

## A Verve Brief on **KEEPING YOUR WEBSITE FRESH**

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### **Five Simple Steps to Keep Your Website Up-to-Date**

In order to secure grants, build loyalty from donors, members and the public, and grow awareness of the importance of your mission, your Web site should dovetail with your “offline” efforts and support promotion of your mission.

Regularly updating your website will:

- Showcase your successes as they happen.
- Generate interest in time-sensitive events and happenings.
- Attract return visitors to find out "what's new" and build loyalty by the service you provide online.
- Build confidence in your organization's communication efforts.

Breaking it down into manageable steps should help with common issues such as lack of time and resources.

#### **Step #1: DO REGULAR CHORES**

At least once every six months, plan time to review your website for broken links and out-of-date photos and content. Read older content - organizational lingo or terminology may need a change on multiple pages.

The time you need to spend will directly relate to the size of your website and how regular you have been with these chores in the past. Most web publishing applications make link finding and search and replace a quick task.

#### **Step #2: LIST WHAT'S HOT**

Look at your most current sitemap, or browse your website. What needs to be updated? How often?

Make a list of pages that may need updating at least annually, but are not necessarily time-sensitive. This could include general resource pages or "about xyz organization" pages, which might include descriptions of staff, mission, facilities, etc. Next, make a list of the more time-sensitive content such as news/announcements, event calendars or upcoming event pages, and features or other highlights such as a "Volunteer/Client of the Month" spotlight.

#### **Step #3: MAKE DEADLINES**

Create a website maintenance schedule. Enter dates right into your personal calendar, or use a common word processing or spreadsheet application. Basics to include – type of content (i.e. “news”), where it's located (i.e., “on homepage”), how often (i.e. “every two weeks”), when (i.e. “every other Friday”), who (i.e., “specific staff member”). A more detailed spreadsheet matrix could show a yearly snapshot with months, content authors, and a list of content, providing an easy way to see “crunch times” at a glance.



#### **Step #4: GET THE WORD OUT**

Distribute your schedule to involved staff and other key stakeholders. Include guidelines and due dates. Some tips for direct content providers:

- Send your spreadsheet to all content providers.
- Add the date(s) content is due to content providers' personal calendars.
- Send a reminder one-week prior to the due date, and again two days prior.
- Remember to build in a buffer for your due dates to allow for late submissions. If you need content by Friday, make it due the Tuesday or Wednesday beforehand.

Your Web Development or Advisory Team – which could involve staff, Board, and volunteers – will also play a crucial role by assisting in evaluating your website and creating a plan for future development. Make sure your website is a regular topic of conversation at staff and board meetings and report the progress being made by this team.

Your entire organization should be aware of your plans, not just those who are directly involved in website content publishing or planning. Send out a memo announcing your new "Web maintenance initiative." Discuss the importance of the Web as a tool for communicating the organization's success, promoting events, and generating action and detail what you intend to update and how often. Knowing your plans should motivate staff to take pride in the site, and to talk about it when speaking at events, fundraisers and meeting constituents.

#### **Step #5: SHOW OFF**

It's not always obvious to visitors when you update your site. Your efforts to keep your site fresh may go unnoticed if you don't advertise them. Make it clear when the site is updated by putting a date stamp on the homepage, or on every page on the site. Put dates next to news teasers on your homepage. If you have press releases or new stories, make sure the dates are within the introduction of the story.

Lastly, make sure you have a written online strategy. This can range from some simple goals scribbled on a napkin to a robust component of your strategic plan. What's most important is having the ability to show both effort and results to Board and staff. Mapping those efforts and measuring website effectiveness are the steps to guaranteeing your website presence gets the attention it deserves, and eventually securing more resources to continue forward momentum.