

## Second Century

# Toward A More Secure Future



*Four years ago, when I was President of IEEE, I wrote an editorial called “Toward a more secure future.” It started: “History is littered with companies that did almost everything right, but nevertheless failed. Some of these organizations did not understand what their business was, or should have been.”*

*I went on to say, “Companies like Eastman Kodak and Polaroid thought they were in the film business. They were in the business of capturing and preserving images. They ignored potentially disruptive innovations that would render their traditional film businesses obsolete.”*

I believe that ARRL is in a situation similar to what transpired at Kodak and Polaroid. We are at a crossroads, and we need to look seriously at what we are and what we do.

In my January 2019 “Second Century” column, I talked about ARRL as a membership association, a business, and a public charity. All three of these entities must remain in balance for ARRL to function effectively. In order to begin to understand what this balance might require, let’s take a closer look at ARRL’s businesses.



**ARRL Business of the Future**

ARRL is a publisher, receiving revenue from the sale of books and magazines. ARRL receives additional revenue from advertising, membership dues, awards, and our VEC program. Revenue they generate funds and supports the tax-exempt purpose for which ARRL was created, and supports our five pillars: Public Service, Advocacy, Education, Technology, and Membership. But are these the right businesses for our second century?

ARRL is not just *QST*, the *Handbook*, DXCC, or the VEC program. We can’t allow ourselves to continue to think within those traditional parameters. If we abstract from our current lines of operations and consider our core purpose as defined in our Articles of Association, we are members, volunteers, and staff creating information and building relationships — creating value; disseminating information and building organizations — using value; and advocating to advance the art and science of Amateur Radio. We are about relationships and information.

We are not about publishing books, for example, but about creating, curating, and disseminating information about Amateur Radio. Creation could happen by hiring a professional author to write text. Curation could involve staff and volunteers repurposing locally developed content. Dissemination could involve traditional publishing, but also creating a video, a series of magazine articles, or a presentation that a local club could use.

ARRL must be forward-looking. There are startups innovating in our space, whether that is publishing, membership, or advocacy. We must be ahead of them. We must invest in the future, while sustaining current operations and supporting our members. We must reuse and repurpose content, integrate it with a broad spectrum of external information, and deliver it in individualized and appropriate ways that engage everyone interested in Amateur Radio, and match the expectations people have today when they consume information.

Membership is not about getting hams to join ARRL; it is about engaging members and having them engage others. Every member should have an elevator speech — a 30-second talk to give to a complete novice — on what Amateur Radio means to them. Every member should find value in his or her unique form of engagement with ARRL. Should membership be redefined, not as having a membership card, but instead as having a level of engagement?

We have local club meetings and hamfests — face-to-face events that are periodic in nature. People have been gathering in their communities for eons. But today people are busy, and fixed agendas might not be convenient. And the definition of “community” is changing. People are communicating 24/7, 365 days a year around the globe. Are episodic face-to-face meetings becoming obsolete in the internet age? How can we engage local members when “local” is defined virtually?

For ARRL to remain relevant to Amateur Radio, it must evolve. That evolution, while it must be swift, can’t be haphazard. Instead, there must be a comprehensive vision of what ARRL is as a community, and what we wish to be in the future. I encourage your comments to me at [wb2itx@arrl.org](mailto:wb2itx@arrl.org).