

A VerveBrief on **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE YOU REDESIGN YOUR WEBSITE**

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A website redesign project involves changing, enhancing, and/or expanding several components of your website – from changing navigation structure and graphic design to adding new content and functionality.

There are many good reasons to redesign an organization's website every few years:

- As your organization grows, so does the amount of content you will need to provide online. The navigation structure and page organization of your current website may not be equipped to support the growth you need. You may also need to enhance the amount of marketing or “feature-oriented” content to generate excitement for your mission and programs.
- Your website should be on a par with the “look and feel” of your print materials. Your visual presence on the web should accurately reflect your organization's image and personality.
- Demand for online forms, customizable searches, and online transactions increases every year. Your website should include the online tools and interactive features your visitors expect.

How do you accurately evaluate your site in these crucial areas and know when the time has come to redesign your website? There are a few things you can do that will not only help you determine if a site redesign is necessary, but will also assist you in documenting needs and setting the goals for a redesign.

1) Survey Your Current Site Visitors

Before taking any steps towards a site redesign, you need to evaluate what needs to be improved on your current site. The best place to go for feedback is to those who currently use your site.

Place a survey on your website for 4-6 weeks and promote it on your homepage. Ask questions about both the usability and the content of your website:

- Could visitors find the information they were looking for? How easily were they able to find it?
- What areas and pages of the site do they visit most often?
- How often do they return to the site and for what reasons?
- Ask their opinion about the layout and graphics.
- Ask for suggestions for content or functionality.

Use this to document your successes and determine areas in which your site can be improved, enhanced, and expanded in terms of content, navigation, graphics, and timeliness.

2) Survey Your Key Stakeholders

In addition to surveying general site visitors, you should create a more targeted survey for your members, donors, board members, volunteers and other key audiences. These are the visitors who are most familiar with your organization, will benefit most from the services you provide online, and are best able to give an accurate reflection of how the tone, content, and “look and feel” of your website represent your mission.



Promote the survey through an email campaign, requesting participation in order to improve the service of your website specifically for your stakeholders' needs.

- Ask if they currently use your website; if so, what areas of the site?
- If they do not visit your site often, why not?
- Ask what information and services they would like to see online that would bring them to your site more often. For example:
 - Are there documents they would like to have access to online?
 - Which online forms would make their interactions with your organization more convenient (e.g., event registration, membership renewals, etc.)?

Use this feedback to document ways in which you can better communicate with and serve your key stakeholders online to complement current phone and traditional mail communications.

3) Investigate What Your Current Site Visitors Are Doing

There are two key ways to explore the behaviors of your current site visitors:

- a) Find out how to access the tracking software that should be offered by your Internet Service Provider. These are referred to as "Web Server Statistics." The most common formats include easy-to-read graphical displays that summarize the traffic to your website in graphs and bar charts. Look to see:
 - What pages are most visited? Can you further expand the information or services provided in the areas that are most popular?
 - Is there is a large difference between hits and files? This can give you a rough indication of repeat visitors. Are you attracting repeat visitors? If not, this indicates that you should consider adding a news area, a calendar of events, and/or refresh content more often to give visitors a reason to return.
- b) Do you have email links and/or online forms on your website? Are visitors using them? Are they using them appropriately? By evaluating this usage, you can plan for areas of content or decide if additional forms may be warranted. For example, if you are receiving the same questions over and over again, consider creating an FAQ as you plan content for your redesigned site.

4) Evaluate Your Offline Communications Strategies

Do you have print collateral that uses your organizational color palette, fonts, logo, or other elements of graphic design and photography? Does your current site incorporate these elements to convey a consistent and accurate visual impression of your organization? Use your offline collateral to shape and document a design strategy for your website redesign.

Do you conduct campaigns and promotions offline? Are there ways to complement these efforts online? For example, you could add forms, functionality (such as the ability to accept contributions, fees, or donations), or even content (such as volunteer or donor testimonials) to your website to support your efforts. Plan for this as you document your strategy for your site redesign.



5) Evaluate Internal Business Practices

Do you or your administrative staff spend time answering common questions or responding to requests by phone or mail? Consider placing information that addresses these questions on your website in the form of FAQ's and/or enhanced/expanded content areas.

Do you or your administrative staff spend time processing forms, donations or other transactions? Could these business practices be transitioned to the web to save time, streamline processes, and/or save on postal costs? Forms that may be worth considering include: "Contact Us," "Request for Information," and event registration forms.

Redesigning your website is a big task so it's important that your efforts are targeted and relevant to the needs of your site visitors. Investigating the needs of your website visitors and evaluating your offline communications strategies are important precursors to determining if a website redesign is necessary and assuring that yours will be a successful one. Collecting and analyzing this information will help you decide if a redesign is necessary and chart a course of action.