# Web-Based Communications For Any Chapter

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Websites and e-newsletters are publications, and face many of the same hurdles. (So are blogs, podcasts, Youtube, etc.)

We are going to use the terms "editor" and "webmaster," and "publication" and "website" interchangeably. Everything we say in this presentation applies to e-newsletters, websites, blogs, etc.

We are going to start by discussing the fundamentals of creating or re-creating a newsletter or website, and then discuss the technology and content sources available to make this job easier.

Why do you think people listen to Podcasts? The same reason they read newspapers or visit YouTube – there's something there that interests them. No one uses technology just because it exists. So you need to focus on what makes you interesting to your audience, not on what technology to use.

## Step Away From that Laptop!

When developing a website/newsletter:
- Meet with the Prez., the Prez-elect, and leaders who will produce the newsletter and website.
- Define the 4 factors that most affect newsletter and the people involved with it.
- Strongly consider using pen & paper.

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Leaders often become focused on a new technology – blogs, podcasts, etc. – and spend time worrying about how to use the technology, instead of focusing on the message.

Start planning by having a laptop-free meeting with your leadership.

Consider using pencil and paper during this meeting to resist the urge to look at something online and get caught up in the hype.

## 4 Factors

- Message
- Audience
- Goals
- Resources

These factors determine content and the technology used to transmit it – not the other way around!

***Again - Technology is the last thing to consider!***

Do not assume every member in your chapter – or even on your board – knows what these are, or agrees on what they are. Have a meeting and talk these factors through.

We also recommend starting any discussion about a new marketing campaign, membership campaign, program series, etc., this way.

This is a good exercise to remind every leader why they joined CSI and to keep them enthused. Nobody joined your chapter to become an editor or webmaster. Keeping focused on the higher purpose we support with our volunteer work keeps us positive and involved.

Technology is the LAST thing you talk about.

## Message

- Your message is a version of CSI's national message.
- Your message could also be described as your chapter's statement of purpose.
- CSI's purpose (in Joy's words):
  To improve construction communication at the commercial level by developing standards and formats, providing education and certification, and creating a human network of construction professionals.

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Good publications have a laser focus on their message. Your purpose is what makes your publication unique. Any time you stray from that message you confuse your audience and make your publication less valuable.

You also run the risk of trying to cover content that is better covered by other publications, which will trounce you in the competition for space in a reader's inbox or a user's time.

Focus on your niche. That's why people are coming to your publication.

## Audience

- Your audience is not "everyone."
- Audience is who you are trying to reach – most likely chapter members.
- Potential members are a subset of your audience.
- Emerging professionals are also a subset of your audience.

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Your audience isn't "everyone." Yes, anyone with a browser can see your website, but that doesn't make them part of your "audience."

Audience is the target group for your message.

Consider the example of Google: Google's audience isn't "everyone." It's "people who are searching the web." Google is not interested in you if you already know where you're going on the web. This is why there is a giant search box in the middle of Google's homepage and not much else, and why Google spends money on data-crunching algorithms instead of TV ads. Be like Google – focus on your message and your audience like a laser.

Potential members and students/emerging professionals – people who might join your chapter – should receive your newsletter and visit your website. There is not much difference between them and your audience; they are interested in the same topics that interest your audience, and they understand that they are reading a publication developed for a membership audience.

Accommodate potential members with good editing practices – use full names on first reference, write directions to meetings as if the reader has never been to the meeting, include "join CSI" info, etc.

## Goals

The goals of your publication are based on the goals of your chapter.

○ Be specific:

Chapter Goal: Increase membership 3%.

- Newsletter Goal: Increase non-members receiving newsletter 25%.
- Website Goal: Update the "about this chapter" page.

*Your most important website goal:*
*Keep content current!*

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The goals of your publication are based on the goals of your chapter, which are in turn based on the goals of the CSI. This is why you're meeting with the President and President-elect.

Goals should be specific. Nothing pushes an editor over the edge faster than a President who says, "Our goal this year is to improve the website/newsletter," but can't follow the statement up with concrete plans.

**Keeping your content current is your most important goal**. There are a number of reasons for keeping your content up to date – one of the most compelling is that it builds trust with your audience. You demonstrate that you are dependable – you are not a fly-by-night operation, or a chapter with nothing to offer. Potential new members will not hand a check to people they don't trust – your web communications play a role in convincing them to trust you and join.

**It doesn't matter how much content you have – what matters is that it is current, relevant to your audience, and on-message.**

## Resources

- Determine your budget.
- Determine the volunteers available.
- Identify members who can create content:
  - Columnists, photographers, editors
  - Incentives for members to write about an event
- Do not choose technology!
  
  *90/10 rule: 10% to create a website –*
  *90% to keep it current!*

Newsletter editors and webmasters burn out fast. What they do is intensive, exhausting, and monthly. Developing content is what kills them. They need a constant stream of material coming in.

When discussing resources, you will be strongly tempted to discuss who has what software and knows how to use it. DO NOT DO THIS. Talk about who'd like to be involved in the newsletter or website. You'll pick technology later based on what your team is capable of. If you choose your participants based on skills they already have, you are well on your way to making the newsletter/website an albatross around a single member's neck.

Be careful of expecting too much. December is the loneliest month of the editor/webmaster year – nobody has time to help with the publication then.

# Mission Miss-Fire
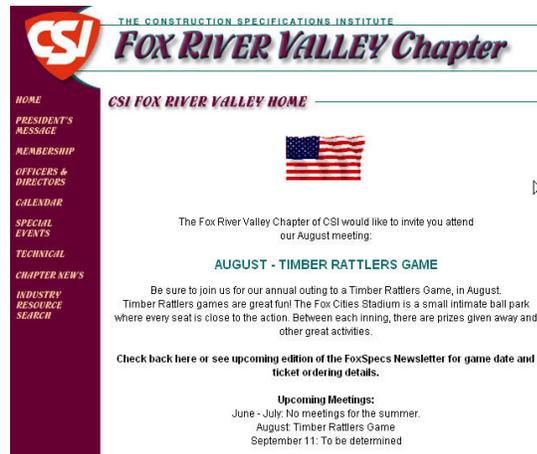
Don't feel bad, Fox River Valley – many chapters are making this mistake. Why is there a U.S. flag in the middle of what is arguably the most valuable piece of real estate on this website? Probably because someone thought it'd be a "nice idea."

Let's compare this to the 4 factors:

-Mission: It's not part of Fox River Valley's mission to communicate that they're patriotic, or located in the U.S. This flag also doesn't tell people that Fox River Valley is involved in construction.

-Audience: The flag is annoying for the audience – it's one more piece of content they have to look at before finding what they came to this website to read. It's also forcing them to scroll down to get to the useful content.

-Goals: Again – this flag doesn't relate to any of Fox River Valley's goals.

-Resources: Content that doesn't relate to the mission or audience is a waste of the editor's time. Someone had to approve this, someone had to post it, someone had to review it once it was up. **Do not waste precious volunteer hours on content that doesn't contribute to the publication.**

# Limited Resources

Illowa has 16 members. Clearly, resources are an issue for them.

What if instead of listing every meeting date, their website had only general monthly chapter info and requested guests contact a chapter leader before attending a meeting? It would be current to the audience and require less of Illowa's resources.

The lesson here is to limit your publication to what you can keep current. It's ok if all you can maintain is information about your monthly meetings – that's what most visitors are looking for!

## Content: Name the Buckets

○ **Define 5-8 buckets**
*All content must fit in in 1 bucket.*

○ **Each bucket:**
- Has a generic name
- Is never empty
- Is always current
- Relates to mission & goals
- Is relevant to audience

**CSI Weekly's Buckets:**
- Construction Docs
- Education
- Certification
- Community
- Membership
- Calendar

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You are not yet ready to turn on your laptop. First, you must outline the content you expect your website or newsletter to always contain. In other words, name your buckets.

These buckets shouldn't be overly specific, and there shouldn't be too many of them, or you'll confuse your users and run yourself ragged trying to fill them. Pick buckets now – design later: your buckets will eventually become your website's main navigation or the sections of your newsletter.

Sanity check: can I name something that will fit in each bucket every month? For example:

•Awards could be a column or a story once a month, but it's not probably NOT a bucket for you. There's very little awards news at some points during the year, and it's not in your mission (although you might have an award-related goal). You can commit to having an awards article every month, without making it a bucket.

Sanity check: do these names make sense to my audience? For example:

•When the Institute launched a new version of CSINet in 2002 or so, it named the buckets after the departments related to them, including "Technical." This resulted in members calling and asking where MasterFormat info could be found on CSINet, and software salesmen calling the Technical Department to pitch them software. Changing the button name to "Standards & Formats" solved the problem.

## Content: Fill the Buckets
*Newsletters*

- Meeting notice
- Board minutes
- Calendar
- President's column
- Board & committee contact info
- New member names
- Member "milestones"

- Region news
- Region contacts
- Region calendar
- CSI news
- CSI contacts
- CSI Calendar
- Technical articles from members & guests

*- From the CSI Newsletter Judging Criteria form.*

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Your mission is not to win an award. That said, the awards criteria can help you plan your content.

## Content: Fill the Bucket
*Websites*

- Minutes w/archive
- Calendar
- Prez column w/archive
- Chapter news
- Membership/join info
- Bylaws & policies
- Chapter award info
- Newsletter archive
- Board & committee contact info

- Region news
- Region contacts
- Region calendar
- Link to CSINet
- CSI contacts
- Student chapter info
- Technical articles from members & guests

*- From the CSI Website Judging Criteria form.*

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This list and the one on the prior slide are remarkably similar. That's good news -- you can post info on your website then link it to your newsletter, and thus kill 2 birds with one stone. For example, post the President's column in its archive on the website, then link to it in the newsletter instead of reprinting the entire column in the newsletter. Say it once in the right place.

You should also avoid posting information that is better maintained by another group. For example, instead of posting CSI national contacts on your chapter site, post a link to CSI national's contact page. CSI national is going to do a much better job of maintaining that information than you will.

## Content: Fill the Bucket
*Other stuff you can publish*

o Columnists/Question-of-the-month
o Pro/Con opinion pieces from members
o Event notices from other chapters/organizations
o Sponsorships, want ads, job openings
o Press releases from CSI
o Briefs from publications you can link to
o CSI's Forums
o CSIWiki
o CSI's Chapter & Region Leader Toolbox

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- CSI leaders can use any information they find on CSI's website. It's copyrighted, but we share it with chapters willingly. We ask that you respect the security of information posted behind the login.
- Event notices – you can trade advertising space for the opportunity to be identified as a "sponsor" of another organization's event.
- Columnists/Question-of-the-month: Get the whole year's questions at once, and get 2-3 timeless columns in advance to use in a crunch. Columnists and question-writers often get busy and can't meet deadlines later in the year.
- Your chapter is a terrible place to find a babysitter or sell a car – but it might be a great place to find a new specifier to hire or to sell an antique drafting table. Consider classified ads.
- We put everything in CSI Weekly as its released – look for news from the Institute there.
- Press releases from CSI: Go to www.csinet.org, and click "Press Room" or "more" under "News & Events."
- CSI NewsBrief: you can use the content from CSI NewsBrief in your publications – but not the full stories. Those belong to the publications that produced them, so just credit them and insert a link for readers who want to follow it. You can also write your own briefs.
- CSI's Forums: go to www.csinet.org and click "forums" – you'll get some interesting ideas your members can discuss.
- CSIWiki: wiki.csinet.org. Look for definitions that will make your readers chat.
- In the toolbox you can figure out who joined & who renewed.

## Content: Fill the Bucket
*Stuff you SHOULDN'T publish*

○ Copyrighted material, such as a newspaper article.
○ Stuff from the web that has no attribution.
○ Stuff you're putting in because you have to "fill a page."
○ ***Anything that doesn't relate to your mission!***

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Everything must relate to the mission. You must stay laser-focused on the purpose of your chapter and your publication.

Don't ever put in information "to fill a page." This is boring to your audience, and causes them to think your publication is less valuable. It's also a waste of your resources.

## Scary Statistics
## To Keep You On Mission

Web Usability Expert Jakob Nielsen
(www.useit.com) reports:
- 11% of newsletters are read thoroughly
- 57% are skimmed
- 22% are never read
- 10% are saved for later

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You are collecting and editing content to be skim-able! Less is more – which can be good news for burned-out editors!

## Scary Statistics
### To Keep You On Mission

Nielsen says readers read newsletters that have valuable information.

*It doesn't matter how MUCH information there is, just how VALUABLE it is.*

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Your newsletter & websites are unique if they're publishing information about your chapter.

## Web-based Communication
*You May Now Approach the Laptop*

Choose technology that:

○ Communicates your message.

○ Serves your goals & audience.

○ Does not exhaust your resources.

○ Allows more than one person to work on the publication.

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Your job is to communicate your message. Your job is NOT to become skilled in HTML, SQL, PHP, ASP, Ruby on Rails, Flash, InDesign, QuarkXpress, DreamWeaver, etc., or to in any other way become a techno-geek.

It is very easy to let one person become the only person working on the website or newsletter. We suggest you pick someone you wish would leave the chapter, as this is an excellent way to drive them out.

If you would like to keep your members, however, choose technology that is useable for more than one person.

## Building a Website

o Member Pipeline: $10/yr
o CSIWSE: Free
o GoDaddy.com: Starts at $56/yr
o Private Developer: varies
   Ex) www.csiphoenix.org
   Ex) www.kccsi.org
o Do it yourself?

•Member Pipeline: Charges $10 a year. Revenue share on any advertising. You send them updates to your information. Contact: Jill Paskoff, jpaskoff@buildingex.com, 317-423-2325.

•CSIWSE: Free – they sell advertising. You maintain your pages. Contact is: Deborah Castelane, dcastelane@csinet.org, Tel: 888-861-6067 x88.

•GoDaddy.com: GoDaddy will let you choose a template, detail it, and then put up your site for as little as $56 a year. They'll handle the payment gateway. They'll even do updates for you for a small monthly fee. Just call them and talk it over.

•Private developer: CSI Phoenix paid $1,500 to build, $120 or so a month to maintain their site.

•Kansas City: Is hosted by a company friendly to the chapter. A consultant developed their design. They edit their content. They offer a Virtual Product Show, which uses a lot of time, but is on-mission and a good use of their resources. On average, they're spending less than 5hrs a month on the website. $50/month for hosting, $500 for consultant. They use Paypal -- see the merchant section – which takes 2-2.5% off the top.

## Website Do-It-Yourself Pitfalls

○ What if only one person knows how?

*You must have members ready to step in and maintain your website.*

○ Maintaining technology can overtake the focus on content.

*Content is more important than technology.*

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We strongly recommend against do-it-yourself websites. What if only one person knows how to maintain the website:

-He could get hit by a bus

-He could burnout and quit

-He could get fired and leave

You must have a succession plan for your publications, or your content will quickly become out-of-date.

Technology is a means to an end. Your focus needs to be on your content.

## Services On the Web

If it's online, you can link to it:

- **Surveys**: Surveymonkey.com, zoomerang.com
- **Event management**: Cevent.com, rsvpbook.com
  *(most will manage registration payments for a fee)*
- **Photo galleries**: flickr.com
- **Video**: Youtube.com
- **Blog**: Blogger.com
- **Managing your chapter**: Basecamphq.com

Determine what you need to communicate, then find someone else to handle the technology!

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These are just a few of the services available to help you get your message out there. Explore them and determine which ones work for your budget, resources, goals, audience and mission.

Remember to mention you're a non-profit when you call to ask about a service.

CSI does not endorse any of these services – there are far too many good ones for us to pick just a few to recommend!

## E-newsletters vs. PDFs

**E-Newsletters**
- More than one person can work on it
- No worries about which software to use
- Read it in the inbox
- Good for skimming
- Can track open & click-thru rates
- Easy to forward & sign-up new recipients

**PDFs**
- One person does layout in their software
- Can require printing
- Can be removed by email filters
- Requires more time
- Can't track use
- Looks good printed
- Can win you an award

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We've been talking about e-newsletters, not PDFs that are emailed. PDFs have their advantages, but we're focusing on e-newsletters here as a useful tool for small chapters.

You can't tell how your PDF is being used, but you can tell how your e-newsletter is read. People will often report that they do one thing when reading a newsletter, but actually do something different. Don't rely on your members to tell you the truth about their e-newsletter reading habits. Check the tracking reports.

Remember 57% of newsletters are skimmed.

# E-newsletter Services

- Constant Contact – starts at $15/month ([www.constantcontact.com](www.constantcontact.com))
- My Newsletter Builder – starts at $8/month ([www.mynewsletterbuilder.com](www.mynewsletterbuilder.com))
  - Choose a template, choose colors, add your photos and text.
  - Services include survey tools, click-thru/open rate tracking, notices/coupon templates, multiple email lists (so you can have a separate "non-member" marketing list).
  - They don't trigger spam blockers, and they manage your bouncebacks.

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Two excellent options for e-newsletters – but again, CSI isn't endorsing them. There are many others.

# Example: E-Newsletter



I can assume you all have seen a PDF'd newsletter laid out in Word, InDesign, etc.

This e-newsletter is produced through Constant Contact. The editor uploaded the chapter logo and images, chose the colors and fonts, inserted links to other websites for calendars and sponsors, etc. The editor knows no HTML or other web programming.

## But We Never Picked the Colors!

Everything you need to know about picking colors & fonts, developing a layout, or questioning the designer's suggestions, can be found here:

- Jakob Nielsen's www.useit.com
- Vincent Flanders' www.webpagesthatsuck.com
- Steve Krug's *Don't Make Me Think*
- Linda Jorgensen's
  *Real-World Newsletters to Meet Your Unreal Demands*

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Spend a few amusing hours at www.webpagesthatsuck.com, and you'll know everything you need to know to design a chapter website. We recommend you visit this pages, which explores why Architect websites are so awful: http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/architecture.html

Nielsen's columns are free for the public to read, and focus on studies he conducts to determine how people use web tools. If you've never seen an eye-tracking report, visit www.useit.com – it's worth it.

Caveat: more than 50% of males have some form of red-green colorblindness; avoid "Ronald McDonald" and "Christmas tree" colors.

And don't put red text on a blue background or vice-versa!

## One Last Time…

Determine your message, your audience, your goals, and your resources.

Then choose the technology that works for you.

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# Call us!

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