

Web Development Plan

Introduction

The purpose of the USMS web site is to serve as a vehicle for USMS leadership to support the USMS Mission Statement "To promote fitness and health in adults by offering and supporting Masters swimming programs" and to fulfill the USMS Core Objectives of Service, Educate, and Build the Membership. This document is intended as an executive summary of the what, why, and how of USMS web development.

Historical Perspective

Since the Ad-hoc Computer Online committee began work in 1996, the EC, BOD, HOD, Web Administrators¹, and individual committees have proposed and approved projects to be done on the web site. These decisions have led us to develop the site as the lynchpin for communications, marketing, and functional processes of USMS. The key decision points in this process were to: create a USMS web site (1996); leave our Mindspring web site and go to dedicated hosting (2000); implement the Professional Management Guidelines (2000); build a database-driven web site (2001); build an Enterprise Database system (2002); hire a full-time webmaster (2002); bid our online entry system for the 2006 World Championships (2003); engage a web contractor to assist the webmaster (2004); build support for major sponsors (2004); and create a closer integration between our national publication and web site (2004).

Management of Web Operations

Management of web operations is governed by the Web Management Guidelines (WMG), which are attached to this document. The mission and goals for our web site are implemented by the Web Administrators with the concurrence of the Executive Committee. The Web Administrators are supported in their efforts by the Communications Committee, whose members may be tapped to participate in administrative activities as needed. The guidelines also define the process for scheduling projects and the ways in which USMS leaders interact with web operations. Translation of the needs of the customers into web tasks is done by the Webmaster in consultation with the customer. Decisions on the details of implementation are governed by existing web development plans, good web design principles, and available human and financial resources. Prior to commencement of implementation, the customer must agree with the requirements specification.

Web Design Principles

A well designed web site needs to be accessible to the majority of browsers and platforms in use, and should be aesthetically pleasing, easy to navigate, and timely. It should also focus on the product—in this case, swimming. The web is a different medium than paper publications and has different needs and guidelines as a result. The first thing to always keep in mind when thinking about how the information is presented is—how will visitors perceive things? Most of our web site visitors have absolutely no knowledge or interest in our internal USMS structure of committees. As such, the public areas of the web site should not be dedicated to specific committees—they are areas that highlight information, independent of what committee may have jurisdiction over the contents. It's a fine line, but **very** important to the development of the web site. Structuring a web site according to internal organizational/divisional/committee boundaries rather than by what makes sense to your visitors is contrary to good web design principles.

Web Development Plan

The key to modern web development is the creation of dynamic web pages and web-based functions that are implemented using information stored in databases. In addition, there needs to be accompanying administrative tools that allow non-technical persons to maintain web information without intervention by the Webmaster. New development on the web site will be of this type, while older systems will gradually be converted or absorbed into new systems. The benefits of a database-driven site include ease of maintenance by the "owners" of the information, greater flexibility in maintaining and updating display areas, and efficiency in storage of large amounts of information. The downside is that the development times are longer and it requires a higher level of expertise to build this kind of site. On balance, the need to support USMS functional processes and the sheer size of our web site (thousands of pages of information), make the database-driven site a necessity.

Web Support Services

Below are the major support services that the web administration feels are essential to a functional web site for USMS. When considering priorities, we need to determine which services cannot be eliminated or put on

¹ The current Web Administrators are Jim Matysek, Lynn Hazlewood, and Hugh Moore.

extended timelines without rendering the web site dysfunctional for our needs. Those that are left make up the core list and staffing must be arranged to accomplish them effectively.

1. Maintenance and enhancement of existing services (occupies 2/3 of a full time position).
2. Continuing upgrade of the web site to keep pace with new technology, improved graphics and design capability, and research on the human/machine interface.
3. Support for USMS functional processes that provide "Service" to our members and administrators.
4. Support for display processes that provide "Education" and information services to our members.
5. Support for marketing activities.
6. Support for USMS internal and external communications.

Professional Staff

The USMS Professional Management Guidelines (PMG) state that "USMS intends to continue to use its volunteer base as much as possible and practical. However, certain positions and tasks involve a time commitment and expertise well beyond what can be expected of a volunteer. These positions and tasks may be subject to compensation..." In 2002, when we hired Jim Matysek as a full time employee, the HOD recognized that the job of Webmaster/IT Director had risen to this standard. Developing and managing web operations for USMS is a production environment and needs to have continuous attention from professional workers, particularly given the technical requirements for a database-driven web site.

A Place for Volunteers

As systems that can be handled by non-technical workers are rolled out, there will be increasing need for people to engage in data maintenance functions. Web operations will provide the administrative tools, but the tools only allow for the possibility of keeping web information up to date. Other elements of USMS will have to manage the updating of databases and coordination of volunteers. Initially, these tasks will fall to the committees responsible for generating the data. As the volume of work increases, or if the committees do not have the requisite capability to staff these jobs, this approach will have to be reconsidered.

Conclusion

This has been a brief overview of some of the issues facing web operations today and in the future. We encourage anyone who has questions to contact support@usms.org.