

Developing a Scouting Website



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This is the third edition of the fact sheet on Developing a Scouting Website and replaces edition 2 dated Oct 02.

Introduction

The UK Scout Association has nearly 10,000 Scout Groups and 600,000 Members. They are to be found throughout the United Kingdom and as part of British Scouts in Western Europe. Looking even further afield, the British Groups Abroad network embraces the Middle and Far East, the Falkland Islands, Africa and South America.

Geographically widespread organisations, such as The Scout Association, in itself only a small part of the 28 million World Scout Family in over 200 countries, will be quick to grasp how electronic communication (and the Internet in particular) makes it possible to transmit, receive and share information.

In October 1996, the UK Scout Association formally adopted the pioneering ScoutBaseUK (SBUK) www.scoutbase.org.uk website as its official presence on the World Wide Web. By March 1999, the site had grown to one of the largest of its kind with over 3,000 pages and over a quarter of a million page requests a month. Some months it delivers over a million pages. SBUK has now been joined by other sites. There is www.scouts.org.uk, the corporate website for non-scouting audiences and specialist sites such as www.scouting2007.org.uk

for Scouting 2007 and www.outdoors.ltd.uk for Outdoors, The Scout Association's trading subsidiary.

At the same time a great many Scout Groups, Districts, and Counties have been developing their own websites, often as part of the training programme for young people.

The purpose of this document is to give advice and guidance on creating and developing Scouting websites - whether they are for your Cub Pack, District, Area or County. It has been produced in response to many requests for such a resource. Anyone reading this note is specifically asked to note the section headed Safe from Harm.

What this guide does not do is give an in-depth technical tutorial - there are many good tutorials available, and today it is quite easy to create web pages with many of the packages that are available.

Purpose - Why Create the Website?

Perhaps the first thing to get clear is does your Group, District, or whatever actually want a website - and why. If nobody wants one then perhaps this project is a non-starter.

With this hurdle over you should decide on what information you are going to display on your web pages. One of the best ways is to work out your target audience and think what they would want

to see. For example existing Members would want information on future events and contact information; potential new Members and Leaders would want interesting and exciting pages and contact information, while the general public would want general information on your section, Group/District/County/Area, what you do etc.

The next thing to decide is who is going to provide the information for your pages and keep providing updates (see copyright information). At this point, it may be worth forming a team to help you provide the content.

Where to put the website?

The website has to be 'hosted' by an Internet Service Provider's (ISP's) computer. The ISP holds the website for you and provides access to it for Internet users. Note: with the latest ADSL/Broadband technology it is possible to host the site on a home computer, but this would mean leaving your computer on 24 hours a day and have users from the Internet accessing it! ISP's normally provide hosting in the following ways:

- Free space on a web server included with a dial up account.
- Free space provided by an ISP (note: nothing is ever free and your site may have 'Banner' advertisements or commercial breaks forced on you. You will need to make sure that advertisements are appropriate).
- Purchased Web Space – This is normally sold in two ways:
 - Amount of space, e.g. 25mb, 50mb etc this is the maximum size of your website.
 - Bandwidth usage, (250mb/500mb per month) this is the total amount of

data that can be downloaded (looked at) by visitors in a month.

When you purchase web space you will have the ability to get optional extras. These will probably include domain name registration; the name you have for your site, email accounts and email forwarding, access to website log files, visitor counters and database areas.

Choosing a name

Free name – with free accounts it is possible to set up a name but the name normally includes the ISP name, e.g. www.myisp.co.uk/1stAnywherescouts/

Domain name registration – for a fee, it is possible to purchase a name that is personal to you e.g. www.1stAnywherescouts.org.uk

Starting with the ending – When the Internet was initially set up, an outline design was decided. Any sites ending with .COM would be commercial, other organisations would end in .ORG, government sites .GOV and sites in the UK should end with .UK. Then the Internet revolution took place and things became a bit confused. Sites did not fit into the design and everybody wanted a .COM address. For a UK Scouting site the best ending is probably ORG.UK but you could use .COM or .ORG. The ending of the name normally decides the price (.COM will be more expensive than .UK). As the Internet expands we will see more suffixes brought into play, whatever you choose try to always pick one that is most appropriate for a Scouting website.

The beginning This is the bit that makes your site – you need something that is short enough to be memorable, but long enough to explain what it is. (Note, you can't have spaces so use a hyphen) e.g. www.somewhere-scouts.org.uk

Email and the name If you get email accounts with the name, this can be useful, as you will not have to include Leaders personal email address on your site. The District Commissioner could be DC@Somewhere-scouts.org.uk.

There are normally 3 ways to set up email (or a combination of the 3).

- Mailbox/POP3 Account – mail sent to DC@somewhere-scouts.org.uk would be held in a mailbox on the Internet that the DC would check.
- Mail Forwarding – you set it up so that any mail sent would be forwarded on to the DC's personal email. You could also set up accounts for the ADC's to be forwarded in the same way to their personal accounts.
- Catch all Accounts/Auto Forwarders – this works like mail forwarding but you only specify one destination. Therefore if you set up accounts for the DC and the ADC's, they would all end up at the same e-mail address.

Using domain email has a few advantages; the Leaders personal email accounts remain private, and the Leaders could switch roles and not get mail for the old position.

If you decide to go for purchasing web space and domain name, shop around. Try using an Internet search engine and search for 'Domain names' and 'hosting'. You will be amazed at how many entries will be returned. It may also be worthwhile asking parents in the Group or District for help - you might be lucky and find a parent who works for an ISP.

Safe from Harm

Websites should be careful about including photographs, contact or other details which together could serve to make children easy to identify and contact.

It is the policy of The Scout Association to safeguard the welfare of all members by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional harm.

It is essential that anyone creating a website follows a few simple guidelines designed to ensure the personal safety of young people. We do not want our sites to be used as a method for people with evil intentions to develop contacts with children.

Young people should NOT be easily identified.

- Do not give out their email or other contact details.
- Do not use their full names.
- Avoid using names at all if possible.

Photographs

Parents should be given the opportunity not to have their child's picture displayed on the Internet or used for other publicity purposes. This is not a legal requirement as the copyright of an image belongs to the photographer and not the subject. Nevertheless, it is good practice and good manners to seek parental approval.

When a person joins the Scout Group a simple form seeking permission could be handed out. The wording should be on the lines of:

Sometimes photos and video images of Scouts taking part in activities are submitted to the local newspapers, the Group, District or County newsletters and website or put on display. If you have

any objections please indicate that you are not willing for your child's image to be used in this way by ticking the box

This can be reinforced using PC forms and newsletters. The parent's wishes must be respected.

The photos must meet the requirements of our activity and other rules and should be considered in good taste.

If you do use pictures of people, you need to consider the type of caption you use.

- Idea caption - Scouts receiving their badges from the DC.
- Acceptable caption – “John and Peter get their badges from the DC.”

Note you should shuffle the names so they don't coincide with the picture and try to avoid names if possible.

Meetings and Events

Exact details of meeting places and times should not be published. You can provide an email link to request more details.

Replying to these requests should not be an automatic process, but should be dealt with by a Leader; e.g. 'The Beaver Scouts meet on Thursday. To find out more contact Beaverleader@somewhere-scouts.org.uk.'

If you want to provide programme information for parents and older Members, you must do this in a protected area of the site, behind a regularly changing password (at least once a month). The password must not be available within the downloadable pages of the site (you should not be able to find out the password by clicking View Source/Page source in the browser).

Events and Camps – Whilst you may wish to publish dates and locations of future events, do not go into much detail if

you feel that the young people might be put at risk because constant supervision might be difficult. This area might also be password protected.

Leaders and helpers – Protection for adults should also be provided by:

- Avoiding using personal email (see mail forwarding).
- Never publish home addresses or phone numbers.
- Always ask adults if you can publish their full name.

Remember, when publicising events, you could also be telling others when a Leader's house may be empty.

Content

The content of your site depends on the purpose of the site. There are certain legal requirements you need to follow.

Legal Requirements

On your home page you should either display or have links to a page with the following information:

Privacy Statement – This should cover what you are doing to the information that the users supply to the website (knowingly or not).

It should include:

Personal Details Supplied – If a user gives you an email address, what purpose will you use it and to whom will you give it. It is safest to only ask users to submit minimum information about themselves (name and email address) as you become responsible for safeguarding any information they supply.

Log Files – As you access any website, technical information about your computer is usually stored on the Web

Server; what operation system your computer is using, what pages were visited etc. You need to tell the user you are going to do this.

Cookies – You may want to improve navigation around the site by storing relevant information in small files called cookies on the users computers. The cookie file could be something as simple as asking for the users name, and storing it in the cookie; so when they return to the site you can give a personalised greeting. Or it could hold the date they accessed the site so you can list all the pages that are new when they return. If you are going to use cookies, you need to tell the user and to look in their browser for help to turn them off.

Links – you need to tell the user that the site contains links to other Internet sites and that this privacy statement only covers your site name.

Term's Statement – This describes what your site does and whom it is for. This does not have to be an individual page but could be a statement on your welcome page, e.g. 'Welcome to 1st Somewhere Scout Group website. On this site we aim to give anyone details of the Scouting activities and events within somewhere.'

Disclaimer – You need to include a disclaimer e.g. 'The views expressed in the website are not necessarily those of the Scout Association.'

Copyright Statement – A simple statement should be added along the lines of 'The content of this website are the copyright of the 1st Somewhere Scout Group 2003'.

Other Legal Issues

Copyright – Don't break copyright, i.e. steal information from other sites. Websites are copyrighted in the same way as a paper resource; using someone

else's material without permission infringes both their integrity and their intellectual property rights. Some sites offer free graphics and information to charities and voluntary organisations but require a link back to the originating site (do not forget to add the link if this is the case). Always remember to give credit where this has been requested.

Links – You are only allowed to link to the home pages of other Internet sites, unless you have sought permission to link to 'deeper' pages. SBUK (www.scoutbase.org.uk) gives permission for any Scouting website to link to any page within the site. In fact, SBUK would prefer that you link to it's pages rather than 'stealing' them. Information on SBUK changes from time to time and by linking your site will access the up-to-date information rather than potentially misleading or dangerous outdated 'stolen' information.

Information can and has been used in libel and other legal proceedings. Always think before you put information on your site. The guide you should use is: 'would I be happy if what was written referred to me?'

Other Design Tips

Graphics

Graphics can brighten up your site and make it more interesting for visits but too many graphics can divert the visitors eye and detract from the page content; load time could also be increased to an unacceptable level.

Where do I get graphics?

- The clipart section on SBUK has various images and logos you may wish to use. It also has a necker generator so you could display your Group's scarf on the site.

- Graphic/Clip art websites may offer free graphics to voluntary and charity sites.
- Purchasing clip art on a CD ROM.

Always check the copyright on the graphics and be sure you are allowed to use it.

Forums, Newsgroups, Chat rooms and Guest Books

These are great for getting feedback about the site and exchanging information, but any information that is posted to them must be moderated by you before it is put on the site. The reason for this is that you are responsible for the content on your site and if someone makes a libellous statement on your site you could be held responsible.

Some Do's and Don'ts

Don't use the latest technology on your site; setting it up for the very latest Internet browser, without having a backup route for the large percentage of people that don't have the new technology would be pointless. You should aim for the site to be accessible for version 4 and above, of Internet browsers; this will cover 90%+ of Internet users.

Don't have 'Under Construction' pages, if the page is not ready, do not have the link.

Don't set up your pages for your new 1600 by 1200 monitor. Most users use 800 by 600 or 1024 by 768. People won't look at the site if they have to scroll back and forth all the time.

Don't use Intro or Gateway pages unless you add a button to skip them; Intro pages look good the first time but get to be irritating after a few visits.

Do be careful with the download time of your site. It may load in 30 seconds on

ADSL/Broadband but it might take minutes on a 56K modem.

Do be careful with your navigation. You may know your site intimately, others won't. A good tip is to make every page accessible within three clicks of your home page, and have a link to the home page from every page.

Do include contact email addresses so people can find out more, but remember not to put personal email addresses online.

Do keep information up to date; a blank diary page is better than last year's diary.

Do publicise your site. Include the address wherever you would put your postal address. Add the web address to search engines; be warned that you may be required to leave an email address which may result in an increase in junk mail.

Do break up pages into reasonable chunks. No one wants to have to page up and down through 15 pages of text.

Conclusion

Producing a website can be rewarding, especially if young members of the Association are involved. It can also improve the communication process within your Group, District, or County/Area and be an invaluable publicity aid.

Most of the guidelines laid down in this document are common sense, and we hope that this information will help you bypass the pitfalls in setting up your website.