



## Design Guidelines for a Non Profit Website

It's easy for a web site project to turn into a nightmare. But it doesn't have to be. You can get the design you want once you understand the key components of a site design for an Organization.

Obviously, the place you don't want to go for your web design is a print designer or a traditional marketing firm. Instead, find a web designer who understands not just how to make pretty pictures, but who also understands the user experience and search engine optimization (SEO). Web Design & Print Design are two very different skills set. More often than not, your print designer will produce a pretty layout that will be either a nightmare to reproduce in HTML or just very ineffective.

A website is first and foremost a visual experience as opposed to a printed brochure which is both a visual & tactile experience.

### Hire a Professional Website Designer

Once you've hired your web designer, the first call to order before you even discuss color palette, layouts & designs, is to define the followings:

1. **Who's coming to your website?**  
top 3-5 visitors (i.e. Historians, Students, Doctors, Nurses, Trade Professional, etc)
2. **What are they looking for?**  
top 3-5 reasons (i.e. Events, Member Directory, Resources, Member Only Area, etc)

Now here is the issue: most organizations do not have this information, they think they do, but they are usually way off.

If you have current web statistics, it's now time to really dig and find out what are the top 10 pages that are getting the most traffic on your website in the last 12-24 months. Many organizations are surprised by the findings: "wow, we had no idea that the job bank, which we outsource, is #1 on the list"

In 10 years of doing this, almost no one has been able to give me this information accurately. So the first job of the designer is to help you find out the accurate answer to those two questions. Sometime a survey is required if no traffic statistics are available.

Here is why this is so important: people couldn't care less about how pretty your site is. They come with a very specific objective in mind, want to find it as quickly and easily as possible, download it, print it, register for it, pay for it....and move on.

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Browsing for hours and getting lost in interesting or fun stuff happens on Facebook....not your website! A non-Profit website's purpose is to quickly give people what they are looking for.

Once you have established who your top visitors are and what is their main purpose to come to your site, then you will have the initial framework of your homepage.

For the actual design, the goal is to be consistent with your top visitor's expectations. Based on their demographics, what will they consider nice & pleasing to the eye. Your 25-40 age group in management will have a much different expectation than your 40-55 age group in a professional trade. You may not know the answer but your website designer should be able to guide you.

Research shows that people searching for anything will look at an average of 15-20 sites and spend on average 5-8 seconds per site. So the design goal is to tell "visually" what your organization is about or better yet, what are the benefits in 5 seconds. What we also know is that people do not read on the web, they mostly scan for keywords and move on to the next page.

What does that tell us? Well, first, keep the home page a mostly visual experience. Lots of words and lengthy paragraphs will be a turn off for most people. Don't try to say who you are with words, say it visually with images, pictures and graphics. Busy websites with too many options to choose from are a recipe for disaster. Keep it simple; remember the golden rule of "Less is more" in website design. Your navigation menu can provide access to a lot of information; resist the temptation of cramming too much stuff on the home page.

Have fun planning your website design.



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