

Website Development Guidelines

Using Technology without Compromising Traditions

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Introduction

These guidelines have been developed specifically for OA service bodies that wish to use the Internet to help inform others about the presence of Overeaters Anonymous in their area. As with most things in Overeaters Anonymous, these are not meant to be “rules.” They are provided to help OA members with specific interests related to developing or maintaining an OA-related website.

What format to use on a website?

Generally, OA-related websites contain information presented in a structured, logical format. The main or “home” page contains general information about OA and the service body sponsoring the website. In addition, it may provide links to any or all of the following:

1. Link for newcomers to oa.org
2. Local meeting information
3. Links to OA basics, such as Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of OA Service
4. Local events list and/or local newsletter

5. OA.org bookstore

6. Other OA websites, such as region’s

The sponsoring service body decides what information it wants to provide and maintain. Remember that the more complex a website is, the more difficult it is to maintain and, probably, to navigate. Keep It Simple applies here.

Mobile technology

Staying relevant and attractive to visitors means enabling them to access your website anywhere, anytime, from any device. Recent statistics from a large city’s OA website indicate that 50 percent of its visitors were using mobile devices. It’s likely that visitors already coming to your website are also on mobile devices.

Service bodies should strongly consider having a mobile-optimized version of their website. A single website can be designed to be mobile friendly. Or, in more and more cases, a separate but identical website exists that only mobile users are directed to. Often website development software includes an option to include a mobile version of the website.

How do the Traditions affect what we put on a website?

Our Eleventh Tradition states: “We need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.” The Internet is one of those “other public media of communication,” and we must be aware of all Tradition issues related to this medium. No matter how modest a website may be, its audience is potentially large and diverse. Unlike other public information efforts, once it is published, a website is accessible by anyone and everyone. Worldwide.

As an example, in keeping with our Tradition of anonymity at the level of “other media of

communication,” it is advisable not to include full names or personal addresses. However, posting the first name (with or without a last initial) and email address (with the member’s consent if it is a personal email account) of a service body’s contact is vital to helping suffering compulsive overeaters find the help they seek in Overeaters Anonymous. For OA’s main website, there is a policy not to use an email address that includes someone’s last name. It might be a good idea to adopt a similar policy. There are several ways to do this. One is to use a service position, for example, secretaryIG or Reg_Treasurer; or a name with initial, for example, maryt or johnt; or something silly, for example, justaboutwonderful.

Unity: deciding on content

Unity is best maintained with broad-based, inclusive information. Remember that, “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity” (Tradition One). Keeping the information general allows us to reach as many compulsive overeaters as possible.

No one may republish OA copyrighted material, including on the Internet, without permission from the World Service Office. Any registered OA service body may receive permission to publish OA copyrighted literature by completing the Reprint Permission form on oa.org. OA material currently published on the OA website is exempt from this policy. All registered service bodies may reprint those pieces without submitting a written request for permission. Additionally, any registered service body may apply for blanket permission to use the OA logo on any of its publications (e.g., flyers, posters, newsletters, meeting lists, websites, stationery, and business cards) for a two-year period (renewable). The Permission to Use the OA Logo form is on oa.org.

The service body is responsible for the contents of the website it sponsors.

Security: inside and out

The Internet has made getting the OA message out easier. It has also made it easier for malicious actions to take place. Your website, if not protected, is vulnerable to malware, phishing, viruses, spying, and/or hijacking of visitor information.

Website visitors these days are more tech-savvy than in the past and are generally aware of the potential security risks of visiting any website, OA-related or otherwise. They also likely use antivirus software that not only warns them of a potential threat but can also report your website as unsafe.

If you haven’t done so already (or recently), it’s a good idea to review your website’s security and take necessary action to assure visitors that it has all the proper security systems in place to ensure the safety of their visit.

Administratively, make sure that at least two service body board members know the website’s passwords. Use strong passwords; “serenity” is not a good password for a Twelve Step organization. It is recommended that passwords are at least sixteen characters and contain a combination of numbers, symbols, and upper- and lowercase letters. Change the passwords at least annually or when you have a rotation of service with password-holders.

Protect against the change of status of the person with website responsibility by having more than one person with information about the process. If you use an outside resource for your website, make sure that your group is listed as the owner of the website’s hosting account, domain name, and any other assets. Generally a specific person is listed, so when that person rotates out of service, make sure the contact details are changed with the vendors your service body uses.

Welcome newcomers!

Websites have little time to keep a visitor's attention. Most often a newcomer will visit your website looking for something specific, perhaps a meeting nearby or someone to speak with. Make newcomer information easy to find by creating a clear path.

- Include an obvious newcomer field on your home page.
- Make the newcomer message inviting.
- Create a separate newcomer page.
- Include OA-approved content that is already available.
- Include links to stories of recovery. These can include reprints from *Lifeline*, local stories of recovery, "Welcome Home," and reprints from local and region newsletters.
- Provide a current meeting list (or link) within the newcomer page.
- With permission from the WSO, include reprinted excerpts from OA publications. For more information, see above or the "Copyright Requests" page on the OA website.
- Provide easy-to-find contact information, including telephone numbers, emails, and postal addresses.

Avoiding endorsement and/or opinions of outside interests

As stated in the Tenth Tradition: "Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues." This consideration is clear when we look at websites developed and maintained by non-OA organizations. When a visitor sees a link on those webpages, it's as if the website's owner is saying, "This is a

website I think well of. This page can provide you with information you may want to know." It is an unspoken endorsement of the linked-to site. OA does not endorse, so OA-related websites do not link with websites not affiliated with OA.

Technical issues

The OA Website/Technology Committee provides a resource for people responsible for OA-related websites at <http://www.webtechoa.org/>. Or, connect with the OA webmasters Yahoo group by sending an email to subscribe to the list to oawebmasters-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Summary

General things to remember:

- Design the website with newcomers in mind.
- Keep content current, especially meeting lists.
- When using OA copyrighted material or the OA logo, use the permission forms on oa.org.
- Link only to websites sponsored by Overeaters Anonymous service bodies or the WSO (oa.org).
- After your website is developed, send the URL (website address) to the WSO.
- As a courtesy, send copies of your website publications (e.g., newsletters, flyers, etc.) to your region office and/or region trustee on a regular basis.
- Create a website technical information document within the service body that includes login and passwords, vendor identification, process instructions, and other important information.

OA Board-approved

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