



## **Top 10 tips to increase the effectiveness of your website**

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A website should always be in a state of improvement and trying to enhance the user's experience while browsing. The more engaged your readers and members are, the more likely they are to come back in the future.

### Tip #1: Improve the Landing page:

- **The 4-7 seconds rule**

You have about that much time to have them stick around on first visit or....move on and never come back. The decision will be strictly based on visual appeal. Do this test: ask someone to look at your site for 7 seconds then ask them to tell you what the site is about. If they can say describe what you do, then you nailed it. Your website needs to communicate visually what you do.

- **People do not read**

We know that from studies: people do not read on the web, they glance, gravitate to keywords, buttons, but read...no, not really. Your words are mostly pointless, unless they are keywords, in bold and few of them. Large chunks of text will mostly be ignored. Look at your site and see if there is any areas of your site using too many words, could you replace some of the words by an image?

- **Web credibility**

A survey was recently done and asked people how they rated the credibility of a website from most important to least. Number one by 46% was the design, number two was the layout of the page by 28,5%. Name recognition came in with 14.1%. Don't rely on your name alone, it won't be sufficient to keep them browsing.

- **Less is more**

I see too many websites with way too much information on the home page. Looks like the board couldn't agree on what needed to be on the home page and as a result...everything ended up there! Bad idea. Think from two point of view: what are the top 3 areas that are most important to the organization or the business and what are the top 3 things people will go on your website for. Design your layout & graphics around that. The rest should be an interior page easily accessible from the navigation menu. Avoid the multiple navigations all over your landing page...on the left column, in the header, in the right column, in the footer...oh my!



- **Hire a professional designer**

A professional designer that caters to your industry that is. There is most likely a designer with a great deal of expertise in your industry or business type. If you are a non profit member based organization, it would make a lot more sense for you to hire a web designer that specializes in non profit websites.

## #2 - Improve the Content of your Website

- **More than just a few pages**

Did you know that some of the major search engines will not index a website unless it has 10 pages of content? Non profit websites with less than that, have little chances of showing in the search engines. An easy way to fix that is to start a blog which will add lots of content over time. You can also add helpful content for visitors: Top 10 tips...., What to do when....., FAQ's, etc (read:[content, getting it right](#))



- **Tell a story**

Avoid the marketing speak anywhere you can, most people nowadays won't read it anyway. Try instead telling a compelling story: the why you do what you do. Everybody is most effective, best in class, outstanding service, excellent, affordable and blah blah blah. It would be refreshing and interesting if your non profit website had more of a human touch. (read: [Four new signals with search engines](#))

- **Page titles & opening paragraph**

Page titles are really important with search optimization, they need to include keywords and be compelling. Same goes with the opening paragraph, most people won't read past that anyway, make it count.

- **Keyword rich**

Find out what are your 10-20 keywords for your organization. You can either hire a professional or use [Google Keyword](#) to identify the 10-20 keywords that best describe how someone would find you. Notice that I didn't say how you describe yourself, but how people will refer to you as. For example, the local chamber may use "City Name Chamber of Commerce" as a keyword but they would be missing the point. People would most likely be looking for "Business networking" or "Business growth" or several versions of this keyword. Once you have identified your keywords, add them to your page titles & opening paragraph....don't over do it, it will look weird. Be strategic.

tell a story

- **Half page format**

Best format is less is more, people don't read anyway. Half page is plenty, include several bullets to highlight your offering/services/information and include one small picture to convey the words in an image.

- **Call to action**

Study shows that "[Get Started](#)" will get better results than "Register", "Click

Here" gets more clicks that "Submit" and a "Red" button will also get more clicks than a "Green or Blue" button. I don't know why, it just does.

### #3 - Use quality graphics & images

- **Use a small image or graphic to support the content**

Since we are now aware that most people don't read all the content, a small image will most likely attract their attention. A small image in a good quality & resolution will help in keeping people engaged on your website. Only text is a recipe for them to move on. A rule of one small image per page is good, don't over do it with images all over the place.



- **They'll forget the words but will remember the images**

Spend a few bucks on getting nice quality images that were professionally taken. A quality image will have a much longer impact in their memory than any of the words posted on your site.

- **Remember to insert a description for each image**

Each image should have a description, also known as an "alt tag". This is very helpful with search optimization. All your images are indexed by the search engines and an description including your name will only help you. You can also add an image "title" which will add a small box over the image when you mouse over it (try it on the image on this blog to see what I mean)

- **Make sure to use licensed images only**

Taking images from the web is "no big deal" right? Well, the day you'll receive an email from the owner of the images posted on your website claiming royalties and asking for damages, you will think differently. Note that some of these claims are bogus, nonetheless, you would better off simply paying a few bucks for images. We used iStock to purchache the image of the little guy with the camera, cost: \$1.50 and we can use this how we want and are now protected with a license on the image.

## #4 - Optimize your content

Below are few tips to help you optimize your website:

- **Define your keywords**

One of the mistake we commonly see if people trying to compete for highly competitive keywords instead of looking for opportunities. When you do an analysis, I would recommend you look for high traffic with lower competition and establish yourself there instead of trying with everybody else to compete for the top keywords. Look for the opportunity!



- **There are plenty of free & low cost tools on the market to choose from:**

- **Google Keywords search tools** (free)  
Great to identify your top 10 keywords.
- **Google Analytics** (free)  
Will analyze your traffic and tell you what people do when they land on your site. It will also tell you what keywords lead you to your site.
- **ScribeSEO** (starts at \$17/month)  
This is one of the best value software and we highly recommend it. Install the plug-in directly into the text editor of your webpages, blogs, news articles, etc and click on the button to analyze the content. The analysis will tell you exactly what's missing to be 100% optimize, make the corrections and voila!! Our CMS is already configured to work with the plug-in and the set up takes about 3mn and is free to our clients.
- **Website Grader** (free)  
There are few tools on the market but the [websitegrader.com](http://websitegrader.com) is probably one of the easiest one to use. Simply enter your domain name, the url of a competing organization, your email address and it will send you a report of how your website is doing

Remember that optimizing your website is not very hard once you know what to do, but can be very time consuming. Large organizations will often time, have a dedicated staff to work on optimization only. I know of a person working for a large non profit organization where her job is to work exclusively on their blog and social networking presence on the internet. That's it. So considering hiring someone to help you with this may not be a bad idea unless you can spare 2-4 hours a week on optimizing your site.

## #5 - Call to Action: make it easy!!

A call to action can either be a button or a text link you want your web visitors to click on. Easier said than done, especially if you don't apply the basic rules that produces better results. Often time on a non profit website, I see them hidden somewhere or just hard to find. Below are few rules to follow when your design the layout of your site:

- 1. Make it clear & self evident (Grandma test)**  
Here is a way I teach people to find out if they did it right: ask grandma to look at your website and ask her to point out where or what to click on to renew/purchase/get more info. If she tells you where they are within 10-20 seconds, you nailed it. Anything above 20 seconds is starting to be a concern, if more than a minute before grandma finds the button, then time to start over. FYI: the test works just as well with Grandpa!!
- 2. Donation in one stop checkout**  
Studies shows that a complicated or multi step donation process will increase your chances that people will abandon the transaction by more than half. So fast & easy is the way to go. One stop check-out is the best way to go: Donation button should be self evident (i.e. Grandma found it in 2 seconds), when I click on it, a simple form should appear asking me how much I want to donate, then ask for contact info & credit card info, then click/process & done. I see too many non profit websites with complicated or multi step process to collect donations. Apply those simple steps and see your donations increase!
- 3. No account sign up required**  
A survey was recently conducted that showed that most people find it annoying to have to sign up in order to do something. They just want in, get their stuff & get out. This also results in many people leaving your site. The question should be: "do we really have to have them sign an account?"
- 4. Use real people images vs. graphics**  
Human face gets better results than a graphic anyday. People relate to others. In tests, the picture of Jason got as much as 50% more clicks than the graphic



5. **Short forms is best**

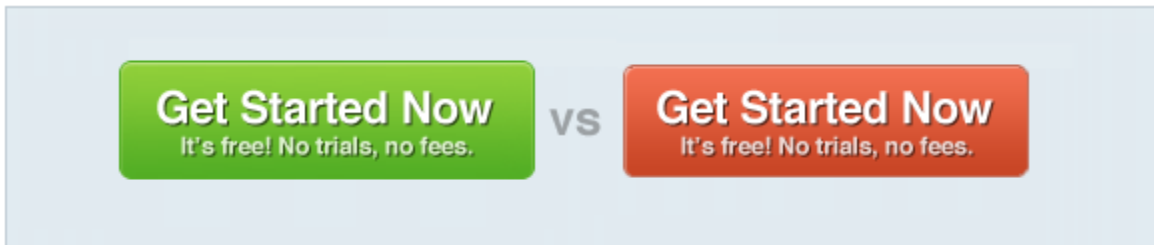
Organizations & business have the tendency to ask way too much stuff up front on their online forms, as in they are pre-qualifying people before they are even talking to them. You should really only ask the basic info required to know how to get a hold of them (i.e. Name, Phone, Email), your pre-qual should be done over the phone while starting to build a relationship. Asking too much on the online form will be a turn off for many.

6. **Get started vs Click here**

Some test were done that shows that buttons with "Get Started" vs "Click Here" will produce better results, in some cases 40% more clicks. The words on the buttons matter more than you think. Maybe "Click here" occurs as a form of domination and subconsciously is a turn off....who knows, but in any case words make a difference, choose the right one and you will increase your results.

7. **Choose the right color buttons**

Another test showed that a red button will consistenly get better results as the green one (see below). It's most likely because it pops out of the page better than a green one. A red button will also occur as most likely more important. Use the right color button and increase your results.



## #6 - Start a blog

A lot of organizations understand that they should have a blog on their **Non Profit Websites**. I couldn't agree more and most Executive Directors I talk to agree as well. But there is a lot of confusion about how to do it or even what constitute a true Blog. So here are few tips to help you get started with your blog:



### **Your blog title should be keyword rich**

You want to use good keywords, keywords that your typical member or potential member would be searching for. To identify good keywords, you can use [Google Keyword Tool](#) to get started.

### **Short & Sweet**

I would recommend to keep it within 300 words, to include bullets, multiple short paragraphs and to bold keywords. Statistics show that most people don't have nearly the attention span you think they do, get to the point and remove all unnecessary words & phrases.

### **Include some related links to your content**

The rule of thumb is to have a link for every 120 words. Could be a link to some interior pages of your website with more in depth information on the subject or better yet, a link to an outside source (i.e. [Wiki](#)) to provide additional information or to explain a specific term.

### **Add one single image to your blog**

Most of what we track, show that having one image per blog is good. It makes it more visually appealing and gives people something to relate to than just a whole bunch of words. The image should describe the mood or feeling or describe in some ways what the blog is about. Make sure to add an image description to your image (aka [ALT tag](#))

### **Make sure to have a RSS & email subscription**

Most blogging services include [RSS](#) and adding a way for people to easily subscribe to your upcoming blog is a great way to spread your voice and to make your organization relevant. Some organizations have 70-80 percent of their blog readers subscribe by email, the rest will use RSS.

### **Getting people to comment**

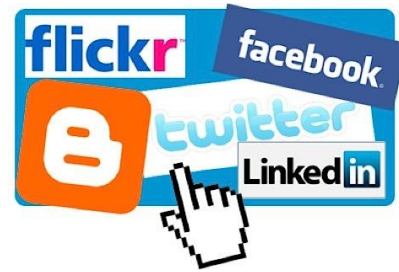
Some of the great ways to do that is to ask a question at the end of your blog or be controversial. Also, you can leave part of the subject not covered. If you completely cover a subject, there isn't much room for someone to add anything to it.

### **How often?**

Once or twice a week. Yes, at least once a week, twice would be better. I know what you are thinking: "How on earth am I going to find the time to do this once, let alone twice a week". I think it's important for any organization to engage the whole membership, dumping this on one person's lap is a recipe for it to fail. Try a contest with your members: "best blog submitted will be published and the winner will receive a discount for the annual convention".

## #7 - Social Network like a Ninja

Most organizations are keen on having social networks links on their updated non profit website. Certainly, it's important to consider social networking and inbound marketing in your web redesign. But don't just do it because all the cool kids are doing it.



Make sure you have an overall social media strategy in place, or at least an organized approach to the big four: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn & YouTube. You would never put out an event or service that you had no intention of supporting. If you won't be monitoring or engaging with potential customers on social networking sites, or don't think you have the time to do that, hire someone that will, or wait till you have a strategy in place to promote your social media presence.

### **Best time of day:**

According to various statistics, the peak time for Social Networking activities is 7am-10am. This doesn't mean that 4-7pm is bad, but as a rule, you may want to schedule your post to be delivered around that time frame. In any case, always measure the effectiveness of your post, for your demographics, later in the day may be a better option. Just test, test & test.

### **Automation:**

There are plenty of tools out there to help you automate the process. Ping.fm is great and can be linked to your content management software to push content anytime you add an event or post a news article to your website. Another tool is HootSuite which is great to schedule post to all your social network from one single location. In any case, make your life easy with automation.

### **Likes & Comments:**

It's really important to engage your audience in "liking", "re-tweeting" & "commenting" on your post. Most major search engines have now admitted that it does play a role in making your content relevant. Ever wondered why the local retail store or local restaurant will run a free iPad sweepstake to people that will "Like" their Facebook page? It's because the benefits will far exceed the cost of the iPad in Advertising. Engage your audience in liking & commenting on your social networking sites.

The big 4 social network explained:

- **Facebook = Party/Fun**  
This is a fun & lively space, keep it light, keep it fun. Make sure to mix both business & fun, be relatable. Beware of getting political or controversial here. Also, what happened in Vegas used to stay in Vegas...now what happens in Vegas, ends up on Facebook.
- **LinkedIn = Networking event**  
This is your online networking event, it's all business here, exchange of ideas, etc. Don't get wild & crazy here.

- **Twitter = Watercooler conversation**  
Sound bite & quick talk, it's light & fast. One way I describe Twitter is "this conversation is so 2 hours ago!!". Keep it light & stay engaged.
- **YouTube = Open mic/Kareoke**  
Nobody has time to seat through a 10 minutes presentation nowadays, keep it to 1-3 minute. Create a channel and embed videos directly on your site. A video testimonial is far more compelling than a written one. You'll believe the video but will question the written testimonial.

## #8 - Make your website volunteer friendly

Make it easy for visitors to your non profit website 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.

### A volunteer friendly non profit website should have the following:

- A calendar showing all the upcoming opportunities to volunteer
- An easy form to fill out so volunteers can sign up
- Have the form pre-qualify volunteers by asking:
  - Area of expertise
  - Hours available
  - Days available
- An online photo album of pictures showing past events and volunteers in action...potential volunteers will relate to that a lot more
- A phone number & a contact, some people still prefer the old fashion phone call rather than filling out a form

With the holiday season fast approaching, take a look at your website and make it easy for people to interact with your non profit organization.

## #9 - Use Email Marketing to drive traffic

A recent report from analyst firm Forrester is predicting that by 2014 non profit organizations & small businesses will spend over \$1.2 billion on email marketing in the US alone – an 11% compound annual growth rate.



Yet it also predicts that much of this spend will be wasted as messages are targeted inappropriately or not at all.

### **Your Email Marketing Campaign's purpose is to drive people to your site**

That's it, it's a pretty simple purpose, just drive traffic to your non profit website. If you don't give them any reasons to go to your website, they won't. If you send an article or a blog, just give them half, or just the title + the opening paragraph and to read the rest you need to go to the website. The Email Marketing is the lure,

your website is the fish!!

### **An email marketing piece is not a flyer or a poster**

Here is a fact: 70% of people have the images blocked by default on their email reader. So guess what happens to your giant jpg of a flyer...most will delete. Email was designed for text, it's quick & easy to read, get to the point in half a page or less. If you have a flyer, you can send a link to it so people can print it and post it somewhere, but the content of your email should be mostly text. A small header & an accent picture to support the text is all that is needed.

### **Values based vs. Sales driven**

If you have to sell, do it softly. Most people are bombarded by offers for this & that all day long and most are just about numb. Focus on the value you provide, be helpful, provide tips that will demonstrate you expertise in your industry.

### **Have a compelling subject line**

According to studies 65% of people will delete emails based on the subject line alone. If your subject line is not compelling, they won't even open it. Spend more time on the subject line than you think, it could simply double your open rate.

### **Use a real name & real email address**

After checking the subject line, people will look at who sent the email. Generic names such as company names with info@ or sales@ will get deleted just as quick. So if you make it with a great subject line, don't blow it with using a company name instead of a real person's name. It doesn't matter if they know that person or not, you are much more likely to delete an email coming from "Marriott Hotels" than if it's coming from "Julie Drew"

### **Here is a couple of example with a bad & better email marketing:**

- **Bad: Marriott Hotels - sales@marriott - 10% discounts at the Spa if you book your meeting now**

(Clearly an advertisement, clearly trying to sell you, don't have time for this....click DELETE)

- **Better: Julie Drew - julie.drew@marriott.com - When did you enjoy your last massage?**

(This one is more like: "who's Julie Drew? and yes....when was it the last time I got a massage....way too long ago if you ask me...click OPEN)

**and here is one for a meeting:**

- **Bad: Association ABC - events@aabc.org - Register now for the annual meeting**

(It really feels like you are bossy me around, I have enough people telling me what to do....click DELETE)

- **Better: Michael Johnson - michael@aabc.org - Learn, Network & Have fun...see you in Vegas in October**

(this one is telling me what's in it for me and yet all I can see if Have fun in Vegas....yeah baby...click OPEN)

## #10 - Here is what people don't like when navigating a website

When navigating a non profit website, there are key things that annoys vistors that should be taken into account. But in order to take them into account, it helps to know them.

According to several surveys conducted on the subject, below are the top 7 things people surveyed said was reason enough to leave a website and most likely never come back:



1. **Pop up Ads: 93% surveyed**  
Or anything that will start without your consent. Music or a podcast that will start without you agreeing to listen first, annoying pop up ads, and all of those fancy gizmos are a perfect recipe for having people leave your website.
2. **Having to download something to view content: 89% surveyed**  
Of course, downloading a pdf document is a different story, what we are talking here is having to download some software to view some content, a video, a podcast, etc. People will generally distrust any software download, out of fear of downloading a virus or altering their computer in any way. Whether real or not, the fear will be enough for the vast majority of people to move on.
3. **Deal Links: 86% surveyed**  
Oh those dead links will drive them crazy, clicking on a link and then....nothing or an error page. We are all at the mercy of this, especially if you have a website with 50-100 pages or more. It's hard to stay on top when you may have several people working on the site at the same time, someone at some time will delete a file or rename a page and there you have it....a broken link! Just schedule a monthly check of all your links with a free link checker tool.

4. **Confusing Navigation:** *84% surveyed*  
I am sure that you have gone to a website before and wondered "oh where oh where could it be??"....I even bet that it may sometime be your own website. Have a plan in place to create a navigation that make it easy to find content. Remember that a good rule of thumb with navigation is: "less is more". Resist the temptation of placing too much content on the home page of your non profit website.
5. **Required Registration:** *83% surveyed*  
Requiring people to register or become a member before they can view content is not a good practice. Note that some non profit organizations have member password protected pages, that's not the same thing. The issue is with non profit websites that will require you to sign up before you can view ANY content. Not a good idea, people expect to have the right to view content, and if you want to know who they are, ask softly, have them sign up for a free eBook. Give something of high perceived value and they'll let you know who they are.
6. **Slow Loading pages:** *83% surveyed*  
Ever been on a website where it takes forever for the banner to load or it loads so slowly....found it annoying? Yes?...well 83% of people agree with you. Make sure your content, images and applications load quickly. Reduce the sizes of your images prior to inserting on your website.
7. **Ineffective Search Tools:** *80% surveyed*  
If you have a search feature on your website, make sure it works. More and more, people will rely on the quick search tool to locate content faster, just type a keyword and voila, I got what I'm looking for. If the results are inaccurate or simply doesn't work, will most likely have people go some place else to find what they are looking for.



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