

# *GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES*

## **Involving People**

### **Website design and maintenance**

*(Initially prepared as part of a workshop on Website Design and Maintenance – Vicki Court)*

### **The Internet and Historical Societies**

Local history organisations in Victoria are realising the potential of the Internet to improve access to the extensive collections of material distributed throughout the state, promote the existence and services offered by the historical societies and provide a means of communication between members of historical societies and those researching the history of Victoria.

### **Websites**

More and more historical societies are using websites to publicise their societies and promote their local history. Historical society websites may provide:

- Contact details
- Information about the society
- List of activities and events
- List of publications for sale
- Copy of a newsletter
- Historical information about the local area
- Links to other organisations
- Links to collection database
- Photographs of local area

### **Designing Web Sites**

Effective websites need to be planned – not just have information added to them in an ad hoc manner.

### **Define the site**

Considerations include –

- Purpose of the site – write the purpose in one sentence
- Goals of the site
- Information to be included on the site
- Potential visitors to the site
- Experience of visitors in using computers
- Equipment visitors will have to view the website
- Accessibility of the site for sight impaired visitors
- Information visitors will want to access

### **Storyboard the site**

- Divide the site into sections (pages)
- Create a filename for each page
- Decide the content of each page
- Decide images to be included
- Decide if site is to contain other features

## **Create a layout for the site**

The layout gives the site a distinctive look

Look at the design of other sites

Decide the features of other sites that may be incorporated in the site

Layout considerations include –

- Colour of text
- Background colour
- Type of font
- Size of font
- Placement of text on the page
- Placement of images on the page
- Headings
- Use of tables
- Navigation methods between pages
  - Navigation links
  - Navigation bars

Make a template for the site to ensure a consistent layout.

The template contains the basic layout and is duplicated as required. Text and images are then added to the template for each web page.

If the site has many pages that will share the basic formatting, an external file style sheet can be created.

## **Creating Web Pages**

There are a number of ways of creating web pages:

- Using raw HTML code to determine the structure of the site using a text editor
  - Text editors include:
    - Notepad (found under Accessories in the Programs file – a good basic text editor)
    - WordPad (found under Accessories in the Programs file – WordPad contains additional editing features)
    - Notepad++ (<http://notepad-plus-plus.org/> – the layout of this text editor makes editing html code much easier)
- Using a web-authoring program
  - These programs are WYSIWYG – what you see is what you get and using them is similar to using desktop-publishing programs. The program creates the HTML code.
  - Web authoring programs include:
    - Macromedia Dreamweaver
    - Microsoft FrontPage
- Using a free web-authoring program or website builder
  - Free programs include:
    - Amaya
    - SeaMonkey Composer (Mozilla)
    - KompoZer

For information about a selection of free HTML Editors and WYSIWYG Web Editors (plus links to the programs) –  
[www.thefreecountry.com/webmaster/htmleditors.shtml](http://www.thefreecountry.com/webmaster/htmleditors.shtml)

- Using a Content Management System (CMS) such as LightNEasy –  
<http://www.lightneasy.org/index.php> – Vicnet can provide access to LightNEasy as part of its webhosting service for community groups
- Using a webpage generator such as the one provided to members of My Connected Community (mc<sup>2</sup>) to create a simple web page – html code can be added to achieve additional formatting

Other ways of creating web pages from documents include:

- Converting word processing documents into web pages by saving them as html. Web pages created in this way may require editing to achieve the required results.
- Copying and pasting pages from a word processing document into a text editor and then adding the appropriate html tags – note some symbols, particularly some punctuation, may need to be retyped in the text editor as they do not always transfer to plain text

Websites can also be created directly online

- Using Google sites – <http://sites.google.com>
- Using blogs such as Blogger – [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) or Wordpress – <http://wordpress.org/>

### **Checking the web pages**

After creating a page using html code save the page as an html or htm file.

Pages created in html can be viewed in a browser.

If Windows Explorer is the browser:

- Open the browser
- Go to the File menu
- Choose open
- Use the Browse button to locate the html file
- Select the file and click the Open button

The page will then display in the browser

### **Images**

Images can make web pages more interesting. People using local history sites like to see images showing how the local area looked many years ago and these images are usually readily available in local history collections.

Some historical societies are reluctant to include their images on the Internet as they fear that they will no longer have control of the images. This is a particular concern as revenue from selling photographs is often a major source of historical society funds. Placing selected images on the Internet however can help to publicise the historical society and show the range of items available in the collection, encouraging more people to use the collection and maybe purchase photographs.

### **Technical considerations when including images in a web page**

Safeguards can be implemented to prevent the exploitation of online images:

- Limit the resolution of scanned images – 72 dpi is sufficient resolution for images on the Internet
- Limit the size of images – the width and height of the image can be altered
- Use JPEG format when saving images for online use
- A watermark or label may be used to identify ownership of image

Internet users can save images to their computers and also print them. However if the image has a low resolution, is not too big and has been saved as a compressed file, it will not be possible to produce a good quality print of the image.

Large images also take longer to appear as the page is displayed on the screen. People lose interest in a page if it takes too long to download.

When designing web pages the required size of the image on the screen should be noted (when using html in pixels).

Including height and width attributes also notifies the browser about the size of the image, allowing the image to be displayed more quickly.

Internet users can decide not to download images on a page and visually impaired people also have problems with images. Therefore information about the image using the alternative text (alt) attribute should be included in the image tag.

Placing the cursor over the image will produce the text in a box. If a text only browser is used text about the image will be available.

The position of the image on the screen in relation to text can also be incorporated in the text.

Attributes can also be added add a border or specify space around an image.

Images that are not photographs are included in web pages as gif files – dog.gif

### **Copyright, access rights and moral rights**

Having an image in a collection does not mean that the image can be published on the Internet.

If the society does not own the copyright of an image then permission must be obtained from the copyright owner before publishing the image.

Currently photographs created prior to 1955 are out of copyright, but even if the image is out of copyright another organisation such as the State Library of Victoria might have access rights to the photograph and permission would need to be sought before publication of the photograph.

When acquiring image material for a collection the society should have the owner of the image fill in a form specifying the copyright and or access rights for an image.

Even if the society owns the copyright of a graphic item it may still not be appropriate to include the image on a website, especially if the image is a recent photograph and particularly if the photograph contains identifiable images of children. Permission would need to be obtained from the subjects (or guardians of the subjects) before publication of the image on the Internet.

If photographs or digital images are created specifically for an online presentation then an announcement should be made that photographs of the event will be taken and if anyone objects to being included, they should make their concerns known so that they will not be included in an online image.

The Australian Copyright Council – <http://www.copyright.org.au/> – provides up to date information on copyright.

### **PDF files**

Portable document format (pdf) files were created by Adobe and are often linked to web pages. The file extension is .pdf. The files are created using programs such as Adobe Acrobat and the software Adobe Acrobat Reader is required to read them. Other programs that create pdf files include pdf995 downloaded from [www.pdf995.com](http://www.pdf995.com).

Recent versions of programs such as word processors, spreadsheets, presentation programs often allow the document to be saved as a pdf file.

### **Links**

- Links can be made to another website
- Links can be made from one page to another page on your website
- Links can be made to information elsewhere on the same page
- Images can be used as links

### **Create a site map**

The site map provides a directory of the web pages and or items on the web pages in the Internet site.

### **Search box**

It is possible to include a search box facility on your website. Free find – [www.freefind.com](http://www.freefind.com) – is one service while Google also provide a search facility –

<http://www.google.com/cse/>. Free search boxes usually include advertisements. A monthly charge is made for advertisement free services.

### **Test the website**

Ensure that users can readily access the web pages. This includes visually impaired users and users who do not necessarily use the latest computer equipment.

- Check that the pages are easy to read – uncluttered and not too busy
- Check that the text is easy to read – type, colour and size of font
- Check that the images are relevant and not there just for the sake of including images
- Check that all links work
- If links are imbedded in images, buttons etc, ensure that alternative text is included in the element
- Test the pages on more than one browser – what works on one browser will not automatically work on another browser
- Check that the pages work on computers with different screen resolutions
- Check the colours used on different monitors

### **Load your site on the Internet**

This involves using file transfer protocol (ftp) to transfer the files to server on which the files are to be stored and accessed by other computers. There are a number of ways to do this including the program FileZilla – <http://filezilla-project.org/>.

Some Internet authoring and editing programs incorporate ftp facilities in the program. The mc<sup>2</sup> web generator transfers completed pages to the server when the creator of the page clicks the Create button.

### **Hosting of Internet Sites**

Web pages need to be transferred to a server in order to be published on the Internet.

#### **Free hosting of Internet sites**

A number of organisations will host Internet sites free of charge though there are usually restrictions on the size of files that will be hosted. There may also be restrictions on some of the scripts that may be incorporated in the web pages. Some of the free hosting services include advertising banners on the top of the pages.

VICNET – [www.vicnet.net.au](http://www.vicnet.net.au) – provides free hosting of websites for community groups.

#### **Maintenance of Internet Sites**

Creating and publishing a website is the first step.

Websites can be static where the information on the site is never changed. Once the site has been read there is no need to return to the site again.

Websites can also be dynamic with the information on the site constantly being updated. This encourages people to return to the site to obtain the latest information. Effective websites need someone prepared to work on them to keep the information on the site up to date and if necessary refresh the appearance of the site from time to

time. It is therefore important that when the website is designed and created thought should be given to the maintenance of the site.

If the web pages were prepared using web authoring or web editing software will the maintenance be done using the software or will the maintenance be carried out by altering the information within the html code or adding additional html sections to the page.

When designing the web page keep in mind the sections that will be regularly modified and take this into consideration when creating the site.

If for example links are made to pdf files that will be constantly changed, ensure that the name for replacement file is the same as for the original file so that the new file can be ftp'd to the server without having to alter the information in the html page.

An easy way to change the appearance of the site is to change the images on the pages from time to time.

The website should include a section with information about when the website was last updated. This date should be altered each time changes are made to the site.

### **Usage of the site**

It is useful to record the usage of the Internet site.

Counters can be used to record the number of hits a website or web page receives. These counters can also provide information about how the site is used – daily, weekly and monthly usage, times of the day when site generally used, the countries from which enquiries are made.

Statistics for sites hosted by VICNET can be accessed on the VICNET site.

A counter for web pages is one of the features of the mc<sup>2</sup> web page generator.

Counters can be downloaded from the Internet. One such counter is StatCounter – [www.statcounter.com/](http://www.statcounter.com/).

### **Publicising the Website**

Let people know about your website. Ensure that the website address is included on newsletters, correspondence, society documents, banners etc.

Search engines such as Google use software called Spiders to regularly trawl the Internet looking for new sites. When designing the website make sure that keywords describing the website contents are near the top of the page so that relevant information about the website can be collected by the Spider.

Metadata tags inserted in the Head section of the web page are designed to contain information that will be collected by Spiders. Using metadata tags will improve the chances of the site being accessible via a search engine.