Web Resources for Sprint Canoe & Kayak Clubs

Purpose

Most canoe and kayak clubs are organized by athletes and parents who likely have little in the way of technical skills, and no background in web development or design. This is for whom this document is written.

This resource is intended to provide clubs with a guide to using cost effective tools for organizing, marketing, and managing their club. There are likely going to be other tools that are discovered or already known to some readers that are perhaps better than what is offered here - please share them with us! This should be a "living document" that gets improved over time.

Assumptions

- Clubs are either registered 501(c)(3) organizations or will become one.
- In the age of Google and other search engines, users of this document can educate themselves further on any of these topics and tools; this will not be a step-by-step guide.
- There will be important topics missed and not covered yet.
- All users have Internet access and at least a Chromebook, Netbook, or iPad with a web browser.
- Security, sustainability, and transparency are important goals and should be considered and weighted heavily when deciding which tools to use and include in this document.

Recommended Software

Office Suites

Non-profits have access to free services from many large providers today. This includes access to **Google's Workspace**, or **Microsoft's Office 365**. You'll have to pick one of these two paths, not both as your club's domain name can only be serviced by one at a time. (We have found Google's tools to be of more value but if you have software developers, they may prefer the Microsoft solution.)

Either of these options will give your club access to software for:

- Email with your domain name associated with it
- Word processing
- Spreadsheets

- Web forms
- Presentation tools like PowerPoint
- Video conferencing
- Cloud storage for sharing and archiving documents.

The sign up process can take a bit of time but once you have this step done, you've got an extremely powerful set of tools for free.

Secure Passwords / Notes

Bitwarden

Maintaining your organization's passwords for things like your bank accounts, domain name registration, hosting provider, email accounts, ACA and other organizations, etc., is important and something that will likely need to be shared with your Board, the Treasurer, any accountants you may need, or simply to hand off from one coach to another as roles change over time. All such information needs to be securely managed. Bitwarden will provide you with a tool to do this, and the free account will likely suffice. You can read more about their service on their website, but by having all "key holders" in your organization get a Bitwarden account, passwords and other information may be securely shared *and maintained* for everyone.

Graphic Design Templates

Canva

Another service that will provide non-profits with a free account is Canva.com. Graphic design templates for annual reports, multimedia presentations, social media campaigns, and business cards and more are available here. See https://www.canva.com/canva-for-nonprofits/ for details.

Calendaring Tools / Scheduling

Calendly

https://calendly.com/
The free, single event type offering from Calendly is a good way for some of your club volunteers and coaches to show their availability to others. This tool allows people with a provided link to see the open time slots an individual is providing for a meeting request. It does so without sharing the activities or specifics of an individual's calendar.

Doodle

https://doodle.com/en/
Need to get your Board together for the annual meeting? Doodle will help you choose a time that is convenient for everyone. The free account does all you need, too.

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Google Calendar

https://calendar.google.com/
I like GSuite/Google Workspace because of the ease of sharing and integrating with many other tools. With Google Calendar, you can have a shared calendar in addition to individual calendars. The shared calendar can be for workout schedules, events, whatever. Best of all, the shared calendar can be *managed* by more than just one person and then displayed on many websites. This will give clubs the ability to have a separation of duties and if desired, limit access to tools only needed for the role the volunteer needs.

Finances and Bookkeeping

Wave Accounting

Wave Financial: Financial Software for Small Businesses
Wave Accounting makes its money as a payment processor and accounting consultant, or if you use their payroll services. I cannot speak to their payroll features as our club does not have any paid resources, but their financial reports and payment processing are excellent. Sending recurring invoices for club dues is simple and you can also set automatic reminders. Best of all, the person paying the invoice can do so securely and with an ACH payment (direct bank withdrawal) that has a lower fee. Credit card and ACH transaction fees are comparable to other providers, too. We have only used their free account thus far.

Another great feature for this application is that you can have multiple users with different usage rights. Give your bookkeeper access to everything, have read only access to additional Board members, etc. You can also configure donation buttons on your website that will allow people to use credit cards for payments directly to your Wave account, which in turn are deposited to your bank account. Wave will also integrate with your bank so transactions are automatically pulled in from your bank account.

PayPal & the PayPal Giving Fund

PayPal Giving Fund Home
Payment processors are often complicated to configure and set up. PayPal (who also owns Venmo) makes this far easier. You can also purchase a card reader for use with Apple Pay/Google Pay, or use the simpler swipe reader that is free for PayPal Now users.

Once you are approved, you can also join the PayPal Giving Fund. With this tool, there are *lower fees* for donations - it was once free. The only catch is that it takes longer to receive your donation and it requires that the person donating use a PayPal account. (PayPal as a payment method does not require you to create an account contrary to many people's assumptions; you can pay with a credit card through PayPal, too.)

Meta (Facebook and Instagram) Donations

Facebook For Nonprofits

Meta vets nonprofits and provides not only the means to market and receive donations, but to do so with low transaction fees. Start the setup process now and expect payments to take over a month to arrive. You can love or hate Facebook and Instagram, but they are solid sources for fundraising.

Candid (was GuideStar) and the Network for Good

Candid provides nonprofit reports and Forms 990 for donors, grantmakers, and businesses and Simple & Smart Fundraising Software for Small Nonprofits
Candid is an organization that vets nonprofits. (GuideStar is now branded as "Candid" as of 2023.) Having your club setup in Candid will help you with obtaining grants as well as donations. All of their donations are via the *Network for Good.* I would recommend setting up an account at the NFG, too.

Communication and Safe Sport

With smartphones being nearly ubiquitous, the need to keep adult and minor communication transparent is especially important. Texting should not be the primary form of communication, if permitted at all. The following tools and suggested uses of them should be considered.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp Messaging
Meta's WhatsApp messaging application is the default tool used at international regattas and often at our Nationals for instant messaging and overall communication. Care should be taken when adding youth and when possible, limiting direct contact. Parents/Guardians should always be added to groups with youth.

TeamReach

TeamReach - Team Management Simplified
This is a free app and there's very little advertising! Made by an app maker who specializes in software for college and university campuses, this app allows you to create transparent communication for your whole team. Our "channel" for the club has private messaging disabled nor are phone numbers or email addresses shared, not even during the sign up process. For a small annual fee, members can also drop all advertising, but it's also rather easy to ignore.

Google Groups

Google Groups
Google Groups can be configured to work as an email newsletter, or if one is careful about adding the information, text messages may be sent too. See this article for how to setup cell numbers as an email recipient. You can make a Group that only specific people can send messages but that will still go to your entire team and all parents. Having a single email address for your Board can also be useful with the Board members changing over time but all communication being kept in the Google Group created for the Board to use. Note that the Board's communication may also be kept private and visible to only Board members.

Microsoft Teams

Teams can have “channels” that you invite people to and that will work similar to Google Groups. (I find Google Groups far easier to configure but you can still make Teams work if this is the resource you have chosen.)

ConstantContact

Constant Contact - Send Fundraising Emails with Nonprofit Marketing
This email provider is for sending out your important email. Washington Canoe Club uses it and likes that they can see if the membership has opened and read the email. This allows their Board to know if the membership knows what it is supposed to know. There is a fee associated with the service but if your membership is large and dispersed, these metrics could be important to you.

National Center For Safety Initiatives (NCSI)

https://solutions.ncsisafe.com/

Background checks for your coaches and volunteers can be done through this website for a reasonable fee. *This is the same resource used by the American Canoe Association.* All ACA competition licenses for adults have their backgrounds checked via NCSI semi-annually.

Volunteer and Project Management

SignUp

SignUp.com Mobile
If you have a volunteer coordinator for your club, give them a list of tasks that need to be done and they can use SignUp to get your volunteers connected and more importantly, reminded. This free web application will do it all for you. You may wish to consider making an email address for your domain just for volunteer coordination, too, and using that email with this program.

Trello

Which Trello Plan is Best for You? Our Pricing Guide Can Help
Trello works with a “Kanban” style board; you have tasks that are in either a “To Do,” “Doing,” or “Done” status. Very visual, very simple. There’s a Trello phone app, too. The free version will likely be all your club needs.

Basecamp

Basecamp discounts for teachers, students, and nonprofits
Basecamp has a free offering that will likely work for nearly every club and is a more robust project management tool and it is very simple to use. Nonprofit organizations receive a discount should you find you need more than the free offering (so long as you’re using it just for the nonprofit.) If Trello doesn’t offer enough for your needs, Basecamp likely will.

ClickUp

ClickUp's free account will likely suffice for most canoe and kayak clubs and offers a very robust project management solution. It has many more features than Basecamp and greater complexity, too.

Training Logs and Stats

If you have a GPS device that will record your workout, you should also know about a few free or inexpensive digital tools that will provide you with valuable workout stats.

Garmin Connect and Strava

If you own a Garmin device, you can upload your workouts to Garmin Connect for free. Better still, get a free Strava account and have your workouts in Garmin Connect sync over to Strava, too. A Strava subscription is worthwhile but not required to use the product. However, if you want to compare stats with other Strava users, you'll need a subscription. This may be especially helpful for working with athletes such as college students who have to rely on remote coaching help much of the year. Once on Strava, there are two additional resources you should know about that work with Strava that are listed below.

Elevate - Chrome browser plugin

https://thomaschampagne.github.io/elevate/#/landing

Elevate will provide you with stats about your level of fitness, alert you to over or under training, and more. There's now Elevate desktop apps – also free – which are great!

Intervals.ico

https://intervals.icu/fitness

This tool also provides fitness stats in a similar fashion to Elevate, but with a different methodology. Other analysis is provided too such as what type of training your workouts are falling into; Base, Pyramidal, Threshold, HIIT, and Polarized.

Marketing and Branded Gear

Bonfire

Bonfire: Nonprofit Fundraising | Easy Online Fundraising

Bonfire will allow you to make branded gear for marketing and fundraising purposes easily. You don't have to carry inventory and there's no cost to you to set things up. Products can be mailed to one address or to individuals. You also set the prices and can buy your own stock at a discounted price if you want some on hand for a race or other event. Shirts and sweatshirts are of high quality and customer service has also been excellent from my own experience with a screen that didn't turn out well being replaced free of charge. Note though that these shirts are not athletic, race shirt material.

CustomInk

I've used CustomInk for making shirts for various events and find their tools, features, and speed to be excellent. They have a fundraising option which looks useful but I have not used it nor do I know of anyone as a reference at this point in time.

SquadLocker

https://www.squadlocker.com/
For race gear, SquadLocker offers most of the major athletic brands and can apply your club's logo to shirts, shorts, and jackets. This has been used by the Washington Canoe Club but not by me yet. Like Bonfire, you are not required to carry inventory and there's no contract or minimums required. Inventory is processed quickly which allows you to offer this option year round. (One limitation at this time is that logos must be placed on the front of all garments.)

Race Management

SprintTimer

SprintTimer
Available in the Apple App Store for iOS devices, there are simple and Pro versions available of this sport timing application. (The cost of the Pro version is about $25 as of June, 2021.) This app allows one person to accurately time all of the racers in a sprint race and also provides a photo finish feature. This app also integrates with JRaceman listed below!

Google Forms / Office 365 Forms

Google Forms | Office 365 Forms
If you are doing manual entry of races, or perhaps running a virtual regatta with participants being timed at different venues, having a Google or Office 365 Form setup to standardize the data being entered by a group of people will be a time saver for you. Both form applications are free and both write to their respective spreadsheet tools allowing you to sort, filter, and share results later. Obviously you could also build a form for capturing race entry data, too.

WebScorer

Webscorer | Race registration, race timing, race results
A subscription based tool, WebScorer has tons of features and is recommended by Seattle Canoe Club. Subscription prices are reasonable and billed annually.

CrewTimer

CrewTimer Regatta Timing
Payment is by the honor system -- worth paying for as this little project does an awesome job and works on both iOS and Android. Directions are good and this should cover most club races if not more. Improvements to CrewTimer for Sprint paddling are being done now as the ACA

has used this software for the past few Nationals and National Team Trials. This software will likely become an open source project in the future, which is a good thing, too.

PaddleGuru

PaddleGuru Race Management
A simple to use race management tool that has financials built in and with a larger use base, can attract more paddlers to your race if it's open to more than just sprint paddlers.

Website Infrastructure & Platforms

There are *many* web building tools available today, and even some which are specifically geared towards sporting teams. These sports oriented platforms are not open systems; you get the functionality this system offers and can (at best) configure things to fit for paddling, you cannot customize them. These "monolithic" offerings still might meet your needs.

Monolithic systems include a layer of support and tend to be more expensive. *I would not recommend them to the vast majority of users.* Examples of these systems include - Sport80USA, Sports Locker, TeamUnify, and Wild Apricot. As was noted in the assumptions section above, this document is focusing on the less expensive and more flexible offerings.

Web Infrastructure

It is important to note that each of the following are *different* systems and are also requirements for all websites. Because all are related to one another it is easy to conflate and misunderstand them. Each of these infrastructure pieces below may *also* be provided by *different* businesses.

Domain Registration

Domain Registrars are where one registers a domain name - venturacanoekayak.org is our club's domain name and our hosting provider is *also* our registrar. You can expect to pay between $15-$20 a year to lease your domain name. Technically, one never "owns" a domain name.

Web Hosting

Web hosting is the business service that provides the computers for your website. We use Ionos (previously known as "1and1") for our hosting provider. Hosting varies in pricing and it is possible to even have free hosting from some providers such as DreamHost. I would advise budgeting $100 to $150 annually for web hosting which may include your domain name fees, and ideally an SSL certificate which will allow you to run your entire website through an encrypted layer. Hostinger is another good hosting provider.

Email Providers

Email is usually included with your web hosting and will be adequate for most clubs. However, if you opt to use either Google Workspace or Microsoft Office 365 offerings, your email will be hosted by either of these providers and likely include far better spam filtering. As a non-profit, remember you can get access to one of these two services for free.

What web host you use will largely depend on what *web building platform* you select. Monolithic providers will include hosting and may also require you to use their registrar services if they have this function in their offering.

Information Architecture

Successful websites have information that is easy to understand, doesn't require that you read a separate download to understand key details, and gives key information to both the general public and to the membership.

Most clubs will *likely* need the following sections and attributes:

1. **About Us** - A good use of the "home" page where we define the mission of the club and perhaps its history.
2. **Programs/Join the Club** - Explain what services are offered and how to join in.
3. **Events** - A calendar of workouts and club sponsored events.
4. **Donations and Dues** - Providing both information and the ability to provide secure online payments and also allows individuals to provide financial help to the club.
5. **Contact** - This section (or page) should provide the location of the club's workouts, perhaps with a link to an online map for directions, a mailing address, and a web form for sending email to a responsive member of the club.

Some clubs will want a "News" section to post announcements about events, club happenings, and more. This section is also helpful for publishing Board meeting notes and other legal responsibilities. A "blog" will work quite well for this function. (If you are scratching your head at the difference between a web page and a blog, this is a good article to read - SEO for Blogs and Web Pages: Know the Difference.)

Web Platforms

SquareSpace

Squarespace Pricing - All Pricing Plans
This is one of the monolithic systems I *would* recommend. SquareSpace is a well equipped platform with a very large amount of self-help resources and features that you can either enable or ignore. It is not sports oriented but is instead *design* oriented; SquareSpace puts guard rails in place to keep your site looking good and usable. Squarespace is pretty simple to use,

reasonably priced, and secure. You can also have SquareSpace manage your domain registration - it will manage your hosting needs.

If your club wants a one-stop shop with online support, this could be the path for you to consider. San Diego Canoe/Kayak Team has used SquareSpace for their website.

With Squarespace, you get the ability to add pages, photo galleries, paid “membership” areas where you could privately post images from races and perhaps the workout schedule. (You could also use the cost of gaining access to the membership area as the way you collect club dues.) This package costs about $20 per month which is roughly what you might pay for hosting from other providers.

SportsEngine

SportsEngine HQ Pricing

This monolithic sports program has both a free and paid membership version. Washington Canoe Club uses the free version and has also connected their SportsLocker store. Since the offerings of the paid version can be covered with other free or less expensive tools, this is a viable option for clubs to consider.

WordPress

Blog Tool, Publishing Platform, and CMS - WordPress

At the present time, WordPress runs about 40% of all websites according to W3Techs. With this extremely large adoption rate, and with it being an open source platform, there are supporting programs (called “plugins”) that cover nearly any function you decide you want or need. The Ventura Canoe & Kayak Club’s website is running on WordPress and uses only free versions of all plugins; the only cost we pay for our websites are for the domain name and hosting, which also includes an SSL certificate. (We use Ionos for our hosting and have several WordPress sites within a *single* account.)

Even if the prospect of setting up your own WordPress site seems daunting or overwhelming, know that once the site is configured and built, maintaining and updating the site is simple and there are many, many, help documents and training tools available.

WordPress Plugins

Below is a list of the plugins used by the VCKC website with notes about each one. I’ll also list some other plugins that your club may wish to consider using, too. To add these to your WordPress site, simply go to the add plugin section in the admin and search for the plugin title provided.

Amelia

This plugin provides us with a means of scheduling events or appointments. These are *different* functions and to date, we have only used the events function. With it, we can schedule beginning paddling classes that have size limits. Amelia allows the person signing up to include additional people that they are bringing with them, and emails that are customized for each event get sent out which includes directions and links to our insurance waivers and FAQs for beginners.

Amelia Shortcode Extender

Shortcodes are how one can add a plugin's functionality to a WordPress page or post using the content management system. Shortcodes look something like this: [amelia_calendar]

BackWPup

Backup both content and the database -- or just one of these things - nightly and automatically. We keep three days of backups and the program automatically deletes older ones. IONOS backs up our database, too, separately.

Contact Form 7

Simple and flexible, add contact forms of any type and customize them.

Contact Form 7 Email Validation

We added this plugin for extending Contact Form 7 after seeing some typos from people who in turn didn't get the notifications we responded with. This has solved that problem for us.

Contact Form CFDB7

This plugin saves every contact form that is generated to a database, too. Email can end up in a spam folder, get deleted, etc. This is a backup of the data and simple to install.

Cookie Notice & Compliance for GDPR / CCPA

This plugin helps meet some legal requirements that many people ignore. It's easy to configure.

Elementor

This plugin works with specific WordPress templates and extends the capabilities of the default content management system from WordPress. The free version does nearly everything you can think of but we also paid for the "Elementor Pro" version to have a few more bells and whistles. It was inexpensive. There are also several free alternatives to consider.

Solid Security (was iThemes Security)

This is a critical component for WordPress. This plugin is free and has many features to help secure your website from hackers. Simple to use and great support. I recommend using their multi-factor authentication feature, too.

My Custom Functions

Sometimes you want to make a change to the native programming in a template. This plugin allows you to do this without digging into the code itself. We have added a custom function to work with the email verification plugin and Contact Form 7.

Redirection

Want to have a simpler URL that you give out for marketing purposes like ***domainname*/donate**? Or perhaps you've changed web platforms and have URLs that are listed places and you want to make them still work with your new WordPress site. This plugin will let you do that.

Simple Calendar

We use this plugin to embed our Google Calendars in the website and give them the same look as our template. Different users can update the calendar and never touch nor have access to the website this way, too.

The SEO Framework

SEO means Search Engine Optimization. This plugin helps get your website registered with search engines.

Wordpress 2-Step Verification

Secure your website from hackers by requiring administrators to use Google Authenticator or another multi-factor authentication method. (Note iThemes Security plugin has the feature covered and there's no need for both tools.)

WP Login Logo

This simply replaces the WordPress logo with one of your own on the login screen. Not vital but why not brand your login too?

Other Recommended WordPress Plugins

LearnDash

A complete course management system with tons of features. Not free, but if you're selling coursework and classes, it would be worth considering.

WooCommerce

An ecommerce plugin with many additional addons and features. The free version will do nearly everything you may ever need, too. Additional features are not expensive.

The Newsletter Plugin

Yes, that's its name. It is an excellent newsletter generator, and free. The paid version will give you open-read statistics and is only $50.

About the Author

Drew Story has over 30 years of experience in Information Technology, and web design and development. (His first career was in education teaching Social Studies and Technology classes for 13 years.) He has taught usability and advanced ecommerce classes for the University of California Santa Barbara Extension and been a featured speaker for national teaching conferences. For 21 years, Drew worked for Patagonia in the roles of web developer, technical project manager, and solutions architect. He also had a web development freelance business as a side hustle for over 25 years building hundreds of websites.

Drew is an active paddler and endurance athlete, paddling sprint canoes for well over five decades. He leads the effort to restart a sprint canoe and kayak club in his hometown of Ventura, California, and wanting to help grow and improve paddle sports, he has volunteered his time and expertise for this document.

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