Do You Really Want a Chapter Website?

Blue Knights International Internet Committee
Mark Howard (Chairman)
Mike Gratis
Paul Croteau
Harry Shaw

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Creating a Chapter Web Site

Introduction

This is a list of points that should be considered when designing a web site.

Is a Web Page Right for Your Chapter?

- Consider the following when deciding whether or not to develop a Chapter Web page:
- Poll your members regarding Internet access. Familiarity and expanse of Internet access will determine whether a Web page will be limited to advertising your group, or used as a communication vehicle.
- If most Members don't have Web access, you will have to communicate information in a different manner.
- As a group, determine why you want a Web page.
- Is it because your Members want to post information about your Chapter?
- Is it to post important dates and notices?
- Is it a scrapbook record for your chapter to share and brag?
- How much will it cost?
- Are you part of someone else's site, or are you purchasing your rights to your own Web address?
- Will there be additional costs for a password protected site?
- Does that site provide a way to keep individual files and downloads?
- Does it have a calendar function?
- Does it have e-mail and bulletin board features?
- Consider the time needed for site upkeep.
- Who will be responsible for posting changes? How often do you want to change the site— *weekly, bi- weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly?*
- Discuss whether your site will remain an information only site, or whether you want additional functions, such as an interactive component, which will require password protection.

A Quick Overview

1. Make your site usable by everyone if possible.
Don't do things that limit the number of people that can benefit from your site.

2. Make your site as fast as possible. This not only makes your site more enjoyable to use, but also allows those with expensive and/or slow Internet connections to use your site.

3. Make your site easy to use. Make it uncluttered, easy to navigate and easy to read.

4. Make your site useful. Create a site that fills a need.

5. Maintain Professional Appearance. Check your spelling and content.

6. Use "cutting edge technology" wisely and effectively. Use it when it's the best way to do something, but don't annoy visitors with "cute" stuff.

7. Should I really worry about the minority who use less powerful computers, use older browsers, and have slow Internet access? Yes.

The Guidelines

Getting Started
If your Chapter decides to post a Web page, begin with the following:
Spend time looking at other Web sites. Note what you like about them. Search for other "Blue Knight" or motorcycle group sites, as well as "Blue Knights International" site.

Research hosts for your site on the Internet. This is where International and your technical member can be of great help. Google web hosting and see what shows up. Consider learning simple html or other Web language, or utilizing a more sophisticated program, such as Adobe Dreamweaver, which writes the code.

Members can also learn how to prepare photos and graphics for the Web, as well as video and music posting. (A note on music – this can be very annoying if the wrong sounds are chosen.)

Be prepared to scale back your graphics or to break your content into separate pages (files) so that your audience will not have to wait a long time to see your Web page. One page that scrolls on forever can be broken down into several smaller informational pages.

Create an outline of the information of your site. It can be very simple on one page, or it can take the form of more than one page, with links between. The kind of hosting you decide upon will either limit or broaden your options.

Developing Your Web Page
Write the text for your page(s). Check for spelling and grammar carefully, use a spell checker program. Ask other people to help you proof-read as well to ensure it contains the information you wish to provide.

Create or find graphics on the Internet for your page. Be sure NOT to use graphics that are copyrighted by someone else without their permission.

Do NOT clone another Blue Knights web site, you might find yourself in court on the other side of the bar.

Consider any links you want to create between your site and other sites carefully. Each linked site should contain only material that is safe and suitable and appropriate. Make a link to your Conference and to International so your members can access either.

Avoid sites that contain inappropriate advertising or lack of family values. Ads change frequently, sometimes every few seconds, so it may be impossible to keep track of these links from your site!

Publishing Your Web Page
There are many ways to post the pages you create on the Internet. You may have to pay a monthly fee, especially if you go over allotted space for free services, or if you want extras, like chat, file sharing, etc.

Most Internet service providers or search engine sites, such as AOL, Yahoo, or Google have publishing options. They also provide a list of suggested hosting options, as well as many helpful hints about Web site development and establishing "user communities".   Look for security features, privacy features, amount of space available, and cost from a provider.

If you are offered space on a Web site that is a private business or owned by an individual, be very cautious. You become associated with that person's domain name (Internet address).

You should NOT be associated with a commercial business unless it is clear that they are sponsoring space only, and you should check out the site content and its links, as well as the business to see whether you are in appropriate company for Blue Knights and law enforcement professional group.

For example, it might not be appropriate to be sponsored by an outlaw motorcycle club or a saloon, but it would be OK to be on the site of your local library or your public newspaper with other non-profit groups without questionable associations themselves.

A site that has links to sex shops would not be appropriate. If your group's sponsor offers you space, you should check with knowledgeable "surfers" or Blue Knights International before accepting; and they can help you word a statement that needs to be placed on your page or the page of your sponsor to indicate that the sponsorship of the page does not indicate Blue Knight endorsement of the host site.

- Create an e-mail account specifically for your Web site. Never use a personal e-mail account for your Web site contact from the public.

- Have only one or two members as the administrators, as it makes it easier to make quick decisions. Rotate the responsibilities if other members are interested in learning how to administer a site.

- Determine a schedule for updating your site before it is posted. Some sites will only need to be updated quarterly, or when something is meant to be shared, such as pictures from a poker run, dinner ride or meeting sites. Minutes if they are to be posted within a subfolder that is password protected should be updated after each meeting or event in preparation for the next meeting or event. Be sure to remove old sites from free hosting services.

- If you choose a service that has password-protected space, you must set up ways to protect the password for the users. Limit it to members only and use a tier of different user rights.

- Determine a schedule for changing the passwords and discuss the importance of keeping the password within the member group.

While reading this list of guidelines, keep the following in mind. *From a visitor's point of view, a good web site is one that...*
- *...is usable*
- *...has something they want*
- *...doesn't waste their time* and
- *...isn't irritating*

Although there is some "how to do it" information, the guidelines are not meant to lead you through the construction process. We leave that to the experts.

We suggest that you find someone who knows the technical and legal aspects of Web construction, and someone who is capable of making it a learning experience for you and your members

1. Make your site usable by everyone if possible.
A. Make pages that work on any browser.
Don't require a wide "window." Some photo's are well over a meg in size and expand the viewable area considerably. Reduce the size of those pictures before putting them on your web page. Consider the number of cell phones in use today. Many folks will use them while on the road to look at your web pages.

Don't make your web page(s) depend on images. Be careful with using images for "text" items such as sub-titles, menu items, etc.

B. Make pages usable by everyone regardless of their preference settings.
Remember that many people using the latest browsers may still have things like images, Java and JavaScript disabled. Most menu systems now incorporate those programming languages. Hopefully these people will now allow JavaScript to be used.

C. Make your site as backward compatible as you can.
For example, if you use Flash, and you can make something that works with the Flash 2.0 plug-in, don't add some little cosmetic feature that requires you to save it as a file that only works with Flash 4.0. Sometimes even if it can be done slightly more effectively utilizing features only available on the latest browsers, it is better to compromise and make a page that works for a wider audience.

D. Make your pages usable by handicapped visitors as well.
For the visually handicapped, be careful about assigning font sizes and colors. Speech synthesizers can read text, but can't read images, so titles, sub-titles and other text displayed in an image get ignored.

2. Make your site as fast as possible.
Keep the size of the file to a minimum. Eliminate everything that doesn't show on the surface of the page. Eliminate multiple spaces, returns and tabs. Remember that any amount of "white space" is reduced to one space on the surface of the page.

Remember that color changes, font size changes and tables add to the size of the file. Make your pages cache-friendly. Design pages that

can be cached, both by Internet or proxy cache and local cache.

Traditional, straight-forward formatting allows visitors to read the top of the page as the rest of the page is downloading.

3. Make your site easy to use.
A. Make your site easy to navigate.
Make navigation easy. Make it easy for the visitor to find what they are looking for. The most popular pages should be the easiest to find.

If you offer sub-pages for civilians and members, make it very clear on your main pages which pages are for members only.

If possible, have direct links to all of your sub-pages from the main page. If a visitor needs to click more than 2 or 3 times from the main page to get to any page on your site, you may want to reconsider the structure of your web site.

Don't have "orphan" 404 pages. Double-check to ensure all your links are accurate to the various pages in your site. Always have a link back to your main page from every page.

B. Keep your pages clutter-free. Avoid putting distractions and unrelated things on the page.
Animated images often distract from what one is trying to convey. Resist the temptation to include "cute" things that are unrelated to your content.

If you must use advertising to support your site, consider putting the ad at the bottom of the page and not accepting animated GIF banners.

C. Make a fast-loading, easy-to-understand, useful main page.
Don't waste your visitors' time with a cover page that says "Click here to enter." If your main page doesn't load quickly, there is a lower chance that visitors will take the time to look at your sub-pages.

Don't let your page be one of those pages where a visitor doesn't know where to start. Some pages, especially multi-column pages, are so cluttered with images and links that it's easy to get confused.

D. Don't require logging in or registering to use the civilian portion of your site.
If you require registering an email address, most wise people will assume that they will start receiving "junk mail" no matter what your "privacy statement" may say, so they won't use your site.

4. Make your site useful.
A. Provide content.
The main aim should be to provide "information," not a lot of advertisements.

B. Make your pages printable.
Visitors may want to print your pages and read them off-line for later references. Not very often, but it can happen with chapter events.

C. Keep your site stable. Avoid "Not Found" errors.
Once a page has been uploaded, don't move it to another location. If you change URLs, then people who like your site and have bookmarked favorite sub-pages will get "not found" errors. Changing URLs within your site means your site can't easily be used, that you will also lose a certain number of potential visitors who find your old URLs using a search engine.

D. Make your site complete for today's visitor.
Don't have links to sub-pages on your site that are still under construction. It's easy enough to add these links as those pages are completed.

E. Focus on one thing and do it well.
Instead of trying to produce a comprehensive BK site, focus on your area geographically. Since anything on the web is only one click away, you don't have to create pages on your site for things that already exist. It's better to have a good site than an average or below average general site. BK International looks at the world in perspective, keep your Conference or Chapter web site localized to focus in your special area of the world. People will automatically migrate from one web site to another to find information.

5. Maintain integrity. Be professional.
A. Be legal and Be Family Friendly.
Don't include anything you wouldn't want your mother, wife or daughter to view.

B. Be accurate.
Check your facts. Check your spelling. Proofread your pages. If you have a collection of links, be sure your descriptions are accurate.

C. Don't violate copyrights.
Using copyrighted material without permission, even if credit is given, is still a copyright infringement.

D. In an obvious location, put the date of the last update, and a way to contact you.

This lets visitors know how old the page is and allows them to contact you with feedback on the contents.

6. Make your site friendly and fun to use.
A. Don't annoy your visitors.
What annoys visitors most are crowded pages, irritating color combinations, blinking text, animated images, excessive use of images, too much advertising, and obnoxious sounds that are so loud it is ridiculous! Can you imagine someone who clicks on your web site at 4:00 AM in the morning all of a sudden their speakers are blaring the sound of someone's bike exhaust? All they wanted was to read the chapter upcoming events not wake the entire household because your web page is inconsiderate of others. If you must play sound, give the visitor an option to TURN IT OFF.

7. Use "cutting edge technology" wisely and effectively.
It's better not to use the latest features for purely cosmetic purposes or just to make your site "cool." You should take advantage of "cutting edge technology" if it allows creating effective communication avenues.

If you have pages that won't work for everyone, tell visitors what is needed. (PDF reader, QuickTime) Some people turn these off to avoid pop-up ads and irritatingly slow Java applets.

Listen to what your visitors say.
If a visitor takes the time to inform you of a problem, believe him. Just because you've had millions of visitors that haven't commented on the problem, doesn't mean the problem doesn't exist.

Remember that what is true now may not be true in the future.
Also, what used to be true may no longer be true.

In conclusion, what was stated in the introduction is restated along with a few comments. *From a visitor's point of view, a good web site is one that is usable!* If the site is not usable, then everything else is irrelevant. What is usable varies from visitor to visitor. However, there is absolutely nothing wrong with using special plug-in, Java or JavaScript, since your page will still be usable by those with the plug-in installed and everything enabled, though sometimes it is better to compromise and create a page that reaches a wider audience.

Definitions:

Browser— a software application used to locate and display Web pages. The two most popular and widely used browsers are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Both of these are *graphical browsers,* which mean that they can display graphics as well as text. The majority of Web sites are designed to be displayed for Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer.

Bulletin board—an electronic message center, where visitors can leave messages, which are live or screened,
then posted, usually focused on specific topics.

Home page—the first page of any collection of Web pages or a Web site, often referred to as the "front door" of a Web site.

html— abbreviation for hypertext mark-up language, which is the basic code-based language used with text to create Web pages.

Internet—a decentralized global system developed to link computer networks around the world using protocols. When referring to the global net, Internet is always capitalized. An "intranet" refers to computers that are connected together for internal use. Intranets usually belong to an organization, or a corporation, and it's only accessible only by the organization's members, employees, or others with authorization.

LISTSERV — An automatic mailing list server developed by Eric Thomas for BITNET in 1986. When e-mail is addressed to a LISTSERV mailing list, it is Automatically broadcast to everyone on the list.

Password protection-- A password is a secret combination of characters (letters and numbers) that allow the user to access Web pages or files on a computer. It ensures that unauthorized users do not access to the Web Pages, or files on the computer

Search engine-- A program that searches documents for specified keywords or titles and returns documents where the keywords or titles are found. Although *search engine* is really a general class of programs, the term is often used to specifically describe systems like Google which enable users to search for documents and other media on the Internet.

Web server—a dedicated computer or system of computers that allows content, audio/video to be served via Web browser. Every Web server has an IP address and possibly a domain name. Servers are often dedicated, meaning that they perform no other tasks besides their server tasks.

URL— stands for Uniform Resource Locator, and indicates the global address of documents and other resources on the Internet.

Web host—provides server space, Web services, and file maintenance for Web sites created by individuals or other companies who do not have their own server.

Service Providers (ISPs) -- often are given limited Web space for their own Web site, or there is a fee charged, depending on the complexity.

Web page(s) — printable/viewable pages on the Internet.

Web site—a name for a collection of Web pages. Most individuals refer to their page or pages as "Home page" or "Web page" rather a Web site, which is usually much more extensive, expensive, and professional.

Internet (WWW or Web or Internet)—a global system of linking documents, pictures, sounds and other kinds of files across the Internet. The Web uses the HTTP protocol, only one of the languages spoken over the Internet, to transmit data. The Web also utilizes browsers, such as Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox or Netscape just to name a few, to access Web pages that are linked to each other via hyperlinks.

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