

Your Website: An Investment Worth Making

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Most non-profit organizations use email, and many have websites, but most do not effectively maximize their website's potential. Often hampered by a lack of resources, skills, or a vision of how the Web can be used, non-profits frequently lag behind commercial and government organizations in website utilization.

A large, stylized graphic of the letters 'WWW' followed by three dots. The letters are bold and black, with a slight shadow effect. The dots are also black and of the same size as the letters.

The potential of the Web is tremendous for non-profits, with uses ranging from a simple informational resource for volunteers to a full-fledged Intranet tool, allowing staff members to collaborate, organize and share information. With so many people these days looking to the internet for research, ideas, and information, non-profits can no longer afford not to put organizational resources into this outreach tool.

So, how can your organization harness the Web's potential for your work? A good place to begin is with the development of a Web Site Strategy that reflects your needs and resources.

Approximately 40% of people who receive information about your organization (mailed appeals, newsletters, on the news) go to the web to research your organization. What does your website say about your group?

First, look at your organization's goal and think about how your website can help you meet these goals. Are you poised to increase your capacity? You could utilize your site to show the value of your expanded services. Are you beginning a fundraising campaign? You can accept donations using PayPal or a custom-developed interface. Do you need to keep in touch with volunteers? Allow them to sign up for periodic email e-newsletters.

If you already have a website, sit down with some key organizational players (i.e., staff, volunteers, board, donors) and look at what your site says about your organization. A professional-looking, easy to use website indicates an efficient, professional organization. If your site is beginning to look dated or disorganized, consider building a new set of templates to keep the look of your site consistent. Start by organizing the information on your site into logical sections that make sense to your visitors. If you have many different kinds of visitors (such as volunteers, clients, and donors), consider organizing your site with sections for each

audience. Create templates that use a consistent navigation structure on each page, allowing users to access each section from anywhere in the site.

Whether you already have a website or are building fresh, remember that content is what users want, and what will bring them back. Visitors are likely coming to your site to learn something (how to volunteer, where your office is located) or do something (contact you, make a donation, sign up for a raffle). Keep your content organized around these tasks. Information on your site should be kept as short as possible and divided into chunks that are easily scanned. Web users have notoriously short attention spans, so make use of lists, subtitles, and headlines to quickly direct visitors to the information they need.

Be sure to take a step back and look at the big picture content, too. Your site should immediately communicate the identity of your organization, its mission, and a sense of action – a feeling that “something great is happening here” that makes people want to be involved.

Finally, it is critically important to keep your site up-to-date. Nothing frustrates web users these days more than outdated content. It is absolutely essential that your organization make a time and financial commitment to adding fresh content to your website on a regular, on-going basis, such as once a week. A good approach is to appoint one staff member or volunteer as “web editor”, but be sure not to make them do all the work. An effective, engaging, useful website will take the participation of your entire staff: everyone in your organization must contribute photos, articles, testimonials, quotes, etc. to the site through this editor. In other words, the web editor's job is to post all the information provided to them by the entire team – not to come up with all the information to post on their own. A variety of perspectives keeps content fresh and resonates with many audiences: volunteers, contributors, and the community.

The Web is a critically important communication tool for non-profits. If your organization does not have a website, or has not updated its content in a while, it's time to make an organizational commitment to this. An investment of time and resources into this outreach tool will have huge rewards for your organization in the end: increased community participation, better informed clients, and more donations.

For more information on how to increase the power of your website to bring in donors, volunteers, and clients, contact ***do good Consulting*** at dogood@dogoodconsulting.org or 217-778-1687.