



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set III Number 5

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Set III Strategies for Vice-Presidents

Society Web Sites: Plain & Simple

by J. Mark Lowe, CG

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

This paper is an introduction to the reasons why a web site is important to a society's visibility and image, and the purposes for which it can be used

The information on page 4 which directs the interested person on how to obtain copies of this paper is incorrect.

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Set III Strategies for Vice-Presidents Society Web Sites: Plain & Simple by J. Mark Lowe, CG

INTRODUCTION

A Web presence is as important to a society as a telephone number or an address. In today's environment, if folks can't find an answer or resource immediately, the seeker goes elsewhere. A Web presence also lists the society in on-line directories used by those who seek organizations by location or focus.

Some Web opportunities for societies include creating a society Web site, listing the society at FGS Society Hall, using electronic mailing lists, posting on bulletin boards, and engaging in chat room discussions. Each option is an inexpensive way for a society to communicate with its members and promote itself to the public.

OPTIONS

If your society does not have a Web site, it can still be listed at no charge in Society Hall. The Society Hall welcomes Internet users who indicate an interest in family history. These visitors get important information about your society while learning about the Federation of Genealogical Societies. The site, hosted by Ancestry.com, part of MyFamily.com, accepts free listings from societies that include the

organization's membership requirements, dues, meeting dates, publications, officers, items for sale, and special events or projects. Societies from all over the United States and Canada are listed. You can visit Society Hall at <<http://www.familyhistory.com/societyhall/main.asp>>. For societies that have a Web site, a link from a page in Society Hall brings visitors to you.

INTERNET OPPORTUNITIES

An online presence enables a society to:

Advertise. Creating and maintaining a Web site is becoming more affordable for even small societies. It might be as easy as using the FGS Society Hall, described above, or as simple as creating a Web site through a free Web hosting service (i.e., <freepages.rootsweb.com>). You might also register a new domain name for your society, i.e., <genealogicalsociety.org>. The registration fee and Web hosting fees for individual domain names are inexpensive and give the society a unique presence online.

If you decide not to host your own site, consider sharing your meeting information and special events with USGenWeb hosts and commercial

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sites. (i.e., <ancestry.com>, <genealogy.com>, <heritagequest.com>, and others).

Promote Events. If you do not host your own Web site, ask others who do if they will display your event advertising. Many bulletin boards allow the posting of genealogical special events. Focus on Web sites that your potential audience will be most likely to visit. You might need to supply the text and graphics, but the exposure will broaden your opportunities.

Provide Educational Opportunities. Whether you use a chat room, a mailing list, or a Web site, the Internet is an excellent tool for sharing facts about local records and their genealogical use. Even when the information is given in small snippets, genealogists appreciate learning more about the records that help their search. Adding valuable resources is as simple as providing related links for your area. Dispensing record and repository news via the Internet can build community with your members and make them and others more sophisticated users of area resources. This educational application can also generate support for records preservation when it is most needed.

Post Original Records. Perhaps you have a large number of cemetery transcriptions or abstracts of local records, but decide not to produce a print publication. Instead, publish the data on the Internet. Although it is essential to include specifics about where, when, and how the information was collected, and citations that allow verification of the original source; it is not beyond the capability of most societies to post original or copied material. Easy-to-use programs such as Adobe Acrobat[®] allow the publishing of documents on the Web where they are accessible to all. A caution: do obtain written permission from the original “owner” of the information before placing anything online.

CREATE A WEB SITE

Find a Home. Every site needs a good home. There are many fee-based and free “hosting”

services that are eager to accommodate your Web site. Here are a few things to keep in mind when selecting a Web host.

1. Reliability. Consistency of service and access to professional-level technical support are key considerations. Free hosting services rarely offer the level of reliability and technical support that fee-based services provide.

2. Distractions. Free hosts often add pop-up ads, banners, and other distractions, which can be a real nuisance to visitors. This might reflect poorly on your society.

3. Simplicity. The ability to access, edit, and upload your pages in a simple matter is important. Direct access to your Web site’s server using an FTP client is the standard method. FTP or File Transfer Protocol works much like Windows Explorer.

4. Consider Options. Internet Service Providers (ISP) such as AOL or Yahoo!, offer limited Web hosting as part of their package. You may receive as much as 40MB of free storage space on the company's server, but even 5MB of storage could be sufficient.

THE DESIGN

Welcome Guests Wisely. Think of site visitors as your guests and potential society members. The design of your site should make them feel welcome and should help them find the information they seek quickly. A simple interface is important, even on a site with just a handful of pages. An all-glitter site with flashing signs and music can be exciting, but it also might suggest a lack of useful information.

Maintenance. It is not uncommon for an organization to “leap without looking,” that is, design and mount a Web site without knowing the hours it takes to sustain the site. Lack of maintenance will result in a site that is soon out of date. People tend to revisit sites that have fresh and current information. So, when

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planning the site, keep it simple. Follow the 80/20 rule: 80% of the content is static, 20% is regularly updated. A good Web site is always a work in progress.

The Planning Stage. Web developers often use flowcharts and storyboards to help them visualize the content of a site's pages and the links between them. A low-tech flowcharting program is to depict each page with a 3-by-5 card and then draw lines on the cards to represent links. It may sound simplistic, but this technique gives you get a bird's-eye view of your site.

Move to Reality. Although there are many programs that will help you create a Web site, the example uses a simple text editor like Notepad. Using a simple format and software will make updating your Web site easier. All of the ideas and suggestions can easily be applied to any program.

Promote Your Web Site. After you have created the society Web site, submit the URL or address to the most popular search engines, and especially to the genealogical portals and link lists (both commercial and free). As Internet use continues to grow, more and more people will seek society information on the Web.

Stay Alert. Visit other society Web sites for ideas and inspiration. Consider how the site can be modified and improved. Keep the information current and remember that copyright laws do apply to the Internet.

HTML IN BRIEF

<i>This HTML code:</i>	<i>Appears this way on the Web page:</i>
<H1>TheHome Page:</H1> <P>This is the first page of our Web site.</P>	The HomePage This is the first page of our Web site.

Tags (<H1> <P>
) are the simple codes used in basic HTML or Hyper Text

Markup Language, the programming language used to create web pages.

Add a few special tags and formatting for an elegant Web site. Each element has an opening tag and a closing tag that surround the text you wish to format.

<H1>Heading Level 1 (There are 5 levels for headings, with 1 being the largest)
</H1> This is the end or closing tag to "turn off" the Heading Level 1

Basic HTML Tags:

Image	
Page link	Southtown Genealogical Societies Home Page
E-mail link	Send e-mail to office
Bold	 text to be shown in bold
Italics	<I> text to be italicized </I>
Center	<CENTER> text or image to be centered </CENTER>
Paragraphs	<P> text in the paragraph </P>
Left Align Text	<P ALIGN=LEFT> text </P>
Center Align Text	<P ALIGN=CENTER> text </P>
Right Align Text	<P ALIGN=RIGHT> text </P>
Line Break	 (similar to a single carriage return)
Horizontal Rule	<HR> (horizontal line across the page to divide sections)
Page Background	<BODY BACKGROUND="URL for the background graphic to be used">
Line Item Bullet	 (no closing tag necessary)

Use a combination of pre-planning with the flowchart approach and appropriate HTML tags to create an attractive, effective and easily maintained Web site. Consider this template:

```
<HTML>
<IMG SRC="stwnlogo.jpg">
<H1>Southtown Genealogical Society</H1>
```

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<P>The purpose of the Southtown Genealogical Society is to promote the study of family history, and encourage others to participate in this activity. We meet on the first Monday evening (7pm) of each month at the Southtown Public Library.</P>

Membership Information

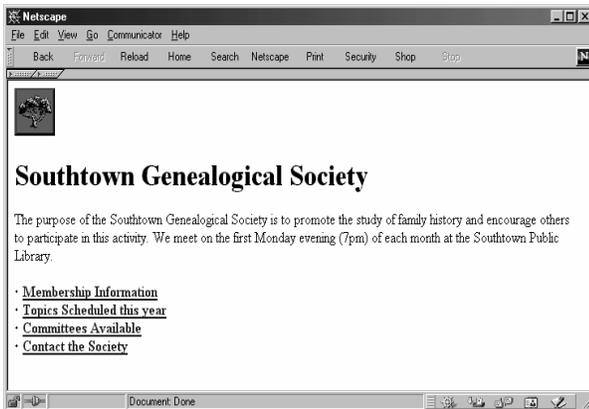
Topics Scheduled this year

Committees Available

Contact the Society

</HTML>

The code above is for the home page, or the front page on the society's Web site. Four additional Web pages will be created, each with file names that end in the file extension ".htm" as shown in the page links above. The code for the home page above, looks like this in a Web browser:



FOR MORE INFORMATION

- NGS Guide for Publishing Web Pages on the Internet
<<http://ngsgenealogy.org/comstandWeb.htm>>
- The Web Design Group Help Page
<<http://www.htmlhelp.com/>>
- Barebones Guide to HTML
<<http://werbach.com/barebones/>>
- Case Western Reserve University - Intro to HTML
<<http://www.cwru.edu/help/introHTML/toc.html>>
- Cyndi Howells has a comprehensive online guide to creating your own Web site.
<<http://www.CyndisList.com/construc.htm>>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. Mark Lowe, CG is a full-time professional genealogist, author, and national lecturer. He is Secretary of the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), Vice President for the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), Vice President of the Genealogical Speakers Guild (GSG).

FGS thanks Cyndi Howells for her review of the text for the section, HTML in Brief.

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