



## **Part I: The Basics**

[www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov) is the Agency's official web site. It should always be the primary online source for the latest news and information about agency missions, events and other activities. In cases where other mission or program sites exist, [www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov) should always take precedence in telling our story to the public.

The current version of the site is the result of management directives, individuals' initiatives and user feedback. The most recent redesign, which went live in November 2007, was undertaken at the direction of the deputy administrator. It incorporated the results of three rounds of user testing as well as five years of traffic data and user demographics. Paying attention to what users want – and not simply assuming they want what we think they should want -- is the core of the site's success.

### **Who Is It For?**

The target audiences for [www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov) have always been defined by the agency's leadership. In 2003, Administrator Sean O'Keefe directed that the site be focused on the general public and K-12 students and teachers. In 2007, Deputy Administrator Shana Dale concurred in those choices and added policy makers and 18-to-24-year-olds as a target audience. The best way to accommodate NASA's other audiences, including industry, researchers and NASA's own employees, is by linking to content appropriate to them rather than trying to be all things to all people on the top-level page.

The choice of audience drives choice of content. These users are drawn to our site by the excitement of what we do, but most of all by the stunning images we offer. With this in mind, the site is designed with a heavy emphasis on imagery and other multimedia, such as video, interactive features and 24/7 live streaming of NASA Television.

### **Editorial Voice**

Think of NASA.gov as a hybrid hard news site/feature magazine. There is a strong emphasis on topical updates, usually based on mission operations or science findings. Users will also find plenty of non-topical feature material, including historic image features, in-depth content on iconic events in NASA history, and profiles of NASA employees.

Content for NASA.gov should be written for the intelligent lay reader -- never "dumbed down" -- but always explained. As with other public affairs products, we should avoid excessive acronyms and dense scientific and technical terms, as well as institutional jargon and boilerplate language. A good editorial test: can you show the content to a relative or neighbor outside of NASA and expect them to find it both understandable and interesting?

### **Connecting With Users**

NASA.gov has been a leader among government sites in using Web 2.0 techniques to engage users more directly. These efforts include blogs, podcasting, RSS feeds, e-mail subscriptions, user commenting and rating, opinion polls, tag clouds, personalization with MyNASA, Google map mashups, content guides ("people who read this also read ..."), social search and the NASA calendar.

Other features such as user tagging are in development. In Jan. 2009, we launched [www.nasa.gov/collaborate](http://www.nasa.gov/collaborate) to highlight the agency's external social networking efforts as well as sites where users can work directly with NASA by joining contests or looking at project data.

### **Demonstrated Success**

The site's user sessions have grown every year since the inception of the "portal" in 2003, and our annual growth rate continues to outpace the growth on global online population. Our customer satisfaction rates are consistently among the best of any government site and often measure up against commercial news sites. Simply put, more people are coming to the site than ever before and they like it better than ever before. The site has frequently been recognized by outside groups as an example of "best practices" for a government Web site.

## **Part II: Specifics**

### **So, Where Is Everything?**

There are literally tens of thousands of pages on the site, but here is how the top-level sections break down:

- Home -- The primary entry point. Serves as a snapshot of the most important things the Agency has to say at any given time. Heavy emphasis on multimedia elements. We also publish slightly altered versions of the home page known as "dashboards," designed for the different audiences. These are linked across the top of the homepage just above the top story -- For Educators, For Students, For Media, For Policymakers, For Employees
- News -- Some overlap with home but includes press releases and media resources. Multimedia less prominent
- Missions -- Jumping off point for current, past and future missions, with three topical missions as the centerpiece. The missions finder allows users to search for a mission alphabetically or filter by topic. Section includes a missions calendar and launch schedule

- Multimedia -- Showcase for image features, NASA Television, video, podcasts and interactive features.
- About NASA -- Institutional information on agency leadership, policies, etc. Includes directorates and Google map mashup of centers.
- Collaborate -- Highlights social networking and collaborative sites

Other key pages not in top navigation:

- Topic Pages -- Based on ten categories in which users expect to find our content -- shuttle and station, solar system, NASA History, etc. These are linked from the buttons at the top right of the home page and are built primarily by automation, based on how content creators "tag," or describe the content
- Mission Pages -- These are the full sections built to support missions, such as [www.nasa.gov/lro](http://www.nasa.gov/lro) or [www.nasa.gov/oco](http://www.nasa.gov/oco). These sections are where we direct users for both the latest news and in-depth coverage of missions. We often link to these from press releases
- Centers/Directorates/Offices -- Each NASA center has its own full section under [www.nasa.gov/centers](http://www.nasa.gov/centers). Many of the offices such as CIO, CFO have sites under [www.nasa.gov/offices](http://www.nasa.gov/offices). As of Feb. 2009, ESMD is at [www.nasa.gov/exploration](http://www.nasa.gov/exploration). Aero and Space Ops are in the process of bringing their directorates in, but SMD has its own, external site.

Important pages for PAOs:

There are several pages of special interest to public affairs under the /news section:

- News Releases -- Expandable link contains main news release page and archive, media alerts page and press release search
- Media Resources -- Expandable link contains several links geared toward reporters, including the media contacts page, transcripts, press kits, fact sheets and the news audio streaming page
- Speeches -- posted PDF transcripts of administrator and deputy's speeches
- Budgets and Plans -- budge materials, performance reports
- Reports -- location for things like NAOMS, CAIB, etc.
- [www.nasa.gov/newsaudio](http://www.nasa.gov/newsaudio) -- Media telecons can be streamed live on this page. Simply provide the HQ Web team with the telecon number and passcode as early as possible and they will take care of the rest.

### **Who Does What?**

The vast majority of content is created and published at the NASA centers by the center web teams. The size and makeup of these teams vary widely based on the resources the centers have allocated to web efforts. Some teams are mostly editorial staffers, others are mostly technical. Many rely heavily on contractors.

Some centers have separate teams for video production and multimedia designers who create flash features such as [www.nasa.gov/50years](http://www.nasa.gov/50years), created by the HQ multimedia team. The HQ Multimedia team provides leadership and guidance on NASA.gov standards for video, flash features, and accessibility.

Each center has a representative on the NASA.gov editorial board. Center PAOs and news chiefs should know who to contact for web work at their center, but if there is any doubt, the HQ Web team can point you in the right direction. *Note: A list of contacts as of Feb. 2009 can be found at the end of this document.*

If you have any new content or special projects for the Web, please coordinate with the editorial board member at your center first. Please do not initiate, coordinate or approve any web project with an outside group without at least making sure your center web team is in the loop.

NASA missions are generally covered by the web team at center who has the PAO lead for the mission. For example, JPL handles Cassini and the Mars missions, JSC and KSC share shuttle, Goddard has Hubble. If your content is in a gray area and you're not sure who would handle it, the HQ Web team can provide guidance. Please do not come to the HQ Web team the day before or day of a release expecting to have images or other web content posted because a release is going out. That should be worked through the appropriate center web team in advance.

For questions about the Image of the Day, Multimedia features or the home page, consult the HQ Web Team. You should also consult the HQ team with any "big picture" questions about how things work, or proposals for new projects and changes to the website's layout or organization.

### **Where Do We Put Stuff?**

Most of our content gets created in either the mission sections or the topic pages. A few examples:

- You want to get a web feature posted about an instrument on LRO. Since the Goddard web team manages that section, you would work with them to get the feature posted in the proper place. We could link to it from the home page and other areas, but it would reside in the LRO mission section, grouped together with related content and mission specific-navigation to help the user dig deeper.
- JSC has a new video showing an element being added to the ISS. They post the video in the /station section and let the HQ Web team know. The HQ Web team makes sure the video is featured on the home page and other multimedia pages, while automated search agents place the video on the news page and relevant topic pages.
- You're working on a cool web story about a NASA spinoff, but it's not tied to a specific mission. In this case, it would be built in the NASA in Your Life directory and placed on the NASA in Your Life topic page

- You've got a feature about a new Mars mission and we don't have a NASA.gov mission section for it yet. That would get build by the appropriate center web team and placed on the Solar System topics page.

Other than the image features and podcasts housed under /multimedia, virtually all topical content will fit in either a mission section or a topic page. The main exceptions are the press releases and media resources built under /news and the institutional materials built in the /about section.

### **Center Sections:**

Center sections should be used for news and features that are ***specifically about the center***. Mission-related content and other general interest features should never be built in center sections. It's fine to highlight the center's role, and to link to the content from the center section, but our users are not going to /jpl looking for Mars news, or to /jsc looking for station news. They're looking in the top level pages, or the mission and topic areas. We should put our content where our users expect to find it. Examples:

- Kepler Spacecraft Arrives At KSC for Launch -- It doesn't go in the KSC center section, where the action is, or in Ames, which is managing the mission. It goes in /kepler, where we've trained our users to look for updates
- Beached Whale Rescued By KSC Volunteers -- This goes in the center section. It's about employees at the center and doesn't tie in to a mission.

### **Part III: What We Need**

#### **Editorial Help**

When you know of a mission update or other important news development, please remember to always think of the web as part of your planning. NASA.gov is the fastest, most visible way we have of communicating directly to the public, unfiltered.

Ask yourself, "Does this need a web component?" The answer is almost always "yes." The next step is determining the appropriate POC on the NASA.gov editorial board and working with them on a plan for developing the content and posting it. The center web teams should always be involved as early as possible and kept in the loop at each step of the process.

If material is to be posted in a timely manner, it shouldn't be "hidden" from the web teams until the last minute because of sensitivity or any other reason. The system allows for pages to be built in advance and reviewed on internal servers with no access to those outside of NASA.

Some of our center web teams have a strong editorial presence while others are more technically oriented. Any editorial feedback and guidance you can offer on web features will help us produce more compelling content.

## **Materials for the Web**

As mentioned above, our site relies heavily on multimedia. Any time you know of images, videos, interactive features or podcasts that can add to our coverage, please work with the center web teams to get those posted in the appropriate way. The sooner they have access to these materials, the better. Some of these files are large and require processing. They can't always be posted at a moment's notice.

## **Video**

Some centers produce their own video packages specifically for the web and those have proven to be more popular with users than repurposing news footage or B-roll. The best web videos are compelling mission footage (launches, spacewalks), animations, or short produced packages explaining a mission or a particular science finding.

Except for extraordinary circumstances, we do not post video of full press conferences on NASA.gov. It's far too labor intensive, takes up too much bandwidth and isn't what our users want. If your directorate insists on posting a full news conference, they can provide the resources.

All videos posted on NASA.gov (or any other government site) must have synchronous captioning to comply with Section 508 accessibility regulations. The web teams are familiar with this regulation and the captioning processes, but you should all be aware of the requirement. Providing open captioned video (especially for longer pieces) can help us get material online faster.

We are working toward a goal of presenting all NASA.gov videos in a Flash player, with the ability to download and embed, as you see on YouTube. The challenge will be getting all centers to adopt standard production methods.

## **NASA TV**

NASA TV is streamed live 24/7 on the web at [www.nasa.gov/ntv](http://www.nasa.gov/ntv). If it's being broadcast on NASA TV, it will be on NASA.gov. We also stream shuttle and station mission audio on that page and can set up other streams in cases where NASA TV isn't covering something but we have access to the signal.

## **Podcasts/Vodcasts**

As of Feb. 2009, there are eight audio podcasts and thirteen video podcasts, or vodcasts, being managed as part of the NASA.gov podcasting page. They're categorized based on topics similar to those on the home page (Universe, Solar System, etc.) These are all syndicated by RSS feed and available for subscription on iTunes and other services. Many other NASA podcasts are produced outside of NASA.gov.

The best suited items for podcasts are regularly recurring features such as This Week @ NASA and JPL's "What's Up?" feature, a monthly video guide to the night sky. "One off" events do not tend to make good podcast content.

### **Image Feature**

Our Image of the Day feature is consistently one of the most popular items on the site, usually only trailing the NASA TV page and videos. It regularly gets between 80-100K views each week. Many other galleries on NASA.gov are built in this style. If you have an image you'd like to run as Image of the Day or in one of these other galleries, it needs to have caption information and meet some basic specifications:

- Please provide the largest sized image available
- An image of at least 1600x1200 will allow the system to create the image on multiple web pages, as well as all desktop wallpaper sizes
- The aspect ratio is 4x3, which is landscape. This means your image may be cropped from the original to fit the format.

### **How Can I Participate Directly With NASA.gov?**

- The "Email2RSS" tool lets users email updates directly to the site, Twitter-style. This is now the standard for up to the minute updates on shuttle missions.
- A new "Email2Document" feature allows a user to send an email, which creates a NASA.gov web page. It can be immediately published or created in our system and published later. Web team members can dress the content up with images and links.
- A WYSIWIG (What You See Is What You Get) editor allows newsroom staff to put out press releases using a Microsoft Word-style interface. This can be developed into a more advanced content creation tool.
- Anyone can author and moderate a blog on <http://blogs.nasa.gov>. These blogs should be casual, first-person accounts, not overly vetted position statements.
- PAOs can moderate user comments on the website and respond directly to them using the "NASA Moderator" field in the commenting interface.

### **Social Networking**

You can reach external communities by participating in NASA Twitters, Facebook pages, Flickr photostreams, YouTube pages and more. These efforts serve as compliments to the "official" NASA.gov efforts, not as competition or a replacement. These sites reach different demographics, but are not a replacement for NASA.gov. Important news updates or cool multimedia being posted to these sites is also being posted on NASA.gov.

## Quick Reference

### The Basics

- NASA.gov should always take precedence over other sites
- NASA.gov's primary audience is the general public
- There is a heavy emphasis on images, video and other multimedia
- Content should be created for the intelligent lay reader
- Never "dumb down," but always explain

### Specifics

- The NASA.gov homepage and dashboards serve as snapshots of what the agency wants to communicate at any given time
- Top level pages: News, Missions, Multimedia, About NASA, Collaborate
- Topic pages are based on ten categories where users expect to find our content, built by automation based on how content creators tag content
- Mission Pages such as [www.nasa.gov/shuttle](http://www.nasa.gov/shuttle) are the main way to showcase updates to NASA missions
- Other important pages for PAOs, including /newsaudio for telecon streaming, are found in the /news section
- The vast majority of content is created and published at centers by center web teams
- Please contact the appropriate center NASA.gov first rep for any web content or projects
- Don't initiate, coordinate or approve web projects with an outside group without checking with center web team
- If unsure who to contact, check with HQ web team
- Most content is created in either a mission section or topic section
- Center sections should only house content specifically about the center, not about missions being managed at that center.

### What We Need

- Always take the web into consideration when developing media plans
- Provide appropriate web team with as much content as possible as early as possible
- Offer editorial help to center web teams whenever possible
- The best web videos are short compelling mission footage, animation or produced pieces on missions or science findings
- Regular recurring, short features such as This Week @ NASA make the best podcasts and vodcasts
- Image of the Day style galleries require minimum image sizes
- PAOs and others can author content directly on NASA.gov through tools such as Email2RSS, Email2Document, WYSIWIG, blogs.nasa.gov and commenting
- Social Networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube can supplement NASA.gov's efforts by reaching a different demographic.

## NASA.gov Contacts as of Feb. 2009

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