

FAQ About A.A. Web Sites

1. Q. How do we start to set up a local A.A. Web site?

A. Decisions in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous are usually made through an informed group conscience and the decision to post a web page is no different. Whether area or district, central office or intergroup - A.A. experience suggests forming a committee to discuss all aspects of setting up a web site, including all possible concerns about the Traditions.

Early on, it is important to agree upon a method for gathering the group conscience of the local A.A. community, and to inform local groups, districts, areas and central/intergroup offices (if affected) about the committee's progress. When the committee has reached a consensus, its findings are shared with the whole group (district, area, etc.) and a decision is made through an informed group conscience vote. It is then that the actual work on the web site can begin. It is helpful to remember that there is no need to let the speed of this technology dictate the speed of our actions. Technical questions regarding this communication method will need to be answered by experts in that field.

2. Q. Who is responsible for a web site?

A. A thoughtful and informed group conscience is encouraged to be responsible for deciding the contents, policy and procedures involved in setting up and maintaining a web site. It has been suggested that a web master (web manager) be appointed or elected to serve as a trusted servant, responsible to the committee or groups served. This can be an arduous task if the web master is responsible for updating local meeting information.

3. Q. How do we select a domain name for our web site?

A. What you choose for your domain name should, again, be determined by the group conscience. To preserve Alcoholics Anonymous' trademarks and service marks, individuals and A.A. groups are asked to avoid using these marks ("A.A."; "Alcoholics Anonymous"; "The Big Book") in their domain names. It has been our experience that many service entities have integrated lower case "aa" into their domain name along with other identifying information (e.g. www.aacentraloffice.org or www.area999aa.org).

4. Q. What A.A. information is suitable for a web site?

A. Again, the group conscience will determine the contents. Copyright restrictions apply to material displayed on the web site - just as copyrights protect A.A. literature. Permission must be obtained from G.S.O. prior to including A.A.W.S. material on your web site. However, web sites created by A.A. areas, districts and central/intergroup offices are permitted to quote a phrase, sentence or brief paragraph excerpted from A.A. literature - such as the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous), Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, The A.A. Service Manual, and Conference-approved pamphlets - without a prior, written request to do so. When this occurs, the proper credit line should be included

to ensure that the copyrights of A.A. literature are protected. After a quotation from a book or pamphlet, the credit line should read: "Reprinted from (name of publication, page number), with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc."

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Again, aside from web sites created by A.A. areas, districts and intergroups/central offices, all others wishing to include A.A. material on their web sites must request permission from G.S.O. to do so.

5. Q. Who pays for a web site?

A. In keeping with our Seventh Tradition, A.A. pays its own expenses and this applies in cyberspace A.A. as well. Free web hosting sites are available on the Internet, but often require the inclusion of mandatory advertising space or links to commercial sites as consideration for their use. To avoid confusion and to guard against inadvertent association or promotion, care should be taken in selection of the web host site.

6. Q. What about linking to other sites?

A. Linking to other A.A. web sites will often have the positive effect of significantly broadening the scope of your site. Information contained on these sites becomes instantly available to those visiting your site. However, since each A.A. entity is autonomous and has its own group conscience, a site to which you have linked may start to display information which your group conscience finds objectionable; and there is no way to know when this might occur, or to prevent it from happening. Linking to non-A.A. sites is even more problematic. Not only are they much more likely to display non-A.A. and/or controversial material, but linking might imply endorsement, if not affiliation, regardless of the contents. In the final analysis, experience strongly suggests that, when considering linking to another site, one must proceed with caution.

At G.S.O. we have attempted to avoid some of these pitfalls by confining our links to known A.A. service entities, and by incorporating a mandatory exit from our site (including when accessing application software such as, Adobe Reader, provided to assist visitors in reading Portable Document Format (PDF) files). The mandatory exit applies even in those cases when someone wishes to activate any of the links we have included on our site. Additionally, we post a prominent notice to that effect.

7. Q. What about anonymity?

A. We observe all A.A.'s principles and Traditions on our web sites. As anonymity is the "spiritual foundation of all our Traditions," we practice anonymity on A.A. web sites at

all times. An A.A. web site is a public medium which has the potential for reaching the broadest possible audience and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio and film.

8. Q. Will the General Service Office of A.A. act as a "clearinghouse" for local web sites?

A. There is no central authority in Alcoholics Anonymous, hence, the General Service Office of A.A. is not a "clearinghouse" for local web sites. Questions regarding the Traditions, contents, linking, etc. are determined by a local group conscience. G.S.O. is available to share collected experience on any subject, including web sites. At this point, though, G.S.O. has only limited sharing from local web site committees regarding their experience with matters which are unique to web site creation.

9. Q. What can be found on G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site (www.aa.org)?

A. In keeping with our Twelve Traditions and viewing the Internet as a form of public and electronic media, G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site was originally set up as a public information tool. It has been broadened to include material that are more directed to members of our Fellowship. The site provides accurate and consistent information about Alcoholics Anonymous to the general public, media and professionals in English, French and Spanish.

10. Q. How many people visit G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site?

A. In 2004, the Web site was visited 2,571,896 times, which is an average of approximately 7,046 visits daily.

11. Q. Is this promotion rather than attraction?

A. As our co-founder, Bill W., wrote: "Public information takes many forms - the simple sign outside a meeting place that says 'A.A. meeting tonight'; listing in local phone directories; distribution of A.A. literature; and radio and television shows using sophisticated media techniques. Whatever the form, it comes down to 'one drunk carrying the message to another drunk,' whether through personal contact or through the use of third parties and the media."

The needs and experience of people in your own area, large or small, urban or rural, will affect what you decide to do. If you have further questions do not hesitate to contact our office at:

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