

Knowledge-Based Decision Making (KBDM): Improving Circulation of *LA Treasure Chest*

Topic.

Improving circulation of *LA Treasure Chest*, the AFG Area 22 newsletter.

Relevance.

Each issue of *LA Treasure Chest* typically requires 5 hours to circulate. This is above and beyond the time needed to prepare each issue. The Editor wishes to improve the method of circulation and needs approval from Assembly to do so.

Background.

At one time, *LA Treasure Chest* was printed then circulated via the United States Postal Service. Much effort was required to print, collate, staple, address, and sort (for bulk mail) each issue of the newsletter and Assembly paid for postage. Additionally, the editor was responsible for collecting subscription fees. Your current editor is amazed by the devotion of those who did this.

At some point, Assembly approved email circulation of *LA Treasure Chest*. Initially, there were few limitations. The editor created a list of email addresses, attached the newsletter, and pressed "Send". In time, an impediment appeared in the form of spam (a/k/a unsolicited bulk email).

In 2012, Microsoft and Google (two of the world's largest technology companies) determined that the annual global cost of spam was **20 billion dollars!** This finding led to creation of software to block delivery of email messages perceived as spam (even if they weren't really spam).

Anti-spam software looks for messages (1) with attachments, (2) are sent to many recipients, and (3) contain particular content. Given that *LA Treasure Chest* is circulated as an attachment via a large circulation list, *LA Treasure Chest* fits two of the three markers.

As a result of anti-spam software, hitting "Send" for all subscribers no longer works. Rather, the editor creates 30 mailings with 15 or fewer recipients in each mailing. This is a time-consuming task that is made more challenging by ongoing changes as subscribers' change addresses, new subscribers are added, and former subscribers are deleted.

Further complicating this situation is that Gmail provides no indication when a mass circulation is blocked. In April of 2019, the editor discovered that 77 subscribers hadn't received the latest issue of *LA Treasure Chest*. The editor had no idea that this happened until subscribers emailed to say that they hadn't received *LA Treasure Chest* even though they heard that others had.

1. What do we know about members' needs, wants, and preferences?

Our officers, coordinators, and members have stated that timely communication is important.

One member of Assembly noted that, “A hyperlink to the website has the beneficial side effect of exposing a newsletter reader to other items on the site...”. Moreover, group representatives can announce in a meeting that the latest issue of the newsletter is on the website. For some group representatives, this might be preferable to printing and circulating the newsletter.

Additionally, Al-Anon Guideline G-21 (*Guidelines for Newsletter Editors*) offers the following insight.

“A newsletter is a vital communication link to help keep groups and members informed.”

2. What do we know about our resources relative to this issue?

There have been two major developments since Assembly approved emailing *LA Treasure Chest*. First, the AFG Area 22 website has become a major resource for members. Second, the advent of newsletter circulation services.

The area website is chock full of useful information. In addition to staple items like the policies and procedures manual, new information is added regularly, including the Delegate’s Corner and recent KBDMs that are being discussed by Assembly.

Newsletter circulation services are designed for one purpose: circulation of newsletters. They offer features that email doesn’t, like automated list management that lets subscribers join or leave the list at will, plus automated circulation management that tracks the number of messages sent, number of messages opened, and number of messages bounced. Despite these advanced features, newsletter circulation services don’t allow attachments. (Recall that anti-spam software looks for attachments). To offset attachments not being included, the newsletter can be placed on the Assembly’s website (which the area webmaster already does) and a link to the newsletter can be included in messages. This allows subscribers to click the link and view the newsletter on their computers. They may also print it. Further, they may easily share the message with others. Essentially, the circulation service becomes an email notification that the newsletter is online.

3. What do we know about our “culture” or “environment” that relates to this issue?

We live in a time of evolving technology in which new opportunities and challenges are present. To perform our mission well, Assembly might need to adapt to the digital age. Regardless, as an incorporated entity, Assembly has a legal obligation to meet various laws, including those that apply to the electronic circulation of newsletters. These include the CAN-SPAM¹ Act of 2003 and the GDPR² of 2016. Our current newsletter circulation system fails to take these into account but newsletter circulation services comply with the current legal landscape.

4. What are the implications of our choices (pros and cons)?

Pros. Changing from email to a newsletter circulation service automates list management and circulation management (with attendant statistics), and meets Assembly's legal obligations by maintaining compliance with the CAN-SPAM¹ Act of 2003 and the GDPR² of 2016.

Cons. Preserving the status quo requires a huge outlay of effort without circulation statistics and with no means of assuring compliance the CAN-SPAM¹ Act of 2003 and the GDPR² of 2016.

5. What do we wish we knew, but don't?

Unknowns were identified in a joint meeting of the Membership-Outreach Action Committee and the Fellowship-Communication Action Committee. These included cost, privacy, and efficiency. Since that meeting, answers to these questions were found and addressed above.

6. How do AI-Anon's legacies apply to this issue?

Our First Tradition addresses unity. Many subscribers see timely circulation of LA Treasure Chest as contributing to unity.

Our Third Concept addresses the need for effective leadership. By stepping forward as leaders, we can work together for a solution that meets the needs of our members through-out the state.

Our Tenth Concept addresses the need for carefully defined service authority. While it addressed the authority of the newsletter editor in the past, changing circumstances present the Assembly with an opportunity to re-define that authority with a view to current circumstances.

¹Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing

²General Data Protection Regulation

This KBDM submitted by *LA Treasure Chest's* editor; last revised August 16, 2019.

To seek information or offer comments, contact latreasurechest@la-al-anon.org.