The Digital Yearbook Concept

Remember how we used to get our classmates to sign the pages of our physical yearbooks for us?

People would write nice things about each other, make predictions about each other’s futures, and mention shared experiences to ensure they were recoverable if forgotten. The reason that schools do this is to reinforce the sense of community between people in a way that lasts. Alumni stay in touch better, donate more, and generally think more highly of their schools. Many cherish their old yearbooks and pull them out to look at them from time to time. It was a good practice to reinforce positive culture in a community. Digital transformation has changed this practice, and it never really applied to organizations additional to schools to begin with (can you think of a company that had a yearbook?). I think there’s an opportunity to bring it back digitally in a meaningful way within communities generally.

High Level Function

This app allows anyone with a list of email addresses and names to begin a series of chain mails soliciting positive comments from a community. For each participant who opts in, the app chooses a community member at random and asks the participant to write something nice about that community member. Whenever anyone elects to write something nice about someone else, the note is shared with the community member (and saved in a master spreadsheet). This community member is then shown the message and is asked to write about someone else at random. Community members can elect to write about someone else whenever they want. The more messages they write, the more likely they are to be selected to receive more comments from others. Community members have the option to opt out of the digital yearbook. The process of collecting comments ends in one of two ways: either every community member has written about every community member, or everyone has stopped responding to automated emails.

FAQ

*What is this built in and what is needed?*

This app is built in Google Script and relies on Google Sheets and Google Forms to function. It also relies on the members of the community to be in a Google Group together so that the form can automatically collect email addresses and prohibit non-members from joining.

*Can this work for a community that isn’t in a Google Group and may have non-Gmail email addresses?*

It is not hard to change the script to enable any type of email address to work. Doing so just requires you to turn off the auto-email collection from each Google Form, add a question to each form asking survey correspondents to fill in their email addresses, and then double checking that each of the scripts are referencing the correct columns on the spreadsheet. You might want to add a second question asking correspondents to verify the spelling of their email addresses. Note that disabling the auto-email collection from a Google Form opens it up to potential correspondence from outside your community, so share the links carefully.

*Can this work outside of Google Forms and Sheets?*

The digital yearbook process relies pretty heavily on the Google Sheets and Google Forms, and it relies on functions in Google Script that reference and manipulate these Sheets and Forms. If you want to use a different set of tools to implement this concept, you can borrow from some of the pseudo code, but you’ll have to rebuild.

*What if I want to change the questions?*

Changing the number of questions requires editing the code, but changing what the questions are themselves just requires you to edit the form.