



## Club and Region Website Development Guidelines

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Before tackling website development, a club/region should ascertain who will direct the overall content and look of the site, who will design/implement the site, and 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—like a news release, flier or brochure—that shares information and fosters an image for the club/region. If a club/region has a public relations committee, perhaps the responsibilities can be divided and everyone can report to a club “webmaster” (a similar job to the club/region newsletter editor).

If no one in the club/region has web design expertise, a local web company should be hired 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 or communications department at a nearby college for assistance.

Before starting, another important consideration is finding a place to “house” the site. Soroptimists can take advantage of community websites that often list local service organizations and provide them with free websites. Or, clubs/regions can contract with an Internet service provider (ISP) or other company to “host” the website.

Once site responsibilities are covered, the club/region should have a plan for carrying out the development of this powerful communication medium. A simple written plan should include the site’s objective and target audiences, as well as an explanation/overview of why the site is needed. Keep in mind that club/region sites should cultivate an identity in line with Soroptimist in terms of content and look, to identify the site as being part of a larger organization. All club/region sites must adhere to Soroptimist’s bylaws and procedures, which address such issues as cross-solicitation, position statements, etc.

### **Domain name**

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

- When registering a name, pick one that relevant to the club/region.
- Many clubs/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/regions should try to use a .org suffix available for charitable organizations.

## The homepage

The homepage is the first page that pops up when a visitor types in the domain name on a browser, such as Netscape or Explorer. The homepage gives a first impression and a “face” to the club/region, revealing its personality and professionalism. This part of the site communicates a lot to the visitor. The visitor will be able to see from the homepage, within just seconds, whether the site offers much information, whether the site—and club/region—are organized, and whether the visitor should come to the site again.

- The homepage must be appealing, inviting and visually easy to comprehend.
- Include the new Soroptimist “S” logo, which includes the organization’s tagline, “Best for Women”; a brief description about the organization and its mission (Soroptimist is an international volunteer service organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.); a navigation menu listing sections found throughout the site; and contact information.
- Ideally, the homepage should display club/region project photos that show members in action.

## Content and navigation

Club/region websites should be designed to communicate about and market the club/region and the Soroptimist organization to the public at large. Therefore, information should be placed on the site with the goal of informing, educating and persuading. Because the website serves an “internal” audience of club/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/region. Therefore, it’s best to include interesting and informative content that fosters an understanding of the organization.

- Organize information into different sections, which can be accessed on 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, the club/region site should not attempt to replicate the federation site. Visitors to club/region sites are probably mostly interested in club/region 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 “E-mail” section that provides site visitors 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

It is important to 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 site visitors have no idea what Soroptimist is or what it does. Do not include a lot of facts and figures that will be little interest or use to a casual visitor.

## 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 printed materials can be created for the site by converting it to RGB (Red-Green-Blue) mode. This color should be used with the new “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 people’s 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 goodies 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.

- Clubs/regions can set up message boards or chat rooms that foster the exchange of ideas.
- The site can contain forms that allow visitors to submit a request for more information, or encourage 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 come back 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 <[www.soroptimist.org](http://www.soroptimist.org)>. All region sites should provide a link to the federation.
- 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.*

- It is proper “netiquette” to request permission of another organization before linking to it.

## 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 not go onto a site for security reasons.
- While it may seem appropriate to list club/region members’ professions, places of business and e-mail 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 Women’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 Violet Richardson Award honoree before adding her information or photo.

- 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 2004 – 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*!