

FROM THE SOCIETY

“To Infinity—And Beyond!” SGIM’s Technological and Communications Advances Will Shoot Members into Orbit

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As a mother of young children, I am constantly surrounded by animated characters on TV and in our playroom. From Phineas & Ferb to Buzz Lightyear, these characters ask “what if?” and then work together to find solutions to their problems. They show children each day how to creatively use technology, ingenuity, and their own imaginations to make their environment a better place. And through them, my boys grow, learn, and embrace new ways of thinking and playing.

The same analogy can be applied to SGIM. In the past we have heard members ask us for more robust communications, both internally and externally. We knew communications was a problem for us. We wandered a bit into the social media forums to reach out to members online, and we used our existing technologies to inform and connect members where possible. But it wasn’t enough. How, I wondered, could we communicate if the sky were the limit? What could we do if we re-imagined the ways in which we talk to members and reach out to other organizations, media, readers of our publications, and others? Could we really catapult ourselves into a new communications orbit through new technology and our own creativity? I certainly thought about this during the Council retreat in Orlando at Walt Disney World, where I hear dreams can come true.

Over the past 18 months, SGIM Council, members, and staff have been working to make our communications dream come true. We’ve been working to formulate a strategic communications plan both internally and externally to spread the

word about the work of SGIM committees and task forces. Part of the fruition of this dream is the revitalization of the SGIM/ACLGIM website. This website, tentatively set to launch this summer, will be a complete re-imagining of how SGIM/ACLGIM relate to the online world and their members. Social media (through Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter) will be embedded in every page. You’ll physically see our members as they Tweet in real time. There will be room for discussion boards on current articles from *JGIM* and *Forum* as well as blogs, podcasts, links to YouTube videos, RSS feeds, and more. This will be a completely new way of relating to our members—from what was a static website full of information from SGIM/ACLGIM to an interactive site where our members form a community to talk to and learn from each other. Of course the site will have a completely new look and feel, along with a new logo. The editors and staff at *JGIM* are also working to redesign their website. It’s being built alongside SGIM and ACLGIM and will be a collection point for all things *JGIM*—author resources, cutting-edge articles and features, and areas where readers can engage with one another.

But a new website cannot be implemented in a vacuum. In order to get it launched, SGIM needed to overhaul its existing technological platform. The first thing we did was invest in a major upgrade for the members-only side of the web platform. You may have noticed an improved user interface when you logged in to update your membership information. This upgrade to a new SQL database technology

gained efficiency in database structure and improved response time to member queries. The technology in the national office was also improved: We moved all of our servers into the cloud, providing staff members with instant access to files from wherever they are working; we upgraded our Internet security and connection speed; and we added instant messaging, video, and computer sharing capabilities to increase staff efficiency.

Additionally, we have implemented new software called Higher Logic, which will become the communications hub for member networking. This tool can provide a myriad of functions to connect members to one another, including:

1. Replacing the current SGIM/ACLGIM Listservs with “Community Discussions,” which allow members to view discussions online at the Higher Logic site, via instant e-mail, or via e-mail digest at the end of each day;
2. Providing “Community Libraries,” which have the ability to store, categorize, and search reference material by several sets of criteria;
3. Providing the ability to maintain an SGIM, ACLGIM, or *JGIM* Community “Event Calendar,” which can be updated by members;
4. Connecting members through a new and improved Membership Directory with search capability and fields to add content on each member;
5. Providing the ability to create Community Microsites for

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- specific targeted groups of members (i.e. committees, regions, interest groups); and
6. Providing blogging and video streaming capability, either on the SGIM landing page or by communities within the Higher Logic site.

We expect Higher Logic to be operationalized sometime this spring and to be fully integrated into the SGIM/ACLGIM/JGIM websites in the summer. This tool will become what the members make of it. The more information you load the more robust it will become. If

we all work together to create a real information-sharing society—though our current and emerging communications solutions—we can truly make our dreams come true and catapult our members “to infinity, and beyond!”

SGIM