

# Building our Club Website

By Keith Lee

One of the most incredible moments that I have had since getting involved with SAITSayers was when I discovered that our club website finally came up #1 when you did a Google search for "SAITSayers". "Welcome to SAITSayers, A Toastmasters Club", the link declares. Man, that was sweet.

It was not always thus. When I was first developing the site I was surprised to find that earlier attempts at creating a website for our club came up first. It was interesting to see what others had tried, but I was determined to publish something that fit in with my vision of what our club website could be.

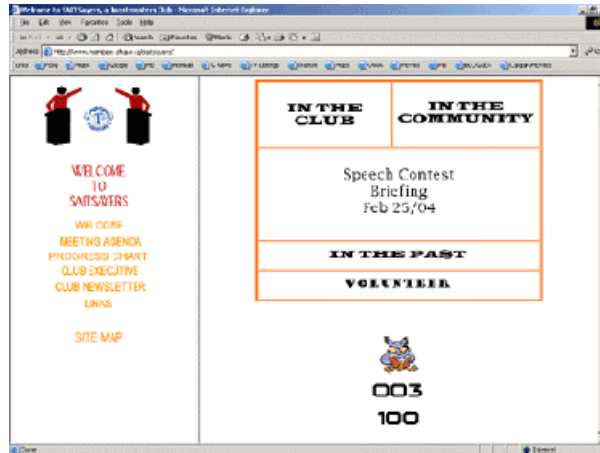
Of course, this vision was not entirely mine! While the site was being initially developed and reworked in August 2003, we had a session during a club meeting to brainstorm ideas for what our members would like to see. Concepts included things like a map to the meeting place (with clear pointers to places to park), info on upcoming events (such as contests, special speakers, etc.), an outline of club meeting roles so members could have a reference when they were preparing for roles that they had not tried before, bios for club members and the exec, and pictures from club meetings and events.

Many of these ideas were worked into the site. The ones that haven't made it yet are still coming... we just need to figure out how to do them!

In order to build the site, I used the following tools:

1. Microsoft Frontpage 2000: Since I was neither a programmer nor a web designer, I chose to use this product to build the pages that would make up the site because it was very simple and easy-to-use and had templates available so I could make up simple frames pages.
2. Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0: I used this to create the 'buttons' that could be used for menu bars and other picture elements. By using pictures for the buttons I could also insert little messages that would appear when you hovered your mouse pointer over the image. This program was also useful for resizing and reducing the image resolution on pictures so they weren't annoyingly huge; this helped pages load a little quicker.
3. WS FTP PRO: This is the program that I used to upload the web pages from my home computer to the shaw web servers. Shaw had plenty of useful how-to pages that made the process fairly simple.
4. Win2PDF: This is a program that I found that allows you to create Adobe Acrobat PDF documents. It is pretty good but I recently noticed that it is a little limited with respect to specialized fonts; however for most purposes it is fine.





In terms of content, all of the versions of the website included links to the following information:

- Club meeting time and location
- Overviews of meeting roles
- Agenda for the meeting the current week
- Advanced Agenda for upcoming weeks
- Explanations of the roles of the club executive
- Listing of club announcements and upcoming events
- Links to the club newsletter
- Links to other Toastmasters-related sites and resources

Specific enhancements over the past months have included:

***Addition of a photo-tour of the SAIT campus:*** This was added because I found it hard to describe (imagine!) how one gets to our meeting place, especially after we switched meeting locations a few times during the fall

***Addition of a site map for easier navigation:*** This was added to make some of the secret stuff less secret.

***Reworking of the Upcoming Events/Announcements pages:*** Originally, we had a single upcoming events/announcements page that I would post new stuff onto but this became a little unwieldy (read: really unwieldy) because it would be hard to find info and add updates that people would notice. To overcome this, in the current version of the site I have split the events into three pages:

- ❖ In the Club (for stuff happening at SAITSayers proper),
- ❖ In the Community (for stuff happening in the greater Toastmasters community), and
- ❖ In the Past (for stuff that has happened recently).

Also, I made a point of making a little picture-link for each event so I could easily move them without having to worry about playing with formatting.

***Agenda Archive:*** This is an archive of our past meeting words, themes and agendas.

***Progress Chart:*** This was added to allow us to keep track of what roles that we know that our members have done so far in the context of our club meetings. I also added a tracking system for speech completions, complete with speech titles and presentation dates incorporated into the star.

***Story Space:*** I envisioned this space as a way for members of SAITSayers and other clubs to share stories about projects they have worked on, events that they have participated in, or just plain old cool stories that they would like to share about the “Toastmasters Experience”.

The website is definitely still a work in progress, and I know that there are still many enhancements that can be integrated into the site. From a technical standpoint, I feel that our site is almost embarrassingly simple (read: no fancy Javascript menus, no crazy Flash animations or intros, no theme music, etc) but I think that the site definitely succeeds as a communication tool – a means of sharing information about our club and our approach to Toastmasters. It has been a pleasure working on the site and I look forward to handing off this project to others in the club in order to see how they can make it even better!

*February 15, 2004*