

# DEVELOPING A SCOUTING WEBSITE



The UK Scout Association has nearly 10,000 Scout Groups and 600,000 Members. They are to be found throughout the United Kingdom and as part of British Scouts in Western Europe. Looking even further afield, the British Groups Abroad network embraces the Middle and Far East, the Falkland Islands, Africa and South America.

Any organisation as geographically widespread as The Scout Association and which in itself is only a small part of the 25 million strong World Scout Family in over 200 countries, will be quick to grasp how electronic communication (and the Internet in particular) makes it possible to transmit, receive and share information.

In October 1996, the UK Scout Association formally adopted the pioneering ScoutBase UK website as its official presence on the World Wide Web. By March 1999 the site had grown to one of the largest of its kind with over 3,000 pages and over a quarter of a million page requests a month.

At the same time a great many Scout Groups, Districts and Counties have been developing their own web sites, often as part of the training programme for young people.

The purpose of this document is to give advice and guidance on creating and developing Scouting Websites - whether they are for your Cub Pack, District, Area or County. It has been produced in response to many requests for such a resource. Anyone reading this note is specifically

asked to note the section headed **Safe from Harm**

What this guide does not do is give in-depth technical tutorial - there are many good tutorials available, and today it is quite easy to create web pages with packages such as Microsoft Word.

**Purpose - Why Create the Website ?**

Perhaps this is the most important question to ask, as the answer will guide the content you will create. Perhaps the purpose of a Scout Group website will be to publicise its activities to other Scout Groups over the world and use it to make contacts. A County website may be used as an information resource to allow publishing and distributing information as a replacement or supplement for paper. It also gives easy access for people who wish to contact the County.

**Where to put the Website ?**

The Website has to be 'hosted' on an Internet Service Provider's (ISP's) machine. What this means is you are renting space on a web-server which is permanently connected to the Internet. Almost all dialup accounts (what home users use to connect to the Internet) provide webspace 'free' and the amount given is usually more than enough to host a website comfortably. Commercial packages are available so you can have a good-looking address (perhaps akin to a personalised number plate) - like <http://www.lanchester-scouts.org.uk/> . These tend to be far more expensive - usually with a start-up cost to register the address and yearly fees, as well as the monthly cost for

the Website. If you decide to register such an address make sure that it will not confuse visitors – registering an address like scouts.org.uk might give people the impression your site is an HQ site. A sensible solution is [www.name-scout.org.uk](http://www.name-scout.org.uk)

#### Safe from Harm

It is the policy of The Scout Association to safeguard the welfare of all members by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional harm.

It is essential that anyone creating a website follows a few simple guidelines designed to ensure the personal safety of young people. We do not want our sites to be used as a method for people with evil intentions to develop contacts with children.

- Young people should NOT be identified. Their email addresses should NOT be available from the site. As a general rule it is best to try and avoid naming any individuals. If they are Leaders the job title will probably suffice.
- Pictures of named individuals should not be used or pictures clearly showing where the young people come from (easily read Group name tags on uniforms etc.). The content of pictures should be considered for good taste.
- Meeting Places and Times. This information should not be published on the site. You can always provide an email link so that the information can be requested.
- Events and Camps. Whilst you may want to publicise dates and locations of future events, do not go into too much detail if you feel that young people might be put at risk because constant supervision might be difficult.

#### Content

As previously discussed, the answer to the question of 'what is the purpose of this

website' will govern the content of your website. However there are certain details which would be useful on most pages - and dos and don'ts.

#### Useful Content

- Information about your Group/District etc. for visitors and outsiders
- Contact details for people wishing to get in touch with you
- Email directory of people in County, District *but don't write your own - link into the relevant ScoutBase UK page*

#### DOs

- **Do** keep pictures to a sensible size - more on this subject later.
- **Do** keep the information up-to-date - there is no use using the WWW if it is not up-to-date. If somebody views your website, and it tells them "our summer camp is in two weeks time", yet it is now the middle of winter it gives a bad impression of your Group.
- **Do** publicise the website. Make sure everyone knows about it, and print the address where you print your phone and address details. Not everyone has web access now, but the number who have is increasing dramatically.

#### DON'TS

- **Don't** publicise contact details for young people - addresses and phone numbers etc., should not be made available. Make email addresses available at your discretion.  
**Don't** duplicate information. For example, don't type out Talking Points and put it on your website. This is available direct from ScoutBase UK (<http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/>). Furthermore, don't copy information from ScoutBase UK then put it on your

website. The information may well change quickly, and it could be confusing and perhaps even dangerous if Leaders viewed out-of-date information on your web site.

- **Don't** use copyrighted information - information on the WWW is copyrighted in the same way as paper medium, so bear this in mind. Remember that information on ScoutBase UK is covered by this copyright, too.
- **Don't** get carried away with the latest crazes - with the Internet and World Wide Web developments seem to happen at breakneck speed, almost daily. It can be tempting to use the flashiest tools and techniques *just because you can*. Don't. Carefully consider what you need to make your website useful and use them. Remember the Internet is a global medium, and other people may not be able to see your page if you use the latest techniques. This is especially true if they are accessing the Internet using older, computers with different software.
- **Don't** publish information without thinking about what you are doing. Making meeting times and location explicitly available on the web is an open invitation for thieves to break into Leaders' houses, as they will be out! Information on web-pages can and has been used in libel cases and other legal proceedings.

### Graphics

It is almost certain you will wish to brighten up your page with graphics and logos. Doing so effectively can make a page visually attractive and capture the readers' attention. However, careless design can make your pages very un-viewable.

### Where do I get the graphics ?

If your artistic skills are not up to it, there are many sources of free graphics (or do you have a Scout wanting to do an artist's badge ?)The Clipart section of ScoutBase UK is a good place to start (<http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/library/clipart>) This has various images you will find useful, and also includes a 'neckie generator' - idea for creating your Group's scarf for your web-page. There are also many clip-art sites on the Internet, ideal for supplying you with images. Digital cameras are abundant these days, and make it easy to add your own photos.

The same rules apply here as to general web-page design; Do not add graphics for the sake of it - images which show a little letter being folded up and put in a envelope look great at first, but when you have seen it a thousand times on a thousand websites, it tends to look tacky!

Navigation is very important - remember that you will know the site intimately before it goes 'live', but other people will not! Make sure it is easy to find the pages that you want.

### General Design Tips

- Avoid using frames unless you have to - not only does it make the page unusable by older browsers, it makes it impossible to bookmark a certain page
- Avoid using fashionable gimmicks, for example scrolling messages along the bottom of the screen, which will quickly look dated
- If the background colour is dark and the text is light, it is impossible to read when printed out
- Keep the page address simple

- Some people think that web page counters are of no use and a cliché. This may be true, as they do not give a true representation of who visits your site (because of repeat visits and caches). However, many people still like them as a useful idea to gauge the popularity of their page.
- Don't change the link colours - people are used to blue for a link, and will get confused should you change this. Avoid blue text for the same reason.

#### Publicising your web-page

When you have completed your web-page, you will want to tell the world about it. In fact you will probably want to do this as soon as you upload your first page. Don't! Internet users find pages that say 'under construction' or with broken links incredibly frustrating and are unlikely to visit your page again. You may wish to submit your website to Internet search engines. Most search engines will pick up your page eventually but submitting your details will mean it will get added faster. You should add your page to the ScoutBase UK Directories (go into the directory section from the main page).

#### Conclusion

Writing a web-page can be an extremely rewarding practice, especially so if the young members of the Association are involved. There are many pitfalls and traps, so we hope that this document will help and enthuse you to create your own pages. The suggestions here are by no means hard and fast but have been compiled from the experiences gained in the last three years of creating the Scout Association's web site, ScoutBase UK. Perhaps if you enjoy creating your own website, you may consider joining the ScoutBase team!

(This Fact Sheet is based on an original note by Colin Chaplin of the ScoutBase Team)