

Guidelines for Club Web Sites



INTRODUCTION

There are now hundreds of swimming clubs in Britain with web sites. If your club isn't one of them it's certainly worth considering the merits of setting one up. An effective website can improve your club's communications and act as a shop window to non-members. It's also a way of involving more than just the committee in your communications.

These guidelines were written with the experience of having set up club web sites as well as working on the ASA's website. It will hopefully give clubs an insight into how to go about setting up a website and how to effectively maintain it to keep people coming back to look at it time and time again. Whether you want to set a site up from scratch or you already have a site and want some advice on managing it, it is hoped that these guidelines will be useful.

There are several different software packages mentioned within this guide but it should be kept in mind that in addition to these there are several other good products on the market that will do the job for you, inclusion in this guide shouldn't be considered as an endorsement of any of them in particular.

We have divided these guidelines into easily digestible sections to help you:

- Where to Start
- Site Map
- Home Page
- News
- Club Info
- Fixtures
- Results
- Members
- Links
- Web Site Policy
- Web Name and Space
- Software
- Site visitors
- How Long Will it Take?
- Quick Dos and Don'ts
- Literature

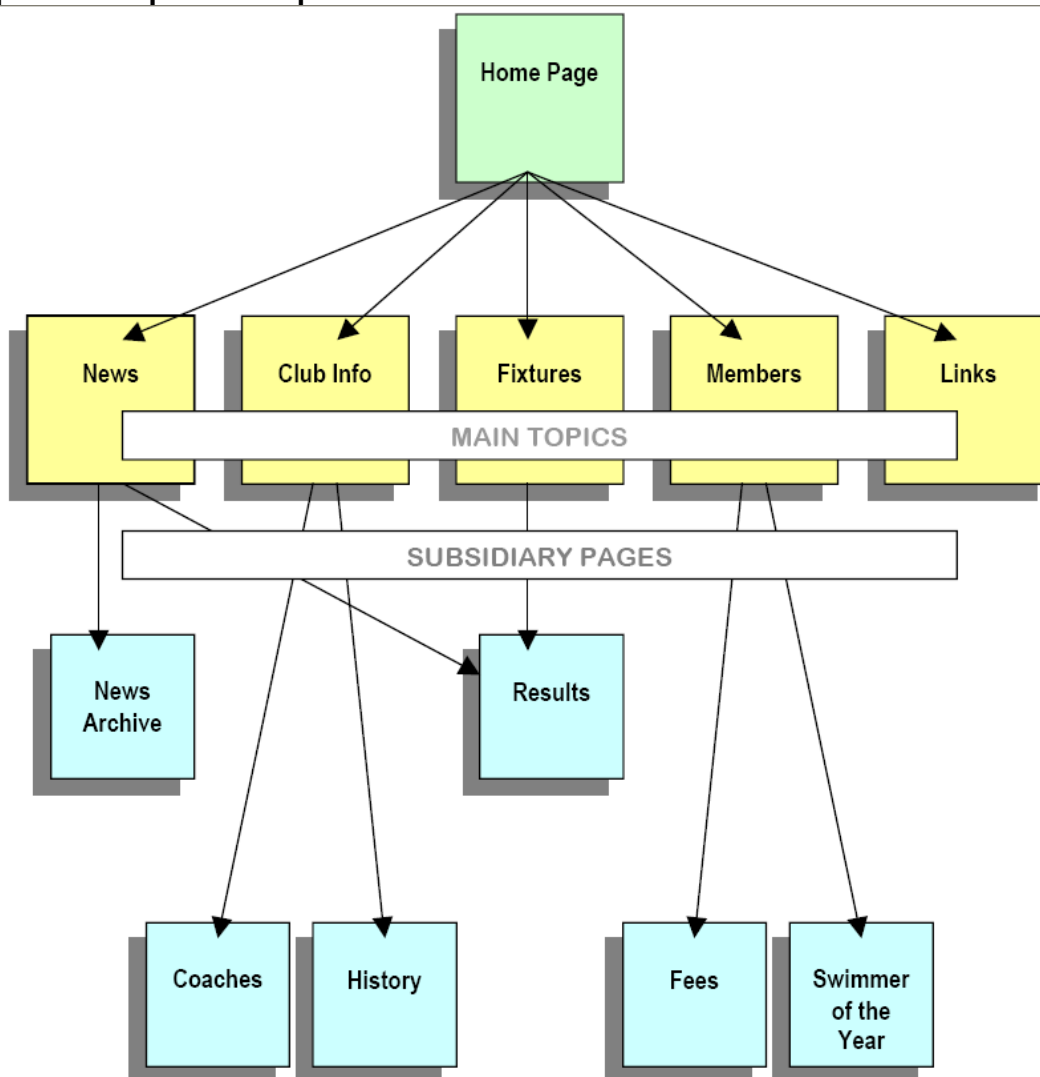


WHERE TO START

Before you start it's a good idea to have in mind why you want to set up a club web site and who the target audience is. Have a brainstorming session and write down what you want to tell people about your club. The majority of users will probably be club members. While the general swimming community might surf around your site to see what it's like and what you're up to, the people that will hopefully come back time and time again will be club members. You should write your site plan with this in mind.

Once you have a list of things you want to include on the site, group them together into similar topics and try to come up with a storyboard or site map. The sample map on the next page shows how different topics can be arranged into a hierarchical map with the most important pages at the top of the map. This gives you a concept to work from and can be taken to the next committee meeting for discussion and approval.

Sample Site Map for a simple club web site:





Once the site map has been created the homepage can be designed with links to the main topics fitted in.



TIP Have a link back to the Home Page on every page, it will prevent users from getting lost. (The other method is to use frames to split up the screen and leave the navigation buttons on screen at all times. However, this can make your web site more complicated to set up.)

HOME PAGE

The Homepage should grab the attention of the user and most importantly it should download quickly. If the user has to wait around to download a huge graphic they will probably get bored and go somewhere else.

What to Include on your Home Page

- Full club name, including 'Swimming Club'
- Location ie. Walford, London, England
- Links to main pages ie. News, Links, Fixtures, Results etc
- Club logo or a picture related to swimming/polo etc – but not too large
- What's new? – A list of new modifications and additions to the site will encourage frequent users to keep coming back.



TIP Re-use images, it speeds up the time it takes to load a page. Once an image is downloaded it is stored in the computer's cache and won't need to be fetched from a faraway server. It also creates consistency throughout the site.

When selecting a colour scheme and fonts for the home page remember that these will be used throughout the rest of the site.



TIP Use 'browser-safe' colours – if you mix your own colours they may not be visible by both Windows and Macintosh browsers.

TIP By using a clear font, such as Arial (used in this document). You will make your site more accessible to the partially sighted. Blind people are also able to use the internet via a software package that will filter out graphics and convert text to speech. By having a fairly simple page layout you will make your site friendlier to the visually impaired.

The home page could open straight into the main news stories to draw people into your site.

Alternatively, the News page could be separate. If it's not going to be possible to update the news very regularly it's probably a good idea not to put it on the home page. Users may be discouraged from exploring the rest of the site if the news on the front page is out of date, they might assume that the rest of the site isn't being updated regularly.



NEWS

What's happening in the club?

Notice Board. This could include team selections, reminders about paying subscriptions, notice of meetings etc.

CLUB INFO

Where does the club train? What meets does it compete in? How many members does it have? When was it established? Etc.

This is a page that might well attract new members. Parents looking for a club for their young children might want to find out about your club. They'll want to know how much it costs, the regularity of the training sessions, whether they have to be a certain standard to join or whether the club teaches beginners. They may also want to know at what age their children can join, and whether they will have to swim galas... and so on.

If the club secretary is happy to have an e-mail address on this page it might be a good place to put their contact details. Please consult them first and avoid putting up physical addresses and phone numbers.

This is also an area that young members might want to consult for school projects, so it's a nice idea to include some history of the club. You could also include past club captains or swimmers of the year as a role of honour. You could allow people to vote for captains or swimmers of the year online.

SUMMARY - Suggestions for the Club Info Area

General:

- Objectives and scope of the club
- Membership fees
- Training venues and times
- Information for new members
- Code of conduct
- Committee information
- Affiliation
- Club kit details

Coach information:

- Who are the coaches?
- What qualifications do the coaches have?
- Some tips from the coach

History:

- The year the club was founded
- Major achievements by the club
- Past captains/champions/swimmers of the year
- Past presidents

FIXTURES

Include all the dates of league meets as well as suggested open meets. You could also include qualifying times. Rather than duplicate district or national qualifying times that are already on another site, you can link to the specific page of your region or the ASA site. An events calendar is available at www.swimming.org and you can link straight to this



page from your site. The advantage of this is that you won't be responsible for keeping it up to date yourself.



TIP When adding links to external sites it's a good idea to open it in a new browser window. This means that, for example, the site would open on top of your site and the user can go off and look at that site but when they have seen enough information they can close the window down and your site will still be underneath. If you have too many links out of your site users might get lost and may not find their way back. Opening the linked site in a new window is a good way to keep your user. It's also a good idea to tell the user where you are taking them. See the example below.

If your club holds an open meet, you can put all the details on your site. By putting the entry form on the site you will not only cut postage and printing costs but you may attract competitors who might not normally have entered your meet. It's usually a safe bet to put your form online in Word format but individual printer settings may affect the layout of the form. Try to keep your form simple. Beware that documents saved in more recent Word formats may not open correctly where the user has an older version of Word installed. It might be prudent to save documents in Word compatible format instead.

Many sites, including the ASA site, use Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) for such things as large documents. Acrobat software will convert your document from Word (or whatever package you used to design it in) and conserve its original appearance. Acrobat (.pdf) files are compressed so will have the added advantage that they will download faster and take up less space on your server. Users will need an Adobe Acrobat Reader to view the pages, but this is free software. For more information see <http://www.adobe.com>.

RESULTS

You could either have a separate results page or link it from the fixture/calendar page as in the sample site map. This could simply be results from league matches or you could include all the meets that your swimmers go to. It might also be a series of links to other sites that offer results. For example, if your club sends swimmers to an open meet at a neighbouring club they might put all the meet results up on their site after the meet. You could link to their page and do a summary on your site of how your swimmers did. Similarly, you might want to put the results of your open meet or club meet on your site.

The ASA owns the intellectual property to national level results and clubs are asked not to duplicate such results. Whenever possible the ASA runs a live results service from National meets and clubs are encouraged to link to these results from their own sites.

The ASA site currently has British Rankings available. This is another area where clubs are asked to link to the relevant page rather than copy the rankings onto their own site. However, it's a nice idea for clubs to say on their sites where their own members are ranked.

MEMBERS

In this area you could include membership information such as how many members you have and who some of the stars are. Some clubs list the names of all their members and offer profiles and photographs of selected swimmers. This is an area to be very cautious because you don't want to expose young members to any unwanted attention. However,



when managed properly this area of the site could prove to be popular with swimmers logging on to see their name on the internet.

The following guidelines were prepared by the ASA Child Protection Working Party:

Following some queries regarding what is acceptable for clubs to include on their websites, the Working Party are endeavouring to obtain advice from a number of different sources. In the meantime the general guidelines are:

- Not to include photographs that show full length images of children in swim suits.
- Better to ensure that photographs are, where possible, group shots. They should be head and shoulder shots, fully-clothed shots, or action shots in the water.
- Information on sites is inevitably going to be used to include names in results and selection lists. However, profiles should only be included with the permission of the person concerned and for those people under 18 with the permission of their parents. The information in the profiles should be carefully selected, such as PB's, best events, medals won, and favourite TV programmes. They should not reference where people live or go to school, and for very young swimmers photos are best avoided.
- Websites should not include any information which allows swimmers to be contacted either through the internet or by reference to individual phone numbers and addresses.
- The opportunities for access to chat-lines should be thought through carefully and will need to be monitored in some way.
- Any contact details for club officers should only be included with their permission.

The internet is a new and rapidly growing medium which will have lots of advantages for communicating information and ideas, but it is also proving to be a difficult area to police in relation to inappropriate access to the young and vulnerable.

LINKS

In this area you can provide all the web links that you think your users might find useful or interesting. These can range from local clubs to international governing bodies, but you don't have to restrict yourself to swimming sites. Include links to your local football team or city information site. You can also invite visiting users to submit the address of their site for consideration on your site. If you add their site why not write back to them to let them know and ask them to add a reciprocal link, this is a good way of promoting your site.

To get link suggestions from other clubs you could design a feedback form. If you want specific information about the user and the site they are suggesting, feedback forms are very useful. However, if you simply want them to send an address, you can get them to e-mail you by using the following code:

```
<a href="mailto:you@yourswimclub.co.uk?subject=Please add my club link">Suggest A New Club Site</a>
```

By adding the subject line you will be able to identify what the e-mail is about before you open it, but this isn't essential! The simplified version would look like this:

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<a href="mailto:you@yourswimclub.co.uk">Suggest A New Club Site</a>
```

It's good practice to check all your links regularly as addresses change and sites close down. If you don't want to be responsible for checking all your links you could link to the Clubs section of the ASA web site.



WEBSITE POLICY

As a general rule, including such things as Chat Rooms and Message Boards where users can post messages directly to the site need to be carefully considered. You need to consider whether you can moderate all of the comments posted. If you can't then there are plenty of chat rooms available on the internet and people can also comment on all of the stories on the ASA and British Swimming websites.

Messages in chat rooms that are of a defamatory nature may give rise to legal liability on the club. This is an evolving area of the law. One internet service provider has already been found liable for failing to adequately police a chat room area. The easiest way around this is to plan an information based web site. You might make it lively and include such things as quizzes and votes to make it interactive, but the focus should be on information sharing.

You should also consider who is authoring the site. It will be using the club name and possibly also the logo so the committee or someone appointed within the committee should know what's on it and have a say in its content. You should also consider whether the author has enough time to keep the site up to date and what would happen to the site if they were to decide not to continue with it.

While helping and encouraging keen web developers within the club, the club should have ultimate ownership of the site. In practice this is the best way to ensure the site is kept up to date. The efforts of your web author may go to waste if there is no channel of communication open with the committee because new information won't be getting to them.

WEB SPACE AND NAME

If you are already using e-mail the chances are that your e-mail provider (Internet Service Provider, ISP) has already made some web space available to you. Most will offer between 10 and 20Mb for free, this is more than enough space for the average club web site.

A good starting point would be to look at your ISP's web site and see what they say about web space. If you're unsure you should have a telephone support number to give them a call. If they don't offer you any web space you might consider changing your provider. It is possible to buy space at a fairly low premium but this is really aimed at larger users.

Once you have some space and have started building your site you may decide you want to buy a web name to go with it. If you use your ISP web space the address you will need to type in to get to your web space will look something like this:

<http://www.yourisp.co.uk/yourname~index.html> - hardly memorable! Much better to actually use your club's name in the address, for example:<http://www.yourclub.org.uk>

It's well worth buying an internet magazine to look at the adverts. This should give you a good idea of prices and where to look for web names and space. Most magazines also come with a free CD that's got lots of sample software that you might find useful in setting your web site.



SOFTWARE

WYSIWYG Editors

A lot of the donkey-work can be taken out of web authoring by using software such as Microsoft FrontPage or Dreamweaver. These and similar packages allow the user to edit text on screen, much as with any word processing software. Unlike using notepad to create web pages, FrontPage or Dreamweaver are WYSIWYG environments, in which “what you see is what you get.” In addition to these two packages there are several good products on the market.

Microsoft FrontPage 2000 is a popular web authoring tool because it uses much of the same functionality as Microsoft Office. Microsoft also made FrontPage Express available free with the intention that interested users would then want to upgrade to the full software version. If you’ve got at least Internet Explorer 5 installed on your computer, the chances are that you’ve probably got FrontPage Express along with it. It’s worth having a play around with it to learn a few basics. The advantages of WYSIWYG editors becomes very obvious when you don’t have to write all the code that is needed to get a simple sentence to appear on the screen. With such editors you are assured that the HTML tags that are in the page are correct, with no missing angle brackets, misspellings, etc.



TIP It’s always worth looking on the internet for trial versions of software. There are lots of different packages around.

Graphics

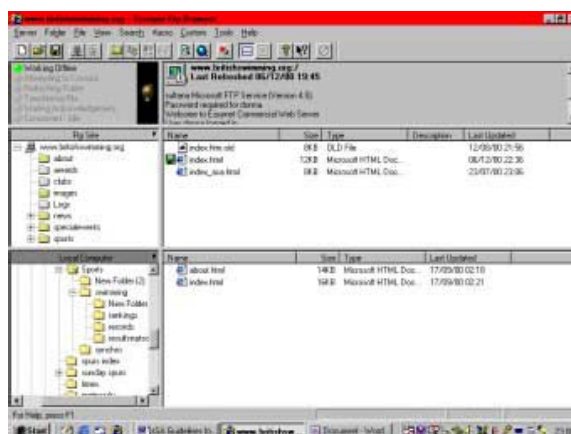
You may also want to consider getting a decent photo editor. Some packages could set you back nearly £500 but unless you’re really into graphic design you’ll probably never use them to their full capacity and it might be worth looking at a limited edition that will be a lot cheaper. If you buy a decent scanner you’ll get free software with it that is usually good enough to edit photos and design simple graphics. The down side with free software is that you don’t usually get an instruction book!

It might also be worth investing in a package that will optimise your graphics to reduce the file size. There are lots of packages that will do this for you.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP)

Unless you are very confident with DOS or Unix, you will need a graphical file transfer programme to send, or ‘upload’, files from your local computer to your web server. If you’re used to using Windows Explorer then you’ll have no problems using an FTP programme. Windows based software is available free on the internet and there is a facility within Dreamweaver to send files to your internet server.

The screen shot below shows the Terrapin FTP Browser in action. In this window the bottom half of the screen shows files on your local computer while the top is the server computer. Files can simply be dragged around and dropped to move them. The software will recognise if you have a newer version of a file on your computer than is on the server so you’ll know which files you need to update. It will even check all your links for you.



Screen Shot of Terrapin FTB Browser in action

This software can be downloaded from <http://www.tpin.com>

However, there are a host of similar products available, some of which are free. Some web editors also include a file transfer module. Try doing a search on file transfer protocol on any internet search engine or looking in an internet magazine. It is also possible to use Microsoft's Web Publishing Wizard to upload documents to your server.

Site visitors

After you have completed your site and sent the link address to the ASA for inclusion on the club links page (for free), you should consider posting the address to all the major search engines. If you go to sites such as Google, Yahoo, Excite, Lycos, or Alta Vista, you will be able to fill out a form and add your link. It's also worth posting it to as many swimming related sites as you have got time to post it to. Put the address on your club notice board and use it on club stationary. After all your hard work you want people to come to the site!

Search engines will find your site in a number of different ways but there's a chance it might not get picked up unless you post it to them via their web sites. Some do searches based on the content of your front page, some will search pages further into the site and, some will search your page titles. However, most are looking for the META tags in the head of your page.

<META> Tags are used within the <HEAD> of the a page to embed information on what the page is about. Such information can be used by search engines to identify the site.

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
  <TITLE>My Swimming Club</TITLE>
  <META NAME="description" CONTENT="The Official web site of my
  Swimming club">
  <META NAME="keywords" CONTENT=" Swimming, Swim, Britain,
  British, Walford, London, Club">
  <META NAME="resource-type" CONTENT="document">
  <META NAME="distribution" CONTENT="global">
</HEAD>
```

This is all to help increase the number of people visiting your site, and these are usually measured as unique visitors, visits or hits. 'Unique visitors' is the number of individual



computer addresses visiting your site, while 'visits' is the number of times the same or different computer has visited your site in a given time. 'Hits' measures all the individual files downloaded from your website. So, if you have two pictures and some text on your home page and one person brings this up on their computer at work or at home, you will register three hits: two picture files and a text file.

There is plenty of free software on the internet to count the number of visitors and hits you get. Try <http://iclicks.mycomputer.com> or <http://www.fastcounter.com>. You can get detailed reports about not only the number of hits you are getting, but how long people are spending on your site (this is often referred to as 'site stickiness'), how they got there and the most popular pages. You can even find out what resolution they set the monitors to and whether they are using Internet Explorer or Firefox.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Setting up the site plan and collecting all the information to go on the pages can take some time. The initial design and set up of the site will also be time consuming and won't happen overnight. It's important to get the design and structure right from the start. If you manage this, editing the site in the future will be a relatively quick and easy job. If your web author is working full time and then working on the web site in their spare time it will probably take at least a month or longer to get the site up and running. However, that is the most time consuming part of setting up a club web site. Updating it may only take a few minutes each week if all information is sent to the web author in electronic format.

QUICK DOs AND DON'Ts

DO

- Have a logical site plan and obvious links
- Use graphics to brighten up your pages
- Use your club logo or design a mascot
- Use a good size, clear font
- Update your site regularly
- Put your e-mail address on the site and invite comments
- Make your site interactive

DON'T

- Underline text that isn't a hyperlink
- Have a complicated background that detracts from the text
- Set your font size too small
- Have too many large photographs on the site
- Have too many animated graphics
- Use blocks of red or blue text
- Put signs all over your site saying 'under construction'
- Use too many frames

LITERATURE

There are lots of books about HTML and web authoring available. Have a browse around your local bookshop and be sure to choose one that's not too out of date! Although HTML 4



has been the standard for some time now the internet is a rapidly developing world and new literature is available all the time.

Good Luck!

ASA Communications Department
communications@swimming.org
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