow the user to pull information at their own pace. The information is usually permanently part of a page and is available always. There are thousands of websites devoted to Scouting topics, but this work only looks at the information available that would primarily benefit commissioners. Of course, [scouting.org](http://scouting.org) is a primary source for all information and training from the National Council. Within that site, the commissioners have a dedicated area holding the latest information about Commissioner Service. Councils, districts, even regions and areas may also have sites specializing in information for commissioners. In Appendix A, I have listed many of the sites commissioners would use in providing information to their units. Some of these are Facebook pages and others are dedicated web sites. I am sure this is not an exhaustive list, but it is a good basic list of informational sites.

Many of the sites in Appendix A include training modules. Most commissioner training can be accessed online within the [scouting.org](http://scouting.org) site and the commissioner training page.<sup>25</sup> Just about every course syllabus is available. Many of the courses can be completed online. In addition, information about upcoming Commissioner College training is available as well as national level training for commissioners. Many individual training teams have also put together training videos available on YouTube, such as training for the commissioner. Finally, there are

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<sup>24</sup> Surveys and Questionnaires - Guide. (n.d.). Retrieved December 5, 2017, from <https://explorable.com/surveys-and-questionnaires>

<sup>25</sup> (n.d.). Retrieved December 5, 2017, from <https://www.scouting.org/Home/Commissioners/training.aspx>

hundreds of Doctoral Dissertations from the College of Commissioner Science with in-depth studies of a multitude of topics that are available for study.<sup>26</sup> Most colleges have extensive archives available on their web site.

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<sup>26</sup> (n.d.). Retrieved December 5, 2017, from <http://pacommissionercollege.com/doctoral-papers/>

## **CHAPTER III**

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION METHODS**

This project is based on a review of the literature and history of communication tools. The development of each method and the user base are used to make decisions on the appropriate use of each by the commissioners. Each level of communication within the ranks of the commissioner service are examined and each communication tool is discussed based on their effectiveness. The Appendix includes many of the online sites and pages found in the study. As mentioned earlier, despite the long history of the Boy Scouts of America, communication methods remained relatively unchanged until recently. Most interaction within early Scouting would have been face-to-face or the written word. Things did not change for years...many years. It was not until the development of the personal computer in the late 1970's and the early 1980's that other options we have discussed could be developed. Means and methods we now take for granted were not available during the first two-thirds of the program. Email was first developed in 1972 but it was well into the 1980's before email really started expanding. Within the last 35 years, every new communication tool except the telephone has been developed. Most of the online tools have been developed within the past 15 years. Facebook did not appear until 2004. Computer technology, cell phones and other wireless technology have made advances that seemed impossible now be in widespread use. Almost everyone has a computer and a cell phone making all these tools available to virtually everyone. Each new tool has its place. This work will discuss each tool in context with Scouting and specifically with the commissioner service to look at which can benefit the commissioner and the program.

The historic methods of communication, that is the phone and the commissioner reports still have relevance to today's program. The telephone, cell or land line, is still one of the easiest and best ways to communicate. It is direct, and a live discussion can cover many topics, not just the primary subject of the call. The downside to a phone call is that there is no record of the call, unless it is recorded which almost never happens.

Almost universally, commissioners are trained to use the online commissioner tools for assessments. That should be done for every visit, but there is still room for using the unit commissioner worksheet from the Commissioner's Field Book. Information from these worksheets give the commissioner more information for their records on unit health than the online assessment. This information can lead the commissioner to the score for the online assessment and provides a written record for the commissioner's file. It does take time to complete and the form must be copied.

The development of Facebook and its rapid and continued expansion make it a good example of a tool to be used by commissioners, if for no other reason, the number of users. Facebook has many pages aimed at commissioners. Many are listed in Appendix A. Facebook is an easy way to distribute information in near real-time and allow response from other users. Commissioner group pages allow people to join the group and receive communications and discuss current topics privately. They allow the National Council, local councils, and districts to distribute information about meeting, trainings and policy changes without waiting for website additions or revisions. Many districts and councils have dedicated commissioner groups on Facebook.

Facebook also allows for private messaging or chat providing one-on-one conversations between users. For the commissioner, these chats could discuss a particular unit or problem without involving the entire group. A real benefit to Facebook is that those who use it tend to keep up with it. Over 80% of people who use the Internet use Facebook. Because most people also have a smartphone, users tend to check Facebook more often, an average of 14 times a day.

Just because Facebook is popular, does not mean that it is an effective communication tool for commissioners. It can be good to use to distribute information, but the commissioner must check the page. Also, even if they see the information, reading the information can't be guaranteed. There are still a fair number of the population, which probably includes some commissioners, who do not use or do not regularly use Facebook. Just having a Facebook account does not mean that it will be used.

Twitter gets mentioned all the time in the news media. It is a favorite of many to "Tweet" short messages in real time to react to news and events. I know the Chief Scout Executive tweets out national news and information and so do many local councils. As a communication tool for commissioners, it has limited value. There is no group capability which limits the type of information that can be discussed, and the size of its user base does not equate to an effective tool for commissioners. A large user base does not make up for the limitation in message size and secure conversations. It may be great for breaking news but for day-to-day communications of a commissioner, its use is not high on the list.

Instagram, the internet-based photo-sharing application has a large following and is the number one application for sharing photographs. Instagram's platform allows photos to be



shared to other platforms, like Facebook and Twitter so a commissioner might find it useful to highlight an event. Like Facebook, Instagram accounts are private, so the photos can be limited to a group. Since the photos are cloud-based and not stored on a single individual's computer, it can be more effective as a photo archive. Scouts and Scouters take a lot of photos, Instagram may be an effective way to store and share them. Commissioners may not use Instagram as a part of their job as a commissioner but if they do take photos to document commissioner visits, camporees, district events, it may be a helpful tool.

The LinkedIn site is popular among professionals and several Scout related groups have appeared on the site. Since it is aimed at the professional, most of the interaction for the groups is used to promote affiliation with the group rather than to advance communications within the group. It is not a significant site as a communications tool for commissioners.

Internet chat or what was once known as chat rooms are not as popular as in the early days of social media. Sites like Facebook have been shown to be much more flexible and offer a chat feature within the site. Group chat like those used in business require dedicated software and each member must sign in or install the software. Group chat may be used to invite members to a site at a time to discuss issues when a face-to face meeting is not possible. It is the online version of a conference call. That is a big disadvantage for commissioner communications because many would not want to go to the trouble to install extra software. The chat feature of Facebook could be used within a Facebook group if enough users could be following the group and if a decision could be made on a time.

Many people using Facebook also use the Facebook Messenger for their instant messaging tool. It is by far the most popular and it is free with Facebook. Messenger is like a social media email. It is one-on-one messaging and is private. It can be used to comment privately about a Facebook post or to ask a question. This can be helpful for a commissioner because it is private, and it does allow two-way communication. A disadvantage is that even in a group, people must be selected individually, which could be a time-consuming task. Although it is a very popular application, it does require Messenger to be installed and the user also be a Facebook user.

A far more usable form of messaging is what we normally refer to as text messaging. Everyone who has a smartphone can use this service. Many more people use text messaging also known as SMS messaging, than even the popular Facebook Messenger. A real advantage to this messaging is that over 90% of text messages are read within 3 minutes. Even though the messages must be short, they will be read. Next to a phone call, it is probably the best way to communicate other than a direct phone call. The Millennial generation tends to use texting as their primary communication method even more than email and more than phone calls. They even use texting at work to spread information or coordinate employees using a single text message. Because of the allowed message length, the type of information would be limited to short, concise messages but the sender can be confident that the message will be read. As a quick reminder from a commissioner to their units about upcoming meetings, due dates for payments or signups, or even reminders about recharter, text messaging is an underutilized tool.

Most may think that email is the preferred method of communication, other than a phone call. Anyone with a computer and an email address know the number and spectrum of emails. Personal emails as well as direct mail marketing materials tend to fill our inbox daily. Some are requested by the user and others are considered as spam, unwanted email. For commissioners, much of their day-to day information is handled by email. Tools such as email marketing programs may not be a primary concern of the unit commissioner, but they probably get Scouting information by one of these marketing tools. If the district or council sends out a newsletter, it is probably from one of the email marketing programs. MailChimp is a free program for smaller groups and could easily be used by a district commissioner to distribute information or even by a unit commissioner to distribute information to their units.

The disadvantage to the email marketing programs is that even though people sign up to receive the emails, the rate of opening is only about 30%. For mail marketing, that may be a good return but for distributing information to commissioners, that is not a very effective tool. The advantage to using one of the mail marketing programs is the data gained from each mailing. It is possible to ask for a read report from regular email programs like Outlook. Email will always be a primary tool for communication for the commissioner, but the results are probably going to be best if the email is one-on-one rather than from a marketing program.

Managing appointments and meetings as well as keeping up with daily tasks can be assisted by using shared calendars. These apps allow users to be invited to an event, meeting etc. and the date and time accepted by a user. The user then accepts, and the time and date are added to their calendar. Any number of Scouting and commissioner events can be arranged using

shared calendars. Google calendar is a free calendar app and a calendar can be shared even if a user does not have a google account. To be fully interactive, all users must have a Google account.

Scheduling a time for those meetings is often the most difficult part of meeting planning. Using a scheduling app allows the meeting planner to poll the users to select the best meeting time. With the busy schedules of Scouters and specifically commissioners, a planning tool like this can be a time saver. District commissioners trying to find a time for a non-scheduled meeting or training can benefit from this type of program.

Discussion boards or forums have been around for many years. They are sites where users can ask questions or, in some cases, be a part of the discussion. These sites allow a user to present a situation or ask a question about a process or policy that may question other written policy. It is easy to see the use of this type of site for commissioners. Those are the types of questions commissioners get on a regular basis. To use a site like this to get a second opinion or to see if anyone else has the same concerns can be a valuable resource for a commissioner.

One discussion board site is “Ask Andy”, an affiliate website to the US Scouting Service Project. This site is not affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America National Council, but its host is a Scouter. Another is Bryan on Scouting, which is affiliated with Scouting magazine. This is a blog covering many topics, not just commissioner service. On the blog there is a forum page and an “Ask the Expert” page. Both cover a wide range of topics of interest to the commissioner.

There can be a lot of forms, files and other documents a commissioner may want or need to keep. They might keep them on a laptop or a flash drive or maybe a desktop at home. With the

development of cloud storage, that is, off site storage available from a cell phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer, there is no need to have all the files present during a visit. If they are needed they can be accessed from any computer device. In many cases, files can be updated automatically so the latest version is always available. Links to websites can be stored the same way so a search is not necessary to find a site. Another use for cloud storage is as a backup of files stored locally. Hard drive failures happen all the time, it is best to be safe with a backup. If there is a disadvantage to cloud storage, it is the potential cost. For the information needed by a unit commissioner, free storage is available. If very large files are necessary, a paid service like Dropbox, OneDrive or Google Drive may be best. They allow some free storage up to a point then a monthly fee is charged for higher storage capacity.

Most people don't like to fill out surveys. That is why they are given out at the end of a meeting or training and expect them to be filled out before leaving. For businesses or organizations doing internal surveys a 30-40% response rate is considered good. For external surveys such as a business surveying their customers, 10-15% response rate is considered good. If this is an online survey, only 15-20% will open it and even fewer will respond. Which of these might best describe a survey from a district commissioner to their units may be somewhere in between but may be the subject of another study. Surveys for commissioners would appear to be low on the list of effective tools. They may be good for training but not so much for getting feedback from units.

As stated earlier, websites are good examples of pull communications. Commissioners need to be familiar with them because they hold vast amounts of information which can aid the

commissioner in their day-to-day activities. These would begin with the [scouting.org](http://scouting.org) site for policy, training, recognition, general information, and just about everything else dealing with the Boy Scouts of America. The commissioners have their own section including the Commissioner Newsletter. Many of these sites are listed in the Appendix, including several Facebook pages. All commissioners should be familiar with these sites plus any local sites for their own council and district.

Advances in technology have given the commissioner many new tools for communications. Within the ranks of the commissioner service, how do these fit into the operation? It has been often said that communications can make or break an organization. Knowing how to communicate and with whom to communicate is necessary for the commissioner. Since they are the liaison between the unit and the district or council, they need to be well informed and capable of delivering that information to their units.

Many times, all the information is funneled to one person within a unit. A single leader may make the decision whether that information is passed on or not. Part of a commissioner's duties are to make sure everyone knows about what is going on in the district and the council. Many units have their own social network tool like a newsletter or web site to communicate with leaders and parents. It would be a good idea for each commissioner to ask to be included on that list and contribute to it with current news within the district. Unit management software like Scoutbook may also allow the commissioner to be included in unit communications. The commissioner must first be informed by keeping up with the monthly Roundtables, news for the district and council and on their own by keeping up with the national and other web sites and

Facebook pages. If the commissioner is not well informed, they are not going to be as helpful to the unit as they should. It is, therefore, the commissioner's responsibility to keep up with events, training and policy.

Every commissioner needs to be proficient with Commissioner Tools. There are videos available on YouTube and [scouting.org](http://scouting.org) for training. Each commissioner needs to understand the detailed assessment and learn to be prepared for that visit. Commissioners should offer detailed information in the comments, even for a simple assessment. District commissioners need to use Commissioner Tools on a regular basis and read all the comments for new visits. District commissioners need to keep up with visits using the reports and make calls on commissioners who fall behind on their visits. Detailed analysis tools are available on [scouting.org](http://scouting.org) that allow advanced pivot tables to be generated for more complete review than normal reports in Commissioner Tools.

Commissioners also need to be the eyes and ears of the district and council. Many District Executives do not have time to know what is going on in every unit. The commissioner needs to contact the district commissioner directly if there are red flag events such as the unit not meeting, loss of leadership, no planned program or recharter problems. The best way to communicate in that situation is by phone or text message. Just making notes on a visit in Commissioner Tools is not enough. Any down grading of unit health should be a reason for a direct contact to the district commissioner and/or the district executive. Other reasons may not be directly related to the health of the unit but may be important to the district or council. Unit participation in district or council events is important to the success of the district or council.

Why a unit is not participating needs to be relayed to the district commissioner or district executive. In all these unit concerns, a phone call or text message are the best tools to use.

It may be the commissioner's responsibility to know what is going on within the district or council but how do the needed communication tools fit in? The Appendix is a listing of many of the online websites and Facebook pages the commissioner needs to know about. The monthly roundtable program is another major source for both the commissioner and the leaders. The commissioner should be encouraging the unit leaders and parents to attend the monthly roundtable. Many districts also have a newsletter and maybe a Facebook page. Each commissioner should place a reminder on any correspondence to leaders to promote district media tools.

A Facebook district page can be an effective tool to promote events and training. Commissioners can encourage the units to follow the Facebook page and promote the individual event. A calendar scheduler can help by placing a reminder on their calendar. The unit commissioner should also keep up with their own training. Much of their training is now available online, at their University of Scouting and at the College of Commissioner Science.

Peer-to-peer communication is also important for commissioners. The sharing of situations, problems and solution are helpful to every commissioner. First, the unit visit is the most important task for a commissioner. According to the Journey to Excellence guidelines, a commissioner should visit a unit at least once every two months. A lot can happen in two months so a phone call to check in may be in order for the months there is no visit. Many situations can arise during a visit, some that a commissioner has not seen before. Having peer-to-peer



communications allows shared ideas for solutions or to question other commissioners for similar situations. Chat or a dedicated Facebook page may be the best to use for this situation. A private Facebook page or group can be private, so the conversations are limited to other commissioners within the group. Group text messaging can also be used but should probably be used for hurry cases.

Information from the district or council directed toward the unit can be funneled through the commissioner or provided directly. District and council Facebook pages, council websites, newsletters and email list mailings all are useful tools. Some require the unit leader to go to a site or to read an email. For most of these, it is hard to show they have been seen. Calendar tools may provide a reminder for upcoming events or training. Email allows a read report but if the information is just on a Facebook posting, it may or may not be seen. Again, the task of the commissioner is to promote these sites to the leaders and get them in a habit of using them on a regular basis.

Keeping up with everything from the National Council to the commissioner follows the same path as district or council to the units except the information is from the BSA sites rather than the council. Also, the same problem exists. There is not a good way to measure the effectiveness other than look at statistical averages from surveys. It has been shown that only about 30% of mail marketing emails are even opened. That would not be the best way to distribute information that needs to be seen by everyone.

When considering methods of communications to younger, millennial leaders it is best to think about how they communicate. They are not a group that would spend time on the phone.

Many will choose not to answer a phone call. They are the texting generation. That is what they do outside of Scouting and should be considered when communicating with them about Scouting. That may create a disconnect between a lot of commissioners and younger leaders. It is up to the commissioner to adapt to the tool that will be the most effective.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **SUMMARY**

With the development of the internet and other technology, many new communication tools have been established and become familiar items. Considering the age of the Scouting program, these developments are very recent. Until recent years, the cell phone has gone from just being a wireless phone to a very sophisticated hand-held computer. Although the laptop and desktop computer have advanced, the cell phone advancements have amplified the usage of the new communication tools.

Commissioners need to become familiar with the use of these new tools. Knowing when and how to use the various tools can strengthen the skills of the commissioner as well as the program. As innovative programs like Scoutbook become more popular the commissioner needs to look at ways to interact with the programs in use by the units. No single tool is best in each situation, so the commissioners need to know which tool to use in a particular situation. Many of these tools are not being used enough. Communication training would be a good topic for commissioner training. Every commissioner should want to improve their skills. Communication is a basic skill for the position, no matter what level. Each commissioner needs to take their own inventory of communications skills. This study will hopefully help.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**ONLINE REFERENCE SITES AND PAGES**

<https://www.scouting.org/Home/Commissioners.aspx> BSA Commissioner Site - This is information central for commissioners. All references to printed material, latest policies, other information commissioners need to perform their duties.

<https://www.scouting.org/Home/Commissioners/Manuals.aspx> BSA Manuals and Resources – A subsite from the Commissioners site above with reference to all the commissioner manuals.

<http://netcommissioner.com/> The NetCommish – This is not a BSA sponsored site but has useful information for the commissioner. It is not kept up as much lately but all the previous information is maintained.

<https://www.facebook.com/gsmccommissioners/> GSMC Commissioner Facebook Page – A Facebook page designed especially for commissioners within the great Smoky Mountain Council.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ScoutRTCommish/about/> Roundtable Commissioner Facebook Page A Facebook page designed for the Roundtable commissioner staff

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/bsa.commissioners/> Commissioner Service Facebook Page – A volunteer operated Facebook page designed to support and the promote commissioner service and unit support.

<https://www.facebook.com/CommissionersOfTheBoyScoutsOfAmerica/> BSA Commissioner Facebook – The official Facebook page for the Commissioners of the Boy Scouts of America

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1976324522626471/> Commissioner Training – the official training Facebook page for the National Commissioner Support Staff

<https://www.facebook.com/SRA4Commissioners/> Area 4, Southern Region Commissioners – An example of an Area commissioner Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/503350186662568/> Toqua District Commissioners – An example of a District commissioner Facebook page.

<http://netcommissioner.com/askandy/> Commissioner Forum Site – Volunteer led site with question and answer discussions.

<https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/> Bryan of Scouting – A blog site for Scouting magazine, with a “Forum” page and an “Ask the Expert” page that frequently cover topics of commissioner interest.



<https://scoutingmagazine.org/> Scouting magazine – The official site for Scouting Magazine

<http://usscouts.org/> U.S. Scouting Service Project – The official site for the USSSP. A comprehensive, volunteer run site with a wealth of information.