



Best Practices for Developing a CAP Squadron Web Site

"Do you have a website?" That's a question you hear all of the time as a Public Affairs Officer.

Nowadays, it's no longer about whether you have a Web site but rather how your Web site represents your squadron, and whether you're using the medium to its fullest potential. A Web site is a squadron's face to the world; and as such, it must reflect the tone and style of the squadron in a professional and polished manner.

So why, after 10 years, are there still so many poorly designed squadron Web sites?

Simple: Because they're easy to build.

With all the commercial and freeware do-it-yourself Web tools on the market — and the relative ease with which they can be used — everyone who knows how to turn on a computer considers themselves a Web designer. But Web sites are much more than the sum of the bits and bytes that makes up its design. There are a lot of pre-development planning and strategy issues to deal with before you can successfully represent a 3-D squadron on a 2-D medium.

Representing your squadron on the Internet requires preparation and a well thought out strategy. You should never adopt a quick-and-dirty solution simply because the advertisement for a particular Web tool boasts that it can get you up and running in 20 minutes. Professional Web sites don't come in a box — they need to be created, not unwrapped.

A truly effective Web site reflects not only the image of the business, but also its objectives. Settling for a cheap and amateur-ish site will devalue your squadron and can do more harm to your professional image and reputation than not having a Web site at all. Remember: Building a Web site might be easy, but building a good Web site is not.

CAP Policy

CAPR 110-1 governs CAP Internet Operations. IT is a short regulation that establishes that A CAP Internet Operation is any activity operated or conducted through the Internet if:

- such operations make use of a domain name registered or assigned to Civil Air Patrol, including, but not limited to, CAP.GOV or CAPNHQ.GOV or

- use is made of the name "Civil Air Patrol" or its insignia, copyrights, emblems and badges, descriptive or designating marks and words used in carrying out its program which name and marks are specifically owned by Civil Air Patrol pursuant to 36 United States Code § 206.

The following acts shall be prohibited in CAP internet operations:

- There shall be no use or distribution of any obscene, indecent, or offensive language or material that is defamatory, abusive, harassing, disrespectful or hateful.
- There shall be no:
 - use or distribution of junk mail
 - unauthorized advertising
 - communication that invades anyone's privacy, or encourages conduct that would constitute a criminal offense or gives rise to civil liability or that otherwise violates any local, state, national or international law or regulation
 - communication that contains false statements about Civil Air Patrol or Civil Air Patrol employees or members
 - publication or distribution of any information that violates any copyright, trade name or trademark.

Unauthorized advertising shall not include the recognition of individuals or companies that have demonstrated financial or other support to the performance of CAP missions. Provided, however, when such recognition is extended or links or references to non-CAP sites is provided, a disclaimer, in no less than 12 pt type, shall be clearly displayed that provides:

"LINKS OR REFERENCES TO INDIVIDUALS OR COMPANIES DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN ENDORSEMENT OF ANY INFORMATION, PRODUCT OR SERVICE YOU MAY RECEIVE FROM SUCH SOURCES."

CAP units presently involved with or desiring to be involved with a CAP internet operation must obtain approval for such operations as follows:

a) for CAP.GOV domain delegations or any other CAP internet operations, approval must be provided by

either the National Commander or the applicable region or wing commander or their designee.

b) for CAPNHQ.GOV domain delegations, approval must be provided by the CAP Executive Director, or designee.

CAP internet operations involving web pages must set forth the name "Civil Air Patrol" and immediately thereafter identify the name of the sponsoring unit on the main page of the site.

Personal information regarding CAP members or employees, including but not limited to, social security number, residence address, date of birth, should only be made available through CAP internet operations to those individuals who have a specific need to have such information for official CAP business only. When this information is placed on a web server as part of a CAP internet operation, reasonable security, such as password access, should be implemented to protect the information. Such information when included in a CAP internet operation shall be accompanied by the following notice:

Warning: The information you are receiving is protected from interception or disclosure. Any person who intentionally distributes, reproduces or discloses its contents is subject to the penalties set forth in 18 United States Code Section 2511 and/or related state and federal laws of the United States.

Public Affairs Information. Unit public affairs officers shall be encouraged to participate in assisting with appropriate information disclosures through CAP internet operations. Likewise, CAP members should avoid using CAP internet operations to disseminate information that would normally be distributed through public affairs officers.

CAPR 190-1

Electronic Communications. The PAO shall have the authority to develop and coordinate the public affairs elements of electronic communications tools employed by the unit for internal and external communications, including unit websites and list-servs, which automatically broadcast e-mail to everyone on a list. The content shall be created in collaboration with appropriate staff members and shall be facilitated by the staff member(s) designated as webmaster, listserv manager and/or information technology officer.

Understanding Form and Function

A Web site is a perfect marriage of form (i.e., how it looks) and function (i.e., what it does). The site must be aesthetically pleasing, and sometimes even entertaining, in order to catch the audience's attention. But the site must also be informative and functional in

order to provide value for the audience's time and to get them to come back.

Your Web site must convey a message about your squadron to potential clients and customers. Unfortunately, many squadron owners place too much emphasis on the flash and not enough on the substance.

The purpose of your Web site's design is to complement its message, not overshadow it. People rarely go to a Web site solely to ooh and aah the design — and if they do, they're unlikely to return because non-functional design gim-micks can get old very quickly.

When planning your Web site, it's important to keep in mind that what you can technologically do with your Web site should never take precedence over what you must logically do with your Web site. Try to observe a three-to-one ratio of functional content and design elements to non-functional, purely esthetic elements.

Maintaining this balance, however, can be difficult for some squadrons developing their very first Web site. People can be easily blinded by their enthusiasm for design because that's always the fun part. Content and functionality seem too much like work in comparison. But a well rounded Web site must be equal parts form and function; otherwise, it will seem a little lopsided.

Defining the Web Site Concept

The most challenging part of building a Web site is not so much the nuts and bolts of development; it's the planning and conceptualization. Before any actual designing and development can take place, you need to define your Web site's main purpose, what message you wish to convey, and how this message will be conveyed.

You will also need to have a firm understanding of your core audience, and cater to its needs and style. A graphic design firm's Web site, for example, shouldn't look like a financial institution's Web site because they convey different messages to different audiences. The design concept for the former must project a creative and hip style whereas the latter must convey trust and security.

No one can tell you your Web site concept. This is something you need to determine on your own. Although there are many factors that contribute to a Web site concept, most are based on your:

- Squadron's identity
- Target audience
- Web site's purpose
- Web site goals

Online expectations
Long-term squadron goals

Representing Your Identity

Every organization projects an image, or an identity.

They can be represented by logos (e.g., McDonald's golden arches, Nike's swoosh, Apple's bitten apple), mascots (e.g., the Energizer Bunny, the GEICO Gecko, the Pillsbury Doughboy), slogans, or catch phrases (e.g., Nike's "Just do it," Mastercard's "Priceless," Verizon's "Can you hear me now?"), personal brands (e.g., Martha, Oprah, Trump), or a combination of all these. What a squadron does and how it treats its members and customers also contributes to its identity.

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Brands are used to promote a squadron in various forms of media, from TV and radio ads to squadron cards and letterheads to brochures and posters — and of course, Web sites. But a branded Web site must go beyond sticking a logo on a Web page.

Web sites differ from other forms of promotion.

They require the Web developer to understand not only how audiences interpret visual content such as a hard copy brochure, but also how audiences interact with multi-media content.

The advent of blogs and other Web 2.0 technologies over the last several years have given squadrons even more creative and interactive ways of promoting brand identity.

Are You Redesigning an Existing Site?

Web sites, like everything else, have a life span.

Sometimes they need to be updated, and sometimes they need to be redesigned entirely.

Whatever the case may be, you must understand your motivation for doing it.

- Are you looking to change some design elements to freshen up an outdated design?
- Are you updating the entire site to reflect a new brand identity?
- Or are you redesigning your site for the sake of redesigning it?

Web site redesign projects must be purpose driven. They shouldn't be done simply because you're bored with your site and have nothing else better to do.

Your redesign must contribute something to your squadron and, more importantly, to your audience. Doing it for the sake of doing it shows lack of focus and commitment on your part.

And although users may appreciate a new design every few years, it can be disorienting to encounter a drastically different design too often during a short period of time.

Web Site Anatomy 101

When people hear "Web site" they immediately think of its design, the flash and the wow-factor.

But Web sites are made up of many interrelated components that are dependent on your specific squadron and goals.

Although all squadrons have their own Web site vision, most sites have a basic set of components that need to be included and issues that need to be addressed regardless of the squadron:

Design elements: Design elements define a Web site's look and feel. They include layout (e.g., minimalist, spacious, multi columned), typography (e.g., traditional, modern, unconventional), and color scheme (e.g., bold, subdued, monochromatic).

Site navigation: Site navigation type defines the logical organization of content. It's the mechanism by which users navigate from one location to another. Common navigation types include tiered menus (parent-child), sequential menus (brother-sister), and site maps (overview).

Site navigation mechanism: The manner in which the navigation is carried out and represented.

Common navigation mechanisms include static menus, drop-down menus, and pop-up windows. Whatever mechanism you choose, it must remain consistent throughout the site. Don't use a drop-down menu on one page and a pop-up window in another.

Site and content architecture: Site and content architecture defines the physical organization components (such as applications and databases) and content. Site administration, manageability, and security will greatly influence your architecture.

Content: The content you wish to present to users. This can include information about your company's

history, employees, and mission; information about your products and/or services; a portfolio of work; a list of past projects and clients; and contact information.

Content formats: The format of your content. Common Web site content formats include text, images, PDF files, and audio and video files. Style and tone of content: The style of your design elements and the tone of your Web copy will define the overall mood of your Web site. Style and tone can be formal, casual, humorous, or offbeat.

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Optional components: In addition to the basic components described above, you can also make use of many other Web site features: blogs, streaming media, online chatting, search engine, search engine optimization plan, interactive applications, electronic shopping cart (for e-commerce sites), just to name a few.

The following checklist will help you piece together the anatomy of your Web site (Note: If you already have a Web site, and are undergoing a site redesign, some components can be reused or retrofitted):

Are You Ready to Do It Yourself?

Those members tasked with the responsibility of building a Web site must have an understanding of the fundamental principles and concepts associated with Web development.

So before you commit to building your own Web site, answer these key questions first:

Do you have the expertise to do this?

This is the deal breaker. If you don't have the expertise to build a Web site you don't even need to answer

Are you ready to commit to a deadline and accept responsibility for the project?

A Web site can help a squadron communicate its message to the world, but it is a direct part of our core CAP Missions. As a result of this, your Web site often takes a backseat to other higher priority tasks.

And more often than not you'll wind up saying; "I'll work on my Web site when I have time." This can drag on indefinitely. If you're going to build it in-house, you have to treat it as a real priority or it will never get done.

Finding a home for your site.

You should have your site hosted on a CAP Server if possible such as

The CAP.GOV domain has been delegated to the Civil Air Patrol and is a valuable asset in CAP communications. The domain is administered through a network of domain name servers situated in locations around the world.

For more information please go to <http://ns1.cap.gov/>

North Central Region has server space available to NCR units. The Region Special Projects Officer, Lt Colonel Troy Campbell can assist you with getting your site set up on the NCR Server.

He can be reached at: spoweb@ncr.cap.gov

Website in a Box

NCR Public Affairs has developed a basic and easily editable set of web pages that contain standardized styling and suggested web pages for a squadron.

These templates were developed after researching hundreds of squadron websites and determining the best type of content for a typical squadron website.

Use of these templates are not mandatory but can serve as a starting point for a unit looking to design or re-design their web site.

The WSB is included in your Resource DVD as is some basic web page editing software.