Promoting Rotary on the Web
Using your club or district Web site to enhance
public awareness of service activities

All over the world, individuals and organizations are "on the Web." Rotary clubs and organizations are no exception. A Web site is an exciting way for your Rotary group to improve public relations, provide new ways for members to keep in touch, and build bridges with the wider community.

This guide will give you an overview of the steps involved in using a Web site to conduct effective public relations for your club or district. You'll learn how to use the site to improve communications, attract and retain members, and conduct media outreach. You'll also discover how other Rotary groups are using the Web and get pointers to a host of resources that can provide Rotary-specific Web page templates, free graphics, tutorials, and more.

The Internet as a Promotions Tool

The Internet isn't just about connecting computers in a huge worldwide network. It's also the perfect place to network with other individuals who are interested in finding out about your Rotary club.

Here are some reasons why the Web can be a great place to promote Rotary:

◆ The wide-open spaces. In a single location, you can provide detailed descriptions of all your activities. Rotarians in District 7150 find plenty of room on their Web site for their Gift of Life Program, Group Study Exchange, Literacy projects, and other activities (www.rotarydistrict7150. org). The site provides links to separate Web pages that describe each project in detail. "Webmeister," Rotarian Marlene Brown, also publishes an electronic weekly news memo that draws visitors to the site. On the Web, you aren't constrained by issues of paper size or printing costs. You can publish virtually all of the text and photos you want.

◆ Stop the presses. It can take weeks to print a brochure or booklet, but you can get the latest news online in a matter of seconds.

◆ Build a community. Getting people together is a common purpose of both Rotary and the Internet. Rotarians on the Internet can hold regular chats, get information about upcoming meetings, leave messages on a bulletin board, and keep in touch when they're on the road.

◆ Alert the media. Post your press releases on the Web and encourage reporters to go to your site regularly for fresh information as it becomes available. You'll not only save time and printing costs, but reporters will enjoy having a source of late-breaking news available around the clock.

The important thing is to use the Web to its fullest extent. According to research done by CBS television, when people around the globe log onto an Internet site, they are seeking news not entertainment, generic investment information, or idle chat. Because people use the Internet as a hard news source, there is a need for both news briefs and detailed reports.

Rather than publishing a single home page that announces your group's upcoming meeting schedule, fill your Web pages with useful and relevant content about future projects, members who have made outstanding achievements, and links to useful Web sites. Rather than trying to inform only your current members, reach out to new members, the media, and the wider community.

Public Relations on the Web

The success of many nonprofit groups depends on how effectively they use a limited budget to spread the word about themselves. You'll find the Web to be a treasure trove of low-cost public relations possibilities.

Already, many magazines and publications exist on the Web. A growing number of journalists scan the Web for news tips and can be reached quickly via their own e-mail addresses.

A club or district Web site can be a great place for a reporter to contact the group's members and to gather story ideas as well. If you make the media thirsty, they will drink. Try e-mailing to reporters an

announcement that a much anticipated piece of information can be obtained only on your Web site. People like the opportunity to control when and how they get information.

How Are Rotarians Using the Web?

One of the best ways to stimulate your thinking about your own group's Web site is to visit other outstanding Rotary sites. Here are some places you can study, plus some strategies you may find useful.

◆ Rotary Finland (www.rotary.fi). This site includes a map showing the district of Finland, a summary in English, links to district Web pages which highlight service activities, and news about district events and meetings. This site has been repeatedly recognized by the International Computer users Fellowship of Rotarians (ICUFR) and Rotarians on the Internet (ROTI).

◆ Rotary District 4530 in Brazil (www.geocities. com/Broadway/Orchestra/4042/). This site includes online registration for district conferences, photographs and biographies of district officers, and background information on their Group Study Exchange participants.

◆ John O'Donnell, in his Rotary club Web page (www.rotarynashuawest.com), provides more than Rotary-specific information. The site invites you to search towns in New Hampshire for history and tour information and offers local recycling guidelines.

Rotary clubs and districts use their Web sites as central gathering points for their groups. Visitors and members can find out about upcoming meetings, view photos of recent events, find out how to join, interact by posting a message in a "guest book" (a simple Web page form where visitors can type a message that can then be posted so others can read it), and conduct individual or group discussions via e-mail. A Web site can dramatically increase the number of people who receive Rotary information and provide new opportunities to work together. For example, Rotarians in Indonesia and Nova Scotia can discuss projects in "real time" in interactive chat rooms, and publish joint reports online.

Media Outreach

Describing projects and providing contact numbers and addresses on your Web site is one way to help the media. But you can go a step further and actively reach out to journalists. Look around the Web for any sites that are maintained by your local newspapers or radio/TV stations. Note the e-mail addresses of any reporters who would likely cover your group's activities.

You can also assemble your own list of reporters to contact whenever you have a compelling human interest story, fundraising event, or an accomplishment you want to announce. Local reporters are the ones who are most likely to respond, but you can find a nationwide list of reporters on the Internet on Yahoo's extensive index to the Web (www.yahoo. com/News_and_Media/Journalism/Journalists).

Don't forget the obvious when preparing text for your Web page. Your main address and telephone number should be prominent, along with the name and contact information for at least one representative who is available and qualified to respond to queries. A signature file is a few lines of text that most e-mail programs can append to each of your e-mail message and includes your name, job title, and contact information. Also consider providing on your Web page Rotary's mission statement and short biographies (along with photos) of key Rotarians in your club or district.

Live Internet events are a great way to gain media attention and attract new members. You can have either a one-time or regularly scheduled chat event. Call in a featured speaker of the month such as your town's mayor, school principal, or police chief. A few more specific suggestions are included in the following section.

Attracting and Retaining Members
Via Your Web Site

Having a Web site and publishing program information and e-mail addresses for your group's members goes a long way toward the goal of retaining current members. Publishing schedules of upcoming meetings keeps everyone in the loop. An especially good way to make members feel special is to include their photos on your Web site.

In order to create a photographic image to include on a Web page, you first need to convert it to computerized form. You do this by scanning a glossy photo with a device called a scanner. Check with local copy companies as many can do the scanning for you.

Providing members with ways to interact with one another also helps boost retention rates. A popular Web page editing program called Microsoft FrontPage enables you to create bulletin board-type Web pages where users can exchange messages about a wide variety of subjects, including Rotary projects. A more elaborate and exciting form of online interactivity revolves around a real-time chat event in which participants connect to a special Web site and type messages to one another in a live conversation. This type of event requires special chat software. The Rotary International Forum described in the following "Improving Communication" section used *ichat* software to bring together students from around the globe to chat online and discuss topics of current interest.

Improving Communication

Besides being a great way to gather information on virtually any subject, the Web provides individuals with new ways to communicate. Once your site is online, tell your members about it. Give them a guided tour at your next meeting. Encourage them to give you feedback and to suggest different sorts of information that can be added to make your site even better.

Many clubs find it helpful to form a Web committee. All members then know whom to contact with ideas and information of additions and improvements to the site.

Internet technologies allow people to collaborate on projects using mailing lists, newsgroups, bulletin boards, chat rooms, or even videoconferencing.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of its educational programs, Rotary International (RI) held a special event involving 800 Rotary Scholars. Since scholars are located in more than 70 countries, RI hosted an interactive "virtual" conference. The Internet presented an exciting opportunity to create a forum where — for the first time in the program's history — scholars could gather to share experiences and learn from each other.

The online conference featured a keynote speaker, chat rooms, discussion forums, and scholar Web pages with links to important world issues and Rotary projects around the globe.

A mailing list is a group of individuals who share a common interest and who communicate by sending e-mail messages to other members of the list. To join a list, you have to subscribe to it. Subscribers are then sent the e-mail messages that constitute the group's "discussions." You can join in by sending your own comments either to the entire list or to individual members. A compilation of lists especially for Rotarians can be found under "Rotary E-Mail Lists/News" at http://pro1.borg.com/rotary/links.cfm.

Tips for Creating a Winning Web Site

Here are some recommendations for creating a Web site, as published in *The Public Relations Strategist* by Dr. Louis K. Falk.

What makes a good Web site?

◆ A Web page should load completely in less than eight seconds.

◆ Make certain your Web pages are compatible with the different browsers.

◆ Consider screen size. Design pages to be viewed in both standard mode (640 x 480) and 800 x 600 mode.

◆ There are six crucial items that must be addressed to create a winning Web site.

— No dead links

— Contact information: There should always be a way to contact the site-owner. The requests generated from the site have to be monitored and answered — preferably within 48 hours.

— Placement of information: As a society we read left to right. Your most important information should be placed on the left.

— Use of color: The color scheme is important because it affects load time and it represents your organization. Problems arise when a nonstandard color is used.

— Ease of use: Information must be readily available and placed in logical order. Hyper links need to be accurate and clearly marked.

— Purpose: What is the purpose of your site? This is important because it determines the information as well as the depth. The **Presence Model** is used as a promotional tool and lets the viewer know your organization is progres-

sive. The **Informational Model** contains pages heavy with material and is specifically designed as a tool to pass information along.

◆ Check, Check, Recheck. Above all test your page to make sure it works. You should also make feedback easy by incorporating in the site an e-mail link to your Web page designer.

Finally, to let others know your page exists, you must register it with the major search engines including AltaVista, Excite, HotBot, infoseek, and Lycos. This should be done automatically through your Web site hosting company. You should also submit your page to the directories of Yahoo, LookSmart, and Snap.

Rotary-Related Web Sites

A growing number of resources are available on the Web to help you create a Web site or contact other Rotarians worldwide. Here is a list of places to start.

There's no place like "home," and Rotary's home on the Web, www.rotary.org, is the place to start if you're looking for Web pages to link to, files to download, or news to which you can refer on your Web site.

Visit these specific parts of the Rotary site for information you can use:

◆ The Press Center (www.rotary.org/press) provides a good model of how Rotary groups can use the Web to share news and improve public relations. This page provides links to important information such as presidential biographies, news releases, news by region, and Rotary's mission.

◆ PR Tools and materials (www.rotary.org/club/prtools/index.htm). This Web page provides vital public relations tools to promote club and district activities. You can register at this location to receive PR Tips on a regular basis, via e-mail. Click on "Register" and submit your name and e-mail address.

◆ Rotary Fact Pack (www.rotary.org/club/prtools/toolbox/forms.htm). This is the address of an electronic "Fact pack" of files, graphics, and information that you can add to your site. In addition, visit www.rotary.org/press/atwork for Rotary initiatives addressing a broad range of social issues.

◆ Where Clubs Meet (www.rotary.org/services/clubs/index.htm) is a list of upcoming Rotary

meetings around the world. If you are not listed already, you can contact Rotary International to add your own meeting to this page.

◆ The Download Center (www.rotary.org/services/download/index.htm) offers several versions of the official Rotary emblem along with presidential theme-related materials, opportunities for service, and Rotary program material.

A template is a predesigned Web page that you can fill with your own images and content. By providing you with a document that has already been set up, you save a good deal of time and effort in designing a Web page. A set of Rotary Web page templates, along with a guide to getting your Rotary club on the Web, have been created by Computer Resources of Bend, Oregon. These templates are available for free on the Internet at the Central Oregon Rotary clubs' Web site (www.empnet.com/rotary/guide.htm).

Rotary's Policy on Web Sites

Before developing your club or district's Web site, it is important to read RI's policy on electronic communications. The policy can be found on Rotary's Web site (www.rotary.org/club/guidelns.htm). You'll discover that every site has to have a link to the main Rotary Web site, for instance. You'll also find helpful information about creating and maintaining your site.

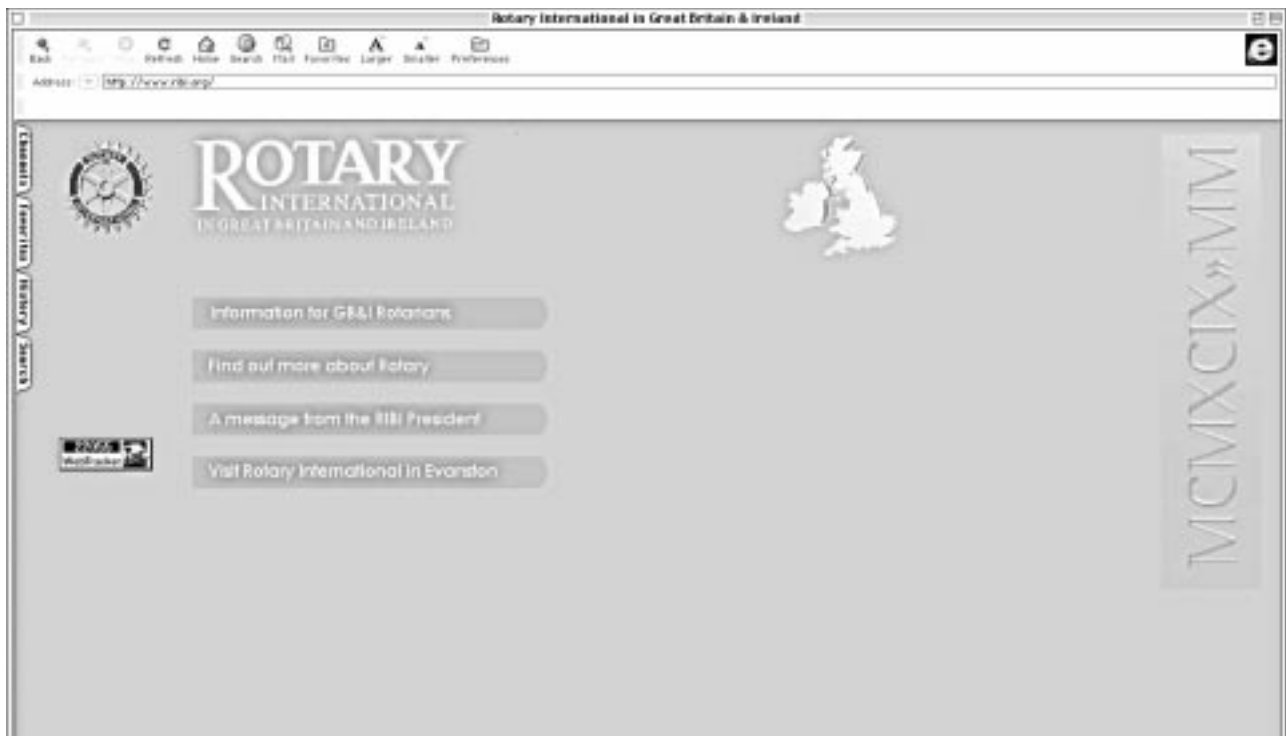### Following Up and Measuring Success

After your site is online, it's essential to get feedback to improve it. A Web site, unlike a printed booklet or brochure, is easy to remake and revise.

Feedback and gut feelings are useful, but developing a more scientific way to measure the effectiveness of your Web site is important. First, determine your objectives by defining what you expect to accomplish. Then decide how to measure success by, for example, tracking hits or responses to an online survey, or conducting focus groups. Keep records for a period of time so you have a benchmark against which to compare your results. If performance doesn't meet goals, take steps toward improvement. Then keep on measuring.

Some Web hosts provide customers with sophisticated measurement tools that track who views your Web pages and where they are from. Ask your hosting service if they provide you with regular reports from software packages such as WebTrends. You'll find out which pages are most popular, when you receive the most visitors, where most of your visitors come from, and more fascinating information. For example, you can get an idea of the kinds of access statistics that can be obtained at the Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland Web site, www.ribi.org.

At the very least, many Web hosts (such as America Online) will let you install a link to a computer program called a hit counter. The counter records the number of visits to a Web page and can give you an idea of how frequently your Web site is accessed. The Barnsley, England, Rotary club's Web site, for instance (www.mikelees.demon.co.uk/rotary.htm), includes a counter as well as a guest book.

A Web site allows your Rotary club or district to convey your group's message to internal and external audiences. The Web is an exciting way to build interest and enthusiasm among your current members, and makes them feel good about their contributions. Such strength gives you a firm foundation that you can build on in order to recruit and retain new members and inform local media of news stories and ongoing projects. In short, a Web site enables you to capitalize on every opportunity to make your club or district better known, and ultimately more effective in service to the local and global community.