

Web Site Development as a Marketing

tool for Non-Profits and Profits




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Getting Started

You should always have a set of questions prepared for your initial meeting with your web developer. You must remember that most web developers will not understand what your business is about, so a quick education about it will go a long way.

Most non-profits and profits rely heavily on your use of computers in your day to day operations. Still they are hesitant to put themselves online. By moving yourself on line you open yourself to a market that probably wasn't there before. If you put just a few hours a month into it, you will see the result. The market of online is huge now. Almost everyone uses it on a day to day basis. And all it takes is one click and you may have a potential customer/volunteer. Some people don't even recognize your nonprofit even exists and with some simple marketing strategies coupled with an online presence you will be instantly reaching out to these people.

 Many people rely on social media networking groups, so that is a good place to start even if you don't have a web site right away. Put your organization/business on one of these and invite as many people in your organization as possible. This way it gets out to their friends and their friends friends, and so on. So when you finally get your site up and running you can announce it to them. By then you should have quite the network that will be visiting your site, which may turn out positive results for fund raising events and possible sales for your business. You will want to update your site monthly to keep it current. This does not mean you need a redesign every month but just simply a paragraph or two of new information stating what changes are going on and how people can help with these changes.

List of Questions to ask your developer before you hire

How comfortable are you with writing HTML entirely by hand?

Can you write table-less XHTML? Do you validate your code?

What are a few of your favorite development tools and why?

What skills and technologies are you the most interested in improving upon or learning?

Show me your portfolio.

What size web sites have you worked on in the past?

What are a few sites you admire and why?

What is your favorite development language and why?

Do you find any particular languages or technologies intimidating?

What web browser do you use? The answer should be all of them.

What are a few personal web projects you've got going on?

These questions will give you a sense of your developer's style and allow you to match up with the appropriate one.



Offline Marketing

Offline marketing of your web site is JUST AS IMPORTANT as online marketing of your site:

Add your web site address to all literature and publications (business cards, letterhead, newsletters, fax coversheets, etc.) right next to your organization's "snail mail" address and phone number.

Announce the launch of you site, as well as major changes to your site (such as the addition of a directory of services, an essay from an executive director, etc.), in your printed newsletter. Your goal is to have something in every newsletter that highlights additions or a resource on your Web site.

Make sure everyone who answers your organization's main phone line and e-mail address, and everyone who deals with the public in any way, shape or form, as well as your Executive Director, marketing staff, fund raising staff and volunteer manager (and at a mission-based organization, this is often all the same person) knows how to say the web site address, and knows what information is available via the Web site. It is particularly hurtful to an organization if all staff cannot do this and, instead, stumble over the URL of the site, or can't describe what's on the site.

Add the web site address to your organization's main voice mail message.

If you write an article for a publication, ask that your organization's web site address appears with your name or bio at the beginning or end of the article.

When talking to the press, remember to mention your web site address.

Add your web site address within the text of all press releases. For instance, on a press release announcing a new publication, add a paragraph that says (if applicable) "This new publication can be accessed via our Web site at...".

Your web site address needs to be on all T-shirts, posters, buttons and other items given to the public. Make the address

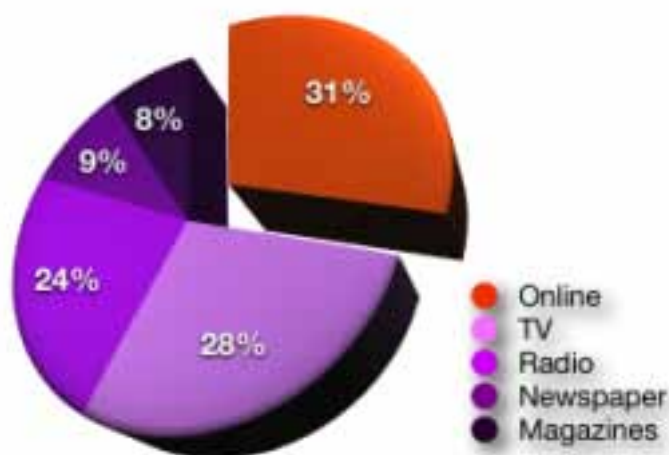
LARGE and easy-to-read from a distance! (I cannot believe how many nonprofit event T-shirts DON'T do this!).

Put the web site address on all signs for the organization: the sign in front of the building where you are, the banner at trade show, etc.

Online Marketing

Make sure the name of your organization appears in the TEXT of your web site, not just within a graphics file. This greatly increases the possibility of your site being found when someone types your organization's name into a search engine. I can't believe how many organizations don't do this, and are then surprised when they can't find their web site easily using Google. If you do nothing else, you need to do this first suggestion.

Make sure the keywords and phrases you want people to use to find your web site via a search engine appear often in the TEXT of your web site, not just within a graphics file. Again, this greatly increases the possibility of your site being found when someone types your organization's name into a search engine. And, again, I can't believe how many organization's don't do this, and are then surprised when they can't find their web site easily using Google.



Search for organizations on the web that are similar to yours, and see what sites link to them. Send an e-mail to the web masters of these sites that you think should link to your organization as well, and request what specific page(s) of theirs you would like to be linked from. The more sites that link to your web site, the greater your ranking on sites like Google.

Keep your requests appropriate: if you find a web page that links to services in a specific geographic area for parents, for instance, don't ask for a link from that page unless your organization provides services in that specific geographic area for parents! Also, do NOT ask for link exchanges; that puts you into the position of linking to any organization that links to you, and perhaps you don't want to link to just any organization. Instead, in your request for a link, explain why it would be appropriate to link to your site, based on to whom the site links to already. If you are going to link to their web site as well, do not make such a link conditional on their linking to you, and create the link before you ask for such yourself.

List your URL address in every e-mail signature on every e-mail your staff sends, and require staff to post the web site address within any post they make to any online forum.

Announce the web site on appropriate online discussion group (however, please remember your netiquette and don't announce it on online discussion groups that in no way relate to your organization). Any search engine can help you find appropriate online discussion groups.

Keep Visitors Coming Back

Don't just market to new visitors; market to return visitors as well! There are a number of ways to do this:

Update your web site at least once a month!

Make sure ALL departments are using the web site to communicate. Not just the marketing staff but, also, your volunteer manager, anyone who works with clients, your fund-raising staff, etc.

Have a place on the home page for announcements, upcoming events, links to blog updates, etc., so that a visitor to the home page can immediately see what's new.

Create a subscription-based e-mail newsletter to promote updates to your web site.

Create a way to allow people to receive updates about your web site via their RSS readers. For instance, you could create a blog at a free site like Forumer (it's what I use for my blog) that you use only to announce events, new services, updates to your web site, etc., and then link these announcements to appropriate places on your web site. Then, anyone who wants to can put your web site announcement blog into their RSS reader, and automatically receive updates whenever you post.

The key to successful Internet marketing is to accept that it is a never-ending, integrated process. New web sites and online discussion groups emerge and disappear regularly. You need to track with regular searches new sites

Latest News

with whom to link and new lists on which to announce your organization and its service. To market efficiently and effectively online your entire staff has to immerse itself, at least to some degree, in using the Internet regularly as part of their work.

Search Engine Strategies

Perhaps the most important -- and inexpensive -- strategy is to rank high for your preferred keywords on the main search engines in "organic" or "natural" searches (as opposed to paid ads). Search engines send robot "spiders" to index the content of your webpage, so let's begin with steps to prepare your webpages for optimal indexing. The idea here is not to trick the search engines, but to leave them abundant clues as to what your webpage is about. This approach is called "search engine optimization," abbreviated as SEO.

Write a Keyword-Rich Page Title. Write a descriptive title for each page -- rich in keywords you want people to find you with -- using 5 to 8 words. Remove as many "filler" words from the title (such as "the," "and," etc.) as possible, while still making it readable. This page title will appear hyperlinked on the search engines when your page is found. Entice searchers to click on the title by making it a bit provocative.

Plan to use some descriptive keywords along with your business name on your home page. If you specialize in silver bullets and that's what people will be searching for, don't just use your company name "Acme Ammunition, Inc.," use "Silver and Platinum Bullets -- Acme Ammunition, Inc." The words people are most likely to search on should appear first in the title (called "keyword prominence"). Remember, this title is your identity on the search engines. The more people see that interests them in the blue hyperlinked words on the search engine, the more likely they are to click on the link.

Write a Description META Tag. Some search engines include this description below your hyperlinked title in the search results. The description should be a sentence or two describing the content of the webpage, using the main keywords and keyphrases on this page. Don't include keywords that don't appear on the webpage. Example below

```
<meta name="Description" content="A multi-purpose facility providing free employment services, computer training, tourist information, community research, and social/educational programs for all-aged residents and visitors of the Lucan Biddulph area.">
```

The maximum number of characters should be about 255; just be aware that only the first 60 or so are visible on Google, though more may be indexed.

When I prepare a webpage, I write the article first, then develop a keyword-rich title. Then I write a description of the content in that article in a sentence or two, using each of the important keywords and keyphrases included in the article. This goes into the description META tag.

Next, I strip out the common words, leaving just the meaty keywords and phrases and insert those into the keywords META tag. It's no longer used much for ranking, but I'm leaving it in anyway. I think it may have some minor value. So to summarize so far, every webpage in your site should have a distinct title and META description tag. If you implement these two points, you're well on your way to better search engine ranking. But there's more that will help your ranking....

Include Your Keywords in Headers (H1, H2, H3). Search engines consider keywords that appear in the page headline and sub heads to be important to the page, so make sure your desired keywords and phrases appear in one or two header tags. Don't expect the search engine to parse your Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) to figure out which are the headlines -- it won't. Instead, use keywords in the H1, H2, and H3 tags to provide clues to the search engine. (Note: Some designers no longer use the H1, H2 tags. That's a big mistake. Make sure your designer defines these tags in the CSS rather than creating headline tags with other names.)

Position Your Keywords in the First Paragraph of Your Body Text. Search engines expect that your first paragraph will contain the important keywords for the document -- where most people write an introduction to the content of the page. You don't want to just artificially stuff keywords here, however. More is not better. Google might expect a keyword density in the entire body text area of maybe 1.5% to 2% for a word that should rank high, so don't overdo it.



Include Descriptive Keywords in the ALT Attribute of Image Tags. This helps your site be more accessible to site-impaired visitors (www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/glance/) and gives additional clues to the search engines. The ALT attributes do help get your images ranked higher for image search.

Use Keywords in Hyperlinks. Search engines are looking for clues to the focus of your webpage. When they see words hyperlinked in your body text, they consider these potentially important, so hyperlink your important keywords and keyphrases. To emphasize it even more, the webpage you are linking to could have a page name with the keyword or keyphrase, such as `blue-widget.htm` -- another clue for the search engine.

Make Your Navigation System Search Engine Friendly. You want search engine robots to find all the pages in your site. JavaScript and Flash navigation menus that appear when you hover are great for humans, but search engines don't read JavaScript and Flash very well. Therefore, supplement JavaScript and Flash menus with regular HTML links at the bottom of the page, ensuring that a chain of hyperlinks exists that take a search engine spider from your home page to every page in your site. Don't set up your navigation system using HTML frames (an old, out-dated approach); they can cause severe indexing problems.

Some content management systems and e-commerce catalogs produce dynamic, made-on-the-fly webpages, often recognizable by question marks in the URLs followed by long strings of numbers or letters. Overworked search engines sometimes have trouble parsing long URLs and may stop at the question mark, refusing to go farther. If you find the search engines aren't indexing your interior pages, you might consider URL rewriting, a site map, or commercial solutions.

Web Site Design Terms & Definitions

1 **AJAX**

AJAX, stands for Asynchronous JavaScript and XML, which is a term describing a web development technique for creating interactive web applications using a combination of: * HTML (or XHTML) and Cascading Style Sheets for presenting information* Document Object Model, JavaScript to dynamically display and interact with the information presented* XML, XSLT and the XMLHttpRequest object to interchange and manipulate data asynchronously with the web server

2 **ASP**

Short for Active Server Pages that is used for creating dynamic content of a web page. Technically said it is a server side scripting language. It is mostly used on Windows platforms

3 **FTP**

FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol which is one of the methods of transferring files over the Internet

4 **HTML**

Stands for HyperText Markup Language. the authoring and editing language used to create web pages on the World Wide Web

5 **Search Engine Optimization**

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an act of increasing the number of visitors to a particular Web site by adding appropriate keywords and phrases, and such ranking high in the search results. The higher a Web site ranks in the results of a search, the greater the chance that your site will be found by a search user. For general and competitive web sites it takes a lot of professionalism to tweak the web site in order to be well optimized and search engine friendly

6 **Submission Forms**

Forms are web pages "fields" for a user to fill in with information. They are an excellent way of collecting and processing information from people visiting a website, as well as allowing them to interact with web pages. Forms are written in HTML and processed by CGI programs. The output can be sent as an e-mail form, stored online, printed, and/or returned to the user as an HTML page

7 **Hosting**

Hosting is a service provided by hosting company. That's a place (a computer available on the Internet) where a web site is stored and made available to web site users to view the content of that web site

8 **E-Commerce**

E-Commerce means conducting business on the Internet. It is mostly referred to buying and selling items online

9 **Domain Name**

A unique name that identifies one or more IP addresses. For example, the domain name abacus-carepresents one IP address. Domain names are used in URLs to identify particular Web pages. Every web site that you visit is stored under a domain name

10 **Flash**

Browser independent vector and graphic animation technology owned by Adobe Inc. Most browsers support Flash technology and one flash animation looks the same on all browsers. A kind of website content that usually contains animation and sound. Can be used to add an attractive and interactive element to the site.

11 **Banner**

Also referred to as a banner ad, a banner is a typically rectangular advertisement placed on a Website either above, below or on the sides of the Web site's main content and is linked to the advertiser's own Web site

12 **CGI**

Scripting code commonly used with web based forms (i.e. requesting of information form).

13 **Data Transfer**

When you visit a website, your computer downloads all of the text and images from the site to a temporary location on your computer. Your hosting account generally has a limit to the amount of data that can be transferred from the server. The more popular your site is, the higher the transfer rate you will need.

14 **Form**

Used on a website for gathering information that is then sent to you via email. Uses include visitor feedback, information requests, polls, etc. The information that is sent through the form can also be sorted in a database accessible by whomever has specific permissions to view them. These are usually used for mailing lists.

15 **JPG**

Pronounced "jay-peg". A type of digital photo or image format, commonly used on websites. Generally used for higher quality images or photos.

16 **Keywords**

A list of words that describes what a website is about which are embedded into the html – not visible in the website. These words are inserted into the website so that when someone uses one of the keywords in an internet search, your site will be listed.

17 **Meta Tags**

A sentence or two that describes what a website is about which are embedded into the html – not visible in the website. They describe the site and are mainly used by search engines to locate a site.

18 **Script**

Additional programming that goes into a website that allows for interactivity or special features

19 **Webmail**

A browser-based method of accessing your email

20 **Navigation**

Navigation is your visitors means of finding their way around your website. With well planned navigation, your visitors can quickly and easily find what they are looking for. It is just as important as the actual content of your website. Various navigation methods can be used, depending on the nature of the website

21 **Website Reporting & Statistics**

Website reports which give you information on your website's usage. Very important in learning where and what people are doing on your site.

Planning Your Project

Planning is an activity involving the client, customers, resources, timing, user use, and establishing good communications and techniques. If the project is to be well managed, then planning is vital.

Project Objectives

Objectives of the client

Sometimes it takes much discussion before the client can reflect on what is specifically required. It helps if the results of these deliberations are recorded. The following may be involved:

What is the aim of the website? Are there measureable objectives? Will the website result in a major change in the way the enterprise conducts its business? How can we do better than our competitors? How can it be used to improve our image and branding?

Budget available? New costs to the business will arise.

Timing? What is a reasonable estimate of how long it will take? Are there timing imperatives? Agree on deadline and milestone dates and feedback about the development process.

Sustainability? Site maintenance must be planned in terms of timing, personnel and training. What are the life expectancies of the software technologies? How long before a complete revision may be required? How to avoid getting locked into proprietary solutions?

Do we live the image? The website is a representation of the company on the Web, so it should incorporate the values of the company in its makeup.

Objectives of the provider

The provider clearly seeks to satisfy the client's objectives, but has further concerns which must be satisfied for the project to be an overall success.

Consistent client objectives which are clear and mutually attainable. This may require a degree of client education about how objectives may clash. When objectives are changed then the impact must be explained.

Make a profit. This must be of the order of competitors', yet provide a value-for-money site.

Enhance the reputation of both the client and the provider. The site must conform to good practice and use up-to-date techniques.

ASSESS

Strategic, high level decisions need to be taken regarding the present marketing, and deciding what is to be retained and what needs to be changed.

- what are the overall aims of the non-profit/business? Where can the website make a contribution?
- what branding with legacy colour schemes, logo etc. MUST be incorporated?
- what should be the extent of the website? It could range from a few pages advertising products (a presence on the web), to a completely new way to sell goods on the Internet.

CONSTRUCT A TIMETABLE

Be realistic

It will take longer than the initial estimate! Recognise that this is a very time consuming activity. Allocate sufficient time for the process and allow a generous amount of time for the design phase, where well thought through decisions will show and be appreciated by users.

Set milestones

Target dates for the phases can be estimated and these act as indicators for timely delivery.

Educate the client, and help them to realise that it is not just a coding exercise.

CLIENT

At a lower level, decisions must be made to establish:

are there any knock-on effects for staffing?

who is to maintain the site? will training be required? A static website is unattractive, so a systematic dataflow must be established with regular updates, maintenance and checks.



incorporation of the website as part of the branding. Use the URL and e-mail throughout the enterprise on letter-heads, stationery, adverts, transport , etc.

CUSTOMERS

Initially, certain assumptions are made, but patterns of usage will indicate where changes can be made. The aims must be to:

meet user needs (can information be accessed quickly and easily? is it easy to place an order? if there are queries - who can provide an answer?)

enhance user experience (to encourage them to return to the site and to get a positive impression of the enterprise)

Requirements (content)

Website content is one of the first inputs. Development should concentrate on the areas of greatest interest to the customer.

Usability (navigation)

Navigation must be as user-friendly as possible. Actual usage may point to improvements, as users rarely use the site in the way envisioned by the designer.

Profile

The customer and client profiles must be defined, as these will affect the overall design, especially in terms of colours and 'voice'. As time elapses, changes in customer base or product range may dictate a change of design to suit the new circumstances.

HOSTING

An ISP must be approached and hosting facilities setup to include:

the availability of suitable software - do you need SSLs? shopping cart?

space and bandwidth restrictions

a number of e-mail accounts

archiving policies particularly in regards to system logs, and reporting software for feedback on usage

good server availability statistics

set-up costs of domain name?

RESOURCES

There are many resource issues to consider including the availability of :

development hardware & software. Diligent searching can unearth some excellent, free software tools.

personnel number (often wildly underestimated) and skills required (artistic appreciation, creativity, communication skills, good command of the language, coding ability, knowledge of software packages).

funding constraints and opportunities.

ACCEPTABILITY

How will the final product (website) be rated against the requirements?

Factors involved in the evaluation of a website.

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