



How to use the Internet to promote your organisation

Even if you already have a website for your organisation you can still do things on the internet to build up and communicate with your members and supporters:

Norfolk Home Page

Norfolk Home page and the local sites under it are designed to pull together snapshots of what is happening in a local area based on what is published in the websites of local organisations and individuals. Rather than trying to compete with those sites it aims to bring them together so people can get a clear overview of their area and then click through to your website to find out more information.

You can use it to support your members by putting a link on your site so they see what else is happening, or by adding information to your website which will feed through there to promote what you are doing.

People can comment on stories on Home Page so you can see what others think of your work and start a dialogue with them – especially if you cannot do that on your own website.

Below are some other ways in which you can use your website to support and grow your membership.

Keep your website fresh

People will visit your site because they are interested in what you are doing and will find you because of search engines, word of mouth, or seeing the web address on posters, leaflets, newsletters etc. However to keep them coming back you need to add new information they will want to read. Examples are:

- Latest news – recent events, planned events, committee meetings, successes
- Photographs – especially of your members as they will visit to see themselves. If you can't add pictures easily to your site, use something like Flickr (or Youtube if you have videos) and put your photographs there with a link from your website.
- Articles about your organisations interests – or links to news and articles on other sites. Make yours the must visit site for what is happening in your subject area
- Feeds from other websites of interest – they will often have an RSS feed button which you can click to add feeds from their page to yours by following the instructions.

Add functions to encourage followers

There are lots of things you can add which will allow others to be alerted when you change your site. This can be as simple as asking people for their email addresses so you can send them an email or more technical developments:

- You can add RSS feeds. Ask your website provider or see if you have this function. If you build or manage your own site some web design tools will have this option built in or you can search for “RSS feeds” on the internet and look at one of many online tutorials

- You can add a weblog or blog – an online diary. There are a number of free blogging sites you can use and you simply put a link to that site from your front page. Most of these have an option for people to subscribe so you can use this as your news page and alert people to new information. This is another place you can have pictures or videos or if you are a music organisation some sound files of your performances
- There are lots of other tools on the internet which would be useful to your members which you can provide links to, to add value to what you offer. If you do a search around your area of interest and find good sites, add a link or an RSS feed to your site.

Open two way communications

The more feedback you get from your members the more you can design your activities around their needs. The simplest way is to have an email address on your website and ask them to send you their thoughts. This will also help build an email address list of your members so you can tell them your news (but remember to ask them if they object to you keeping their details and keeping them up to date).

Your website may have an option for comments built in. If not, use a blog or other free website like a Facebook page which allows them to add comments on your news.

There are also wikki's – like Wikkipedia but which you build yourself – where people can edit documents you place there. If you are developing a constitution or want people to put in ideas for future events, this can be useful.

Link with other sites

As we said above there will be other website locally, nationally or across the world which will be of interest to your members. Add a link to them on your page and email them asking if they will link to you. This gives a better service to your members and can add new ones

Use social networking sites

You will probably have heard of social networking sites link Facebook, Myspace, Bebo and Twitter. These are sites where you can set up a page for your organisation, or for yourself, and post information on what you are doing. Your members and others can the join, link or follow your site so they get an alert when you add something new. They can also send you messages with their ideas and activities so you turn your membership into an online community. Not everyone can get to every event so you can post pictures and videos and they can enjoy meeting people with similar interests online as well as in the flesh.

Different community networking sites have different users or features. Twitter is for short messages. Facebook tends to have an older group of users than myspace or Bebo.

And remember the real world

The on and offline world should work together. The local media will often search for local stories online so articles on your webpages may well be picked up by them. Remember to include details of your website in physical publicity – newsletters, posters, handouts, notepaper. Many organisations send out electronic versions of their newsletters as attachments to emails and you should write information once and then cut and paste it into lots of different media including your website