

Planning an 'Independent Website' for Probus Clubs

A Committee Guide to Planning, Building and Managing an Independent Club Website

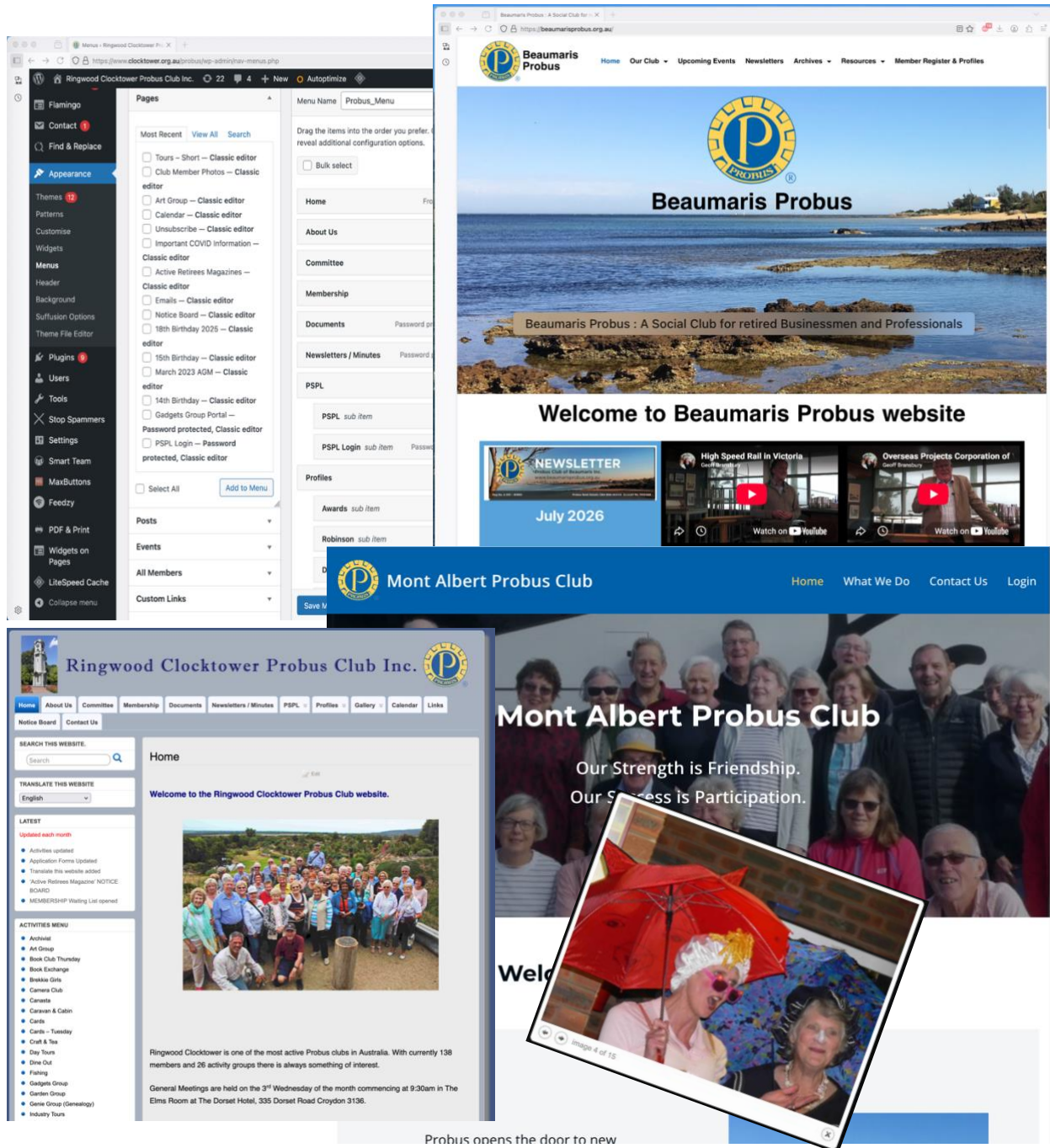


Table of Contents

<i>Preface.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>About the Author.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1. Initial Committee Discussions</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Why Does the Club Want an Independent Website?.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Consider the Alternatives</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Appoint a Website Project Coordinator</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Establish a Small Working Group.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Determine the Scope of the Website</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Committee Responsibilities</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Good Practice.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>2. Understanding How a Website Works.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Understanding the Components.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Domain Name.....	9
Hosting Company.....	10
Website Build	10
Domain Email.....	10
End User	10
<i>Committee Tip</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>3. Choosing the Right Website Solution.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Option 1 – Website Builders (such as Wix).....</i>	<i>12</i>
Advantages	12
Limitations	12
<i>Option 2 – WordPress with a Hosting company</i>	<i>12</i>
Advantages	13
Considerations	13
<i>Option 3 – Engage a Website Developer</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Comparison of Common Website Solutions</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Committee Recommendation</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>4. Domain Names.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Selecting a Domain Name</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Selecting a Domain Name extension</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Registering the Domain Name.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Renewals of Domain Name.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Good Practice.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>5. Website Hosting.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Selecting a Hosting Provider</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Email Services.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Typical Costs.....</i>	<i>17</i>

6. Working with a Website Developer	19
What the Website Developer Should Provide.....	19
What the Club Must Provide	19
A Shared Responsibility.....	20
Remember	20
7. The Website is a Club Asset.....	21
Club Ownership.....	21
Administrator Access.....	21
Password Management	22
Website Backups.....	22
Website Security	22
Annual Website Review	23
8. Budgeting for an Independent Website.....	24
9. Committee Checklist Before Proceeding.....	25
Planning.....	25
Ownership	25
Content	25
Ongoing Management.....	25
10. Ten Golden Rules for Independent Probus Websites	26
Final Message	26
Appendix A.....	27
Questions to Ask Before Engaging a Website Developer	27
Ownership.....	27
Scope of Work	27
Ongoing Support	27
Future Flexibility	27
Documentation	27
Acknowledgements.....	28

Preface

An effective website is one of the most valuable communication tools available to a Probus Club. It enables members to stay informed, prospective members to learn about the club, and the wider community to gain an understanding of the friendship, fellowship and activities that Probus offers.

For many clubs, the **Probus South Pacific Ltd. (PSPL) Microsite** provides an appropriate online presence. Other clubs, however, may choose to establish an independent website to provide greater flexibility, additional features and a unique online identity.

The decision to establish an independent website should not be made solely on technical grounds. Rather, it is a committee decision involving governance, ownership, financial commitment and ongoing management. A successful website depends as much on good planning and administration as it does on good design.

The objective in preparing this guide is to assist Probus committees to make informed decisions when considering an independent website, while avoiding many of the common governance and ownership issues experienced by volunteer organisations

This guide has been written specifically for committee members rather than information technology specialists. It explains the decisions a committee should make, the questions it should ask, and the responsibilities it should accept before embarking on the development of an independent website.

While every effort has been made to ensure the information is accurate at the time of publication, technology continues to evolve. Clubs should therefore regard this guide as practical advice rather than a detailed technical manual and should seek current information when selecting products or services.

About the Author

Col Pask has more than **24 years' experience** in planning, developing, hosting and maintaining websites for small businesses, community organisations and Probus Clubs. During that time he has designed and managed more than **34 websites**, including **five Probus Club websites**.

His experience encompasses website planning, domain name management, hosting, website development, governance, ongoing maintenance and committee support. He has also operated as a website hosting reseller, giving him practical experience in the complete website lifecycle from initial planning through to long-term management.

This guide has been prepared from that practical experience and has been developed with the assistance of **OpenAI's ChatGPT** as a writing and editorial tool.

Introduction

Every Probus Club is unique.

Some clubs simply require an online presence to advise members of meeting dates and activities. Others wish to provide information for prospective members, publish newsletters, promote social activities, maintain photograph galleries, preserve club history or provide links to other organisations.

An independent website provides the flexibility to achieve these objectives while giving the club complete control over its online presence.

Unlike a social media page, a website provides a permanent and professional source of information. It reflects the image of the club and is often the first impression that prospective members receive. For many people considering joining a Probus Club, the website will determine whether they make further contact.

An independent website also provides continuity. Committee members change over time, but a well-managed website becomes an enduring club asset that supports future committees for many years.

The purpose of this guide is not to teach members how to build a website. Rather, it explains the planning, governance and management considerations that will help committees make informed decisions before commencing an independent website project.

1. Initial Committee Discussions

An independent website should be treated as a significant committee project.

Like any major club initiative, it requires planning, budgeting and ongoing commitment. Before work begins, the committee should clearly understand why the website is being established, who it is intended to serve, how it will be managed and what resources will be required.

Many websites fail over time—not because of poor design—but because these questions were never properly considered at the beginning.

Why Does the Club Want an Independent Website?

This is the first question every committee should answer.

Possible reasons include:

- Providing current information for members.
- Promoting the club to prospective members.
- Publicising club activities.
- Supporting membership growth.
- Preserving the history of the club.
- Publishing newsletters and committee information.
- Providing online enquiry forms.
- Presenting a professional image within the local community.

If the committee cannot clearly define the purpose of the website, it should reconsider whether an independent website is the most appropriate solution.

Consider the Alternatives

Before deciding to establish an independent website, committees should first consider whether the **PSPL Microsite** will adequately meet their requirements.

For many clubs, the Microsite provides all the functionality required while significantly reducing the administrative and technical responsibilities placed on the committee.

An independent website is generally more suitable where the club requires:

- Greater flexibility in design.
- Additional pages and information.
- Extensive photograph galleries.
- Greater control over content.
- Integration with external services.
- A unique online identity.

The decision should be based on the long-term needs of the club rather than simply on the technology available.

Appoint a Website Project Coordinator

One of the committee's first actions should be to appoint a **Website Project Coordinator**. This person does **not** need to be a website developer.

Instead, they should possess:

- good organisational skills;
- effective communication skills;
- an understanding of the club's objectives;
- the ability to coordinate information from committee members; and
- the confidence to report progress to the committee.

The Website Project Coordinator becomes the principal contact between the committee and any website developer or experienced volunteer assisting with the project.

Establish a Small Working Group

Responsibility for the project should never rest with one individual.

A small working group of three or four members usually provides the best balance of skills and experience.

The working group might include:

- the Website Project Coordinator;
- the Club President or nominee;
- the Club Secretary;
- the member responsible for publicity or membership; and
- a member with website or computing experience.

This group can coordinate information, review content and make recommendations to the committee while ensuring that responsibility remains shared.

Determine the Scope of the Website

One of the most common causes of delays is attempting to include too much information in the initial website.

A staged approach is often more successful.

The initial website might include:

- Home Page
- About the Club
- Committee
- Activities
- Meeting Information
- Membership Enquiries
- Contact Details

Additional features such as newsletters, photograph galleries, event calendars, members-only information and historical archives can easily be added later.

Launching a well-designed website with essential information is generally preferable to delaying publication while trying to include every possible feature.

Committee Responsibilities

Before approving the project, the committee should ensure that:

- ✓ The purpose of the website has been clearly defined.
 - ✓ Alternative solutions have been considered.
 - ✓ A Website Project Coordinator has been appointed.
 - ✓ A realistic budget has been established.
 - ✓ Ongoing maintenance responsibilities have been identified.
 - ✓ The committee understands that the website will require continuing attention after it has been launched.
-

Good Practice

Treat the website as a long-term club asset rather than a one-off project.

A successful website requires regular updates, periodic review and ongoing support. Planning for future maintenance should begin before the website is built, not after it has been launched.

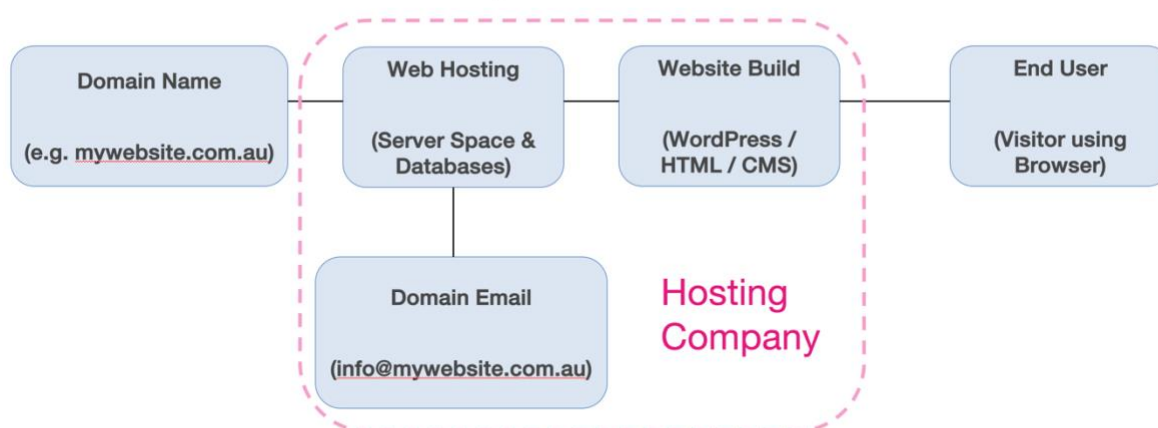
2. Understanding How a Website Works

One of the greatest concerns expressed by committees considering an independent website is that they "don't understand how websites work."

Fortunately, there is no need to understand the technical details.

A committee simply needs to understand the major components and how they work together. Once these are understood, committee members can make informed decisions when selecting a website platform, engaging a website developer or discussing hosting arrangements.

How a Website is Hosted, Built and Delivered to the End User



- The domain name points visitors to the hosting server.
- The website files are stored on the hosting account.
- Domain-based emails are usually linked to the same domain and hosting provider.
- End users access the website using a web browser.

Understanding the Components

Domain Name

A **Domain Name** is simply the address that people type into their internet browser to locate your website.

Think of it as the street address of your club on the Internet.

A good domain name should be:

- easy to remember;
- easy to spell;
- reasonably short; and
- representative of the club.

Where possible, include the club name or locality.

Hosting Company

The **Hosting Company** is the organisation that stores your website on its servers and makes it available on the Internet twenty-four hours a day.

The hosting company provides the equipment, internet connection, security, backups and technical support required to keep your website operating reliably.

When selecting a hosting provider, committees should consider:

- reliability;
 - technical support;
 - security;
 - automated backups;
 - storage capacity;
 - Australian-based support (where available); and
 - overall value rather than simply the lowest price.
-

Website Build

The **Website Build** is the website itself.

It consists of the pages, photographs, menus, documents, contact forms and other information visitors see when they access the website.

This is the club's online "shopfront" and should present a welcoming, professional and up-to-date image.

Domain Email

Many clubs establish email addresses using their domain name, for example:

- secretary@yourclub.org.au
- president@yourclub.org.au
- membership@yourclub.org.au

These addresses present a more professional image than personal email accounts and provide continuity as committee members change.

End User

The End User is simply the person viewing the website.

They may be:

- an existing member;
- a prospective member;
- another Probus Club;
- a community organisation; or
- a member of the public.

The objective is to provide visitors with accurate, current and easily accessible information. If visitors cannot quickly find what they are looking for, they are unlikely to return.

Committee Tip

A committee does not need to know how to build a website.

It does, however, need to understand who owns each component, who is responsible for maintaining it and how the various components work together.

3. Choosing the Right Website Solution

There is no single website solution that is suitable for every Probus Club.

The most appropriate option will depend upon the club's objectives, available skills, budget and the level of ongoing commitment the committee is prepared to make.

Before selecting a solution, committees should remember that establishing a website is not simply a technology project. It is an ongoing communication service that requires regular review, updating and administration.

For most Probus clubs, one of three approaches will provide the best outcome.

Option 1 – Website Builders (such as Wix)

Website builders, such as Wix, provide an "all-in-one" solution that combines website design, hosting and technical management into a single package.

They are designed for people with little or no website experience and provide professionally designed templates that can be customised without programming knowledge.

Advantages

- Easy to establish and maintain.
- No programming knowledge required.
- Professional design templates.
- Hosting included.
- Automatic software updates.
- Technical management undertaken by the provider.

Limitations

- Less flexibility than a dedicated website platform.
- Ongoing subscription costs.
- More difficult to move the website to another provider.
- Limited expansion for specialised requirements.

Website builders are often suitable where a club intends to maintain a relatively simple website and has members willing to undertake routine updates.

Option 2 – WordPress with a Hosting company

WordPress is the world's most widely used website platform and powers millions of websites ranging from small community organisations to major international businesses.

Unlike an all-in-one website builder, WordPress separates the website from the hosting provider. This gives the club greater ownership, flexibility and long-term control.

Advantages

- Excellent flexibility.
- Highly customisable.
- Thousands of design themes available.
- Large range of additional features.
- Easy to expand as the club's needs change.
- Can be transferred to another hosting provider if required.
- Extensive support from a worldwide user community.

Considerations

- Requires periodic software updates.
- Requires regular backups.
- Usually benefits from someone with basic WordPress knowledge.

For many Probus clubs, WordPress provides the best balance between flexibility, cost and long-term ownership.

Option 3 – Engage a Website Developer

Many clubs prefer to engage a professional Website Developer or seek assistance from an experienced volunteer.

This approach enables the committee to concentrate on planning the website and preparing the information while the technical aspects are undertaken by someone with appropriate experience.

Regardless of who builds the website, the committee should ensure that ownership of the completed website remains with the club.

Comparison of Common Website Solutions

Consideration	Website Builder (e.g. Wix)	WordPress	Website Developer
Ease of Initial Setup	Excellent	Moderate	Excellent
Flexibility	Moderate	Excellent	Excellent
Expansion Potential	Moderate	Excellent	Excellent
Club Control	Moderate	Excellent	Excellent
Technical Knowledge Required	Low	Moderate	Low
Long-term Ownership	Moderate	Excellent	Excellent

Committee Recommendation

When selecting a website solution, committees should look beyond the initial establishment of the website.

Questions worth considering include:

- Can another person maintain the website in the future?
- Can the website grow as the club's needs change?
- Can the website be transferred to another hosting provider if necessary?
- Will future committees understand how it operates?
- Does the club retain ownership of all website assets?

The least expensive solution today is not always the most economical over the life of the website.

4. Domain Names

A Domain Name is one of the club's most valuable digital assets.

It is the address by which members, prospective members and the community locate the club on the Internet.

Choosing an appropriate Domain Name should therefore be one of the committee's earliest decisions.

Selecting a Domain Name

An effective Domain Name should be:

- easy to remember;
- easy to spell;
- reasonably short;
- representative of the club; and
- unlikely to be confused with another organisation.

Where practical, include the club name and, where appropriate, the suburb or locality.

For example:

www.montalbertprobus.org.au

is generally preferable to a shorter but less meaningful alternative.

Selecting a Domain Name extension

There are many Domain Name extensions. examples could be

- myprobusclub.org
- myprobusclub.org.au
- myprobusclub.com
- myprobusclub.com.au
- myprobus.club
- myprobusclub.au

Usually .org is for not-for-profit organisations and .com is for business and businesses making a profit.

.au for Australia is not necessary but identifies that the business/organisation is mainly in Australia.

Committees are encouraged to research Domain Name Extensions and select what is most appropriate for your club.

Note that pricing for extensions can make a difference to the overall price for the domain name.

Registering the Domain Name

Once a suitable Domain Name has been selected, it should be registered through an accredited Domain Name Registrar.

Most importantly, the Domain Name should always be registered in the name of the club—not in the name of an individual committee member or Website Developer.

This simple decision will avoid many problems in future years.

The committee should also ensure that:

- renewal reminders are received by the club;
 - at least two authorised committee members have access to the registrar account; and
 - login details are securely recorded.
-

Renewals of Domain Name

Domain Names are generally registered for one or more years and require periodic renewal.

Failure to renew a Domain Name may result in the club temporarily losing its website and associated email services.

The committee should therefore include renewal dates in its annual administrative calendar.

Good Practice

The Domain Name belongs to the club and should remain with the club regardless of who built the website or who currently maintains it.

5. Website Hosting

Every website requires a Hosting Provider.

The Hosting Provider stores the website on specialised computers (servers) connected to the Internet twenty-four hours a day.

Whenever someone visits the club's website, the information is delivered from the Hosting Provider's servers to the visitor's computer, tablet or smartphone.

Selecting a Hosting Provider

When comparing hosting providers, committees should consider:

- reliability;
- security;
- automated backups;
- technical support;
- storage capacity;
- Australian-based support where available;
- value for money.

While price is always an important consideration, reliable service and responsive support are often of greater value than a modest saving in annual costs.

Email Services

Many hosting providers also offer email services using the club's Domain Name.

Examples include:

- president@clubname.org.au
- secretary@clubname.org.au
- membership@clubname.org.au

Using Domain Name email addresses projects a professional image and ensures continuity when committee members change.

Rather than creating a new email address each year, the address can simply be redirected to the current office bearer.

Typical Costs

The costs associated with Domain Name registration and website hosting are generally modest when compared with the benefits provided.

Item	Typical Cost*
Domain Name Registration	\$20–40 AUD per year
Website Hosting	\$120–300 AUD per year
Domain Email	Usually included or up to \$100 AUD per year

*Indicative costs only (AUD, 2026). Actual prices vary between providers and should be confirmed before committing to any service.

6. Working with a Website Developer

Whether engaging a professional Website Developer or seeking assistance from an experienced volunteer, the committee should prepare a clear written understanding of the work to be undertaken.

The agreement need not be complex, but it should clearly define:

- the scope of the project;
- what is included;
- what is excluded;
- estimated completion dates;
- training to be provided;
- ongoing support arrangements; and
- the agreed cost.

A written agreement helps avoid misunderstandings and provides a useful reference throughout the project.

What the Website Developer Should Provide

Depending upon the agreement reached, a Website Developer would normally provide:

- website design;
 - page layout;
 - menu structure;
 - installation and configuration;
 - contact forms;
 - mobile-friendly design;
 - security configuration;
 - testing before launch; and
 - training where included in the quotation.
-

What the Club Must Provide

No Website Developer can build an informative website without accurate information from the club.

The committee should provide:

- Club and PSPL logos (where appropriate).
- Current committee structure and names.
- Written material for each page of the website.
- Details of club activities.
- Calendar of club activities.
- Membership information.
- Meeting venue, meeting times and contact details.

- Photographs* taken by club members wherever possible.
- Email address for CONTACT page and for system messages to the club.

NOTE: Photographs should **not** be copied from other websites unless permission has been obtained from the copyright owner.

A Shared Responsibility

A successful website is a partnership between the committee and the Website Developer.

The developer provides the technical expertise.

The committee provides the knowledge, photographs and information that make the website relevant to members and attractive to prospective members.

Neither can produce a successful website without the active support of the other.

Remember

A Website Developer builds the website.

The committee creates the content.

Together they create the club's online presence.

7. The Website is a Club Asset

Perhaps the single most important message in this guide is that **an independent website is a club asset**.

It should be managed in exactly the same way as the club's finances, records, equipment and other important assets.

While a Website Developer or knowledgeable volunteer may design, build or maintain the website, **the committee remains responsible for the website on behalf of the club**.

Many difficulties experienced by community organisations arise because a website has become dependent upon one enthusiastic volunteer. When that person retires, resigns or is no longer available, the committee may discover that no one knows where the website is hosted, who owns the Domain Name or how to access the website administration area.

These situations are entirely avoidable through good governance and careful planning.

Club Ownership

The committee should ensure that the following remain under the ownership and control of the club.

Asset	Recommended Owner
Domain Name	The Club
Hosting Account	The Club
Website Files	The Club
Website Content	The Club
Club Email Accounts	The Club
Website Administrator Accounts	The Club
Website Backups	The Club

Individuals may administer these assets on behalf of the club, but ownership should never depend upon one person.

Administrator Access

Every website includes an administration area where authorised users can:

- update pages;
- publish news items;
- upload photographs;
- manage documents;
- maintain calendars; and
- undertake routine website administration.

The committee should ensure that:

- at least two authorised committee members have administrator access;
- usernames and passwords are securely recorded;
- administrator access is reviewed whenever committee positions change; and
- unnecessary administrator accounts are removed.

This simple practice provides continuity and greatly reduces the risk of the club losing access to its own website.

Password Management

Website passwords are valuable club records and should be treated accordingly.

The committee should maintain a confidential register containing:

- Domain Name Registrar login details;
- Hosting Provider login details;
- Website Administrator login details;
- Domain Email login details;
- renewal dates;
- two-factor authentication recovery information where applicable.

These records should be stored securely and be available to authorised office bearers when required.

Website Backups

No computer system is immune from failure.

Regular backups provide protection against accidental deletion, equipment failure or other unforeseen problems.

Good practice includes:

- automatic daily backups by the Hosting Provider;
- retaining several previous backup copies;
- periodically confirming that backups can be successfully restored if required.

A backup is only valuable if it can be restored.

Website Security

Modern website platforms include many built-in security features.

Nevertheless, the committee should ensure that reasonable security practices are followed.

These include:

- keeping website software up to date;
- using strong passwords;
- enabling two-factor authentication where available;
- removing unused administrator accounts;
- installing software only from reputable sources.

Simple precautions significantly reduce the likelihood of security problems.

Annual Website Review

An independent website should be reviewed at least once each year.

The review should confirm that:

- committee details remain current;
- meeting information is accurate;
- activity information is up to date;
- contact details remain correct;
- website links continue to operate correctly;
- photographs remain appropriate; and
- outdated material has been removed.

A website that is regularly reviewed reflects a well-managed and active club.

8. Budgeting for an Independent Website

When considering an independent website, committees should budget for both the initial establishment costs and the relatively modest ongoing annual costs.

Typical ongoing costs include:

Item	Typical Cost*
Domain Name Registration	\$20–40 AUD per year
Website Hosting	\$120–300 AUD per year
Domain Email (if required)	Usually included or up to \$100 AUD per year
Website Maintenance (if outsourced)	As agreed
Website Enhancements	Optional

**Indicative costs only (AUD, 2026). Actual prices vary between providers and should be confirmed before committing to any service.*

In addition to financial costs, committees should also recognise the ongoing commitment required to keep information accurate and current.

The most successful websites are those that receive regular attention rather than major updates once or twice each year.

9. Committee Checklist Before Proceeding

Before approving an independent website, the committee should be able to answer **YES** to each of the following questions.

Planning

- ☐ Have we clearly defined why the club wants an independent website?
 - ☐ Have we considered whether a PSPL Microsite would adequately meet our needs?
 - ☐ Have we appointed a Website Project Coordinator?
 - ☐ Have we approved an appropriate budget?
-

Ownership

- ☐ Will the club own the Domain Name?
 - ☐ Will the club own the Hosting Account?
 - ☐ Will the club retain ownership of all website files?
 - ☐ Will at least two committee members have administrator access?
-

Content

- ☐ Have we prepared written material for the website?
 - ☐ Have we collected suitable photographs?
 - ☐ Have we ensured that photographs may be legally published?
 - ☐ Have we prepared accurate membership and contact information?
-

Ongoing Management

- ☐ Have we decided who will maintain the website?
- ☐ Have we established a password management procedure?
- ☐ Have we arranged regular backups?
- ☐ Have we planned for future committee succession?

If the answer to any of these questions is **No**, the committee should resolve the matter before proceeding with the project.

10. Ten Golden Rules for Independent Probus Websites

1. **Treat the website as a valuable club asset.**
 2. **Always register the Domain Name in the name of the club.**
 3. **Ensure the Hosting Account belongs to the club—not an individual.**
 4. **Never allow the website to depend upon one person.**
 5. **Maintain secure records of passwords and administrator access.**
 6. **Use photographs taken by club members wherever possible and respect copyright.**
 7. **Keep website information accurate, current and relevant.**
 8. **Budget each year for ongoing website expenses and maintenance.**
 9. **Review the website annually and update it whenever committee information changes.**
 10. **Remember that the committee remains responsible for the website, regardless of who built or maintains it.**
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Final Message

An independent website is far more than a collection of web pages.

It is often the first impression prospective members receive of a Probus Club. It provides an important source of information for existing members and serves as a permanent record of the club's activities and achievements.

When carefully planned, owned by the club and regularly maintained, a website becomes a valuable communication tool that will continue to serve future committees for many years.

A successful website is not measured by how sophisticated it appears, but by how effectively it informs, welcomes and supports the members and community it was created to serve.

With thoughtful planning, clear ownership and ongoing commitment, an independent website will become one of the most valuable long-term assets a Probus Club can develop.

Appendix A

Questions to Ask Before Engaging a Website Developer

Before accepting a quotation or engaging a Website Developer, the committee should consider asking the following questions.

Ownership

- Will the club own the Domain Name?
- Will the club own the Hosting Account?
- Will the club own the completed website?
- Will the club receive full administrator access?

Scope of Work

- Exactly what is included in the quotation?
- What additional work would incur extra charges?
- Is training included?
- Is assistance provided when the website is launched?

Ongoing Support

- What ongoing support is available?
- Is there an annual maintenance agreement?
- Who installs software updates?
- Who monitors website security?
- Who performs website backups?

Future Flexibility

- Can the website be transferred to another Hosting Provider?
- Can another Website Developer maintain the website if required?
- Will the committee receive copies of all website files and documentation?

Documentation

The committee should retain copies of:

- Domain Name registration details.
- Hosting Provider details.
- Website Administrator usernames.
- Password records.
- Website Developer contact details.
- Website maintenance procedures.
- Renewal dates for Domain Name and Hosting.

Maintaining these records will assist future committees and ensure the continuity of the club's online presence.

Acknowledgements

This guide has been prepared to assist Probus clubs considering the establishment of an independent website. It draws on practical experience gained over many years in planning, developing and maintaining a number of Probus club websites, together with current good practice in website governance and management.

It is intended to provide practical guidance for committee members and to encourage informed decision-making when planning, building and managing an independent club website.
