

Technology Use Guide

Improving Technology at the unit level for better recruiting and retention

Introduction

This is a topic near and dear my heart. My non-scouting career has been in the small and very small business IT Consulting and support field for the last 20 years (2003-2023). Throughout my career I have helped many companies with different website issues, lapsed registrations, migration to new web host, creating from scratch, etc. All scouting units, no matter their total membership fit in to the small company or very small company designation when considering technology use. During the run up to my on-course time at Woodbadge 23-1 I wanted to find something that I could bring over from my non-scouting career to benefit not just my unit but the larger scouting community.

This guide is created to provide a basic overview of what is needed to build from scratch a new website that if designed appropriately will help improve your units recruiting and even retention. It will take some work and commitment from you to set up and maintain. This is not a set it and forget it sort of venture, this takes a shift in mentality, a shift in how your unit uses technology.

The basic ideas are this, to better improve recruiting you need a website that works for you, that helps with Search Engine Optimization, is helpful to new families that don't know scouting, and provides an easy way for them to reach out for more information or for them to join. Retention is accomplished by having all of the recruitment pages, and resource pages with online payment options for your members. The goal when questions come up from members and potential members should be to drive them to your website.

There is some ongoing cost with this, which can be difficult for some units. As described in this guide, the cost per year is about \$80 for fixed fees and if you add the credit card processing there are per-transaction fees.

Most of this can be accomplished for free with minimal trade-off for a well designed and maintained website. When appropriate free options are discussed throughout this guide.

Purchase Domain

The first thing you need is a domain. A domain is the address you have people type in to get to your website, like google.com, yahoo.com, or shac.org. For our discussions there are 2 parts to a domain, the domain name and the extension/ top level domain. Google is the domain name, and .com is the extension or top-level domain. There are lots of different top level domains available. Some are expensive, and others are restricted, like .mil and .gov. Stick with the .com, .net, or .us top level domains.

Keep it in the Goldilocks zone for domain names, not too short, not too long, descriptive enough without going overboard.

Before purchasing your first domain, decide if you're going to get the paid-for web hosting discussed in the next section. If the free service route is chosen then purchasing a domain is not necessary.

Most of the paid-for services in this guide are easiest paid by credit card. If your unit does not have a credit card, a parent might have to pay for the service and get reimbursed, or maybe your charter can

help. Most website hosts and registrars offer pay by invoice, but that is usually slower. Be sure that if a parent is paying for this that there is some level of written understanding about how that parent will transfer things if they move away or quit.

Picking and registering the domain

Use a valid registrar, somebody like Godaddy, Network Solutions, or your website host if they offer the service. Wix, Weebly, Squarespace, Shopify are some of the website hosts that should also offer domain registration as part of your plan. Bluehost and hostgater are also some services you might try.

Check to see if your specific domain is available first. The registry checks a global database, so trying other registrars would not benefit.

Sign in or register for an account.

Complete the registration information.

Any domain registration requires information be provided for the WHOIS database, which is a publicly accessible address. It is a way to show ownership of a domain. Registrant, Administrative, and Technical contacts must be provided. The information can be repeated across all 3. Use the chartered organization details here. Private registrations are available for additional cost.

Website Hosting Service

The website hosting service you choose is going to make the biggest difference in your ability to maintain and design your website. Many services will provide you a free trial or a free website option. It may be worth it to try a few different services before settling on one.

Things to look for are easy to edit pages, no coding, and drag & drop features. Ecommerce options, calendar sync to google might be nice, lots of room for pictures, etc.

Most website hosts will also register your domain, but it isn't required. If you already have a domain, they can walk you through the process of pointing your existing domain at their servers.

Make sure to set up a secure account, share the details with others in your unit, and if utilizing a credit card, be sure that it is a unit card, charter organization card, or you have an agreement in place with a parent about ownership of the service. If using a personal card, it is imperative that other people have the password and have a way to log in should the cardholder leave the organization.

Basic Website Design

This is what will take the longest time and make the most impact. You want a dynamic website with lots of color, pictures, and graphics. On the homepage keep the total word count down to near zero. You probably want to start with just a home page and then expand to the following:

1. Home page
2. Calendar
3. Payments
4. Resources
5. Join FAQ

More about the homepage

Pictures, Pictures, Pictures! Keep the paragraphs off the page and have two prominent buttons, join now and more information. Save the other information for other pages. The join now button should link to the unit's beascout.org direct link. Get help with that link from one of your key 3 or contact your council for help obtaining the link.

Calendar Syncing

Create a secondary page showing your public calendar. Scoutbook offers calendar subscriptions, if your website host can subscribe directly to Scoutbook, then go that route, but in some cases unit might need to have a free gmail account subscribed to the scoutbook calendar and then have the website use that account to display the calendar. Be careful about the information that gets posted publicly. Consult with your unit leadership and Chartered Organization before adding this to your website.

Payments

Using your website's e-commerce capabilities allows you to take money for dues, camping trips, activity t-shirts (if not already included in dues), or anything else that money needs to be collected for. When adding these if your payment solutions allows you to add the credit card fee automatically be sure that is noted in the description. If your payment solution doesn't have that ability, add a few extra dollars to help offset the credit card fees and note that as well. Maybe mention a cash and check discount if you are set up for taking payments in that way as well.

Resources

This is a page for your existing scouts and families for expense reports/ submissions, camping checklists, the current blank (and fillable) health forms, as well as any other resource that might help your families. Might even be a place to list volunteer positions and their job descriptions. New program changes? Great place to put resources for your leaders about that change.

Join FAQ

This page is the target of the 2nd button from your homepage. This can be a collection of the most asked questions. Remember, this page is online 24x7 and can be a great way to separate your unit from other nearby units. Dues, uniform, number of times you camp, when are den meetings, describe the basics of a unit, etc. Remember, many of the people visiting this page are going to be brand new to scouting and may not really understand the difference between packs, troops, dens, and patrols.

Website as part of broader marketing strategy

A unit's webpage should be the center piece of a unit's marketing strategy. Have all printed materials point to the website, whether it is a free site or one with a custom domain, drive people to your website. Have an email automated response to inquiries from your website or other contact methods? Drive them to your website or if already from the website, make sure they know about the FAQ page.

Credit Cards

In order to accept credit cards sign up for Square Account. Get permission from your charter organization to use their EIN and have you bank account handy. Other mobile credit card processing companies exist and may offer similar service and similar devices, but Square has been easy to use and is

the recommendation here as long as Trails-End continues to use Square within their app to process credit card payments for popcorn.

Venmo

There are two options available when setting up Venmo, using a personal account linked to your unit bank account or using a Venmo business account.

The cleaner, preferred option is to set up a Venmo business account. Venmo business charges a percentage for every transaction.

There are tax implications for setting up a Venmo personal account. Please seek advice from the appropriate tax and/or accounting professionals.

Web Host Vendors

This is a partial list of website vendors.

- Weebly – my recommendation for a simple system to use that integrates with square. You have to visit their website directly to be able to sign up. Searching directs you to Squarespace. Allows free and paid-for subscriptions. Weebly is mostly an ecommerce/ website provider but that should not dissuade you from using them. My pack uses this service. Owned by Square.
- GoDaddy – allows free and paid-for websites. They are a full-service registrar, dns provider, and also have websites. I've used them in the past professionally for websites and am happy with their content management. Have not tried integrating square payments to them so that might prove difficult.
- Squarespace – This is another Square owned website that doesn't seem to have a free option and their paid-for options seem a little steep. You might be able to find a more cost effective option on their site but at the time of this writing they didn't seem to have a plan that really fit.
- Bluehost- Don't know much about them other than they are one of the larger, more well known players in the space.
- Wix – Had a good free service in the past.

What do you need to purchase with your website

There are a lot of options and things to consider when planning out your web hosting service, email, private registration, custom domain are just a few of the options typically available with a web hosting plan. What do you need? What can you skip?

For the truly free service, you can do it all for free without any extras. I wouldn't add extras unless you were going with a fully paid-for plan.

- Custom domain – Do this first and then if you have the budget and volunteers to manage the additional optional items, consider them.
- Email – It might be nice to have some email associated with your custom domain. Use generic addresses, like treasurer@, cubmaster@, or other specific job titles. Changing email as people move in and out might be more difficult. You would set these up to forward to whatever

personal address these people use. It would be a good way to not need to update your beascout link every time someone on the key 3 changes, or to update your printed material that might have personal addresses. If you go this route, I would still keep your free gmail address.

- Private registration – oftentimes this is a cheap and/or free option for your custom domain. When you purchase a custom domain you have to publish to the world, the owner of the website, their name, address, phone number, and email address. Most of this can be your chartered organization, but check with them first. This gets published to something called the WHOIS database and is used across the globe for domain registrations. There are companies that make the public information private and then they hold on to the required details.

New Site Creation Steps

Follow along as a new site gets created.

These are the steps to set up a free gmail email account, a weebly website with a custom domain, and to create a basic homepage. Steps are approximate, there are a ton of videos out there with step by step guides. These instructions will cover the big steps but can't be a do this, click there, right click that sort of instructions. Things change so fast it would be out of date as soon as it was published.

Gather

Your website is going to need pictures. Before you get started on this journey collect pictures that people are willing to provide for the website. They all sign Part A of the health form which allows for photography to be used for marketing. Check with your Chartered Organization if they have a stricter policy.

Also start gathering common questions that the Cubmaster, Committee Chair, and den leaders get asked by new parents for the More Information/ FAQ page.

Gmail

Create an account, make it something generic like cubscoutpack1102@gmail.com (Not sure if that's a real address, please don't try sending to it). Be sure to set up the recovery email addresses to your personal address and maybe set up a 2nd recovery address or a phone number of a different person in the unit so that 2 people always have access.

Set up 2fa/ mfa for this account and have a 2nd person with access and the password. This is important to prevent somebody from guessing your password and then taking over the account and using it for non-scouty things.

For the below website example, were using lordoflifescouting@gmail.com.

Website

For this example, we are creating a site for all the units at my charter, Lord of Life Lutheran Church in The Woodlands, TX. While not a unit specific website, the steps are all the same here. We are using Weebly to create the site.

Create a Weebly account. It may ask you to create a square account. Use an existing account if you already use Square for more than popcorn. Follow the steps. For name get creative and set it up using some combination of your Unit number. First name Pack and Last name 883, maybe. It may need a

verifiable name, and if that's the case, use your name or coordinate with your charter organization to use one of theirs.

You've created the account, choose the plan, for most units it's going to be the cheapest option here.

Set up your domain. Weebly has you register the domain separately. Pay for as long as you're comfortable. Choose private registration if you can, but use legitimate addresses when setting up the private details.

Choosing a domain is a mixture of science and art. Use your neighborhood or city name but don't let it get too long. Think twice about pack123.com. Mainly it's probably already taken, and second, where is that pack located? But, if you include your location in the url then it might be too long.

Woodlandscubscouts.com isn't exactly short but it works pretty well for SEO.

The important thing is to get a domain, you can always change it later or what I would suggest, add a second one later. You can have 1 website answer to multiple different domains.

Now would be a good time to make sure you share the login details with a second person. If you use a password management tool make sure you save that password. I would even log out and log back in to make sure you know the password and can get logged back in before you spend hours making the website just to get locked out when you don't remember the password.

You've got the plan, you can log in to Weebly now let's get started designing.

Homepage

Start playing around with the different templates and examples available. You want pictures, colors, etc. What you don't want is a bunch of words.

Create a picture collage or picture background, maybe even see if there's a feature where new pictures scroll by or show up over the existing pictures. Maybe have the background set as a collage and use a slideshow as the main part of the site. This is where you can let your creative juices flow.

Don't forget about what this looks like on a mobile when doing this as well, you should have the ability to preview before publishing and while doing that you should be able to select a mobile version.

[Join now and more information buttons.](#)

Place the buttons in a spot that works best for your template and design. The very top might be too high, maybe not. If you have the slideshow going up top you can have the buttons right below that next to each other centered on the screen. For mobile, you might end up with them vertically aligned, but that should be ok.

You want to get your direct beascout link from your committee chair or cubmaster. Set up a button and make the text say join now and make the link point to your beascout link. This might be an external link.

The more information link will direct visitors to another page on your website, so you might need to create it but leave the link details blank for now, leaving it blank as a placeholder until you can come back to it. There's always several options and when in doubt, if you find yourself struggling with decisions, use the first one I suggest. That's the one I want you to do but I'm an over-sharer and honest so there's always a different way that can be done and I often provide more options than necessary.

So you have pictures, buttons that link to places, and you've maybe even created a placeholder for more information page, now what?

Let's publish the site and start asking others for their input.

Other Pages

Calendar

We set up a Gmail account because Weebly will display a google calendar. In Scoutbook find the directions for subscribing to a calendar. In the 2023 Scoutbook calendar, updates would publish once per day in the evening or overnight hours. Not sure what the new internet advancement calendar is going to do for synchronization so it may behave different than described here. As described here, the calendar is public so certain considerations have to be made in order to find the right balance of information for those that have not yet joined and safety for those that are already members.

Make sure your committee chair and charter approve of publishing your calendar. Investigate limiting the details of your events in Gmail.

Payments

This is where it gets super specific for Square and Weebly customers. If you are going a different route, like through Godaddy or Wix or something like that, the overall steps will be the same but terminology and specifics will vary greatly.

First you're going to create the items, then you're going to publish them on your site.

Back in the main Weebly dashboard, create items you want to sell. Pay attention to your plan, it allows only so many active products. Items can be added and removed from the website, so you can have short-term products listed like a camping fee or fall dues, or pinewood derby entry fee.

Don't count on the card details to tell you what scout the payment is for, sometimes grandparents or step-parents pay and that can make it difficult to figure out which scout gets that payment. Add a field for the scout's name. Stay away from sizes and options built into Weebly, those oftentimes end up counting as additional items.

What to create as items?

Yearly/Quarterly dues – If your unit charges additional dues over and above national you can post that here and give your families another way to pay it.

Class B shirt – Make people select quantity and have them type in the size they need rather than use the sizing options in the item.

Camping Fees – Need to charge by family or person? Include a place to put Scout's name and how many are attending.

Anything else requiring a fee to be collected. (Blue & Gold, special overnigher, etc)

Credit Card Surcharge

To help with the cost of credit card processing, surcharging based on a percentage isn't really available at the time of this writing, but what our unit does is charge a few dollars extra up to \$100 per item, then \$5

per \$100 to cover the credit card fees.

[Publish to website](#)

Now that you have the pricing and the item completed, go back to the website editor and add an item page.

[Invoices](#)

It is possible through square to create and send invoices. It may not be the best use of your time, look for ways to import scouts so that you limit the amount of data entry done. Scoutbook and my.scouting rosters can be exported via CSV which might help here.

[Resources](#)

This page is designed to make doing business with your unit easier for your existing families. Post files and links on this page. Keep it utilitarian. If you post an expense report or have policies you want everyone to have access to, remember this will be available to everyone who visits your site. Link to the BSA Health form and any other forms that might be needed.

[Join FAQ / More Information](#)

This would be nice to have a few more pictures and graphics as this is part of your marketing efforts for new families. Bulleted lists, sections, etc.

[Configure link to domain](#)

If you purchased a custom domain you have to link that custom domain to your website. Each website hosting service is going to be different.

[Publishing your page](#)

Once you are done with the edits you can publish the page. There's no harm while developing your site to publishing often and sharing your progress with a few other parents that might be helping you out. Be careful once the site is live that you verify after publishing that items looks right and behave appropriately. You don't want to publish the yearly dues item to find out that it is only charging 50 cents.

[Bringing it all home](#)

Your site is live, you and somebody else know how to edit and manage the site. You've started looking for your replacement to take over management in a year or two and now you get to focus on other things in your unit that you can help with. Remember, this is a tool for your unit and with all tools, it requires maintenance and periodic management. Make sure somebody else can manage the orders and the square/ credit card side. Learn how to run the order reports so that as events gets close, payments can be matched to RSVP lists. This is a manual process though, so be prepared.

[Periodic Maintenance](#)

Every couple of months you need to come in and review pictures, seek out new and better pictures. The more your site changes, the better Google likes it for SEO purposes.

[Keep paying the bill](#)

There will be ongoing yearly expenses for this. Make sure that whatever was originally purchased, the treasurer and committee chair are aware. A favorite fraud attempt is sending domain owners fake

renewal notices, so unless the “invoice” comes from the domain registrar and/or web hosting company, don’t pay that bill. Most likely, logging in to your web hosting account is the most secure way to make sure that you keep your bill paid and keep your website online.