

Creating a Website for the Rossmoor Woodshop

How does OUR organization communicate now?

- It is often the case that an organization's information is "stove-piped". Various people are in charge of 'their' data and it has not here-to-fore been a priority to bring it together in an organized way. In a private or social group, this means that the information may or not be in machine-readable format and if it is, it's in various computers at people's homes or offices. As awkward as this is, it works OK until someone is 'hit by a bus' or encounters some other mishap. Then some (or all) of the organization's material in that person's custody is at risk of loss.
- Often, an organization's first effort in streamlining its communication is via email. A central email contact list is established and information gets emailed on an ad-hoc or scheduled basis to some or all of the people on the list. On the receiving end, each email recipient is therefore tasked with providing his / her own data organization scheme to meet their own needs.
- The result of the above is a situation where many folks are not getting 'the word' in a useful or timely fashion. Some may be OK with that level of communication, but many may feel there is a better way.
- The refrain often heard in response is: "Let's get a website".

So... what exactly IS a website? How will it help us communicate with those we serve?

- In its simplest terms, a website is a central repository of an organization's information. The organization's information will have been digitized (if not already in machine-readable format) and brought to a central location.
- Through some technological effort some of that information is made available to anyone with a desktop computer, laptop computer, tablet, or smartphone.
- It is important to keep in mind that virtually ALL of an organization's information may be in the central location, but NOT everyone (in the world) should have access to every category of information. Most people will be simply viewing our website. A small number of our people will be adding, modifying, and deleting the organization's information over time.
- It follows that a significant number of ground rules need to be in place if our organization's information is to be safeguarded while being made available 'on-line via a website'. Those ground rules must be established by the organization's management and implemented properly to protect people's assets, privacy, reputations, etc. etc.

So... how does an organization go about getting a website?

- First of all, the organization's MANAGEMENT must take responsibility for the project. Creating a website is NOT a project that is delegated to the organization's resident 'tech' guy/s. When it is done that way, the result often fails to meet the expectations of the various members of the organization. Management's expectations must be codified and documented at the BEGINNING of the project. ((This is sometimes the HARDEST PART of getting a successful website established. It SHOULD NOT be bypassed.))
- Once management's expectations and objectives have been documented, the content that is to be shared will be identified. This identification needs to be specific as to:
 - Who has responsibility for providing each category of content?
 - What content exists at the present time and what content will need to be created?

- Where is the content located, and how can it be transferred to a central location?
- When will it show up in the central location and what format will it be in?
- Once centralized, how will it be transformed into a usable website?
- A small management team will create an outline "IN WRITING" for the website that will become the website's menu. Again, this may sound easy, but when getting down to detail levels the team must come to grips with the many possible ways to present the organization's policies, functions, and resources on a website.
- Once the website's structure and the DETAILED categories of information (content) have been identified, that content needs to get collected / organized / **'wrangled'** into the agreed-upon central location and format/s. The skills of the people who do this work are both technical and organizational. The selection of the people who will do this work is critical, because they will have to visualize not only what currently exists, but will help with the creation of some content that does not currently exist.
 - At this point, the organization's 'tech' guy(/s) will come into play. He / she / they will merge the content into the agreed upon structure..
 - A 'hosting' company will be selected, and the organization's information transferred (in preliminary form) to that company's computers. In our case this is our Google account.
 - At this point, a subset of the club's information will become the (preliminary) website.
- At this point a review process will begin to identify minor revisions, style changes, reorganization of material, rewrites, etc. These modifications will be made as necessary. This process may take a few weeks or more, but must not be allowed to run too long.

What kinds of people and skills are involved?

- **Board members and woodshop supervisors;** we have the skills necessary to get this done.
- **Users of information** --- Rossmoor residents, woodshop supervisors, and other interested parties.
- **"Content Wranglers"** --- members of the project team responsible for collecting disparate information and translating it into usable digital content stored in a central location.
- **"Tech' guys"** --- with a working knowledge of computer file management, web design, web domain & hosting, ongoing maintenance, etc. etc.

Things to consider

- **History** --- some Rossmoor clubs have previous iterations of newsletters, websites, email blasts, etc etc. To the extent possible, much of that information may be of significant value in the creation of a website.
- **Stovepiping** --- some Rossmoor clubs have a situation that will present a challenge during the development of a workable website. A lot of the information that can be considered the property of the club may be dispersed across a variety of members' personal computers.
- **Now is the time** --- to bring much (if not all) of this information together into a central repository. This is where the "Content Wranglers" come into play. The collection of information from the individuals currently possessing it can be very tricky, not technically but politically.

- **Central administrative location** --- organizations that make effective use of sophisticated websites usually also have central administrative offices or locations. These facilities often have full-time paid (or volunteer) staff to attend to the organization's information. The Rossmoor Woodshop Supervisors Association does not have such a resource. That's where the club's Google account comes in.
- **Options** --- now is a good time to point out that there are organizations that adopt a very simplistic approach to obtaining an online presence. These should be addressed one by one, and (in the opinion of the author) then be rejected.
 - Social Media --- Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, etc. These will allow everyone to communicate with everyone without a lot of refereeing taking place. Lots of people will acquire a lot of new "friends" who want to "connect".
 - Build it yourself websites --- such as: WIX, SquareSpace, GoDaddy, 1&1, Weebly, etc. These offer the non-technical user to develop a highly formatted fill-in-the-blanks website very quickly. As soon as some 'non-anticipated' item crops up, these non-technical approaches often collapse.
 - Hire an established web development firm --- very expensive and almost all of the organizational work described above will STILL need to be performed.
- **Inertia** --- management of Rossmoor clubs is usually a voluntary undertaking. The way it usually works is that much of the burden for communication falls to the club's president or a few very dedicated volunteers. Without a workable alternative, the path of least resistance is often to communicate via email and a series of meetings. That may be where our club is at this point.
- **Timing** --- if not now, when?
- **The Secret** --- may lie in keeping any website design focused on simplicity and usefulness.
- **So** --- should we, can we, and will we get a website up and running? If we do, what will it take to make it a success instead of a one-time "good idea" that goes back to sleep from neglect?

How to get the website off the ground

- **Management** --- As discussed earlier in this presentation, management participation and commitment are critical to the success of a website development project. Management's commitment will be evidenced by:
 - the project having been presented to and **approved** by the club's general membership
 - the project's status being presented to and **reviewed** at meetings during the project
 - the project's commitment to between 3 and 5 **pre-scheduled meetings**
 - the project's meetings will be **working meetings** that produce written work products: ie design documents, the club's policy documentation, work-step commitments, etc etc
- **Transparency** --- to the extent possible and practical, the website's progress should be made viewable by the club's membership at a few stages of the project. In our case, a staged release of the website to the woodshop supervisors at two or more points during the project.
- **Centralization of Information** --- in our case, the club's Google account services
 - **Gmail** --- used to communicate between project team members and at a later stage to the organization's full membership. This account will accept and retain website content submissions as an intermediate step in entering the information into the website.
 - **Contacts** --- contains complete contact information for all of the club's current members,

some former members, and a few assorted others.

- **Calendar** --- Contains EVERY scheduled organization event going back to the fall of 2008. This event information will flow through to the website's calendar page.
- **Drive** --- (Google's cloud-based file storage service) contains the original versions of all organization documents that will appear on the website. It will also serve as the repository of all (original) photographs displayed on the site. Adherence to good naming and file organization conventions will apply here.
- **Docs** --- (Google's version of Microsoft's Word) will be used when certain content must be prepared from scratch during the project.
- **Slides** --- (Google's version of Microsoft's PowerPoint) will be used to "tell a story". If a club member has a project or interest, it can be highlighted via a slide show.
- **Sites** --- (Google's website content management system) used to prepare a fully functional website based on content that is maintained in the club's account.
- **Assignment of a Project Team** --- the creation of a website can proceed very quickly under the right conditions. The primary element to a short and successful project is a small group of volunteers willing to work hard and learn a few relatively simple technical skills.
- The project team members must be **working participants**, willing and able to enter content into the website from the 'front end'. That is, they must be able to log in, navigate to the correct page, open the page's online editor, and use the editor to 'cut and paste' content into website pages.
- Minimum requirements for these folks are
 - ability to use one of the four modern internet web browsers (Firefox, Chrome, Safari, or Edge) at an intermediate level of proficiency
 - ability to manipulate files using their computer's file management software (Windows Explorer on Windows PCs or Finder on Apple Macintosh PCs). This kind of work cannot be effectively performed on mobile phones or tablets
 - ability to use an online editor at an intermediate level including cutting, pasting, deleting, and formatting material

Project Meetings

At the inception of the website development project, we will set out a project timetable. If the Rossmoor Woodshop Supervisors Association is well-prepared at the outset, this period could be four to six weeks (or even less).