

Creating a School Web Site

Since many students and parents use the Internet as a source of information, setting up a school Web site is a great way to advertise your institution and to provide information for your constituents. In this column, we will look at reasons for having a Web site, examples of information to include, and some design and technical suggestions.

Why Create a Web Site?

A Web site can provide good publicity for your school, as well as a great deal of useful information for students and parents. And it may attract other people as well. Who might visit your site?

- Parents seeking a Christian education for their children.
- Grandparents eager to see their grandchildren's school work and artistic creations.
- Community members seeking information about school events or fund-raising programs.
- Students from near and far who are interested in studying at your institution or in special programs or features you offer (help for students with learning disabilities, foreign language immersion courses, musical groups, etc.).

How do you get started? What should you put on the site? First, define your audience and determine what information they would be interested in. Don't try to provide more information than you can manage and keep up to date. Here are some examples of information you may want to include, along with examples of actual Web sites of some Adventist schools around the world.

- Begin with general information about your school, using already-printed materials as the basis of your first pages. Include your location (along with a map); the programs you offer, information from your handbook, such as application procedures, dress code, necessary immunizations, and documents to bring when they enroll (photo identification, Social Security card, birth certificate, passport, visa, etc.), school fees; policies relating to grading, suspension, expulsion, cheating, and plagiarism; school closing policies,

transportation information, what to do in case a disaster strikes during school hours, and how to request information such as a transcript or other documents. Be sure to post an up-to-date school calendar, including scheduled meetings such as parent/teacher conferences, open house, and PTA and board meetings.

- Prominently feature your school's mission statement and master plan, along with any supporting documents or evidence of how you work toward those goals. Include pictures that illustrate the mission statement and various spiritual-life activities.

- Include students' individual and collaborative work (writing, art, science projects, etc.). Consider inserting a photo essay to give parents a glimpse of a typical day in their child's classroom at that grade level. Include a description of long-term assignments and class projects, with periodic updates ("This year, Ms. Miller's 5th and 6th graders are doing an ongoing analysis of the water quality in the Baobab River.")

Make sure that the links from your school's entrance page to other locations in the site entice visitors to read and learn more. Don't start with a long and boring introduction by the principal or president. See the "Following Christ" newsletter, Zaoski Theological Seminary, <http://www.adventist.org.ru/info/view?eng-def2/>; and The Falcon's

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Nest by an Alaskan public elementary school, for an award-winning example of a school Web site. Be sure to check out the Microcopium. (See <http://www2.northstar.k12.ak.us/schools/upk/upk.home.html/>.)

- Next, create pages featuring your school staff and administrators. Include names, titles, photos, and a brief biography of teachers, administrators, office staff members, and other school personnel. Include a way to contact them, preferably school E-mail addresses. Be careful about listing home phone numbers and other personal information, keeping in mind that the Web page will be available to the whole world. It's probably best to give only the school phone numbers and an emergency after-hours number to call. Obtain permission before posting staff photos and personal information on the site.

- Be sure to feature any special programs offered by your school. Do you have one or more teachers skilled in helping learners with handicaps or learning disabilities? Do you teach English as a Second Language or advanced technology courses? Does your school have any other unique offerings? What extracurricular opportunities are available (choir, band, clubs, or sports programs)? How about classes in applied or fine arts? Do you offer advanced course

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work to challenge students? Be sure to advertise and feature these programs on your Web site.

- What kinds of work opportunities are available to help students defray the costs of attending your school? Post photos of students at various jobs in school offices and industries.

- Include information for residential students, such as a photo of a typical dorm room and a list of items needed to furnish it.

- Feature prominently the service opportunities at your school, such as mission trips, outreach and spiritual-life activities, and

sure Web pages are educationally safe and do not contain links that violate the district's acceptable-use policy.¹¹ See teacher Web pages at La Sierra Academy: <http://www.lsak12.com/webpages/teacherwebs.htm/>.

- Provide recent issues of school and classroom newsletters or up-to-date news about the school. See the Web site for Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines: <http://www.aiias.edu/>.

- Include information on fund-raising programs such as citrus fruit sales and ways that prospective financial partners can support the school. See Pakistan Adventist Seminary's site: <http://www.tagnet.org/pas/>.

- For colleges and universities especially, include information about the town/country around you for prospective students and visitors. See Caribbean Union College's

to keep the information, news, and teacher Web pages up to date. Most universities and colleges can afford to hire students or staff to maintain their site. However, elementary and secondary schools will probably need a volunteer or paid technical-support person to create and maintain the site. Sometimes this can be assigned to a small team.

Decide what is most important to feature on the site, what needs to be updated and how often, and then find staff members, volunteers, or students to help with the work. It may be best to get a professional to design or at least evaluate the plans for the site to ensure that technical issues such as computer capacity, software, and protection against hackers have been addressed.

Other Issues to Consider

If students are helping to design or maintain the school Web site, a responsible adult should check their work for accuracy, appropriateness, navigation, and design before it is posted on the World Wide Web. Also, if you intend to post pictures or work of students under the age of 17, you should obtain parental permission.³ A parental-release form can be incorporated into the registration process to make this process easier.

Thoughts on Design

As you design your school Web site, keep your audience in mind and try to make the pages simple and easy to use. Aim for clean graphics, crisp copy, useful information, and easy navigation.⁴

Make the type large and bold enough to be readable, and arrange it in a way that is pleasing to the eyes. Avoid putting type on busy backgrounds or over photos. Don't use loud colors for backgrounds. Make sure the graphics are small in size (25K or less if possible) so that the pages load quickly even with slower modems. Create an entrance page that is simple and fast loading. Avoid repeating music and video clips that will annoy the visitor after the first few page views. When selecting graphics, be sure to obtain permission to use materials from the Internet unless they come from "copyright friendly" sites.⁵ Or you can create your own graphics.

Design the navigation of the site so that a visitor can get to the various pages easily. For example, note that Thunderbird Adventist Academy's page has multiple links to the various services on their Web page: <http://www.thunderbirdacademy.org/>. Another helpful navigation feature is short descriptor phrases with the links on the home page so that visitors know what is included under

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other avenues for reaching out to the community. For example, Majuro Seventh-day Adventist Schools list information for prospective student missionaries on their site: <http://www.tagnet.org/majuro/>.

- Highlight the accomplishments and successes of your teachers and students, including standardized test scores, statistics on campus safety, and other information that promotes the advantages of attending your school.

- Include links to other Web sites that students can use in their classwork. This saves instruction time and makes the resources available to students both at home and at school. Provide links to other resources helpful to parents and students, as well. Include a disclaimer stating that "Every reasonable attempt has been made to en-

site: <http://www.tagnet.org/caribbean/>.

- Include recorded quotes by students and chat rooms and bulletin boards for alumni to add variety and interest to your site. However, be sure that such Web-based "bells and whistles . . . add clarity and enhance your message."² See Avondale College's site: <http://www.avondale.edu.au/>.

- Consider offering information in more than one language (or a separate site for each language) if your institution serves more than one language group. See Zaoski Theological Seminary's site: <http://www.adventist.org.ru/>.

Time Investment

Creating and maintaining a school Web page is an ongoing task. The site needs to be maintained regularly (weekly or monthly)

each link. See the Universidad de Montemorelos Web site at <http://www.umontemorelos.edu.mx/> for an example.

Hosting the School Web Page

When you are ready to put your school's Web site online, choose a reliable service to host it. Here are some options:

TAGnet ("Three Angels Global Networking") at <http://www.tagnet.org/> is an organization operated by a group of Seventh-day Adventists to enable and empower churches, schools, organizations, and ministries wanting to have a presence on the World Wide Web. Many Adventist schools host their Web sites through TAGnet.

Other options for Web hosting can be found at the Web Host List at <http://webhosts.thelist.com/>.

Free Homepage Hosting. Another option is to create and publish your school Web page on a free site. There are many options for this, including BigChalk.com/, MySchoolOnline, Apple's iTools, and more.⁶ Many of these sites include advertising to pay for their costs.

Providing a school Web site for your parents and students can enhance home and school communication, offer information on homework and assignments, and attract new students to your school. ✍

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. "One District's Approach"—sidebar by Sylvia Knapp on page 27 of Nora Carr's "Building a Better Web Site," *Electronic School* (September 2001), pp. 24-27. Also available at <http://www.electronic-school.com/2001/09/0901betterwebsite.html/>.

2. Nora Carr, "Building a Better Web Site," *Electronic School*, p. 24. Also available at <http://www.electronic-school.com/2001/09/0901betterwebsite.html/>.

3. See the Child Online Protection Act for more information: http://www.epic.org/free_speech/censorship/copa.html/.

4. See "Building a Better Web Site," by Nora Carr, page 24. Also available at <http://www.electronic-school.com/2001/09/0901betterwebsite.html/>.

5. For links to graphics that you can use on your school Web site, see Web Authoring Tools at <http://www.rem11.k12.mi.us/bcisd/classres/web.htm/>.

6. See <http://www.macul.org/newsletter/2001/july2001/techelem.html/> for more information and detailed descriptions of each site.