



## Online Platforms: *What Home & Schools Are Using*

The COVID-19 pandemic has motivated Home & Schools to find new ways of working, whether it be holding meetings, fundraising, or sharing information with their school community. In late February 2021, the QFHSA organized a meeting with local associations to share ideas and information about online platforms and resources. If you are looking to bring your Home & School online or improve your current set up, you may find this information helpful. The QFHSA is happy to share this information, but does not recommend any online platform over another.

### **Things to Know:**

- The following summarizes information gathered from the February meeting and other sources. Do you have more information to share? Please get in touch and we will be happy to update this document. In addition, the [QFHSA Think Tank Facebook group](#) is an excellent forum for information sharing.
- Please click on the embedded links to find out more about the companies/services mentioned in this document — **and get the most up-to-date information available on pricing/features.**

## WEBSITES:

### What Are the Options?

#### A “Home and School” Section Within Your School’s Website

In this set up, the Home & School has its own section or “tab” on the school’s website. **How this works:** The H&S provides information/updates to the person at the school or school board managing the website. Children’s World Academy H&S (CWA H&S) has this arrangement.

### **Things to Know:**

- Minimal work on the part of H&S volunteers.
- As H&S volunteers are not making the updates, they cannot control exactly when the information is uploaded.



#### Popular fundraising tools for this kind of website (and they work for other websites too!):

- **Sagoto Solutions** (<https://bit.ly/3nmEF43>): This company creates online forms for fundraisers. Payment is by credit card; Sagoto has a built-in secure system to handle online payments.

*Sagoto currently charges \$1 per transaction plus a percent fee for each transaction.*

- **Active.com** (<https://bit.ly/3byjeZn>): This is an online registration platform that allows you to create a form for your event (Pizza Days, etc.) and handles payment processing. Active charges a registration fee for each sign up and a processing fee every time a credit card is used for payment. You can create a link to the Active.com site from your “Home and School” section on another website or from your own site.
- **Google Forms** (<https://bit.ly/3dOhTPn>): With Google Forms, Home & Schools can create a form for registrations/fundraising. On the form, parents click a mandatory check box agreeing to send an e-transfer when they submit the form. H&S volunteers have to match up the submitted Google forms with the e-transfers received.
- **A link** to a company that will run a fundraising campaign of their product for your Home & School community. Find more information on Page 4.

## A Separate, Dedicated Website for Your Home and School

In this situation, the school's website has a link to the H&S's website. Keep in mind that if you have your own website, you'll need to register your domain name and renew it annually. An advantage of having your own website is that volunteers are in complete control of when and how the website is updated.

Your website can be as simple or as elaborate as you wish. You can use it to share news and information, create online fundraising campaigns (and manage those campaigns), and communicate to your members via email (by connecting your site to a contact management/email creation service), or any combination of the above. Currently, Home & Schools are using several methods to create their websites.



### Option 1: Enlist the Help of Tech-Savvy Volunteers to Set Up Your Site

Are there computer programmers, software engineers, web designers, etc., in your pool of volunteers? If so, they can help set up and test a new website (and the payment processing options) before the site goes live. This was the case for École Primaire Beaconsfield's Home & School Association (EPB).

#### EPB's Recommendations:

- **Wordpress** (<https://bit.ly/3aEzuYh>) is a great website builder. Once the site is set up, it isn't difficult to make updates (EPB uses Elementor to edit/make additions to the site.)
- When designing your site, you can take advantage of many free plugins to add to its functionality.

#### Things to Know:

- With this option, you do not need to pay for the website design.
- Developing a website to serve your specific needs is a significant time commitment. For EPB, the process took over 8 months.

### Option 2: Subscribe to a User-Friendly Website-Builder Service

Don't have tech-savvy volunteers you can recruit for the project? There are some user-friendly web design services available.

- **Squarespace** (<https://bit.ly/2QWkKwU>) provides templates, explanatory videos, etc., to guide users through the process of creating their own site. St. Patrick's H&S has opted for this service.
- **Shopify** (<https://bit.ly/3xnH82H>) is the e-commerce platform used by Beacon Hill Elementary's H&S.

#### Things to Know:

- Volunteers are able to start small and build on the website as needed.
- Companies like Squarespace, Shopify, and others are secure for online payments.
- Be prepared to pay for this service. Squarespace plans range from \$18 to \$40 per month. The cost of the most basic Shopify-hosted website is \$30 per month. Shopify allows you to pause your website when you are not actively making sales. Although you still have full access to your website, customers cannot make purchases (and your monthly rate is reduced while shopping is paused). This may be an attractive option during the summer months.
- Shopify offers purchasers multiple credit-card payment options. When you design your website with Squarespace, you need to connect with a payment processor like Stripe, Square, or PayPal. (More information about payment processors is available on the next page.)
- Looking for more information about "website builder" companies (and their prices)? See this article from Tech Radar, which compares website programs: <https://bit.ly/3xpHl5Q>.



### Option 3: Hire a Small Business to Tailor Make a Website For You

We know of a couple of small businesses run by entrepreneurs who are H&S volunteers themselves. The companies specialize in building and maintaining websites for non-profit organizations (including H&S associations).

- **Online Empowerment** (<https://bit.ly/3xolsSY>) is used by Clearpoint H&S.
- **Novel Forms Studio** (<https://bit.ly/3npul1F>) is used by Lord Aylmer H&S.

#### Things to Know:

- You have the advantage of working with someone who has made websites for H&Ss before and is therefore aware of the kinds of features the website needs.
- You do not have to worry about volunteer turnover and the transfer of knowledge when a company is managing your website.
- Check with the companies for the cost of their services. Typically, there is a fee for setting up the website. Once the site is up and running, the H&S pays a fee based on the sales made through the site.
- Your website provider will discuss your online payment options to ensure all transactions are secure.

## ONLINE PAYMENTS: What Are the Options?

If you do not opt for a website provider that takes care of payment processing for you, you will need to choose a payment system to handle your online orders.



#### Here are some popular options:

**Stripe:** This service allows customers to pay by debit or credit card. The company operates on a pay-as-you-go model (no monthly fees). The system was initially developed for online shopping only, but the company has added an in-person shopping option as well. Find out more about Stripe here: <https://bit.ly/33Fk13w>.

**Square:** Like Stripe, Square offers a pay-as-you-go model, so no monthly fees. Square is very popular with businesses that offer both online and in-person transactions. Their free Square device can be connected to most android phones, iPhones, iPads, and tablets for processing in-person credit card transactions. Find out more info about using Square here: <https://square/3eKnHdm>.

**PayPal:** The biggest player on the block, PayPal accepts payments by credit, debit, bank accounts, and more. Find out more about using PayPal here: <https://bit.ly/3hnECnB>.

#### Things to Know:

- All three payment systems can connect directly to your bank account, allowing you to receive the money from your transactions easily.

- All three systems allow for in-person payments.
- Currently, the fees for the three payment systems are the same: 2.9% plus a fixed fee of \$.30 per transaction. Note that with PayPal, you can apply for the charity fee, which is currently 1.6% plus \$.30 per transaction. (You will need to provide PayPal with official documentation to confirm your local Home & School has charitable status. *You cannot use the QFH-SA's charitable status.*)
- Home & Schools need to decide how they will handle the extra costs involved with doing business online. Will they absorb these costs or pass them along to the purchaser?
- One H&S that tried both PayPal and Stripe preferred Stripe. The H&S didn't find that PayPal meshed well with Canadian non-profits and found it laborious to deal with customer service. In addition to finding Stripe more user friendly, the H&S likes having the option of receiving multiple reports on purchases. The H&S also gives high marks to Stripe's customer service department.
- A number of H&Ss are choosing more than one option. For example, some use Stripe, but allow for payments from PayPal as well. Others use a combination of PayPal and Square.



## AND MORE INFORMATION!

### Other Ways to Communicate with Your Membership

#### Using Facebook

Some Home & Schools, like St. Michael, are using Facebook to great advantage to share information.

#### Some Things to Consider:

- You can create a Facebook page (open to all) or private Facebook groups for specific audiences. One school, for example, has a parents' group for the entire school as well as separate parents' groups for each grade level.
- Some Home & Schools have found it helpful to have a general parents' Facebook page (or private group) that is separate from the H&S page/group. The parents' group allows the school community to discuss everything from school bussing to gym attire. It has meant that H&S executives no longer have to answer every question, and parents have a nice forum for discussion.



- To bring more traffic to its Facebook page, one H&S offered a prize to the new follower that allowed the H&S to reach its milestone goal of followers.
- To boost school spirit, some Home & Schools are creating "Facebook challenges" for their families. It could be a fun photo contest, for example.
- It is a good idea to check your Facebook group/

page regularly—to answer questions and monitor the comments.

- Consider using canva.com (<https://bit.ly/3wcXzO4>) to jazz up your social posts. The free version of Canva includes templates, text styles, and photos. You can build an attractive post really quickly and share it just as quickly. Canva offers great tutorials too!

#### Sending Emails

How are you getting messages to your membership?

- Some Home & Schools pass along information via the school administration's email bulletins to the families.
- Other Home & Schools send emails directly to their membership. To do this, some are using Mailchimp (<https://bit.ly/3wg57Qd>). Mailchimp is a handy tool to manage contact lists and send out emails. Mailchimp's free plan includes up to 2,000 contacts and 10,000 sends per month, with a daily send limit of 2,000. It is possible to link up Mailchimp to a website too.

#### Other Ways to Fundraise Online...

- Quite a few Home & Schools are using companies like TruEarth, Mabel's Labels, Loveable Labels, Make It Sow, and Bad Monkey for an easy online fundraiser. Home & Schools just provide a link to the company's site and the company takes in the orders and—in most cases—takes care of delivery too! Home & Schools receive a percentage of the sales made.
- Home & Schools have included a "Donate Now" button on their websites to great success.

#### Want more information?

Ask your question in the [QFHSA Think Tank](#) or email the QFHSA at [info@qfhsa.org](mailto:info@qfhsa.org).