

Report of the  
**Task Force on Communications and Publications**  
American Philosophical Association  
2012

In 1997, the APA's Board of Officers charged an Ad Hoc Committee on Priorities and Problems of the APA, chaired by Karen Hanson. Two years later, this Committee delivered a detailed and thoughtful report recommending actions pertaining to data collection and analysis, part-time and adjunct faculty, the public understanding of philosophy, support for teaching and scholarship, professional standards, the Association's governance structure, transparency of governance, and resource issues. Some but not all of these recommendations were subsequently implemented, and the Board revisited the Hanson Report in 2011, striking four task forces to make recommendations on Communications and Publications, Membership and Membership Services, Governance and Structure, and Development.

Effective communications are pivotal to many of the recommendations of Hanson Report (and indeed of the other task forces). For example, the Hanson Report attributed some issues with the APA's governance and structure to poor communications and recommended that the APA "review its publications... in response to members' concerns and with the aim of communicating more effectively about the organization's structure and activities." The Hanson Report also noted that some members "would like to see the APA reach out to the lay public with a magazine or with radio, television, or web site offerings" and recommended steps to increase public awareness and appreciation of the discipline. Similarly, the Hanson Report recommended "new modes of support for teaching and research," including outreach to small schools and greater use of the web site.

The potential for the APA to project its communications to its members, the profession of philosophy, and a wider public remains to be fully realized. Since 1999, the APA has been slow to adapt to the changing communications landscape. While this was to have been addressed in 2011 by the adoption of a new association management system and web site, the implementation of the new system has been rocky, leading to a loss of functionality and information content on the web site. The

Association now has an opportunity to rethink, “from the ground up,” what it communicates and by what means.

The Task Force on Communications and Publications was appointed by the Chair of the Board of Officers in December 2011 with instructions to work with all dispatch to produce a draft that could inform the process of hiring a new executive director and then to report formally to the Board in November 2012. The Task Force has made a study of the kinds of information now published by the APA and of some of the range of communications vehicles used by other learned societies. The recommendations below fall into three parts. First are general principles that should guide the Association’s communications strategy. This is followed by recommendations of specific actions to be taken in the near and medium term and a table recommending a redistribution of information over types of communication vehicle. Two appendices supplement these recommendations. One represents a design idea for a new logo, as an example of what might be done to refresh the APA’s identity. The second appendix is a report of a communications specialist written for the APA *pro bono*.

## **I. General Principles**

The following general principles should determine what kinds of communication modalities are best suited to convey any given type of information. These are listed in order of descending priority.

1. Content should be distributed across print and electronic media according to the needs and habits of the intended audience.
2. Time-sensitive content should be published without delay.
3. Multiple, redundant communications channels should be used (instead of expecting users to locate information).
4. All else being equal, the Association should minimize its use of paper both by moving content on-line and by adopting more efficient designs for print materials.
5. APA communications should integrate non-APA resources in a seamless and noncompetitive way. (Examples of such resources include phil-papers, phil-events, phil-jobs, and the Leiter Report.)

6. The Association should make it a practice to periodically survey and adjust its communications in light of these principles, especially taking into account the availability of new technologies.

## **II. Recommendations**

The Task Force makes several detailed recommendations for action in the near and medium term. The seven headings under which these recommendations are grouped identify the major areas where efforts should be focussed.

### **A. Design Identity**

1. The APA should create a consistent, contemporary, and energetic design for print covers, print layout, and electronic publication. This should be implemented as a set of templates for InDesign or Quark, a web site template and CSS, and templates for PDF, eBook, and email. These should be cleanly written by a trained graphic designer.
2. As part of (1), the APA should commission a new logo that will function as an electronic banner as well as a print logo. This may be a modification of the existing phi logo, but it should be given a contemporary treatment. An example, brainstormed by two members of the committee is provided in Appendix 2.

### **B. Alerts**

1. The national web site should include a “what’s new” column linking to upcoming events and new publications. Links should be embedded in short descriptions that enable visitors to gauge relevance at a glance.
2. The “what’s new” column should be served as an RSS feed to a Google Homepage Widget.
3. Members and non-members should have an option to subscribe to targeted email lists for notification of events, publications, tables of contents, and the like.
4. The APA should provide targeted twitter broadcasts.

5. The APA web site should provide downloadable calendars with APA events and deadlines. All standard calendar formats should be supported, including Outlook and iCal.
6. The APA should establish a presence on the more popular social media sites, specifically (at the moment) Twitter, FaceBook, and Google+. The sites should be curated to connect to other philosophical or academic groups or circles, they should be launched via a friending and advertising campaign, status updates should be made at least daily, and they may include “human interest” items.
7. As appropriate, metadata on APA publications should be posted to third-party databases. For example, *Newsletter* articles may be added to philpapers.org.
8. Articles should be assigned DOIs.
9. A system should be created for issuing press releases to mailing lists of blogs and other media outlets, including the general academic press (e.g. the *Chronicle*).
10. Serious thought should be given to publishing an APA-wide magazine-style publication (entitled, for example, *The APA Bulletin*) with news about events, publications, governance, member news, new books, and articles about the profession. This would not replace the *Newsletters* but it would funnel readers to them – for example, by providing synopses in a journalistic style. While, distribution to members in print may have a strong impact for a number of years, the magazine may eventually move to electronic-only format.

### C. Print Publications

1. *Jobs for Philosophers* should no longer be offered in print. Additional recommendations pertaining to *JfP* are made separately below.
2. The *Addresses* (that is, texts of papers) should be separated from the *Proceedings* (conference programs and information about APA operations). They might be folded into an APA journal (especially if this allows the Association to grandfather high-rate institutional subscriptions in package sales). Alternatively, the *Addresses* might be published in an attractive book-like format. The purpose of this recommendation is to signal the special value of this publication to members and to the community of scholars.

3. Most content now published in the *Proceedings* should be moved to other communication channels. See the table below.
4. To make better use of space, conference programs should be printed on a larger page format, in two columns, using a more efficient graphic design.

#### D. Web Site: Wayfinding

1. Nothing should be more than three clicks from the homepage and key functions should be accessible one click away (via toolboxes, described below).
2. Cross-site tabs should be oriented to types of information: for example, Meetings, The Profession, Research, Teaching, Outreach, Governance.
3. The separate member section should be abolished. Visitors who are not logged in as members should be able to navigate all menus across the site but will be asked for login credentials and provided a link to the membership page when they click links for members-only documents. The purpose of this recommendation is to display what the APA offers to members.
4. Documents should be placed redundantly where members will look for them. For example, a document pertaining to teaching and outreach may be placed in both sections.
5. A stack of site-wide toolboxes should be placed on the left margin. Tools include: Google search of the site, APA blogs, dues, fees, paper submissions, voting, submitting member news, and links to web sites for the APA journal and divisions, other societies, and other philosophy web sites.
6. The site map should be replaced with an A-Z list of all documents. Ideally this is automatically updated from document metadata.
7. A humanly meaningful and concise url hierarchy should be implemented (using server-side redirects if necessary). It should follow main tab labels.

### E. Web Site: Home Page

The APA's web site should serve as the gateway to the profession of philosophy. It should be the page members set up as the home page on their browsers.

1. Redesign the Association's home page modeled on *Arts & Letters Daily*. Below the site-wide banner and navigation bar and next to the tool bar there would be three or more text-rich columns, each comprising short paragraphs as leaders to more detailed information. The columns need not have titles, but each would have a theme: (1) what's new at the APA (meetings, live updates from meetings, recent *Newsletter* articles, recent blog posts), (2) professional news (media reports, hot topics on the blogs, PhilosophyTV, podcasts, iTunesU and YouTube lectures...), and (3) news from members (provided by members but curated).

### F. Web Site: Primary Content

1. Restrict access to *Newsletter* articles to members.
2. *Newsletter* content should be exploded out as articles seamlessly integrated into the web site as content, in addition to being packaged as complete issues.
3. There should be options to print, download in PDF and download as eBook for *Newsletter* issues and individual articles.
4. Facilities and support should be provided for APA committees, the divisions, and individual members to create and publish podcasts and videocasts. These may include addresses at divisional meetings and interviews. Topics may include philosophical issues but also professional issues, such as placement.
5. Recipients of APA grants should be required to contribute materials to the web site, as appropriate.
6. *Jobs for Philosophers* should be on-line only and should be generated as html from a database with functions to search by AOS, AOC, and region.
7. The web site should include a permanent, moderated blog to provide forum for discussion of hot-button topics, especially so as to inform decision-making within the Association. Blogs for specific issues,

moderated by APA Committees or members should also be supported.

8. The governance section should include an organizational box chart associated with brief descriptions of jurisdiction and responsibility, to enable members to quickly contact the right staff member, national officer, or divisional officer. Boxes should link to email addresses and phone numbers.
9. Targeted advertising that is informative to members of the profession should be integrated throughout the web site.

#### G. Web Site: Technical

1. Permissions for web content management should be assigned to those responsible for the content (e.g. divisional officers and committee members).
2. The web site should detect and optimize for all browsers, including mobile browsers.
3. Standards-compliant CSS3 and HTML5 should be used throughout with backwards-compatibility for legacy code. There should be no Flash or Java and the use of JavaScript should be kept to a minimum.

### III. Recommended Content Distribution by Vehicle

	Current				Recommended	
	P&A	www	other www	other print	print	www
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE</b>						
Administrative Cost Policy		x				x
APA Committee Nominations	x					x
Board of Officers	x	x				x
Bylaws		x	x			x
Divisional Officers and Committees	x	x	x			x
Committees		x				x
Dues		x				x
Membership Information and News	x	x	x			x
Membership List	x					x
Membership Lookup		x				x
Minutes of the Board of Officers	x					x
Minutes of the Divisional Executive Committees	x		x			x
National Office Staff		x				x
News from the Divisions	x	x				x
Affiliated Organizations		x				x
Refund Policies		x				x
Results of Elections	x					x
Voting Privileges and Divisional Changes	x					x
<b>MEMBER SERVICES</b>						
Advertising	x				x	x
APA Grant Fund		x				x
APA Shopping List	x					x
Awards to Members	x					x
Jobs For Philosophers		x				x
Member's Guide to the APA	x	x				x
Memorial Minutes	x					x
Newsletters – Current		x				x
Newsletters - Past						x

Prizes, Fellowships, and Lectures	x	x				x
Statements (Guidelines, Issues, and Missions)		x				x
<b>MEETINGS</b>						
Abstracts	x		x		x	x
Addresses	x					
Audio-Visual Equipment Requests	x		x			x
Call for Proposals for Mini-Conferences	x		x			x
Conference Registration	x	x	x			x
Forms	x		x			x
Instructions for Participants on the Program			x			x
Letter from Secretary-Treasurer	x					x
List of Participants	x		x		x	x
Meeting Program	x		x		x	x
Preprints			x			x
Requests for Accommodations under the ADA			x			x
Past Programs and Mini-Conferences			x			x
Paper Submission Guidelines	x	x	x			x
Registration Policies	x	x				x
Travel Stipends		x	x			x
Volunteer to Chair or Comment			x			x
<b>PLACEMENT</b>						
APA Placement Brochure	x					x
APA Placement Service Information	x					x
Jobs for Philosophers		x		x		x

Respectfully submitted,

Dominic McIver Lopes, *chair*

Michael Griffin

Sally Scholz

Tamler Sommers

Alison Wylie

## Appendix 1

The following was written as a favor to the APA by a communications specialist with experience revamping the electronic presence of the *International Herald Tribune* to tie it into social media.

### APA – Communications Recommendations

Before any communications strategy can be implemented one should identify:

- Objectives
- Key messages
- Audiences
- Picture of success – what is it?

I envisage the project to be broken down into the following areas:

#### **Design**

For the purposes of ease and continuity, I would personally retain the same logo as you have also suggested but it would definitely benefit from some modernisation. A good designer will enjoy this process and should provide you will a range of alternatives.

Don't ever feel pressured into choosing one because the designer is keen or annoyed or pushing one they particularly like. Designers need to be handled with firm care.

#### **Traditional communications**

Public Relations / Press e.g.

- Targeting external local and international media, local and international institutions (e.g. universities, research and funding organisations etc.)
- Producing (English and local language) press releases around research and publication findings, international events, newsworthy topics regarding the association and/or it's board and members
- Research regional titles, writers and target media in North America, Europe and Asia. Ideally you might like to have a representative in Vancouver, London and Hong Kong for example who work on your behalf to distribute press release and manage media relations
- Target local Canadian media (?) and international media e.g. IHT, New York Times, IHT, Monocle, Intelligent Life, Foreign Policy, Time, Le Monde, Les Echos, Times of India, The Hindu, Financial Express, China Daily, Hong Kong Standard Moscow Times etc.
- If there are any big events make sure the activity is supported by creating materials such as podcasts, photos and video to post up on the website post event – creates more interaction with brand, drives traffic to website and social platforms before, during and after event.

- Arrange 1-2-1 press (print, radio, broadcast) interviews with members – especially those who are producing groundbreaking, controversial, topical and important work.
- Also arrange media opportunities e.g. experts on popular panels, shows and documentaries.

#### **Internal communications e.g.**

- Member newsletters, e-flyers – although I recommend keeping these to a minimum. You want to drive all traffic (and visitors) to the website and your social media pages.
- Develop and utilise existing mail databases (e.g. have an obvious sign up / register button on the website, use university databases such as listserves, initially hit the current database when launching new website, also polls and questionnaires later down the line – your database is your asset, it will need to be cultivated)
- Blog / community site. This is the new newsletter really. It can be hosted on the main website or you may have a ‘member’ section of the website – blogs are a very successful way to engage regularly with your audience. Additionally, the new breed of academics blog intensively themselves. I would recommend having guest contributors from the association around the world to keep it fresh and engaging. The other way these are managed is that one person (or two) blogs on behalf of the APA, collating and writing up news from the organisation’s perspective. You can of course combine both methods.

Here are some examples (the APA one should be integrated into the website):

- <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/>
- <http://eyelevel.si.edu/>
- <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/category/books/>
- <http://www.dancohen.org/>
- <http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/>
- <http://www.artsjournal.com/blogs.php/>
- <http://scienceblogs.com/channel/humanities>

At the IHT we launched Rendezvous, which was a **big deal**: <http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com>. This is a stand-alone blog with plenty of links back to the IHT and NYT. It features some of the IHT’s best journalists but is managed by three main contributors. It is also supported with its own profile on Twitter and a whole lot more media activity being rolled out this year e.g. interviews with the journalists running it and so on.

#### **Digital communications / Social media**

Social media strategy – this is key and currently without a doubt one of the effective marketing and audience engagement tools for promoting your organisation.

Use social media to engage with key members of media, respected academia who are active on social media networks around the world. Create and develop APA academy social media profiles, and audience by:

- Designing a branded and dynamic profile (for both the organisation and key persons) for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest etc.
- Adding and accepting selected 'followers', 'fans' and 'invitations', link with relevant persons who will help promote brand and APA information
- Interact with regularly to foster trust, interest and create a forum for distributing and discussing APA information about research, funding, events and fellows.
- Upload images, audio and video content.
- Share and re-tweet other posts and profiles

### **Website / new online identity**

- Scrap the current website and start again.
- Find examples of other websites and designs that you like, this really aids the creative briefing process. If the designer has an idea of what you have in mind it will make things ten times easier. From a UK perspective I would be recommending for example the LSE, AHRC, Royal Society etc.
- Because philosophy crosses so many different disciplines and areas in life, it might be a nice idea to commission and illustrator to design some artwork for the website. I have done this many times before, it's your own and it will be more bespoke. I envisage something that uses elements from the following:

<http://royalsociety.org/>

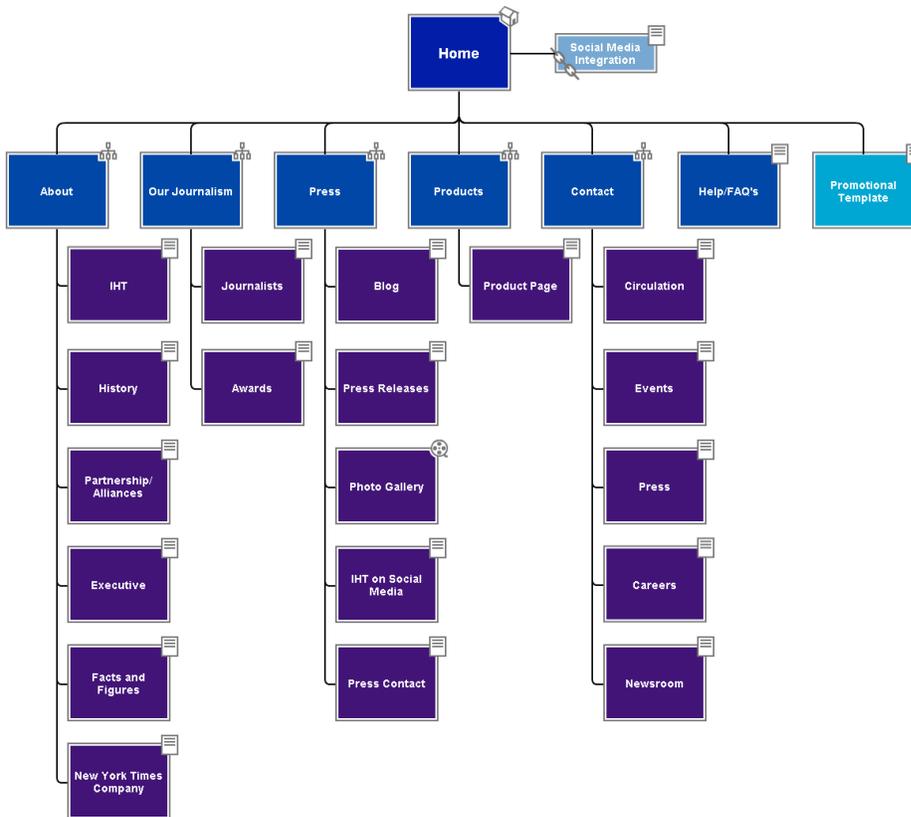
<http://colly.com/>

[livepage.apple.comhttp://www.moma.org/](http://www.moma.org/)

<http://1minus1.com/>

<http://www.culturalsolutions.co.uk/>

- Also have a look on the Word Press website for some ideas, they have loads of great designs and layouts that are being used everywhere now.
- Develop a plan for the layout – pages, what they are called and the content first, which you can all refer to as a working doc. This is what we created for a new IHT website to be launched soon (APA however needs leading pages/titles such as: (About us, Events, Publications, Members, News etc.)



- You can divvy up writing and managing the content, unless you get in a freelance copywriter to produce the content. As a rule I would say all the copy could do with being much more accessible and conversational.

#### Important design features to bear in mind

- Keep it functional and easy to navigate (no flash etc.)
- Make more visual and graphic
- Use a changing banner – eye catching, can complement APA news
- Archive and file a lot of the content under more visually appealing banners/ buttons – get rid of all unnecessary copy.
- Click through buttons to take the user back the home page easily
- Feature tasteful adverts for philosophical events and conferences around the world, across all pages- it's also a chance to do cross-promotion
- Create a social media hub and/or incorporate Twitter feed into homepage
- Create a 'top' philosophers page e.g. feature some of your high profile members, their work, book launches etc. (could also be in the news section) but would be good to make more your members
- Profiles – of those on the committee/board

- Include a press and media page (with PDF downloads, press releases, about doc etc.)
- Create a blog – featuring guest editors and contributors
- Develop video content (also for sharing on social networks)
- Create podcasts (also for sharing on social networks)
- General page ideas:
  - Home
  - About Us / Members
  - Events
  - Publications
  - News / Blog
  - Press / Media / Contact page
  - Students
  - K12 page / teaching materials
  - Jobs

**Other ideas:**

- Once everyone has agreed on a design, I would recommend one person manages the process. Given everyone has their own creative ideas these things can go on and on and be changed and changed again, which is not efficient or productive.
- Designers can be difficult at times, I would be very clear when briefing and try not to change things endlessly.
- Having said that if you're paying an agency they should be obliging, I think my note of warning is it is helpful to be organised and have the information and ideas prepared beforehand.
- Set a deadline for the website launch otherwise it will drag on. Give yourself three months maximum. (You can always add content as you go along).
- Make a big song and dance about the launch and new look. This is where a good press/event plan could help.

**Resources**

Off the top of my head I can identify a few areas that need outsourcing:

- Designer / creative agency – for logo, and website
- Illustrator – if indeed you go with a bespoke design
- PR agency – or a PR freelancer to get some systems in place and who can then hand-over to an internal communications manager
- Copywriter
- Social media manager
- You may wish to use a one-stop-shop as well, which would at least make it cohesive.
- You may wish to use professionals in the first instance, and then get post-docs/interns involved to manage it going forward.

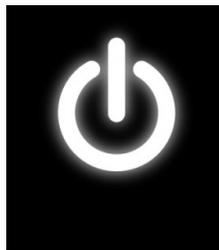
## Appendix 2

This is one example of how the APA might freshen up its identity.

1. The APA's logo is the Greek letter phi.



2. Here is the ISO symbol for the on/off or power switch. It resembles an inverted phi.



3. Combine them...

