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Club and Region Website Guidelines

From a business standpoint, it has become imperative for organizations have websites. People visit organizational websites because they are interested in learning more. It has become second nature that when a person comes across a company she's never heard of and wants more information, she looks up its webpage on the Internet. A website is often a person's first point of entry into an organization. In today's every-changing technology world, not only are they a source of information for the visitor, but also a tool for an organization to generate publicity.

Organizations want people to come back to their sites time and time again. So how can an organization guarantee that it will get repeat visitors? It may be tough to guarantee, but organizations can certainly try by making their sites as interesting and fresh as possible.

These guidelines provide clubs and regions with ideas on how to create an engaging website that fosters the Soroptimist brand and promotes the mission by employing a professional look and tone.

Getting Started

Before tackling website development, clubs and regions should determine the following:

- Who will direct the overall content and look of the site
- Who will design/implement the site
- Who will be responsible for changes and updates to the site

Most likely, the public relations chair will handle one or all of these tasks because the site is a promotional tool that shares information and fosters an image for the club or region. If a club or region has a public relations committee, perhaps it can divide the responsibilities and have everyone report to a club "webmaster" (a similar job to that of the club/region newsletter editor).

If no one in the club or region has web design expertise, hire a local web company to design the site and implement changes and updates. Perhaps a company or public relations/advertising agency would be willing to offer this service for free. Another alternative may be contacting the graphic arts, communications, and/or web development department at a nearby college for assistance.

Before starting, it is also important to find a place to "house" the site. Soroptimists can take advantage of community websites that often list local volunteer organizations and provide them with free websites. Or, clubs and regions can contract with an Internet service provider (ISP) to "host" the website.

Once site responsibilities are covered, the club/region should have a plan for carrying out the development of this powerful communications tool. A simple written plan should include the site's

objective and target audiences, as well as an explanation and overview of why the site is needed. Keep in mind that club and region sites should cultivate an identity in line with Soroptimist International of the Americas—in terms of content and look—to identify the site as being part of a larger organization. All club and region sites must adhere to Soroptimist International of the Americas’ bylaws and procedures, which address such issues as use of logo, cross-solicitation, position statements, etc.

Domain Name

Clubs/regions must register a domain name with a name registration site found on the Internet. Many of these sites exist and clubs/regions should shop around for the best price.

- When registering a name, pick one that is relevant to the club or region.
- Many clubs and regions will use their name and/or initials in front of the Soroptimist name, such as <www.atlantasoroptimist.org>. This works much better than an obscure name that may be confusing or misleading.
- Note that domain names have no spaces between words. It is preferable that names do not contain dashes or underscores.
- Clubs and regions should try to use a domain name that ends in an .org, which is available for charitable organizations.

Homepage

The homepage is the point of entry into the website, and gives a first impression of the organization. It is the first page a visitor sees when she visits a site. It is probably the most important page of the site (and also gets the most hits). A visitor can tell from this page, within seconds, whether the site offers useful information, whether the organization is organized, and whether the site is worth a return visit. The homepage communicates a lot to the visitor. As the virtual “face” of Soroptimist, the homepage should:

- Contain the Soroptimist logo—prominently placed at the top of the page, the tagline and mission statement. (“Soroptimist” is a hard name to explain. It’s important that the organizational mission, as well as the tagline, *Best for Women*, is clearly stated on the homepage. After all, the purpose of the site is to share who Soroptimist is with the world.)
- Be appealing and inviting
- Be visually easy to understand
- Contain a navigation menu that lists the sections found throughout the site.

Ideally, the homepage should also display photos of club and/or region projects that show members in action.

Please note: The homepage should not include the emblem. For the purposes of branding and publicizing Soroptimist International of the Americas and its projects—such as the Soroptimist Women’s Opportunity Awards program—the Soroptimist logo must be prominent.

Content and Navigation

Club and region websites should be designed to communicate about and market the club/region and the Soroptimist organization to the public at large. Therefore, place information on the site with the goal of informing, educating and persuading. Because the website serves an “internal” audience of club and

region members, and an “external” audience of prospective members and others, the content should appeal to both types of audiences. This is difficult to accomplish since the external audience may know very little about the club or region. Therefore, it’s best to include interesting and informative content that fosters an understanding of the organization for an external audience:

- Organize information into different sections that can be accessed through the homepage with a navigation bar or menu.
- Sections on programs, membership and events should constitute the bulk of the site because this information serves all site visitors. This information should be accurate and consistent with that of the federation.
- Although the federation website should be used as a guide for content and wording, club and region sites should not attempt to replicate the federation site. Visitors to club and region sites are probably mostly interested in local projects, news and activities. Those seeking more in-depth information about Soroptimist International of the Americas and Soroptimist International should be directed (via links) to those websites.
- Information on meetings, committees and other details will probably only interest members, so place these in a “For Members” section if possible.
- Always include a “Contact Us” or “Email” section that provides site visitors with a way to get in touch with the club/region. In addition, a special feedback area is a good way to prompt people to share their comments and suggestions about the site.
- Make sure the navigation of the site and its various sections is easy. People don’t like to hunt for information, so avoid hiding items deep within subsections of the main sections.
- Always provide a “home” button that allows visitors to get back to the homepage.

Writing

Writing for the web should be short and to the point. Just keep in mind that it is more difficult for readers to read on a screen. People go to websites because they want information and they want it fast. The content must be easy to scan so visitors can quickly find what they're looking for. In addition to following the rules above, use bullets, subheads and menus to make the website reader-friendly. Use typographical elements, like larger type, bold face and italics to make certain elements stand out.

When building a club/region website remember that not everyone visiting the site will understand what Soroptimist stands for or what a federation is. It is best to avoid using acronyms or Soroptimist language that only members will understand. Write as if visitors have no idea what Soroptimist is or what it does.

Design

The design of the website is just as important as its content. The overall look speaks volumes about the professionalism of the club/region and its commitment to volunteer service. The colors, graphics, photos, fonts and other elements should be selected carefully to ensure a clean and readable presentation. Interestingly, most design principles used for printed materials do not apply to web pages because the eye views computer monitors and paper differently:

- Avoid a black background or a light one with a pattern. These backgrounds make reading text and printing pages from the site difficult. Opt for a white background or a solid, light-colored one.

- The official Soroptimist blue (Pantone 659) used for print materials can be created for the site by converting it to RGB (Red–Green–Blue) mode. This color should be used with the “S” logo and other design elements.
- Use a sans serif font such as **Arial**, **Tahoma** or **Verdana** (specifically created for the web) because it is easier to read on the screen. Keep in mind that an individual’s computer must have the designated font in order to read the site. Therefore, stick with these three fonts or select ones that come with most computers. Another problem is that some people configure their browsers to override the site’s fonts with ones they selected. One way to gain control is by creating words with a certain font, then saving this as a graphic. This is particularly useful for section headings and subheads in the text.
- Organize text in small paragraphs or as bullets. Studies show that people read 25 percent slower on the web than they do print. Because people navigate through websites so quickly, they comprehend less, so it’s best to display information in small, digestible portions. Also, avoid displaying text in ALL CAPS because it’s difficult to read and will be perceived as shouting to the reader.
- Photos and graphics should be placed on the site in JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) or GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) file formats, which enable people to view high–quality images at minimal download time. A JPEG format works best with photographs or scanned images. A GIF format works best with clipart. A graphic or photo only needs to be 72 ppi (pixels per inch). Try to keep the file size of graphics or photos between 20 and 30K (kilobytes).
- Keep in mind that since everything on a computer screen is made up of square pixels, rounded edges will appear slightly jagged.
- Use only the special effects that enhance communication on the site. Flashing and flip–flopping graphics, sound and video capabilities, and other high–tech features can either appear tacky or creative, depending on their context and use.

Interactivity

For most organizations, interactivity is a major advantage of websites and key to bringing people back to the site. And, while clubs/region may not be able to commit a lot of dollars to fancy, interactive sites, there are several ways of creating a two-way communication link via the site:

- Add a blog where visitors can post thoughts and ideas on various topics.
- Set up a message board or chat room in the members area, where other club/regions and members can exchange ideas.
- Add interactive forms that enable visitors to submit a request for more information, or for members to sign up for a committee or submit a change to their address and/or phone number (best suited to a members-only section).

Updating

While some general information on a website may stay the same, clubs/regions should make regular updates to encourage members and other visitors to return to the site. Site updates can include important dates, event announcements, upcoming meeting information, details during and upon completion of club/region projects, fundraising progress, meeting or conference minutes, news from Soroptimist International of the Americas, short articles from members, etc. Be sure to include a date on the homepage that notes the site’s last update.

Linking

A popular feature of most websites is the ability to connect visitors to other websites to provide more information or access to an affiliated organization:

- Although it may be tempting to form a business relationship with corporations whereby they “advertise” on a club or region’s site and provide a percentage of revenue for all purchases made through that link, clubs and regions should refrain from entering into such relationships. SIA and its U.S. clubs and regions are considered 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organizations and as such, may be subject to unrelated business income tax (UBIT) for these types of arrangements. It is very important that headquarters be contacted before clubs or regions enter into any business arrangements to make certain that the reporting and expense ramifications of accepting such revenue is understood. At a minimum, such portals might appear to be an endorsement by Soroptimist of the product or service, which may not be desirable.
- All Soroptimist clubs should provide a link to their region site and that of the federation at <Soroptimist.org>. All region sites should provide a link to the federation.
- All Soroptimist club and regions should also link to the Live Your Dream website at <LiveYourDreamCampaign.org>.
- It is proper “netiquette” to request permission of another organization before linking to it.
- Clubs/regions may choose to link with the websites of community partners. However, when providing links, use caution. Links give the perception that Soroptimist endorses the other entity’s site. To protect from possible liabilities in associating with other sites, include the following disclaimer:

This website includes links providing direct access to other Internet sites. However, Soroptimist takes no responsibility for the content or information contained on other sites, nor does it imply endorsement or approval of products or information offered.

Protecting Information

Since websites are accessible by anyone, certain information should be left off to protect the club/region and organization as a whole:

- Members’ personal information—such as their home and business phone numbers, social security numbers and birth dates—should never go on a site for security reasons.
- While it may seem appropriate to list club/region members’ professions, places of business and email addresses to illustrate Soroptimist’s make-up of professional women, a club/region should get each member’s permission before adding this type of information—or list it in a secure password protected members-only section.
- Be sure to obtain written permission from any non-Soroptimists such as SoroptimistWomen’s Opportunity or Making a Difference for Women award recipients, before placing their name, town, place of business or photograph on the Internet. Get written permission from the parent or guardian of a Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award honoree before adding her information or photo. *(Media consent forms are available in the public awareness section of the members area of <Soroptimist.org>.)*
- The information on the site needs copyright protection. It is not necessary to actually register a copyright. It suffices to note the creation date next to the © symbol or the word “copyright”

somewhere on the homepage. The following statement should also be used for additional protection:

All materials posted on this site are subject to copyrights owned by Soroptimist International of _____ and/or other individuals or entities. Any reproduction or retransmission of all or part of any document found on this site is expressly prohibited, unless Soroptimist International of _____ or the copyright owner of the material has granted its prior written consent. Copyright 2008 – Soroptimist International of _____.

Publicizing the Site

Once the club website is complete, it's important to publicize the site address on all materials. Also, get members excited about contributing to or helping to maintain the site. It's a mighty medium that's here to stay, so jump on the *webwagon*!

Quick Check List

If a club or region already has a website, answer the following questions to make sure the website follows the guidelines:

- Is the Soroptimist logo and tagline visible from every page?
- Does the site include the Soroptimist mission statement?
- Does it encompass the Soroptimist brand with colors, look and feel?
- Are Soroptimist programs described?
- Does the site feature photographs of members doing women- and girl-focused projects?
- Does the navigation bar appear on all pages?
- Does it have a members-only section where personal and secure information is kept?
- Does the site link to the Soroptimist <Soroptimist.org> and Live Your Dream campaign <LiveYourDreamCampaign.org> sites?
- Does the club website link to the region website?
- Is the content interesting and up-to-date?
- Is the club or region contact information easy to locate?
- Has someone been appointed to regularly update the site?
- Is the site well organized and easy to read?

For More Information

Please direct website questions to the communications department at Soroptimist headquarters:

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