

Key Resources for Union Web Designers

On the web, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery – when creating your website, you don't have to start from scratch. Instead, look at other successful union websites, follow their examples, and learn from their mistakes. Also, check first with your international union to see if they have a set of policy guidelines for local union web sites, or if they offer resources and help in setting up your site. But, don't be afraid to be creative and create a unique website for your local!

CWA's "Local Web Site Tools"

<http://www.cwa-union.org/resources/local-website-tools/>

A comprehensive guide to websites for CWA locals, this website includes links to templates, graphics, and the CWA's "Guide to Establishing and Maintaining Local Websites." Comprehensive step-by-step guide to creating, publicizing, and maintaining a site; includes scores of additional resources and some basic technical guidance. Understandably, this site is a bit CWA-centric – and goes in much more depth than might be needed for your local to establish a web presence.

Union Web Services

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

Union Web Services is a company that "provides high quality web site design, maintenance services and content development to the labor movement at a reasonable cost." Their website includes a number of resources designed to assist local unions in establishing and maintaining effective websites, including website checklists that can help guide unions through the creation of a website (<http://www.unionwebservices.com/webcheck>) as well as a listing of Labor Union Internet Resources and links to general sites that help with website design (http://www.unionwebservices.com/weblinks/labor_unions_and_the_internet). Additionally, they provide links to a number of their clients – good resources that you can use when thinking about content/design for your local union website.

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Website Hosting/Guides

(<http://www.cupe.ca/www/webhosting>)

Guide for CUPE locals in establishing a local union website using their content management system. While CUPE-centric, their 60 page guide to establishing a local union website does help local webmasters think about some important issues when establishing their own website

(<http://www.cupe.ca/www/webhosting/localwebsitehowto>).

Canadian Association of Labor Media Guide to Building a Local Union Website

<http://www.calm.ca/calmedia.html>

Good, basic guide that any local thinking about establishing/updating their website should explore. This site also has a number of links to good web resources and a number of Canadian union websites.

Association for Union Democracy "Guide to Building an Effective Rank and File Website"

<http://www.uniondemocracy.com/AUDLinks/website%20guide/buildawebsite.htm>

Adapted from the *Troublemakers Handbook*, this website has 50 guidelines for building a union website than can help guide your union in the creation of an effective local union website. Additionally, they have a yearly website contest – a quick way to look at "good" websites. The contest can be found at <http://www.uniondemocracy.com/AUDLinks/website%20guide/websitecontest.htm>.

LabourStart

Two resources that are of interest:

Best Websites of the Year (<http://www.labourstart.org/lwsoty/>) – LabourStart hosts and annual contest for the best union websites each year – this is a good site to check and see what works for a good union website.

LabourStart Web Browser (<http://www.labourstart.org/opera.shtml>)
Fast browser alternative to Netscape & Explorer available for free download. Pages checked in this browser are "guaranteed" to work in any other browsers.

Free Web Tools

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

Useful tools to download for use in your site (counters, forms, calendars, etc.).

Miscellaneous Web Resources

Free email

A number of companies are providing free email available to anyone who subscribes – the trade off is that you have to put up with ads in their email. Some of the more popular sites include Yahoo! (<http://mail.yahoo.com>), MSN's Hotmail (<http://www.hotmail.com>), and Google's Gmail (<http://www.gmail.com>).

Free Listservs

Yahoo! Groups provides free listservs – anyone with a Yahoo! account can set up a listserv. To set up your own listserv, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com>.

Free Website Counters

Web designers often want to track the visitors to their website, knowing how those visitors found their website and what they're looking at. A number of companies provide free web counters – devices that will allow you to learn more about your website visitors. Some that are worth checking out include StatCounter (<http://www.statcounter.com/>), Amazing Counters (<http://www.amazingcounters.com/>), and CQ Counter (<http://cqcounter.com/>).

Registering Domain Names

The most effective websites have their own registered domain name that is easy to remember (i.e. www.cogs.org). A number of companies allow you to register your own domain name and provide web hosting – while you have to pay for these services, they are fairly inexpensive and worth the effort in order to maximize your web presence. Some companies to consider include Network Solutions (<http://www.networksolutions.com>), GoDaddy (<http://www.godaddy.com>), and Bravenet (<http://www.bravenet.com/>).

Additionally, your local Internet Service Provider should be able to assist you with registering your own Internet domain.

Website Design

You can easily design a website today without having to learn the programming languages that make these sites run – there are a number of different web development tools available for purchase and for free. One of the best is Macromedia's Dreamweaver

(<http://www.macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver/>), an expensive tool (\$399 on their website, but you can probably find it cheaper from other sources), but one that's well worth the money if you're going to create a fancy union website. A free web design tool that I periodically use is Mozilla Suite – a browser that also includes a basic web designer which will create a basic web site (<http://www.mozilla.org/products/mozilla1.x/>).

Blogs

With the growth of blogs and blogging software, a basic website design is just a click away. Blogs can be as simple as a set of posts containing relevant union information and links to other sites. Two of the most popular blogging sites are Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>) and Wordpress (<http://wordpress.com>). Both of these sites provide a basic blog free of charge (though it costs you to register a separate domain name) and provide basic templates and instructions to get you online in a matter of moments.

Union Web Sites: Some Legal and Other Issues¹

1) Check with your international union

Most unions have policies on local union web sites (what should and shouldn't be included, suggested links, etc.). As you start setting up a new site, or whenever you are in doubt about a piece of content, check with your union!

2) Political Candidates on Your Web Site

Unlike your union newsletter which is mailed to members only, most Web sites are open to public viewing. Because of this, different legal restrictions apply on political content endorsing or advocating for candidates. Most general political information (issues, statistics, etc.) is ok to include on the site, but if you want to publicize your union's endorsement of candidates, or if your newsletter argues for defeating certain candidates, you must follow the rules below before putting it on your union site:

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) has ruled that restrictions on spending for television and newspaper advertising also apply to web sites. This means that if you feature an article in your local newsletter announcing the union's endorsement of a candidate, you can't automatically post the same article on your Web site, because on line, the article can be considered an "ad," on a site paid for with members' dues money.

According to an AFL-CIO memo regarding partisan political content on union web sites:

"The FEC interprets and enforces the Federal Election Campaign Act to preclude a union or corporation from listing on its Web site endorsements of presidential and other federal candidates, or otherwise expressly advocating on its Web site a candidate's election or defeat, if the Web site is accessible by the general public." FEC considers a publicly accessible Web site "to be a means of public communication comparable to other outlets, such as leaflets and print or broadcast advertising." Using the site for political endorsements violates the FEC rule that bars unions and corporations from using their treasuries to communicate partisan advocacy messages beyond their so-called 'restricted classes,' which for unions includes union members, union executive and administrative personnel, and their families.

What to Do? If you want to include candidate endorsement information on your site, there are two possible solutions:

- 1) **Pay part of your Web bill from COPE funds.** Put a disclaimer on pages with political endorsements, keep track of the percent of the total space these pages take up on the site, and bill your COPE or political action fund for that percentage of your Web service bill.

¹ Portions of this section were adapted from the CWA "Guide to Establishing and Maintaining Local Web Sites" page on "Legalities, Formalities, and More."

Sample disclaimer: "This portion of the Website is paid for by the CWA Committee on Political Education, with voluntary contributions from union members and their families, and is not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee."

- 2) **Set up a "members-only" section of your web site.** Some web sites contain both public information, plus a "members-only" section that can only be entered with a password (be aware that this will require several steps: getting technical help setting up the feature, distributing individual passwords to members, and explaining the feature ... plus convincing people to use it!). If you go this route, it is fine to put political endorsements on this part of the site.

3) Copyright and Trademark Issues

Many photos and logos on the web are copyrighted, meaning you can't just cut and paste them into your web site without permission.

- You can and should use your union's logo on your site, but corporate logos are protected by copyright/trademark law—don't put your company's logo on your site unless you have permission.
- It's ok to link to articles and photos in other copyrighted publications, but usually not ok to cut and paste the full text into your site.
- It is usually ok (and in fact encouraged practice!) to use articles from other union publications, including materials from the AFL-CIO, Iowa Federation of Labor, and your international union. Just mention the source when you reprint articles from other union publications (for example: "Reprinted from the Spring 1997 issue of the IAM Journal. c.1997 JAM. All Rights Reserved.")
- If in doubt, it is always ok to quote part of an article within your own article, as long as you attribute the source.

4) Member permission

If you're using member photos on the web, as a courtesy, you might consider asking first to make sure it's ok. Some members who don't mind seeing their photo in the members-only newsletter might not feel comfortable having the same photos available to a worldwide public audience.

Sending Effective E-mail Messages

Writing an effective e-mail is a lot like designing a good leaflet. Most people won't read an overly long message, or a message that doesn't seem to have a purpose, so:

Keep it short: like a leaflet, ideally an e-mail should focus on one topic.

Make it important: use the subject line and put key points first in the message.

If it's not important, don't clutter the e-mail list with a message about it.

Make it easy to read: use headers, spaces between paragraphs, capital letters, etc. to organize information. Don't rely on fonts and graphics that won't show up in some people's home computers.

Include links: this can help keep the message short while still allowing those who are interested to find more information on a web site. If you have a local web site, you should include a link to it in every e-mail message you send out.

Some tips for writing common types of messages:

Announcements:

- Include what, where, when.
- Set off the time and place information in the message so it stands out.
- If announcing a meeting, include key agenda topics that make it clear why it is important to attend.

Action Alerts:

- Include what, why, what to do & by when (give a **deadline**).
- Include specific, clear directions for action. For example, if you want members to write to their legislators, include a short sample letter **with** an e-mail address to send it to, or include a link to a sample letter on your local web site that members can modify and send.

News:

- Keep it brief! Ideally focus on only one item per message (refer to a link if there's more information available on-line).
- Try to avoid duplicating everything already appearing in print newsletters or **discussed** at meetings (e-mail works great to remind people about meetings or to communicate breaking news, but if everything appears on the e-mail list, why come to meetings or read the newsletter?) Rather than posting the whole newsletter, publicize your on-line newsletter and local web site by providing a link.
- If possible, link the news item to an action, or ask for a response.