



Caron-Jane Lyon to the OLB Page – Livestream Transcript by Martin Williams

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This is **not** the activity I was expecting to do this afternoon.

Hello everybody on Facebook, thank you for visiting the page and particularly welcome to anyone who is an Equity member and particularly welcome to anyone who is an Online Branch member.

Now, this morning people started to email me and message me saying that they received an email from Equity demanding that they choose whether they are going to be attending a physical branch or attending the Online Branch.

Now, when the Online Branch was conceived the idea, and written into our rules, was that members could be affiliated to both. And those rules have been in place for...well, we've been official for two years. And it's been a long journey to get to this point and we've currently got 800 people opted in.

But one of the problems that we've had from the start is the architecture that was provided to us by a company who collaborated with Equity were paid by Equity to build that branch never really delivered on their original specification. As a result, we've constantly been fighting to really get the, um, platform that we were promised. And one of the, erm, biggest problems with that was the notification system and the notification systems had a major, major flaw in that it was connected to people's emails. And while that isn't necessarily a problem it did mean that because the Equity branch is a closed system, it's supposed to be for members to discuss things with members, it kind of meant that once those messages were released into the e-mail system that it would mean that members could then personally e-mail each other by replying to all and there wasn't really any way of us stopping those from within the branch and I felt for a long time that this was...problematic.

And finally, there was an incident that meant that this was going to cause some defamation of characters potentially and it was closed down. It took that long to get closed down and thankfully it was.

As a result of some of the things that happened at the beginning of 2018, we had a review and that review was carried out by an independent professional, who has consulted with Equity in the past on their web infrastructure and they spoke to some of the council...er, the committee and it was decided that there would be three options of how we could proceed. Those three options were detailed, they were, they were given to me for review and, um, they were given to the committee to look at, but at the time we hadn't got a particularly cohesive committee. Although they were very

dedicated it had taken us a long time to, to really find our stride. By the time we had started having our monthly meetings and starting to address things that were going on within the branch, it was getting to the stage where we really needed to hold a new election and that became problematic because of the introduction of the new Equity website. The old Equity Online Branch is **not** part of the new Equity website.

So, we've currently been holding court in the old servers if you like and the server went online which is what is giving you the new Equity website. So, in a result I was kind of quiet please because it meant that for there to be any movement forward with the new branch in the new website there would have to be a rewrite. And that was a really exciting opportunity and I wasn't too disappointed that we weren't going to be migrating.

Gradually as the year progressed, things have gone very quiet. In a June council meeting, and this is where I really wanted to provide some context today of why I'm so...incensed that this email that has asked you all to make a decision about whether you want to be physically involved with a physical branch, or whether you as an entity want to opt in to the digital branch, because for me it's not about where you're present, it's about where you democratically vote. And this has been the case all along that there can be a decision made and they [members] can vote, but then they could also come into the online branch and they can vote and potentially raise points that didn't get voted on through their branches. So, they have a second chance at democracy, which was starting to be noted by Equity and not seen as particularly democratic, and I agree.

So, there were several options and I'll not bore you all with what option two and three was. But option one was to reform, and the council met on the 12th of June and they **all** voted to support option one. Now, at this point, it was an option and the option was:

'Equity has invested significantly in this branch and this option looks to make the most of that investment. This means maintaining the existing branch, hosted by [The Developer] and making some small changes to functionality that have always been identified by the committee. Four more significant changes are required in order to make a safe space for members, particularly the members that the branch was set up to serve.'

Now, these points were:

1. *Members of General and Variety, should not be able to be members of the Online Branch and visa versa, and the rules of the three branch types must be changed to reflect that.*

Now, again that was written in the option, that is where we are going to be at the table. That's fine. It might not be quite where we wanted to go with it, but that's something that needs to be addressed.

2. *Moderation should be shared by the Online Branch Committee and not left to one individual (i.e. Me [Caron-Jane Lyon]). Completion of online training in moderation should be mandatory.*

Now, without going into the architecture of the branch, there is no tools to moderate! There really isn't. And that's just something that I'll leave on the bench there, but let me tell you, there is no moderation. Apart from me getting a little 'M' in the top corner of my screen, I essentially see what you guys see, if you've ever been in the branch. There's no way of me blocking or there's no way of me...anyway, there's no way of me moderating in the traditional moderator sense, if you've ever

moderated on a forum. So, that would have needed looking at. Very good idea, but it needed implementation.

3. *Moderators must be empowered to close down abusive, bullying, or intimidating posts sooner.*

I refer you back to point 2. We don't have any moderation tools. [laughs] There's rules in the standing orders, but they kind of take place in... you have to put stuff in writing, and then 'x' happens, and then this happens, and someone...there just in the world of digital, there just isn't that time for that process to ever have gone through.

And then:

4. *Notifications that enable the activities of the branch to enter the public domain should not be restored in their current format and should be replaced with a simple notification that a post, or posts, have been made, with a link to them online.*

Great! So that was...that was the option! Then the end of those options was:

the one-off development budget for the changes required will be in the region of £3,000 with ongoing hosting and maintenance provision in the region of £4,000 per annum.

Fantastic option! Let's take that! They wanted that to happen in six months. It's very tight, but I was willing to have a go.

So, my immediate responses, which I will go into, because I've got this up on screen. Let me just flick back and just have a look at who's in chat.

Hi Cliff. Hi Tracey. Erm, yes I'm going to come back and take some questions from the chat, so if you're watching do comment in the chat. I'm going to be coming into the chat afterwards. I just really want to give some context into this option, because in an ideal world if you'd received the newsletter about seven days ago the object...objective was to give you that newsletter, which you might have read or not read, and then follow it up in the middle of next week with a notice asking:

- a. If you've read it
- b. Would anybody like to stand for election?

And at this stage we don't know who's digital and non-digital so we can't divide that line. So, it would have been on the old rules as they stand, which keeps us legitimate, that we would have had an election and we would have hopefully have got nine or more people, to then put together what could become a working party rather than a committee if we decided, you know, that people have to be one or the other.

There may have been a stopgap we had to negotiate and go to Council and get a bit of backwards and forwards with Council. Which [Council Meetings] happens only monthly. So, the idea was to have an election in place by the end of this year so that we could then take March-time as a six-month point to be able to decide bits and pieces.

Let me go back to...so, my moderator's response was, and these are on the very first page. It's the first comments I make they are: *[Developer's Name] capacity to deliver*. I've just said the company name.

- *The developer's capacity to deliver.*
- *My concerns with alienating the branch network.*

It's always been my concern that people weren't sure if they could be in the online branch or the physical branch. And we've been very assertive in saying 'no you can be members of both'. You know this is about you having a voice. My next concern was:

- *Fueling fears that Equity is going to close down the Physical Branch network.*

Now this is something that people have said to me 'oh Equity are doing this because they want to close down the branch network' and I was assured that, no, that's not the case, because the Online Branch should be integral to the physical branch network. The next one [concern] was:

- *Fueling fears that Equity is going to close down the Online Branch.*

So, the inverse that people have been saying 'oh well Equity are doing this because they want to close the Online Branch down. And again, I've been reassured that that's not the case. That this is about a negotiation of the technology as it stands now. You know, Equity staff are very busy. There are much more important concerns industrially than the operation of the Online Branch. But we wanted to work together to make that happen. So, we then had:

- *limited delivery period of six months from time of June decision.*

So, that decision that was made in June, I wasn't formally notified of this decision was...that the clock had started from June when I met with staff members in August. So, I had initially put in a plan to start the six months from September so that would take it through. That didn't get any approval and I didn't want to act without consent. So, I sat back and waited for a response to this document which never came. I was then asked for the newsletter which I sent out at the beginning of November which seemed to trigger the six months...those six months. Today happens to be the council meeting that I hoped would kind of rubber stamp that everything's going to be okay. We can continue. We can have the election. The closing date on the 16th of December. But council are in meeting today. I have had a message over Facebook Messenger saying that council have yet to discuss this. So, I still wanted to provide context to this option. 'cause one of the problems I have is that because of my Dyslexia writing fast response written documents is not very easy. So, this is my preferred method of communication and I tend to find that my videos get more views than my blogs get read. So, hence I really felt that this was timely to do this today. With those immediate concerns on the table, I then added in a consensus agreement that, you know separating the physical branch affiliations, and solely online affiliations for the purpose of democracy was really important. And for me it would be talking with a committee, with Equity, proposing and motioning as appropriate through Council, because they're the only ones that can really make decisions. Was to look at the possibility of having one vote for one branch.

Now, with the Online Branch, you have to opt in on the website, and you're allocated a physical branch. Now, with some development which I'm sure I won't need to go into now, but would be investigatable, is that the biggest problem with democracy in Equity is that in January the process starts, amongst the physical branch, and the Online Branch too, to propose motions for our Annual Representative Conference [ARC]. And it takes quite a while because obviously we're all spread out over the country. AGMs and Branch meetings take place where people want to put forward a motion that will go to the Annual Representative Conference where everyone who's a representative gets to debate collectively. And anything in the Annual Representative's Conference gets entered into Equity policy in which they are obliged to explore and take those decisions into account. So, that's the foundation of Council and Equity are working to for the next few months, six months, twelve months. So, it's really important at January 'til March when those votes are taken in branches and people decide which motion's gonna go to the ARC. It's also really important for votes to be

allocated for the election of Council one year, and Committees the other year, so they alternate. Although you get a vote, and you personally there's an online vote, you can vote online. If you choose to submit your ballot paper, you can do that. One of the things that the branch has the power to do is collectively nominate candidates. Or, they can collectively decide to support candidates. This has to be done on a vote within the branch. Now, this year, the branch [The Online Branch] decided it didn't want to support or nominate any individual candidates. Some branches did, some branches didn't. But that is really important to be voting in a specific branch. So, in terms of having 'dual democracy' that's really important to have one vote, one location. So, I think from a six-month consultation would have been included in that report at the end.

But as you say, we've had an 'Option 1'. That Option 1 was chosen. That 'Option 1' was supported. The members of the Online Branch, they needed that time period to actually deliver and explore the option. And, with today's e-mail just going out not only have branch members had one e-mail communication from me in the last two years. Although I've had a collective e-mail address, it's kind of been built up from my own network, it's been built up from Annual Representative Conferences. And Annual Representative Conference in their nature are **all** branch members, physical branch members. So, being able to reach the digital members has been a challenge from the start. So, the immediate objective, was, and again this was on the first page, the first page of the document...the immediate object was to communicate via a newsletter the [Online] branch's current status. And that's what happened at the beginning of November. The next thing on there is to elect a 2018, 2019, or 2020 Online Branch committee. So, at the moment, it is the 'Caron Lyons show' and I'm fantastically supported by Helen Raw, and I'm fantastically supported by Cliff Evans. But, in terms of mandate, it's kind of members led, but it's important to me. It's really important to me to be a collective experience, and I want to reach as many members as possible, to have this conversation. Some will say there's Facebook groups and there's Twitter, but sadly in our industry those two public domains are often the last place that you want to be. I recently spoke to one member who has had a long-standing role in *Game of Thrones*. They can't use Facebook or Twitter because they just get bombarded by fans, and they would really like a place in which to engage with members who are not going to pester them with fandom. I spoke to someone who has had a long running role in a TV series and they told me exactly the same thing. The problem is with social media is that they are kind of wedged between their agent because they feel vulnerable in Twitter and Facebook. Whereas signing in as a member into an online space and having an exchange with people who are industrial professionals, who have paid to be a member, to take their industry seriously, they would like to contribute to that.

So, the other point was this analysing the current membership. Who is physical and who is affiliated to branches. 'cause even if you are affiliated to a branch say in the East Midlands. That reaches out to Lincolnshire. No-one can get in from Lincolnshire! To there, for a two-hour meeting. There needs to be some other alternative. And I think that other alternative of that Online Branch should also be about encouraging digital capacity in regional branches. And I've worked with several branches over the last two years. The East Midlands Variety Branch, Leeds and General, South West Area, and the South West Variety Branch, East Anglia. And helping them to start using technology to be able to encourage remote attendance. But, a lot of that, the first step of that is maybe getting them into the digital branch. So, there's been a lot of work going on over the last two years, and the report would have shown that. I have posted some links to this document that had some solution suggestions. I went through point one, how that might have been sorted. I included screenshots, how it looks now and how it could be adopted and some ideas of how you know the database could be sorted. So, there's a document that kind of shows it all. The other thing that's in there is the current status and

legacy. And I'm going to collect the link from this document and I'm going to pop over here into the chat and I'm actually going to put this in the chat.

So, that's kind of...I wanted to just give a little bit of context to this...this e-mail that's come out of the blue, demanding that you make a choice. It was not something I was anticipating you all receiving at this stage. It was something that I expected you to receive maybe at the end of a six-month process where we'd had a chance to maybe fix the branch. Had a chance to reach out to people and them more involved in the branch structure first, because at the moment you've got nothing to opt-in to, quite frankly. We've got our rules and standing orders and we do have a mechanism where you can have a debate, and you can fulfil the democratic process of proposing a motion. That does come to me to then put the seconding and then people can second it and we can have a debate and we can have a vote, and then that motion can be forwarded to council, so we do have that legitimacy. It's that core, that's the one thing that really kept me going is that this wasn't just a Facebook group, it wasn't just a Yahoo! Group or a Google group, it wasn't just a Ning network. This was a parallel, democratic entity, that existed alongside the physical branches. That's something really, really special, and I'm sure there are some other unions trying to do it, but from my investigations I haven't come across any organisations who have got that legitimate parity within their structure. And that is something really, really...should be celebrated. And to have reached this point now, is a real shame. And today, I really felt that I have tried to communicate with staff, and I have spent the last two years pursuing connection with branch and it's been so very difficult. This felt like it needed to have an immediate response because the e-mail was so immediate in your inboxes. It was quite visceral. It was quite a visceral e-mail and I know some people who've contacted me and said 'wow! That was a bit full on!' I just want to reach as many, many people and really say that please opt-in to the Facebook **group**, you will when you join be asked for something.

25 Minutes, 11 Seconds: [Pauses to tell someone off-camera in another room that she's on a Livestream]

It's really important for as many members, physical members or Online Branch members to join the online Facebook **group**. Yes, join the page, the page is public, this is a public Livestream. The Facebook group, you will be asked to submit your membership number. I don't have anything to reference them off against, but I know the format that membership numbers should be in and I can usually see, if I'm not sure I can check with Equity and I can check my own branch network. But please do join. I will want to see a number of some kind. So, I'm just going to take any questions now really. So, if anyone's got any questions or comments, please do feel free to chat to me.

26 Minutes, 7 Seconds: [Begins to take Questions]