

Unit Introduction

Computers and electronic information networks have become a pervasive part of our daily lives. The Internet has revolutionized global communication, and will continue to do so as technology advances. In this fast-paced information age, the Web is fast becoming the first choice for anyone seeking news or information on virtually any topic imaginable.

The Web has also affected the learning process, as you certainly know from this distributed learning course. You are learning the principles of public affairs from your home or office, a setting outside the traditional classroom environment.

As a public affairs officer, you will be responsible for shaping how your organization communicates via the Web. While the Internet is a valuable communication tool, it must be used with great care. The ease of obtaining information online must be balanced with the very real potential for compromising security or invading personal privacy. This unit of instruction will introduce you to the key principles of effective Web communication.

Unit Objectives

In this unit, we will

- Define Department of Defense Internet policy
- Explain the public affairs role in Internet operations
- Identify military Internet resource

Unit Overview

In this unit, we will examine

- Web policy
- Command responsibilities
- Web site requirements
- Principles of design

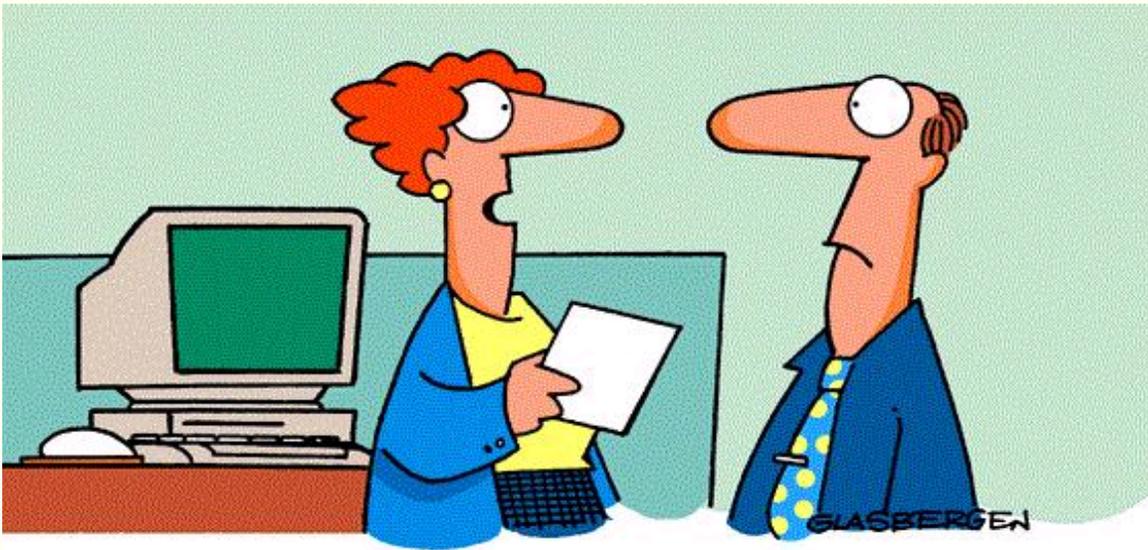
Web Policy

The Internet has changed our lives in ways big and small. Want to find out what's playing at the movie theater? Pop online and check.

Need to get directions to a new restaurant, or read other people's reviews of the food and service? Log on and get a map or a review, and maybe later add your own critique.

Thanks to the Internet, you don't have to go out and buy a newspaper, or go to the library to find a magazine or book of restaurants. The lure of the Web is that it provides near-instantaneous information to a global audience, with the click of a mouse. It can search for the information you need, whenever you need it.

Be First with the News!



"OUR COMPETITION LAUNCHED THEIR WEB SITE, STOLE ALL
OF OUR CUSTOMERS AND PUT US OUT OF BUSINESS
WHILE YOU WERE IN THE JOHN."

Web Policy

There is no requirement that your organization *has* to have a Web site. In fact, many smaller units do not. However, the Department of Defense *strongly encourages* the use of the World Wide Web to convey information on a variety of activities, policies and programs. (Hint: That means that senior DOD leaders think it's a *very good idea* to have a Web site).

The Web can serve as a vital communication link between Defense officials and military members, their families, and members of the general public.

The Web is an important communication tool because:

- It provides real-time access to information
- It is accessible to audiences worldwide

Web Policy

While the Internet can be beneficial, it does have its downside. The mission benefits must be weighed against potential threats and other concerns, such as:

- **Safety and security:** You don't know who might be looking at your Web site, or what their intentions might be. Consider Operational Security (OPSEC) when posting information about upcoming activities, or information about your unit. For example, listing specific dates, times and destinations of deployments is not practicing good OPSEC. But giving general information about a unit's mission or future deployments may be permissible.
- **Individual privacy:** Balance the public's right to know with an individual's right to privacy. Before posting information about specific individuals on your Web site, consider what information you are allowed to release under the Privacy Act or the Freedom of Information Act.

- Example: Biographies should not contain the names and ages of dependents. It's okay to say, "General Jones is married and has two children." It is not okay to say, "General Jones is married to the former Bonnie Parker and has two children, Buffy, 12, and Jodie, 10."

It may seem slightly paranoid, but what if a "predator" happens to learn that Bonnie, Buffy and Jodie are home alone while Dad is deployed? That's why it's best not to broadcast that information to the world.

Web Policy

- **Information aggregation:** Seemingly harmless bits of information gleaned from public sources, such as maps or telephone rosters, can be compiled into impressive arrays of critical information that can be used to inflict great damage if it falls into the wrong hands. Intelligence gathering from “open sources” must be considered when compiling the content of Web sites.

“Using public sources openly and without resorting to illegal means, it is possible to gather at least 80 percent of information about the enemy.”

--al Qaida Training Manual

Command Responsibilities

- The **unit commander** is ultimately responsible for an organization's Web site. However, commanders typically delegate control of the actual content and maintenance of the site to subordinates, usually a team of specialists in various disciplines. These specialists include:
 - **Public affairs**, responsible for the site's **content and release authority**
 - **Communications or Signals**, which handles the site's **design and technical operations**. They would be the ones who design and build the web site, and ensure that it operates correctly.
 - **Other offices**, such as the OPSEC (operational security) officer, Information Assurance officer, and those who monitor for the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). These offices ensure that information on the Web site can safely be made public while maintaining operational security.

Command Responsibilities

These specialists work as a team to ensure that an organization's Web site is easily accessible, easy to navigate, provides timely and accurate information, and that it does not release sensitive information that should be kept confidential.

Deciding what information to put on a public Web site represents a **balancing act**. Some organizations, such as the Intelligence branch, would probably prefer that you not release *any* information. Your job as public affairs officers is to remind them that we have a duty to inform the public about what we do. Deciding how best to do that requires that you work as a team.

In the future, military organizations are likely to rely more and more on technology to provide information services, rather than providing more manpower to get the word out. To assist you and your fellow information specialists, some services may provide standardized Web "templates," designed to help build Web sites that conform to the service's "look and feel" for all Web sites.

Command Responsibilities

The Department of Defense assigns a number of specific responsibilities to the service components for creating and updating Web sites. (For more information, refer to [DefenseLINK Web Policy](#)):

- Establish a process for identifying appropriate information for posting on military Web sites, and apply it consistently
- Make sure that all information posted on publicly accessible Web sites is properly reviewed for security, levels of sensitivity and other concerns before it is released
- Make sure that all information on publicly accessible Web sites is suitable for worldwide dissemination, and that it does not jeopardize national security, DOD personnel or assets, mission effectiveness, or individual privacy
- Establish procedures for managing the oversight and regular functional reviews of the Web site
- Maintain the security and operational integrity of the computers and network supporting the Web site
- Make reasonable efforts to ensure that all information posted on the Web site is **accurate, consistent, appropriate, and timely**
- Provide the resources necessary to adequately support Web site operations, including funding, equipping, staffing and training

Public Affairs Responsibilities

Normally, public affairs officers are responsible for the **content** on a Web site, not the technical design and operation of the site. Specifically, PAOs are responsible for:

- Identifying information that is appropriate for posting online
- Conducting security and policy reviews regularly
- Posting information that is appropriate for worldwide audiences
- Conducting regular oversight and review of the Web site

Military Internet Resources

If you've surfed the Web at all, you know there are millions of Internet sites out there. Finding the information you need may be difficult, depending on which "Search engine" you use, or how well you can specify exactly what you want.

To help find information about the military online, the Department of Defense created DefenseLINK, DOD's official Web site ([Click here to view](#)). It is designed to be a starting point for members of the public, the media and military members seeking information on specific policies, organizations, events and activities affecting each military service.

- DefenseLINK lists the top DOD Websites all in one convenient site, so users can click on any link ([DefenseLINK Sitemap](#))
- DefenseLINK also allows direct access to the database of **all** registered DOD sites ([Military Web sites](#))

Web sites are considered for listing on DefenseLINK based on several factors, including:

- The importance and timeliness of information they contain
- The frequency with which their information is requested by its users
- Selected non-DOD Web sites may also be included if they contain information that contributes to the overall mission of DOD Web sites.

Interim Review

Let's see how well you've understood the material presented so far. **(Click on the appropriate answer.)**

1. The Department of Defense discourages use of Web sites.

True False

2. DOD Web sites do not have to consider the Privacy Act when posting information online.

True False

3. Gathering information from publicly available sources to learn critical information about an organization is known as:

Real-time (RT) Access

Information Aggregation

Phishing

Spyware

4. DOD Web policy requires that commanders consider all of the following potential threats when designing their Web sites except:

Violations of safety and security

Violations of the time/space continuum

Violations of individual privacy

Collection of data that can be compiled into arrays of critical information used to inflict harm

5. Listing the names of an individual's family members in official online biographies is acceptable if you have the military member's permission.

True False

Web Site Requirements

Now let's look at some specifics involving Web sites themselves, and learn what features make an effective site.

One of the basic requirements is that every DOD Web site must have a **clearly defined mission and purpose**.

All information posted on a DOD Web site **must support that mission**. Otherwise, it simply clutters up your site and distracts from your message.

Your Web site should be the **primary online source of information** for your organization. Linking to related sites is encouraged, to help users get additional information. But your site should not duplicate these other sites. Likewise, these other sites should not present the same information as your site.

Web Site Requirements

Links to other sites can take you to a lot of places you never intended to go. It's a bit like the old game of "telephone," where one person whispers something to the person next to him, and he whispers what he thinks he hears to his neighbor.

By the time the message gets back to the person who started it, it often bears no resemblance to the original message. To avoid having that happen with your Web site, the solution is to be at the "front end" of the information chain, not at the end of several links.

Be very careful about what links you include on your Web site. It is essential that you regularly screen your site to ensure that it does **not include inappropriate items**, such as:

- Material that violates operational security (OPSEC), such as recall rosters, deployment schedules
- Personal information governed by the Privacy Act, such as Social Security numbers, family members' information, medical records, etc
- Information considered to be "for official use only" (FOUO), such as base telephone directories
- Inactive or outdated links

Web Site Requirements

Operational security and potential privacy violations are not the only considerations for what can or cannot be posted on your site. Here are some more examples of materials that should **not** be posted on your site:

- Inappropriate links (For example, commercial Web sites, pornographic sites, or casinos—even if your base is in Las Vegas!)
- Copyrighted material, unless you have received written permission from the author or publisher to use the material
 - **Exception:** Copyrighted material may be used for educational purposes
- Commercial trademarks, such as the Nike “Swoosh” logo.
- Product endorsements, advertisements or commercial sponsorships
 - **Exception:** Non-appropriated Funds (NAF) sites, for organizations that do not receive congressionally appropriated funds, may post ads or commercial sponsorships,

Newspapers: Military Web sites may post electronic copies of both funded and commercial enterprise newspapers. However, **advertising must be removed** from the pages of commercial enterprise papers before material can be posted on the site.

Web Site Requirements

DOD Web policy also dictates various technical requirements, which should be addressed by the information technology specialists who design and maintain your Web site.

Cookies:

“Cookies” are electronic identifier tokens that pass information back and forth between the server and client’s computer. It is possible to turn off the cookie feature on your computer. However, cookies are useful tools, because they help users navigate around a site. They “remember” where you’ve already been on a site, so you can easily return.

DOD Websites should not use cookies to collect personal information on site visitors. In fact, there is a specific “cookie disclaimer” that DOD Web sites should include. To see the "cookie disclaimer," click [here](#) and scroll down to item No. 9.

DOD Web sites use cookies to collect *statistical* information, for determining which information is most or least useful or most frequently accessed by visitors during a particular session. This information must be discarded after the session ends (“session cookies.”) It should not be kept on file after a browser session ends (“persistent cookies.”) [Privacy Warning](#)

Web Site Requirements

Security: Web managers must establish a security certification and accreditation procedure, as outlined in DOD Directive 5200.40 [DOD IT Security Certification](#).

Among the security requirements are to:

- Use approved DOD security and privacy notices, and applicable disclaimers, such as noting the fact that a link does not constitute endorsement of a site by the Department of Defense. [External Links Disclaimer](#)

This external-links disclaimer is found at the bottom of most pages on DefenseLINK, and also appears when a user clicks on an external link, just to alert the user that they are going to an outside site over which DefenseLINK has no control.

Web Site Requirements

Software: DOD sites cannot require or even encourage visitors to use specific browser software, such as Internet Explorer, NetScape or Firefox.

- Use only plain text or hyper-linked text to direct visitors to software download sites.
 - In other words, you can link to the Adobe home page by saying, "To view a pdf (portable document file), click here: [Adobe Home Page](#)
 - You cannot post the Adobe icon and ask users to click on it, because the icon is a copyrighted commercial trademark.

Registration: Publicly accessible Web sites must be registered with the Defense Technical Information Center, or DTIC. [DTIC Site Registration](#)

You should also register your site with the Government Information Locator Service, or GILS. [GILS Home Page](#)

Access for the Disabled

In 1998, Congress directed that federal agencies make their electronic and information technology accessible to individuals with disabilities. This requirement is commonly known as "Section 508 Compliance," because it is contained in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Under Section 508, federal agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to everyone else.

Key items affected by Section 508:

- Provide "text equivalents" for non-text items. For example, provide text to explain to a visually handicapped user what is being shown in a photo.
- Pages should not require color identification for navigation within a site
- Use equivalent alternatives for any multimedia presentation
- Provide row and column identifiers on data tables

Access for the Disabled



Roll your mouse over the photo. Notice the text that briefly pops up? This feature assists those who are visually impaired and use a special device that reads aloud all text on the screen.

This rollover feature assists in making this page 508 compliant.

Principles of Design

While an installation's public affairs officer is generally not responsible for "building" Web sites, it is certainly useful for you to know some of the basic principles that contribute to a well-designed site.

As a PAO, you are responsible for providing a site's **content**. A site that is easy to read and easy to navigate will draw more visitors and ultimately help you disseminate your message to a wider audience.

The three key aspects of Web design are:

- **Readability:** How information is presented on the screen, and the amount of information presented at one time.
- **Usability:** The time it takes to navigate through a site and locate various pieces of information.
- **Content:** Remember that everything you post to the site must be consistent with the purpose of the site. If it doesn't relate to the site, it doesn't belong there.

Principles of Design

How many times have you clicked on a Web site and been frustrated by all the “bells and whistles,” the clutter, the competing texts and links? Or perhaps it has taken a site *forever* to load to your computer because of the photos and graphics. Or maybe you’ve had to scroll to the right or scroll down endlessly to read the text.

Aggravating, isn’t it? Well, visitors to your site won’t put up with that for long, either. Poor design can mean missed opportunities to get your message out to the world.

Designing the layout of a Web page is similar to laying out a page in a newspaper. For example, you wouldn’t want huge blocks of gray text that overwhelm your readers. Instead, you want some “white space” – open space, along with illustrations (photos or graphics) that break up the page, catch the reader’s attention, and draw in the reader.

Let’s look at some of the key principles of designing an effective Web site.

Principles of Design

Think about a Web page as if it were the front page of a newspaper. Studies have shown that readers' eyes glance at various elements, taking in snippets of information as they scan the page.

Readers glance at the **upper left-hand corner**, scan diagonally to the **bottom right**, then the **bottom left**, and then back to the **upper right corner** of the page. That means that the most important elements on your page should be in the **upper left-hand corner** of the page, so they are the first thing a user sees when the page opens.

Principles of Design

Readability

- People scan and speed read
 - Put key elements in upper-left corner



Principles of Design

To further aid readers of your Web page, here are a few more tips:

- Place key design elements “**above the fold**,” that is, visible on the page when it is first opened
 - [Click for example](#) (Above the fold)
 - [Click for example](#) (Below the fold)
- Keep the color scheme simple – two or three colors at most – and ensure that the colors are universal to all Web browsers.
 - [Click for example](#) (Color scheme)
- Use design elements such as headers, **bold face type**, colors, and pictures to focus the reader’s attention on key information quickly.
 - [Click for example](#) (Dominant photo)
 - [Click for example](#) (Font sizes)
 - [Click for example](#) (Subtle use of color)
- Use consistent fonts and complementary colors throughout the body text, headers, and backgrounds.
 - [Click for example](#) (Color scheme)
- Don’t put dark-colored printing on dark backgrounds, or light-colored printing on light backgrounds. This makes a page tough to read.
- Avoid cluttered, “busy” pages. Use open, or “white space” to aid readability. Think of white space as a “rest for the eyes.”
 - [Click for example](#) (Good use of white space)

Principles of Design

As you lay out your Web site, here are some design principles to consider:

- Use a common logo or banner to “brand” the site, much the way magazine covers give a distinctive look to the publication.
- Prioritize information from the top to the bottom, with the most important stories on top, just as newspapers put the most important stories “above the fold.”
- Keep all text to about two-thirds of the page’s width, for easier reading. Make sure all the information on your site fits from side-to-side on a single screen. A bit of vertical scrolling is okay, but don’t force readers to scroll **left to right** to view the information.
- Hint: Not everyone has a 19-inch computer monitor; laptops and smaller screens, and variations in screen resolution settings limit how much information can be displayed on a screen at any one time. Take these limitations into account as you lay out your pages.
- Limit pages to no more than three screens long, to reduce the amount of vertical scrolling required by readers.

Principles of Design

Readers usually do not spend a lot of time on any one screen, so your design should be consistent and easy to understand, or they will click right past it and go on to another site. For example, look at any successful [commercial Web site](#) and each page of the site will look very similar, with the same banner across the top.

Military Web sites use the same principles: [US Strategic Command](#)

- Keep it simple – five or six global navigation buttons (example: Home, Contact Us) should be sufficient.
- Keep it consistent -- put critical navigation tools, such as Home, Contact Us, etc., in the same place on all pages.
- Keep it logical – group similar information under topical headers, so readers won't have to search the entire site for information.

Principles of Design

Writing for the Web is a specialized skill. In general, the advice to “keep it tight, light and right” is even more essential for the Web than for newspapers.

- Use clear, concise, and accurate words.
- Be brief. Readers scan Web sites even more quickly than they do newspapers.
- Avoid acronyms or bureaucratic jargon.
- Use a conversational tone, but avoid wildly informal or profane language.
- Think about who else might see your site. Remember, your site is accessible to a **global audience**.
 - Example: What might be wildly popular in a small, all-male unit, like photos of scantily clad cheerleaders, might be inappropriate for units with both men and women.
 - Some material may even be forbidden in some overseas locales. Think about what a country’s “Ministry of Decency” might say about your Web page.

Principles of Design

The ultimate test of your Web site's effectiveness is the number of users who successfully access the information they are seeking. Hopefully, readers will find your Web site useful enough that they will return to it in the future.

You should work with technical Web specialists to develop a program to consistently evaluate your Web site for readability and usability. There are no set standards for evaluating these criteria. It's best to develop your own methods for evaluating the effectiveness of your site.

Test Your Knowledge

1. Which of the following is **NOT** a public affairs responsibility for Web site management?

- Design and construction of Web site, ensuring it operates correctly
- Identifying information appropriate for posting online
- Conducting security/policy reviews regularly
- Conducting regular oversight and review of the Web site

2. The public affairs office is responsible for maintaining DOD Web sites.

True False

3. Military Web sites do not have to consider the Privacy Act before posting information on their sites.

True False

4. Which of the following is **not** one of DefenseLINK's main missions:

- Provide a list of approved acronyms for military Web site use
- Allow direct access to the database of all registered DOD sites
- Provide top DOD Web sites in one convenient location
- Provide a starting point for all seeking information on specific policies, organizations, events and activities affecting each military service

5. Links to commercial Web sites are encouraged on military sites, to be helpful to military members.

True False

6. "Section 508 compliance" means that federal Web sites must:

- Provide multimedia presentations for veterans and disabled people
- Ensure that all pages carry no more than 60 percent advertising
- Give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to everyone else
- Allow for those who are veterans

7. When designing a Web site, it's best to put as much information as possible on each page, so users have everything they need in one place.

True False

8. Using **bold-face type** and a consistent, coordinated palate of two or three colors improves a Web site's design.

True False

9. Military acronyms are acceptable on a DoD Web site, to give it an air of authenticity.

True False

Unit Summary

The Internet is playing an increasingly important role in how the military communicates with its audiences. As a public affairs officer, you will be responsible for ensuring that the information posted on your site is timely, accurate, and in compliance with all DoD Web policies.

By using what you have learned in this unit, you should be able to work with your information technology specialists to develop an effective Web site for your unit.