

2009 USPS Website Awards

Introduction

The World Wide Web is an important community where individuals and businesses go to acquire information on topics of interest, and to contact other individuals and organizations with which they share common interests. The Web is a first-point-of contact for many potential new USPS members.

It is essential that the first impressions we make using this medium are ones, which accurately and attractively represent our mission, and goals. In addition, it is desirable to recognize the efforts of those whose creativity, time, and energy is given in developing and maintaining web pages. To these ends, the USPS Information Technology Committee (ITCom) has created the USPS Website Award (WebAward) program.

The program provides two levels of recognition: The first is (**The USPS Website Recognition Award**) for websites that meet the basic criteria of presenting your squadron, district and USPS to the public and dispersing critical event information to members. The second is (**The USPS Website Excellence Award**) for those websites that have gone far beyond the minimum requirements and provide the information in an especially organized, informative and artistic manner that encourages visitors to view all of the information available and be inspired to make contact for additional information.

Neither award is a competition between websites. It is recognition of the webmasters efforts to promote the squadron, district and USPS. There is no limit on the number of recipients for either award.

Websites should present the viewer with the compelling reason to become a member of USPS. Websites should be a clearinghouse for current, timely information and resource center for the local members it serves.

The evaluation process consists of two parts. First, a group of volunteers organized by ITCom developed a Website Evaluation criterion that describes elements that have been shown to be effective website communications tools. These criteria are listed in the Website Evaluation section of this Guide. Second, a group of volunteers will be organized by the Coordinator to look at websites with respect to implementation of the Website Evaluation criteria.

This Guide is a source of pertinent information for webmasters of new and existing USPS websites. It will let them know what will be considered in the Website Evaluation. This Guide is also intended to be a reference for the ITCom Web Award evaluators in the Award evaluation process.

The focus this year once again emphasizes the basics of getting information out to members and the public. The scoring was reorganized in 2006 to make the evaluation process more objective, defining the elements desired to get the message out to the web site visitors. The score sheets provide space for comments by the evaluators to assist webmasters in understanding of the scores. An additional underlying theme is **"Boating is Fun We'll show you how"**

Website Requirements

The USPS National Information Technology Committee, the USPS National Law Committee and others have determined the need for a number of requirements for all publicly viewable USPS websites. There are two sets of website requirements, one for all USPS squadron and district websites and the second for those websites hosted on the ITCOM server.

1. All USPS websites, regardless of where they are hosted, are required to conform to the Requirements *for All USPS Web Sites* at:
<http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/shared/policy/weball.html>
2. All USPS web sites that are located on the USPS web server (the ITCOM system) have additional requirements. These items are generally technical requirements of the ITCOM system and do not directly affect the content of a web page. They are on the page *Requirements for USPS Web Sites Housed on the ITCOM System* at: <http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/shared/policy/webitcom.html>

Webmasters should be sure that their site meets these requirements that have been established by ITCOM. Also, to be considered the squadron or district website link on the USPS website (Squadron or District) must be active on or before September 1, 2009. If your website link is not active contact the Web Site Coordinator at Websites@usps.org.

Website Evaluation Process All USPS District and Squadron websites, that have an active link on the squadron or district listing on the USPS website on September 1, 2009, will be evaluated using the following set of criteria. The evaluation will occur between Sept.5 and October 15, 2009. There are fifty-one (51) items that will be evaluated. Forty-seven (47) items add points to a maximum of 100. Four (4) items reduce points. Websites that have a cumulative score of 70 - 84 points out of 100 will be presented with the *USPS Website Recognition Award*. Websites that meet or exceed 85 points will be awarded the *USPS Website of Excellence Award*.

Feedback and Comments Webmasters and any others who have any questions or comments regarding the 2009 USPS Website Excellence Awards should contact the 2009 USPS Website Awards Chairman at: petefox@verizon.net

Website Evaluation

This section is meant as a reference for the website evaluators during the USPS Website evaluations and for webmasters to prepare to be evaluated. These items have helped USPS websites communicate with recreational boaters. However, this is not intended as a complete guide to building a website.

Required Items: If a website is found out of compliance, it will not be eligible for award status regardless of accumulated points.

1. Link to USPS.org on Home (opening) page.
2. Subtitling. The following statement must appear directly below your squadron's name; **"a Unit of United States Power Squadrons ®"** If your squadron name does not include reference to sail and power (i.e. Podunk Sail and Power Squadron) then the following is required on the next line **Sail and Power Boating.** Reference to your District affiliation may be included on this line. These items must be on the home page and splash screens if used. - Including the "registered" symbol. Hyper-linking the USPS and District items fulfils several requirements listed
3. (squadron) Link to district website,
4. (district) Links to squadron websites for squadrons with websites
5. Privacy statement, link to USPS website, on home page
<http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/privacy.html>
6. USPS Trademark reference, link to USPS, on home page
<http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/trademark.html>
7. USPS Disclaimer reference, link to USPS, on home page and commercial link page
<http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/disclaimer.html>
8. Active e-mail link to Webmaster on home page and splash screens if used.

Website must display current information and may not be over 45 days out of date. This includes social activities, meeting dates and boating education schedules. Scores will be reduced by 10 points for each page with past dates exceeding 45 days. Past dates must either be removed or apply a `<strike>date</strike>` [example: date] or some other obvious notation.

Active link to the webmaster. Active refers to a link on the required pages where a viewer can click on a link to send a message directly to the webmaster. During the 2007 evaluations, there were several web sites found with links titles "Contact US" or "For more information" or who used forms as a means of contact. All of these methods leave the viewer questioning where their mail is being sent. The link should state "Webmaster" and actively link to a way to send mail. I.e. have *mailto:* in the link. We are all aware of the problems that Spam mail creates.

There are several tools and suggestions available to help you identify and separate your mail. Comment forms have several negative sides. The viewer may not completely fill out the form. This means additional time must be spent requesting clarification. A bigger downside is that the sender has no record of their communication. Some webmasters take days to respond. If the webmaster does not include the original message in the response, confusion results.

Challenge to Awards Results. There will be a limited time period to challenge the evaluation result following the release of results. This mostly concerns non-compliance issues, which prevent the site from being considered for an award and only for sites that would have otherwise, based on points have been eligible for an award. Negotiation of points awarded will not be accepted. Challenges shall be submitted via email to petefox@verizon.net. The subject line shall state **website award challenge for (your squadron/district web site name)**

The Evaluation criteria are grouped in the following categories:

- A. Organization Identification and Promotion** -These items tell the visitor who we are, what we do and that we are a part of USPS. (9 items - 47 points)
- B. Technical Quality of Website** - this section evaluates the "nuts and bolts" of what a visitor sees on our websites. (5 items - 32 points)
- C. Artistic/Esthetic Quality of Website** - this might be thought of as how a site looks to our visitors. (4 items - 15 points)
- D. Overall Impression** - what was the overall impression you, the evaluator, had of the website? (1 item, three parts - 6 points)

A) Organization Identification and Promotion

A1) Identify purpose of the Unit(squadron/district)/USPS. This tells the public what is the primary purpose of the squadron or district and USPS (a non-profit boating safety educational organization). It is usually in the text on the main page. For example, squadrons have fun, teach boating related educational courses, and do civic service. Districts tie squadrons together and provide administrative oversight. Here is where we let the visitor know that they are at the right place to find out how to get more enjoyment out of their boats and become affiliated with people of common interest. It is best to have this on the main page. Will the viewer of this page have a basic understanding of our organization as a result of reading the homepage? This page must be the hook for getting the visitor interested enough to visit the other parts of the website.

0-5 pts for The Unit description, 0-2 pts for USPS description

A2) Identification of squadron/district area of activity. All sites must have a text description of the area they serve or directions to their activities. It is also important to describe your area in a manner that doesn't leave the visitor wondering just where you are – saying "Boating in the North Shores area" doesn't describe where you are. District maps are available or may be developed by any source you have.

USPS District Maps http://www.usps.org/d_stuff/D-NE.html

1 pt for description, 1 pt for map

A3) Explanation of the benefits of membership. This is the basis of what USPS has to offer to prospective members. We can help members improve their boating skills, contribute to their community, and increase their fun on and off of the water. Does the website effectively sell the virtues of the squadron and USPS? The following links may be useful to explain benefits. Ensign - <http://www.usps.org/national/ensign/>
Port Captains - <http://www.usps.org/national/PortC/>
Member benefits - http://www.usps.org/national/admin_dept/membenefits.htm
0-3 pts description, 0-2 pts links (2 points if all three links are present)

A4) Display of USPS emblems and logos. People will remember visual clues more easily than the written word. This is one way we associate our organization with USPS. Several Nautical supply stores and places where mariners congregate display posters advertising VSC exams and Public Boating Courses. USPS distributes several publications and Videos through non-USPS sources such as BoatUS and West Marine. Consumers are more likely to purchase and use products or services if they recognize the icons displayed on the products or posters. Prominently displaying USPS logos goes a long way toward promoting public awareness. Does the website use the USPS ensign, wheel and ensign and/or triangle in an effective manner? Graphics shall not appear distorted. Logo graphics for all the items are now available at <http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/webawards/current/weblogos/index.htm>
The ensign contained with the USPS wheel does not constitute the separate ensign requirement.

1 pt ensign, 1 pt wheel, 1 pt triangle, 1 pt for the logo "America's Boating Club, 2 points for the logo "Boating is fun.. We'll show you how" (must be on top half of home page) if anywhere else on the web site it is worth one point.

New for this year is The ABC3 course logo with a link to the USPS course description (<http://www.americasboatingcourse.com>) *If both the logo and the link are located on the Home page it is worth 3 points. If both the logo and link are located on other than the Home page it is worth 2 points. Only 1 point will be awarded if only a link to the course description or only the logo is displayed*

"What we do", show the fun we have. This can be a big part of getting visitors interested in membership. This should describe our activities both on and off the water, but it is important to show people enjoying themselves. How effective are the descriptions and/or pictures in describing our various activities? Pictures should be titled to give some idea of what is happening.

0-3 pts description, 0-3 pts photos

A5) Presentation of the Vessel Safety Check (VSC) This program is one of the major activities for many new members of USPS. Besides being a great member involvement program, it is another way we help serve the boating public. Does the website provide a basic understanding of the program, contact information and criteria used in a VSC? Is the VSC decal shown and of the correct date? Is there a schedule of planned VSC events listed? This page needs to be informative. Include checklists of what will be done and why yearly safety checks are important. This item should describe what your unit is doing in this area. A single link to the USCG Aux VSC page is a poor substitute.

0-3 pts for explanation, 2 pt for correct decal, 1 pt for pre-check list or reasons for failures, 1 pt for contact information

A7) Current Activities/Education calendars available. This is always a useful reference to members. It can help get new members interested in what we do by listing our planned activities on the water, or the programs or speakers at our general meetings. Public, as well as member education, schedules are important. Are the pages current, showing future courses and/or activities for the public and members? An out of date calendar or listing of events indicates a lack of interest to website visitors. **If past events are maintained on the schedule to demonstrate the depth of a squadron's programs, they must be shown as past events.** Be very careful. Later in the year, all items might be "past" events. A strike is the recommended method to indicate past events. In 2008, 13% of websites were disqualified because of out-of-date issues. Squadrons are encouraged to keep an annual calendar. In late fall it appears that all squadrons close their door if no items are shown on calendars.

Do not rely on posted newsletters as the source of this information. The web site is being evaluated for its content. Newsletters have a separate Distinction in Journalism Award. No credit will be given for newsletter content.

A8) Identification of the bridge, committee members and contacts. Are photos used or just name and rank? A picture of the bridge member adds the human touch to this portion of the website. Membership, roster chairman, the editor, activities chairman, event chairman and webmasters are members most likely to be contacted. *1 pt bridge contact information, 1 point for more than 2 photos, 2 pts if at least 5 additional contacts are listed.*

B) Technical Quality of Website

B1) Presentation quality and correctness. This includes proper grammar and spelling, etc. While we are all volunteers, we all need to project as professional an image as possible to help USPS look good. One of the most visible things that we can do is to be sure that we use language in the best way we can. If you are not confident of your abilities, it is always a good idea to have someone else look at your website. Usually, your newsletter editor will be glad to help if asked. Many word processors have spelling and grammar checkers, but your best option is other members. Is the information in the website presented with proper grammar and free of spelling errors?
0-3 grammatically correct and understandable text - 1 point deducted for each spelling error

B2) Quality of photographs and graphics. This section involves rating proper exposure and color balance, clarity, "jaggedness" and size. Size does not refer to height and width. It refers to memory size in KB. Thumbnail should be between 2 and 5KB. Most photos and graphics placed along side text should be 5-15 KB. tags should include height and width specifications to allow the browser to place the graphic with minimal "jumping" of the page as it loads. Do not confuse this section which rates the technical preparation of photographs and graphics with C3 which rates how the photos and graphics were used. Large pictures (resolution size) cause the web page to load slower and do not add to the quality of the picture being viewed. That is controlled by the resolution of the monitor. *0-2 pts clear & undistorted - 0-2 pts good color - 0-2 pts appropriately sized*

B3) Active Linkages. If you have a website that has more than one or two pages, or has a large single page, then it will probably help to have some sort of index or directory. Is the website easy to navigate? Are the Links easy to identify? A part of maintaining your website is to check links on a routine basis. A link-checking program for sites housed on the USPS server is at <http://www.usps.org/national/tools/>. An alternate link checker at <http://validator.w3.org/checklink> works for everybody - set Summary and recursive = 5 options. Be aware that graphics are also considered links by the link checkers. *0-2 Site easy to navigate - 0-2 pt links easy to identify- 0-2 pt links accurately identify the subject*

B4) Resource Links. Links to resources of interest to your viewers adds a nice touch to the website. It is suggested that links to USPS information, non-commercial links such as weather and commercial links be separated in a manner to make them distinguishable. A link to the USPS disclaimer must appear at the bottom both the home page and the commercial link page. In lieu of a link to the USPS disclaimer a message shall be included on the link(s) page informing the reader that:; a) we are not getting paid to display these links, b) we are not endorsing any product or service provided by organizations that are linked, c) we were not asked to provide the link, d) we are offering it as a convenience, and e) we retain the right to remove the link at our sole discretion.

3 pts for 10+ USPS links - 3 pts for 10+ non-commercial links - 3 pts 10+ commercial links ZERO points for B4 if disclaimer statement or link are missing from the page.

B5) Ability to read the message. The proper choice of text color, font and size can have a major impact on the retention of the viewer. Background color and design can also detract from the readability of the website. Does the choice of background colors/design, font type, font size and color of text provide an easy to read page(s)? Too much information (clutter) on a page can be confusing. Too little or too much "white space" gives the impression that there is nothing to present. Either problem can cause a visitor to leave the website. With reference to color - what looks good on one viewer's screen can look totally different to another viewer. You are not working with a print medium where colors can be controlled.

There is no USPS standard for point size used for text. 10 point seems to be internationally used by high traffic sites. This page used 11 point, 12 point for section headers, 8 and 9 point seems to work well for menus and footers. 12 point often causes spacing problems when used in tables such as calendars or contact lists. Black text on lightly colored backgrounds makes for easiest reading.

*0-2 pts Font size - 0-2 pts Font color - 0-2pts Good use of text spacing on page
0-2 pts Appropriate background ***Overwhelming backgrounds will reduce points.*

C) "Artistic/Esthetic" Quality of Website

C1) Heading descriptive & appealing. Most websites have a heading (sometimes including graphics) unique to the organization. Does the **home page** provide a visual message defining the squadron/district? Does each page have a header defining the page contents? (Pages such as newspapers, fliers and information not intended for the general public are excluded from this rule.)

3 pts unique home page header graphic 2 pts if all pages have informative header

C2) Consistent format across pages. Do all pages have similar headings making the purpose of the page evident? Is the navigation scheme the same for all pages to simplify the movement between pages?

0-3 pts for consistent page format.

C3) Use of photos and/or graphics. For example, pages' describing what your organization does can be more than just a collection of images. Are the use of photos and graphics appropriate for the message trying to be conveyed? Do they add to the overall visual appeal of the website? (Bridge/Committee member photos are excluded from grading) Photographs and graphics included in this category reflect the little extras that have been added like classroom and event photos. *0-5 pts - photos depicting events.*

C4) Additional Website Features. These items have been added as they both can add to the value of the website.

1. If the website has adopted the USPS-News RSS feed and it can be found (1pt).
2. On the USPS Webpage that lists squadron names and links to their respective websites (www.usps.org/lc/squadrons.shtml), if the area of location is listed (1pt). All district websites already have the listings, so all district websites will automatically receive this 1 point during scoring.

D) Overall Impression

D1) Overall impression of quality and effectiveness of the site. There are a large number of things that can be done with a website, and it is impossible to list all of them here. This is where a website should get their "overall" rating – This score should be considered as the evaluator's subjective look at all elements of the website and how well they tell the story of the squadron/district and USPS.

0-2 pts - how well did you like it, taken as a whole? Did it accomplish the stated goals of presenting USPS and the host squadron/district to the public and members?

0-2 pts - If you were a non-member visiting this site for the first time would your interest in USPS be stimulated?

0-2 pts - Would you be proud to have such a website representing your squadron or district? Keep all of these questions in mind when assigning the points for this category.

Appendix: Website Requirements This is a guide to the USPS National Information Technology Committee (ITCom) requirements for all publicly viewable USPS websites, whether at National, District or Squadron levels. ITCom has established requirements for all publicly viewable websites. References to pertinent parts of the USPS Operations Manual are included. The most current version of the USPS Website Requirements, Policies, Services and Support documents can be found at the USPS National Information Technology Committee website. All USPS webmasters should have a copy of these documents available for reference. The USPS National Information Technology Committee website main page is at:
<http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/>

All USPS websites, regardless of where they are hosted, are required to conform to the *Requirements for All USPS Web Sites* at:

<http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/shared/policy/weball.html>

All USPS web sites that are located on the USPS web server (the ITCOM system) have additional requirements. These items are generally technical requirements of the ITCOM system and do not directly affect the content of a web page. They are on the page *Requirements for USPS Web Sites Housed on the ITCOM System* at: <http://www.usps.org/national/itcom/shared/policy/webitcom.html>

Webmasters should be familiar with the contents of the document from the USPS National Law Committee as it applies to trademarks and copyrights. The USPS National Law Committee Webpage is at: <http://www.usps.org/national/lawcom/>

Webmasters should also have some familiarity with the USPS Operations Manual. An online version is available at the USPS Operations Manual Committee Website at: <http://www.usps.org/national/om/> See Appendix G.8

ITCOM

Web Awards Rules

12 May 2009