A STEP-BY-STEP WEBSITE REFRESH

Keeping your website fresh, made easy

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- This guide is set up so any association, no matter their size, can follow step-by-step guidance based on best practices to maintain an updated website presence on a budget.

- Consider each action item as a tip you may choose to follow – or not follow – at your association; every association is different, so you may need to adjust your own website refresh plan. Certainly, this guide is not meant to cover every scenario or type of update, but rather, some common ground most associations share. Customize the timing, too. If you had a recent brand refresh, tackle that before the content updates suggested here.

- I strongly recommend creating a cross-functional web team led by the marketing or communications department to review this guide together and make all website-related decisions in larger associations.

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SECURITY

1. Make sure your SSL certificate is up to date! (It's not if you see a yellow triangle with an exclamation point in it in your URL bar.) Contact your webmaster or managed IT services firm, or even your website domain host, for help if you're not sure how to do this. Protect your site from hackers!

   • Ensure web admin passwords are strong – 12 characters and not something easily guessed, like your association name and founding date. Use two-factor authentication as well.

2. Make sure you know who your technical details, such as your domain registrar and login details and web host and login details. If something happens you need to know who to contact and how to access your website.

3. Back up your website regularly – once a month or quarter can be fine, depending on how often it changes. Check your content management system (CMS) to see if there is a tool that allows you to do this. Many website hosting companies also offer this service.

4. Update your CMS software when your provider releases new updates to ensure any security bugs are addressed. Work with your CMS provider to see how this will affect the rest of your website. Plug-ins are another bit of software that need to be updated regularly!

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SECURITY

5. Run a malware and virus scanning utility on your website. Your website hosting company may offer this as a service, and there are several commercial options out there, some with free options, such as Astra Security, Site Guarding, Virus Total, and SUCURi.

6. Train your staff to recognize phishing and other cyberattacks. Sometimes the bad guys get into a website through our own teams!

   - Have a budget? Services like KnowBe4 offer automated training.

YOUR CONTENT... OUT WITH THE OLD...

1. **Archive any news content** (news articles, press releases, Washington updates, newsletters, etc.) more than three years old. Many content management systems (CMSs) allow you to sort by date added and apply bulk actions. Why? This remove them from the site search so that more current items take center stage. A typical web visitor is seeking current, up-to-date content.

2. **Archive any events** more than two years old.

3. **Archive any magazine or journal articles** more than five years old.

3. **Review any member testimonials**, whether written or video, and consider whether anything more than a few years old needs to be replaced with members or other stakeholders. Value propositions change over time, as do reasons why members join, donors donate, or sponsors sponsor. Develop a list of testimonials you need to get and make a plan to collect them from current stakeholders. Gather Voices is one of several commercially available programs that simplifies video testimonial gathering. Or, simply use a Zoom recording. Be sure to give subjects a guide to good video production (see sample on the next page).

4. **Review any videos** on the site. Are they up-to-date? Do you have a new president who should be on-video instead of the former president talking about the benefits of membership, for example? Make a note of videos that need updating and make a plan to update them over the next few months. Canva is a free tool you can use; or, record your speaker on Zoom. Be sure to write a snappy script!

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VIDEO GUIDE

Provide this guide to stakeholders who will record video (testimonials, etc.) for you to ensure higher production value.

- Clear any unnecessary clutter from the camera viewing area. Ideally you should not blur your background or use a background image, because when you move, the image quality drops.

- Be sure you're in a quiet location with no interruptions.

- Wear a solid color or only simple patterns.

- Ensure lighting is behind your computer screen — a lamp or ring light — and that there is no lighting directly behind the camera in the viewing area to cause on-camera glare.

- Seat yourself comfortably so your head and shoulders are showing on camera. There will be more room for the association to add your name and affiliation to the video screen if you sit at one-third of the screen instead of directly in the middle. It also adds more visual interest.

- If you make a mistake, say "I'm going to re-do that" and proceed. That will alert staff to edit out that portion of the video.

- Speak naturally; pretend that you are talking to a friend. Watch your pacing, if you naturally speak quickly, you may want to slow down just a bit.

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YOUR CONTENT... OUT WITH THE OLD...

5. **SEO-optimize your content!** Use a tool like Dynomapper (which has a free trial) to create an Excel sheet listing all the pages on your website automatically. Dynomapper lists the URL, page title, meta description, and meta keywords, in addition to other data. At a minimum, add a meta description and meta keywords to important pages on your website – pages you'd want someone searching on Google to find your site, such as your membership page, publications page, home page, resources page, and more. You can write meta descriptions and keywords for several to dozens of web pages at once in your Excel file (be sure to use spell check) and then edit those pages quickly in one sitting in your content management system.

    - Here's a resource to help you write meta descriptions that get results.

    - Here's a resource that will help you research and use keywords that get results.

    - If you're serious about SEO and also have a budget of $100 - $150 per month, tools like SEMrush, MOZ, and ahrefs will help you research keywords and track performance.

6. Remember that content behind your members-only login isn't visible to search engines, OR to potential members, so include a **public-facing "teaser" page** with the appropriate keywords – and enough content to show non-members what they're missing. (And show members what they get by clicking!)

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7. Ensure your web forms are compliant, offering visitors the opportunity to opt in to communications such as your newsletter, or communications from third parties such as sponsors and advertisers. Consider enabling CAPTCHA to block out spammers, and make sure to use secure forms (with an SSL certificate). Your webmaster or web hosting company can help you with this.

- For GDPR compliance be sure to have a checkbox leading to your privacy policy and a checkbox to accept terms and conditions. Both of these should link to web pages on your site describing each.

- To meet accessibility guidelines, be sure your form is simple, includes simple instructions, and makes it crystal clear what data you are asking the user to complete. Form field validation helps ensure the user knows what errors they are making, if any, such as not formatting an email properly. Review the complete accessibility checklist here.

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LOOKIN' GOOD... AND, IN-BRAND...

1. Has your brand palette changed since your website was last designed or updated? If so, now's the time to update your website colors, fonts, and images.

2. Pay special attention to call-outs like quotes and statistics. Make sure they don't use the same color treatment as your calls-to-action, such as white text on a solid red button (rectangle), but make sure they do use in-brand colors and fonts. Over time, it's easy for designers, especially multiple designers, to stray from your brand guide.

3. Speaking of brand guides… be sure anyone using Canva or any other tool has easy access to and is trained in your brand guidelines. It's so simple for non-designer staff to update graphics and images, but you'll want to ensure everyone stays on-brand.

4. And in addition to staying on-brand, make sure you're following Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) when it comes to text, colors, and fonts. Install the WAVE browser extension and look at contrast errors in the summary section. WCAG 2.1 guidelines specify minimum contrast between text and background colors, including hyperlinks. Also, ensure your font size meets/exceeds minimum requirements.

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LOOKIN' GOOD... AND, IN-BRAND...

5. Have a graphic designer? Have them use brand colors on images – change someone's shirt or other visual element from an off-brand color to a brand color, for instance. Inventory the images on the site and systematically update them.

6. Have more staff or more time? Grab your association writing style guide and review key sections of content, such as your About Us page, membership pages, and more, and ensure you're following the style guide. Common areas for improvement include:

    • Using active voice, rather than passive voice.

    • Avoiding the use of industry jargon.

    • Linking descriptive text such as "Read the article" instead of using "click here".

    • Using the most up-to-date association boilerplate copy on current press releases.

    • Using the most up-to-date value proposition on your membership pages.

    A bonus is that some of these tips also help make your site more accessible, according to WCAG 2.1 guidelines and common website usability heuristics!

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PAGE SPEED, IMAGES, AND ACCESSIBILITY

1. **Web pages should load within 3 seconds.** Use a page speed checker tool on key pages on your website, such as the home page, events page, publications home page, and other "home" pages and follow the recommendations to reduce page load time.

2. A common culprit for slow page load times is images! Use this image file size reducer to reduce image size and upload the newly compact image to replace the old bulky image.

   - While you're reviewing images on your website, be sure to use your content management system to add alt text describing the image to make them accessible. This applies to photos and graphics! For simple graphics, like your association logo, the alt text could be "[Association] logo". For a photo, simply and succinctly describe the contents of the photo. You may even add a caption for even greater accessibility and usability.

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NEED HELP?

- Contact Lada Consulting if you'd like a custom website refresh plan, which will include the action steps here as well as much more, including updating your website navigation menus and content. We can also execute on the plan for you!

Cathy Lada, D.Sc., CAE
cathy@cathylada.com
https://cathylada.com/book-time-with-cathy
www.CathyLada.com

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