

Your Web Site & the Law: Things You Should Know

The laws that apply to printed communications also apply to web sites, including copyright and libel law. Below is an outline of important legal guidelines you need to follow.

Union funds cannot be used for internal politics. Follow the same rules on internal politics when maintaining a union web site as when publishing a union newsletter. You are not legally allowed to use union funds in any way to promote or oppose any candidate for union office. That means promotions or denunciations of candidates for union office cannot be put on an official union web site. But you can include comments from leaders the union has already elected, even when they are running for re-election, if they deal with regular union work.

The web site is no place for attacks on any union member, whether a leader or a member, whether or not they are running for union office.

You cannot promote or denounce political candidates on a public site. Be very careful about mentioning candidates for public office on a union web site. The law treats a public union web site differently than an internal union newsletter, flyer, etc. That means the local union should review all newsletters and other communications before putting them on-line, so you can delete any material that the union cannot legally communicate to the public with dues money.

What you can do on a Union web site:

- You can legally urge people to vote.
- You can communicate the union position on issues such as trade or the minimum wage.
- You can urge people to contact their representatives, and link them to the APWU Congressional Info site (<http://capwiz.com/apwu/home>).
- You can put on your web site factual news articles about what politicians and candidates are doing and saying and their positions on issues, so long as you don't editorialize.
- You could create a private, password-protected web site to promote or oppose candidates if it is restricted to APWU members only.

What you CANNOT do:

- Federal law says you cannot use union dues money to promote to the public candidates for federal offices, such as a U.S. Representative or Senator, even when they are endorsed by the union.
- You cannot make appeals for political contributions to the candidates or to political parties or to an APWU political fund on your web site.
- Do not use anything taken from candidate materials.
- In many states, the law is similar for state and local offices. However, state law varies considerably.
- Do not provide a direct link to just one campaign's web site. If you link to any campaign site, you must also include links to competing campaign sites, with various points of view.

Copyright law. The same laws that apply to printed publications also apply to the web -- and since you are out in public, it's much easier for someone to find out that you have "borrowed" their article or graphic without permission. You must get permission before putting pictures and original articles from other web sites or publications on your web site.

Exceptions:

- Although few web cases have made it through the courts, it's generally agreed that you have a right to put a link on your site to articles and other material on other web sites, without asking permission.
- You have the right to reproduce facts and news articles, if they contain little or no original thought or opinion.
- You also have a "fair use" right to reproduce copyrighted material for news reporting, comment, criticism, or other one-time educational use, especially if you don't interfere with its commercial value. But the No Electronic Theft Act, signed into law in December 1997, makes it more dangerous to use or re-use articles, photos or art on the Internet without permission, even if you don't profit from that use.

Being factual. The broad public exposure of a web site makes it doubly important to check facts and use only responsible sources for material posted on your web site. If you put false information on your site, the union's credibility could be seriously damaged.

Libel law. You could also violate libel law if you put something that's damaging or embarrassing about a person or company on your site without knowing whether it's true. This includes material you take from other sources. It is especially dangerous if you post something untrue when you knew it wasn't true or didn't check it out.

Visitor postings and chat rooms. The union is responsible for everything on your site, including e-mail and chat. If you decide to include a chat room or messages from web visitors on your site, someone must monitor all messages to weed out racist and other offensive (as well as libelous) statements. And remember: unless you restrict access to members through a special system, managers and union-busters have as much access as members do, both to contribute statements and to use statements in ways that could damage the union.

Setting up a member-only area with password protection would help protect such communications. But no such site is secure, since passwords can be "borrowed." Never post anything on a web site you don't want management to see, even if it's supposed to be a members-only web site.

Nancy Brigham's favorite Online resources for web-page builders

Some basics

To register your domain name (something like www.myunion.org), use one of the many services listed at:

<http://www.icann.org/registrars/accredited-list.html>

To look up domain names and find out what's available:
www.whois.org

Helping.org

This is a site designed to help non-profit organizations use the Internet, including step-by-step web development

<http://www.helping.org/nonprofit/index.adp>

Online dictionaries of web-related terms

<http://www.computeruser.com/resources/dictionary/dictionary.html>

<http://webopedia.internet.com/>

Here's another good way to look up terms, from CMP's Techweb

<http://www.techweb.com/encyclopedia/>

ZDNet How-to site: Links to help you with computers, the web and building web pages

<http://www.zdnet.com/zdhelp/filters/subfilter/0,7212,6002354,00.html>

ISP.com

www.isp.com

A source for finding Internet Service Providers for your online connection and also for helping with websites.

Tech Soup

This is a non-profit techie group dedicated to helping other non-profit groups. They offer tips and support on anything that has to do with computers.

<http://www.techsoup.org/index.cfm>

To build a web page

Introduction to basic html

<http://htmlgoodies.earthweb.com/primers/basics.html>

One-stop guide to web-building resources on the internet

Writing HTML: A basic tutorial

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/tut/lessons.html>

Bare-bones Guide to HTML

Down-to-earth basic guide.

<http://werbach.com/barebones/>

HTML Home Page

This is from the guys (and women) who invented HTML. It offers precise guidelines for both the beginner and for advanced web developers.

<http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/>

BigNoseBird:

One-stop guide with everything from guides to writing html code to free graphics
For beginners to advanced web-builders

<http://www.bignosebird.com/>

Jakob Nielson's Alertbox of weekly web tips for usability

This is the guru of website design: he's got high-tech credentials, but advises simplicity.
www.useit.com

Also see: www.useit.com/alertbox/

Nancy Brigham's favorite Online resources for web-page builders, cont.

CMP.net: The Technology Network

Web building instruction and tools; also links to current online magazines for webmasters.

http://www.cmpnet.com/search/Web_Development

Webmonkey

Current news on technical developments and also Webmaster guides, including free javascript code.

<http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/index.html>

WebVoodoo Web Design Clinic

<http://www.webdesignclinic.com/>

Includes free web art

Make Pictures for the Web

Ulead Smart Saver Pro

If you don't want to shell out \$800 for PhotoShop, try this great graphics program. It will convert photos to the web formats GIF and JPEG, while at the same eliminating the "World Wide Wait" for viewing pictures. There's a free download version, and if you like it, you can buy it for just \$59.95

<http://www.webutilities.com/products/SSPro/runme.htm>

Free graphics

You'll find some simple pictures and graphics like arrows and buttons at:

<http://hitbox2.gograph.com/>

I'm giving you the next link on condition that you promise not to use distracting backgrounds and stupid moving graphics that will annoy your visitors on the 3rd visit and led them to contemplate murder on the 20th visit.

<http://www.webimprovement.com/Design/Graphics/>

Free Programs

Tucows

This site has everything you can get for free, from email to graphics programs to web creation. Includes shareware (try it for a limited period before buying).

<http://tucows.com>

Netscape communicator

The standard browser package includes a free web "composer" which isn't half-bad.

<http://home.netscape.com/computing/download/index.html>

To make sure your web site works:

Web code validator

Checks to see if there are problems with your web pages and tells you what needs fixing.

<http://validator.w3.org/>

ZDNet Net Mechanic

Checks your links and graphics to see if they work and load quickly.

<http://www.netmechanic.com/>

And this page will give you different versions of graphics on your site that load faster.

http://www.netmechanic.com/cobrand/zd_dev/accelerate.htm

Nancy Brigham's favorite Online resources for web-page builders, cont.

Webmonkey browser chart

Shows what each version of each browser can handle

http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/reference/browser_chart/

ProSTATS

For just \$5 total, you can buy a simple, easy program that will show you how many people are visiting your web page and what they visit on your site (without those annoying ads or counters on the web page that will show everyone you had just 5 visitors last week)

<http://www.pagetools.com/webstats/StatsV2/index.htm>

Web site Garage

<http://websitegarage.netscape.com/>

Helps you analyze and speed up your site

Advanced Tools

C/net's web-building site:

<http://home.cnet.com/webbuilding/0-3880.html>

"Bobby" analyzes your site

Rates it for adherence to code and accessibility of your site to people with disabilities, suggests improvements

<http://www.cast.org/bobby/>

Free Java applets for dynamic content

<http://java.sun.com/applets/>

Php manual:

A good, free open-source program for interactive content and accessing databases. But if you don't have any experience with databases or unix code, forget it.

<http://www.php.net/manual/>

Devshed: Developer Shed

Full of news, tutorials and help for developers; can help you learn advanced tools.

<http://www.devshed.com/>

HTMLDOC

This is a FREE program that converts files into the pdf form that is displayed by the Adobe Acrobat reader. It's good for web pages that you want people to print out, but not so hot for pages that you want to be viewed quickly and be easy to read on the computer screen. Comes with documentation you can download, but you have to pay for human support.

<http://www.easysw.com/htmldoc/>

Codelifter.com

Shows you the real code behind complex pages you like so you can borrow it.

<http://www.codelifter.com/>

Web Reference with lots of articles around the fine points of web page creation

<http://www.webreference.com/>

And finally...

Web pages that "suck"

"Where you learn good Web design by looking at bad Web design."

<http://webpagesthatsuck.com/>

This also gives you a link to

<http://www.fixingyourwebsite.com/>

LOCAL UNION WEB SITE GUIDELINES

When you plan a web site, make sure you have the answers to these questions:

- 1. Why do you want a local union site on the World Wide Web?**
- 2. Who are you trying to reach?**
- 3. Who else will you be communicating with, whether you want to or not?**
Are you prepared for this?
- 4. What do people want from a union web site?**
Can you offer what they want?
- 5. Can you design a site that looks exciting & interesting?**
It shouldn't just echo your bureaucratic structure, but should reflect what people are looking for
- 6. Are you prepared to keep your site up to date?**
- 7. Are you prepared to be interactive (with two-way communication)?**
- 8. Who will answer e-mail inquiries?**
- 9. Who will check content to make sure it your site complies with the law and union policy?**
Can this be done quickly?
- 10. Who will handle the technical work on the site, and when are they available?**

Getting Started on the Web: What you need

- **A modern computer** with at least 64 megabytes of **RAM memory**, and at least 4 gigabytes of **hard disk storage space**, and a **modem** offering at least 56k access to the Internet. If you're going to be on the Internet a lot, consider buying a separate **phone line**, at around \$25 to \$30 a month, plus installation.
- **Access to the Internet.** For **dial-up access** you pay a monthly fee of around \$20 to an ISP (Internet Service Provider) company like American Online. Before you sign on, find out from other users if they often get busy signals or disconnected when they use the ISP. For high-speed access at about \$50 a month, ask the phone company if you're eligible for **DSL access** or ask the local **cable** company if it offers **cable Internet access**.
- **A web browser.** Download both **Microsoft Internet Explorer** and **Netscape Navigator** for free from the Internet so you can check how the web site looks in each.
- **A web site creation program.** These programs automatically create the code needed to design each page and link it to other pages, when you enter simple commands or click the right symbols, and show you how it will look. A simple **Composer** program is free with the Netscape Communicator. For greater control, buy a good program like Microsoft Front Page 2000 or Dreamweaver for \$200 to \$300.
- **A way to scan pictures and convert pictures.** To use original photos you need access to a **scanner**. To convert scanned photos, and/or photos in publication formats like .tif, to the web formats **.gif** or **.jpeg**, you need a **graphics conversion program** that also compresses them so that they can be viewed quickly. Ulead is the best for the money, at \$60. *Photoshop 5.5 or 6.0 is expensive and harder to use, but also does a great job.*
- **Access to a server** where your web site "lives." It can be anywhere in the world. **ISP companies** offer space on their servers at around \$30 a month. (You can get some free space from ISPs like America Online, but it's usually too limited to use for a real web site.) Here are questions to ask when looking for a server:
 - How much **space** do you get? How much will you have to pay for your site to expand?
 - Will they help you get a simple **URL or web address** of your choice, or do you have to use one that's hard to remember? Can you use standard **ftp** (see below) to upload your pages?
 - What kind of "**back-up**" is there, if the server computer, cable or power source goes "down?" In other words, if the site disappears, do they have a duplicate back-up version somewhere and back-up power and cables, and can they get the site back on-line quickly? Do they offer any guarantees?
 - Is there **24-hour monitoring** of your site? Do they have an after-hours phone number you can call if something goes wrong? Do they guarantee a quick response?
 - How many **visitors** can view your pages at the same time without slowing down the server or costing you extra? Will they give you statistics for visitors to your site?
 - How much "**downtime**" is there for other sites using the same server? Can you contact other customers to see if they're happy with the service?
 - Will they **consult** with you over problems? Will they offer other services you might need, such as help creating graphics, and how much will it cost? Do they offer a **search engine** for your site?
 - If you have someone in your local who can create **special features** such as audio, on-line forms or database-driven pages, what programs does the server have to handle this? How much does it cost?
- **Your own domain.** To get the web address (URL) of your choice, such as www.APWULocal2.org, the ISP company can help you register an address costing \$70 for the first two years, so long as no one else is using the same address.
- **FTP access** to your site. FTP means File Transfer Protocol, and it's a program that allows you to dial directly into the remote computer where your site lives, right from your own computer. Once you get the computer address and a username and password from the server company, you can upload and correct web pages from your computer. You can download FTP programs like WS_FTP for free from the Internet. If you buy a program for \$50 or so, you also get phone and e-mail support.

Web Writing Basics

Do we need to write differently for the Web? YES!

One study by Jakob Nielsen at www.useit.com found:

- Concise text will increase your readability 58 %
- Scannable text will increase your readability 47 %
- Objective language will increase your readability 27 %
- Combining all 3 will increase your readability 124 %

Basic Guidelines for Web Writing

1. Use the inverted pyramid – put the punch line first.
2. Write short, conversational sentences.
3. Write without fluff.
4. Use bullets when possible.
5. Link everywhere but don't list a lot of links in 1 paragraph.
6. **Highlight** key words.
7. Use informative subheads, and a lot of them.
8. Keep it to one idea per paragraph.
9. Use half of the words you'd use in a print article.
10. If sending long (more than one screen) email updates, list the subjects at the top so people can scan down to what interests them.

NOTE: *A lot of what you learn writing for the Web also applies to good newsletter writing – inverted pyramid, concise writing, subheads to help organize your article and usable information.*