



Digital Fundraising Playbook Series:

Revamping Your Website

Introduction and Program Overview

When was the last time you thought about how your website is performing? Have you considered lately whether it is meeting the needs of your target audiences? Chances are, even if you have a good sense of what's working and what's not, you might be too busy to address your website needs. An organization's website is often the gateway for new adopters, volunteers, foster caregivers, donors, rescue partners and community members looking for help with their pets. So, it's important to make sure that the website's information, accessibility and experience is up to date with today's changing digital landscape.

A website redesign might seem overwhelming and time-consuming, but redesigning your website doesn't necessarily mean changing every single design and brand element. In fact, it can mean simply making functional modifications that help your website work better and that more effectively support your marketing and outreach goals (e.g., getting more pets adopted, raising more money, recruiting more volunteers).

Even if you discover that you need a completely new website, analyses of your current site and your audiences are the first two key factors in ensuring success.

Program Composition

First things first: Analyze your current website. You probably already know some trouble spots within your website. Maybe you've heard from supporters that it's hard to find certain information or that your website doesn't always load well on mobile devices. Start by looking critically at your current website.

What's working? What's not? If you have time and resources, use [Google Analytics](#) to study traffic patterns. Analytics can give you a good overview on how people are consuming your information. You can learn what pages are visited most often, which pages have a high [bounce](#) rate and more.

You can also survey users about their user experience. Don't just look in the mirror, though, by surveying staff. Look out the window at adopters, foster caregivers, donors and volunteers to get points of view from outside the organization.

It's also important to know how fast your website loads. If it loads slowly, visitors might leave and go to a competitor's website. [Think With Google](#) is a free site that lets you check your site speed and gives recommendations on how to improve it.

Once you've taken a good look at your website, here are the next steps:

- Update your knowledge of your website's audience.
- Ensure that your website is accessible to everyone.
- Make sure your site is mobile-friendly.
- Make search engine optimization a priority.
- Keep it simple if you need to build a new site.

Knowing your website audience

Once you know what types of people come to your website, you can target your site's content and information to best meet their needs. The most critical question to answer is this: Why are you here? Are people coming to your website to learn about your mission, to adopt a pet, to find particular services? All of the above? The important information must be easy to find, understand and act on. You'll also want to gather data on your target audience's age group, gender and location. All of these factors will play a role in the redesign of your website.

With your site and audience analyses in hand, you're ready to innovate. If you're short on time and resources, start small. Tackle the most pressing issues first and perform an overall cleanup. At the very least, use the tips in the next section to help ensure that your site is accessible to as many people as possible in your community.

Ensuring that your website is accessible to everyone

Having an accessible website is one of the easiest ways to do business with people who have disabilities. This includes people who can't read print material and people who have difficulty going to a physical location. Furthermore, what you do for accessibility overlaps with other best practices, such as mobile web design, usability and search engine optimization.

Here are some quick and easy ways to increase accessibility:

- Ensure that your website is visually appealing by using high-quality photos and graphics. (See our playbook *Choosing Images*.) Keep paragraphs short and make your copy as concise as possible.
- List a physical street address (if applicable) on your website's homepage.
- Make your phone number highly visible.
- Make buttons consistent in design and easy to click on.
- Keep a consistent font style and size. The paragraph font size should be at least 14 points and heads should be 16 points or larger.
- For the best readability, text should be black on a light background.
- Underline your links and check their URLs to make sure they are linked correctly. Take a look at this [sample](#).

Making your website accessible to people with disabilities will enhance its accessibility for everyone. For more comprehensive information on accessibility, [read this article](#).

Making sure your site is mobile-friendly

Websites today must be accessible across many different devices and platforms. The most important step when redesigning your site is to ensure that it works best on mobile devices (phone or tablet). Today's web audiences are more connected than ever, thanks to smartphones. We use our phones as much as (if not more than) our desktop computers. This [trend](#) has been steadily increasing over the past five years, so it is likely that mobile use will only continue to go up.

Be sure to test your website on multiple devices to ensure readability, easy navigation, fast loading times and an overall good user experience. Many drag-and-drop website builders, like

[Wix](#) and [Squarespace](#), include a mobile-specific editor that makes it easy for even a novice web designer to create mobile websites with less effort.

Making search engine optimization (SEO) a priority

SEO is about making sure your website gets found in the search engines (like Google) by the right people: your potential customers, supporters and members. One of the best SEO tips for beginners is to prioritize creating quality content. You need great content to increase your organic traffic, engage your visitors and guide the search engine crawlers to help them understand what your website and organization are all about.

The goal is to get people to engage with your website longer, so aim for creating content that people love to read (and will share). The longer someone stays on your website, the higher your site will rank on search engines.

With that goal in mind, avoid industry jargon and use key words that people who are not in the animal welfare field might use to search. Ask friends and family who are not involved in the field what they might google if they were searching for help with a pet issue, hoping to volunteer or looking for information about anything else related to your mission.

Simplifying the process if you need to build a new site

What if you conclude that you must build a whole new website? You can keep it simple by using a drag-and-drop website builder like [Wix](#) or [Squarespace](#). These website builders are very easy to use and don't require programming expertise. You can start for free, and you can pick templates and add content easily. These customizable builders allow integrations (with Petfinder, etc.) and include forms, donate widgets and more.

If you have the expertise to accurately define what you need in a new website, consider recruiting a skilled volunteer to build the site. (See the resources section below for more on recruiting skilled volunteers.) One caveat, though: Far too many organizations put out feelers for anyone who can build a website without screening applicants adequately or knowing if what is built can be sustained by other members of the team. Website management should be under the control of the organization itself, so you need to have someone on your team with the expertise to oversee volunteers and ensure that passwords, domain names and all other critical business assets remain under the control of the organization itself, not one individual.

Conclusion

These days, someone's first impression of an organization can be based almost exclusively on that person's experience with the organization's website. Donors, volunteers and adopters have many choices, and if they encounter an outdated or confusing website that makes it hard for them to find information or respond to a call to action, they may choose another organization to support.

Redesigning your website requires thought, time and energy, but the upside of going through that process can mean your organization gets more donations, adoptions and volunteers, and greater public awareness of your goals and mission.

Resources

- Learn more about avoiding jargon [here](#) and read a related article on avoiding veterinary jargon [here](#).
- Best Friends offers information on recruiting volunteers [here](#).
- [You can read more tips here about SEO.](#)

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