THE CASE FOR FACE-TO-FACE

When you're my age, attention has to be paid to the generation gap. Slacking off leads to a slide into isolation and even ignorance. It isn't always easy for my generation who are more at home with paper, print and books than iPhones, iPads and touch screens. But I will also be the first to recognize the importance of change.

Last year we planned our annual Wisconsin Turfgrass Association Winter Turf Conference. We are past the time when we held our meeting in a large hotel for two days, offering a full-blown equipment show, concurrent educational sessions with speakers, and a great social event the first evening. Now we're down to one day, eliminated even tabletop displays for vendors, and offered educational lectures by our own faculty, grad students and maybe one out-of-state speaker. I believe our experience is mirrored across the country.

Our winter conference has always been a dicey proposition, primarily due to snow. The lawn care/landscape guys plow snow and really need the off-season revenue. For others, just getting to the conference is dangerous if the roads are slippery. So this year, for the first time, we offered a simultaneous webinar. The meeting was held at a university auditorium that was equipped to broadcast the conference live. Thirty-two responded to the survey, and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

Clearly, we'll do it again, with a few changes. It is cheaper (our webinar was only $20), eliminates travel time, takes out the weather factor, and it can be watched later if work interferes. It is also a concept familiar to younger superintendents.

However, I still prefer the face-to-face conferences, and probably always will. To me, there's something refreshing about the personal connections made during a conference. I like the interaction that occurs when a group of turfies gather, and they often have a real dollar value to the organization that paid your way to attend. I think I have learned as much from other superintendents at these meetings as I have from the lecturers. There is a personal connection.

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I think I have learned as much from other superintendents at these meetings as I have from the lecturers. There is always someone who has successfully dealt with the same issue you are now working through and may have some alternatives for you to think about. You cannot do this at a webinar!

In the final analysis, we're lucky to be able to tailor our educational programs to fit our circumstances, whether from a distance or in person. We get to choose.

ADDENDUM. A medical issue prevented me to attend this year's GIS, my first absence in 40 years. What one misses is far more than you'd guess and I hope to attend next year. My successor, Chad Grimm, and his assistant Jacob Schneider, again proved that the Wisconsin Golf Hall of Fame. Reach him at groots@charter.net.

Monroe Miller retired after 36 years as superintendent at Blackhawk CC in Madison, Wis. He is a recipient of the 2004 USGA Green Section Award, the 2009 GCSAA Col. John Morley DSA Award, and is the only superintendent in the Wisconsin Golf Hall of Fame. Reach him at groots@charter.net.