

Building American Legion Membership in the Internet Age

By: Rand Cordle

Given the Department of Defense's active role in the development of the Internet, it shouldn't be surprising to learn that 100% of America's Service Members are online and have been for some time. In August 2000, for example, regulations went into effect requiring all members and employees of the United States Army to establish an account with Army Knowledge Online, the Army's Internet Service. As a result of the U.S. Military's embracing the Internet, E-mail has become not only the required communication media for members of the military, but the preferred media due to its speed and efficiency. Today's service members can communicate easily online with family and friends in America from military installations around the world.

Consequently in today's world, with 75% of Americans online, and 100% of the members of America's armed forces online, it only makes sense to utilize e-mail, the Internet's primary form of communication, to communicate with members of the American Armed Services. In fact some would argue that it would be folly to ignore this predominant communications tool as a means of introducing current and recent members of the Armed Services to The American Legion and its programs.

To quote the official description of The American Legion: "*The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic, war-time veterans organization, devoted to mutual helpfulness. It is a not-for-profit community-service organization ...*" In order for The American Legion to effectively serve its purpose of mutual helpfulness and community service, it must communicate effectively both internally and with the communities they serve. Employing the dominant technology of the Internet is the logical communications solution in an era when print media is rapidly vanishing. The Internet and e-mail makes effective, affordable communications and public relations available to virtually every Department and Post.

By using this technology, most notably email, to initiate communication with and provide services to America's Service Members and their families, Departments and Posts of The American Legion can establish a sense of community with those service members which can naturally lead to involvement in American Legion Programs and membership.

To accomplish this, Departments and Posts of The American Legion can employ email newsletters featuring articles and news of interest to veterans and service members. Legionnaires are then encouraged to subscribe and share their e-newsletters by forwarding them to friends and family, particularly those who are veterans or are on active duty in the U.S. Military, inviting them to subscribe free. By providing free regular access to relevant news and information on veterans and community programs, a relationship is created that establishes The American Legion as a valuable resource in their lives, serving them and protecting Veterans Rights.

A Department or Post E-Newsletter can become a communications and public relations tool that literally reaches across the country or around the world to serve Veterans and members of the American Armed Services. This sort of outreach can only have a positive impact on membership, as new generations of veterans learn and come to appreciate the value of The American Legion and its family.

Rand Cordle is an SAL Member and President of Corande Publishing, LLC, a digital publishing firm that provides no-cost, revenue producing e-newsletter services to Departments of The American Legion and other qualifying not for profit organization. Information on services is available at <http://www.corande.com> or by email at info@corande.com