SELECTING A WEB HOSTING SERVICE

Groups, intergroups and other service entities interested in creating local websites will need to secure web hosting service. The service literature offers basic guidance on the subject.

WHAT IS WEB HOSTING?

A web hosting service allows organizations to make their websites accessible via the Internet. Web hosts provide space on a server, Internet connectivity, storage for website files, and other services.

WHAT DOES WEB HOSTING COST?

In the world of web hosting, you get what you pay for. Free or inexpensive web hosting services exist but in most cases, those services are supported by advertising, which shows up on all websites hosted by that service.

WHAT SERVICES DO WEB HOSTING COMPANIES PROVIDE?

Most quality web hosting companies provide services to create and maintain a website. The costs will vary according to the level of services contracted. Services often include:

- Website design
- Email accounts associated with the website
- Upload and download capabilities called File Transfer Protocol (FTP)
- File management and backup
- Basic spam blocking
- Website security and Secure Sockets Layer (SSL)
- Autoresponders and mailing lists
- Statistical analyses

CHOOSING A WEB HOSTING COMPANY

Before choosing a web hosting provider, it is important to have a good understanding of your needs. This will enable you to choose the best provider for the lowest possible cost. Answering the following questions will help your website committee develop an accurate assessment of need which will make it easier to choose a provider to host your website.

WEBSITE DESIGN
- Will the pages be created by the web hosting company or by someone else?
- How easy is it to create or modify web pages? Add images?
- Who will be responsible for page maintenance?
- Will the website committee have the ability to add or change text or images on website pages? If not, how will changes be made?

EMAIL
- Will the email account associated with the chosen website domain be used to respond to helpline requests?
- How else might the email account associated with the website be used? What other kinds of correspondence might your group need to conduct using the email associated with the website?

FILE TRANSFER PROTOCOL
File Transfer Protocol (FTP) is the most common method to transfer web pages and other files from a computer to the web host's computer so the information can be seen by anyone on the Internet.
- How easy must the uploading and downloading of files be for the person in charge of the website?

FILE MANAGEMENT AND BACKUP
- How will the website files be backed up? Within the web hosting company servers or elsewhere?
- Will the backups be automatic or done manually? If done manually, whose responsibility will it be?
- How often will the backups occur?
- How easy is it to restore files?

SPAM BLOCKING
- What tools are provided to block spam?
- How are items marked as spam?
- How easy is it to remove items marked as spam?

WEBSITE SECURITY, SSL, AND HTTPS
Both SSL and HTTPS are computer protocols that create a secure connection for transmitting information over the Internet.
- Will it be necessary to obtain private, confidential information, e.g. credit card numbers?
- What tools are provided for blocking hackers and malware?
- How effective are these blocking tools?
- Who will fix the website if it has been hacked or malware is present?

AUTORESPONDERS AND MAILING LISTS
- Will the website automatically email a response when someone uses the "Contact Us" link? If not, who will respond?

- Will there be a need for creating and maintaining mailing lists?
- How easy is it to create an autoresponder and/or a mailing list?

STATISTICAL ANALYSES
- Is data about website visitors important to track?
- What kind of statistics might your group be interested in tracking?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A WEB HOSTING COMPANY

Once the website committee has identified needed services and has determined how the website will be funded, the search can begin for a web hosting company. When evaluating a proposal, consider the following:

RELIABILITY
It is important that the website be consistently available. A good web hosting company will present a service level agreement that helps you know what to expect. Quality service level agreements will set measurable targets for "up-time," lay out a response plan in the event of service interruptions, and explain what you can expect for the availability of service and support.

DOWNSTREAM SPEED
Downstream speed refers to how quickly web pages are loaded onto a user's device. Look for providers with high downstream speed to decrease the chances that users will confront excessive loading times.

TECHNICAL AND CUSTOMER SUPPORT
When there is a connectivity problem, how quickly will the web hosting company respond? When are customer service and technical support personnel available? Are those hours sufficient to meet the needs of volunteers who will be maintaining the website?

PRICE
It pays to comparison shop for the best combination of speed and price. If you choose a free or very low cost web hosting provider, it is very likely that your website will be required to post advertisements.

ADVERTISEMENTS
Companies that offer inexpensive web hosting services are typically subsidized by advertisements. If you purchase hosting from one of these providers, ads may appear on your website. This creates problems for organizations that look to the Twelve Traditions for operational guidance. The presence of ads on an S-Anon website is incompatible with the following Traditions:

- Tradition Three: The presence of ads could imply affiliation with the ad content or the company producing the product or service being advertised.
- Tradition Six: If ads are present, it may appear that your group is endorsing what is being advertised, or that the company being advertised is endorsing S-Anon.
- Tradition Seven: If your web hosting company prices its service so low that ads are required, your website is not fully self-supporting.
- Tradition Ten: The ad content or the company sponsoring the advertisement could draw S-Anon into controversy.
- Tradition Eleven: S-Anon works on the principle of attraction. Ads are purely promotion.

Just as we leave outside issues and non-Conference Approved literature out of our meetings to provide a safe, distraction-free place to hear the undiluted S-Anon message, our websites should strive to reflect the same safety, focus and singleness of purpose.

AMOUNT OF WEB SPACE
Web hosting companies usually offer hosting packages that provide varying amounts of storage space. Purchase a hosting package that will give your website room to grow.

NEED HELP?

Creating a website requires mastery of many technical details. If your group or intergroup does not have the skills or knowledge to purchase web hosting services with confidence, consider securing the services of a local consultant to assist you. For more information or assistance, contact the World Service Office at 800-210-8141 or sanon@sanon.org. Staff members will put you in touch with other groups, intergroups and service entities that have created their own websites and are willing to share their experience, strength and hope on the subject.

MORE RESOURCES
Creating a Local S-Anon Website (L-25): This service literature title offers a practical guide to planning for and launching a local website.

S-ANON
International

Family Groups