



The Associated Students site at the University of Utah ([www.asuu.utah.edu](http://www.asuu.utah.edu)) is among the best in the nation. It incorporates most of the critical elements that make up a truly useful web site.

“Site maps detail the hierarchy of the whole site. It works like an outline for your web pages,” Robinson says. “It’s a great way to help visitors navigate through the site.”

**Selecting Perfect Photos and Scenery**

Once your club masters the text, you’re ready to design. “A visitor goes to the web for content first because they have a purpose to go to it,” Robinson says. “What keeps them there is design and how it uses the content.”

Considering tastefulness also is important because your site represents the members and the club’s purpose and good will. For example, if your group decides to add photos to your site, choose ones that show decorum. Appropriate photos are those that display your club’s mission and aren’t offensive.

Photos supplement and accentuate your information and keep students browsing. “People like to look at other people. It makes the content more exciting,” Robinson says. “If it were all text, they would get bored.” However, Robinson warns against excessive download time, including those for pictures. “Graphics are also sometimes too intense that it takes too long to download,” she says. “People have less attention when it comes to the internet.”

Be wary of “backgrounds.” As their name suggests, they’re meant to be behind your content and not distracting the viewer from it. As Carlson says, “A common problem I see is that backgrounds are so busy that they distract from the readability of the text.” Robinson agrees. “I usually stay away from them unless they enhance the look,” she says. “You don’t want one that will overpower anything.”

**The “Must Haves” of Club Sites**

Sell your group by prominently displaying the logo or symbol on the site. It’s also a good idea to provide a link to the parent or national organization. Make sure all of your links work.

Include a calendar of events, contact information for officers, and a message board. Posting events, meeting information, and e-mail addresses make it easier for those members who lose printed material. Instead of fumbling to find the information, it’s only a click away.

**A New Way to Communicate**

Finally, your organization’s web site should provide interactivity. Students enjoy voicing their concerns and opinions. Having an element that allows students to speak out also demonstrates that your leaders are considerate of their members. Robinson suggests using polls, surveys, and registering on-line for events. “Interactive elements make a web site successful because it brings students back. The little things make a difference.”

*If you think your site is one of the best, nominate it in the “America’s Best Student Web Sites” competition at [www.studentleader.com](http://www.studentleader.com). You can also contact Carlson at [gigabit@ufl.edu](mailto:gigabit@ufl.edu) and Robinson at [krobinson@atlantic.net](mailto:krobinson@atlantic.net).*

See expanded coverage at [www.floridaleader.com](http://www.floridaleader.com)

# Web Sites That Wow

## How to design a killer site for your group

By Carla Rojas

Oh, the tangled web sites students weave. Creating a visually pleasing and informative page is a key tool to enhance your club’s membership, promote your events, and communicate your group’s goals and ideas. But beware! An improperly created site can fail to deliver. Distracting graphics, no navigability, and outdated information can deter surfers from further browsing. “Lots and lots of students fall into the trap that if the web site looks cool, then it is cool,” says David Carlson, director of the Interactive Media Lab at the **University of Florida**.

**Capitalizing on Content**

Although immediately eye-catching, the latest graphic elements won’t necessarily make surfers stay. Carlson warns that although design elements boost a web page’s creative appeal, forgetting the rules for print can discredit student organizations. “The most important thing to ensure is that the information is accurate and spelled correctly. That it’s literate,” Carlson says. “If the content is lousy, you haven’t succeeded.” Groups need to perfect content before moving on to design.

Like any other medium, you need to write professionally and use proper grammar. It’s also essential to check for old

information on your site. “Keep your content fresh and updated,” says Kimberly Robinson, web designer for Atlantic.net, an internet service provider. “There’s nothing more irritating than when it’s outdated. No one will keep going to it if it is.”

**Making your site surfable**

To serve current members, your web page should provide relevant information in an easy and accessible way. Make browsing simple by fixing links and making sure every page returns back home. This will avoid the frustration of backtracking.

Other elements that can enhance navigability, not to mention save browsers’ time, are search components and site maps. A search component allows people to type in a key word on your site, which then takes them to the place where that word or words are found. “Search components decrease the time of finding what you want,” Robinson says. It’s also a good idea to imbue your page with “meta tags” or key words that are written in HTML, the language used to create web documents. Search engines recognize the words or tags and give surfers the link to your page. More exposure is better for your group because it gives students the opportunity to learn about your club.

Even though search components are a faster way to retrieve information, another element you can consider adding is a map, which indexes major topics or sections.