Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Toastmaster club websites

Or, how to show up near the top on a Google search.

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A community (open) club's website serves three different audiences:

1. Google & other search engines – so prospective visitors searching online can find the club
2. Prospective visitors – once they found the site, give them what they need to show up
3. Members – for club business

The first and second points are extremely important for membership, especially in urban areas where there are several clubs.   People looking for a Toastmasters club won't visit unless they know about the club, and the club website is your most flexible, useful, online representative (social media sites are important too – more on that later). Most prospects are using Google or one of the other search engines to look for a club to visit. Once they find your website, they want to quickly get the information they would need to visit, and also get a favorable impression of the club, or they will simply go 'back' in the browser and look for another club.

While the website is also useful to members, they have additional ways, such as email, phone and meeting time to get the information they need. So, the club website needs to be primarily oriented to the search engines and prospective visitors. Agendas and other club business with member names should generally be in a password-protected section, not readable by the public.

Here are some tried-and true methods for having your website show up better on search engines.

First, be sure your club website link is accurate and working on the find-a-club page at TI. Test it by going to find-a-club and clicking the link in your club's entry. If it's not working, fix the link in Club Central.

https://www.toastmasters.org/Find-a-Club

Website content for search engines:

1. Make the content attractive both to prospective visitors and to the search engines. For visitors, photos are good to include, but don't make them too big (leave room for text!). For Google, have plenty of text (see below).
2. Review and possibly re-write your page content so that Google readily "understands" that your website is about Toastmasters in YOUR location. A good way to do that is to have your city/town/location name appear very close to the word Toastmasters. For best results, have it in at least a couple of places on every page, and not close to each other. Text in titles, headings and bullet points DOES NOT COUNT, it must be in ordinary human-readable sentences (Google is picky about this). Examples:
   a. "Happy Speakers is a friendly Toastmaster Club in Fremont CA."
   b. "We help Toastmaster members in Fremont, Newark and Union City."
   c. "If you are looking for a Toastmasters club in Fremont, check us out on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm."
3. Add more content, including more pages, to your website. The more material you have, the better job Google does of figuring out what your website is about. Write up meeting minutes, publish any member material you have ("what the general evaluator does", recent meeting minutes, etc) on the website, but be sure to get "Toastmasters" and your location on every page.

Outbound links won't help you with Google, but if they are useful to visitors, sure, add them – along with text indicating how they relate to Toastmasters, but beware of having too many of them – you want visitors to stay on YOUR site, not go elsewhere!

4. Update the website content every once in a while, at least monthly. Google and visitors like "fresh" content". A meeting summary, even a short one, is very helpful for this purpose since you can update it after each meeting.

Content for Prospective Visitors

1. Typically, when someone is looking for a Toastmaster club to visit, they already know something about Toastmasters, so they are more interested in where and when the club meets. Be sure your club meeting time and place are shown prominently on the home page, so they can see it at a glance. Yes, it's great to have a Directions/Contact page too, perhaps with more details, but don't make them look for it – website visitors can be very impatient ☹

2. Give a positive impression of the club; pictures of smiling members (in a group or individually) are great, but the pictures should not overwhelm the page.

3. Some people will stick around and read more information if you provide it. One very helpful type of page is "how do I join", explaining how your club does it.   Another is what happens in meetings. Having more readable text is good for your Google rankings too 😊. Text readable right on the page is preferable to posting PDF's, Word docs, or other files. Don't make the visitor work to see your great content!

External (in-bound) links

Links to your website are <u>extremely</u> important. They make a difference because Google and other search engines consider those links as important factors regarding how well they "rank" your website. Here are the top ones to add.

- A Yelp entry – Google puts a high importance on Yelp entries, so create a listing, add some photos, and get several members to enter reviews.
- Google My Business – this is Google's own directory for organizations. Having an entry here can result in Google giving your club a top spot on the search results page. https://www.google.com/business/
- Other business and directory sites, including Bing and Yahoo.
- Facebook and other social media. Even if the prospective visitor doesn't see your social media entry, Google records it as another link to your website. Be sure and put a link to your website on the Facebook page!
- Any other organizations where you can get listed, including Chamber of Commerce, community organizations, your LinkedIn profile, your business, church, other review sites.
- Meetup and similar websites. Some of these cost money, but can be worth it, at least for a while. Be sure to include a link to your website on each one!

If this list seems overwhelming, don't worry, just get started. Recruit a team in your club and start them working on different tasks. Your club rankings won't change overnight, but everything you do will help.

Remember, an easy-to-find club website leads to more visitors, so get started now!