

# Freemasonry: the Original Social Network and Media

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As we continuously journey and seek out the secret word and its meaning, we are travelers upon a spiritual journey. As we search for meaning we in due course will reach, "The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn No traveller returns" (*William Shakespeare - To be, or not to be (from Hamlet 3/1), 2010*). Travelers make friends along the principal roads of life, and through their comings and goings they acquire trust of a few. The few, like the fifteen Fellowcraft, the trusted, become brothers, but sometimes brothers stray from the "good course" as did the three ruffians. We must escape before we are found, let us have a word with the man on the road before us to see if we can travel with him into another country. What...; we cannot,... but why? Because we have no pass. We all are familiar with this story, although we have to use different words to describe it here for obvious reasons.

Freemasons of old traveled in foreign countries, as we say, to make a living. They possessed special skills and knowledge, not found within the common masses. To protect themselves, their skills, and status, they developed what we would call today a very cohesive social network based on their skill set.

The view most generally held is that *free masons* were those who were free of the masons' guild. Free because they claimed exemptions from the control of the local guilds of the towns in

which they temporarily settled. *(Albert Mackey M. D., 2010, p. 282)*

Today the buzz in the business, local communities and the social scene is social media and social networking. You have heard of it, but what is it? Why is it so important? Is it important? Is it just vogue or a novel term? Before you say social networking is just a new age technological fad consider this: ad spending for social networking sites was expected to top \$1.6 billion in 2008. Wikipedia.com has 10 standard languages and has over 14 million articles. *(Wikipedia, 2009)* E-mail is now passe' to Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1980). In 2010, Generation Y (those born between 1980 and 2000) will outnumber Baby Boomers, 96% of Generation Y are connected to one or more social networks, social media has overtaken pornography as the leading #1 activity on the web. It took 38 years to reach 50 million users of radio, 13 years to reach 50 million users of TV, 4 years to reach 50 million users of the internet, 3 years to reach 50 million users of the iPod, Facebook added 100 million users in less than 9 months, iPod application downloads hit 1 billion in 9 months.

If Facebook were a country, it would be the 4th largest in the world. Today 80% of companies are using LinkedIn as a primary tool to find employees, 80% of Twitter usage is on mobile devices and YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world. *(Qualman, 2009)*. Still think it is a fad? Talk to your co-workers, talk to your employees, talk to your children, your grandchildren, actually ask the ten people in the room with you or the next ten people you meet if they use any of the social media already mentioned. In 2009, three of the top five most visited sites on the internet were social media sites. *(Qualman, YouTube, 2009)*

A social network focuses on building social relations among people, who share common interests or activities. It is this interaction between people that is important as it revolves around a common theme or goal. Let us rephrase this by saying *“Our Fraternity of Freemasonry focuses on building social relations among the Brethren (members) so that we take good men and make them better”*. We do this by teaching a way of life that promotes the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God. The goal is to be the premier organization composed of men of integrity and character, who are honest, true to their word, believe in God, are devoted to family, charitable in their community, and courteous and helpful to each other. **(TAKING GOOD MEN AND MAKING THEM BETTER! 2010)**

Social media pertains to how the message of a group is to be disseminated. Many instances it is by way of easily accessible web based publishing techniques such as Internet, broadcast media such as podcasts, Facebook, Twitter and Wiki sites that are built on Web 2.0 content. The network is the people, who come together around a common goal or theme, and the media is the tool used to expand the knowledge to those who are interested about the particular topic. Today, social media are shrinking the world and allowing communications to take place and information to be exchanged that would never have happened even ten years ago. As I am writing this article, I posted on Twitter “Working on a Lodge program to be presented in all Lodges in Virginia entitled, “Freemasonry the Original Social Network” with the URL for the Grand Lodge of Virginia. I have received numerous replies and re-tweets both as direct messages and publicly from as far away as California, Nova Scotia, and the United Kingdom. Now, if it were not for Facebook, and Twitter, I would have never had

conversations with most of the Brother Masons that I have. It is a game changer for all.

Why did the operative Freemason want to travel in foreign countries? Let us contemplate this question for a time. *(Give your audience time to discuss this among them and see what answers they develop, suggested 5 minutes of discussion.)*

Envisage the operative Freemason sitting back in location waiting for someone to approach him to build a majestic edifice where he lives. Would the operative Freemason's skills be used frequently? Would the operative Freemason receive the same quantity of recompense as if he traveled to build?

My Brethren, the operative Freemason knew that he must travel in foreign countries if he was to continue to be paid a master's wages. The work was not going to come to him; he must go to the work. The operative Freemason had to provide verification of his worth, by having a pass only identifiable to other operative Freemasons. The operative Freemasons were one of the original social networks. The Operative Freemason's social media was his password. Let us remember that social media pertains to how the message of a group is to be disseminated. Operative Freemasons disseminated their message after strict verification as we do today when someone visits a Lodge. If no one can vouch for a proclaimed Brother, we have special oaths, signs, tokens and passes, besides a dues card to authenticate a claim in our Fraternity.

We, as speculative Freemasons, have many duties and obligations, but each of us is charged that we must "take good men and make them better." The speculative Freemason today must search and seek out those young men, we must travel in

foreign countries to find them, just as the operative Freemason did.

Speculative Freemasons of today, take a lesson from our operative Brethren. Just as they traveled in new social networks, so must we continue to travel in foreign countries of newer social networks. We must travel into the foreign country of new forms of social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. We will travel to those undiscovered countries along our spiritual journey. We speculative Freemasons have a different skill set than our operative Brethren, but we both are bound by duty and must seek good men and are challenged to make them better. Many of you mastered the new forms of social media in your lifetime such as radio, television and the internet. Many of us grew up with these, not knowing a life without them, but we must continue our journey, we must travel to where there is work to be enabled to earn master's wages. Our wages are found when we seek out new ways to spread the cement of brotherly love, along our never ending spiritual journey to that "undiscovere'd country, from whose bourn No traveller returns (*William Shakespeare - To be, or not to be (from Hamlet 3/1), 2010*)". My Brethren, so mote it be.

Brethren, a presentation on Freemasonry, social media and branding will be conducted at the Reid James Simmons Academy of Masonic Leadership in August at Fork Union, Virginia. You are encouraged to attend and learn more about this topic, as well as additional Masonic education topics and ritual proficiency. Please contact your DEO for information about registering to attend.