

Harnessing the Power of the Web

Introduction

More than 70 years ago, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, foreshadowed the characteristics of the future world commonwealth towards realising the unity of the entire human race on earth. He identified "a mechanism of world inter-communication" as one of the intrinsic features of such a global civilisation. This mechanism would embrace the whole planet, and would be "freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity." There is no doubt that through the emergence of electronic communication and the Internet, such vision has been realised.

Since its inception, the Internet has significantly affected many aspects of human life including communication, relationships, and commerce. The most profound, however, has been the new degree of connectedness that has emerged among people as the result of various tools developed on the Internet including websites, blogs, podcasts, wiki, newsgroups, and on line social networks.

Focus of the Weekend

The program is designed to demonstrate how the spiritual dimensions of human life can be explored through tools available on the Internet. It will also familiarise the participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively contribute towards them.

The focus of the program will be on the following themes and topics:

- **Blogging and the Bahá'í Faith:** An acronym for Weblog, blog is a personal journal on the web which is updated frequently. The area of the Internet blogging offers opportunities and challenges to the Bahá'í community through which Bahá'í teachings and community activity can be explored through a personal lens.
- **Social Networks:** A social network is a dynamic environment through which people interact, share stories and experiences, and conduct discourse on issues of interest and concern. Over only a few years, social net-

works have rapidly expanded, diversified and multiplied, embracing hundreds of millions of people worldwide engaged in interaction and collaboration towards achieving common interests and goals. A new world has emerged as the result of such exceptional development and growth, providing not only an essential element for the unification of human race, but facilitating and stimulating the development of a collective global consciousness.

- **Podcasts:** An audio-version of blogging is called podcast. They provide a unique vehicle to share first person testimonies of faith, reflections about the Bahá'í teachings, or educational material. Unlike text, they allow the powers of the human spirit to be more directly experienced by the listeners.
- **Search Engines:** A critical question often asked after building a blog or a website is how it can secure a prominent listing on the Internet search engines such as Google.
- **Responding to Criticism and Opposition on the Internet:** While unfettered and constructive examination of the Bahá'í teachings is welcome, there should be no hesitation to respond, in a spirit of courtesy and fairness, to serious misrepresentations of the Faith.

Structure of the Course

The program has a modular and scalable structure to be of interest and benefit to people with different levels of familiarity with the Internet and social networks. This is achieved through both plenary and parallel sessions.

The content of the program is designed along the guidelines developed by the Bahá'í Internet Agency (BIA), an organisation operating under the supervision of the International Teaching Centre. In addition, there will be some presentations provided live by BIA from New York through Skype. Successful worldwide Bahá'í initiatives on the Internet will be reviewed and remote live interviews will be held with the authors on Skype.



The program will consist of presentations, practical workshops, and group activities. During the formal sessions, the latest methods available to deploy various Internet tools will be introduced. The guideposts offered in the Bahá'í writings in using the Internet will be explored.

Workshops will be organised as parallel sessions and will provide training and hands on experience for using the Internet tools. It will cover content-based management systems for web development and blogging such as Wordpress, DotNetNuke, Joomla, podcasting techniques, and publishing on Wikipedia.

Tuition Fee

The tuition fee of the program is set to \$110 which covers the cost of overnight accommodation, 3 meals and 3 refreshments per day, and the course handouts.

Facilitators

Natalie Mobini-Kesheh: the national public information officer for the Australian Baha'i Community, as well as the coordinator for the national Baha'i website, the Australian Baha'i Report newsletter, and other public information materials about the Baha'i Faith.

Nabil Naghdy: Currently the Director of Advertising for an Online Marketing company Atrinsic, also worked on several Baha'i based sites, including www.bahaitube.com and www.cedawiran.org.

Tessa Scrine: Executive Officer Government Relations for the Australian Bahá'í Community. Based in Canberra, working with government and non-government organisations in support of human rights, the equality of women and men, and grassroots participation in sustainable development initiatives.

Frank Carsberg: The National Technology and Telecommunication Coordinator and officer in charge of the Bahá'í IT infrastructure at the National Office, YBCL and Sydney Bahá'í Centre.



Application Form– Harnessing the Power of the Web

(You can enroll on line at <http://www.ybcl.org/>)



Surname: First Name: Date of Birth:

Current study/work:

Address:

State. Post Code: Tel: Home: Mobile:

E-mail:

Please tick your method of payment:

Cheque Money order Credit Card Course Fee : \$

Payable to: "Yerrinbool Bahá'í Centre of Learning"

Please debit my: Bankcard Mastercard Visa Card

Number: Expiry Date:

Name on the Card: Signature:

Please send the completed form to Programs Administrator: 27 Sierra Street, Yerrinbool, NSW 2575.

Tel: 02 48839462, Fax: 02 48839552, Mobile: 0411879028, E-mail: admin@ybcl.org,

Web sit: <http://www.ybcl.org/>

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11– 13 September 2009



Yerrinbool College
Social Discourse Series