

Guidelines for a Club Website

Introduction

District 70 recognises that not all clubs have the interest or means to create and maintain their own website. Nor is a club website necessary for public relations purposes, despite the internet being a valuable source of member enquiries. This is because the District 70 website, which ranks at the top of Search Engine enquiries for Toastmasters, acts as an overall marketing tool for Toastmasters in NSW and the ACT. The District website provides information on where and when **all our clubs** meet together with their phone and email contacts. Thus District provides all necessary information for an interested person to take their enquiry to any club. However a good professional club website has been proven to attract local people to clubs in their area.

To make full use of these potential leads, it is essential that each club should provide a high standard of customer service. Phone numbers should be of daytime contacts that are generally available and email enquiries should be responded to within 24 hours.

If a club does want to have its own website though, then this document can be used to understand what is involved and the options available.

Policies and Guidelines

Each Toastmasters Club is an independent legal entity with its own Constitution and Bylaws. As such, it is totally responsible for looking after the design, hosting and updating of its own website if it chooses to have one. The club has complete freedom of choice in relation to the appearance and style of their website. There is no need to gain permission or approval for a club website. The person who has ultimate responsibility for the club website is the Club President who is regarded as the site "Publisher" in the same manner as the President is regarded as the "Publisher" of a club newsletter.

Toastmasters International has some basic policies and guidelines on club websites, especially relating to the use of its logo and trademarks. These TI guidelines can be reviewed by [clicking this link](#).

District 70 realises that, of those clubs who are motivated to create a website, there will be differences in expertise and ability. While each club is autonomous, District 70 also recognises that if a club website does not meet certain minimum standards, then there is a good chance that a potential member may be turned away from our organisation, thus robbing other nearby clubs of an opportunity for membership growth.

District 70 has defined certain minimum standards for a club website to comply with if that website is to be included as a link from the District website and if the link is to be maintained.

All information on the website must be:

- **Correct:** In particular, meeting times and places, number of members etc. This is a legal requirement relating to misleading and deceptive conduct.
- **Current:** Out of date information leads a viewer to believe that the website (and by extension the club itself) is no longer functioning correctly.
- **Relevant:** Sites which feature advertisements, including pop-up windows, for unrelated products, services or websites risk bringing the organisation into disrepute. This is a requirement from Toastmasters International, so websites using free hosting services such as Geocities will not be linked.

In addition, **the following minimum information must be included:**

- Toastmasters logo
- Toastmasters International disclaimer must be on at least the Home page – preferably in the footer of every page
- Link to the District website prominently placed on the home page of the club website with text along the lines "Click here for details of other Toastmasters Clubs in NSW" (or Sydney or Canberra, etc as is most appropriate considering the location of the club). It is not sufficient to just put in a link to "District 70", since non-Toastmasters will not understand that reference.
- Location, time and date of meetings
- Cost of meetings for members and guests
- Contact name, email address and phone number.

Website Content

A club website needs to cater for the needs of both club members and non-members/guests. These are two quite independent requirements and should be treated differently. The primary objective should be to promote Toastmasters to the general public and the secondary objective to inform members.

For non-members/guests, the website should give information about what Toastmasters and the club can do for them such as:

The Toastmasters program will help you to:

- Develop better speaking and presentation skills
- Learn to think quickly and clearly on your feet
- Build strong leadership abilities
- Hone your listening skills

A website provides the opportunity to give details about

- the location of the club's meetings
- the meeting time and dates
- the cost of meetings and any meal arrangements
- the size of the club
- the attendance at meetings
- the club's culture and target market.

Note: As an example of culture and target market, there are some clubs in District 70 catering for business and professional people where it is normal for a people to wear formal business attire (jacket and tie/business suit). There are other clubs, often close by, where the target market is more casual and formal business attire can look out of place. Explaining the dress code helps visitors feel comfortable about attending your meeting.

Including photos of a meeting, members and the club officers is a way of indicating the membership mix and style of a club and its dress code. However all such photos should be done professionally and be a maximum of 72 pixels so as to download quickly. The wrong photos can do the opposite and turn people away e.g. if a young person is thinking of joining and the photos are only of the older generation or vice versa.

Remember, this is your opportunity to **sell the benefits of Toastmasters**, and your club in particular. **Focus on what Toastmasters can do for its' Members.**

For the club members, the club website should act as a focus of all club activity so that members feel the need to visit it regularly. In this regard it should include material such as:

- Future meeting schedules and programs – **This can be better achieved** by using [Easy Speak](#)
- Club resource material, such as educational material related to club practices Newsletters, including archiving these if desired
- A history of the club
- A Hall of Fame of previous club officers and winners of the various speech contests and Club awards – Excellent way to find who has the trophy required for the next contest
- Promotions/flyers for Club and Area functions – Division and District functions should not be on club sites
- Reports and photos of club events
- Biographies/photographs/items of interest of the Officers and other members.

Building a Website

The best way to build a website is with proper web authoring software. These programs have many templates and wizards built into them, enabling the novice user to produce good web pages with a little training and a good book. Websites built this way have a professional look, load quickly and are easy to update. Using MS Word, MS Publisher or other software not specifically designed for web page authoring produces mixed results and is not recommended. The best website building software as used by many clubs, including the award winning clubs mentioned on the District website, is [WordPress](#). This is free online content management software that is easy to setup and very easy for a novice to work with.

Domain Name

Irrespective of where you host your site, you should register a Domain Name for your Club. All Toastmasters Clubs should use a .org.au domain name such as [clubname.org.au](#). For example, Parramatta Toastmasters Club uses -

parramattatm.org.au. (If you choose the Foremost Communications host option below, we recommend that you let them do your domain name registration for you when they arrange the hosting.)

Notes:

1. Since Clubs are unincorporated societies without an ACN or registered business name, it is illegal to register any other type of name such as a .com.au or .net.au.
2. To register your domain name you must first have an ABN from the Australian Tax Office (ATO). For information about obtaining an ABN, see the Club Officer FAQ page on our District website (at www.d70toastmasters.org/clubofficerfaqs.htm). This page contains full information about Toastmasters clubs and their status in respect to GST, income tax and ABNs. It includes information on why a club should have an ABN and how to apply for one.

To register a .org.au domain name we recommend that you go to the [NetRegistry website](#) Their cost is around \$20 for 2 years and can be registered immediately online. Once registered, you “delegate” the name to point to the server where your website is hosted. Every website hosting server has a separate Primary Domain Name Server (DNS) and Secondary Domain Name Server. These servers translate your text based domain name – clubname.org.au, into a binary Internet Address that is used by a web browser such as Internet Explorer to find your website.

Website Hosting

There are several choices when it comes to finding low cost hosting for your club website. We recommend that you choose one of the following options

- **Special Offer for District 70 Clubs from Alan White at Foremost Communications Their annual fee to host a TM club website is \$66 (inc. GST), with no set up fee.**

The website hosting server provides 100Mb of space, unlimited POP email boxes, unlimited email aliases and email list manager. The **list manager** is very useful where one email address such as members@clubname.org.au will be automatically sent to all members. The Webmaster of the club updates the list.

To take advantage of this special offer, simply email Alan White at awhite@foremost.com.au.

- **Use a members free ISP space (on a website hosting server such as BigPond or Optusnet) and have NetRegistry direct traffic that is sent to your domain name across to the ISP space (Not recommended as this will vanish if the member changes ISP).**

NetRegistry a cost per annum for their service called TheDomainManager. You can use a club member's free web space (generally 5Mb) that is provided with their ISP account (*or for a small fee you can open a basic email account in the club's name, thus giving the club a permanent email address as well*) to host the site. If the member leaves the Club, the site can be moved to another member's free hosting space.

The DomainManager from NetRegistry is used to point www.clubname.org.au to the free web space at your member's or your club's ISP account. If you enable “cloaking” in DomainManager, the member's actual host address never appears, just the Club's registered URL. Email hosting is also included with TheDomainManager service at NetRegistry at no extra cost.

- **Use the services of FreeToastHost.org** (Not recommended for Australian clubs)

This is a free service to help Toastmasters clubs set up a basic website with little expertise. It is a cumbersome and slow site but has various member sections to help the functioning of the club such as an online directory, a club calendar and a discussion forum. It requires all members to commit to using the website as a basis of all inter-club communication, something that many clubs have not been able to achieve. The basic web pages that are created have a lot of generic material that should be replaced with material relevant to the club. **This especially applies to the home page.**

When created, the club is given a web address such as clubname.freetoasthost.com. This does not give the website an identity and in practice all that are created are a few pages amongst the thousands of others on the freetoasthost website. Hence the material will not usually be picked up by search engines and even if done so, will be indexed as being in the USA as part of freetoasthost. In other words, rather than having an independent website, all a club has created are some webpages on an American based website.

- **NOTE .** Functioning of the club such as tracking members educational progress including speech and CL progress, easy to generate club agendas, an online directory, a club calendar and a discussion forum **can be better achieved** by using [Easy Speak](#). Easy Speak is undoubtedly the most powerful tool available for club management on the planet.

Putting all this into action

If, after studying the above, you want to go ahead and have a club website, then you will need an action plan. Here is a 3 stage plan to follow in order to plan, produce and publish a club website.

1. Planning

- Study other club websites.
- Decide what you would like your club website to contain.
- Develop a structure for your website by deciding how your site will be organised into different pages. Decide with your other Club officers how the website is to function to involve your members. That is, work out an action plan to keep the site up to date with forward programs and newsletter information (You can either publish a normal newsletter on the site in addition to other forms of distribution or
- else devote a page to report on past meetings etc. and dispense with a normal newsletter if your club members all have web access.)
- Gather all the material you need and put it together in pages in a normal word processor. Review all this in the Club Executive. See if you have been able to collect all relevant material.
- Decide whether there is an ongoing commitment to maintain and promote the website before you invest money in the project.

2. Production

- Invest in web authoring software as nominated above. Preferably WordPress.
- Buy a book on website design. WordPress has a wealth of online help
- Convert all the material gathered in the earlier stage into web pages.

3. Publishing

Only if you have got this far, having a complete and reasonable looking site on a home computer, should you undertake the next stage

- Obtain an ABN if the Club does not already have one.
- Check at NetRegistry that the proposed domain name is available.
- Organise the hosting at Foremost Communication or at another web host. Upload all the site files, usually requiring use of an ftp (file transfer protocol) program but also possible with the in-built publishing facilities of programs such as FrontPage.
- Register the domain name through NetRegistry.
- Delegate the name to the hosting site or use NetRegistry's DomainManager as appropriate.

Making the Commitment

A club website is a reflection of a club to the general public. **If you want to use it to build your club's membership, something that good websites are doing across our District, then it needs to be professional in appearance and action.** Even if your club is not a high quality one, the website should aim to be quality one as a means of lifting the club's standard. This obviously involves **an initial and ongoing commitment of time and money.**

This means that you have to decide what it is that you really want and decide whether you are prepared to pay the price. To quote PR guru Michael Levine in the June 2003 Toastmaster magazine,

"Most people are not willing to pay the price, and the people who are even worse are the ones who deny that you have to pay the price. We're looking at the most immature generation in the history of humanity in which people believe you can get something for nothing, It's totally depressing but true."

While these are general remarks, they particularly apply to the world wide web. **Do not get involved with freebies. Either do it properly or not at all.** We can testify though that the rewards for a club are great if you go through with the project. We invite you to browse our club websites before proceeding further.

Gary Wilson
[Parramatta Club](#) webmaster and [Western Gourmet Club](#) webmaster

David Cassey
[Professional Speakers Club](#) webmaster

Alan White
[Hills District](#) Club webmaster
District 70 webmaster

Additional information in this document provided by the District 70 Public Relations Committee.