

By Brenda Battat



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From the Executive Director's Desk



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When I first came to HLAA over 20 years ago (SHHH as it was known then), the staff had to sign up to use the one computer we had in the office. The staff person responsible for fundraising got first dibs and the rest of us had to put our names on a time slot for that day and wait our turn.


We communicated with our members mostly by snail mail letters, typed on a typewriter, filed everything in hard copy that was kept in order by a volunteer, and researched topics and inquiries in our "library" of books on hearing loss slowly accumulated over the years. The only relay service our members used to reach us by phone was the traditional TTY—text telephone—with the roll of tape that recorded the conversation. That was 1989.

Fast Forward to 2009

The library at our office is about to become a storage closet. When the power goes out staff is at a loss as to what to do without access to their computers. Our members contact us through captioned telephone, most inquiries come in by e-mail, we do our research online, and staff communicate via inter-office messaging. With one click we can send out an online communication to thousands of people all at once, "meet" in chat rooms on different subjects, refer inquiries to resources on our website, post videos to our website and YouTube, set up blogs, and network on various professional and social networking sites.

Times have changed. Even in a small non-profit organization staff and volunteers are "on" 24/7. On vacation we no longer completely turn off and relax as there is always the urge, if not the feeling of obligation, to steal a quick look at our BlackBerrys. We say it is to prevent that pile up when we return but maybe we are really just addicted and cannot resist opening that new e-mail that just came in that always has an element of fascination to see what it says.

Today at our weekly staff meeting one of the topics was "Twitter." Twitter is a popular free social messaging utility for staying connected in real-time. Now, the way to be known is to "tweet," apparently a new verb entering the lexicon. Fortunately we have a staff person who keeps us on our toes to make sure we are up-to-date with the latest online applications and ways of communicating.

Just as some of us are getting used to the HLAA group on Facebook, she introduces Twitter into the mix and informs us that we are limited to 140 characters and that users sign up to follow other users whose tweets they enjoy. Some of us are pushed into it screaming; others just get it, and others, I for one, see the light and are willing to admit that it is great for marketing. So join HLAA on Facebook and Twitter and whatever else arrives on the scene! 

Brenda Battat is executive director of Hearing Loss Association of America and wears both a hearing aid and a cochlear implant. She lives in Bethesda, MD, with her husband Joe. She can be reached at battat@hearingloss.org. Read Brenda's blog at www.brendabattat.blogspot.com.