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JULY 2009 TOBACCO INDUSTRY UPDATE

Smokers Turn to Social Networking: The Online Smoking Section

Remember when you'd walk into a restaurant and be asked, "Smoking or non?" If the answer was the former, you would have been escorted to a dedicated portion of the floor where you could light up before, during or after your meal. This ritual is disappearing in the physical world, but it's springing up online, where a "virtual smoking section" is taking form, connecting cigarette and cigar smokers alike from around the world.

Obviously, there are plenty of resources on the web for the smoking community. Many tobacco industry publications publish to the web, even with some exclusive content. Retailers, both brick-and-mortar and online, are numerous, and there are more smoking blogs than one can count. The growth of social media has taken the online smoking community to a new level, though. The same utilities that enable 140-character conversations and elaborate digital friendship interconnections have emerged around the "fellowship of the leaf."

While nonsmoker's rights advocates could celebrate the online smokers' quarantine, tobacco prevention and control experts would be remiss to ignore this new form of coalescence. The reality is smokers are not being forced out. They, along with vigilant tobacco enthusiasts and industry leaders are opting in. While smokers believe they are being subjected to banishment from public places in the real world, they are quickly discovering the online smoking section, making it the growing destination of choice, especially for cigar aficionados.

[Social Cigar](#) is a social network of the [Facebook](#) and [MySpace](#) variety. Members can customize their online cigar smoker identities, connect with existing friends and meet new ones, sharing their thoughts and feelings about shared experiences and interests, finding the basic features expected from any social network.

The other, [CigarShout](#), is effectively Twitter for cigar enthusiasts. Cigar smokers can proclaim their tobacco thoughts 140 characters at a time, and keep track of the latest developments in the cigar world with the "shouts" of users who follow. This community is still small, but it's growing.

Additionally, there are plenty of Facebook groups and fan pages for all smokers, including many tobacco activists groups. One recently discovered by a TFL staff member is [Louisiana for Fair Tobacco Reform](#), a group that is fighting smoke-free policies in Louisiana. Twitter is also home to plenty of smoker-related action groups.

TFL urges you to do your own search for these groups online or form your own Facebook group or Twitter account to "shout" positive tobacco prevention and control messages while promoting smoke-free environments.