

Top Ten Tips to Improve Your Organization's Web Site

Despite the fact that the internet has been around for almost 20 years now (in one form or another), smaller organizations have yet to grasp some basic truths about their web sites. Organizations who cannot afford a high dollar webmaster often use people in their organization who have some knowledge about web pages. All too often these people know the basics, and could very well build an acceptable website, but often times they try too hard and completely miss the mark. I have personally seen this phenomenon happen much too often. So, I have picked the brains of a few professional web designers and these are the things most important to your site's future. Whether you're a fraternity, sorority, chamber of commerce, Kiwanis, or small business; these are a few tips that could help to get your organization's website back on track.

1. Keep It Simple...

An overly complicated site will only serve to confuse the people to which you are trying to appeal. If your web designer is not a professional, do not try anything on the site that they are not completely comfortable doing. The worst thing you can do for your site is to have an image that doesn't load or a page that doesn't work because your designer was rushed into it.

2. Hire a Professional Web Designer.

This may not always be possible, but will make all the difference in the world. Some one who knows nothing about your business would be best. That may seem odd, but the key to your site is making people understand your organization. If the designer comes to an understanding of it, they can express that through the site. Hiring someone who knows nothing about your organization is also good because they will have no preconceptions. You will be starting with a clean slate. So, make the web designer love your organization.

3. Have a Plan

One misconception that some organizations have is that simply having your name on the web is enough. If you simply want people to know your name, that may be fine, but if you want them to know and remember anything about your organization you must go into much more detail. This requires a plan. Just like any good communications campaign you must take great effort to plan every detail of your site. Good planning is half the battle.

4. Realize that your site is a marketing tool.

Whatever you may have thought about the internet up to this point, know that it is the most powerful tool you have at your disposal to make your organization noticeable. It is the cheapest, and if it is well done, the most visible face of your organization. So, make sure it is

your best face. People will connect the dots if your site doesn't load correctly. It could be perceived that your entire organization is "loaded incorrectly".

Free Tip: Be sure to register your site with major search engines (i.e., Google, Yahoo!, etc...). There is no reason to have a organizational site if you won't show up on a search. I recommend using a service like Overture.com, or at least registering with Yahoo!. If you do register with Yahoo!, more than likely Google will pick up your site in their listings. This is just the nature of Google. That is why I say to at least register with Yahoo!.

5. Don't simply have a presence

By presence I mean a static page that never changes. A page with your name, address, and phone number will not entice people to visit your site often, much less your actual organization or business.

6. Set short and long range goals for the site and map it out accordingly.

As your site is such a powerful communications tool, you must have a structured message. Have a planning session, and be sure to include the web designer. They will be able to tell you what you can and cannot do with your site. Take stock of what your site is now, and where you want it to be in two, four, or six years. Be sure to include

your site as a part of any communications campaign for your organization. Continuity will breed public loyalty and faith in your organization.

7. You can't have a site without copy

One thing I see all too often is an organization wanting a website, but having no information to put on it. Obviously, this can cause a problem. You can have all the graphics in the world, and the best programs available, but without anything to say you're better off saving your money. Do not waste your money on a website if you do not have at least a page of text to put on it. It is a waste of your money and the builder's time.

8. Viewer Friendly

It doesn't do any good to have a site that people cannot view. It must download quickly, need no special plug-ins to be viewed, be viewable in multiple browsers (i.e., Netscape, internet explorer), and be easy to navigate. Confusing navigation will kill your site quicker than unplugging the server. No one likes to have search for the information they want. Don't make them have to. If someone viewing your site has to make a special effort make your site work for them, they are more likely to simply close their browser window.

9. If you can make it in MS word it isn't an acceptable website

This is fairly self explanatory. If you can create your entire site in MS Word, it isn't going to generate the type of sentiment about your organization you want. Making your site look professional is a huge undertaking; don't doom yourself to failure from the beginning by using poor software to develop it. Some software titles you might look into are Macromedia Dreamweaver, and Microsoft FrontPage.

10. Graphics are everything

Nothing helps your site stand out more quickly and cheaply than good graphics. These can be anything from logos to actual photographs. I do not recommend over use of Photographs as this can be very overwhelming, plus they can cause your site load slower. If your organization has a symbol or logo, be sure it appears on your homepage, at least. Creating graphics can seem very daunting at first, but with some time and effort and a few good tutorial books you will have it down in no time. I recommend Macromedia's Fireworks, or Freehand Programs to create your web graphics. Of course, Adobe Photoshop serves very well for this also.

Those are the Top Ten Things you can do to improve your organizations website. There are obviously many, many more things that need to be done. If you are the person designing and building the site, DELEGATE! There are

bound to be people in your organization who can help, even if it is nothing more than typing the site text so you can copy and paste. If there is one thing I want to stress, it is to present a unified front. Be sure to use your organizations logo, and your organizations colors. A successful site that people are going to visit often is going to have some degree of interactivity. This doesn't have to mean you have games or chat rooms, it can be as simple as updating your site often, that will keep people coming back.

My thanks to Darlene Noennig and Gateway Business Solutions, on the web at <http://www.gatewaybusinesssolutions.com>.

Links to sites and services mentioned in this article:

- Overture listing service - <http://www.overture.com>
- Google – <http://www.google.com>
- Google advertising - <http://www.google.com/ads/>
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