

Unit Web Page Guidelines

Introduction

While these guidelines must be followed for your unit's web page to be linked from the Theodore Roosevelt Council web site, we would hope that all units follow these guidelines so as to ensure your site does not violate BSA policy nor put our youth members at risk.

Guidelines

- The unit must have direct control over the content of its official Web site.
- The content of the unit site must be appropriate to the Scouting movement.
- The unit site cannot contain links to any sites that contain material that is not appropriate to the Scouting movement.
- The unit site cannot contain any advertisements or commercial endorsements.
- The unit site cannot engage in the electronic sale of merchandise.
- The unit site cannot replicate any BSA publication currently for sale through the Supply Division.
- Unit sites must abide by all laws regarding copyrights, trademarks, and other intellectual property, and by those pertaining to the Internet.
- Unit sites must consider the safety and privacy of their members and participants by obtaining the necessary permissions to release information about or images of any individual.
- Unit sites should not allow "pop up" windows to open when their site is accessed as these pop up windows are generally a commercial advertisement, which is not allowed.

Materials from Other Web Sites

Reusing material found on the Internet is *especially* dangerous. It is all too common for amateur Web publishers to take copyrighted material and reproduce it on their own Web sites and say that it is "free" or "public domain." A written agreement is prudent, regardless of any explicit disclaimer on a Web site, before using any material downloaded from the Web. It is especially important to obtain permission in advance for materials used on the Internet. Unlike newsletters, which are distributed only to members, the Internet is available to the public, and it is inevitable that the owner will discover your use of their material on your Web site.

Third-Party Commercial Sites

While many commercial sites provide valuable information of a non-commercial nature, units should be careful when linking to these sites to avoid the impression that the unit is endorsing commercial products or services. Annotation often makes the difference, as in

this example: A link to xyzboots.com (the XYZ Boot Company's home page) appears to be a commercial endorsement. If you added the sentence "The XYZ Boot Company provides excellent advice for avoiding hiking injuries," and then linked directly to the page about avoiding hiking injuries, you clarify that the unit endorses the information the company is providing rather than the product it is selling.

Sites with "Free" Services

"Free" site components tend to be commercial. Certain sites offer services such as statistics, hit counters, guest books, animations, and the like to other Web sites. Like the bogus "awards," sites and sites offering "free" Web space or e-mail, the primary purpose of these giveaways is to advertise and plant links to the "donor" site on a wide range of Web sites in order to draw audience away from its "benefactors." Of course, there are plenty of legitimate reference Web sites as well. The best approach when you consider linking to a site is to "click through" the site while asking yourself, "Why are they offering this service? What do they want from me?" The answer should tell you whether you want to link to the site or not.

Content and Links to Avoid

Advertisements and Banners

Units are prohibited from endorsing commercial products or services in any medium, including the Internet. Banner advertisements for commercial products and services are thus inappropriate for Unit Web sites. (NOTE: any use of the Internet for fund-raising is subject to the same policies and procedures as other fund-raising activities.)

Another popular type of banner on the Internet provides site owners with free promotion on other Web sites in exchange for promoting other sites on theirs. Though not strictly a commercial endorsement, these banners remain unacceptable because they provide a highly visible link from the unit site to others, and the unit does not control either the graphic that is displayed or the site to which it links - one or both may be patently inappropriate.

Web Site Awards and Certification

There are a number of Web sites that offer "awards" or "certification" for other sites. These awards/certifications often require the honoree to display an URL or provide a click-through link that promotes the grantor's site. In many cases, such "honors" are ploys to draw traffic to other sections of the grantor's site, with a commercial or political motive. These should be avoided.

Control of Content

It seems to be common practice, and seems reasonable, for a unit's Web site to be governed by a committee of volunteer Scouters, and that this committee defines the goals of the Web site and determines the content and resources that will be published in pursuit of those goals. All materials destined for the unit Web site should be reviewed and approved by the top leader before they are published. The unit's Committee Chairman is ultimately responsible for all content on the unit's site.

Youth Participants and Parents

Contact information for youth participants should **never** be provided on the Internet. If the unit wishes to maintain contact information for youth participants, it is strongly recommended that these lists are kept entirely off-line.

Concerning e-mail addresses in particular, units should be aware that there are computer programs that crawl the Internet compiling lists of e-mail addresses that appear on Web pages. These lists are often sold to e-mail marketers who regularly send unsolicited advertisements, primarily for pornography and pyramid schemes. It is recommended that units that wish to provide e-mail contact information utilize techniques to prevent or minimize this unfortunate side effect (such as "escaping" characters or using CGI scripts that maintain the actual addresses in a safe location).

If a child's photograph is published on the Internet without his parents' permission this may be a violation of the law. Ownership of the image alone does not carry with it the right to publish it. Therefore, the unit should obtain written permission from the parent of any person who is the subject of a photograph before displaying their image or likeness on the Internet. When using photographs of members, especially youth, it is also important to consider their safety and privacy when choosing captions or ancillary text. A "first name only" policy for youth should be followed, the full names of adult leaders may be published with their permission.

Adult Volunteers

Contact information for adult volunteers should be treated with caution, as it is likely this information will be personal in nature (home addresses, residential telephone numbers, and private e-mail accounts). If this information is made available on the Web site, it would be preferable to provide it in a password-protected area of the Web site to which the general public has no access. Exceptions may be made for those volunteers whom it would be necessary for third parties to contact in order to obtain information about joining individual units.

It is strongly recommended that this information be published only after obtaining written authorization, and that these individuals should know that they can (and how to) request the prompt removal of their information at any time.

On-Line "Conversation"

Chat, guest books, and bulletin boards are three forms of interactivity that are generally inadvisable for unit Web sites because they require dedicated resources to monitor and control them sufficiently.

Chat Rooms. These are on-line forums in which users "converse" by typing messages to one another in real time. Recent advances have also made it possible to audio- or videoconference on the Internet. The first concern for units should be youth protection issues; also "chat" makes it impossible for units to control the text content of their sites. Because conversations take place in real time, messages are immediately posted to the site for others to view. Also, because chat participants are anonymous, often there is much less discretion exercised than in most forms of conversation.

We recommended that units avoid "live conversation" technology altogether. If it seems necessary for a special purpose, protective measures should be taken, such as a "chat" forum could be open only during certain time periods, access to the forum could be restricted so that only those who have been given a password may participate, an authorized moderator could stay online and eject participants who break the rules. Software countermeasures could censor speakers on-the-fly. Even with such measures, incidents can occur.

Guest Books. Guest book programs allow site visitors to leave a message, and are generally not a problem unless the log file (which contains all the comments visitors enter) is visible to the public. In that case, anyone can add text, graphics, and even programmatic components to the unit's Web pages that will immediately be viewable to other visitors. If a guest book is used, the log file should be kept in a location that is not visible to other visitors, but which must be downloaded using administrative software (Telnet/FTP) in order to be read. The unit should then review that material before posting it to a publicly accessible interface.

Bulletin Boards and News Groups. These are a form of chat in slow motion: Users post messages and others may read and respond at a later time. Bulletin boards have the same inherent risks as chat, but since conversations do not occur in real time, there is opportunity for better moderation. Users may be allowed to send their remarks to a private section of the Web site, but the remarks should not be posted to the site for others to read until the unit has approved the content for publication on its site.

Summary

Unit web pages can be a valuable promotional and informational tool for your unit. We need to be careful that our web pages do not violate the rules and regulations of the BSA, compromise the safety of our Scouts, nor provide content (intentionally or unintentionally via links) that does not present the BSA in a positive light.