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### On-line Missions: Creating a website for a short term healthcare mission team

You need to get the word out. The initial arrangements have been made with your mission partner including the trip dates and general scope of the trip. But how does one best inform people about your mission trip? By e-mail? Phone calls? Informational meetings? As a team leader, one has a set of challenges related to “selling”, recruiting and educating. A place is needed where potential short term mission team members can quickly learn about the trip and can get trip applications. Team members, who have cleared the selection process, need access to up-to-date information about the trip and need to review key team-related information prior to the team meeting. Team leaders (yes these days we have two or more leaders for a team) need a place to discuss team planning and prayer requests.

When Jesus said called his disciples to be “fishers of men”, we can be pretty sure that he had the foresight to anticipate that short term healthcare mission trip leaders would use the “internet” to recruit team members.

From an organizational stand-point, a team leader needs to accomplish much before the short-term healthcare mission team ever steps foot in another country including casting the vision, determining the mission, setting values, budgeting, trip advertising, team member screening, team education/preparation, making and posting assignments, obtaining devotion and debriefing materials, determine how the team will communicate with people back home, and communicating with the team. A team website represents an effective tool by which team leaders can accomplish these tasks.

A short-term mission website can be perceived as a front door to the church's ministry activities. When well maintained, visually interesting and informative, a website can be used as a means of encouraging people to prayerfully consider the current short-term ministry *while* also serving as an advertisement for the next short term mission trip.

### Check with your church first

Some large churches have information technology departments that can construct websites. I have not had that luxury. I have been working as a short term healthcare mission leader who has been recruiting people from a variety of venues – work, church and from the Christian healthcare professional community. My church, Harvest Christian Fellowship, is just beginning to embrace healthcare missions and needs time to develop an appropriate webpage for the healthcare ministry. One of the challenges of working with an information technology group is the relatively slow pace at which new information is placed on the web. Most of the time this is due to the competing demands of the congregation and the demands of keeping the website updated. Conversely, if one creates the website, there is immediate access to the site anytime needed to add additional information, which can be several times a day! One also gets the opportunity to develop the website content.

### Weighing the benefits and responsibilities of website creation and maintenance

The responsibility of creating a website comes at a price; however. If one is working for Jesus, oversight of one's work should be welcomed. We should want our work to honor Jesus. Consider seeking people who can give honest critical feedback about the website. Are you hitting the right tone? Is the website too secular? Is the website organized in a way that people can easily navigate the website and gain access to the information they need? Does some piece of information on the site put your international partner at risk? Are there other complementary church ministries or missions that need to be mentioned on the website? Oversight enhances the website and keeps mission partners happy.

I always try to remember that the website belongs to God, not me.

Not every mission trip needs to have a website. We have a micro-team (four people) going to China in March 2007 to make advanced arrangements for a May 2007 trip. Creating a website for such a small team does not make sense. The cost-benefit analysis should be considered each time a website is created. Some churches insist on external control from church leaders or even outright prohibit the creation of an independent website that refers to your church mission projects. It is important to check with church ministers and elders prior to creating the website. The team may not have the time or skill mix to set-up or maintain a website. For some groups, website start-up and maintenance costs can be an issue. Websites can be a lot like children and pets. People have enthusiasm for the website initially, but find less and less time and interest in keeping them

updated and fresh. Sometimes this means that website should be seen as a short-term site, where the contract for the site is canceled at the end of 6-9 months. If your team goes back to the same place over and over, then the creation of a website should take in to account the need for a long-term commitment.

### Getting started with website development

So, where does one start to create a website? First, one should select a website domain name (for example: <http://www.BarbadosHammockMissions.org>). It is important to give good consideration to the domain name. The domain name effectively becomes a organizational

headline or even the name of your organization. I have created a website for our short-term missions in Yunnan, China and selected a domain name of [healthyunnan.org](http://healthyunnan.org). A significant amount of thought should go into creating a domain name. Consider creating more than two or three domain names and ask people which they would select. If possible, have a native speaker from the country where you are serving look at the domain name so that there are no unintended meanings to your domain name. Also look carefully at the domain name to determine how else the name could be pronounced or if sequences of letters within the domain

name spell something undesirable. Sometimes a .org or .com domain name that you want is not available. In that case, there are other options including .info, .us, .net domains.

There are number of different companies that can help you obtain a domain name. Companies such as Yahoo, Google, Network Solutions, GoDaddy and 1&1 typically offer website domain names for \$3-6. The domain names can be maintained for about \$5-\$6 per year. Some companies will offer “free” websites, however they may provide limited webspace, limited applications for designing the website, and require that you display advertising banners. There is a current “scam” where a company will offer to renew your domain name license for \$20-30 per domain name. These companies prey on the consumer’s fear that somehow your domain name could be taken by someone else or that you have not properly renewed your registration. Do not fall prey to confidence tricksters who use this scam!

Once a domain name has been obtained, the next task is to identify a web-hosting provider. Some of the largest providers are shown below.

#### Steps to develop a website

1. Check with your church leaders to see if they will endorse website for your church-based ministry.
2. Will the church develop the website or allow an external non-church website?
3. Select a domain name.
4. Select a web hosting company.
5. Register the domain name.
6. Create content using either Microsoft FrontPage, Adobe GoLive, or the web host's proprietary software.
7. Seek church-based oversight for the website.

Company Name	Disk Space	Data Xfer	Special Offer
<a href="#">LunarPages</a>	35GB	800GB	\$700 CoffeeCup Webmaster Software FREE - Special Only \$6.95
<a href="#">Apollo Hosting</a>	5GB	150GB	Multiple Websites on 1 Account --- 30 day guarantee
<a href="#">StartLogic</a>	50GB	750GB	Host up to 10 domains for only \$5.95/month
<a href="#">Gate.com</a>	2,000MB	200GB	2 Months FREE - FREE Setup
<a href="#">WebSiteSource</a>	5,000MB	50GB	Host Unlimited WebSites on one Account, Unlimited Sub Domains
<a href="#">PowWeb</a>	20,000MB	400GB	Free Domain & Set-Up. \$7.77/mo
<a href="#">HostMySite</a>	15GB	250GB	DOMAINS ONLY \$2.95 or FREE with an annual hosting package. HURRY offer ends 12/31/06!
<a href="#">IPOWER</a>	50GB	750GB	\$3.95/mo. Host 6 domains in 1, 30 day guarantee
<a href="#">HostGator</a>	50,000MB	200,000MB	Unlimited Databases, 24/7 Support \$6.95/month
<a href="#">Dot5Hosting</a>	100GB	1,000GB	6 Domains in 1 account for \$4.95/month.
<a href="#">SuperbHosting.Net</a>	50GB	750GB	Free Domain, Host up to 11 Sites \$6.50/m
<a href="#">Dotster</a>	10GB	500GB	Award winning hosting solutions with 5 free domains. \$7.95
<a href="#">HostMonster</a>	50GB	999GB	Unlimited Domains. Free Site Builder and Support. \$4.95/month
<a href="#">MochaHost</a>	20,000MB	200GB	\$4.95/monthly, FREE: 2 Lifetime domains & Site Builder
<a href="#">PenguinWebHosting.com</a>	20,000MB	NO-LIMIT	100 Free Addon Domains + 100 Free Parked Domains \$5.95
<a href="#">GoDaddy.com</a>	5GB	250GB	\$1.99 domain. Free .INFO & 20% Off Hosting!!!
<a href="#">BlueFish Hosting</a>	6,000MB	100GB	FREE Setup, Domain, SiteBuilder, Unlimited Email, mySQL, & more!
<a href="#">BlueHost</a>	50GB	999GB	Free SiteBuilder, Domain, SetUp, \$6.95/mo
<a href="#">1&amp;1 Hosting</a>	5GB	250GB	Free SiteBuilder, Domain, SetUp, \$2.99/mo

These companies have large banks of servers which place web pages on the internet. Current competition means that web-hosting can be obtained for about \$3-8 per month. Home computers can be used for this task, however, a web-hosting application must be purchased and the computer should be almost exclusively used for web-hosting. Most team websites will have 5 or more visitors per day. Remember that search engines like Google, Hotbot, Yahoo and others will direct people to your site. Most web-hosting companies will ask for key descriptors for your site to facilitate more frequent and accurate connection with web search engines.

Developing the website can be the most challenging due in part to the wide range of choices. Many web-hosting companies will offer their own web-development software to make it easier to develop the site. For example 1&1 offers Website Builder and Website Creator applications. Since website design

can seem daunting these applications have been developed to make it even easier. Most of the applications have large number of website templates, colors and photos from which to choose. The advantage of this approach is the ease of use. A professional appearing website can be created in a few minutes. A 74 year old friend recently created a website for his conference in Kiev. The applications are extremely intuitive and there is no need to learn HTML, hypertext mark-up language. One can easily access the website and make changes as frequently as needed. Forms are easy to create and Adobe PDF documents and videos can be easily posted for team use. Many have photo pages which make displaying photos easy.

The disadvantage of these applications is their cost, which often range around \$10 per month. Therefore, if one were to set-up a single website for six months, the cost could be around \$60-100. Alternatively, one could use web-authoring tools like Adobe Go Live or Microsoft Front Page. Any Word document can be easily converted to an HTML document or to a PDF document. PDF has become the industry standard for placing photo-like reproductions of documents (scanned), Word documents, Excel spreadsheets or Power-Point slide presentations on the web.

### Website content: Starting with the vision, mission statement to team values

Content for the website should include a description of the short term mission trip on the home page. It is very helpful for potential team members to gain an understanding of the vision, team mission and values. Most websites will have a spot for a slogan. The slogan should either be the *vision statement* which reflects the vision of the healthcare mission team. A short term mission vision should give people the big picture – **Health for children in the name of Jesus**, for example. The *mission statement* tells people the arena in which you anticipate working. An example might be: **Providing short term health -care and -education for the orphans in Kiev**. Values can be particularly challenging as values may differ somewhat from team to team. Certainly some values will remain the same: 1) serving people through healthcare, 2) servant leadership, 3) a learning posture, 4) telling people about Jesus, 5) quality health care, etc. Some time talking about team values during the team preparatory meeting about values will be time well spent. There will likely be conflicting values surrounding issues including work versus tourism, doing versus being, serving others and being served, travel as Westerner's versus travel as the indigenous people, education versus clinical hand-on care, telling other through love versus evangelism.

When posting the team vision, mission and values consideration should be given to how much is appropriate to post. This is particularly true when traveling to creative access countries where an overtly Christian website may place partners and even the team trip in danger. In these cases the names, address and phone numbers of partners should not be added to the public

website pages. It is possible to have this information available by creating a protected directory, which is password protected. The protected directory is a means by which data or information access can be restricted to team members only. Most webhosts have means by which a password protected directory can be established. The password protected directory is named by the customer (say TeamOnly). A file folder is created in the website directory. A user name is provided by the webhost and the password is created by the web customer. The customer must distribute the user name and password to team members. Content are placed in the protected file by using an FTP application.

### Getting documents onto your website

An FTP application allows one to access the website directory which is physically present on the webserver. There are a number of FTP applications including Wise FTP , and others that effectively make it possible to insert and remove documents and files from the webserver computer. If you wanted to place PDF document (say a team roster) in a protected folder (TeamOnly), one uses the FTP application to move the PDF document from your computer to the protected directory in the webserver. For team members to be able to see the roster, you need to create a link on your webpage. Highlighting word and clicking a link icon usually creates a link in most web page creation applications. To link to the folder in the webserver it would be necessary to create a link to your website, the specific folder and the specific file. For example:

<http://www.BarbadosHammockMissions.org/TeamOnly/roster.pdf> The forward slash directs the computer to a file in the next lower level.

The team website should have information regarding the key elements of the team trip. It is possible to create a separate webpage for each of the following key elements.

1. Dates for the team trip with a day-to-day description of the projected ministry
2. Trip cost. There may be some advantage to breaking down the budget into items including Airfare, Hotels, Team Supplies, etc, so that potential team members can understand how their donation is being spent.
3. A contact us web page is essential so that people know how to get in contact with the team leaders to ask questions. We always provide address, telephone and e-mail information. Most web packages will allow you to have e-mail addresses specific to your website, i.e. [jim@barbadoshammockmissions.org](mailto:jim@barbadoshammockmissions.org).
4. Placing the team application on the website is very useful. Adobe Designer allows one to create a PDF form that can be posted on line. The form allows the user to print or e-mail the form to the team leaders.
5. If the team is providing education, it is a great idea to post that educational material on the web, so that anyone can gain access to it at any time.
6. Team information. We have chosen to place team information in a protected directory so that only team members may access it.

7. Team reports. This could be pictures, movies, written day to day reports, journal entries, etc.
8. Consider creating a blog site on your website so that everyone can provide input regarding their area of expertise. It is also a good way to keep everyone up-to-date.
9. If appropriate, links to your international partners.

### There are some limitations to websites

Certainly, a web-based approach cannot replace informational meetings, face-to-face interviews, rapid communication to the team or to an individual by e-mail, or even picking-up the phone to talk with a mission partner or a team member. The website also needs to be constantly updated and maintained. I am looking toward a large amount of work soon when I update two websites.

I personally get a great deal of pleasure seeing a team website grow. I find that it is really easy to get wrapped-up in web design. Therefore, I need constantly reminding myself that that the team website is an adjunct to our ministry, not our ministry!

So, go out there and start a short-term mission team website - I know that God will bless your efforts.