

## CHAPTER 6:

# Creating a Presence on the Internet

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*The World Wide Web (the web) is a user-friendly means of exploring the vast information resources available on the Internet. By combining text, pictures, video, and audio, it has made the Internet much more enjoyable and accessible to folks who are not computer buffs. The web's relative ease of use for retrieving and publishing information electronically has made it the primary means for people around the world to share resources.*

*Creating a presence for your organization on the web requires a combination of organizational and technical planning, but it is well within the capabilities and budgets of even the smallest organization. This chapter will get you started on planning, designing, and managing a simple website. A basic knowledge of computers and experience using Windows or Macintosh operating systems and software is necessary to understand most of this material. It is also helpful to have some experience "surfing the web" before you create your own website. A recommended reading list is included in Appendix C.*

## Common Website Uses

**Community outreach** — You may be surprised at how many people in your community are online. Your website can be a vehicle to attract volunteers. If you run community projects, like adult literacy classes or neighborhood watch programs, your website can help inform the community that those services are available.

**Networking** — A web presence can create new relationships and unique collaborations. The Internet allows colleagues worldwide to share information. A surprising aspect of the Internet is its ability to link local efforts, too. Ultimately, being able to easily access a profile of diverse services and assets in a local area allows communities to better address the needs of their community and facilitate the involvement of concerned citizens.

**Public relations/education** — An informative website is an excellent public relations vehicle. Nonprofits who have a clear and informative website indicate to business donors and foundations that they are innovative and up-to-date. For little to no cost, your

“As an AmeriCorps\*VISTA, I created a website on LibertyNet...for my literacy agency, Philadelphia YMCA. An adult literacy instructor from Great Britain found us and e-mailed. We matched the students from each of the programs and set up an e-mail pen pal (‘key pal’) exchange.”

***Martin McClure  
Mayors Commission on  
Literacy, Philadelphia***

website can engage and educate the public by disseminating your press releases and newsletters to an audience much larger and more diverse than was previously possible.

**Fundraising** — Websites can advertise fundraising events and attract potential grantors. Third-party vendors can raise funds through online charity auctions or credit card donations. Since the business world has embraced this tool, a website can complement any strategy for attracting corporate donors.

**Investing in the future** — There are unlimited possibilities for the creative organization on the web. Clients of a job training program can put up their own résumés, youth programs can set up a countrywide bulletin board, and literacy students can develop web pages as exercises. In general, learning how to publish on the web is an investment in the future. New and exciting applications are being developed at a rapid pace. The future is promising for those who take the time to learn.

## Limitations of Web Publications

**Realistic expectations** — The most amazing website cannot replace traditional methods of outreach and recruitment. The Internet is just one more tool that can complement your existing means.

**Appropriate uses** — Though it seems like the web is everywhere, not everyone has access. Like any outreach or public relations effort, you need to know how to reach your target audience. For example, if you are offering adult literacy classes, advertising on the web may not directly attract participants.

**Confidentiality** — The Internet does not have guaranteed privacy. Do not put confidential or proprietary information onto your public website. Client records, staff home addresses and phone numbers, and internal memos should be kept offline.

## Creating a Website

Creating an effective website takes technical know-how and computer skill. Fortunately, there are many resources available for people who want to contract the work of creating a website to a professional. However, if you have some technical skill and would like to experiment on your own, here are some very basic instructions about how to create your own website.

To develop a good website, there are some basic steps you need to follow. First, you'll need to decide the overall goals and objectives of your electronic publication. Once the text is created, information for the site is converted into the language of the World Wide Web, called hypertext markup language (HTML). These HTML files are assembled to create your website, then transferred to a server computer (which houses your website files and makes them accessible to the public).

### **Step 1. Define Your Objectives and Audience**

This is the most important step. The information you include on the website should reflect the existing goals of your organization. Decide what you hope to achieve with your site: Is community outreach the main objective? Do you hope to attract funders? Is your site a way for professionals in the field to network?

Then, define your audience. Many organizations that are just starting out on the web choose to direct their content to the general public and provide as much information as possible.

### **Step 2. Create the Text for Your Website**

Begin by drafting an outline, similar to the table of contents in a book. Each item of the outline represents a page or section of your website. For example, if you were the project director for the Gotham City Youth Services organization, your outline might look like this:

- I. Mission of Gotham City Youth Services (GCYS)
- II. General Information
  - A. History of GCYS
  - B. Staff
  - C. Organization
- III. Services
  - A. Sunshine Childcare Center
  - B. Sports in the City Teen Program
  - C. Venture Summer Program
- IV. Getting Involved
  - A. Donations needed
  - B. Volunteer opportunities
  - C. List of contributors
- V. Publications
  - A. Monthly newsletters
  - B. Quarterly board report
  - C. 2000 Special Report on Youth in Gotham City

#### ***Basic questions to consider when creating a website:***

What audience are you trying to reach?

What information do you wish to convey?

How might the online audience want to interact with your organization?

In what ways is your agency capable of responding to inquiries?

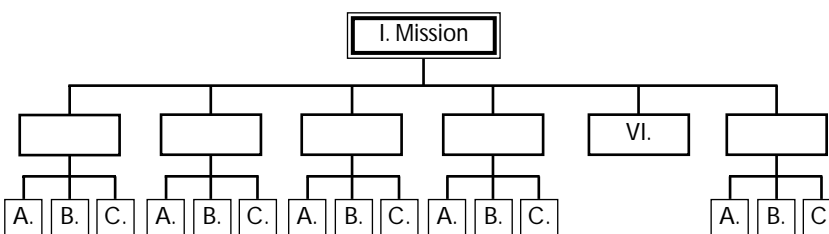
***What is hypertext  
markup language  
(HTML)?***

HTML is a set of logical formatting “tags” or codes used to make documents readable on the web. These tags make intuitive sense and are inserted into the simple text of the document you are preparing. For example, if you want a line to appear in boldface, you simply add <B> before the line (to turn on bold type), then add </B> after the line (to turn off bold type) in your plain text document. When viewed on the web, the line appears in bold.

- VI. Related Internet Resources
- VII. Contacts for More Information
  - A. Mailing address
  - B. Phone and fax numbers
  - C. E-mail address

After you have created an outline, you may want to convert it to a flow chart that depicts the structure of the website and how the pages are arranged. It should look something like the diagram of a family tree, with the home page at the top and the levels of the outline spreading out below.

**Flow chart example of outline**



You can then create the content that is represented by the different items in your outline. Much of the material, such as the mission statement and description of services, may already exist within the text of brochures, fact sheets, and grant applications.

**Step 3. Convert Text into HTML**

The text that you want published on the website must be prepared for placement on the web. Ideally, the text is contained in documents that are available on your computer (as word-processing files). If you only have hard-copy versions of some documents or if the material has not been written, type the text into a word-processing program.

Convert the word-processing documents to a “text only” or ASCII format. Nearly all word-processing programs provide the option of saving documents in plain text, which removes all the special formatting. (In order to provide the special formatting such as bold, paragraphs, and margins, word processors add special characters that are not displayed. Documents in this form are not usable on the Internet.) Typically, when you save a document you can choose to save as text-only (ASCII or DOS text formats are other options that work).

Add the HTML formatting “tags” that make the document readable on the web. Web documents are just text documents with HTML tags added. These tags tell the web browser how to present the page in the browser’s window.

There are many resources available to help you learn HTML. If your organization can spare \$30, pick up one of the numerous guides to writing HTML, available in bookstores (see Appendix C for some examples). The web itself contains many excellent guides on web authoring. Here are several good places to start:

**The Beginner’s Guide to HTML**

<http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/General/Internet/WWW/HTMLPrimer.html>

**The Bare Bones Guide to HTML**

(a simple list of HTML tags)

<http://werbach.com/barebones/index.html>

**HTML tutorials:**

<http://www.cwru.edu/help/introHTML/toc.html>

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/tut/>

You can also create HTML documents using an HTML editor. There are many HTML editors available commercially in stores and on the Internet as shareware or freeware. Some are called WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editors. HTML editors allow you to select HTML tags using buttons and menus similar to a word processor. The editor puts in the tags for you. HTML editors can be very useful, but it’s helpful to know the basics of HTML first. Some newer versions of word processors and desktop publishing software include an option to save or export a file in HTML format, but you will usually need to go back and fix some things that don’t appear as you would like.

Another good way to learn HTML is to look at the HTML source code behind other web pages. You can view and copy the HTML source of any page on the web by going to the View menu in your browser and selecting Source. Web pages are protected by copyright law, though, so you cannot simply copy a whole page and use it in your own website.

You can also copy and save graphic images on the web to your computer. With the right mouse button on a PC or by holding the mouse button down on a Macintosh, you can click on any image and

save a copy of it to your hard drive. The same copyright laws apply for images as they do for source code: You cannot use most images that you copy from the web in your own website or other publications. However, there are some websites that offer free clip art that anyone can use.

**Getting started strategies:** Due to the explosive growth of the Internet, many people are trying to learn how to create web pages. You may be able to find an enthusiastic volunteer to help create HTML documents. College and high school students enjoy the challenge. Community networks often have volunteers willing to help nonprofits with such tasks. Computer clubs and user groups can also be a source of volunteers.

#### **Step 4. Design Your Home Page and Links to Other Documents**

The home page is the first page that online visitors see when they visit your site. Make sure it is organized and easy to navigate. Your home page should provide a concise gateway to the in-depth information at your site.

The outline you created in Step 2 gives you a “map” of your site. Each element in your outline could be a link to another page on your site. While the details of designing the home page and other pages are beyond the scope of this guide, here are some suggestions:

- Establish a uniform style for your web presentation so that all documents contain similar elements to your home page. This might include your organization’s logo, as well as certain color schemes and fonts. However, there are some legal limitations to keep in mind when using national service logos. For more information on Corporation policy, please see Chapter 9, “The Online World.”
- Keep your web page designs as simple as possible. Current trends in web design, such as use of animation and complex graphical images, can make a site look impressive, but these images take a lot of time to download, especially on slower computers.
- Include a contact person, a link to your home page, your organization name, and the date of creation or revision on every page, usually at the bottom.
- Test your website on friends and co-workers before you go online. Get their feedback on what works and what doesn’t.

There are many books that teach the principles of good web design. Some of these are listed in Appendix C.

### **Step 5. Find Out If Your Site Must Comply with Section 508**

If your agency is federally funded, your website might have to comply with the provisions for accessibility detailed in the Section 508 standards (36 CFR Part 1194), published in the Federal Register on December 21, 2000. For more information, check the Section 508 home page: <http://www.section508.gov/>.

### **Step 6. Transfer Your Web Documents to the Server**

To be accessible by the public, your web pages must be transferred to a server. The server is a computer that is connected directly to the Internet. Many ISPs allow subscribers to store web pages as part of the subscription fee. Transferring files to a server requires special file transfer software. For Windows users, Ws\_FTP (Windows File Transfer Protocol) is used. Macintosh computers use software called Fetch. Your ISP has specific directions for how to transfer files to their machine. After transferring the files to the server, it is important to check that everything works as expected.

### **Step 7. Advertise**

Inform people that your site exists. Many Internet search tools allow you to register your site, instantly creating a worldwide audience. Add your web address to printed brochures, letterhead, business cards, and grant applications.

### **Step 8. Keep the Site Current and Updated**

Remember that developing a website is an ongoing commitment. To get maximum benefit from your site, keep it updated with current information. Ideally, establish a schedule or policy to update your pages as information changes. Who will handle the revisions? Will additional staff need to be trained? Who will answer inquiries that come through e-mail as a result of your website? A site that is out of date and obviously not well maintained has the opposite effect of the impression you wanted to achieve when you created it.