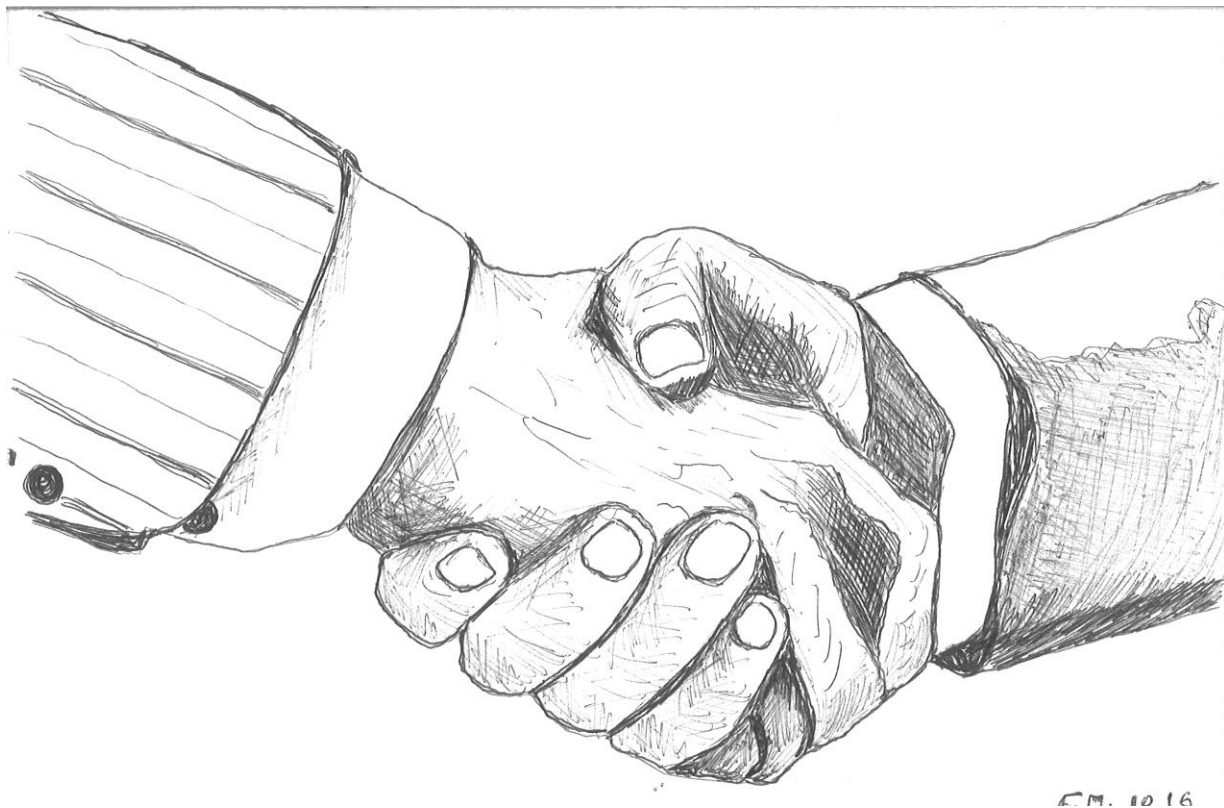


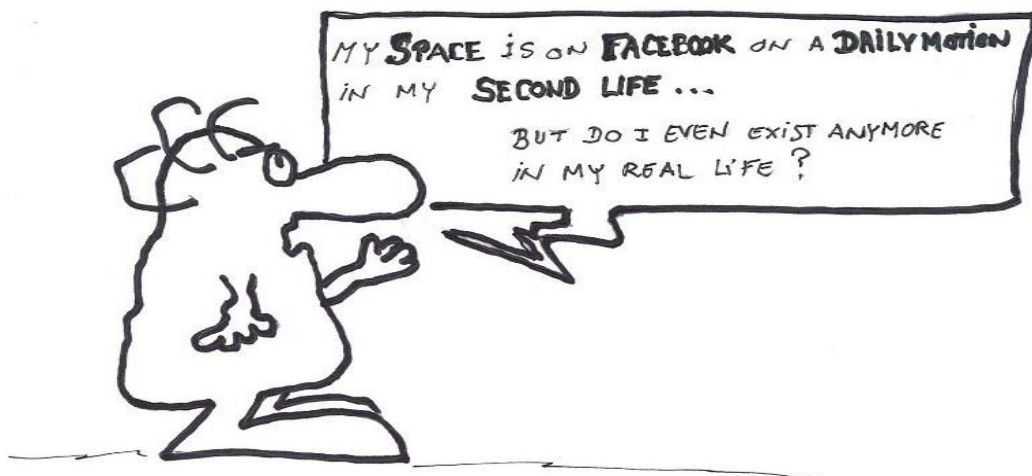
From reality to the virtual reality of social networks

We may wonder at a change between generations in the way that generation “Y” and the millennials, no longer have the same approach to the concept of networks as their predecessors or previous generations. Networking consists of nurturing your relations with other people. It is about creating them and maintaining them within a corporation, particularly, so as to have useful contacts in your day-to-day working life. Having a good network is a little like having the assurance that you can count on someone being there if you need them, for example when you're looking for help or information. This requires physical (by presence) investment and maintenance to exist and last. Today, we need professional networks, regardless of job, to find mentors, peers, friends, contacts and potentially other people's help. More than ever in situations of economic crisis and financial difficulties, the network concept comes fully into its own. If you have no network, you are like the improvident cicada in Lafontaine's fable, which failed to lay in stores against the coming winter.



It is striking how, today, young people see networks as being "virtual" or "social" as they are usually called. You very quickly become a "friend", a "contact" or whatever. I am not trying to downplay the benefits of social networks. Quite the opposite, relying on only one form of social networking would be a big mistake, which far too many young people are making. Social networks are certainly useful, but they are unpredictable, tenuous, relative and superficial. They can never replace physical networks and face-to-face relationships. To build those, you have to go out and meet people, attend association meetings, take part in conferences and so forth, to develop this professional network. Young generations need to return to the future, developing real professional networks at the same time as virtual networks. Virtual networks are a useful supplement, but no sort of substitute for actual networks, as many people think.

Treasurer associations must resist this trend and fight against the real risk that one day these associations themselves will also become "virtual" and tenuous. Social networks produce a sort of smoke and mirrors effect that makes young people think that they are in contact with other people and that they can rely on them. Networks are exactly like friendship: they have to be built up and be maintained. In a way, mentioning "virtual reality" in connection with a network is self-contradictory. We have to go back to the reality of networks, obviously without in the process neglecting social networks and their particular contributions.



In combination they would seem to be ideal. We see them as being mutually reinforcing rather than alternatives. Over time, neglecting this threatens to end up with us no longer even seeing each other. Do not let us lose one of the strengths of human beings: contact (which means physical and not just "virtual").

Our treasurer associations need to resist this trend to avoid falling into this looming trap in the fullness of time. This is just another risk or possible consequence of digitalisation taken to extremes. Instead, we need to prove the merit of belonging to a group, and that is much more difficult to demonstrate. Associations must show dynamism, creativity and innovation to recreate these networks that are no longer there or are disappearing. Relations between us must not be conducted just through a wire, or rather wirelessly over the internet. We need to steer projects in the direction of strengthening the feeling of belonging to a group, and we need to come together up more than just virtually. This is a challenge for associations in a digital world. We need to avoid the *Uberisation* of treasurer associations. We need to prevent the associations that have been our strength and worked in our interests for so many years being swallowed up or destroyed. Never let us forget to develop a robust network (it can never be robust enough), and let us maintain it carefully and consolidate it. Networks are a sort of life assurance policy that everyone would prefer not to have to call upon, but which give reassurance by existing. As the soothsayer Agamemnon said (and this could apply to social networks) *"it is a net with no way out, a real fishing net that I cast around him, a cloak of splendid perfidy"*.

François Masquelier, Chairman ATEL.