



# THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WEBSITES

Use your club site to set your group apart.

By Marcie Hill, CTM, CL

**W**hat is the best way to show how your Toastmasters club is different from the 13,000 other clubs around the world? By creating, developing and maintaining a website.

Your club website can serve as an educational, inspirational, marketing, media *and* conversational tool! Keep your site content current, and highlight what makes your club unique and desirable. Use these tips to learn how you can do that:

## Tone

Tone is the first way to distinguish between clubs. Pay attention to your writing on the site. Make your language more professional, or less professional, depending on your intended audience. If you are in a corporate club, make sure your boss would be fine with what you write. If you are in a specialty club, appeal to your common interest — tell jokes on a humor club site or use culinary terms for a food lovers' site. The one thing that should stay constant no matter what tone you use is the

friendly spirit: You should always be welcoming to members and guests.

## Content

Share your club's story and successes. Each club has history, trials and triumphs. A website is the perfect place to chronicle them all. Be sure to report each of your Distinguished designations, a new point toward your DCP plan and any other awards and acknowledgments your club earns. If you sponsor a Youth Leadership or other program, note those experiences, too.

Share members' stories and successes. All your club members joined Toastmasters for a reason. Some joined to conquer their fear of public speaking while others want to improve their presentation skills. Some members want to become better leaders. Use your site to share anecdotes — perhaps there is a story about how a Toastmasters speech contest winner almost fainted during his or her Ice Breaker speech, or one about how the current club president admitted he skirted leadership responsibilities until he joined Toastmasters. These stories can be encouraging to new and current

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members who want to improve their speaking and leadership skills. Also, be sure to report each time a member completes a manual speech or earns a new designation. That's not only a reflection of their progress; it also makes the club look good.

### Feedback

Get feedback from members and guests. Remember, evaluations are an essential part of the Toastmasters program, and you shouldn't treat feedback on your site any differently. Heed all feedback provided, even if it is negative, and make adjustments to your content, your meetings or your club practices, as needed. When you put feedback into action, members know they are being heard and will continue to be active participants on your website and in your club.

### Provide Tips

Speaking and leadership tips can be provided from Toastmasters material, or members can draw from their own experiences to offer advice and suggestions.

### Create Media

Your Toastmasters website belongs to your club, so, after following Toastmasters brand guidelines, do what you want, when you want and how you want it. Bring a camera or recording device to your club meetings to capture what makes your club different from other clubs. Share stories using text, video, audio and images. Mix up the

use of the different multimedia tools to make your content more interesting and varied. If you find certain forms of media are preferred by your web audience, continue to use them and ditch the methods that aren't working.

### Promote Club Activities and Events

There is always something going on at each level of Toastmasters. In addition to promoting your club's events and activities, use your website to feature district and division happenings. These activities could lead to new members and more member involvement. For maximum effectiveness, make announcements in advance and write follow-up stories after the event.

### Build an Online Community

You want to build as many relationships as you can with

members and non-members alike. To capture prospects, you need to use traditional and new media tools. Traditional methods include email lists, press releases, announcements at clubs and word-of-mouth. New media options include social networking sites, podcasts and videos. Link to the *Toastmaster* digital magazine, the Toastmasters YouTube channel and @Toastmasters on Twitter. Your ultimate goal is to gain new club members and new website readers.

### Reach Out to the World

Even though Toastmasters is an international organization, your club is locally based. A website will help make your club known around the globe. Depending on how active your website is, you may land on the first page of Google when people conduct a search on your club or a subject you posted.

In addition to highlighting the uniqueness of your club, your website will serve as a source of inspiration, marketing and encouragement to members and readers alike. The site will help your club grow, because you are sharing valuable content and tips that enables people to improve themselves, both personally and professionally. It will also help your group grow closer as you share the responsibility of developing and maintaining your club's website! **T**

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