



8 Non Profit Websites Best Practices

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Non profit websites share many of the same best practices as any website. They need to be user friendly, easily navigable, and use appropriate fonts, colors, and other design elements. But often a non profit website needs to offer more than your typical corporate site.

A non profit's website needs to make it easy to find out more about their cause, to donate money, and to become more involved. It needs to make it easy for media contacts to find the information they need and the contact information of key personnel. And it needs to do all this in a way that's inviting to the organization's targeted donors and/or volunteers.

We have identified 8 best practices for non profit websites, today is the first one: Make your site Donor Friendly

#1 - Make your site Donor Friendly

Donations are a necessary thing for every non profit organization out there. Your website can be a great place to solicit donations, especially from new donors. It can also make it easier for recurring donors to make additional donations. In either case, you want it to be a simple and straight-forward process for people to give you money.

There are a few things to keep in mind when creating a donor-friendly site. First, make sure your donation page is prominently linked from your home page. Whether you do this with a special banner or button or simply make it prominent in your regular navigation, donors have to see where to donate before they can do so.

Second, make the actual donation process as painless as possible. Don't require visitors to set up an account to donate. The donation process shouldn't be any more complicated than any other online transaction. Other than information required to process their credit card or e-check, don't require any other information. And use a single-page donation form if possible, with just one confirmation page. There's less chance that there will be browser or connectivity issues if there's only a single page to deal with.

#2 - Make Your Site Media-Friendly

Getting media attention can have a huge impact on a non profit organization. Whether the media attention brings in more donations directly or simply raises the profile of the organization, getting attention from journalists, bloggers, and anyone else with an audience is important.

Make it easy for journalists to find information about your organization. Include profiles of your board of directors, founder(s), and other key personnel. Make sure you include contact information (email and phone) for each of these key people. Have a downloadable media kit that includes everything your print media kit does.

Offer downloadable images from your site so journalists and bloggers don't have to contact your and wait for a response. And include press-ready quotes, both from members and directors as well as outsiders. Make it clear that journalists and other organizations may use these items in news coverage without contacting the organization for prior permission.

3: Make your site Volunteer Friendly

Make it easy for visitors to your site to find information on how they can get involved. There are plenty of people out there who might not have the money to make a donation but are still passionate about what your organization is doing.

Whether you provide detailed information about volunteering directly, steps people can take on their own, or just contact information for your volunteer organizer, make sure you don't overlook this crucial bit of information.

Providing multiple means of contact makes it easier for volunteers to get in touch, so include an email address, phone number, and a web contact form if you can.

#4: Make Sure Your Organization's Purpose is Immediately Apparent

How many times have you gone to a website and not had a clue what the site was about? This happens all too often. Designers and clients often take for granted what visitors to their site will already know about their organization.

But considering how much information is pushed in bite-size pieces on sites like Twitter and Facebook, there's no telling how much or how little visitors will know. With some organizations it's easy enough to figure out what the organization is about just by its name, but for others it's not so easy.

Putting an abbreviated mission statement right on the home page is one way to solve this. Another way is to put a prominent link somewhere on the home page that takes visitors to an about page that offers concise, plain-language (not "marketing-ese") information about what the organization does.

#5: Make Sure Your Content Takes Center Stage

Design on any site should be transparent, and especially so on non profit sites. That's not to say your site can't have an interesting design, just that the design should revolve around your content and your mission, not the other way around. Take into account the types of information you'll be providing on the site and the formats that will be used.

Consider up front how much multi-media elements will be used, and whether they'll be used on every page or just in special gallery sections. If you plan to post videos and photos on multiple pages, you'll need to make sure your column widths other elements are complimentary to the kinds of media you want to use.

Make sure your columns are wide enough to accommodate YouTube videos, for example. If they're not, any time you embed a video (or similar element), your site design will look haphazard (and some of your site content might end up covered up).

#6: Make Sure Your Website is Consistent with Your Other Promotional Materials

Your logo should use the same logo and colors as your other promotional materials. Maintaining a consistent brand throughout your organization greatly increases your chances of being recognized in passing. Your website doesn't have to (and probably shouldn't) match your print promotional materials exactly, but echoing the look and feel of those materials increases brand identity.

Make sure the content is consistent, too. Proofread and copyedit your website content just as you do your print materials. While it's easier to change content on a website, it still gives a negative impression if your site is riddled with errors and inaccuracies.

#7: Know Your Site's Purpose Up Front

The leaders of your organization (or whoever is in charge of the organization's website) should make a list of what the goals for the site are before starting the design process. Is the site primarily to allow existing members to stay updated? Is it to solicit donations? Is it to get new volunteers or members? Is it to raise awareness in general?

Whatever your purpose is, knowing it and communicating it to your designer going into the design process will save headaches and delays down the road. Make sure everyone is on board with the same vision, too, so you don't have to make unnecessary changes down the road, which saves both time and money.

8#: Include a News Section or Blog

Including a blog or news section has a couple of big advantages for non profit sites. First, it gives people a reason to come back to your site. If you offer news about your organization and your cause, people who are interested in either will come back on a regular basis (or subscribe via RSS). This keeps your site visible and makes it more likely they'll become more involved in the future (or stay involved if they are already).

Second, blogs and news sites are often quoted by other blogs and news sites. This increases the exposure for your site and will likely bring you more traffic.

Third, constantly-updated content increases your search engine visibility. This makes it easier for people actively looking for information related to your organization to find your site.



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