

Taking your club online

Charlotte Ahlberg of Färjestaden, Sweden, traveled around the world in her career as a business coach, had small children at home, and just couldn't fit Rotary meetings into her schedule – until e-clubs came along. She joined an e-club in London in 2010; started the E-Club of 2410se, Sweden's first e-club, in 2012; and was 2015-16 chair of the Rotary International E-Club Committee. In 2016, the Council on Legislation voted to remove the distinction of e-clubs versus traditional clubs to emphasize that both are Rotary clubs that meet in different formats. The Council also approved electronic means such as webinars, teleconferences, and live-streaming as flexible meeting options for all clubs. We spoke with Ahlberg about the Rotary club of the future.

Q: What motivates Rotarians to join clubs that meet online instead of in person?

A: There are three reasons. One is they find it too hard to get to a meeting but they still want to support Rotary. Second, they want to visit other clubs to have networking opportunities all over the world. The third reason is the reason I joined – because the concept fits me. I need the communication online and the flexibility in the format.



Charlotte Ahlberg Q: How have clubs rethought Rotary meetings to work online?

A: The biggest mistake is when clubs take the traditional meeting format and just try to do it online. We need to split up what clubs do into information and communication. The first step is to focus on information. Board meetings are an easy place to start, because most people today are used to online business meetings. You send the agenda out digitally, with background information. Then you use an online meeting or a webinar to actually meet. If you are developing a document for the club, you might have an online meeting with a draft and you keep sending it around and people add things and then you've got the final version.

Q: So why meet in person at all?

A: There are things we can't do virtually. The other day we were doing a project to feed children. It's very difficult to pour the rice and the ingredients virtually, right? When we come together in the future, it will be for physical activities. The essence of Rotary is that we join leaders, exchange ideas, and take action. If we focus on the action part, that could be done hands-on, but the information about it beforehand could be done online.

Q: What are some first steps for clubs that want to adapt to the changing digital climate?

A: First, gather correct email addresses for all the members. Second, update the club's website. The website is your club's business card, so it should have a way to contact you. You might also have a Facebook group. Use it to chat and to drive traffic to the web page. You could also have a little film clip on the website saying, "Hi, I'm the president of this club. We would love to welcome you to one of our meetings." Keep it simple and do it step by step.

Source: The Rotarian