

## **Luring Newcomers via Your Group Website**

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### ***Point to ponder***

Newcomers - what are they seeking?  
Information. Reassurance.

### ***How did you first discover the SCA?***

*In a sample of 15 people at the Canterbury Faire 2010 workshop on this subject, only one person had found the SCA via the Web, three by media articles which led to personal contact, one via a poster, the rest by personal contact.*

Typically, group Web sites do not *make* the "sale", they close it. They need to serve the needs of someone who is SCA-curious or wanting to get further involved -- not so much someone who is looking for a new pastime from cold.

### ***Crucial to doing this are the 6 Cs.***

In order of importance:

- ❖ Currency (most important by a long shot)
- ❖ Contacts
- ❖ Calendar
- ❖ Communications
- ❖ Content
- ❖ Credibility

### **Currency**

This beats out the rest because it defines how useful the site is - whether to your own populace or to first-time visitors. Currency is vital because your website is a COMMUNICATION TOOL. If a visitor can't get in touch with your officers because the email addresses are duds, or can't find out what is going on because the calendar is four months out of date, you're just wasting their time. What's worse, you're making your group look as if it isn't functioning at all.

Since it is easy to spot a site which is not being well maintained, that seriously reflects on the credibility of the group. So if a webwright does nothing else with a group site, they should keep it as current as possible. Make sure you have the time and the skills, but most importantly the time, to ensure that you or your designated webwright can do the job properly.

## Contacts

If someone visits your website and wants to take it further, they should be able to easily find an EMAIL ADDRESS that works, and a PHONE NUMBER. Preferably attached to a personal name and role, so they are more comfortable in making contact – personalisation is an important thing in Web contacts. A "Contact us" form is good ONLY if it has both the others too - if it seeks to hide those, it's not good.

If there are privacy concerns in your group with regards to phone numbers, get hold of an old mobile and have the group sponsor its prepay plan costs. Use its number everywhere. Use generic email aliases to keep personal emails private (eg seneschal@group.lochac.sca.org).

The most important points about Contacts are that they should:

- ❖ be easy to find and welcoming
- ❖ cater for how your visitor would like to get in touch (by phone, by email or by including an invitation to "come along to our regular meetings at...")
- ❖ UP TO DATE (see Currency above)
- ❖ answered fairly quickly and RELIABLY (a group cellphone that sits uncharged and untended in a drawer isn't useful)

## Calendar

If your group runs events, holds workshops or even has ad-hoc things that might happen if there's interest, your calendar is the place to show them. Make sure it has relevant contact information for stewards, and enough event information (or links to explanatory pages) to make it sound inviting and not too intimidating for newcomers. Try to avoid SCAdianisms (it's reasonable to have phone, instead of farspeaker – they're using the Internet after all, which is hardly period!)

And keep it current!!

## Communications

Mailing lists: in larger or busier groups, do try to provide a choice of discussion vs. announcements lists if possible, and an idea of how busy each list is (e.g. "typically two or three messages a week").

Membership links. They should be there for those interested, *and* for your regular populace who need to find it easily. But this NOT the primary message for your site, which is to get people in touch and involved. Offering to take their money on Day One is not the best way to achieve that.

Printed matter: put a flyer or A4 poster PDF online – many people like to take material offline to read; ensure it is up to date with contact or meeting details and has your URL on it. If your group still produces a print-based newsletter, see if you can get a PDF to put online

## Content

Home page: this must be *inviting*, make visitors and members feel welcome and involved. It should have a friendly look with friendly content that *puts them in touch and gets them hooked in*. Focus on first-time visitors; experienced users will know which links to follow to find more.

Remember that the SCA is a lifestyle choice -- make sure you give a clear impression of its broad range of activities, social strength and wide network of national and international support, even for those in smaller groups. Make sure people can see they are looking at a community rather than one person's pet project.

Know and focus on the interests of those most likely to seek out your site, and overlapping communities, e.g. clothing for costume players, combat for sports types, dancing, feast info etc. Have a clear and obvious place for newcomers to go, or a friendly FAQ that provides them with useful information or direct contacts in specific areas.

## Credibility

Credibility is created, in part, by the content of your site. It has to read well and be grammatical, talk at their level, and sound a like a branch of an international group but without sounding stuffy. It has to promise the right things, and those things need to match what the group (and/or its neighbours) can deliver.

You can boost this with design elements and good Web practice, such as having:

- ❖ good, consistent, working navigation (no "under construction", empty pages or badly broken links)
- ❖ quick loading pages (not filled with over-large large graphics or flash movies)
- ❖ a clean and medieval-looking layout and text. Make sure this doesn't interfere with display or readability -- black-letter gothic or thin spidery calligraphy for the entire site is right out!
- ❖ appropriate and appealing use of images (get these cleared for Web use with the individuals concerned)
- ❖ instant access, not hidden behind third-party login walls or similar
- ❖ lack of third-party advertising, wrap-arounds and similar

Does your site work? If you're using back-end automation, is it functioning? Does any browser automation or fancy display work function across a wide range of browsers? And so on. Nothing drives people away from sites faster than "I couldn't use it".

Is it up to date? This is one of the first things people notice about a site, and it's a measuring stick for the credibility of your group. Which is why Currency is the first of the six Cs.

## ***And finally...***

Assuming you've got the 6Cs fairly well covered, there is one more way to make your site work well for your group -- marketing.

Do this widely, not simply on the web itself, though you make sure keywords like "your city/region", "medieval" and "SCA" bring it up prominently in search engines.

Mention it in all flyers, whether downloadable or printed documents, on introduction cards, posters, signboards, interactive displays at demos etc. Also in letters to the editor, any media interviews you do and so on.

Use the shortest URL that will work e.g. <http://lochac.sca.org> is far better than <http://www.lochac.sca.org/lochac/index.html>

Get it out there! If you build it – and build it right – they will come.

## ***Helpful Resources***

### **Lochac Masonry Team – Server administration and support**

<http://masonry.lochac.sca.org>

Masonry Deputy – for technical requests, e.g. password access and changes, mailbox or mailing list creation, DB creation: [masonry@lochac.sca.org](mailto:masonry@lochac.sca.org)

If you run a web site or mailing list in Lochac, join the **Site List** -

<http://lochac.sca.org/mailman/listinfo/site> -- that way you'll be informed if there are important server-related changes or outages. YOU MUST BE ON THIS.

### **Web Ministry**

<http://lochac.sca.org/lochac/info/chronicler/webminister.html>

Web Minister: [webwright@lochac.sca.org](mailto:webwright@lochac.sca.org)

Webministers Mailing List (if running a website):

<http://lochac.sca.org/lochac/info/chronicler/webminister.html>

### **Content Examples**

Want some content to crib? Try <http://sg.lochac.sca.org> (generally speaking, the content on that site has been previously offered for other groups to adapt. However, it never hurts to check with the current webwright – [web@sg.lochac.sca.org](mailto:web@sg.lochac.sca.org) -- or with those noted as the authors of a given document or section).

Want some good graphics to use or adapt?

Try: <http://lochac.sca.org/hospitaller/material-graphics.html> - the graphics on this site were mostly created by Lord Ronan mac Briain and are available for SCA re-use.